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PLENARY MEETING

Tunisia

REGIONAL CENTRE FOR TRAINING AND
RETRAINING IN TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Tunisia

Ministry of Telecommunications

Training Department

**REGIONAL CENTRE FOR TRAINING AND RETRAINING IN
TELECOMMUNICATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT
OF HUMAN RESOURCES**

Contribution by the Tunisian Administration to the ITU programme for the development of human resources in Member States, in preparation for the World Telecommunication Development Conference, Malta, 23 March 1998.

Introduction

As a signatory to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement and having concluded a partnership agreement with the European Union in 1995, Tunisia is embarking upon what is viewed as one of the most difficult and important stages in its endeavour to advance into the category of developed countries by the turn of the twenty-first century.

With this end in view, and in the light of the provisions contained in the policy document for the Ninth Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001) regarding the need to equip the country with human resources of the calibre associated with a developed nation and to supply the national economy with the expertise and specialist knowledge it needs for comprehensive empowerment, and in view also of the role of the telecommunication sector in developing the national economy by virtue of its catalytic impact on various other sectors of the economy, which calls for mastery of digital technology and enhancement of productivity, the Ninth Plan attaches very great importance to the training of senior staff specialized in telecommunication engineering and capable of operating and development modern systems.

Global technological progress in telecommunications is proceeding at an extremely rapid pace and our country must be able to keep abreast of developments in order to join the information society and play a prominent role at both the regional and African levels. To this end, the Ministry of Telecommunications has given priority to training and retraining among the strategic aims of the Ninth Plan in view of their crucial role in ensuring comprehensive empowerment.

The basis of the empowerment scheme

Comprehensive empowerment is a key programme designed to enable our country to keep pace with rapid global development in all areas. Empowerment provides the momentum whereby all categories of institutions break free from dependence on the State and become self-reliant, standing firm against both domestic and foreign competition. To play its proper role, comprehensive empowerment must include the following basic elements:

- Ability of institutions to play their full role in developing the economic and social environment;
- ability to master modern technology and to keep pace with rapid advances in all areas;
- management restructuring, a key factor in promoting economic and social development;
- use of a modern accounting system, a vital prerequisite for cost control and reducing costs to enhance competitiveness;
- human resources development, the backbone of all development. In recognition of its importance, the comprehensive empowerment programme has placed special emphasis on this vital component as a key factor in ensuring the productivity of the institution.

Restructuring of training institutions

In pursuit of these aims, a restructuring of the Higher Posts and Telecommunication College has become necessary, since it is the only institution in the country that provides technical expertise in telecommunications. Restructuring will enhance its efficiency and integrate it into the national engineering studies framework.

The main aims of the restructuring exercise may be summarized as follows:

- To offer our country the opportunity to become a technological pivot, with facilities that enable it to compete with developed countries, by providing our economy with the expertise it needs through our own training institutions;

- to adopt global approaches in engineering and technology studies;
- to focus studies on scientific methodology in line with the approaches adopted in the developed countries;
- to tailor the supply of senior telecommunication engineers and technologists more closely to the demands of the sector in terms of both quantity and quality;
- to create a favourable environment for the development of partnerships between training structures and national and international economic circles in order to provide the structures concerned with the requisite expertise and the ability to respond to developments in the outside world;
- to establish an infrastructure for training and retraining in telecommunications so as to create an appropriate mechanism for producing the qualified professionals envisaged under the empowerment programme and the Ninth Economic and Social Development Plan.

In view of the fact that the Higher Posts and Telecommunication College in Tunis is the only institution in the country that provides technical training in telecommunications, and in accordance with the Development Plan, which provides for the tailoring of competencies to the economy's needs for advanced skills and expertise that better respond to development needs and the requirements of scientific and technological research, and also in view of the national policy to give special attention to vocational training with very substantial budgetary appropriations, the Ministry of Telecommunications has decided to divide the College into three independent but complementary establishments designed to enhance human resources through training: the Higher School for Telecommunications; the Higher Institute for Telecommunication Technology Studies; and the Regional Centre for Continuous Training and Retraining in Telecommunications.

The Higher School for Telecommunications

This school will train engineers in telecommunications, awarding a diploma for specialized higher studies in telecommunications, and supports theoretical and applied research in telecommunications.

The Higher Institute for Technological Studies in Telecommunications

This establishment will train high-level telecommunication technologists with advanced technical expertise, capable of project implementation and management and efficient operation of associated facilities.

Both of these establishments will be responsible for the provision of basic training under the joint supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Telecommunications. The third establishment will be responsible for continuous training and retraining.

Regional Centre for Continuous Training and Retraining in Telecommunications

This Centre will be assigned the task of enhancing the expertise of human resources in the telecommunication sector by organizing seminars, meetings, short courses and summer schools for sector management and staff. It will also support pedagogical research, documentation and publishing in areas related to training and retraining in telecommunications.

To enable Tunisia to play a pivotal and outward-looking role vis-à-vis the rest of the world, the Centre will be given regional status so that it can accommodate telecommunication staff from Arab and African countries. Moreover, in accordance with ITU policy, the Centre will be profit-making.

To that end, the Centre will be constituted as a public commercial and industrial body subject to commercial accounting arrangements, operating in an open market without protection and fully independent in financial terms. This will enable it to organize the greatest possible number of specialized advanced training seminars on a commercial basis, pursuing a commercial policy to meet various professional requirements within the country and abroad. The Centre will take an individual interest in trainees to assist them in specifying their training requirements and preparing an appropriate schedule. The Centre will rely from the outset on advanced teaching aids. It will experiment with remote training using ISDN (integrated services digital network), with trainees following the same courses both within the Centre and in other regional centres on an interactive basis. We trust that this method will prove successful so that it can be developed and used more intensively.

The Centre will spearhead "reflection groups" on telecommunications and stimulate the development of telecommunication equipment to support technological change. It aspires to become a trailblazer in the development of human resources.

The Centre is also keen to produce written and audio-visual reference works that will be regularly updated to ensure that they serve as a reliable and sound training aid and hence exert a positive impact on the workplace.

The Centre recruits local training staff, with specialized qualifications in a variety of fields, who are replaced every five years so that the training process is constantly renewed. Former instructors are thus given the opportunity to use their skills again in the workplace.

Future prospects

The Centre will endeavour to provide appropriate training facilities for its trainees and to create a dynamic relationship between telecommunication sector staff and the staff of the Centre so that it serves as an expert adviser to small telecommunication establishments on development of their operations through enhancement of their human resources.

To ensure that the project gets off the ground, the Tunisian Administration has asked France Telecom to appoint two experts to design the Centre and set it on course to become a centre of excellence.

Likewise, to ensure that the project is completed and becomes a star of the twenty-first century, all these institutions will be established within the framework of a telecommunication technology complex. It is a multi-purpose project, one major goal of which is to attract qualified Tunisian manpower employed abroad in international telecommunication and information laboratories and another to export national scientific expertise.

It will also be possible to develop new services and products and value-added telecommunication services, and to build technological awareness with a view to keeping pace with advances in telecommunication and information technology and developing cooperation and integration with Tunisian production, manufacturing and research units.

Conclusion

While Tunisia anticipates major benefits from the Regional Centre for Continuous Training and Retraining in Telecommunications, it should be noted that other African and Arab countries also stand to benefit since the Centre will respond to all requests.

ITU, as the most influential organization in this field, is urged to contribute to the success of the project by doing all it can to facilitate the attainment of its goals.