

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**Statement by
MR. JOMO KWAME SUNDARAM
ASSISTANT SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TO THE
8TH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
New York, 30 March 2009**

Distinguished Delegates and Observers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to the eighth session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration.

Of all the resources necessary for development, people matter the most: they are its beneficiaries as well as its architects. As the world confronts a cascade of crises, from climate change and energy challenges to food insecurity and the global financial and economic crisis, the human factor in capacity building and development is as important as ever.

Let me suggest five reasons why the human factor is so crucial.

First, whether or not the world will be able to cope with these challenges will depend in great part on the capacity of policy makers who are called to respond to them. To respond effectively, we will need public policy makers who combine global awareness with respect for local ingenuity, and technological savvy with a citizen-centric mindset.

This means that, even in midst of crisis-worsened conditions, we must not lose sight of the need to work to improve the capacity of public servants as productive agents and makers of development policies.

This is a sound investment. After all, knowledge is not subject to diminishing returns in the same way that physical capital may be.

Second, in a time of multiple new crises and diminished financial resources, governments and public administration systems worldwide will have to innovate. They will have to think and implement creatively, unconventionally and dexterously. Many administrations have taken steps on that path, including measures such as rethinking macroeconomic policy, bank nationalization, social provisioning and capital account management.

This departs from the experience only a decade ago, when in the face of economic decline, retrenchments of public provisioning in vital areas such as education, health, social protection and environment were the rule rather than the exception.

Today, we know that development involves and requires investment in human resources and human creativity. We need public administrators and policy makers with the ability to find new ideas, create new values, adopt new perspectives, and the will to act on them.

Third, the increasing role and importance of the human factor in development stems not only from the pressing need to think innovatively and to act swiftly. The biggest challenge is to restore confidence and stability, both in the financial and economic system and in government. Lack of trust in government institutions and their representatives significantly impedes efforts to get firmly on the path towards sustainable and long-term economic development and prosperity.

Fourth, delivery on the global development agenda puts a premium on the human factor. The global partnership for development is a major achievement in itself. Yet, important gaps remain in delivering on global commitments in the areas of aid, trade, debt relief and access to new technologies and affordable essential medicines.¹

To deliver on these and other promises built into the internationally agreed development goals, including the internationally agreed development goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), we need to make sure that institutions of public administration as well as individual public servants are: knowledgeable, that is *well trained*; committed, that is advocates of the *public good*; and competent, that is geared towards *service delivery* and concrete development progress.

All this is crucial to enabling governments to develop appropriate national development strategies as mandated by the 2005 World Summit. DESA, in particular DPADM, has been given the responsibility to support Member States in their efforts.

Fifth, these qualities I have just mentioned are necessary, but not sufficient for effective governance and ultimately, for sustainable development. We also need to understand, instil and inspire the sense of “community” – at the global, regional, national and local levels. Now, more than ever, governance and public administration must be inclusive, representative, open and accountable to the public it serves. We need to rigorously clarify our understanding of the relationship between governance and development in order to improve our efforts to support member states in their development efforts.

To build human infrastructure and to strengthen human capacities for development, we now have better tools offered by information and communications technologies (ICTs). Access to information can help limit corruption and reduce costs. E-government can contribute to “people-centred” development.

People-centred development is what the United Nations stands for. And this is what people all over the world long for. In short, what DESA wishes to emphasize is *public administration for development*. Ultimately, public administration will be judged by whether it fosters and contributes to people-centred sustained growth and sustainable development, through rule of law, anti-corruption, efficient and effective public services.

¹ United Nations MDG Gap Task Force. *Report 2008*. Delivering on the Global Partnership for Achieving the Millennium Development Goals. New York: United Nations, 2008.

A corrupt public administration, devoted to serving not the poor and the vulnerable, but the powerful and the corrupt, will be inimical to development. An inefficient public administration, lacking training, skills, information, will be an obstacle to development. That difference will help determine if development fails or succeeds. As experts on public administration, your work helps to make the difference.

We must also advance our understanding of the special challenges of post-conflict peace-building and our work in this area as the United Nations responds to these particular challenges. Besides the special requirements and challenges of post-conflict resource mobilization for reconstruction, special efforts must also go into avoiding possible regression into renewed conflict, as has been the case in so many conflict-ridden poor societies.

Public administration must change to meet the new challenges and conditions. And this session of the Committee should make clear why and how the human factor should take its place at the core of this transformational phase. I assure you that your work will continue to have the strong support of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, particularly through the Division for Public Administration and Development Management.

Please allow me to thank and extend my best wishes to one Committee Member, former South African Minister Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, who has accepted a new position at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as the Democratic Governance Practice Director in the Bureau for Development Policy (BDP). Her contributions to this Committee and to the field of public administration are innumerable. We in DESA look forward to working with you in your new capacity. I know that our cooperation will only become stronger as we continue our efforts to promote development for all.

I thank the Chair and the entire Committee for the opportunity to address you today on this very important topic and I wish you a most productive session.

Thank you.