**INNOVATIONS FOR
SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES**

ENERGIZING THE CIVIL SERVICE:

MANAGING AT THE TOP 2, BANGLADESH, 2006 - 2011

SYNOPSIS

In 2006, politics and procedures hobbled Bangladesh's civil service. As divisions hardened between the country's two main political parties, civil servants were routinely transferred or dismissed at the whim of the government in power. Hierarchical reporting and decision-making structures discouraged innovation and the exchange of ideas. Moreover, many high-level civil servants lacked substantial experience in managing projects. To address these problems, the Ministry of Public Administration collaborated with the U.K. Department for International Development to launch a seven-year reform program called Managing At The Top 2, or MATT 2. Building on an initial three-year stage that ended in 2002, MATT 2 aimed to develop skills, foster networks and gradually reshape the incentives for senior civil servants to make their units more effective. As part of the program, senior civil servants designed and implemented small-scale projects. Ministry officials and project consultants strengthened support for MATT 2 by asking secretaries, the administrative heads of ministries, to endorse the pilot projects every year. During the next several years, about 1,300 reform-minded civil servants operated in teams to design and implement more than 200 innovative projects using a model similar to the Rapid Results approach, a results-focused learning process that some other countries adopted at about the same time. The intended benefits emerged gradually, as more civil servants participated and the public began to see results. MATT 2 did not alter transfer and promotion policies, nor did it take steps to depoliticize the civil service. The case offers an alternative to traditional methods of building government, and explores both the potential and the limits of this distinctive strategy.

INTRODUCTION

In August 2007, as night fell in Comilla, Bangladesh, hundreds of people gathered outside the regional passport office to secure a spot in what they knew would become a long queue by daybreak. Located about 100 kilometers from the national capital of Dhaka, Comilla district's passport office served a population of more than 4.5 million. A fight soon erupted between people trying to keep their

places in the line. When the police intervened, the citizens pelted them with stones and brickbats, and then turned their anger on nearby vehicles. The police fired rubber bullets to disperse the crowd, but 25 people were injured before the army moved in to restore order.[1] The incident illustrated the kinds of problems caused by Bangladesh's ineffective and strained public services.

The situation began to brighten a few months later, when the Department of Immigration and Passport launched a pilot program to reduce delivery times, using seven post offices in Dhaka as processing centers. The department replicated the experiment in five other city post offices and 70 district post offices in 2008.

The improvements in passport processing were one result of a low-key effort to deepen an ethic of public service, improve morale and promote innovative, internally developed responses to some of the challenges ministries faced. The effort, formally named Managing At The Top 2 and known as MATT 2, brought small groups of civil servants together to develop projects, build the skills needed to win adoption of their ideas, and reshape the job incentives of government workers.

MATT 2 began in 2006, when the government, in collaboration with Britain's international aid agency, the Department for International Development (DFID), launched the program as a follow-up to an initial version that had run from 1999 to 2002. Conceived by a small group of insiders and advisers, the program aimed to change the behavior of top-level civil servants, who often stressed party loyalty more than good performance; to sharpen project-management skills; and to lift the generally poor morale of the civil service.

MATT 2's ultimate goal was to create a critical mass of reformers who would generate demand for meaningful and long-lasting change without the need for legislation or special efforts

to coordinate the actions of ministers who had differing agendas. In addition to avoiding ministerial entanglements, the program aimed to reduce the high cost and extensive oversight that characterized top-down, strategic overhauls attempted in many other countries. Bangladeshi ministry officials and advisers believed their deliberate strategy and limited focus would still produce significant progress in changing attitudes and behavior of the people managing and delivering services.

MATT 2 started out by asking groups of middle- and upper-level civil servants to identify small changes they might make to overcome specific service problems or policy weaknesses. Groups then would design and test solutions in a series of small pilot projects while receiving training and advice from facilitators and mentors. The designers hypothesized that the combination of home-grown ideas, on-the-job training, professional development, peer pressure and observation might boost morale among civil servants, develop workforce skills and encourage the broad buy-in that often eluded other approaches. Planners believed that even though some projects might fail, as they would in any sort of entrepreneurial activity, others would lead to improvements in the delivery of services.

Anwarul Bar Chowdhury, secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration from 2000 to 2003, and Mir Obaidur Rahman, director at the government's civil service training college, were early champions of the MATT 2 program. One of the first graduates of MATT 2, Iqbal Mahmood, rapidly rose to become the ministry's senior official and carried the program forward.

The case examines an innovative approach to enhance state capacity in a country where attempts at deep structural reforms had made little progress.

THE CHALLENGE

In 2000, Bangladesh, the seventh most populous country in the world, had roughly one

million civil servants, or about six for every 1,000 citizens. The ratio was far lower than many other countries. For instance, in the 1990s, the average for Asia was 26 civil servants per 1,000 citizens and the average for countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development was 77 per 1,000.[2] In rankings of the quality of public administration, including transparency and corruption, Bangladesh's civil service lagged behind Bhutan and India—two neighbors—as well as low-income countries such as Bolivia.[3]

Inefficiency had long been a hallmark of Bangladesh's public services. A 2001 World Bank study rated the country's bureaucratic efficiency at 4.7 on a scale where 10 was the highest level of efficiency. The same study placed other South Asian countries such as Sri Lanka at 6.7 and India at 5.5. Bangladesh performed only slightly better than Pakistan, which scored 4.3.[4]

The public had little confidence in the ability or integrity of civil servants. A 2002 survey by Transparency International found that 33% of households had paid bribes for an electricity connection, 65% said it was almost impossible to get a trade license without money or influence, and 70% reported unethical practices in getting patients admitted to public hospitals. To improve its ability to meet the needs of a growing population, including nearly 50 million people living in deprivation or extreme poverty, the government had to find a way to eliminate inefficiencies and boost the performance of civil servants.

The ineffectiveness had several sources. In the 1990s, sharp political divisions had led competing parties to make wholesale staffing changes every time government control changed hands. The frequent shuffling had crippled the civil service, depressed morale and undercut effectiveness. Under a 1994 public service retirement law, political leaders in government could force the retirement of any civil servant

who had served 25 years, or shift civil servants to a status known as Officer on Special Duty, where they continued to receive salaries but had no responsibilities. To assert political control and avoid the constitutional requirement for hearings before dismissals, a government could place civil servants on special duty until they reached 25 years of service, when they were forced to retire. In 2001, *The Daily Janakantha*, a local newspaper, reported that the newly-elected Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), one of the two main parties, placed a record 978 senior civil servants on special duty.[5] In addition to being stripped of all responsibilities, those placed on special duty lost any chance for career advancement. Other civil servants widely recognized the designation as a punishment without due process and took it as a signal that they had to toe the party line.

The government also could promote party followers to the top ranks of the bureaucracy and transfer non-supporters to lower positions. In 1996, the Awami League, the BNP's main rival, rewarded civil servants who helped it win power. In 2001, after the BNP retook power, the government promoted 355 civil servants, ignoring senior or more competent ones, the daily *Prothom Alo* reported. Promotions, transfers and contractual appointments became part of the currency of political competition, as leaders favored their supporters and removed or transferred others arbitrarily.

These kinds of political machinations dampened creativity and initiative across the civil service. Civil servants with no political allegiance learned to keep a low profile and avoid drawing attention. Any effective government program might be seen as a success story for the party in power, and could become a target for retribution when the opposition party took over.

Civil servants who improved ways of doing things often found it difficult to sustain their efforts. In many cases, even modest reforms

ended when the reformer left the department or ministry. Abdul Muyeed Chowdhury (no relation to Anwarul Bar Chowdhury), a former civil servant and chairman of the Muyeed Committee that studied the civil service in 1989 and offered recommendations for reforms, said, "If you were too enthusiastic in doing things which you believed in, under one regime, then the next regime would say, '… You were too enthusiastic in working for them, so that means you were part of them.' That caused a lot of mental agony to the civil servants and harassment at the hands of the next group who came to power." Because of the frequent shuffling of personnel, any investment in trying to make an office or department work effectively was difficult to sustain and unlikely to be worth the effort.

As differences sharpened between the political parties, each new government would scrap programs and suspend projects instituted by its predecessor, regardless of merit. The reversals even extended to the names of landmarks. In 2010, the Awami League renamed Dhaka's Zia International Airport because the facility carried the name of the founder of the rival BNP. The alternation of parties in power, often considered an important element of democracy, became an impediment. Commenting on the political culture, Chowdhury of the Muyeed Committee noted, "In Bangladesh, the two major political parties and their allies are totally opposed to each other. That has created an environment of confrontation and has made the life of the civil servants very difficult."

In addition, the country's public sector suffered from a shortage of experienced managers. The government had recruited hastily after Bangladesh's independence from Pakistan in 1971. During the next six years, about 95% of the appointments were made on an ad hoc basis, according to a Transparency International report.[6] Civil servants who had

been recruited with little regard for merit rose through the ranks quickly because of an automatic promotion system based on seniority rather than ability, experience and background.

A rigid hierarchy weighed on attitudes and behavior in the civil service. Rizwan Khair, a Bangladeshi civil servant seconded as academic coordinator to the Institute of Governance Studies at BRAC University, a research and training institute in Bangladesh, said in an interview in 2009, "Once you enter that structure, the so-called 'iron framework', your whole mentality changes. You go by processes, rules and regulations. You become unresponsive to the needs of the citizens. … If you ask me right now how many of the civil servants are able to cope with the challenges in a globalized world … [about] 95% wouldn't be able to cope because they are stuck in the old mode."

The civil service system created strict boundaries between senior and junior civil servants that impeded the exchange of ideas and the ability to make decisions. The structure persisted partly because of fear that greater discretion among employees might promote corruption. Chowdhury of the Muyeed Committee observed: "The reason [discretion] is not provided in Bangladesh is because then people will use that discretionary power to make money, or at least some would. That is the system, because there is a lack of transparency." Coupled with more transparency, loosening the hierarchy might have worked, but no one wanted to take that first step.

Another challenge arose from Bangladesh's market for public office, in which brokers acting as middlemen secured high-level posts for those willing to pay. Positions in infrastructure and major procurement with opportunities for graft commanded premium prices. Clay Wescott, director of the Asia Pacific Governance Institute, noted, "As in most developing countries, potentially lucrative [civil service] positions are for sale in Bangladesh. Many civil

servants need to focus on collecting rents to cover the debts they had incurred in securing their positions—senior posts can sell for $10,000—and their personal needs." The market for public office made performance unimportant to promotion prospects and accelerated the shuffling of high-level positions, as brokers' earnings depended largely on how many appointments and transfers they handled.

Because of the government's poor strategic planning, civil servants often held positions that did not match their skills or experience. Political interference and inadequate policies further prevented the Ministry of Public Administration, the agency that had legal responsibility for placements, from carrying out these responsibilities effectively.

Previous efforts to overhaul the civil service had collapsed in the face of political obstacles. During 15 years of military rule and after a civilian government took over in 1991, study commissions proliferated. Between 1982 and 2002, 17 different commissions issued reports that urged reform, but none produced significant changes.[7] These included the 1989 Muyeed Committee that offered recommendations for restructuring government ministries, the 1996 Administrative Reorganization Committee, and the 1997 Public Administration Reform Commission, which submitted its report in June 2000. Frequent changes of ministers, senior civil servants' fear of being forced to retire early because successes might be associated with one party or the other, and rapid turnover in lower posts all made it difficult to move programs forward.

In 1999, the government had tried an incremental approach with Managing At The Top 1, or MATT 1. Officials at the Ministry of Public Administration, formerly the Ministry of Establishment, conceived the program, in conjunction with DFID, as a way to train some of the country's most senior civil servants. MATT 1 ran for three years and engaged 100

senior civil servants of the ranks of joint and additional secretaries in a series of six-week training sessions held at Birmingham University and the Civil Service College in the U.K. During the sessions, MATT 1 participants prepared project proposals to introduce reforms within a department or ministry. At the end of the training, they submitted the proposals to the heads of their ministry.

MATT 1 was widely acknowledged as a limited success. By 2002, a hundred senior civil servants, mostly at positions of additional or joint secretary, the second- and third-highest administrative positions within a ministry, had been trained in thinking through problems and designing projects to solve them. MATT 1 alumni, however, were not numerous enough to create a network of reformers within the government, and most of them never implemented their proposed projects. John Wallace, a former Ireland civil servant who had prior work experience in Bangladesh and headed the implementation team for MATT 2, said the initial program lacked sustainability. "The MATT 1 participants emerged from the MATT 1 program with new ideas, new thoughts, new concepts, but stepped back into work roles and work environments which were totally unchanged," he said.

The Ministry of Public Administration and DFID launched MATT 2 in 2006 as a seven-year program, hoping to succeed where the three-year MATT 1 had fallen short. The successor program was a more ambitious US$25 million effort that targeted a significantly larger number of senior-level managers within the civil service over a longer period of time.

FRAMING A RESPONSE

When MATT 1 ended in 2002, a group of alumni and administrators proposed a follow-up program that would improve on MATT 1's shortcomings. Secretary of Public Administration Anwarul Bar Chowdhury

recognized the need to sharpen senior civil servants' project management skills. Mir Obaidur Rahman, one of the senior directors at the government's civil service training college and program manager of MATT 1, agreed. Together, they approached a number of MATT 1 alumni for ideas. Many of these civil servants, who held key managerial positions by 2002, were eager to see a similar but better-designed program take shape. Many believed that any successor program should build confidence and expertise by allowing participants to develop and implement their own small-scale projects.

As secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration, Chowdhury had access to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. After consultations with MATT 1 alumni, who supported a longer follow-up program that would engage more civil servants, Chowdhury said, he asked for and received Zia's blessing for a program focused on building the capacity of the civil service. Although Zia appointed him to an ambassadorship before program negotiations and implementation could start, Chowdhury's initial push proved crucial in getting political backing for MATT 2.

In 2003, DFID agreed to support a preliminary study of what would be needed to improve and expand the MATT program. Donald Curtis, who had served as lead consultant of MATT 1, worked with other advisers at the U.K. Civil Service College to propose a program design for MATT 2. In August 2003, DFID approved funding for the program, and negotiations between the government and DFID started in 2004.

During negotiations, high-level civil servants, including Safar Raj Hossain, secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration after Anwarul Bar Chowdhury, along with the director of the civil servants' training college and two additional secretaries, worked with DFID to finalize the program design.[8] In October 2005, after prolonged discussions, officials at the Ministry of Public Administration and DFID agreed on a seven-year project.

The framework of MATT 2 had two key components. The first was a development program that would allow participants to design and implement projects. The second component called for MATT 2 consultants to provide performance-management and strategic-planning advice to the Ministry of Public Administration.

A critical part of MATT 2's development component included implementing small-scale reform projects, often on a pilot basis. In addition to making small but significant improvements in civil service procedures and processes, the creation and implementation of these projects would accomplish two other important goals. First, the efforts would encourage teamwork among different grades of civil servants, challenging the civil service's tradition of hierarchical decision-making. Second, MATT 2 would build networks of competent civil servants, broadening the impact of the program and bolstering sustainability.

Planners decided to divide MATT 2's development component into two levels, the first for all participants and the second for those who performed strongly in the first. During the initial phase, facilitators would train 40 to 45 civil servants on how to design their own performance improvement projects, called PIPs. Graduates of the course then had to implement seven or eight PIPs within the next four months. Facilitators would hold seven first-stage workshops every year, with the aim of training 300 civil servants annually.

One of every four first-level participants—chosen mainly on their performance—participated in an eight-week additional course. These high performers would be organized in groups of 20 to develop and implement six-month projects known as super performance improvement projects, or SPIPs. While PIPs were local projects, SPIPs addressed problems at

the regional or national level. About 80 civil servants would graduate from the second stage every year.

In order to sustain the projects and the esprit de corps of the participants, the design team encouraged PIP and SPIP teams to engage the press and public in formulating and implementing their projects. The team anticipated that involving citizens and the media would help broaden awareness of this effort to improve government efficiency and services and underpin future demand for better services.

Another important part of the program design included an annual retreat for the secretaries who were the administrative heads of ministries. The secretaries would review MATT 2 activities and endorse upcoming projects for their own ministries. Program designers hoped that the retreats would help build support for projects by overcoming the skepticism that MATT 1 alumni often had encountered from peers and senior leaders. They also hoped that secretaries who endorsed specific projects would be more committed to the efforts.

The criteria for selecting MATT 2 participants were straightforward. Aiming to develop civil servants who would administer the country during the next 10 to 20 years, MATT 2's development component targeted civil servants at the top levels of the administrative cadre. The participant pool included secretaries, joint secretaries and additional secretaries under the age of 52, deputy secretaries under the age of 50, and senior assistant secretaries under the age of 48 but with more than 10 years' experience. Because the workshops were conducted in English, fluency in the language was a requirement. Participants received a modest stipend and did not have to fulfill their regular work duties while attending the workshop. They did, however, resume their work responsibilities while implementing their projects.

The Bangladesh Public Administration Training College hosted the MATT 2 workshops. Established in 1984, the college trained newly recruited civil servants and ran advanced administration and policy courses for mid- and senior-level civil servants. The negotiating team agreed that facilitators from the training college would assist external consultants in running the development component of the program.

The team also agreed on institutional requirements for running MATT 2. They decided that a national project director within the Ministry of Public Administration would liaise with DFID, project consultants and the training college. Within the ministry, two project directors with the rank of deputy secretary would support the national project director. A project management committee made up of the national project director, the deputy directors and external consultants would meet monthly to discuss progress and prepare financial and progress reports. A steering committee headed by the secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration would be responsible for overseeing MATT 2. Other committee members were the national project director, the head of DFID's governance team, the rector of the training college, and the project consultants' team leader.

Planners envisioned that MATT 2, scheduled to run until 2013, would create an influential network of about 2,000 civil servants who were committed to improving government performance and service delivery through administrative reforms.

GETTING DOWN TO WORK

In 2006, DFID contracted with Tribal-Helm Corp. Ltd., a U.K.-based business and management consultancy, to manage MATT 2. Wallace, who worked at Tribal-Helm, headed the implementation. Roger Fernando, a human resources-management specialist from the U.K.,

was also part of the group. They soon teamed up with Mosharraf Hossain (not related to Safar Raj Hossain), a former civil servant with experience at the Bangladesh Public Administration Training College, to run the program. Eventually, other facilitators from the training college helped lead the workshops.[9]

Wallace, Fernando and Mosharraf Hossain faced a stern task in trying to make MATT 2 work. They had to overcome skepticism and inertia at all levels of the civil service, identify key reform areas for participants to address with their PIPs and SPIPs, and then implement the ambitious effort across a broad span of Bangladesh's government.

Building a mandate for reform

Beginning work in June 2006, the team quickly discovered that most civil servants were unaware of MATT 2 and that many of the rest were dubious of the program's chances for success. Wallace said, "We should have had endorsement from right across the civil service for us to implement those small reform projects in every ministry. That wasn't the case. … There was an action vacuum, where there was no mandate upon the Ministry of Establishment [Ministry of Public Administration]. There was no imperative within the ministry to implement reforms in any area. … So when MATT 2 began, that was the problem it faced."

The team members recognized that they had to enlist support and build a mandate for reform. Wallace, Mosharraf Hossain, Fernando and others on the team organized a series of meetings at which senior civil servants identified policies and processes that they thought were ripe for change. During August and September 2006, Fernando and Mosharraf Hossain presided over the gatherings with a sample group of about 230 senior civil servants. In written surveys, participants listed impediments to doing non-routine work or showing initiative, identified their own development needs and

those of their subordinates, and provided examples of policies or projects they had tried. Loosely clustering the responses, facilitators Fernando and Mosharraf Hossain came up with 33 categories, most of which dealt with service delivery and governance. They selected the top 14 as target areas for reform. Broadly, the priorities included strengthening leadership, creating accountability, managing resources, and delivering pro-poor and pro-women services effectively.

Mosharraf Hossain and Fernando took their case to the government's top decision makers. At a two-day conference, 33 secretaries, along with the additional and joint secretaries of the remaining 29 ministries, endorsed MATT 2. Fernando described the discussion: "We said, 'We have done a development needs analysis by asking your colleagues a list of questions and this is what they have told us. Is it your view that they are on the right path, particularly with these priorities?' … Every single ministry was represented, and they unanimously endorsed the 14 items and the priorities." After the heads of the ministries had endorsed the reform priorities, the MATT 2 team members had the senior-level buy-in they needed, along with a mandate for carrying out reforms and priority areas for implementing pilot projects.

Implementing performance improvement projects

Between September and November 2006, the MATT 2 team held the program's first workshop. The first cohort of 42 participants spent two weeks at the International Training Center of the training college in Savar, about an hour's drive from Dhaka.

Iqbal Mahmood, who was secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration in 2011, said he learned of MATT 2's goals when he took part in the initial meetings as a joint secretary. When he arrived in Savar, he did not realize that the program aimed to create a network of senior managers who would understand how to move

reforms forward. Assigned to a five-member team, Mahmood and his colleagues were asked to discuss the problems they faced in fulfilling their job responsibilities. Facilitators encouraged them to focus on one issue and develop alternative solutions. After the initial discussions, Mahmood's team members focused on a single issue that they wanted to address. Other groups did the same.

Mosharraf Hossain, Fernando and facilitators from the training college encouraged participants to identify and design projects that would help solve the problems the groups had identified. They divided the 42 participants into teams of five or six. Each team developed a PIP project to solve the problem they had identified.

In most cases, the PIPs focused on issues of service delivery, governance or land and environment (Figure 1). Many included a gender or poverty component designed to provide better services to women, children and poor families. For example, Mahmood's team proposed a day-care facility for women at a government-owned printing facility. Other PIPs aimed to strengthen the performance of a department within the Ministry of Commerce and reduce corruption at the country's busy southwestern port of Mongla.

After the first two weeks, participants traveled to Singapore or Thailand, two neighboring countries with records of efficient service delivery, for another two-week session. During the trips abroad, project teams completed small assignments, visited rural areas, interviewed a wide range of people, and learned about problems that would be relevant to their own PIPs. Upon their return to Bangladesh, the project teams spent a week working in low-income areas, exploring grassroots service-delivery issues and citizens' service needs. Project teams spent the final week of stage one at the training college, refining their project proposals and identifying the resources needed to implement their PIPs.

While working on the PIPs, participants also developed individual action plans that would help them improve their own job performance and effectiveness in bringing about changes in their workplaces. For instance, Mahmood's individual action plan included completing unfinished business before leaving his office each day. "I decided that I will finish all the day's business on the same day," he said. "I will not keep anything pending before I leave office. I still do it." The goal was to help participants change their own behavior in ways
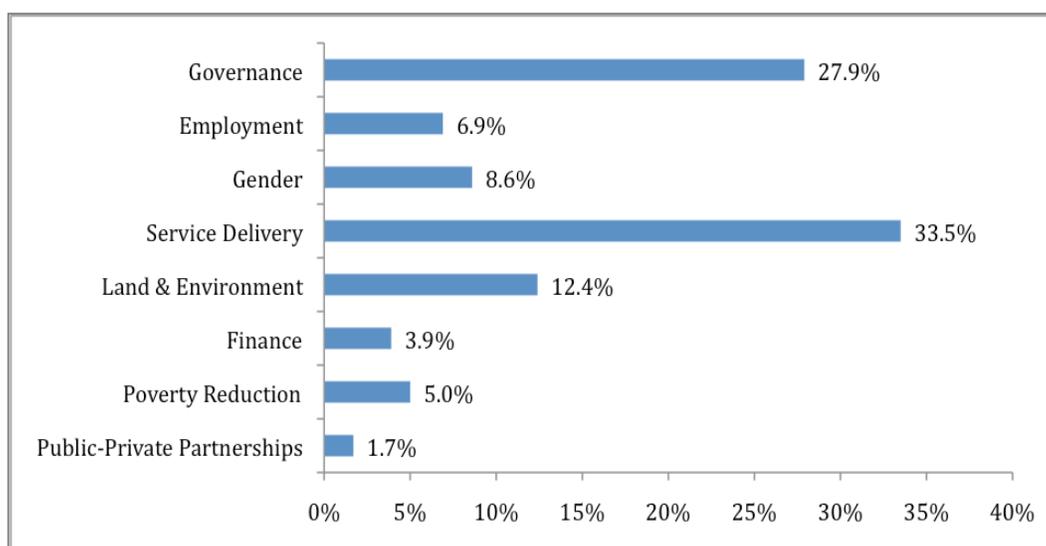

Figure 1. MATT 2 performance improvement projects (PIPs) by focus sector, June 2011

that were personally fulfilling as well as helpful to their organizations.

Project teams began to implement their PIPs as soon as they completed the six-week first stage. Along with fulfilling their regular job responsibilities, they had to find resources and complete PIPs under the supervision of mentors. Once a PIP was completed successfully, the project team submitted a report to the MATT 2 team and presented their results and findings to other participants and mentors.

During the next several years, MATT 2 participants produced many innovative PIPs. The 2007 passport services PIP was an example of a pilot project that was implemented, sustained and replicated. The team that implemented the project assessed existing passport services and designed a PIP to farm out passport submission and collection to post offices around Dhaka. The team enlisted the support of the secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration, the director-general of the Department of Immigration and Passport, and the secretary of state for the Ministry of Home Affairs. Within a month of securing approval, the group oversaw the training of post office personnel and inaugurated passport booths at seven post offices. Once implemented, the pilot PIP reduced the waiting time for passport services from an average of six hours to under an hour.

In July 2008, the MATT 2 team and Ministry of Public Administration officials, with Additional Secretary Manowar Islam as national project director, launched the second stage. They selected 10-12 participants from each first-stage workshop, favoring those who had chosen innovative PIPs, implemented projects particularly well, prepared meaningful individual action plans, participated in workshop discussions, and exhibited strong English language skills. The ideas for the broader, higher-level stage two projects, called super performance improvement projects (SPIPs),

usually came from ministerial secretaries. Following a two-week workshop in Savar, participants spent the next six weeks at the U.K. universities of Bradford, Wolverhampton or Manchester.

During their time abroad, project teams interned at host organizations, where they refined their SPIP plans. Rachel Roland, who was in charge of the program for the University of Wolverhampton, said: "Sometimes, participants had unrealistic expectations, but that often changed during the course of the placements. … Some projects were ambitious, so we tried to make them practical by challenging participants, asking probing questions, and analyzing more." Steve Taplin, who was responsible for placing stage two participants in host institutions in the U.K., said, "The value that I saw was that the program extended their thinking, challenged them, helped them think through the project development cycle. Once they inculcated that, they could translate it to a whole range of settings."

Upon their return to Bangladesh, stage two participants worked with mentors to implement their SPIPs. The process followed the PIP implementation cycle but continued for six months instead of four. During implementation, mentors regularly advised their assigned teams, which in turn presented final results to their peers and mentors. Examples of SPIPs included designing a placement strategy for the administrative cadre, improving the delivery system of a pension program, and mobilizing local resources for 100 primary schools.

The MATT 2 team employed several strategies to ensure that PIPs or SPIPs ran smoothly. Facilitators encouraged teams to design PIPs that were narrow in scope, such as implementing a one-stop information center, improving family-planning services, or introducing a monthly performance assessment

system at the training college. Small-scale projects, especially those focused on governance, helped establish procedures within departments or ministries relatively quickly while avoiding major resistance. They therefore had a higher likelihood of changing norms of behavior.

MATT 2's design and internal reward system also helped move projects forward. Participants were eager to perform well during stage one, which could lead to a second round of training abroad. They were also responsible for finding their own resources for projects, ensuring greater ownership of the projects. Further, MATT 2 guidelines required participants to seek approval from the secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration before starting their PIPs. The secretary's approval would ensure high-level support. Mosharraf Hossain said, "We had to keep ministry involved from the very beginning because each and every PIP has to be approved by the secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration. Without his approval, participants could not implement projects."

Another strategy included pairing PIP and SPIP teams with mentors, usually MATT 2 alumni. In many cases, the mentor would be the secretary of the ministry where a PIP or SPIP was to be carried out. The involvement of high-level mentors helped create and sustain support for implementing the project. Each project team worked with its mentor to develop an action plan, and team members met with their mentor at least six times during the four months. Mentors kept records of attendance, the issues discussed, and follow-up plans, and they provided monthly progress reports to MATT 2 facilitators.

Enlisting media support was important because publicity helped develop citizen awareness and demand for better services. Fernando said, "A vast majority of successful PIPs involved the mobilization of citizen clients. We asked the PIP team to make sure that they got the public and newspapers on their side." Mosharraf Hossain also emphasized the crucial role of the media. "We made the media an integral part of any project," he said. "In the beginning, our officers [senior civil servants] wanted to avoid the media. They had some traditional ideas. But we convinced them to take them on board from the beginning." In many cases, public support became crucial in bolstering a team's efforts. For instance, the Ministry of Home Affairs extended and replicated the 2007 passport PIP when the pilot project covering seven Dhaka post offices ended. Fernando attributed the ministry's speedy response to a public clamor for continuing passport services in post offices.

MATT 2 required PIP teams to spend a week in low-income areas, ensuring that civil servants met with citizens. These interactions helped reacquaint high-level civil servants with citizens' need. A joint secretary in the Prime Minister's Office, Afzal Hossain (unrelated to others with the same last name), and his team visited a slum in Dhaka in 2011. In sessions with residents, he and his team discussed ways to prevent fires that frequently ravaged the city's poor areas. Commenting on the value of the visits, he said, "High-ranking civil servants sit high above and have privileges. They are like demigods who are not supposed to mix with common people. But when completing the PIPs, they are compelled to work with common people and compelled to see their problems. … They go to rural areas to serve the people and learn to become more service oriented. … Earlier they would say to citizens, 'Who are you?' and now they might say, 'How can I help you?'"

Some PIP and SPIP teams also solicited the active support of politicians. At the beginning of a project implementation, a team could decide whether to meet with the head of the relevant ministry. Mahmood said, "Politicians were supportive. Basically there was

no resistance from politicians. They were not aware of or concerned too much with the details of MATT 2. When we went to them and said that this project would change a particular system of work in the civil service, they were supportive."

As MATT 2 progressed, the program's emphasis on teamwork began to break down some of the strict decision-making structures that characterized much of Bangladesh's government. Mahmood said, "In the process, I had a kind of mindset change in working with juniors. Normally, the organization is hierarchical, and we don't discuss things with junior officers and do not pay attention to what the junior officer is saying. But [because of MATT 2] I could really break that kind of hierarchical barrier."

Reinforcing support

Building on the initial program design, the MATT 2 team institutionalized the 2006 secretaries' conference into an annual event, the Strategic Secretaries Workshop. Each year, secretaries or their deputies gathered for two days to hear about accomplishments from the past year and discuss next steps. Wallace noted, "We had the secretaries' workshop every year, and it re-empowered the MATT 2 process. So there was never any question of it not happening. The precedent was established, and once a precedent is established in Bangladesh, it is difficult for anybody to step back from it." At the conferences, the MATT 2 team facilitated sessions to re-establish reform areas, informed secretaries about current or upcoming PIPs, gathered their ideas for potential SPIPs, and asked them to endorse MATT 2 activities for the following year.

The secretaries' workshops followed a similar pattern every year. On the first day, attendees were free to take advantage of an open-microphone session to discuss problems and obstacles to reform. Later in the day,

facilitators from the training college grouped participants into teams to discuss and lay out reform priorities for the following year. On the second day, the teams analyzed the needs of future MATT 2 participants and refined their conclusions. Each group then presented brief reports to the rest of the group.

The annual secretaries' workshops were an important means of bolstering support for MATT 2. Mosharraf Hossain of the MATT 2 team said, "Each year we get the secretaries' endorsement, and this was the most powerful thing. We got support from all ministries, the cabinet secretary and other secretaries." By asking secretaries' to offer ideas for projects, the MATT 2 team cultivated their support and buy-in. The sessions produced initial proposals for SPIPs on performance management at a regional passport office, gender-responsive budgeting at the Ministry of Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment, and modernization of a government-sponsored old-age allowance system. The meetings also allowed secretaries to learn about projects in other ministries, which helped to reinforce and promote good practices across ministries.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

In June 2006, the MATT 2 team found the Ministry of Public Administration ill-equipped to support program activities. Wallace said, "When the program started, the Career Planning and Training Wing of the Ministry of Establishment [Ministry of Public Administration] … wasn't fully staffed, we didn't have skilled officers there. They didn't have a reform agenda. They didn't know what the reform priorities were. … Equally, we should have had, inside the Bangladesh Public Administration Training College, the training body … officers there who were skilled and ready to go on PIPs. That wasn't the case." Program guidelines called for the ministry's Career Planning and Training Wing to work

directly with Wallace and others to set MATT 2 in motion. The training wing was responsible for assisting them in running the development component, including PIPs and SPIPs.

The MATT 2 team had to create the right institutional conditions and build support with the ministry before moving ahead with implementation. First, the team ran a series of basic development training courses for ministry officials. Second, Wallace circulated discussion papers that offered examples of reforms and encouraged officials to think about new concepts and ideas. Third, MATT 2 facilitators Fernando and Mosharraf Hossain worked with teachers at the training college to make them familiar with MATT 2 facilitation techniques. Finally, the team's process of analyzing development needs built support for MATT 2 within the Ministry of Public Administration. Because of the consultative sessions with the initial sample group of 230 senior civil servants and the secretaries' conference, it became easier for Wallace and others to request the ministry to appoint a national project director to assist them in leading MATT 2.

The MATT 2 team also had to navigate turbulent political waters. Team members knew from the outset that reports and projects that had political affiliations often died when the next party came into power. Indeed, the recommendations of the 1996 Administrative Reorganization Committee and the 1997 Public Administrative Reform Commission had suffered such a fate. The BNP was in power when planners were mapping out and launching MATT 2, but in less than a year a caretaker government would assume control during a two-year election interim period. With the opposition Awami League widely expected to win the next election, MATT 2 faced an uncertain future.

The team members decided that MATT 2, in its role as a formal government program, would have to function with minimal overt political support and media attention. Although they encouraged PIP and SPIP teams to garner publicity for individual projects, they were careful to keep the overall program politically neutral. Wallace outlined the strategy: "When MATT 2 began in June 2006, there was a BNP government for six months; then a caretaker government for two years; and then an Awami League government. We deliberately avoided cultivating any clear political linkages in this volatile scenario. We left it to PIP or SPIP teams to decide on engaging politicians, or not, and this will continue."

ASSESSING RESULTS

The benefits of a program like MATT 2 necessarily materialize only in the medium term. Within the first five years, the results were limited, largely because of the program's design and its goal of fostering incremental change. The relatively narrow focus of most PIPs and SPIPs did not lend themselves to triggering bolder programs of reform from top policy makers.

Still, MATT 2's achievements were significant in mid-2011. Alumni included more than 30 of 52 ministry secretaries and almost all additional secretaries. Between 2006 and 2011, the program trained 1,323 senior civil servants, including 195 women. By June 2011, MATT 2 trainees had completed more than 200 PIPs in the areas of health, education, governance, environment and poverty alleviation, and an additional 32 PIPs were in progress. According to Fernando, the lead facilitator of MATT 2 workshops, PIPs had a 99.9% completion rate. In 2011, 40 SPIPs were in progress.

MATT 2 provided participants with the problem-solving tools needed to push ahead with reforms beyond PIPs or SPIPs. Manowar Islam, former national project director and director-general at the Department of Environment in 2011, praised MATT 2's innovative approach. "Throughout my civil

service career, I did not miss any training," he said. But "MATT 2 was totally different. It changed mindsets. Training was only a part of it. The major part was that you thought about your work and your department. It changed my attitude. Wherever I went, I tried to think about what to change. That was MATT 2's contribution."

The MATT 2 training groups and project teams, made up of different grades of civil servants, challenged traditional thinking and hierarchical decision-making. As a network of MATT 2 alumni, senior and junior officers communicated more easily. By 2011, MATT 2 had become a prestigious brand, with supporters in key government posts. According to Additional Secretary Afzal Hossain, an alumnus of the program, "Those who get the training feel lucky. It is an important career experience to have gone through the MATT 2 development program." In 2010, MATT 2 facilitators and alumni formed an alumni association and held a conference as part of a bid to foster the network of program graduates. The MATT 2 Alumni Association has proposals for various activities in 2011 as well, according to Fernando.

Members of the MATT 2 team measured their most important achievements in people terms. The program's 1,323 graduates knew how to design, test and implement reforms. They shared a common experience and were capable of mobilizing for deeper reforms. Wallace of the MATT 2 team stressed, "The MATT 2 program is changing the situation. There are now officers who have undertaken an active reform process and who have the skills to undertake reform. They provide a critical mass of experienced skills and above all, confident officers before whom, if you put a reform agenda, they can actually undertake it. More to the point, they can be mobilized by the government to undertake a reform agenda."

Others applauded MATT 2's emphasis on changing the behavior of civil servants. Khair,

director of BRAC University's Institute of Governance Studies in 2011, said, "MATT 2 is interesting because it tries to equip civil servants on how to do things and how to bring about small change without tinkering with the system. … Some PIPs are quite insignificant in making deep impact. Others are interesting. But the overall impact of MATT 2 has been the ability to reach across a vast number of civil servants and get them to think about change … a very critical thing."

The program's design imposed limitations, however. MATT 2 largely recruited civil servants from the influential administrative cadre. This feature triggered resentment among members of the 26 other civil service groups in foreign affairs, police, taxation and trade, among others. Muhd. Rafiquzzman, DFID's governance adviser, said, "At the time, DFID thought that it was better to start with the focus on the administrative cadre proposed by the Ministry of Establishment [Ministry of Public Administration]. But a focus on one cadre has created some tension in the other cadres."

Mohammad Mohabbat Khan, professor of public administration at Dhaka University, like some other observers, criticized the foreign tours to Singapore, Thailand and the U.K. The overseas element of the program represented a wrong kind of incentive and added insufficient value, he said. Khan said he considered the foreign tours as "shopping trips," and he noted that some of the travel opportunities went to civil servants who were not interested in significant change. Moreover, this component of MATT 2 strained resources. The government found it difficult to spare a large number of senior civil servants for the six weeks of overseas training.

In addition, MATT 2's advisory role was underused. The government did not push structural changes or consistently seek guidance from MATT 2 advisers. As a result, the program could not tackle some of the underlying

causes of bureaucratic paralysis—including the rules that allowed party leaders to retire senior civil servants, the effects of sharp party divisions on the ability to sustain implementation, or the existence of a market for public office. Khan said, "Unless you bring in a recruitment, training and promotion policy and make structural changes, there will be no change."

By 2011, with shifting priorities of a new government in the U.K., DFID's support for the program had waned. According to Rafiquzzman, "The whole purpose of the program was to change the mindset of the senior civil servants. How can the senior civil servants contribute in improving service delivery along with challenging the civil service reform agenda? For this, the negotiation and discussions at political and bureaucracy levels are yet to take place. From our perspective, MATT 2 has been supporting the government to change the key human resource policies and transform those into action but it remains a huge challenge." Doubts also arose over the sustainability of the PIPs and SPIPs. Rafiquzzman said, "Some PIPs and SPIPs were successful but many PIPs were not replicated by the government despite their potential impact on improving public service delivery at the grassroots level."

Some participants expressed doubts about the fairness of the selection process for the second stage. Although the MATT 2 team assigned weight to PIP completion, workshop participation, individual action plans and language skills, they did not take pains to clarify the process initially or include a broad range of people in the selection process. Following suggestions, PIP mentors were invited to participate in the selection process later on. For their part, some stage two alumni felt that the course provided little new information, and that the training was similar to the first stage.

MATT 2 did not build linkages with other similar programs, nor did it reach out to civil servants who had participated in MATT 1.

Khair, a MATT 1 graduate, said, "They did not build on the learning and did not evaluate and learn. ... They excluded MATT 1 participants. We were there and they did not learn from our mistakes." He added, "MATT 2 is run in isolation and there are no linkages with programs like ours at the BRAC institute. There are no exchanges of the ideas and experiences learned from abroad. They are building a cohort of like-minded people, but they are doing so in an isolated manner."

REFLECTIONS

One of the challenges associated with programs like MATT 2 is the difficulty of assessing results, which were likely to appear gradually and often in unexpected ways, through initiatives taken by participants several years down the road. Although the program had not solved many deep-rooted problems of Bangladesh's civil service, it had worked to overcome the civil service's historic resistance to change by embedding projects within a training program and creating a network of civil servants capable of implementing a broader agenda of reform. More importantly, it provided a large number of senior civil servants with substantial hands-on experience in understanding problems and developing solutions. Iqbal Mahmood, secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration, saw value in MATT 2's incremental approach to building capacity. "We have to work with many people who are really very stubborn people and who do not want to be changed," he said. "So we have to continue with this kind of learning … that civil servants experience the problem and try to overcome it. And they have to change [because] at the end of the day, it is the citizens that they have to serve better."

Some of the limitations in MATT's design were evident in 2011, however. Restricted to an advisory role, the program could not press for changes in transfer and promotion policies to

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help depoliticize the civil service. It was also unable to influence the placement of its own graduates. In 2011, the Career and Planning Wing of the Ministry of Public Administration, struggled to do its job of matching civil servants to positions suited to their skills, and many MATT 2 alumni continued to be put in positions ill-suited to their expertise or experience. Nor could MATT 2 offer solutions to issues such as the market for civil service positions. The program's people-centered approach, geared towards changing the attitudes and behaviors of civil servants rather than a comprehensive attempt to overhaul the civil service, did not produce significant reforms.

In the absence of top-level political will, MATT 2 might have had a greater impact if civil servants had used the project implementation skills acquired through PIPs and SPIPs to introduce and institutionalize changes within their ministries, and to influence the behavior of junior civil servants. Although some graduates did so, the Ministry of Public Administration failed to capitalize on their efforts. Mahmood acknowledged the

shortcoming. "MATT 2 failed in institutional capacity building," he said. "But it is really our failure, not of MATT 2. We paid a lot of attention to capacity building. But we must [now] focus on building institutions."

MATT 2 made significant strides in a political context that discouraged strong performance and innovation on the part of civil servants. The program had taught a large number of senior-level officials to think about creating and sustaining change, with some alumni risking their careers to institutionalize or replicate projects. As Mahmood put it, "There is a mindset change in many bureaucrats, and a kind of cultural and behavioral change in the process. The most valuable thing in MATT 2 is that … you know that there is a problem and you feel that you need to address the problem within the shortest possible time. There is something tangible and time-bound to it. There is also the knowledge that you cannot address the problem alone and need to have the cooperation of others. So, it is a kind of blending of coordination, teamwork and leadership."

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[8] Safar Raj Hossain, secretary of the Ministry of Public Administration, Shamsul Alam, director at the civil servants' training college, and additional secretaries Nurul Islam and Sultana Afroze represented the Government of Bangladesh. DFID advisers included Chris Murgatroyd, Tanween Chowdhury, David Gray and Honor Flanagan.

[9] John Dagnall, another human resource specialist, was also part of the MATT 2 team. Key BPATC facilitators included Kazi Hasan Imam, Kanka Jameel and Banik Goshinder, among others.

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