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**RAIL TRANSPORT CHALLENGES AT THE DAWN OF
THE 21st CENTURY**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Given the difficulties that rail transport development encounters in Africa, African States must demonstrate a clear political will to make it participate in their continent's economic and social development.
2. For that to happen, every opportunity should be used to sensitize and inform African Governments about the advantages of railways and rail transport for national economic and social development and the other benefits they generate for Physical planning and community welfare. The primary importance of railways to the development of Western countries need not be recalled nor the importance still accorded to rail transport promotion in Asian and Pacific countries where programmes for the construction of thousands of kms. of railway are being implemented.
3. Every time feasible, African States should conduct comparative cost analyses which take into account the life-span of railway facilities and the benefits over time for the masses of people who use them and the contribution of rail transport infrastructure to the achievement of subregional and regional integration.
4. The problems posed by rail transportation in the year 2000 and beyond call for deep reflection over the future of this transport mode as it faces increasing competition within the context of general transport and that of road transport development in particular.

II. MEASURES LIKELY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS

5. To address the problems which handicap the reliable operation of African railways, the preparation of action programmes and plans (along with the setting of implementation schedules) will make it possible to take the following measures:
 - (a) Formulation of a genuine transport policy within each of the African States;
 - (b) Determination and implementation of measures to attract financing with the designation of coordination focal points within each State and subregion;
 - (c) Mobilization of national savings to be used in carrying out the initial groundwork on the basis of community and local government taxation;
 - (d) Organization of mass self-help projects to mobilize funds and to implement low-cost community projects;
 - (e) Preparation of viable projects supported by Governments which should primarily believe in rail transport development;
 - (f) Granting of autonomy to railway administrations so that the rail transport networks can negotiate directly with donors and thus be able to secure financing for their priority projects; and
 - (g) Preparation of a minimum programme of payment-on-delivery contracts for

railway authorities and setting of time frames for implementation. The time frames could serve as the basis for assessing the status of implementation of planned activities.

Action programmes and plans should be established to cover the following areas:

- (a) Railway and rail transport rehabilitation;
- (b) Modernization of infrastructural facilities and equipment;
- (c) Financial reconciliation and balancing of budgets;
- (d) Increasing productivity and efficiency in all areas of rail transport activity;
- (e) Restructuring of railway administration;
- (f) Commercialization of rail transport operations; and
- (g) Development of human resources.

6. In order to ensure the satisfactory performance of railway in Africa, the following activities will need to be implemented:

- (a) Establishment of competent management teams that are autonomous and motivated; and
- (b) Preparation of payment on delivery, contracts which call for the presentation of programmes and projects to be implemented within a given time frame.

These activities will require:

- (a) An indepth study of the current situation of the networks highlighting their weaknesses and their material, human, financial and other difficulties;
- (b) Phosed restructuring of the rail transport system and accompanying measures to resolve the social and investment problems;
- (c) Programme activities sequenced in order of importance within rehabilitation and service improvement plans; and
- (d) Strategic planning, indicating the resources to be mobilized for the various components of rail transport development.

1. Rail track activities

Short-term efforts: to bring routine maintenance up to par

Medium-term efforts: to institute rehabilitation programmes, correct small radius curves

and inter-connect existing tracks

Long-term efforts: to build new lines based on the Union of African Railways (UAR) master-plan

2. Telecommunications and signalling (including equipment renewal and modernization) activities
3. Terminal facilities involving the development, equipment and modernization of railway terminals and stations
4. Parallel activities involving the training and education of staff at the level of project and programme implementation, middle level management and senior level management
5. Rehabilitation and modernization of fixed operating facilities
 - Maintenance and repair workshops and equipment will need to be rehabilitated and modernized on the basis of equipment diagnoses. Studies should be conducted into the reorganization of railway circuits and work management methods with special focus on posts and reconstitution of teams on the basis of skills and field experience;
 - Staff motivation and empowerment activities.
6. Rolling stock, traction and trailed equipment
 - A comprehensive inventory should be prepared of all the railway equipment and action taken to rehabilitate such equipment following an order of priorities.
8. In doing this, the rolling stock maintenance plans should be reviewed and priorities set regarding:
 - (a) The existing maintenance cycle to be reviewed and improved;
 - (b) The intermediate repair cycles to be readjusted;
 - (c) The general repair plans to be rescheduled; and
 - (d) The rehabilitation and demobilization programmes to be established in accordance with diagnosis results and priorities.
7. Accompanying measures for the rolling stock
 - Comprehensive inventory to determine spare parts needed to put usable equipment back to work;

- Determination of costs and mobilization of funds under the railway enterprise restructuring programme; and
- Procurement and supply management services to be reorganized and modernized using information technology.

It is important to note that the States should not bear all the cost. Planning is needed for the national development plan. Only those major interventions such as realignment works, bridge construction and other major requirements should be conducted at the State level and included in the physical planning activities which cover road building, track laying airport construction and so on.

8. Operational activities

9. The rational operation of railway networks requires the modernization of management tools and the monitoring of coach rotation. The reorganization activities will focus on railway traffic movements, commercialization and marketing development as well as private sector participation in rail transport activities.

10. The objectives which aim at better management of African railways should be pursued through:

- (a) The improvement of work organization methods;
- (b) Better planning of railway equipment maintenance;
- (c) Productivity improvement;
- (d) Increasing the availability rate of rolling stock;
- (e) Achieving greater efficiency of the working tools;
- (f) Reducing overtime work for engine drivers;
- (g) Reducing the cost of service delivery; and
- (h) Achieving operational reliability.

III. MAJOR CHALLENGES

- Operating rail transport under secure conditions whereby trains run on stable tracks that are well-built and safe with comfortable, fast and regular service
- Operating rail transport under the same conditions as other competing transport modes with care taken to ensure viability and profitability
- Managing rail transport enterprises in a proper manner so as to achieve balanced budgeting for railway equipment and tracks and reliable service

- Providing to national decision-makers, that, if rationally operated with modern and reliable equipment and the trains run on well-maintained tracks built for stability and safety, railways can generate positive benefits that will effectively help Africa to become physically integrated and developed
- To achieve these objectives, national decision-makers at the highest level should, first of all, be influenced to focus particular attention on the issues of competence, commitment and motivation of senior and middle management staff. The same should apply to general service staff who should be motivated and committed to the development of rail transport in Africa.

IV. AREAS REQUIRING URGENT ACTION TO IMPROVE RAIL SERVICES.

11. The action plans to be prepared should cover the following areas:

- (a) Training and development of human resources;
- (b) Improvement and upgrading of rail transport occupations, management and maintenance systems;
- (c) Restructuring of all areas of rail transport activity with accompanying measures that make use of regional cooperation;
- (d) Rehabilitation of railway tracks, telecommunications and signalling equipment, rolling stock and repair and maintenance workshops;
- (e) Upgrading and improvement of stock management systems;
- (f) Development and strengthening inter-network cooperation (of South-South cooperation in particular) and realignment of North-South cooperation to benefit both the countries of the south and the countries of the north;
- (g) Technology transfer in all areas of rail transport activity;
- (h) Commercialization of rail transport;
- (i) Marketing development and management;
- (j) Creation of conditions that make for improved productivity (motivation) and efforts to achieve efficiency in railway operating systems;
- (k) Development of inter-State traffic, removing physical and non-physical barriers through immigration, customs police and security service activities in countries of the same subregion in general;
- (l) Initiating action to recover lost traffic volume so as to place railways under the same competitive conditions as road transport in such a way that rail services

- can be provided entirely along the routes or combined with road transport operations;
- (m) Pursue regional integration objectives with a view to inter-connecting African railways in such a manner as would build subregional initiatives within which the railway tracks of contiguous countries are connected;
 - (n) Undertake the transformation of railway administrations into genuine commercial enterprises and harmonization of national laws;
 - (o) Participation of private economic transactors in railway operations, maintenance and equipment repair;
 - (p) Provision of information in those areas where telecommunications play a capital role such as in the improvement of safety conditions, the sharing of management information and the improvement of decision-making process by railway officials;
 - (q) Development of partnerships with private sector operators to achieve some railway development objectives;
 - (r) Finding ways and means of providing access to financing within a genuine spirit of partnership in which both parties benefit mutually;
 - (s) Development of the rail transport industry through technology transfer and the manufacture, in Africa, of some equipment and spare parts by suppliers in the countries of the north;
 - (t) Subcontracting or out sourcing some operation that are not specifically related to rail transport and involving the private sector in programmes for the repair and maintenance of railways, equipment and machinery so as to bring down the social costs borne by the railways as well as the heavy operating costs;
 - (u) Instituting a modernization strategy based on competitiveness as well as the development of human resources and staff training;
 - (v) Taking fully into account the challenges involved in transforming railway administration into privately managed commercial profit-making enterprises;
 - (w) Pursuing an income-generating strategy which reduces costs while guaranteeing high levels of performance and safety;
 - (x) Evaluating the restructuring efforts made to date in Africa with a view to assisting those networks being restructured to benefit from current experiences;
 - (y) Strengthening the Union of African Railways so that it becomes an appropriate framework for coordinating the various activities underway and cooperating with ECA in instituting a new policy that would boost cooperation among the

various actors working to develop railways and rail transport in Africa;

(z) Developing human resources.

12. These measures become all the more necessary since railways, as enterprises in transition, must change in terms of methods, techniques and human expertise.

13. Since training activities are expensive, they must be carried out rationally in order to be effective. The quality of service provided largely depends on the basic training received by the staff member, the content of the job description and how working conditions enable staff to improve constantly their professional knowledge and practice.

14. With other transport modes becoming increasingly competitive and both technical and technological advances taking place rapidly, the survival of railways now depends largely on the importance attached to human resources management.

15. In conclusion, any railway manager should accord human resources development sustained attention (given the fact that staff are a precious asset) because it forms, without doubt, the linchpin in the development of any enterprise, in particular rail transport activity. Staff training should therefore be approached in a comprehensive manner which takes into account the need to restructure and, in particular, to reduce cost and improve productivity. In this connection, efforts should be made to pursue the policy of training people well to carry out their jobs. The stakes deserve to be considered because whatever the value of maintenance rules, everybody knows that the crucial factor in achieving high quality service lies in the expertise with which the job is done.

16. Consequently, particular stress should be laid on developing human resources both with regard to the quality of expertise and the changing of the attitudes of staff accustomed to seeing themselves as civil servants. This is, no doubt, the area of greatest inertia to be overcome if rail transport services are to be improved. Sustained action will be needed to educate people and inculcate the spirit of enterprise whereby everyone accepts their share of responsibility in the process should a goal not be attained. Such arrangements will compel operators to invest more of themselves in their jobs and to feel more concerned about the quality of services delivered.

17. If the steady decline in rail transport services is to be reversed, the work organization should be properly structured and assignments carried out more strictly under controlled supervision and with respect for the rules governing rail transport operations.

18. The management restructuring, rehabilitation, modernization and improvement programmes will be successful only if all the required attention is accorded by the competent authorities to the training of rail transport staff. Consequently, human resources development should have pride of place in all programmes to be prepared for the development and promotion of railways and rail transport in Africa.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, all these activities should be geared to improving railway service quality at minimum cost and bringing rail transport into a competitive position relative to other transport modes.

19. For this to happen:

- (a) The railway and rail transport enterprise should be managed independently;
- (b) Management quality improvement should be promoted;
- (c) Free enterprise and competition should be promoted;
- (d) The cost burden on public finances should be reduced;
- (e) Care should be taken to analyse the conditions under which public utility services are provided and duties clearly defined. Railway operators should be remunerated under contract plans established or concluded between the railway enterprise and the State;
- (f) States should review the debt incurred by railway administrations for infrastructural rehabilitation and maintenance in order to help them to reduce their level of indebtedness and, for that reason, their operating costs with a view to guaranteeing and sustaining their transformation into soundly-managed commercial enterprises.