



Defining Service Delivery :

“We Must Hold Ourselves
Up to the Highest Standards
of Service”

(RAKAN Sarawak's series of interviews
with the State Secretary)

RAKAN Sarawak: Since you assumed the highest position in the Sarawak civil service as State Secretary, you have been travelling and visiting government agencies and departments throughout the State, even right to the remote sub-districts. Why do you make it a point to visit these places personally?

YB DATU WILSON BAYA DANDOT (STATE SECRETARY):

The answer to that question is related to how I've always viewed the civil service. I have the utmost respect for the civil service as an institution. When I was young, I looked up to civil servants with a great deal of respect and admiration. When I was granted the Colombo Plan scholarship, I was elated because one of the doors that it opened up for me was the opportunity to serve the government upon completion of my studies.

With hindsight, I consider working in the civil service a noble career. For me, being a civil servant is not just a job; it is more of a vocation. The presence of a civil servant in any place should be able to give the people the assurance that things are being taken cared of, that there is someone who they can go to for help, for advice, for direction. The civil service serves much more than the “functional” role of providing services to the people. It also plays a “symbolic” role. Depending on how we look at and perform our tasks as civil servants, the civil service institution becomes a symbol of:

- hope or dejection,
- a future that is either bright or bleak,
- a society that is either warm and caring or indifferent or pathetic.

The physical presence of the civil service, in the form of government structures and facilities and in the people that we have on the ground, means so much to the people. That's why, as the State Secretary I made it my priority to “get into the trenches” myself, as often as I can, in order to foster a “site visit – see to verify” work culture among our civil servants. I know I need to take the lead in making sure that we are always in touch with our people and the situations they face on the ground, to remind and encourage them to live up to their calling of civil servant leadership, and to ensure that they continue to be motivated to serve the people well.

RAKAN Sarawak : Could you give us some illustrations of the “symbolic” role of the civil service, particularly in the context of Sarawak?

STATE SECRETARY : When we consider Sarawak's unique geographical features and challenges, then we can clearly see what the physical presence of the civil service means to the people.

Sarawak is so vast, with a land area that is equivalent to the size of all the states in Peninsular Malaysia combined. At the same time, our population of only 2.5 million is widely dispersed throughout this vast land of ours.

In our rural areas, it is a challenge for some of our people to come to our government offices. Usually, they come to our offices only when they have pressing matters of concern; matters that their ketua kampung or village

"When we consider Sarawak's unique geographical features and challenges, then we can clearly see what the physical presence of the civil service means to the people."

chief is not able to help them with. It is still relatively common, for our rural folks to rely on riverine transportation, or to walk on jungle roads, taking them hours, even days, before they can reach the nearest government office. Their journey could be affected by the changing tides and they could get stranded for a few days waiting for the water level to rise during the dry season. Or during the rainy season, the water level could become too dangerously high for them to continue their journey.

Imagine what a person would most probably feel once he finally reaches his destination - a government office. If the office is clean and has a cozy, friendly atmosphere, and if the civil servant who is assigned there, attends to him with a warm, welcoming, attentive, sympathetic and compassionate attitude, then that would have made his long and tough journey worthwhile. That's why I suggest that our civil servants should always be properly attired to reflect a good image of the civil service, even though they are working in the rural areas.

Now, imagine another scenario: the man, who is tired and exhausted from his journey, with some pressing concerns that he needs someone to help him with, sees and enters an office that is dirty and unkempt - paint that is peeling off, curtains that are either torn or dirty, chairs that have seen better days, a room that is dimly lit because the lights aren't working- and was attended to by a civil servant who is indifferent and unsympathetic to his situation. That person would no doubt be going back to his kampung feeling even more dejected and helpless, because the civil service has let him down.

We must have high respect for the civil service institution – what it stands for and symbolizes in our society ; and for our roles as civil servants . We represent, and we must always strive to fulfill, the highest standards of caring, compassionate and professional service to society.

RAKAN Sarawak : During your visits on the ground, what are some of the things that you are particularly pleased with, and the things that you would rather not have seen happening?

STATE SECRETARY : I know of one SAO who did not use the lack of a government vehicle as an excuse for him not to visit the remote longhouses or kampungs in his area. Instead, he applied his resourcefulness, ingenuity and networking skills to work around that problem. He requested the logging companies in his area to allow him to hitch a ride in their logging trucks so that he can regularly visit the people. This is one good example of how a civil servant , who is truly committed to serving the people , is able to go beyond his limitations so as not to compromise on the quality of his service. We need more people like him, and this is what I am glad to take note of, and commend, whenever I visit our staff on the ground.

I would like to see more of our senior civil servants to take the opportunity to visit their respective staff on the ground



"I am particularly proud of our civil servants on the ground who carry out their duties well even with limited resources at their disposal. I am proud of those who understand that their presence mean a lot to the people and so, they make an extra effort to make sure that they get in touch with the people."

more often. I am not happy to note that some of our civil service leaders hardly ever visit our sub-districts, and prefer to conduct their meetings and visits only in the main towns. We must give due attention to our people on the ground. They are the cogs , valves , nails and screws that make the wheels of our civil service machinery work and functioning well. If we do not pay attention to them, and give them the motivation, encouragement and recognition that they need, we cannot expect our civil service machinery to run well. Besides, if the civil service leaders are not acquainted with the peoples' actual needs and conditions, how can they guide their staff in developing relevant policies and directions for their departments?

We are here to serve the people, so we should be right where the people are.

RAKAN Sarawak : How would you respond to comments that "the State Secretary is very meticulous and has very high expectations of the civil servants"?

STATE SECRETARY : I will not deny that I am meticulous and have very high expectations of civil servants. That's because I know and believe that each one of us have what it takes to be the best that we can be. Our civil servants here in Sarawak are much better off in terms of the facilities, the opportunities for training and upgrading of skills and competencies, the salary levels that we receive, etc compared with civil servants in other countries in Asia. I've read about civil servants in some countries, who have not received their salaries for months on end, and are forced to work as taxi drivers after their official work hours just so they can feed their families. While we do have some limitations in certain areas, we do not have any justifiable reason for not being able to provide the kind of service that our people need.

We cannot, and must not allow ourselves to make excuses for failing to provide service of the highest standards .

As I have mentioned earlier, being in the civil service is a vocation rather than just a job. We have been given the mandate by our political leaders to facilitate growth and progress, in line with the vision and directions that they have crafted for our country and State. We are not just here to perform certain tasks or functions. We are here to serve, to motivate, to lead the way, to inspire the people to fulfill their potential, and help harness their capability and resources to realize our national vision and mission. How can we fulfill that mandate if we do not hold ourselves to the highest standards of competence and professionalism?