

WHAT ROLE FOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTES IN AFRICA?

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Colleagues and friends*

It is indeed a pleasure and privilege to be with you today. On behalf Mrs Julia D. Joiner, Commissioner for Political Affairs, allow me to begin by thanking the organisers and host for arranging this most important and significant gathering of African Management Development Institutes. Building on the deliberations of the first day, one cannot but appreciate the reality that these engagements on the value and role of African Management Development Institutes is central to any dialogue on the state capability development and service delivery on the socio-economic mandates established across our vast continent.

All too often, our dialogue on capacity development takes place outside of recognising and appreciating that the dialogue on capacity development without the active and central participation of MDI, is nothing but wishful thinking. MDI's are central to any hope we have of using capability developments strategies to transform the instruments of the state into effective, efficient, innovative and responsive agents for economic and social transformation. This gathering of African MDI's and the success of AMDIN thus has a significance that goes well beyond the confines of our deliberations.

The African Union Commission (AUC) is indeed very pleased to be part of this process and historic first conference of the established network of African Management Development Institutes. Our mandate in this terrain is rooted in the leadership provided by the Pan-African Ministers of Public Service, under the overall guidance of the current Chairperson, Her Excellency, Minister Geraldine-Fraser Moleketi. Through the 4th and 5th Pan-African Conference of Ministers, the Ministers of Public/Civil Service restated their commitment to enhancing the role of MDI's through direct support and engagement with AMDIN.

In responding to our mandate of supporting the AMDIN initiative, we have not, as the African Union Commission, fully reflected on the depth of the mandate and the manner in which we should reflect on and engage with MDI's. I suspect, in this respect, that the MDI's might have reflected more than we have on the value-add of the African Union Commission (AUC) and how this partnership can be taken forward. Naturally, we are keen, within the framework of our mandate to engage in this dialogue to further strengthen relations and ensure that we collectively contribute to the capacity challenges that confront us across our many African public sector institutions.

In reflecting on the role of MDI's in Africa, allow me Chairperson and colleagues, to express some initial thoughts for the deliberations. I do this with the understanding that you will all appreciate that as the AUC our challenge is to be responsive to the needs and approaches you articulate, rather than to reflect independent perspectives. Naturally, this does not detract us from expressing perspectives as part of the process of building a dialogue and appreciation of the 'role of MDI's. The ideas expressed must thus be viewed in the context of a learning process and an attempt on our part to understand and internalise the significance placed on MDI's by our relevant political principles.

In building an understanding of the 'role of MDI's in Africa', I am inclined towards reflecting on this through the critical lens of asking 'how should MDI's position themselves' in a context of the immense capacity development demands. In so doing, I will touch briefly and perhaps in a challenging manner on four issues: Firstly, the location of African Management Development Institutes in the Governance system of member states. Secondly, the positioning of MDI's in the capacity development continuum. Thirdly, MDI's as agents of change. Fourthly, the provision of resources for MDI's.

In reflecting on the location of MDI's within the governance systems of member states, we cannot avoid one immediate imperative and reality. No matter what has been done in the past to establish MDI's as autonomous and self-funding competitive entities, governments need MDI's that are centrally a part of the overall system of governance. The simple reason for this is recognising that whilst governments require and appreciate independent reflection and capacity efforts, they often require institutions that will be responsive to changes initiated and to the demands of active delivery.

Through varying levels of control, government established MDI's are best placed to be responsive to mandates and the realities and

immediacy of capacity needs. Balancing the need to be responsive, to the need to provide independent reflection and out-of-box thinking, is often very difficult. I would go further to suggest that the only manner in which MDI's could provide such independence is through active partnerships with private and University based MDI's. Being responsive to immediate need, by locating MDI's within the system of governance, does not necessarily mean that MDI's will be caught in the spiral of bounded knowledge. That is, they will not just be relegated to the role of reinforcing existing practices and losing the more reflective and change engaging role within government.

Balancing reflective knowledge with responsive training is perhaps best exercised through the forging of partnerships with private and University based MDI's. Through such partnerships, an appreciation will be built of the unique role of government established MDI's, relative to University based MDI's. African MDI's and established University based institutions must, in this context, recognise their respective value-add and requires a shift away from a competitive orientation, towards an orientation that recognises their unique position within the overall governance system. Such a partnership orientation suggests that there needs to be consideration on bringing into the AMDIN fold, private and NGO type MDI's, and University based MDI's.

In the capacity development continuum, from knowledge exchange and research, to active and standard training interventions, it is often tempting to suggest that MDI's must do everything. It is in this respect, also often argued that unless MDI's actively engage in all of these activities, they will not be responsive to the needs of government. Whilst this might be true, the difficulty with this perspective is that it often serves to overload MDI's and establish expectations that are beyond the available capacities within government MDI's. Whilst not a popular perspective, it would appear that Government established MDI's should focus their attention on the provision of responsive training intervention. Whilst arguments might be forged on interventions in all areas of the capacity development continuum, I would venture to suggest that the focus has to be on designing and delivering responsive training interventions. Naturally, research and other capacity interventions are necessary and can be delivered through active partnerships with other institutions.

This brings me to the critical issue of Government MDI's as agents of change. Again, the temptation is to establish MDI's as leaders of public sector reform efforts. Reform and active public sector transformation efforts are often of a much larger scale and require

the involvement of a range of entities within the governance system. Rather than lead the change process, MDI's might be better positioned to focus their attention on how best to shape their training interventions to be responsive to the change or reforms initiated. The temptation to focus on change management and OD related interventions is often strong and could, in my view, result in situations where MDI's loose focus and transform themselves into Departments of Civil Service Reforms or Public Sector Transformation. This does not mean that MDI's should not be rooted in the change process, To be effective, Government MDI's would need to be engaged in the policy dialogues and would need to ensure that they are able to understand the change needs and ensure that training interventions are shaped and re-shaped to fit with the needs within the public sector. In attempting to be everything to everybody, MDI's would loose focus and often key supportive role-players will loose sight of their strategic value and location within the capacity development continuum.

A responsive location within the capacity development continuum requires that MDI's focus active attention on ensuring that their offerings are attractive and the value of their training interventions are recognised across the system of government. Value recognition cannot be enforced, it is something that has to be earned overtime through the consistent delivery of quality programmes. Whilst it is tempting to suggest that senior officials prefer private providers or foreign training initiatives, this reality cannot detract from the fact that often decisions are based on perceptions of inconsistent quality, rather than the perverse incentives established to tempt people towards private and foreign training providers.

This, Chairperson, brings me to the final and most important issue when reflecting on the role of MDI's in Africa, the issue of resources. Whilst there has been in the past a temptation towards suggesting that Government established MDI's must compete in the market place within their offerings, such a position is untenable and perhaps naively driven by the neo-liberal structural adjustment perspectives of a few. The reality is that Government established MDI's will, in all likelihood, require constant investments from governments. If forced to be financially independent and compete with private providers, MDI's will become less responsive and less rooted within the overall system of government.

Whilst needing government resources to ensure a level of responsiveness, this does not mean that MDI's should not focus attention on their own productivity and value. By not demonstrating constant value, the door would be open for those who are tempted to suggest that government MDI's should compete openly with

private providers. Such a position does not make sense, even for the private providers. It must be recognised that a Government MDI is uniquely positioned within the governance system to pave the way for responsive delivery and hence provides an open channel for effective partnerships and the responsive delivery of training by all providers.

In concluding, allow me chairperson, to revert to the initial question I raised, 'how should MDI's position themselves' to contribute to the capacity development we confront across the continent. The answer Chairperson, in my view resides in 'focus'. That is, MDI's need to be focused on their core mandate and role within the capacity development continuum. This requires that MDI's be rooted within the system of governance. Embedding oneself in the system of governance should not be misread as MDI's being involved in all areas of public sector reform or transformation. Such an untargeted machine gun approach is often a result of mis-reading comparable international experiences.

In closing Chairperson, allow me to point out that all that I have argued through my presentation is that good quality training interventions are a product of being embedded in government and that an embedding of MDI's in government should not mean abandoning good quality, attractive training interventions.

I thank you.