Opening Speech

by

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On

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First of all let me express my sincere appreciation for the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the Africa Public Sector Human Resource Managers’ Network for honoring us to host this important capacity building workshop. This is not the first time the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs honored us to host such a capacity building workshop. Ethiopia has been chosen in 2011 and 2012 to host capacity building workshops in Addis Ababa which I believe has contributed to strengthening of the capacity of the public service in Africa.

This capacity building workshop is very important because it addresses an important aspect of the public sector – that is innovation and performance management. Innovation is not an exclusive property of the private sector. In fact, in Africa even the private sector itself needs to build its capacity and capability so as to become more effective and efficient, to become the engine of development and to be more competitive globally. That’s why as part of the overall national reform agenda a number of countries have designed private sector development (PSD) programmes.

Although the public sector has been new to the idea of innovativeness, this state of affairs is changing because of the transformation drive in many
countries. In this regard, the United Nations Public Service Award has been playing an important role. It has clearly shown that there are a number of innovations happening in the public sector including in Africa. Ethiopia has also been honored by winning a second place award in 2012 by the United Nations in its first attempt and I am sure that there are a number of countries that have won this award among you.

I am confident that there are a number of innovations that have not perhaps been recognized by this award but that are making the lives of our citizens better every day and improving service delivery in various sectors, including health, education, etc.

In order to encourage civil servants to actively engage themselves in the change and innovation process, we need to create the awareness and make sure that there is a culture of change and innovation that is rewarded and appreciated in the public sector. We have to create the enabling environment in the public sector so that civil servants are fully engaged in the institutional transformation process and are encouraged, recognized and even awarded for their courage to break away from business as usual and strive to innovate with the aim of making their contribution to the national development effort.

➢ Dear Colleagues

There is no doubt that there are many challenges to face and problems to solve. We are not alone in this situation. What is crucial is to recognize the importance of the public sector in promoting the development agenda we have set for our respective countries and ensure that the public service should be given the necessary tool to achieve the desired goals by creating an enabling environment for change and innovation.

First of all, we need to recognize the critical role played by the public service in promoting sustainable development in Africa. In this connection, it is important that our approach should be holistic and comprehensive, implemented through the public service or civil service reform programme designed to render the sector effective and efficient in its responsibility to implement public sector policies and strategies and to deliver public services.

The overall objective of this exercise within the national development goal is to alleviate poverty, to ensure sustainable development, combat
backwardness, build capacities and capabilities and promote good governance. Change and innovativeness can, therefore, be fully realized in the context of an overall transformation programme. This will take into account, among others, legal, organizational, leadership, attitudinal, ethical and human resource development and, information and communication technology aspects of the change process.

Over the last decade or so, Ethiopia has been implementing reforms in the public services. The Civil Service Programme is an important component of the reform agenda. It consists of five sub-programmes relating to Top Management Systems (TMS), Human Resource Management (HRM), Public Expenditure Management and Control (PEMC), Public Service Delivery and Ethics and Anti-corruption. This has been a coordinated process in which leadership and attitudinal development are critical factors. All the indications are that the results so far are encouraging and the sector is firmly on the change track although a lot more remains to be done.

An important aspect of this transformation movement has been the introduction of business process re-engineering (BPR), performance measurement tools such as the balanced score card (BSC) and the Citizens Charter. The civil servants are learning to familiarize themselves with these tools. Based on these tools, efforts are underway to develop a consistent and standardized mechanism for recognizing and awarding better performers in the civil service although a number of institutions have been recognizing in various ways their best performers. Farmers and private sector individuals, too, are being recognized for their creative way of improving their lives and the lives of others.

There is no reason why such recognition cannot be implemented in the public service following the effective utilization of the performance measurement tools. The award need not necessarily be financial. It could be an annual event or gathering in which better performers are recognized in the presence of all members of a civil service institution. Better performers are also better contenders for promotion in the career ladder.

At the centre of it all is the need for effective leadership at all levels, the importance of mind-set change and the development of skills and abilities. These are being addressed in the context of institutional planning and implementation with the view to effecting institutional transformation in the
civil service in which all civil servants in an institution are encouraged to own and actively participate in the transformational movement.

Innovation and performance evaluation go hand in hand. Motivated and capable public servants are Africa’s most valuable assets in achieving the development goals of our respective countries. No one can deny that the effective and efficient performance of the public service is crucial to ensure good governance and to achieve sustainable development because we all know that an able workforce is essential to meet Africa’s developmental aspirations.

Each country needs efficient and motivated public service in order to formulate and implement government policies and at the same time produce and deliver services to its citizens. More importantly, in order to achieve the global agendas as well as the developmental goals of our respective countries, we need to align the work force with our development objectives.

We are living in an era where citizens are demanding efficient and effective service delivery. In order to meet this increasing demand from the citizen, the public sector does not have any choice but to innovate new ways of fulfilling the demands of its clients – the citizens. This would definitely require the civil service to perform at its peak and it would at the same time require the leaders to set a system of performance evaluations that recognizes innovators and reward them.

The question is what kind of performance evaluation is appropriate for the public service in Africa to promote innovation? How does this relate to the overall reform agenda and the context of capacity and capability building? And what is the role of leadership in general and the human resource managers in the public sector in particular to promote and implement this? What is the role of ICT in this connection? That is what we hope the senior human resource managers in this gathering would discuss and come up with recommendations and plan of action on how to motivate the civil service to innovate and fulfill its role in promoting sustainable development in Africa.

I would like to congratulate the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) for its support to the Africa Public Sector Human Resource Managers’ Network (APS-HRMnet), which is the only professionals
association of its kind in the continent that has done a lot in its short four years existence. Although the membership of the association has not grown as fast as one would have desired, I am confident that membership would grow steadily. I know some of the participants here are members of the Association but hope by the end of this gathering that more members would join the Network.

APS-HRMnet has created an interactive website which I hope all of you would take advantage of it and use it in your daily task. UNDESA has also designed a number of online training courses that are freely available for the public service in general and in particular geared to human resource managers in the public sector. I therefore urge all of you to take advantage of these tools in your endeavor to promote development and introduce innovation in the public sector in your respective countries.

Finally, let me welcome all of you who have come to attend this workshop and especially those of you from abroad. I believe you will find Addis Ababa conducive for your deliberations and wish your stay in Addis will be comfortable and enjoyable as well as productive.

I declare the capacity building workshop on Innovation and Performance Evaluation in Africa: The Role of Human Resource Managers is officially opened.

Thank You