

The Raffles Review

Issue 12. 31 July 2015

Excellence ain't easy!



SOURCE

Paper by Alina Rocha Menocal (Developmental Leadership Programme) published in June 2015: [Inclusive political settlements: evidence, gaps, and challenges of institutional transformation.](#)

KEY POINT

Politics determine the development of public service excellence through shaping the authority, legitimacy and capacity of any state to pursue development and reduce inequality. Or is it the opposite? The way we currently think and talk about 'inclusive' political settlements glosses over some key issues and problems, such as identity and nation-building, and simplifies the very complex process of institutional change needed to get to excellence. This makes it difficult to decide what could effectively be done to strengthen institutions.

BIG IDEAS

- 'Political settlements' are implicit or explicit political deals or understandings between influential people in a country about who has power and who benefits from the distribution of national resources, wealth and growth.
- Institutions are the product of political processes with a historical legacy. The mere existence of formal institutions like parliaments, court of laws and public administrations is no guarantee that the state and its elites work towards development.
- Informal institutions explain why countries with similar formal institutions (and endowments) can have totally different development paths.
- The evidence shows that the basic capacity of a state to provide its citizens with a chance to make a meaningful living is elemental to make other transformations possible, for example more inclusive political processes and democracy.
- Leaders' ability to shape and sell a collective vision or shared national project that will appeal to society's broad sense of identity (e.g. national identity) has a great impact on the quality, effectiveness and potential of the state for development purposes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

- As a key state institution, public services are a crucial part of, and often active participant in, the political settlement. The purpose, quality and effectiveness of the political settlement is reflected in the public administration.
- The success of reforms or, for that matter, the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, depend to a large extent on their alignment with the key characteristics of the political settlement.

The Raffles Review
aims to ruffle your thinking!

This weekly offering summarises insights on public service matters to challenge assumptions and question the status quo.

- As a formal state institution, a public administration has a lot of interaction with informal institutions. This interaction explains, more than technical capacity issues, why similar types of public administration perform so radically different.
- Public administrations are the crucial reservoirs of basic state capacity, as acknowledged by SDG 16. Therefore, strengthening public service organisations' ability to deliver is a crucial aspect of more inclusive political processes.
- As part of the elite and head of a crucial state institution, senior officials play an important role in the development of any genuinely inclusive national vision. Foresight can help – ask us!