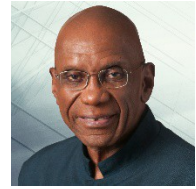




Economic Letter February 2020



Avoiding Policy Hiccups

My topic this month is borrowed from the *Midweek Nation* of January 8. It complained of the inept implementation of new policies by the Barbados Government. The list of "errors" included the replacement of the Road Tax; the retrenchment of public officers; the withdrawing of disability pensions; confusion surrounding the introduction of a new customs system; the failure of Transport Authority initiatives; lengthy corporate registration processes; the online registration of schools; and the introduction of breathalyzer tests.

These failures are the most recent evidence of the ineptitude of the Barbados public services. Our public services are organised as they were for the society of the 1950s and 60s; teachers rode to school on Raleigh bicycles, few households could afford a Morris Minor car, and you could shop for fruit and vegetables from schooners moored in the Careenage. The leadership of the public sector lacks the expertise and experience of implementing modern systems of organisation and management.

The clearest evidence of public sector incapacity is the failure to publish annual reports in a timely fashion. The annual report is the place where departments and agencies ought to report on their stewardship. I invite you to search online for annual reports of the delinquent agencies listed in the *Nation* Editorial, as I did. The only report I could find was for the Barbados Revenue Authority; their most recent Report is for 2017. There are no reports for the NIS, the Customs Department, the Transport Authority, the Corporate Affairs Office, or the Ministries of Public Service, Transport or Education.

We can expect orderly implementation of new policies and effective public services only with a systemic, multi-year modernisation of public services. We need new leadership with the required technical skills, organisational experience and modern management expertise; and we need new systems of organisation suitable for the modern world. The Barbados public will know that this process has begun in earnest when we begin to see annual reports being published within three months of the end of the Financial Year by all Government entities.