

## **Enhancing the capacity of public administration to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration: Strategies for High Quality Staffing in the Public Sector Introductory Presentation**

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There is a discrepancy between the global and regional commitments to sustainable development and poverty reduction, and the visible inadequacies in human capacities in the Public Service of many countries to transform these commitments into concrete national policies, strategies and tangible results. Commitments such as the United Nations Millennium declaration, the Plan of Action for sustainable development, and the New Partnerships for Africa's Development (NEPAD) will not be realised without adequate human capacity in the Public sector to translate them into action at national and local levels.

**“The public sector must develop a strategy to recruit and retain its fair share of the best talent.”** This was one of the conclusions reached by the committee during its last meeting. It is a conclusion that poses a big challenge for the public sector all over the world but especially in developing countries. This paper has been written as the initial attempt by UNDESA to examine the issue and propose some strategic measures for addressing it.

The paper you have before you is premised on observations in various countries that there has been erosion, in varying forms, of public sector human capacity in many countries. There is reason to believe that the bigger part of this erosion touches the best of what would be and what is the workforce in the Public Service. Whether the phenomenon is looked at as “brain drain” involving movement of the best trained and skilled workers and professionals from developing to developed countries, or as migration of the best performers from the Public Service to the private sector and Civil society, it is always either a consequence or symptom of, among several other things, loss of pride within and credibility outside of the public service as well as a significantly tarnished reputation and attractiveness of public sector institutions.

The erosion of the human capacity of the Public Sector is in direct contradiction of the need for the same sector to have at its service men and women capable of leading it to perform the high-level tasks that it is called upon to perform in light of the evolving functions of the State, the challenges posed by globalization and other social changes, the

need to provide leadership in defining “home grown” governance frameworks, policies, and strategies to drive the economic development agenda and eradicate poverty, the more than ever increasing requirements of transparent and accountable public sector practices, and the need for the sector to be a model employer.

Faced with this contradiction, the countries need to interrogate themselves as to what forces lead to the erosion of the human capacity of the Public sector and what strategies should be devised and implemented to reverse the trend and sustain a fair share of the best talent in the sector to ensure sustainable development. There is an equally strong need to pinpoint the core competencies that are mostly required in the public service and how individuals possessing such competencies can be attracted, developed, motivated, and retained in the sector for maximum performance.

Besides numbers and technical skills necessary for the delivery of the essential and poverty reducing services, such as health and education, the core competencies most needed in the public sector, particularly of developing countries, include a committed and principled leadership, informed policy analysis, professional and accountable management and accessible and responsive service delivery. It must be emphasized that the best talent with these competencies can only perform well within sound institutional frameworks, and an environment of good governance. We believe therefore that these two are the umbrella that must exist to provide the relevant shelter for the best talent to expend itself for effective performance.

The search for strategies for equipping the public sector with the best talent will most likely yield varying options, following specific needs of each country. For example some countries may prefer the “career system” for public servants; others, the “job system. Between these two approaches, there is a lot of room for creativity and mixing elements that can be designed into a hybrid system to suit a country.

However, the following are some of the fundamental components that are common to any workable system and they could form springboard frameworks in the

search for how to attract, develop, motivate, and retain a fair share of the best talent in the Public Service. We propose them as recommendations to the Member States.

- There is a need to have long-term human resource development strategies and plans, based on accurate baseline data and clear forecasts of succession requirements. **Human resource planning management systems and units must be established and or strengthened to ensure this.**
- In order to attract and retain highly educated and skilled people, it is very important for **the public service to be professionalized**. Highly competent professionals do not enjoy working in environments that operate in unprofessional ways.
- In promoting the pride of men and women who devote themselves to the public service, we need to bear in mind that **social recognition** plays an important role. While remuneration is important, it does not work alone as an incentive to release the best performance energies out of “the best talent.” There must be incentive structures that take into account this reality to restore pride in the Public service.
- The knowledge and skills sets needed by the public sector are evolving so rapidly that the recruitment of “the best talent” alone is not sufficient. The recruitment must be accompanied by deliberate efforts to continuously develop public sector personnel through **creating the culture of “a learning organization,”** – the encouragement of updating knowledge, skills and attitudes, according to the shifts of needs.
- In many countries, especially developing countries, there are a number of human resource management practices that increase the chances of leaving un-or-under-utilised some of the best talent in the society. Such practices include discrimination against women, minority groups and people with disabilities and they must be discouraged so that **the best talent from underrepresented groups can be tapped**.

While the above are proposed as strategies for Member countries to strengthen the human capacities of their public sector, it is expected that the United Nations programme of public Administration and finance has a big role to play. It has a mandate, expertise and experience to make a contribution towards supporting Member States in meeting the challenge of attracting, developing, motivating and retaining a fair share of the best talent in the Public Sector.

Regional fora, technical cooperation activities, commissioned studies, the next global public sector report, sharing of information and successful practices, development of policy tools and guidelines, should be dedicated to the issues of strengthening the human capacity in the public sector with particular emphasis on the issue of attracting, developing, motivating and retaining the best talent in the Public sector.