Strengthening Public Sector Human Resource Management Capacities in Africa

Capacity Building Workshop on “Innovation and Performance Evaluation in Africa: The Role of Human Resource Managers

Speech Delivered by
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on behalf of
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Your Excellencies,

Honorable Ministers,

Distinguished Experts,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), let me start by expressing my sincere appreciation and honor to address this august body.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to the African Ministers of Public Services gathered here for this event.

I am also delighted to be among representatives of Ministries responsible for Public Services; Public Service Commissions; and representatives of Management Development Institutes.

Last but not least, I would also like to recognize and welcome all focal persons of the Africa Public Sector Human Resource Managers’ Network (APS-HRMnet), members of the APS-HRMnet Executive Council and Advisory Committee who will be facilitating the workshop.

Ladies and gentlemen
Distinguished Guests

ECA welcomes collaboration with our sister organization, UNDESA, in organizing this important workshop which is aimed at providing a platform for Ministers responsible for Public Service, human resource managers in the public sector, and experts in human
resource management, to discuss - how innovation in the public service can be promoted and sustained.

The workshop will brainstorm on measures to strengthen mechanisms for information and knowledge sharing among human resource managers in Africa’s public sector

Ladies and Gentlemen

Distinguished Guests

The quality of human resources ultimately determines the capacity of a government to deliver on its mandate. In this context, most experts would agree that Africa’s future economic development will depend less on its natural resources and more on its skilled human resources.

But getting the best out of a country’s human resources is preconditioned on the capacity to develop and manage such resources. In effect countries need to develop the productive capacities of the people and effectively manage such resources to ensure their optimal contribution to development.

Allow me to expand on the issue of human resource development and management particularly in the context of the rekindled interest by African policymakers in structurally transforming their economies transformation through industrialization. A successful industrialization agenda requires a skilled and competitive labor force as demonstrated by the experiences of the East Asian countries.

Africa’s youthful population can effectively contribute to the industrialization process and yield a demographic dividend if it is effectively developed and managed. The youth can serve as the workforce of Africa’s industrialization agenda if they are healthy, well trained, effectively managed and gainfully employed. In other words harnessing the capacities of Africa’s youthful population will be critical to the success of its transformation agenda.
Secondly a successful transformation agenda will require optimal use of women as a human resource. Even though women account for more than half of the population, gender disparities in assets, wages and access to social services particularly health and education are stark. These trends reflect the limited success of governments and the private sector to appropriately develop the capacities of women and to and equitably reward them for their contributions to the society and the economy at large. In the broader sense of the word, it represents a deficit in human resource management.

Allow me to further illustrate. For instance, while the continent has made progress in gender parity at primary levels of education parity at the secondary and tertiary levels remains low. Out of the 36 African countries with data for 2010, only eight countries had achieved gender parity in tertiary education while nine countries had a very low parity level – i.e., less than 0.40.

These figures do not suggest that women are less capable or less intelligent than men. It points to inequalities in opportunity underpinned by cultural biases that favour boys over girls. However, the cost to society is the lost contribution that girls and women could have made to economic development.

We must redress this imbalance through targeted interventions that harness the full human resource potential of both women and men.

Strengthening capacities for science, technology and innovation is vital for knowledge based economy and must be central to our human resource management strategy.

African countries currently suffer from weaknesses in their capacity for science, technology and innovation. Institutions of higher education enroll 60 per cent of students in the arts and humanities and 40 per cent in science and engineering. Currently, enrolment of Africans in technical subjects (engineering and mathematics) and investment in Research and Development lags behind other regions. In 1995, Engineers and mathematicians accounted 0.04 percent of Africa’s population compared to 1.34% for the Asian Tigers. Africa’s R&D expenditures account for 0.58 percent of GDP compared to (0.76% in India, 0.8% in Indonesia and 1.7 percent in China during
2005-2010. Improving the quality of our institutions of higher learning is also critical. The highest ranked African university ranks 400 worldwide while the best East Asian University ranks 86th worldwide.

In effect, human resource management strategies must include efforts to enhance the productive capacities of people in line with the continent’s transformation agenda. In this context human resource managers can serve as the medium through which the labor market needs of the economy are transmitted to institutions such as primary secondary vocational schools responsible for training the labor force.

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Reaping the benefits of human resource development requires effective management of such resources. Critical dimensions of human resource management include ensuring a conducive environment for individuals to translate their skills into decent employment and livelihood opportunities. Failure to realize such opportunities can lead to a brain drain and or social unrest. The social unrest in Tunisia triggered in part by high unemployment among educated graduates is a case in point. Similarly, the massive brain drain of educated Ghanaians in the late 1970s and 1980s is an example of the adverse effects of weak human resource management.

The Africa Public Sector Human Resource Managers’ Network (APS-HRMnet) aims to ensure the development of effective, capable and well-functioning human resources. We, along with our sister organization UNDESA, believe that by adopting modern and efficient human resource management (HRM) systems, African countries can better manage their human resources and achieve the key objective of structural transformation. In this connection, the sharing of knowledge and insights amongst African public sector human resource management professionals is regarded as imperative. And it is precisely for this reason that UNDESA and UNECA brought our efforts together to organize this workshop.

In conclusion, economic transformation and human development are inextricably linked. Transformation provides the resources for sustaining investment in human
development. In turn, a successful transformation agenda requires a productive healthy and skilled labor force. The effective development and management of our human resources is vital for ensuring better management of our natural capital and our economies in general. But human resource development and management is not an inevitable outcome of market forces. It must be orchestrated through deliberate planning and implementation. In effect, we must integrate human resource development and management in our planning frameworks to ensure the realization of national, regional and global development frameworks such as the MDGs.

I wish you a fruitful and productive meeting and look forward to receiving the results of the conclusions and recommendations of your deliberation.

Thank You for your attention!