

An Overview of Green Human Resource Management Practices in Kenya

*Edwin Chemjor
Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya*

Abstract

A number of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), if well implemented, will lead to green economies and societies. The workplace offers a first-hand ground for the implementation of green HRM practices supporting the attainment of green economies and societies. The desire of every organization to excel in business and achieve its long-term strategic goals cannot be underestimated. Nevertheless, there is need for organizations to balance between profits and the SDGs goals. Organizations are fast realizing that taking their environmental impact seriously is beneficial not just for the outer environment but also for their businesses. The objective of the study was to assess the extent green HRM practices applied in the work places; and to find out the influence of green practices on the management of human resources in selected institutions in Kenya. The study adopted desktop research design involving document analysis from selected practice sectors where studies on the practice of green human resource and sustainability have been undertaken. This involved document analysis of Ministry of Environment, Acts of Parliament, Kenya Green University Network (KGUN) and other institutions that underpin the extent of Green HRM practice implementation in Kenya. The platform of HRM, as the central function of any organization therefore, comes in handy towards the realization of both business desires and Sustainable Development Goals. A number of previous studies indicate that the focus on specific SDGs goals relevant to organizational contexts, have led to a reduction in costs, improved performance, enhanced job satisfaction, high retention levels and a more pleasant working environment. Greening Human Resource Management practices remain a new concept in Kenya because majority of organizations have not yet put it in practice despite the crucial effects it has on the quality of the work environment and service delivery. Although efforts to actualize it in public and private institutions are in place, such institutions have not realized their intentions. Owing to the few efforts observed on the appreciation of GHRM practice, there is need to lay more focus in the area and take advantage of the opportunities that come with it through training on and demystifying the practices.

Key words: *Green HRM, cost reduction, job satisfaction, working environment*

Introduction

Background of Green Human Resource Management

In the past, there was a worldwide consensus that emerged around the need for proactive environmental management (González-Benito & González-Benito,

2006). In Kenya, there has been a concerted effort by the government and the private sector to go green in all areas of the economy. Going green has been misconceived to mean conserving the environment through tree planting to avert soil erosion and pollution and to improve land productivity to get benefits such as clean air to breathe, clean water for domestic use and also to attract rainfall. Subsequently, the Environment Management and Coordination Act 1999 was enacted by Kenyan Legislature to ensure a better environment to live in.

The Act led to the establishment of key institutions including the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), National Environment Tribunal (NET), and National Environmental Complaints Committee (NECC). NEMA has been at the forefront in the oversight on environmental management and oversight, and it has achieved much. It utilizes various fora to educate the public and the private sector on its functions and mandate on safe and sustainable environmental practices including annual celebrations - World Environment Day, World Desertification Day and World Wetlands Day. Today the topic of Green HRM not only includes awareness toward environmental affairs, but also stands for the social as well as economic well-being of both the organization and the employees within a broader prospect.

The issue of environmental management and climate change has become a hot topic hence ratification of laws that would help rescue the situation. The United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA) has undertaken annual programs in Nairobi over the years. Series of events that have brought together the best – leaders in government, private sector and civil society on the innovations speaking to better and sustainable working and living meant to address critical environmental challenges. The sessions also focus on creating shared values in the process and inculcate teamwork for greening the economy. Owing to the harmful consequences of industrial pollution and waste materials, including toxic chemicals, governments and NGOs round the globe promoted regulations and policies with effect of slowing down and to some extent even reversing the destruction of natural resources and its negative effect on mankind and the society as a whole (Christmann & Taylor, 2002). There have therefore been heightened interest in the environmental concerns irrespective of related fields - be it politics, public, or business, which also play a critical role in organizational development.

Greening organizational operations and activities has become a talk of day so much so that every organization could like to put in practice to ensure sustainability. The sustainability issue is fast moving up on the list of priorities in the corporate sector in Kenya as the awareness on incorporating “green” into the corporate strategy is making its way in business. Slowly, organizations both public and private as well as NGOs are putting structures as a way of embracing green human resource practices in Kenya. HR therefore plays a central role in the design and implementation of crucial practices such as green recruitment and selection, green training and development, green performance management and appraisal, green reward and compensation, green employee empowerment and participation, and green management of organizational culture. These practices affect the other

functions within the organization if not well coordinated (Daily, Bishop, & Steiner, 2007).

Kenya as a developing country has made efforts towards realizing a green the environment. Through the Ministry of Environment, it developed Green Economy Strategy and Implementation Plan 2016 – 2030 - A low carbon, resource efficient, equitable and inclusive socio-economic transformation which is yet to be actualized as is faced by a number of challenges. According to the policy, the constitution of Kenya asserts sustainable exploitation, utilization, management and conservation of the environment and natural resources, and identifies sustainable development as an important value and principle of governance. It also reaffirms that Kenya has repeatedly affirmed its commitment to sustainable development and has prioritized transition to a Green Economy as a means of its achievement; this is in line with the outcome of the Rio +20 summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 (GoK 2016). Although the whole idea pf greening human resources is crucial, many organizations are yet to embrace it. This policy among other researches have not addressed the framework to carry out the greening human resource functions in organizations (UNSD, 2018c).

As a topic of concern to every organization, it requires technical approach and understanding as well as appreciation by the employees and leadership of the organization. This will ensure buy-in among employees; otherwise, it will not be approached with the regard it deserves. In order to attain success within the corporate organizations and to facilitate attainment of business objectives such as profit by the shareholders, organizations have to lay a lot of emphasis on social and environmental factors along with economical and financial factors (Daily, Bishop, & Steiner, 2007). Very few organizations have established green oriented practices for ensuring environmentally oriented workforce whose operations should be appraised and monitored for well-established performance management systems.

Research Problem

Organizations in Kenya both public and private are yet to adopt Green Human Resources Management despite the global call for implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.

Specific Objectives

The objective of the study was

- a) To determine the extent Green HRM has been adopted in selected institutions in Kenya
- b) To find out the influence of Green HRM practices in selected institutions in Kenya
- c) To assess the challenges faced by organizations at the advent of adoption of green human resource management

Literature Review

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM)

Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) refers to using Human Resources Management (HRM) practices to reinforce environmental sustainable practices and increase employee's commitment on the issues of environmental sustainability. It embraces considering concerns and values of Environmental Management (EM) in applying Human Resources (HR) initiatives generating greater efficiencies and better Environmental Performance (EP) necessary for reducing employees' carbon footprints. Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is the use of HRM policies to encourage the sustainable use of resources within business enterprises and promote the cause of environmentalism, which further boosts up employee morale and satisfaction (Mampra, 2013). This then affects the employee attitude towards the implementation of sustainable environment.

GHRM involves the alignment of human resource practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance measurement and rewards, to a company's green management objectives (Jackson, Renwick, Jabbour, & Muller-Camen, 2011). It is used to the contribution of people management practices towards wider corporate environmental agenda (Pillai & Sivathanu, 2014). There is a positive relationship between the GHRM practices and the ecological performance of the corporation's (Daily, Bishop and Massoud, 2012). According to Ahmad (2015), the main objective of green HRM is to make the employees aware of the intricacies of environment management, i.e. what action is needed, how it functions, and how it helps in conserving the environment. The exercise motivates and develops a sense of pride in the employees for being a part of the green program.

According to Bhutto (2016), Green Human Resource Management may play an essential role in environmental management, as it is an element of sustainable human resource management. This is a new approach to the realization of the HR function, the nature of which is to include ecological objectives in all HRM sub-areas, from employment planning, through recruitment, selection, employee motivation and development, to their evaluation and influence on working conditions. This necessitates that the formulation of the HR function aims not only at the category of economic interest but also at ecological areas, so as to generate added value for customers. Hence, Green HRM reflects the level of the greening of human resource management practices whereas its implementation requires individual stages of human resource management to be modified and adapted, to become green—i.e., environmentally-friendly (SHRM, 2011).

Green HRM remains a new concept in Kenyan context. Many people imagine that it is part of the environmental conservation process that has been widely advocated for and practiced since independence in the world. Owino & Kwasira (2016) argue that this because for a long time, greening aspect touched on the environment subject and not many thought that the aspect could be applicable and crucial at the work place. Many organizations in Kenya try to improve their services to capture the limited market and scarce business opportunities. They have done this through making the Human Resource function a partner to the other functions or operations such as ICT, finance, sales and marketing to leverage on the growing technology and economic changes. To do this, greening human resource practices becomes crucial. According to Mathapati, (2013), GHRM is directly responsible in creating green workforce that understands, appreciates, and practices green initiative and maintains its green objectives all throughout the HRM process of recruiting, training, compensating, developing, and advancing the firms human capital.

The workforce plays a pivotal role in the implementation of the program hence the need to pay attention to their needs as pertains capacity, compensation, training and development among others. Daily and Huang (2001) argued that organizations essentially need to balance the industrial growth as well as preservation of the environment because it has been confirmed that by supporting the green practices, companies may realize profit more than before (Murari & Bhandari, 2011). Green HRM thus supports the creation of a green workforce, who understands, appreciates, and practices ecological initiatives. At times, Green HRM is also defined as the use of personnel practices to improve environmental performance. This is due to the fact that HR processes play a significant role in the practical application of sustainable development policies and in the construction of a sustainable development culture which is crucial in the process.

Without a doubt, Green HRM enhances the role of HRM in making the sustainable development concept a reality. Ramar and Beyond (2014) underscored the fact that HR departments play a key role in the practical implementation of environmental policies and in the development of sustainable corporate culture. In this context, it is a primary instrument allowing the implementation of sustainable development across an organization (Dubois & Dubois, 2012). According to them the implementation of Green HRM, promoting green organizational culture and stimulating environment-oriented employee behaviour, is beneficial to organizations for a number of reasons including being a tool for increasing competitiveness due to enhanced image, cost reduction, improved customer relations, acceptance by local authorities and communities, and increased employee satisfaction, loyalty and motivation. These attributes then are crucial towards achieving green human resource management.

Methodology

The study adopted desktop research design involving document analysis from selected practice sectors where studies on the practice of green human resource and sustainability have been undertaken. These organizations range from public, private and Non-Governmental Organizations such as Ministry of Environment, Kenyatta University, Kenya Green University Network (KUGN), UN Environment, Strathmore University, Nairobi Retail stores (supermarkets), Gulf Energy and Menengai Refinery limited, in Nakuru. These sectors include the energy sector, manufacturing, environmental, organized groups, Education and Development sectors. The study gave an overview of each of the institution's involvement and practice sustainability and green human resource management majorly on recruitment, policy, training & development, occupational health and operations.

Findings

The study found out that various scholars have carried out studies on the existence of green human resource practices in organizations. Owino & Kwasira (2016) undertook a study on the influence of selected Green Human Resource Management Practices on environmental sustainability at Menengai Oil Refinery Limited Nakuru, Kenya. The selected practices included green employee sourcing, green occupational health, green employee training and green performance management. According to the scholars, these Human Resource practices 'greened' in Menengai Refinery influenced environmental sustainability. When the management of the refinery insisted on recruiting and selecting employees who are eco-concerned, the company was able to improve its environmental sustainability. This means that green HRM practices in the firm affect performance. It further found out that the firm was able to improve its environmental sustainability practices when it offered training and development programs on green aspects of the organization and environmental consciousness. When the firm implemented green occupational health and safety programs, it was able to improve its environmental sustainability largely.

Langat and Kwasira (2016) carried out a study of the influences of green human resource management practices on environmental sustainability at Kenyatta University. The study found out that employees' application for employment at the University was not based on green issues hence their little understanding of the concept. It further showed that many employees were aware of Environmental sustainability and National Environmental Management Authority policies and regulations as opposed to Green Human Resource Management and sustainable organizational practices.

The study further indicated that green/environmental performance indicators were not adequately included in performance management and appraisals systems which tools are crucial in human resource management. It further recommended the need for training and capacity building among the employees of the university and

inculcating the culture of green and sustainable ecological practices as well as developing pro-environment managers and leaders to ensure sustainability in the workplace. This therefore indicates that although GHRM practices have been practiced in the private sector, not many have embraced it and made it part of the organizations function i.e. entrench each in the institutional policies and procedures to make it routine.

The Kenya Green University Network (KGUN) that brings together Kenyan universities was launched in 2016, aimed at including environmental and sustainability practices into the curricula, campus designs and research projects of Kenyan universities (UN Environment). The KGUN is a joint initiative of the Commission for University Education (CUE), the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). To ensure progress and sustainability, institutions such as NEMA have taken quick steps-in to support the program through funding with the belief that the combined efforts can have a positive impact on achieving of sustainable development.

Further study indicated that some institutions of higher learning took greening as part of its crucial programs and rolled out green human activities. According to the UN Environment, Strathmore University has implemented low-carbon solutions at their campuses including installing solar panels with the capacity to produce 0.6 megawatts annually. It has benefited the university enormously, the move proving economically viable, with it selling 0.25 megawatts to Kenya Power at a price of 12 shillings per kilowatt-hour. This program is an indication that a lot can be done to enhance green management in the sector. Although this is a brilliant idea, a lot more needs to be done on the design and implementation of a full spectrum of the program to ensure actualization to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Kenya Vision 2030 objectives.

Some efforts to green Human Resource Management practices in the retail sector in Kenya have been made especially in supermarkets. According to Whiegar, (2012), almost all Supermarkets in Nairobi have adopted various green logistics such as use of lead free fuels, recycling of materials, complying with the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA) regulations, use of environmental friendly packaging materials in serving customers.

Conclusions

The practice of Greening Human Resource Management and sustainability remain relatively new in the Kenyan context. Many studies specifically touching on the area of the human resource function in the organization have been carried out and decry the fact that while GHRM is very important, it is yet to be embraced fully. This study underpins the need for a lot of awareness on the area GHRM to the private, governmental and Non-governmental among other institutions. There is a very thin line between Green Human Resource Management and environmental sustainability, but two areas complement each other such that one affects the other.

There remains a challenge in the coordination of programs by the institutions, which have embraced the practice caused by lack of capacity and general appreciation of the area by a few. The idea of establishing Kenya Green Universities Network has helped to open a channel through which policy, research and education can be practiced in the country. The non-governmental organizations as well as private organizations have the potential to set examples in the application of GHRM hence the need to embrace them.

Recommendations

Owing to the few efforts observed on the appreciation of GHRM practice, there is need to lay more focus in the area and take advantage of the opportunities that come with it. There is need for training and development to build capacity for those institutions that have embraced the practice. There is a further need to demystify the relationship between GHRM and sustainability as well as traditional environmental conservation. There is need for further research on the relationship between green human resource management and green economy systems. There is also need to support the Kenya Green Universities Network and other groups to be the leading vehicle for green human resource management and sustainability in our entities.

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