

Office of the Auditor General repositions itself to confront new realities

Supreme Audit Institutions, including the Office of the Auditor General must reposition themselves and adapt to new public expectations to remain relevant as the custodians of public interest in the expenditure of public funds. This was the message that came out during the opening ceremony of Management Development Programmes supported by AFROSAI- E at the Utalii Hotel from 15th to 29th July 2013.

The Auditor General of Kenya, Mr. Edward Ouko, inaugurated the workshop that saw about 156 management staff undergo an intensive interactive workshop to equip them with knowledge, skills and attitudes to transform the OAG to meet International Audit standards. The Chief Executive Officer of AFROSAI-E, Mr. Wessel Pretorius graced the occasion as a special guest. Others in attendance included DAGs Stephen Kinuthia, John Kagonda, Alex Rugera and Agnes Mita; and the facilitating team from AFROSAI-E comprising Gordon Kandoro, Sally Ross, FaithMary Manyagadze and Elibariki Lyatuu.

Mr. Ouko reiterated that the meeting was simply responding to public concerns by citizens who look up at the office to ensure and assure them that their funds are being put to good use. The Auditor General added, "The profile of the office has been so low for so long probably leading to its underfunding. We must come out as an institution that puts the public interests first in all expenditure and service delivery in the public sector to regain our space in the top of the public mind. "

He urged the directors, senior managers, managers and supervisors who had come to attend the workshop to make sure that they contribute to making the office relevant and meaningful to the Kenyan people. He believed that after the two weeks interactive workshop sponsored by AFROSAI-E, the OAG office will be transparent, open and more responsive to the needs of the common person.

The Auditor General of Kenya said that he is proud that his staff has demonstrated to the world that they can produce compelling audit reports that win international awards, such as the award for the best performance audit report for 2013.

Mr Ouko further stated that ICT use is one of the main pillars that will reposition the office as an effective, efficient and robust assurer on public sector expenditure; saying that his office had put mechanisms in place to implement ICT at the workplace.

On his part, Mr. Wesel Pretorius challenged the Kenyan Audit Office to take advantage of the recent boosted repositioning of the office in the current constitution, which enhanced its independence status. He further stated the need for SAIs to share best practices among themselves, “SAIs are unique institutions in each country and thus peerless within borders, hence the need to have a regional or global family that can be a platform to share experiences and best practices.”

Pretorius decried one major risk facing SAIs, “We have a strong negative image among the public and we need to change that perception”. He however stated that the negative image can only change if SAIs demonstrate their relevance to the public and other stakeholders.

He further cautioned SAIs not to mortgage their supreme responsibility of auditing all public sector entities. He said SAIs should be self sufficient to audit the public sector, and if they find that over 50% of their office work is being done by outsourced audit firms, then they risk losing relevance.

The AFROSAI-E CEO warned SAIs of difficult financial times ahead, due to increasing budget cuts for SAIs in various countries. His advice is for the SAIs to change how they operate so as to survive this turbulent period. “You must be able to do more for less, by being innovative in all core activities to ensure timely release of reports,” he said.

Mr Pretorius challenged SAIs to play a more proactive role. For instance he decried that the voice of Supreme Audit Institutions was missing in the global discourse during the global financial crisis. In his view SAIs should interrogate themselves by seeking to answer the following questions among others: Do we add value or do the same thing over and over again? Do we report on our own performance? Are we a good example? Are we proactive? Do we issue early warning? Do we inform Parliament on risks facing the country?

By answering all these questions and taking appropriate interventions SAIs will cement their positions as Supreme Audit Institutions, hence reaffirming their perception as custodians of public interest.