

Concept Note for an ILO Action Programme in Public Service

Enabling Public Service to Contribute to Sustainable Development & Poverty Alleviation through Improved Social Dialogue and HRD

1. “The public service” focused in this action programme

Whether they are delivered publicly or privately, services provided to sustain the well-being of each citizen and help the development of society as a whole are referred to as public services. According to this definition, health, education, utilities, posts, telecommunications and transport services can all be considered as public services. However, they are, in principle, not covered in this action programme as there are separate activities dealing with these sub-sectors under the Sectoral Activities Programme. Therefore, the focus of this particular action programme is on civil service and non-civil service at different levels of public administration and public emergency services (e.g. the police, fire-fighting and emergency medical services) that are primarily delivered through public funding.

2. Background

Under increasing budgetary constraints and in a changing environment, public services are constantly being pressured to reform to be more effective in service delivery and to be able to respond to changing social needs and conditions. Reforms may take various forms, such as restructuring without changing the ownership, privatisation, private-public partnership, outsourcing, etc. Some reforms have been successful in bringing intended results. Whatever the forms the reforms may take, however, they do not necessarily bring about the kind of results envisaged initially if they have been implemented without carefully examining all possible options and if the decisions have been taken without sufficient consultations with all stakeholders. If a reform seriously affects the job security of many workers and the well-being of their families, this will have a serious impact on their performance, and service delivery is likely to deteriorate on the part of those workers who become demoralised and unmotivated and by those who are not adequately trained for new tasks. Such a situation can seriously affect the welfare of the citizens as a whole and sustainable national development. Promoting good governance and transparency through effective social dialogue in public service and public service reform is the optimal way to enable the public service to contribute more effectively to sustainable national development and poverty alleviation.

The Conclusions adopted at the Joint Meeting on the Impact of Decentralization and Privatization on Municipal Services (Geneva, 15-19 October 2001) underscore that public service reforms must be guided by the following basic principles: accountability, transparency and openness of government policies and actions, specifically including structures and procedures to ensure the integrity of government’s programmes and procurement; provision of new or better public services; the importance of maintaining and creating good working conditions and the application of core labour standards should be adhered to during the reform process for morale and performance of the public service and municipal workers; social dialogue with all relevant stakeholders as a prerequisite for designing, implementing and evaluating decentralization and privatization; adequate resources and training to enhance informed decision-making; valuing the diversity of different communities and cultures; and to ensure the equality of opportunity for all. It was requested

in the Conclusions that the ILO develop educational and advisory material to promote social dialogue at all levels in the context of public service reform and make it available to social partners, member governments and international organizations. As a follow-up to the Conclusions, the *Practical Guide for Strengthening Social Dialogue in Public Service Reform* (hereunder referred to as Practical Guide) has been developed and disseminated to the ILO constituents and international organizations concerned.

In another occasion, improved service delivery through effective social dialogue was emphasized during the Joint Meeting on Public Emergency Services: Social Dialogue in a Changing Environment (Geneva, 27-31 January 2003) at which the *Guidelines on Social Dialogue in Public Emergency Services in a Changing Environment* (hereunder referred to as Guidelines) were adopted. The basic thrust of the *Guidelines* is that emergency workers should be given proper means, tools and funds so as to be able to respond effectively to changing needs of communities and that efforts should be made to retain properly trained and experienced personnel to ensure quality of service delivery. The *Guidelines* emphasize that an enhanced social dialogue mechanism is the optimal way to allow the participation of emergency workers and their representatives in improving their working conditions and ensuring quality services. While the *Guidelines* are not binding, unlike ILO Conventions which governments ratify, all ILO tripartite constituents are urged to be mindful of all the efforts put into the document by all parties concerned with a common objective to ensure quality emergency services delivered by competent and committed personnel, particularly at a time of heightened security considerations. In approving the *Guidelines*, the ILO Governing Body requested the Director-General to promote them through appropriate means to enable effective application by governments, the social partners and other key policy-making bodies.

3. Issues and challenges

3.1. Social dialogue mechanism and capacity building for effective social dialogue as prerequisites for good governance, quality public service and public service reform for sustainable national development and poverty alleviation

Public services, like any other services, need to be reviewed and reformed from time to time to meet changing social needs and conditions to maintain quality service delivery. Whether or not any public service reform will result in improved service delivery to contribute to sustainable national development and poverty alleviation will depend on the ability of all stakeholders, including public service workers, in the country to engage in effective social dialogue at all stages of decision-making processes, which would ensure the support for and commitment to the decision taken by all stakeholders, leading to successful implementation of the reform. Effective social dialogue depends on the ability of all stakeholders to share all relevant information required for them to take informed decisions. This includes employers and businesses which have a vital stake in efficient and quality public services to encourage productivity and entrepreneurship. Political will of the decision-makers to make social dialogue effective is undoubtedly a prerequisite, but the capacity of stakeholders to engage in meaningful social dialogue is equally important. Therefore, establishing a mechanism which would allow effective social dialogue would be an urgent need in the countries where such a mechanism has not yet been developed. Capacity building of stakeholders so as to be able to engage in meaningful social dialogue and to sustain such a mechanism would also need to be emphasised and nurtured.

3.2. Human resource development (HRD) and sustainable quality public services

Whether or not any public service reform will result in improved service delivery will also depend on the technical capacity of public service workers who would implement the decision taken. Like reforms in any sectors, public service reform brings about changes in tasks and responsibilities for the workers. Therefore, proper HRD by allocating adequate funds for training to prepare them for new skills required is essential for ensuring sustainable quality public service delivery.

In addition, proper human resource planning and development in public service has become acutely important for sustainable national development and poverty alleviation in the countries affected by the pandemic of **HIV/AIDS**. Public services, particularly in the developing world, assume the essential functions for national development and poverty alleviation, and a large proportion of persons with technical skills and professional qualifications are concentrated in this sector. The quality and range of public services are thus dependent on the stock of public service employees with the requisite skills and expertise. However, public service workers have been identified as one of the occupational groups with special risks (the risk factors being mobility and separation from family), and they have been reported to show higher than average rates of HIV infection.¹ It is reported that the civil service workforce is gradually decimated and decades of investment in human capital formation in a number of countries is already at risk of reversal as a result of the impact of HIV/AIDS, and the situation needs to be urgently dealt with to reverse the trend. However, very little concrete information on the impact of HIV/AIDS on public service workers seems to exist even in the countries seriously affected by the pandemic.

One known study completed in 2002 on the impact of HIV/AIDS on civil servants is on Malawi, in which several ministries accounting for 80% of the public sector employees were covered. The study faced with the problem of limited data, and suggested in the recommendations that management information systems be significantly improved so that managers and policy makers would have necessary data to respond effectively to the challenges they face. Despite the problem with respect to data, the study shows that total annual attrition from all sources rose almost 6 times during the period 1990-2000, from 347 in 1990 to over 2000 in the final year. The causes of attrition were complex, while death was the most significant cause, ranging from 40 to 58%. Despite the fact that the causes of deaths were not clearly indicated, many were believed to be due primarily to HIV/AIDS as they were disproportionately high among young adults of both sexes, the profiles of whom corresponded with HIV/AIDS-related mortality trends. The study made a special mention of higher mortality rates among professional staff than among junior technical staff, referring to the case of the Ministry of Agriculture, where deaths among research scientists and agriculture officers were double the average mortality rate in the country.²

What is more significant is the slowness of the reaction of the ministries concerned to deal with the situation. Many posts in Malawi have remained vacant for a long time. For example, the vacancy rate in the Ministry of Education was reported as 58%, while that in Water

¹ ILO (2000), *HIV/AIDS in Africa : The Impact on the World of Work*, a report from the African Development Forum 2000, AIDS: the Greatest Leadership Challenge, 3-7 Dec. 2000, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Geneva: ILO. ILO's *2004 HIV/AIDS and work: global estimates, impact and response* also elaborates the impact of HIV/AIDS on public services, although it gives details only for education and health sectors.

² Desmond Cohen (2002), *Human capital and the HIV epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa*, ILO/AIDS Working Paper No. 2. Geneva: ILO.

Development tripled from 18% to 52% during the period 1995-2000. All ministries reported that their productivity and performance suffered seriously due to increased absenteeism, the growing levels of vacancies and associated workload pressures. “The loss of experienced staff impacts negatively both on the coverage of service provision, through a reduction in the total number of staff, and on the quality of services, caused by the loss of skills and experience. Whereas the first (shortfall in the number of people) may be relatively easy to deal with, the second (loss of experience) amounts to a substantial organizational loss. Depending on which staff categories are most affected, certain organizational functions and capacities will be eroded, which will inevitably impact negatively on the core business of the organization.”³

It is undisputable that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is eroding precious human resources in the civil service in the countries where such resources are most needed for their sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The pandemic’s long-term consequence on the future of those countries will be immense and the damage may become irreversible, unless the problem is urgently dealt with and in a more focused way.

4. Action programme (AP) objectives and strategies

4.1. AP Objectives:

The Action Programme (AP) in public service will be implemented to assist governments and the social partners of the participating countries to enable their public service to contribute more effectively to sustainable national development and poverty alleviation by achieving the following objectives, namely:

- (1) Improved capacity of public service stakeholders to engage in meaningful social dialogue and appropriate and sustainable social dialogue mechanism established for good governance, national development and poverty alleviation; and;
- (2) Quantitative and qualitative data collected on the real impact of HIV/AIDS on public services which would be utilized for developing appropriate tripartite/bipartite HRD strategies for sustainable public service.

The participating countries may choose to focus on one of the above objectives for national as well as sub-national activities.

4.2. Strategies:

Objective (1): This will be achieved through capacity training, utilizing, for example, the *Practical Guide*, developed as a follow up to the Joint Meeting of 2001 (see the above). This booklet provides some good examples of social dialogue mechanisms for public service and public service reform that have been institutionalised in some countries. These examples as well as others found in relevant reports and publications may be reviewed and adapted to the needs of the participating countries as appropriate. The *Practical Guide* also provides useful materials that can be used for capacity training of all stakeholders to engage in effective social dialogue. Other suitable training materials for capacity building in social dialogue will also be sought and adapted /utilised as appropriate. As far as establishing social dialogue mechanisms and providing capacity training in public emergency services are concerned, the *Guidelines* adopted by the Joint Meeting of 2003 as well as the *Practical Guide* will be used

³ Ibid.

as the bases of the national-level activities and training, while any other suitable materials will also be introduced.

Objective (2): The participating countries will be assisted in building capacity in strategic HRD in public administration for sustainable national development and poverty alleviation by specifically focussing on combating the erosion of precious human resources as a result of HIV/AIDS. However, HRD strategies cannot be developed without sufficient and pertinent information concerning the present impact of HIV/AIDS on civil service. Therefore, this Action Programme will focus on quantitative and qualitative data collection in the participating countries, utilising the rapid assessment technique developed by the ILO, where appropriate, and with technical assistance from the ILO. The information sought may include worker profiles in detail (educational background, qualifications, experiences, position and responsibilities held, duty stations, family composition, etc.) in relation to absenteeism, attrition and death and their causes to assess what kinds and levels of human resources are being lost due to HIV/AIDS. Data collection will also be conducted to assess the capacity of training institutes which usually provide training to civil servants (e.g. What kind and level of training can be provided adequately currently and in the future with the existing staff? What technical capacity needs to be strengthened to sustain their role as training institutes for civil servants?) Collected information will then be shared with and analysed together by the representatives of all stakeholders for the development of HRD policies and strategies for sustainable public administration.

4.3. External resources to be sought to achieve the long-term objective of securing sustainable public administration for national development and poverty alleviation

The activities with regard to Objective (2) stated above are to be supported by the ILO regular budget funds to be made available for 2006-07. They will focus on data collection and analyses and the development of national HRD strategies for sustainable public administration. However, the implementation of the HRD strategies will require long-term activities involving curriculum development and training of trainers. The post data collection activities will also address the issues of how best to retain the valuable skills/competency that exist today among the civil servants of the participating countries and how best to transfer such skills to new and potential civil servants cost-effectively. All these activities will require at least a few additional years and a considerable amount of funds. Therefore, it is imperative that external resources be secured to assist the public services sector of the participating countries in a longer term to contribute more effectively to sustainable national development and poverty alleviation.

5. Selection of participating countries

Due to the availability of funds, the number of participating countries in this AP will have to be limited. Therefore, consultations will be held initially with directors of ILO field offices to see what their country priorities are. The final country selection will be made through consultations between the ILO and the representatives of the GB's STM (Sectoral and Technical Meetings and Related Issues) Committee. If more countries than what we can accommodate express interest, the selection may be made based on any of the following criteria (as the key to the success of the AP is the keen interest and commitment of the constituents):

- a. Willingness of the government and the social partners to commit to social dialogue as a means of dealing with the issue identified, notably by the establishment of joint or tripartite national steering groups to direct the programme;

- b. Interest shown of not only the Labour Ministry but also other ministries/agencies relevant to public service (e.g. Ministry of Public Administration, other ministries, etc.) in the social dialogue approach to dealing with issues of sustainable quality public service;
- c. The existence of a stable political climate and functioning social dialogue mechanisms on which to base the action programme work; and
- d. Commitment expressed by the government and social partners to collaborate with the ILO by contributing financially or in kind for smooth running of the activities in this AP (e.g. providing a staff member to be the programme manager or secretarial service; providing an office and equipment for the running of the programme.

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