

Weak Talent keeps BPOs on the starting blocks

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The growth of Kenya's Business Process Outsourcing and Information Technology (BPO/IT) sector depends on boosting the talent pool and focusing on big contracts, says a task force report.

Previously, studies have shown outsourcing was driven by cost savings, efficiency, growth strategy, and access to new markets as focus shifts to talents, costs and handling risks. The report released on Thursday last week by the BPO Skills Taskforce says although the sector can generate revenue of up to Sh 45 billion and provide 80,000 jobs by 2014, there is need to boost skills.

Rich Pool

Training on BPO standards is also seen as a move that will help operators to cut costs and have a rich pool of human resource.

"The country has some of the best Information Communication and Telecommunication ICT talents. However, there is need to boost managers' soft skills in business writing, leadership, selling skills and project management in are key requirement in this sector" says the report.

BPO/IT sector is one of the pillars identified to prop the economic blueprint Vision 2030 that seeks to make the country and middle income economy in the next 20 years. The sector has attracted more than 50 local operators but most operate small scale of between 20 and 50 seats, cutting them out of big contracts. Mr Sanjay Sikka, the managing director, Horizon BPO and Contact Centre, which operates a 625 seat facility, says for the country to position for big businesses, there is need of scaling up.

"To attract bid taker deals there is need to have facilities that can handle or scale up their operations When such opportunities occur:" said Mr Sanjay "This can be done by merging small operators we have around the country."

He says the government plan to lease the Sameer Business Park to house BPO operators under one roof is necessary. He, however, says handling clients as a group may be a challenge since most clients prefer to deal with one contact.

Kenya has been focusing on BPO as opposed to knowledge process outsourcing (KPO), a more lucrative niche that a consultant from Philippines says can boost growth and build profile as a BPO/IT destination.

Major contracts

Jonathan Defensor De Luzuriaga, a BPO expert, says unlike BPO that requires many clients, a KPO can survive on two - or three major contracts. While BPO focuses on jobs like back-office operations, customer care services, which are process-driven, a KPO deals in customised services like research and development, customer analytics, and legal advice among others.

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