

# **Improving the Quality of Leadership in the Public Sector: New Needs, New Approaches and New Strategies**

Summary of remarks by

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A year ago, the Division of Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA) agreed to a joint initiative aimed at improving the quality of public administration education and training. A two-pronged strategy was developed for this effort: first, to focus on strengthening the education and training opportunities for future government leadership; and, second to focus on the needs of current government leadership. The former has led to a series of meetings in which the two organizations (working also with relevant regional and national organizations) have held meetings in Bratislava, Slovakia and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil with particular attention given to the needs of assessing the best approaches for education and training for future governmental leadership.

In addition, a meeting convened by DPADM in conjunction with IASIA and the UN Staff College, held in Turin (Italy) and hosted by the Staff College, focused on the needs of top-level government leadership. At that meeting, efforts were made to define governmental leadership, to categorize this initiative in terms of target groups and to review key issues facing governmental leadership. Among those issues were questions of globalization and its impact on governments, inequality and poverty, conflict prevention and resolution (particularly in multi-ethnic societies), the legitimacy of state institutions, and the problems of encouraging leadership in an inter-dependent world filled with contradictions and paradoxes.

This led to concerns about development of a model programme. Such an effort, of course, requires an understanding of just what areas one should focus upon in terms of attempting to enhance the quality of current governmental leadership. As part of the effort to develop such focus, it is useful to look at the basic qualities or characteristics that leaders possess. In that regard, four basic characteristics stand out, two of which seem to be preconditions of leadership and two of which appear to be acquired characteristics, and thus susceptible to efforts to enhance and strengthen them.

The two preconditions might be identified as involving first, a sense of efficaciousness. That is to say, an individual belief that one can have a positive result if one really puts one's mind to a task. In essence, this represents the kind of self-assurance that enables individuals to know that they can make a difference and that to do so is worth the effort. The second of these preconditions involves a sense of competitiveness. The reality is that people do not become effective leaders by chance – in one way or another, they have managed to separate themselves from those who they will lead.

The other two characteristics or qualities, those which can be enhanced as a result of systematic efforts involve the possessing of vision: of having an understanding of where one wants to lead individuals, organizations, or nations. The second of these qualities or characteristics involves the understanding of the systems in which the leader finds him or herself. This involves both knowing how to work within the specific system of which one is a part as well as knowing how that system interacts with others systems.

In terms of efforts to assist leaders to enhance these qualities or characteristics, many of the concerns identified at the Turin meeting have great relevance and are appropriate topics for any model programme that might be designed. The Turin meeting also provided two or three additional recommendations. First, that such a model programme should be developed initially within an African context. This point was made quite strongly by the African participants who pointed out that this was not because the problems of Africa were any greater than anywhere else, but rather because the continent was entering into a new period of self-help and partnership, as represented in NEPAD, the New Partnerships for Africa's Development. Second, it was noted that any such efforts must be done in a collaborative manner with regional partners – that it was totally inappropriate to attempt to impose strategies and approaches from outside. Finally, it was noted, that any such initiative must begin with seeking to understand the key concerns of those who will participate in it.