



## How does government get better? Performance assessment and problem resolution in Ghana's Civil Service

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Ghana's Civil Service performance framework is fragmented and template-driven. While Ghana's Civil Service uses annual performance reports (APRs) and chief director's performance assessments (CDPAs) to track progress, reporting is largely template-driven, focused on activities and staffing, and varies widely in quality and approach across ministries.

There are limited tools and skills for using data to benchmark successes, weaknesses, best practices and failures. Most directorates rely on basic summary statistics for reporting, with significant gaps in technical and analytical skills to drive data-informed reform. This hampers accurate reporting, limits data usability, and leaves little room for learning from one cycle of performance reporting to the next.

Lack of reflection and problem-solving forums in service means problems persist. Neither APRs nor CDPAs provide granular insights or mechanisms to address persistent challenges. Critically, there are few structured forums for reflection across units and ministries; performance reviews are more about compliance than learning or problem-solving.

The goal of this project was to understand the processes the Ghana Civil Service undertakes to assess its performance, identify persistent challenges, and find corresponding solutions. We undertook qualitative assessments of the Civil Service's approach of preparing and collating formal diagnostics of achieving its intended goals, and the goals of the wider government, and evaluated their value.

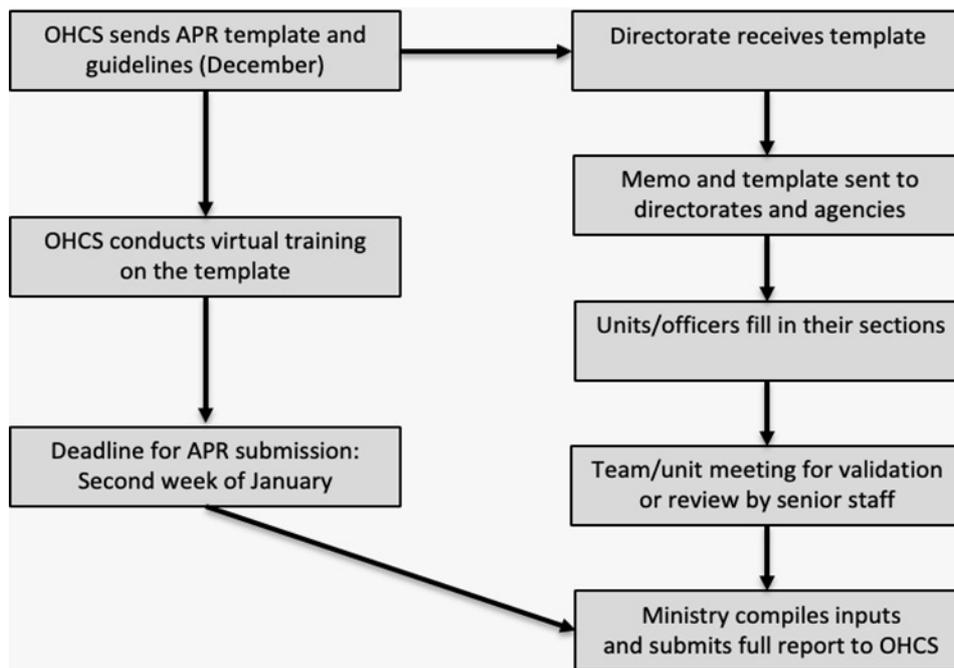
## Ghana's performance framework is fragmented and template-driven

Ghana's Civil Service is constitutionally mandated to track its performance. However, a review of existing practices reveals a disconnect between formal processes and a culture of performance diagnosis. The current system is best described as a bureaucratic cascade of planning documents where the primary focus is on setting future goals and reporting on aggregate progress, which is a reflexive response to fields in the APR/CDPA templates.

The process is top-down and bottom-up: the Office of the Head of Civil Service (OHCS) sends a template to ministries, which is then cascaded to directorates and individual units. While this ensures a uniform reporting process, it lacks the flexibility to capture the full spectrum of performance activities.

The CDPA is more detailed than the APR, but both remain aggregate reports that do not provide sufficient granularity for unit or individual-level diagnostics. This means valuable insights from the ground level are often lost.

Figure 1. APR preparation process



## There are limited tools and skills for using data

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There are limited tools and skills for using data to benchmark successes, weaknesses, best practices and failures. The study revealed a significant skills and tools gap across the service. Reliance on Microsoft Excel and Word is widespread, which limits the ability of units to manage large datasets and perform in-depth analysis. Only a few ministries, such as the Ministry of Finance, have started using more advanced tools like Power BI.

**This heavy reliance on basic tools limits the capacity to benchmark successes, weaknesses, best practices, and failures.** It also makes data validation and cleanup a manual and difficult process, as noted by an HR directorate member:

*"We have to sit and do it manually. Even when you came to the office, what you saw, we were validating information."*

Without the right tools and skills, it is nearly impossible for ministries to move beyond simple data collation to a place of meaningful data-driven performance diagnosis. The lack of analytical capacity means that they cannot easily track and compare their performance against other units, or even against their own past performance.

## Without reflection and problem-solving forums, problems persist

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The most critical finding is the absence of a deliberate and rigorous forum for reflection and problem-solving. While some units have informal meetings to compile the APR, the primary goal is to complete the template, not to diagnose performance gaps or resolve persistent issues.

This gap leaves core questions unanswered: "How do structural problems get resolved if the future is all we talk about?" and "How do we induce better actions in the service in years to come?" The current system, focused on timely reporting, does not provide a space for officers to reflect on what went well, what did not, and why. This means that similar problems often re-emerge year after year, as there is no formal mechanism to institutionalise lessons learned.

## Methodology: a qualitative approach

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To understand the on-the-ground realities of Ghana's Civil Service performance assessment processes, a qualitative research approach was employed. The study's primary objective was to track the flow of performance documents from

the unit level to OHCS and to understand the diagnostic process within ministries.

- **Sample:** The study team selected **five ministries** and **OHCS** for data collection. The ministries were randomly selected from a list of 23. This approach ensured a representative sample across various government sectors.
- **Data collection:** A series of focus group discussions were conducted between 16-25 June 2025. In each ministry, a team of 5 to 15 officers, nominated by their respective directors, participated in discussions lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. The discussions provided a platform for officers to share their first-hand experiences of preparing the APRs.
- **Key informant interviews:** Following the focus group discussions, the team conducted two key informant interviews at OHCS in July 2025. These interviews were critical for obtaining an in-depth understanding of the official assessment process for chief directors and directors, and for gaining insights into the broader context of performance diagnostics within the Civil Service.
- **Desk research:** The qualitative data was supplemented with a review of key public service documents, including the Chief Directors' performance report and the Directors' performance reports, to provide additional context and a more granular understanding of the formal processes.

This mixed-method approach, with a strong emphasis on qualitative data from those directly involved, provides a rich, contextual understanding of the challenges and opportunities for improving performance assessment in Ghana's Civil Service.

## Policy recommendations

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Based on the evidence, we recommend moving beyond the existing administrative framework to pilot targeted interventions that foster a culture of performance diagnosis and problem-solving.

**Pilot randomised controlled trials for performance diagnostics:** Experiment with and pilot new, low-cost diagnostic and reflection approaches.

**Integrate reflection into existing processes:** Amend the APR and CDPA templates to include a mandatory "Reflection and Problem Resolution" section. This would formalise a space for units to document persistent challenges and

proposed solutions, turning the process into a positive feedback loop rather than a linear report.

**Strategic capacity-building:** Introduce targeted, practical training programmes that focus on enhancing diagnostic and analytical skills. The training should move beyond basic software and focus on problem-solving methodologies and the use of data for performance improvement.

## Conclusion: a path to better governance

This study confirms that while Ghana’s Civil Service has a clear system for planning and reporting, it lacks a deliberate and rigorous forum for performance diagnosis. By introducing targeted, evidence-based interventions, we can transform the current process into a dynamic learning system that empowers civil servants to identify and solve problems, ultimately leading to a more effective and responsive government.

**Figure 2. Perceptions of roles and targets in Ghana’s Civil Service**



Scale interpretation:

Roles Q1:

1-2 = No, staff are generally confused about daily goals and individual responsibilities.

2.5-3.5 = To some extent, or at least on some days.

Sometimes difficult to see how current activities are moving us towards those.

4-5 = Yes, roles are always clear to staff in their daily activities.

Targets Q2:

1-2 = Targets are loosely defined or not used to determine work schedules.

2.5-3.5 = Targets exist but are used ad hoc, and many activities are unrelated.

4-5 = Targets are well-defined and frequently used to guide and benchmark performance.

Notes: Responses grouped into Low, Medium, and High clarity categories. Empty values excluded (N=174).

Previous survey evidence from the Ghana Civil Service showed that a majority of level managers had clarity in their roles and targets. Source : Rasul et al (2020)

## References

- Rasul, I., Rogger, D., & Williams, M. J. (2020). Management, Organizational Performance, and Task Clarity: Evidence from Ghana's Civil Service. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 31(2), 259–277.  
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