**HRM in Africa: Understanding new scenarios and challenges in an emerging economy**

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

# **Abstract**

Labour relations took the central place in all the struggles for democracy and so the initial outcome of democratic process was extended to the labour relations in many developing economies albeit this faced different contours (Nkomo, 2011; Ayiteh, 1992). Some of these are related to imperialism that took a prominent place in several African countries and robbed the continent of some key cultural underpinnings (Hack-Polay, 2018; Fanon, 1963).

This book is an exploratory effort on examining some of the perceived contextual issues that impact the management of some topical HR functions in most developing economies (with focus on Africa). The structure of the book is novel and captures the background, contemporary HR approaches, country perspectives, conclusions and implications as well as topical and discussion questions to capture the essence of each chapter. For many international students and multination corporations with presence in Africa that are desirous to investigate appropriate approaches to managing the HR function, this book will serve as an outstanding ‘companion’ in the management of HRM.

**Key words**: Labour relations, democracy, developing economies, Africa, and HR functions.

# **Background**

The scramble for Africa was the occupation, division and colonisation of African territory by European powers during the period between 1881 and 1914 and this lasted until the late 1950s and early 1960s when independence was gradually being achieved by the respective states. Colonialism, imperialism and neocolonialism have given rise to modern organisations in Africa which mirrors the organisation of work in the former colonial powers, mainly Britain, France, Portugal and Spain. Contemporary organisations in Africa are therefore a legacy of domination. These were likely to cause disruptions to the societal and organisational arrangements, including labour relations and the sourcing and management of people. Although contemporary HR issues at the local/country levels are discussed on a contemporary basis, there are no in-depth discussions on specific HR roles and functions neither do such texts delve into African nations and the emerging challenges (Kamoche, 2011). Therefore, at the company level it is obvious that the HR function should seek to understand the impact of a company’s international operations on HRM (Wintersberger, 2017). Unfortunately, this is somewhat descriptive insofar as it describes what is goings on in different countries.

With several countries in Africa now independent, it should be recognised that these states were previously under colonial rules and it is worth investigating if the effect of the colonial rule remains prevalent and whether these can be examined from a comparative narration and to investigate the similarities, differences and the extent to which these past experiences influence labour relations in Africa and in particular, the management of the applicable HR functions. Labour relations is a significant area on which these recent developments have had a dramatic impact and redefining relationships between institutional structures, decision making processes and the key actors in the industrial relations system is essential in this new global environment. Concomitant with this understanding is the recognition that an effective human resource and labour relations system is an important determinant of economic performance. The book draws the attention to the need for management and labour processes which are congruent with African values but at the same time can respond to the constraints of globalisation as a way of enhancing the sustainability of contemporary African organisations.

Africa is taking a central stage in world affairs and the effective management of the HR function will contribute to business efficacy in a globalised world. The uniqueness of the project is understanding the HR function from the perspective of crucial contextual issues, such as technology, politics, culture and economy. It highlights the important roles these contextual issues play in the understanding and management of the HR function in many African countries. In particular, the project will focus on those key HR initiatives that have attracted several scenarios and challenges for which the understanding of current developments will be revealing. Nevertheless, it highlights the theoretical underpinnings but focus much more on the relevance and practicality of these HR issues from the perspective of the identified contextual issues. For many international students including those willing to explore Management or/and HR positions in developing economies or desire to work for international/multinational organisations, this book will serve as an outstanding ‘companion’ in the management of HRM.

The project is much more definitive on the selection of pertinent HR issues and how technology, socio-economic, cultural and political developments impact on the selected topics from a practical perspective. Several texts discuss HR from a broad perspective concentrating on the traditional HR functions/issues and at best delving into a comparative perspective. The text also takes an abridged approach to identifying the similarities and differences across Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa with respects to these contextual issues rather than a comparative approach based on traditional HR topics.

There is abundance of text dealing with the subject of HR from an intentional perspective in relation to the traditional HR function such as recruitment, selection and talent management and much more of how culture and the institutional factors impact on these approaches. Additionally, employee relations are discussed generally to cover other human resource functions and the role of multinational enterprises in diffusing HR best practice from the home country to the host countries within which it operates, hence leading to distinct HRM outcomes in different countries. Another observation is that various texts in international HRM tend to drift to application as it relates with management of expatriates to improve expatriation but somewhat limited focus on how the multinational enterprise can benefit from understanding the challenging contextual issues from a host country perspective. Furthermore, Harzing and Pinnington (2015) makes the case for the three main strands of research in the field of international HRM to cover cross-cultural management, comparative management and international management and HQ subsidiary relationships but admits that the legislation, political, economic, institutional and cultural differences between nations can all influence local practice. Malik (2018) supports this preposition that HRM is at least partly a function of the societal effect.

Many other texts (Harzing and Pinnington, 2015; Tarique, *et al.,* 2016) take a similar narration. On the strategic international HRM front, the human resource function examines the application of HR concepts and practices such as Best practice, Best fit, Resource base and the accompanying strategic choices but focusing more on application, that is, how managers implement HRM and employment relations in a given institutional environment (Malik, 2018).

Furthermore, these text approach the subject of HRM from a broad perspective, examining the traditional topics of HRM with focus on implications for multinational companies and taking a comparative approach to the practice of HR from a country perspective. It does not address specific HR issues and topics that are traditionally influenced by specific contextual issues (such as culture, politics, socio-economic and technology) which commonly cuts across nearly every country in Africa but in varying proportions or applications. There is therefore a significant focus on discussions relating to convergence versus divergence, exportative, adaptative and integrative strategies as well as hard and soft goals as it relates to expatriate orientation and management. To the credit of these texts, there is useful exposition on culture and cross-cultural management and the transfer and suitability of employment practices across boarders in multinational enterprises albeit what matters in the context seems missing, particularly with respect to the African nations (Opute, *et al.,* 2020; Mwaniki and Gathenya, 2015; and Kamoche, 2011).

The project addresses specific ‘down to earth’ HR issues (particularly from an empirical perspective, reflecting specific country applications in some countries in Africa – covering the western, eastern, northern and southern Africa) that are normally central to developing economies, which have been neglected or relegated to the background in most publications or mainly from a theoretical perspective. Additionally, the examples capture new developments on HR issues. The unique points are reiterated as follows:

1. The book addresses key HR topics that have been relegated to the background or have received limited discussions.
2. The book relates politics, culture, socio-economic and technological developments and their relevance to these issues. This is a rare approach.
3. The book goes beyond a theoretical discussion of concepts and employs empirical discussions.

These texts also do not sufficiently address HR topics which challenge participation and engagement in the workplace. In contrast, the project delves into those contextual issues that can impact on the management of HR as well as the understanding of how these contextual issues can be accommodated in the management of the HR function. In this respect, the project identifies key HR issues that most texts neglect or fail to pay adequate attention from an empirical approach. The contributors to this text may not be authors of specific HR functions (as may be the case in several international texts) but they share experiences based on engagement with the HR function at company and country levels in their roles as HR practitioners. Nevertheless, this text will compliment various international HRM texts to the extent that it improves awareness of the complexity and challenges of managing HRM in Africa in the 21st century.

# **Country Profile**

The interviews and discussions with colleagues from some African countries have enriched the empirical data of the book. The author has compiled some background information to provide a broad perspective of the countries to cover political, economic/socio-economic, infrastructural and cultural issues over the years.

**Ghana**

In 1957 Ghana became the first African country to achieve independence from a European colonial power, and today it is one of the continent’s most vibrant democracies. The 2016 elections saw Nana Akufo-Addo, then president, speak to voter dissatisfaction with the economy, which at the time was suffering from the protracted downturn in global prices of its chief commodity exports. The election was thus fought on an issue affecting all Ghanaians, rather than on sectarian grounds, while the exemplary behaviour of both presidential candidates and their supporters in the transfer of power also indicated the growing strength of democratic governance in the country. With a GDP of GHS256.6bn ($55.4bn) at the end of 2018, Ghana is also a contender to become the year’s fastest-growing economy worldwide. As it tries to move away from traditional resource dependency, the country now faces the challenge of ensuring the widest benefit from that expansion, particularly given its growing and increasingly urbanised population.

**Nigeria**

A key regional player in West Africa, Nigeria accounts for about half of West Africa’s population with approximately 202 million people and one of the largest populations of youth in the world. Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse federation which consists of 36 autonomous states and the Federal Capital Territory. With an abundance of natural resources, it is Africa’s biggest oil exporter, and has the largest natural gas reserves on the continent.

Nigeria has emerged as Africa's largest economy, with a GDP in 2017 estimated at US$ 508 billion.  Oil has been a dominant source of government revenues since the 1970s. Regulatory constraints and security risks have limited new investment in oil and natural gas, and Nigeria's oil production contracted in 2012 and 2013. Nevertheless, the Nigerian economy has continued to grow at a rapid 6-8% per annum, driven by growth in agriculture, telecommunications, and services.

Oil price volatility continues to influence Nigeria’s growth performance. Between 2000 and 2014, Nigeria’s gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average rate of 7% per year. Following the oil price collapse in 2014-2016, combined with negative production shocks, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate dropped to 2.7% in 2015. In 2016 during its first recession in 25 years, the economy contracted by 1.6%.

Since 2015, economic growth remains muted. Growth averaged 1.9% in 2018 and remained stable at 2% in the first half of 2019. Domestic demand remains constrained by stagnating private consumption in the context of high inflation (11% in the first half of 2019). On the production side, growth in 2019 was primarily driven by services, particularly telecoms. Agricultural growth remains below potential due to continued insurgency in the Northeast and ongoing farmer-herdsmen conflicts. Industrial performance is mixed. Oil GDP growth is stable, while manufacturing production is expected to slow down in 2019 due to a weaker power sector performance. Food and drink output are expected to increase, likely in response to import restrictions. Construction continues to perform positively, supported by ongoing megaprojects, higher public investment in the first half of the year, and import restrictions.

Growth is too low to lift the bottom half of the population out of poverty. The weakness of the agriculture sector weakens prospects for the rural poor, while high food inflation adversely impacts the livelihoods of the urban poor. Despite expansion in some sectors, employment creation remains weak and insufficient to absorb the fast-growing labor force, resulting in high rate of unemployment (23% in 2018), with another 20% of the labor force underemployed.  Furthermore, the instability in the North and the resulting displacement of people contribute to the high incidence of poverty in the North East.

Without significant structural policy reforms, Nigeria’s medium-term growth is projected to remain stable around 2%. Given that the economy is expected to grow more slowly than the population, living standards are expected to worsen. Growth is constrained by a weak macroeconomic framework with high persistent inflation, multiple exchange rate windows and forex restrictions, distortionary activities by the central bank, and a lack of revenue-driven fiscal consolidation results. Rising public debt, and increasingly complex policy interventions by the central bank constrain private sector credit growth.

**Morocco**

One of the most developed countries in Africa, Morocco is a melting pot of indigenous Berber, African, Arab and European influences. Due to its strategic location and proximity to Europe, the kingdom has been able to accommodate its cultural diversity in a stable and politically inclusive system. The kingdom possesses North Africa’s only constitutional monarchy and has fortified its position as an international trade centre by increasingly liberalising its economy and attracting foreign investment. If the country can sustain its balancing act of working to provide domestic freedoms and opportunity while maintaining security, it is likely to remain a leading regional power. Morocco has not only deepened its economic and security ties with the EU, but also with the Gulf states and China. Most recently, the kingdom re-joined the African Union after a 30-year hiatus.

Morocco’s economy is diversified, particularly relative to many other countries in the MENA region. Both the agricultural and the tourism sectors are major contributors to economy, with the former generating 40% of the employment and the latter accounting for roughly 8% of GDP. Manufacturing industries, including textiles, automotive and aeronautics, are also highly developed. In addition, the kingdom’s ICT sector has seen significant expansion, creating new employment opportunities, while investment in transport and infrastructure, and the establishment of a free trade zone, have boosted competitiveness.

Despite the kingdom’s dependence on agriculture for strong GDP growth, efforts to strengthen other export sectors, coupled with diversification of trading partners, have allowed Morocco to develop a variety of competitive industries and increase their presence in international markets. Traditional segments such as phosphate production remain important, but a range of emerging manufacturing capabilities are helping to promote growth across a broader base of activities. Morocco has seen a recent influx of investment that has been translated into various projects, such as new industrial and infrastructure developments. With an emphasis on diversifying its commercial partners, Morocco’s African strategy has been raising the kingdom´s political and economic profile and extending its clout across the continent.

**Sudan**

Sudan has significant natural resources, but since independence its economy has been constrained by civil war, debt, and mismanagement. Although it has recently turned its economy around with sound economic policies and infrastructure investments, it still faces formidable economic problems, one of them the low level of per capita output. Since 1997 Sudan has been implementing International Monetary Fund (IMF) macroeconomic reforms. In 1999 Sudan began exporting crude oil and in the last quarter of 1999 recorded its first trade surplus, which, along with improvements in monetary policy, has stabilized the exchange rate. Increased oil 6 Library of Congress – Federal Research Division Country Profile: Sudan, December 2004 production, revived light industry, and expanded export processing zones yielded gross domestic product (GDP) growth of an estimated 5.9 percent in 2003. Agriculture remains Sudan's most important sector; however, most farming is rain-fed and susceptible to drought. Oil production continues to rise annually and in 2003 constituted more than 80 percent of export earnings. Chronic instability, including the long-standing civil war between the Muslim North and the Christian/traditionalist South, the current rebellion in Darfur, adverse weather, and weak world agricultural prices ensure that much of the population remains at or below the poverty line. Sudan also suffers from endemic corruption, an undeveloped and neglected physical infrastructure, and a financial system still in need of major reform.

Wealth is concentrated in the central Nile corridor region, the northern, eastern, southern, and western regions being markedly less prosperous. Gross Domestic Product (GDP): GDP was US$12 billion in 2001 and was estimated at US$13.4 billion in 2002 and US$15.4 billion in 2003. Per capita GDP was about US$415 in 2002. Since 1999, economic growth has averaged about 6 percent annually, helping account for an estimated doubling in the size of the economy between 1996 and 2003. In 2003 estimates, GDP by sector was: agriculture, 39 percent; industry, 19 percent; and services, 4 percent. Government Budget: The budget has been in chronic deficit from the early 1980s, largely as a result of outlays for military campaigns against the Sudan People’s Liberation Army. With the advent of the structural adjustment program in 1997, new fiscal controls combined with new revenues from the oil sector reduced the deficit from nearly 13 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1990 to less than 1 percent in and after the late 1990s. In 2002 total revenue amounted to Sudanese dinars (SD) 470.6 billion (US$1.8 billion), and expenditures to SD503.4 (US$1.9 billion), including capital expenditures of SD118.6 billion (US$450 million). The deficit amounted to SD32.8 billion (US$125 million). Inflation: Sudan experienced high rates of inflation during the early 1990s, reaching 133 percent in 1996. Since then, rates have declined through double digits to 8.4 percent in 2002 and 7.8 percent in 2003. Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing: Agriculture is the most important

**Zambia**

The territory of Northern Rhodesia was administered by the South Africa Company from 1891 until takeover by the UK in 1923. During the 1920s and 1930s, advances in mining spurred development and immigration. The name was changed to Zambia upon independence in 1964.  
In the 1980s and 1990s, declining copper prices and a prolonged drought hurt the economy. Elections in 1991 brought an end to one-party rule, but the subsequent vote in 1996 saw blatant harassment of opposition parties. Zambia is large and landlocked in the center of southern Africa. It shares several of its key geographical and economic features with neighboring Zimbabwe—the Victoria Falls, Lake Kariba (and its hydroelectric capacity), and a stretch of the Zambezi River. It also borders the southern tip of Lake Tanganyika and Tanzania, as well as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, and Malawi. Its population, much of it urban, is estimated at about 16.5 million (2016).

Zambia, Africa’s second-largest copper producer, achieved middle-income country status in 2011 during a decade (2004-2014) of impressive economic growth, averaging 7.4% per year. However, growth only benefitted a small segment of the urban population and had limited impact on poverty. The Zambian economy grew by 3.7% in 2018 compared to 3.5% in 2017. The slight increase in growth reflects strong performance of services (wholesale and retails, pensions, and information and communication). However faster recovery was undermined by lower crop harvest and weak a fiscal performance that led to an accumulation of new public expenditure arrears and government domestic borrowing at high yields and impacted private sector activity. Agricultural sector growth was negative, reflecting overall poor harvests in the 2017-18 farming season.

Public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) debt has nearly quadrupled from 20.5% of GDP in 2011 to 78.1% of GDP in 2018, driven by accumulation of both external and domestic debt. The debt composition has also significantly shifted towards commercial and Non-Paris Club bilateral creditors, exacerbating the country’s exposure to exchange rate and market risks. Overall PPG debt is expected to increase to 98% of GDP by 2020, while external public and publicly guaranteed debt service obligations over 2019-21 are estimated at $4.6 billion. The 2019 WB/IMF Debt Sustainability Analysis concludes that Zambia’s risk of overall and external debt distress remains very high and that public debt under the current policies is on an unsustainable path. Zambia is considered a stable country in Africa with successful democratic elections held every five years. The next elections will be held in 2021.

**Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone, a country in West Africa, has a special significance in the history of the transatlantic slave trade as the departure point for thousands of west African captives. The capital, Freetown, was founded as a home for repatriated former slaves in 1787.

Sierra Leone, officially the Republic of Sierra Leone, is a country in West Africa. It is bordered by Guinea to the north, Liberia to the south-east, and the Atlantic Ocean to the south-west. Sierra Leone has a tropical climate, with a diverse environment ranging from savannah to rainforests. Sierra Leone has a total area of 71,740 km2 and an estimated population of 6 million (2011 United Nations estimate). Freetown is the capital, largest city, and the economic and political centre. Bo is the second largest city. The other major cities in the country with a population above 100,000 are Kenema, Makeni and Koidu Town. Sierra Leone is divided into four geographical regions: The Northern Province, Eastern Province, Southern Province and the Western Area, which are further divided into fourteen districts.

But the country's modern history has been overshadowed by a brutal civil war that ended in 2002 with the help of Britain, the former colonial power, and a large United Nations peacekeeping mission. Sierra Leone has experienced substantial economic growth in recent years, although the ruinous effects of the civil war continue to be felt.

The country is also rich in diamonds and other minerals. The trade in illicit gems, known as "blood diamonds," for their role in funding conflicts, perpetuated the civil war. The government has sought to crack down on the trade.

# **Structure of the Book**

The book is divided into five main chapters which are centred on selected HR functions, as follows: Recruitment and Selection, Training and Development, Appraisal/Rewards and Promotion, Succession Planning and Management of Disputes/Exits and Retirement. Each chapter is presented as follows:

1. Background: This provides a historical background to the subject and examines developments and challenges faced with the management of the function from the point of view of developing economies in Africa. It examines the role played by various institutional arrangements as well as the differentiations on how the functions are managed at the public and private sectors of the economy.
2. Contemporary Human Resources: This aspect discusses the broad understanding of the respective HR functions, mainly from a theoretical and academic viewpoint and highlight the various approaches that are open to the management of the respective functions, including the challenges inherent in each approach. Furthermore, it elucidates the challenges faced by the HR practitioner and management with respect to aligning these functions to corporate strategy of the organisations.
3. Empirical data on current HR practices: In this section, an across the board empirical contribution is provided to examine the array of approaches to the respective functions by various scholars with exposure to the respective countries. These contributions are resulting from HR/Managerial assignments in the respective countries and backed with some research activities in the HR function of the respective countries. This network of colleagues was developed over five years as a result of collaborative activities with four academic institutions in Europe – London South Bank University, London, University Carlos IIII Madrid, Spain, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Spain and L’ Universite Professionnelle Internationale, Paris, France.
4. Conclusions and Implications: This section is intended to draw from both the theoretical and empirical literature/perspectives of contributors as well as development in the respective subject area. Furthermore, it highlights the critical roles that the contextual issues (politics, culture, technology and social economic situation) plays in the management of the HR function and what in the context matters so as to improve the employer and employee engagement and provide a narrative that captures these activities and thus improve company efficacy.
5. Discussion Questions: A central goal for the book is to stimulate practical discussions based on the contemporary debate, the various country perspectives, concluding notes and implications therein. The ensuing learning outcomes therefore serves as a learning trajectory for further reflections and applications going forward.
6. Conclusion: These summaries the learning outcomes of the book and reiterates the contribution and role of key stake holders as well as the broad implications for politics and economy, culture/socio-economic environment, technology, SMEs, employee/industrial relations, technology, collective bargaining, academic literature and research.

This is an exploratory effort on examining some of the perceived contextual issues that impact the management of some topical HR functions in most developing economies (with focus on Africa). The author is convinced this effort can be complimented by several researchers and HR practitioners.

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