

# A line in the sand



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Libya has shaken off its pariah status and its deserts are rich in untapped reserves of oil and gas, but it is yet to develop a civil service to match its economic and social ambitions. As part of its reforming agenda the country has turned to LSE to help train its new public servants. **Francis Terry**, academic director of the course, describes the challenges.

**H**ow should one prepare civil servants to design and manage a sweeping programme of reforms? It's a fascinating practical question, relevant in many countries today – from the United States to Zimbabwe – but on which academic research unfortunately is somewhat scarce. Yet this was the challenge faced by the team I am leading from LSE Enterprise, when the contract was signed with the Libyan government in January 2008.

Libya is only slowly emerging from more than a decade of international ostracism, and retaliated by discouraging casual foreign visitors and tourists. For many years, the use of English in educational media was banned. So what would it be like working in a country where, at least in theory, the people collectively own almost everything, but the ideals and opinions of the Leader, Colonel Mu'ammarr al-Qadhafi, impinge on the daily life of everyone?

Local information and background were initially hard to come by, but certain facts were clear: Libya

is a vast country, more than seven times the area of the UK, with a population of less than six million. The majority of people live in, or near, the two major cities of Benghazi and Tripoli; the rest consists of more than 90 per cent desert. Older readers may remember such cinema classics as *Ice Cold in Alex* or *Sea of Sand*, featuring British troops in the North African campaign of the Second World War. Well, the scenery now is much the same, but underneath it are some of the world's largest reserves of oil and gas, much of it untapped.

So shouldn't Libya's problems be fairly soluble? Unfortunately, selling natural resources does not automatically make the population rich or improve the quality of life. Libya suffers low life expectancy by Western standards, severe unemployment, and a declining profile on several key economic and social indicators. In government, time-honoured patterns of bureaucracy persist, with weak motivation and endemic corruption. Policy making is confused and inconsistent. The Libyan Economic Development

## CASE STUDY

### Jalal Krikshi

'I work for the Libyan Investment Authority, the newly established sovereign wealth fund based in Tripoli. I applied to do this course because I was interested in new ideas of public management and particularly the concept of public governance. I was also very keen to learn from the British experience. The course introduced me to new and different perspectives and has provided a very good foundation for me to explore the field of public administration further. The subjects covered – regulation, budgeting, economic approach to policy evaluation, measurement and performance management, risk management – were all very relevant. The only drawback was that, because we were on an executive programme, rather than enrolled as students, we did not have access to the library. It was great to visit LSE and to attend such a prestigious university. It was also fantastic to be able to attend the public lectures.'

Board (EDB) clearly recognises the problems, but also has views about how to address them; the management development programme we have designed has had to take account of these views.

Thus there was to be a strong emphasis on leadership, innovation and drawing from best international practice. Training people to act as 'agents of reform' is a key part of our brief.

In the first half of the programme, lasting five weeks and delivered in Libya, we try to introduce students to major themes in public management. These include strategy making, finance and budgeting, regulatory systems, change management, accountability and performance review. But first, we try to give students a view of where Libya stands in an international context, by examining data from the World Economic Forum on international competitiveness. It is usually a shock to find that Libya currently stands 91st in a ranking of 132 countries, and below most of those in the Arab world – the primary frame of reference for most Libyans.

This exercise helps to focus attention on what kind of place they want Libya to be in the future, and how to determine priorities for domestic policy. Then we consider the characteristics which ought to make up an efficient and effective public administration, again making use of international comparisons and experience, before exploring the range of instruments that can be deployed to improve matters.

Alongside the delivery of formal knowledge and information, we aim to build the students' skills and confidence in specific areas. Most of them have little experience of putting the case for a policy or course of action, and they are nervous about public speaking. Often, they are

unused to working in collaborative relationships and tend to think in 'top-down', hierarchical ways. Yet the ability to put forward clear, well-argued advice and to work with teams is vital in running a successful administration. Civil servants have to be convincing advocates – even while recognising what they do not know. They may have to stimulate colleagues or partner institutions to help them deliver a programme of action.

So plenty of time is allowed for group work, for debates on policy and implementation, and for preparing presentations on management or policy issues. There are weekly tests to help students and staff to gauge how well the materials are being absorbed, and project work to consolidate what has been learned. At the end of the five weeks, students who reach the desired standard are presented with an LSE Certificate of Achievement.

Working with the Libyans is a very stimulating experience for the LSE Enterprise team. Students are enthusiastic and highly motivated and the prospect of qualifying for the follow-on course, delivered in London, is a powerful incentive. So far, one such course has taken place, during October-December 2008. Feedback from the programme has been extremely positive, and I feel optimistic that when the trainees are placed in their civil service roles, reforms will undoubtedly be driven forward with insight and vigour. We wish them all success! ■



**Francis Terry**

is professor of public management, LSE Enterprise.

## Libyan training programme

In 2007 the Libyan Economic Development Board approached LSE to tender for the design and delivery of a programme that would expose middle and senior ranking civil servants to new ideas and good practice in public management.

The course is run in two parts. Programme one is a five-week residential course. Successful applicants take part in groups of about 35 each, meeting at a hotel in the ancient city of Sabratha or the capital Tripoli. Programme two takes place at LSE in London and is attended by a smaller group who are selected on the basis of their performance in programme one. Participants of both programmes receive a certificate on meeting, or exceeding, a range of competence and performance criteria.

