

19th Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

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Agenda Item 10: Training and awareness-raising for the Sustainable Development Goals

Training and awareness-raising for the Sustainable Development Goals: Liberia under Spotlight

Introduction

The need for workforce training and awareness-raising in developing countries, so as to enhance implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals cannot be over emphasized. Human beings are the subject and object of development. They are the creators of values and producers of the wealth of nations. It is for this reason that human beings are considered an asset. Yet, where human beings have become a diary on the progress and development of a society, in the words of Akerejola (2014) they invariably become a liability.

Although the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) had meaningfully contributed to poverty alleviation across the globe, it is argued that the lack of train and skilled base human resource personnel and awareness-raising impede progress in Sub-Sahara Africa (Diko, 2013). In the absence of strong and coordinated support for capacity development, the efficacy of ongoing and future reform initiatives would remain in danger of reversal.

To this end, the paper assesses training and awareness-raising for Sustainable Development Goals in West Africa with emphasis on Liberia. Specific focus is placed on the institutional framework for training and awareness-raising, progress and challenges as well as recommendations.

Institutional Framework at Regional Level

At the regional level, the West African Management Development Institutes Network (WAMDEVIN) was establish on November 2, 1987 with the aims of harnessing the potential which member institutions could drive from pooling and sharing of the expertise in management development training, research and consultancy available in the sub-region, so as to enhance socio-economic prosperity of member countries. The primary responsibility of WAMDEVIN is to build and enhance the short and long-term management capacity of the Public Services and, in some cases, the private sector.

Since its establishment, WAMDEVIN had made tremendous efforts aimed at building the capacity of member institutions so as to promote training at the local levels. Member institutions benefit an annual Train-The-Trainer Course intended to sharpen the knowledge skills and attitude of senior and middle level managers for policy making, programme/project management and for efficient

and effective service delivery at member institutions. Besides, WAMDEVIN, work closely with member institutions (provide technical support where necessary) to design and implement strategy to attract funding for training and development.

WAMDEVIN mandate involves, essentially three core activities of Training, Research and Management Consultancy. In the area of training, WAMDEVIN is expected to equip Top, Senior and Middle level Public Servants with the requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes. In research, WAMDEVIN is expected to conduct studies into problems and challenges of public administration and management with a view to developing appropriate methods, processes and systems that fit the West African environment. They were also to use research methodologies to identify training needs of Public Servants and assess the impact of their interventions in order to continue to design and offer relevant and cost-effective training program to the Public Servants.

Lastly, WAMDEVIN enhance the capacity of management development institutes (MDIs) in West Africa to act as management consultants to their governments in order to improve work processes, initiate planned change and create the necessary environment that is conducive for the application of the acquired skills, knowledge and competences by Public Servants. Accordingly, the MDIs were expected to contribute significantly to their countries' reform processes and national development.

Institutional Framework at National Level

For Liberia, sustainable development is a requirement for sustained peace and long-term prosperity. Liberia has made several efforts to ensuring integration of the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental development into its national policies (IMF, 2008). The Lift Liberia Poverty Reduction strategy (2008-2011), the Agenda for Transformation (AfT), a five year plan (2012-2017), which aimed at steering Liberia's sustainable development efforts, the Liberia Rising 2030 which also aimed at achieving an inclusive middle income economy by 2030, and the Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development are carved with focus on the MDGs and SDGs.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy organized its objectives and planned activities into four pillars. The Peace and security pillar concerned what the government's military and crime prevention agencies would do to build their capacity to take over defense and security functions from the United Nations forces. The Economic Revitalization pillar concerned what the government economic regulation and support ministries and agencies would do to revive and stimulate private sector led growth. The Governance and Rule of Law pillar concerned reform of public sector agencies, other than what was covered in the other pillars, and ensuring the rule of law. The Infrastructure and Basic Services (IBS) pillar concerned government provision of physical infrastructure and social services, mainly health and education. There was also a quasi-pillar for cross cutting issues, particularly capacity building and gender equality. The Economic Revitalization and IBS pillars had explicit subdivisions into sectors, which contained the major content of the pillars' programs.

The Agenda for Transformation which follows the Poverty Reduction Strategy didn't introduce new ideas on the overall, but modified previous pillars presented in the PRS. Pillar one (Peace and

Security) is rephrased as Peace, Security, Rule of Law; Economic Revitalization is also rephrased as Economic Transformation while Governance and Rule of Law is modified as Governance and Public Administration; Cross Cutting issues was retain as a pillar and Human Development was introduced as new pillar under the AfT.

Training and Awareness-raising in Liberia

Liberia had launched several national strategies in line with international agenda to deal with its severe human capacity crisis that manifested itself at the individual (low learning outcomes and poor skills profiles; brain-drain); institutional (erosion of public systems; loss of competence, authority and effectiveness of public institutions; weak non-state institutions; and societal (depressed economy, low productive capacity, widespread poverty and disempowerment) levels.

Several capacity building initiatives were launched to provide traction for the recovery of Liberia's governance and management capabilities. Three of such capacity building initiatives, namely the Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Support (LECBS) Project, the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) and the Senior Executive Service (SES) were established as a means to help identify and deploy skilled Liberians into the civil service (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs (MPEA) , 2011). The former, TOKTEN, promoted by UNDP globally, is a means of reversing the brain drain in developing countries, especially those coming out of serious civil crisis where the need for skilled human capital to address the recovery and development challenges is critical.

Although these interventions have made significant impact with respect to training and awareness-raising, the Government of Liberia has been concerned that such interventions must lead to more sustainable solutions. Consequently, the 'Government has committed itself to ensure that the existing capacity development initiatives are effectively coordinated within the framework of a long-term national capacity development strategy and action plan in order to ensure appropriate prioritization as well as gain synergy among the various programs. This sets the stage for its decision to elaborate a long-term (10-year) national capacity development strategy.

Challenges

The implementation of Liberia's National Capacity Development Strategy had been challenged in several ways. One of such challenges is the sustainability of investments within a coherent framework and ensure that capacity development issues continue to be integrated within future sector reform strategies and subsequent national development planning efforts. The fragmentation, duplication, and incoherence in capacity development initiatives, national resource mobilization (Ensuring investments in training are nationally driven and not donor-driven), Sustainability of resources dedicated to the national capacity development agenda etc. are further challenges to training in Liberia.

Despite efforts by national government to mitigate those challenges, they still persist. To effectively implement and sustain the national training/capacity development strategy, the National Capacity Development Unit was established at the ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. Three years later, the ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs merge with the Ministry

of Finance to form the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, thus dissolving the national capacity development unit. In an effort to generate and sustain domestic revenue mobilization, two (2) per cent of the budget of every ministry and agency is directed toward training. However, due to constant national budget constrain, said law had not been effectively implemented.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Liberia had made frantic effort aimed at incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals in its national development agenda. However, there exist huge gap of trained workforce to effectively implement its national agenda, thus the SDG. Although a unique training policy was developed to enhance training across the country, the policy was not implemented as planned due to limited resources and weak enforcement of national policy which called 2% of every line ministry's budget to be directed toward training.

In an effort to addressing challenges mentioned above, I wish to recommend the following:

- Effective enforcement of the 2% policy by ministries and agencies to serve as means of revenue generation for training programs.
- Institutes Support enhancement of public institutions capacities and effectiveness to enable them implement and enforce policies, through technical assistance, Regional Corporation and innovative approaches.
- Strengthening the capacity of the civil service in Liberia is paramount.
- WAMDEVIN should Support the Government of Liberia to leverage technical expertise and focus programmatic work on national capacity development through volunteer schemes to enable stronger development outcomes in basic social services, youth, disaster risk reduction and other thematic areas corresponding to SDGs and national development priorities.

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