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Enhancing the capacity of public administration to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration

The critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: human resources development

Report of the Secretariat

Summary

The achievement of the goals set out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration calls for an efficient and effective public administration, which depends on well-functioning institutional structures as much as on skilled, dedicated and highly motivated public servants. Human resources development is a critical factor in ensuring that the development goals outlined in the report of the Secretary-General on a road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/56/326) are effectively achieved. Public servants' skills need to be constantly upgraded and leadership qualities enhanced, and new career structures that emphasize mobility, integrity and professionalism must be developed in order for countries to elaborate and implement reforms for social and economic development. The present report explores some key dimensions of human resources development, including leadership and vision; human resources competencies and training; performance and conditions of work; ethics and integrity; the management of diversity and gender; empowering public service users; and meeting the special needs of Africa. Recommendations on capacity-building strategies in this area are also presented.

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I. Introduction

1. The achievement of the goals set out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2) calls for an efficient and effective public administration, as well as for sound governance systems. Public administration generally and public sector human resources capacity specifically have a critical role to play, directly and indirectly, in the successful implementation of the Declaration's vision and its key objectives. Among the key objectives identified, public administration is fundamental to achieving human rights, democracy and good governance. In addition, public sector human resources capacity is a key precondition for the achievement of the other key objectives, including peace, security and disarmament; development and poverty eradication; protecting our common environment; protecting the vulnerable; meeting the special needs of Africa; and strengthening the United Nations. Building public sector human capacities in terms of knowledge, skills, motivation and commitment, networks and mastery of information technology is crucial in order to be able to translate the values, objectives and goals of the Declaration into nationally owned policies, strategies and action. In fact, the performance of public institutions depends on well-functioning institutional structures as much as on the quality of the people who work in them. Skilled, dedicated and highly motivated public servants are essential for carrying out reforms that are effective and sustainable in the long term, as well as responsive to the changes that are occurring both at the local and global levels.

2. As is well known, Governments throughout the world have been called to adjust their governance and public administration systems to the new challenges of the third millennium, and are increasingly being pressured by global and local trends. Globalization — in the form of trade and investment liberalization policies, technological innovation, the reduction in communication and transportation costs, entrepreneurship and global social networks — is forcing countries that wish to benefit from it to undertake a number of reforms. To integrate effectively into the world economy, countries need to adapt their policies to changing circumstances, restructure the role of the State and increase the effectiveness and efficiency of State operations. Similarly, local trends — including democratization and decentralization — are increasing citizens' demands for changes in policies,

structures and services. As a consequence, public sector employees need to be able to interpret and adapt those trends to their national context and increase their capacity to analyse future trends in order to take a proactive rather than reactive approach to both local and global changing needs.

3. Contemporary management theory also highlights the value and role of learning organizations in trying to reconcile those difficult dilemmas which Governments must face and, furthermore, equip them to manage change effectively. In relation to developing countries and countries in transition, attention should be drawn to four areas of need, all of particular moment to the steering tasks of the state:

(a) Management of change. The state must be in the forefront of implementing change and smoothing the path for progress. That entails adopting proactive measures to develop enabling policy frameworks, enhance human resources capacity, promote the use of new technologies, set up performance measurement and evaluation systems, overhaul administrative structures and design adequate patterns for the collection of internationally comparable, reliable and accurate data for policy-making purposes;

(b) Administrative reform. In the light of current trends, bureaucratic structures no longer work effectively. De-bureaucratization and decentralization must go in tandem with new approaches to management, exemplifying openness, adaptability, participation, flexibility, diversity and responsiveness. Many new tasks of governance require public authorities to act as mediators, advocates or promoters, actively seeking partnerships with business and non-governmental organizations, or otherwise endeavouring to engage civil society in the pursuit of developmental objectives;

(c) Human resources development. Skills must be constantly upgraded, leadership qualities developed, change facilitated and a new image fostered for the public service, which calls for new career structures that emphasize mobility, integrity and professionalism and the overriding claims of merit in the recruitment, placement and promotion of public servants;

(d) Information. Timely availability of adequate, reliable, accurate and relevant data has become a sine qua non not only of sound policy-making but also of the measurement, monitoring and evaluation of public sector performance. The United

Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance is playing a vital role in mobilizing and disseminating such information of essential importance to Governments, notably through the United Nations Public Administration Network (see E/1998/77).

4. In an era of rapid change and globalization, a learning organization necessarily becomes a changing organization; that is, it learns to listen and to respond to messages that come from its environment. Furthermore, in today's global village, that never-ending process cannot, as in the past, take place under the cover of high protective barriers. Consonant with that approach, it should be underscored that all Governments, especially those of developing countries and countries in transition, should accord priority to strengthening capacities in human resources capacity development, public policy formation and public service management.

5. The present report explores some key dimensions of human resources development, including leadership and vision; human resources competencies and training; performance and conditions of work; ethics and integrity; the management of diversity and gender; empowering public service users; and meeting the special needs of Africa. Recommendations on strategies for human resources development are also provided.

II. Leadership and vision

6. The achievement of the objectives contained in the report of the Secretary-General on a road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration (A/56/326) depends upon a visible, strong and consistent leadership, both political and administrative. Improvement in performance of government services is not likely to occur without the overt and enthusiastic support of top leadership. Government leaders, in a wide variety of institutions, need to be technically competent, politically astute and skilled in building consensus and partnerships. Although there are many models of governance systems, every model has some mechanism(s) for developing leadership, including the selection, recruitment and training and level of teamwork in various governmental institutions. Both managerial and technical competencies are needed in order to translate a vision into strategies, programmes and activities for development. The improvement of leadership skills is

key to achieving development successes, especially in a highly complex and volatile international environment.

7. The capacity to adjust to changing circumstances and face the emerging challenges demands leadership skills and strategic planning capacities. Specifically, it calls for:

- (a) Sound analytical and diagnostic capabilities;
- (b) Careful scanning of the environment for possible constraints or emerging opportunities;
- (c) The ability to galvanize and mobilize support for both the goals and course of organizational change;
- (d) Building the structures and culture of dialogue and mutual accommodation;
- (e) Encompassing diversity, reconciliation of differences and promotion of consensus;
- (f) Management of change in both a peaceful and effective manner.

8. It follows that although, under today's conditions of swift technological progress, any change should incorporate extensive expert advice, a learning organization cannot consider reform in purely technocratic terms. In today's fast-moving world, a process of reform and capacity-building must also encompass clients' and partners' perspectives. It should seek to build not only on knowledge and expertise but also on intuition, vision and aspirations (mission statements) because it views success as clearly predicated on:

- (a) Inclusion, integration, participation and empowerment of all key factors, actors and stakeholders;
- (b) Team-building, a key element of motivation;
- (c) Social or organizational peace and cohesion.

9. For analogous reasons, change and capacity-building in a learning organization cannot any longer be approached through the traditional, authoritarian and bureaucratic methods. Although they seek to inject an element of continuity, consistency and predictability, which all organizations and societies require in order to operate effectively, the structures and process of change in learning organizations must also induce acceptance of the following:

(a) A high degree of uncertainty, in an often volatile and turbulent global environment;

(b) Flexibility consistent with a rapid, non-linear change process in an age of discontinuity.

10. The nexus between leadership and reform efforts has several dimensions. In one respect, leadership provides the impetus for reforms. Leadership is also critical to the implementation process. Many Governments are establishing sensitization and skill-building programmes for top leadership, often not only for senior civil servants but also for politicians and leaders of private-sector organizations and non-governmental and community-based organizations.

11. The implementation of the road map depends upon a civil service that can see into the future, analyse policy options, estimate impact and target programmes to agreed-upon goals. Those functions need to be exercised in a transparent manner and with the full participation of citizens. Not only should citizens be involved in policy formulation but they should also be given an opportunity to express their views on policy implementation. Rather than reinforcing the “expert” attitude common in many bureaucracies, civil servants need to engage citizens in all stages of policy and programmes development. Only with citizen engagement can policies and programmes be sustainable.

12. Civil servants also need to be trained in strategic planning with a view to enhancing widespread public participation, thereby maximizing social agreement and sustainability. Implementing national and global strategies requires careful attention to the management of human resources within pluralistic organizations. To develop and manage a global organization implies developing and managing people who can think, lead and act from a global perspective, and who possess a global mind as well as global skills. Among the desirable traits and skills, cultural empathy and adaptability are increasingly demanded. Senior managers have to be able to understand the international implications of their work. Traditional training and development approaches fall short of what is required for globalization. The context in which people work must be modified in order for them to adopt different behaviours which will change their attitudes and have a long-term influence on their values.

III. Human resources competencies and training

13. The road map underscores the importance of fostering among public servants cognitive competencies, technical skills and attitudes, which in many developing countries are in short supply and need to be developed. Indeed, in most developing countries and countries in transition, the gaps in skills have often been substantial among high-level and lower-level staff.

14. Continuous learning in the public sector is an imperative in our turbulent environment, in which new challenges and opportunities arise with great frequency, traditional skills become obsolete and more demands are being made on Governments. In fact, the role of the state has significantly changed over the past two decades. It has shifted from hands-on management and the direct production of goods and services to regulatory functions and strategic planning. Prominence has been given to the establishment of an enabling environment for private sector growth and individual initiative. Furthermore, with the advancement of globalization, the context in which the state operates has dramatically changed. Increasingly, it must respond to demands and pressures at the local, national and global levels. Information technology has altered in many ways the interface between government, the private sector and civil society.

15. Advances in citizen-friendly approaches involve greater abilities to adapt to evolving citizen needs and to manage changes in focus and operations. Public servants need to appreciate the important role of citizens in providing feedback on the efficiency of public services and the performance of the public sector in general. Often, responsiveness to citizens requires teamwork within units and between units of government, as well as partnerships between Governments and non-governmental organizations and the private sector. Although the values of fairness and equity continue to be paramount, public servants should also receive and indeed approach citizens as individuals in their own context and with their own needs.

16. Public servants should also develop specific skills to deal with conflict and situations which may lead to violence. A commitment to peace and security demands enhanced international cooperation in conflict prevention and strengthened capacities to assist

countries in building, keeping and restoring peace. It is now increasingly recognized that the most effective way of managing conflict is to handle it at levels where it has not erupted into violence. That requires adequate human capacities in terms of knowledge, skills, attitudes and networks to integrate conflict analysis, early warning definition, dispute handling and conflict management systems design into the policies, processes and practices of governance and public administration in order to avoid the fire-fighting approaches that get deployed when violent conflict breaks out.

17. To cope with its numerous new responsibilities, public organizations need to develop new skills, and perhaps more importantly to instil a new culture of continuous learning. The concept of the state as a “learning organization” is gaining momentum. There is an increasing awareness that top-down approaches in public management and bureaucratic closure do not respond efficiently to change and do not allow for active participation and initiative of civil society actors in policy-making processes. Given the conditions of rapid change, skills need to be constantly revised and upgraded. Public officials need to be prepared for continuous learning and to build a culture of dialogue and tolerance for diversity. The issue of continuous learning arises most pointedly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition that have to address the problems of volatile economies, widespread poverty and, often, ethnic conflicts.

18. Continuous learning in public organizations seems to be particularly necessary in the following areas:

(a) Expertise at all policy levels. Technocratic knowledge should be replaced with a more interdisciplinary approach to policy-making, especially at the senior level. Public officials should also keep abreast of current developments in their substantive fields;

(b) Managerial competencies. Increased leadership skills, quality awareness, problem-solving tools and group process skills, such as leading meetings, teamwork and making presentations, are especially important in a learning organization. Developing negotiation and mediation skills is also crucial in an increasingly interdependent world;

(c) Information technology. Keeping up with the explosion in information and communication

technologies challenges those in the public sector to constantly renew and upgrade their skills and to expand their competencies.

19. In many countries, public sector reforms are under way and training of civil servants should be directly linked to the reform processes. The reconfiguration of the role of the state and the development of new responsibilities should be matched by relevant skills in the public sector. Most significantly, public officials should be trained to embrace a culture of learning and to see themselves as active agents of change. In the short run, that entails establishing incentives for those who want to learn. In the long run, learning should become an interiorized value.

IV. Performance and conditions of work

20. The achievement of the millennium development goals depends upon a high-performing Government. In order to assess what improvements are necessary in the public sector, performance measurement techniques must be developed. Through such a process, an organization continually learns about its performance and can strengthen its impact. Performance-based organizational programmes can improve effectiveness (getting the real job done), efficiency (reducing costs) and productivity (getting the real job done at least cost), through such strategies as performance measurement, benchmarking to exemplary standards, and quality and incentive programmes.

21. The achievement of the millennium development goals also depends upon a government that places special importance on reaching the most remote and disadvantaged citizens. Although, theoretically, performance improvement involves all programmes and all recipients of those programmes, special attention should be devoted to the ability of highly performing programmes to reach all possible recipients. It is not unusual for a programme to be targeted to those that are most easily reached and most willingly accessible. That strategy is inadequate if the overall goal is poverty reduction, for example. The most impoverished are usually the most difficult to reach.

22. Finally, the achievement of the millennium development goals depends upon civil servants who, by

virtue of their conditions of work, can focus on their duties. High levels of performance require the adoption of strategies to improve work conditions, such as working hours and work arrangements, professional training and development, reducing rigidities and red tape, improving the use of technologies and competitive remuneration.

V. Ethics and integrity

23. The achievement of the millennium development goals depends upon an ethical civil service. Promoting ethics and combating corruption in the public sector directly contribute towards implementing many of the goals set out in the Millennium Declaration. Public servants need to deliver public services and goods in an ethical manner. Any diversion of public resources into private pockets by malfeasance, misappropriation or conflicts of interest directly reduces available resources for the achievement of development goals. Furthermore, systemic corruption results in the erosion of the rule of law, discourages private investment and stymies democracy. The road map mentions the need to combat corruption within the context of strengthening the international rule of law (see A/56/326, para. 29), increasing private capital flow to finance development (*ibid.*, para. 134), and allowing more genuine participation by all citizens (*ibid.*, para. 218).

24. In terms of appropriate human resources capacity in the public sector for achieving Millennium Declaration objectives, corruption can be viewed as one symptom of poor administration and mismanagement. Those conditions allow unscrupulous public officials to exploit opportunities to put self-interest above public interest, contrary to the requirements of their positions. The challenge is to preserve the integrity of other “honest” public officials by putting into place an “ethics infrastructure” that not only rewards good conduct but also administratively sanctions misconduct and punishes corrupt acts through criminal and civil procedures. Public servants are the stewards of public resources and guardians of a special trust that the citizenry has placed upon them. They are expected to put public interest above self-interest.

25. A set of rules and commonly accepted practices guide and manage good conduct in the public sector. Clear civil service and public sector employment laws and regulations outline the legal responsibilities, rights and standards of conduct for public sector personnel. A

career system based on the merit principle, which fairly and impartially recruits and promotes public servants, implements such rules and standards. A well-articulated and fair incentive structure, including appropriate remuneration, training opportunities and disciplinary procedures, makes possible such a career system. A culture of professionalism, transparency and accountability can be nurtured by the example of top leadership, both political and administrative, as well as keen oversight by the public. As integrity is expected, so must it be exemplified and monitored.

VI. The management of diversity and gender

26. The achievement of the millennium development goals depends upon a civil service that respects diversity and gender within its institutions and in its interactions with the public. The goal of working collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries (see A/56/326, para. 218) recognizes the importance of inclusion in realizing human rights, democracy and good governance. A key strategy to realizing that goal involves encouraging States to develop and implement programmes that support pluralistic institutions, periodic elections and other democratic processes, in conformity with international human rights standards (see A/56/326, para. 220).

27. Good governance extends beyond the confines of the elite members of society. It demands fair treatment of all citizens and government needs to be seen as treating all citizens fairly. Good governance involves sensitivity to others’ perspectives, especially when the “others” are different from each other. The greater the diversity in society, the more respect is required to promote harmonious relations. For people to thrive in the same space, they need to be sensitive to each other’s perceptions, needs and styles of behaviour. Mutual respect extends to the inclination to conciliation, willingness to compromise and skills for negotiation.

VII. Empowering public service users

28. The achievement of the millennium development goals depends upon an active citizenry. Although public servants can be well intended, trained,

motivated and enthusiastic, their efforts will achieve a limited spectrum of success without the active participation of the citizenry. Indeed, some citizens are unaware of the services government can provide, while other citizens receive government services but are unaware that they can influence the nature, amount, types and delivery mechanisms of those services. The road map goal of more inclusive political processes is based on the understanding that ensuring democracy requires good governance, which in turn depends on inclusive participation, transparency, accountability and the promotion of the rule of law. All national actors, including NGOs and the private sector, must interact constructively to achieve democratic and representative outcomes (see A/56/326, para. 218). Among the several strategies proposed to reach that goal, providing assistance to government efforts to involve civil society in policy-making decisions and supporting government efforts to strengthen local governance in urban and rural areas are worthy of note (see A/56/326, para. 220).

29. In order to have an impact on the services they receive, citizens need to be educated in basic skills, communication skills and civic education. Citizens need to be able to read, write, speak and listen. Although that prescription appears to be simplistic, more than a few societies fail to spread basic skills throughout the population. And although providing basic education skills — literacy, numeracy and electronic familiarity — seem to be the responsibility of basic educational institutions, those skills cannot be taken for granted and need to be included in the “learning by doing” action of citizen participation in various government activities, such as policy debate and service delivery.

30. Similarly, citizens need to be aware of their governance environment, that is, the institutions and processes for decision-making, the opportunities for participation, the up-to-date information on current events, and the cycles of decision-making, observation and intervention. Vehicles of communication, such as an active and free media, are essential to lively citizen debate relevant to decision points. Without citizen input, policies and programmes may have minimum impact and, at times, result in outright failure.

VIII. Meeting the special needs of Africa

31. Pursuant to the Millennium Declaration, in the road map the Secretary-General highlighted meeting the special needs of Africa as a key objective. The goal of giving full support to the political and institutional structures of emerging democracies in Africa (see A/56/326, para. 24) was identified as a starting point. The strategies identified for reaching that goal include supporting the democracy and governance programmes of the New African Initiative, which includes targeted capacity-building focused on public sector management, administrative and civil service reform and strengthening parliamentary oversight, and encouraging Governments to nurture democratic values, ideals and institutions to develop independent judiciaries and media (see A/56/326, para. 243).

IX. Recommendations

32. **In light of the above, it seems that normative activities and technical cooperation efforts should:**

(a) **Assist Member States, through leadership development strategies and mechanisms, including high-level seminars and colloquia, in improving leadership and management skills;**

(b) **Assist Member States in designing and delivering training through innovative methods, such as individualized training, on-site work-group training, training sequenced over time and computer-assisted training in the following areas: negotiation skills; policy analysis; human resources management; economic and financial management; programme management in social sectors; information technology; benchmarking and performance measurement; and monitoring and evaluation. Particular attention should be devoted to assisting countries in developing appropriate skills to deal with globalization (knowledge, skills, attitudes, sensitivities and networks);**

(c) **Assist Member States in developing the human resources capacities required as a result of the recommendations proposed in the other reports submitted to the Committee;**

(d) **Assist Member States in increasing public service use of information and communication**

technologies to monitor performance, as well as in promoting learning, improving service delivery, and increasing access to information by both public servants and citizens;

(e) Assist Member States in developing ethics infrastructures in the public sector, including codes of ethics and conduct for public sector employees; strengthening the capacity of institutions that implement conflicts-of-interest policies and investigate ethics violations and administrative aspects of corruption charges; developing training materials on ethical behaviour for civil servants; disseminating existing material in other United Nations official languages to make it more accessible; and conducting policy research on how to promote ethics and combat corruption in the public sector;

(f) Assist Member States in researching the dimensions of diversity and ways of dealing with differences, developing training materials concerning behaviour that expresses respect for diversity, and strengthening the capacities of public managers, especially policy formulators, and decision makers in the area of conflict analysis and management;

(g) Assist Member States in promoting active citizenship, through policy dialogues, strategic planning exercises and programme implementation, and in developing civic education training curricula and modules on a number of key governance issues, including the basic organization of the state, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, basic service standards, the importance of participation in public dialogue, and the knowledge and use of negotiation skills. Often referred to as co-production, citizen groups can play a key role in connecting grass-roots citizens with government programmes;

(h) Implement and monitor the Charter for the Public Service in Africa, follow up on the findings of a regional comparative study on public service ethics in Africa, give support to African initiatives that promote regional integration, such as the New Partnership for African Development, and encourage and participate in research on public administration themes that are particularly relevant to the region, such as managing diversity.