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POINTS WORTH NOTING IN THE REPORT OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL ON DEVELOPMENT AND UTILIZATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

(Note by the secretariat)

Introduction

At the forty-third session of the Economic and Social Council, the Secretary-General of the United Nations presented a report^{1/} (attached) dealing with a number of recommended measures for intensifying the concerted activities of the various organizations of the United Nations family for training national personnel for economic and social development. The report is in two parts. In the first part (E/4353) the nature of the problem is discussed, including a brief review of the activities in the field of human resources development and utilization and the main conclusions are recorded in paragraph 66. The second part (E/4353, Add. 1) contains a number of specific projects proposed for intensified concerted international action in the various fields. The purpose of the present note is to sum up, for the Working Party, the main elements in the report, a knowledge of which might be very useful in defining and recommending a global strategy for the development and use of human resources in Africa.

Principal elements

I. The report emphasizes the fact that the concept of human resources comprises not only quantity in terms of the numbers of persons involved, but also quality, in terms of their abilities and their capacity to participate in the development process in different social and economic roles. Human resources, as distinct from material resources, comprise skills, knowledge and capacities of all the human beings actually or potentially available for economic and social development in a community. In this sense, human resources are not limited to the resources of the working population but include also the actual, potential and prospective contributions to economic and social development of the rest of the population (12-14)^{2/}

1/ Development and Utilization of Human Resources in Developing Countries, Report of the Secretary-General, (documents E/4353 and E/4353, Add.1).

2/ The numbers in brackets refer to paragraphs in the Report of the Secretary-General (document E/4353).

II. It is now recognized that human elements are equally important for development, as capital resources are. The shortage of skilled manpower is certainly a world-wide problem. However, the report goes on to say that because of the rapid population increase in the developing countries, the problem is becoming more acute, in spite of increasing efforts to extend educational and training programmes. The population of working age group in the developing countries will double its present size before the end of the century and in the urban areas, population will double every ten to fifteen years. The report discusses the implications of these trends as far as the creation of job opportunities is concerned (15-17-19-21).

III. Although the report focussed on the education, training and utilization of human resources, it considered numerous other factors involved in the problem of human resources development such as health, nutrition and environmental factors. It also stressed the importance of road and communication networks, as well as the utilization of the appropriate methods of transport, as elements in economic and social development(29-33).

IV. The report recognized the fact that it did not appear feasible to conceive a generalized model for the development or utilization of human resources, in which specific local constraints were identified. It was clearly necessary to carry out research so as to identify and, as far as possible, measure the constraints operating in a particular local context against the full development and utilization of human resources. Among the possible restraints, the report noted those stemming from social or economic structures, ancient cultures, traditions, customs and habits. But it was in the minds of men that most profound inflexibilities existed. Hence the importance of education and training as a means of providing the answer to many of the structural, attitudinal, and other obstacles to social change and modernization. It is essential that the educational process should be fully adapted in content, phasing and techniques to the role which is still essentially its own (35-38).

V. The report noted that manpower and educational planning seemed to be an important tool in making the best use of human resources. On the one hand, it provided estimates of the present and future manpower needs for development and, on the other hand, the educational and training facilities necessary to produce a required educated and trained personnel. But, the report recognized that the practical difficulties encountered in undertaking such planning in developing countries were still considerable. Among those difficulties were the lack or paucity of statistical data, the tentative character of many overall development plans, the lack of responsivity to economic demands and, discrepancies between the limited economic demand for certain types of personnel and the actual need for them in the light of development targets (45-47).

VI. As regards human resources development, the report stressed the need for the developing countries to establish national priorities. In this connexion, it was first of all essential to see that existing

human resources were properly used. If this was to be achieved, the developing countries would have to formulate a general wage and salary policy appropriate to the requirements in qualified staff. They would have to ensure that adequate career prospects, status and working conditions were created for the people needed. Special measures would also have to be taken to face the problem of loss of trained personnel, and to induce nationals abroad to return. Also, it would be necessary to review the existing occupational structure to see whether it was genuinely functional, and to ensure that it had the right balance between personnel with various types of training. In the teaching field, special attention should be given to types of training which had the greatest multiplier effect. Similarly, in promoting development projects, the emphasis in the initial stages should be placed on those that have a built-in capacity providing sustained and continued employment.

The fact that responsibility for human resources development is often spread over several ministries, makes it difficult for an overall view and policy to be clearly defined. There is, therefore, the need for a central agency which will be responsible for human resources planning and policies, and for fostering concerted action at national level (53-55).

VII. It is pointed out that the problem of human resources development remains essentially a matter for the developing countries themselves. Assistance from external sources will necessarily fall short of needs, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Besides, it makes large demands on the limited resources of the recipient countries, and there is a great risk that assistance may end up by taking more than it gives. To avoid this, the report noted that the easiest option for a developed country that wanted to help with the provision of skills to the developing world, was to give scholarships for academic or practical training in its own institutions or firms (57-59).