

Performance Management in the Public Sector: Opportunities for Syria

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Abstract

The relevance of the article is due to the fact that in the context of the state and legal reform in Syria, the problem of improving the efficiency of public administration and its individual elements is becoming particularly relevant. The current system of social standards and guarantees has proved itself unsuitable for the conditions of a market economy. Growing problems in the economy – a drop in GDP, a decrease in budget revenues and an increase in budget deficit – exacerbate social problems and reduce access to public services. In this connection, the limited budget funds have significantly reduced public consumption funds and, as a result, certain services have become almost inaccessible under low household purchasing power.

The article substantiates the need for modernization in the management system that would meet the requirements of a democratic state with a socially oriented economy. Modernization should be aimed primarily at the introduction of budgeting and systems that contribute to the improvement of services provided by public authorities. Theoretical and methodological understanding of the improvement processes in the activities of the state authorities of Syria, as well as other states that are in similar conditions, has led to the conclusion on the relevance of the transition from obsolete forms and methods of management to modern ones, where the goal setting and implementation of tasks to achieve the goals are carried out within each individual management entity, and goal setting is focused on a clearly defined result. It is proved that such a mechanism can be the introduction of budgeting and performance management in public administration.

Keywords: *performance management, focus on results, goals, local governments, state power*

JEL: *H11, H50, P21*

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INTRODUCTION

Today, there is a tendency to generalize the goals of public administration bodies, and, as a result, there is the danger of activities being organized for the purpose of achieving intermediate, partial results, which leads to “management for the sake of management”, a loss of development prospects, and resource costs. Such a situation is manifested in rivalry and conflicts between the individual parts of government, preserved existence of each of them acting as an end in itself, and the main goal for which the organization has been created and its activities are carried out fades into the background. Therefore, contrary to the interests of the state, situations arise in which governing bodies created with a specific goal in mind begin to influence the general goal based on the existing staff or material and financial resources, modifying it in accordance with their own capabilities and current interests [Armstrong M., 2009]. All these factors have formed the basis for reformatting the concepts of public administration and searching for directions of positive reforms based on the principles of performance management [Cohen S. et al., 2013].

All this is also relevant for Syria, where public sector reform is one of the key tasks, since the quality of the functioning of a democratic state and the satisfaction of civil society's interests, as well as the constructiveness of the dialogue between these entities, depend on the strength, flexibility and relevance of the former. The classic bureaucratic model of government that has developed in Syria does not meet the needs of the times, its structure and mechanisms requiring modernization and transformation. The logic of the reforms will be determined by the choice of a model for further development of public administration, since modern science of public administration offers a wide, varied range of methodologically different concepts, theories and doctrines of public sector management. The content and direction of future reforms will depend on the choice of one of them for the scientific foundation of practical transformations, and therefore the purpose of the study is a theoretical justification of the possibilities of increasing the efficiency of public administration through the use of performance management, and the identification of the advantages of its use in Syria.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The modern science of public administration offers a wide varying range of methodologically different concepts, theories and doctrines of public sector management. The content and direction of future reforms will depend on the choice of one of them for the scientific foundation of practical transformations. The paradigm of new public management a model of rejection of bureaucracy among the ones most popular in theory and widespread in practice, having originated in the 1980s and having become the most popular in the late 20th – early 21st centuries. New public management is a scientific paradigm that arose from the criticism of the principles and means of the bureaucratic approach to public administration. The latter was long considered the classical system of organizing the public sector, from the end of the 19th century to the 70s of the 20th century. New public administration aims to completely replace the old (bureaucratic) model of government with a new one while developing its own theoretical framework, methodology and mechanisms [Armstrong M., 2009].

New public management is based on two key elements: management and marketing. In turn, these elements are detailed by a number of mechanisms: changes in the behavior and culture of a public servant (turning them into a state manager), the structure of a public institution and the nature of communication within the organization, and the structure of the state apparatus and the redistribution of duties and responsibilities within it; the introduction of a competitive business framework; focus on efficiency and profitability; involvement of private organizations in the process of providing public services; regular audit of the performance of public administration functions at various levels; minimization of expenses;

decentralized budget; citizens being treated as consumers etc. New public management is a public administration paradigm that provides for the introduction of market mechanisms into the practice of the public sector in order to increase its efficiency, productivity and economy through mechanisms such as decentralization, management and audit of performance; managerialism; privatization and outsourcing [Osborne S. P., 2010].

It is advisable to distinguish between the consequences of the principles of new public administration in developed countries and developing countries, through differing initial conditions. Developed countries are faced with the following problems: the paradox of centralization through decentralization; inappropriateness of applying the whole complex of managerial technologies in the public sector; and ethical issues (corruption and a real lack of transparency). In developing countries, the list of problems is as follows: lack of resources and managerial capacities; centralized decision-making; lack of knowledge in market operations; the impossibility of contractual agreements due to the weakness of the regulatory framework; the fallacy of blindly transferring the principles of governance of developed states; and the unpreparedness of civil society for innovative principles of public administration [Lin J.-S., Lee P.-Y., 2011]. We believe that, for states where the socioeconomic situation is difficult, it is necessary to supplement the principles of new public administration with the need for decentralization of power and direct transfer of budgetary funds to the local level for targeted transformations in order to solve the specific problem of local communities.

We can agree with Steve Zaffron and Dave Logan that the transformation of a state manager into a professional manager, the establishment of horizontal communication links and decentralization, and the introduction of market mechanisms for the functioning of the public sector become the key to the productivity of public administration. New public management has both a number of supporters and a number of opponents [Zaffron S., Logan D., 2011]. Nevertheless, the practice of many countries shows positive results in the implementation of its principles.

According to Mark R. Rutgers, new public administration, which provides for a comprehensive reassessment of the essence of the managerial process (goals, objectives, implementation mechanisms etc.), is a unique theoretical model with the formulation and solution of problems, completely denies the bureaucratic approach to the public sector (rejecting the previous paradigm), is in the state of the completion stage today, and can be confirmed by the appearance of new models [Rutgers M., 2010].

New public administration arises as a result of applying the economic approach to the analysis of activities in the public administration system. Introduction of market mechanisms for the organization of public administration and managerial culture ensures its implementation in practice. Michela Arnaboldi and others believe that performance management is a difficult task faced by public service managers, the fulfilment of which is limited by serious adverse consequences associated with the improper use of performance management systems in government bodies, especially with a negative impact on staff morale. The lack of ready-made answers to the questions of performance management makes this task difficult to implement, which necessitates the understanding of the critical aspects of implementing performance management systems [Arnaboldi M. et al., 2015].

A similar opinion is shared by Karen Fryer, Jiju Anthony and Susan Ogden, who believe that there are common problems throughout the world that arise in performance management systems, caused by conflicts between different interest groups, be it between politicians and professionals, or between factions and coalitions; by pressure from groups with special interests; and by conflict between central authorities that want control and departments / local authorities that need autonomy. In their study, the authors identified three groups of problems in the implementation of performance management in the public sector: technical, systemic and organizational, deriving from the participation of employees in this process.

Technical problems relate to indicators and data as well as their collection, interpretation and analysis. These are mainly “complex” problems – in particular, data quality, choice of indicators, their use and analysis of the results. Systemic problems relate to the “general process” – that is, to the integration of performance management systems with existing systems, and the lack of a strategic focus that encourages a short-term approach to the cost of performance management. The third class of problems mainly covers the “milder” issues associated with people and their participation in the performance management system: insufficient customer involvement and organization-wide involvement, including little support from higher levels of management or decision-makers [Fryer K. et al., 2009].

In recognizing the undeniable importance of adequate funding in meeting the needs of society and the territory, it should be borne in mind that the relevance of the budget as an instrument of the public administration sector, ultimately, depends on how budget funds are used and managed. That is, this is a question of a combination of, firstly, budget planning and distribution and, secondly, effective and efficient implementation of the budget program. Unfortunately, the second aspect of governance in terms of effective implementation of plans and programs is often ignored by state and local authorities, which leads to the expected consequences, namely inefficiency, incompetence, wastefulness and corruption.

To solve these problems, it is necessary to strike a balance between qualitative and quantitative performance indicators, long-term and short-term goals, control and freedom for innovation, and internal and external contributions. Each country should evaluate its own performance management system, identify problem areas and choose the most appropriate solution. Unfortunately, many states and organizations do not have the time for objective analysis of the situation or are forced to resort to a standard solution which does not solve their individual problems. One of the most promising tools for improving the efficiency of public administration is budgeting. Budgeting provides for monitoring the implementation of approved budgets for the targeted, timely use of funds, as well as for the effectiveness of the measures taken. This, in turn, leads to increased responsibility for performance.

Jie-Shin Lin and Po-Yu Lee concur with the above and believe that the process of performance management in public administration is faced with a number of structural problems, and therefore modern public sector organizations should provide dynamic performance management with the characteristics of mutual adaptation and self-organization [Lin J.-S., Lee P.-Y., 2011].

Despite the problems that arise in the implementation of performance management in public administration, many researchers are of the opinion that this process can bring good results and significantly increase the efficiency of the public sector. For instance, Andrews Rhys believes that performance management allows one to compare the effectiveness of the work of state organizations across time, between authorities and similar organizations in other places, but it is necessary to make wider use of such approaches as yardstick competition, alternative ways to promote innovation aimed at reducing costs, business process reengineering, large-scale restructuring, and promotion of leadership potential and organizational culture [Rhys, 2014].

Yi Zheng and others proposed a system for measuring and managing effectiveness based on the “3 E’s” methodology, focused on identifying groups of relevant stakeholders—both internal and external—and ensuring a balance of their specific interests, which can be independent, complementary or contradictory.

In this case, the main principles of results-based management should be:

- 1) focus on results “permeating” all strategies, processes, organizational culture and public administration decisions;
- 2) information, goals, priorities and activities of public administration corresponding to the priorities and goals of the state, the interests of welfare in society being insured;

- 3) transparent information about activities, decisions, rules and processes, accessible for use and understanding;
- 4) goals, programs, activities and resources aligned with priorities and expected results;
- 5) decisions and processes accompanied by timely, reliable and substantive information.
- 6) results-based management transforming the very system of public administration, its management, and the process of policymaking;
- 7) budgeting provides targeted and efficient use of budget funds.

The methodology of “management by results” has developed the position that the definition of results leads to knowledge of the tasks of each executor, and this, in turn, increases the motivational potential of employees, allowing one, on this basis, to truly ensure the achievement of results by the whole organization. It is the inclusion of each employee in the process of ensuring the realization of results that is the defining achievement of the approach. It is also important to identify key stakeholders and their interests at each level, considering them from four points of view: goal, operation, stakeholder, and opportunities [Zheng Y. et al., 2018]. To disclose the purpose of the present study, it is helpful to consider the possibility of using performance management in Syria taking into account the characteristics of its management system.

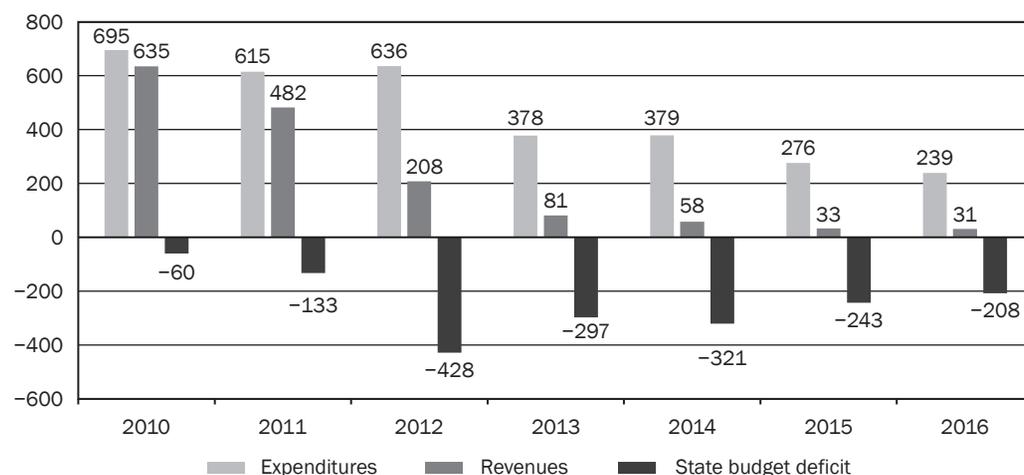
POSSIBILITIES OF USING PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN SYRIA

The economic recession, military conflict, political instability and social discontent as well as latent and obvious problems in international relations are forcing the Syrian government to rethink the management policy along many vectors. The most acute problems in the economy at the moment are rising unemployment, GDP decline, energy crisis, price increase, output reduction, inflation, and others.

The situation in the social sphere of the Syrian Republic can be described as extremely negative and subject to increased risks of socioeconomic unrest and radicalization. Against this background, economic problems exacerbate the existing problems: a drop in GDP by half (Fig. 1) has made access to public services more difficult.

Figure 1

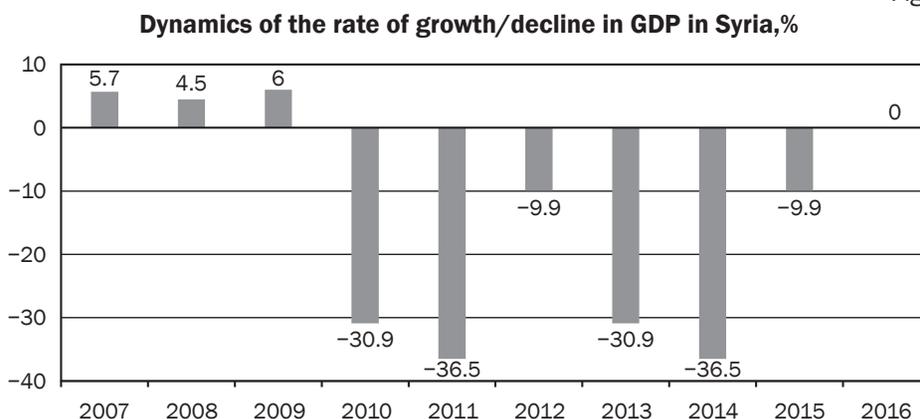
Expenditures, revenues and state budget deficit in Syria, billion Syrian pounds



Sources: compiled by the author based on World Bank. Data and Development indicators (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>); Syria Central Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.cbssy.sy/Introduction.htm>).

A reduction in the state budget and an increase in its deficit can be called another negative point (Fig. 2). As we can see, budget expenditures in 2015 amounted to 39.7% of the same indicator in 2010, while revenues decreased even more and amounted to only 5.2% of the 2010 value in 2015. Thus, today the budget revenues in the Syrian Republic account for one third of the size of pre-war expenses and are almost entirely funded by foreign aid.

Figure 2



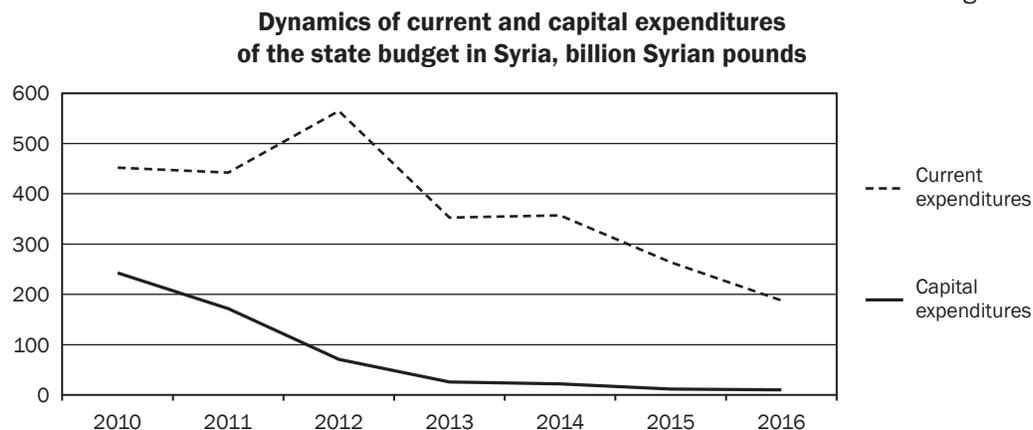
Sources: compiled by the author based on World Bank. Data and Development indicators (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>); Syria Central Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.cbssy.sy/Introduction.htm>).

In this regard, the current and capital budget expenditures have decreased significantly. Current expenses declined by 188 billion Syrian pounds in 2015, which is only 41.6% of the 2010 indicator, while capital expenditures decreased by 95% over the analyzed period (Fig. 3). Growth of Syrian government debt is also to be noted (Fig. 4). The data presented in Figure 4 show a significant increase in government debt since 2010.

Over the past decades of the 20th century, Syria has achieved significant successes in its socioeconomic life—in the new millennium, Syria has embarked on a reform of administrative management relating to all government agencies and bodies. All ministries have conducted a thorough and comprehensive assessment of their internal processes, service procedures and services themselves, and have worked out the directions for the necessary changes. All the proposed changes have been studied to ensure coherence among the internal, interministerial and ministerial levels. New technology requirements for e-governance and e-government have been formulated. New structures were approved in early 2003, and were implemented at various levels for some time. However, these undertakings have been suspended in connection with the outbreak of military conflict.

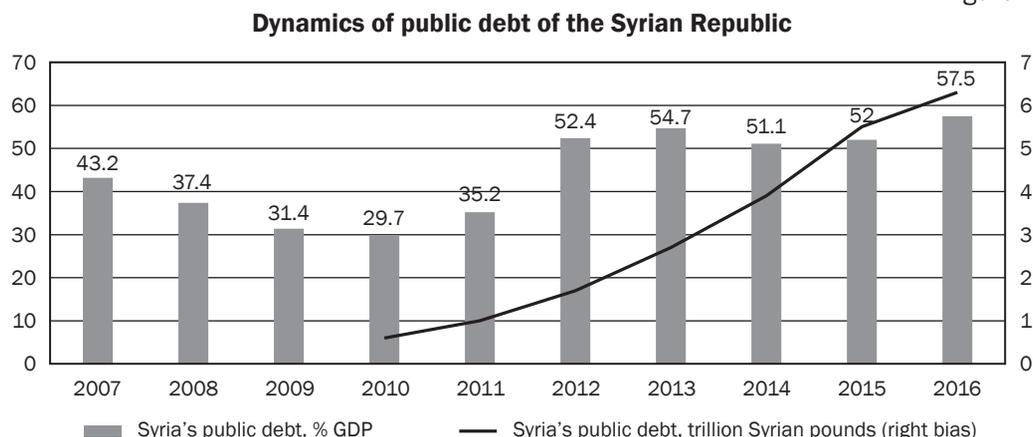
All the declared directions are quite promising and can be regarded as an advanced solution in the practice of public administration; at the same time there are problems and limitations that prevent a successful implementation of all measures. For instance, the implementation of a management system based on results and changes requires serious and continuous functional activities that do not correspond to the nature of the civil servant. The hierarchical structure of the government bureaucracy does not allow it to adapt to the philosophy of general change management, based on the participation of authorities through horizontal decision-making and managerial communication. It is necessary to have clear and specific goals and objectives supported by reliable and well-founded criteria for measuring productivity, which are not present in Syrian government organizations.

Figure 3



Sources: compiled by the author based on World Bank. Data and Development indicators (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>); Syria Central Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.cbssy.sy/Introduction.htm>).

Figure 4



Sources: compiled by the author based on World Bank. Data and Development indicators (<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator>); Syria Central Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.cbssy.sy/Introduction.htm>).

The situation is exacerbated by barriers in foreign relations, such as problems with the United States and sanctions. Thus, in the Syrian government, the following circumstances have formed: political commitment of public service; a large number of government officials; and large public sector spending [Brownlee, 2015; Arab Reform Initiative, 2016].

The lack of clear strategic priorities for socioeconomic policies leads to the dispersal of funds and total underfunding of social institutions. Therefore, the techniques and methods of solving these problems should correspond to the complexity of modern life and be oriented on the use and functioning in conditions of uncertainty and high dynamism of the current situation. A solution to these problems is impossible without a scientific approach to planning and implementing the activities of public administration, focused on the result. There is no doubt that this problem is associated with the organization of the internal structure of governing bodies and with work processes in the provision of services to the population at the local level.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION ON RESULTS

The basis of chronic inefficiency and the unsatisfactory level of implementation of tactical and strategic plans typical of countries similar to Syria lies in the ineffective organization of governing institution management. An effective means of combating these problems, as well as a vital element in organizing activities in the system of state institutions, is the concept of performance management.

The conceptual basis of new public administration are the theory of agent relations and transaction costs; the theory of public choice in the context of economic policy etc. In addition, these theories provide the scientific foundation for the formation of new public management, taking from it the following key points:

- Management practice as a way of organizing the management process can be involved in any management field.
- The manager's behavior is easily modeled using an incentive system.
- The manager acts more efficiently if they are able to organize their own workspace and process.

The theory of agent relations borrows in new public management the principle of client-agent relations and the idea of outsourcing. A citizen is perceived as an equivalent subject. They act as a customer and can choose public sector organizations which offer the implementation of public administration functions, better compliance with individual requirements and the results of previous cooperation.

Point transformations in public administration at the local level contribute to improving the quality of public services because competition creates an environment in which one has to fight for the right to serve the client. This leads to minimization and optimization of budget expenditures on the maintenance of the state apparatus. The transaction cost theory, aimed at reducing business expenses, offers mathematical mechanisms for their reduction and creates the basis for strengthening specifications and monitoring contracts, at the same time helping to establish the boundaries of contracting through securing exclusive appropriate functions for public agencies. The public relations theory grants new public administration the basis for the corporatization and privatization of state enterprises, establishing a boundary between political and managerial functions as well as between the formation of a development strategy and its implementation.

Performance management first forms information needs, and then establishes internal mechanisms and incentives for using the information received in the decision-making process. Organizing the life of a territorial community is one of the main functions of state authorities.

Government bodies should ensure the provision of socially guaranteed conditions for normal existence and development of a person—that is, a certain standard of living. They are responsible for fulfilling the powers delegated by the state in creating appropriate and sufficient conditions to ensure a decent life and free development of a person as a member of a territorial community. Local public authorities should be an effective component of modern democratic transformations in society, and thus the list of their tasks and responsibilities in this area is important and diverse.

Moreover, the more complex the management system, the more intermediate goals exist, and the achievement of each of them is a step toward the main goal. In order to increase the effectiveness of public administration in the process of achieving this goal, it is necessary to use the methodology of results orientation, performance management, which emphasizes the need for a clear orientation of the organization's activities to measure the results planned and achieved in the work process. Since the goal is a criterion for evaluating results, depending on the type of goal used either by the organization as a whole or by a separate unit or executor, individual indicators or a system of indicators are used to evaluate performance.

This concept differs from our understanding of public administration, where more attention is paid to the implementation of planned activities, not always keeping in mind the result and impact of this event [Thomas K., 2007]. The advantages of this approach are that it focuses on results rather than activities; public administration is becoming more open; accountability is ensured; achievements and actions are evaluated; strategic goals are in focus; funds are used more effectively; and the best incentives are formed for staff motivation and celebration of achievements [Pollitt C., Bouckaert G., 2011].

In our opinion, for Syria, the implementation of performance management is caused by:

- the desire to improve the quality of services that should meet the needs of society and the priorities of citizens;
- the desire to improve the image of the government;
- an increase in the needs and expectations of stakeholders;
- a reaction to the financial, political and social crisis in the country;
- the need for reporting on results;
- the application of business planning models;
- attempts to introduce general performance indicators at the state level.
- the need for implementation of performance agreements.

Results-based management has the following components, presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Components of performance management for the Syrian State

Blocks	Characteristics
1. Strategic planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Process planning, which determines the mission of each public administration body and sets priorities for activities to be directed at; – definition of clear and measurable problems (results) using logical structural matrices; – identifying indicators to measure progress in task completion; – establishment of quantitative indicators (targets) for each indicator for activity measurement; – public involvement and identification of the society’s needs; – budgetary process involving the allocation of resources to priorities. The budget process should also be results-oriented. Financing should not be based on the amount of expenditures for the past year, but rather on information on the effectiveness and efficiency of measures. It should focus on the end results, not the resources spent. Social needs should be in the spotlight. The budget process should be related to planning.
2. Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creation of activity monitoring systems to collect information on real results, including a mechanism for collecting, checking, organizing and storing data; – review, analysis and report on the results of achieving the set quantitative indicators; – assessment (measurement process), which supports a management system with a focus on results; – accountability mechanism.
3. The use of monitoring information for the management and improvement of activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Conducting an assessment (evaluation) to obtain additional information that is not available in the activity monitoring system; – use of information for internal accountability, training and decision-making, as well as for reporting to other interested parties and partners; – using information to improve performance.

Source: compiled by the author.

As can be seen from Table 1, the first block deals with strategic planning, the first and second blocks together comprising performance measurement. Performance assessment (performance measurement) is an objective determination of the level of achievement of established goals and indicators by each public administration body through defining objectives, indicators, monitoring activities, analysis and reporting. Performance measurement

includes regular evaluation of results (outcomes) and the effectiveness of services and programs.

1. An important implementation measure is the use of budgeting. We propose reducing the budgeting model of financial activities of government bodies to the following: Given certain factors (economic development, social needs of society, national interests etc.), budgets are drawn up.

2. Financial resources are accumulated in the budgets of the corresponding levels.

3. There is a budget execution, which includes:

- the implementation of capital investments of the state;
- the implementation of public procurement;
- management of funds held by the state;
- the implementation of government borrowing and public debt management;
- the provision of state guarantees and loans;
- risk management and financial management of government projects and programs.

4. There is a display of all operations conducted with budget funds and other financial resources of the state.

5. Internal audit and control are conducted during the implementation of budgets.

6. The results of budget execution are obtained: social services, public goods, effects from the implementation of state programs etc.—all that will, ultimately, contribute to socio-economic development.

7. State control is implemented (implying independent, external state financial control), one of its goals being the assessment of the effect that was achieved by the results of the budget.

CONCLUSION

Summarizing the above, we can conclude that the main prerequisites for the implementation of performance management in Syria are support from the management, mission definition, and basic ability of government to process information. For the implementation of performance management, it is necessary to create organizational incentives for its application and to fit this approach into the organizational culture. The main direction of implementation is budgeting, aimed at determining the needs of society that the state can satisfy, formulating specific goals by developing a budget policy, and choosing methods and principles for budgeting, budget preparation and budget process organization. The central units of government that are responsible for implementing the approach should be active and effective leaders in establishing the criteria for evaluating and monitoring activities. Performance measurement should be linked to periodic evaluation of programs and policies. Performance management should focus on the needs of consumers, customers, and citizens in the process of monitoring activities. The control process reveals what results of activity implementation have been achieved by chance rather than according to the plan. An important part of the control process is the decision-making on its results with the objective of carrying out appropriate activities.

The above is the approach that allows each public authority and each employee to determine their own unique contribution to the achievement of the goals of the institution as well as the establishment of constructive links between personal, local and general tasks. Thus, the key goal of performance management is to search for tools and means of managerial influence that allow the effectiveness of public administration to be maximized. In turn, “management by results” is a management system that should be built on the basis of a certain way of thinking and behavior, focused on achieving the expected results. Such a management system will allow state, regional and local public administration entities to localize systemic efforts on the achievement of the decentralization reform’s goals, ensuring an adequate scale of financial and organizational capacity.

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