PERCEPTION OF PRODUCTIVITY IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

3.1 At various fora external to the Civil Service, criticism has been levelled at the supposedly low level of productivity in the public sector. Such remarks against the Civil Service are not totally founded.

Productivity in the Civil Service has been mainly equated to the number of official hours an employee spends in the office, irrespective of quality and/or quantity of outputs.

The Civil Service operates with a less-than-optimal deployment of human resources. A close examination of the budget for the financial year under review reveals that, out of a workforce of 70,900, only 50,900 are actually in post. This shortage of manpower is bound to cause disruption in service delivery, especially that the bulk of officers in post, some 35,500 (around 70 per cent) are concentrated in three essential sectors – Education, Health and Law and Order – that devolve upon the Government. The core of the Civil Service is manned only by some 15,400 officers.

The official hours of work in the public service is from 8.45 am to 4 pm. Yet it is common knowledge that key personnel in most Ministries and Departments work beyond their normal hours of service to be able to deliver outputs expected from them. The majority of the public officers leave office at 4 pm. This is the official time, nevertheless civil servants are branded as the “nine to four” officials, meaning working for very short hours and hence, at a low productivity level.

In an attempt to change this perception and to create an appearance that work is being performed “as in the private sector”, public officials and the supporting staff are being called for to work or stay in their workplace beyond 4 p.m. irrespective of having or not having any business to do.

This habit has an incidence on government expenditure, in that overtime has to be paid to the supporting staff including office attendants to clean and close the offices; there is increase in consumption of electricity and sometimes there are also the transportation costs of conveying them to their place of residence. This is not in line with Government policy of reducing public expenditure.

Given the availability of modern communication tools and the social and other associated costs, the need for “over-staying” in the work place after normal office hours is not warranted. In this context, it is worth to note that following the recent rise in the number of cases of suicide and other stress related illnesses in the workplace in France, the uninhibited drive towards higher levels of output/productivity has been put to test. The human and social costs associated with the disproportionate levels of this phenomenon have questioned employers to cross-examine their strategy for attaining yet another (higher) plateau of productivity gains.