Seminar on
Public Sector Leadership Capacity Development
for Good Governance in Africa

The Role of Public Sector Leadership in Fostering
Socio-Economic and Political Development in Africa

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Introduction:

The moment of truth for Africa and African leadership has dawned, triggering an awakening in all African societies that see themselves gradually being eclipsed by the giant leaps of developed countries. People throughout Africa are beginning to realize that dramatic words and phrases might provide a platform for temporary crowd pleasing, ego satisfaction and what have you, but they cannot solve their fundamental problems nor satisfy their aspirations for a better life. What is needed is a philosophy which should be both a rational exploitation of Africa’s past and an intellectual stimulus to its renaissance translated in an undertaking which goes against the environment in which the people live. or say an upheaval which sets out to destroy existing structures and overturns prevailing values. Perhaps the only solution to Africa’s problems lies in courageously confronting Africa’s maladies and predicaments that manifest themselves in the following which is by no means an inclusive list:

- Internal and external conflicts that have resulted in devastation of infrastructure. Low economic performance due to poor macro-economic management;
- Unbridled lust for power and the growth of unscrupulous careerists;
- Inter-group cleavages that hampered real growth and development;
- Fragile institutions hobbled by tradition tribalism and nepotism that resulted in reduced efficiency and poor functioning organizations;
- Growing poverty and deprivation and abysmal ignorance;
- Poor governance systems giving way to a mismanagement crisis of increasing dimensions, due to lack of transparency and accountability;
- Weakened trust in government as an institution;
- Poor service delivery, and increasing endemic diseases;
- Lack of creativity and innovation and aggressive pursuit of excellence.

It is therefore critical for us to tenaciously face up to these inadequacies, engage in objective and sober self-critique and slough off self deception before we start thinking about prescriptions to disentangle us from this messy situation we are bogged in, so as not to address symptoms rather than underlying causes.

We need first and foremost to come to grips with the reality of our situation, however harsh it may look, and honestly see the challenges facing us if we are keen to have a place in this turbulent, fast-moving world around us.

The issue is evidently one of survival in this callous world that is why there is this call for an honest undertaking or an upheaval to revitalize out vision, to reshape our values and hit the track in pursuit of achievement and excellence.
**Challenges Facing African Leadership:**

The challenges facing Africa and African leadership are enormous, but the most daunting ones are:

1. The challenge of governance, public service reform and bureaucracy;
2. The challenge of consolidating democracy and promoting sustainable human development and poverty reduction;
3. The challenge of conflict prevention and management;
4. The challenge of the development crisis posed by *HIV/AIDS* pandemic;
5. The challenge of human capital drain;
6. The challenge of private sector development;
7. The challenge of regional co-operation and integration;
8. The challenge of external debt burden;
9. The challenge of globalization;
10. Trade flow and the challenge of trade negotiation;
11. The challenge of information revolution and scientific and technological progress;
12. The challenge of resource flow to Africa;
13. The challenge of tensions within African societies created by increasing demands for recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity in both political and economic spheres;
14. The challenge of facing the growing interest in the decentralization of previous highly centralized governments and the broadening and strengthening of local government capacity;
15. The challenge of addressing the issue of gender equality;
16. The challenge of multinational integration;
17. The challenge of understanding the international political and economic order and responding intelligently to it;
18. The challenge of reshaping and leading organizations and people through a culture that is conducive to excellence to react dynamically to the above challenges.

These diverse and daunting challenges, no doubt, require strategic vision, a clear sense of direction the ability to plan and organize, a muscle to pursue excellence, which can only be attained through aggressive, hard-nosed leadership that has the capacity to deliver, be it political or executive leadership.

**Leadership Defined:**

Leadership will continue to be the challenge for the future. Any reform effort is doomed if this aspect is addressed sufficiently. It acts at the heart of the matter, for much of the change or shift in paradigm will depend on how well leadership perceives its role in re-engineering change. Leadership is one of those qualities that are easier to recognize than define. The nature of leadership varies according to the demands of a particular situation, as leaders themselves are divers individuals. Peter Drucker, a prominent consultant in organizational leadership has noted:
“Among the effective executives I have known and worked with, there are extroverts and aloof, retiring men, some even morbidly shy. Some are eccentrics, others are painfully correct conformists. Some are fat and some are thin. Some are worriers and some are relaxed. Some drink quite heavily and others are total abstainers. Some are men of great charm and warmth; some have no more personality than a frozen mackerel.”

Stephen Covey notes, in his book “Principle-Centred Leadership”

“Leadership focuses more on people than on things; on the long-term rather than the short term; on values and principles rather than activities; on mission, purpose and direction rather than on methods, techniques and speed.”

He goes further on to talk about transformational leadership and transactional leadership, which he describes as follows:

**Transformational Leadership:**

- Builds on men’s need for meaning;
- Is preoccupied with purposes and values, morals and ethics;
- Transcends daily affairs;
- Is oriented towards meeting long-term goals without compromising human values and principles;
- Separates causes and symptoms and works at prevention;
- Values profit as the basis of growth;
- Is proactive, catalytic and patient;
- Focuses more on missions and strategies for achieving them;
- Makes full use of human resources;
- Identifies and develops new talent;
- Recognizes and rewards significant contributions;
- Releases human potential;
- Models love;
- Leads out in new directions;
- Aligns internal structures and systems to reinforce overarching values and goals.

**Transactional Leadership:**

- Build on man’s need to get a job done and to make a living;
- Is preoccupied with power and position, politics and perks;
- Is mired in daily affairs;
- Is short term and hard-data oriented;
- Confuses causes and symptoms and concerns itself more with treatment than prescription;
- Focuses on tactical issues;
- Relies on human relations to lubricate human interaction;
- Follows and fulfils role expectations by striving to work effectively within current systems;
- Supports structures and systems that reinforce the bottom line, maximize efficiency and guarantee short term results.
But whether it is transformational or transactional, effective leadership is a quality that is very much in demand, particularly in situations where mediocrity is the least desired. New leadership attributes like setting the strategic vision and direction, challenging old rules and processes, enlisting support, providing good role models and challenging the heart in bringing about change and more importantly achieving excellent results are crucial. They will make or break any effort at improving the effectiveness of organizations and in particular the civil service in the new era. To be able to achieve that, we have to investigate and analyze the critical dimensions of leadership to grasp its real essence that is relevant to the modern age and that kindles the awareness of the magnitude of African problems and inspires the will and drive of leaders to meet them half way, through mobilized human effort and resources.

We have to identify these critical dimensions by answering the following questions:

- Is leadership simply innovation-cultural or political?
- Is it essentially inspiration?
- Is it goal setting and goal fulfillment?
- Is leadership the attainment of progressively worthy goals and objectives through the intelligent integration of human and production resources, or is it simply driving the herd?
- Is leadership situation appraisal, problem analysis, decision analysis, potential problem analysis and potential opportunity analysis, or is it fire-fighting and thinking after the fix?
- Is leadership continuously assessing strengths and weaknesses, evaluating opportunities and threats for a clear sense of direction with identified and controlled risks, and thus sound decision-making or is it simply repeating yesterday?
- Is leadership concerned with focusing on contribution and making strength productive or is it concerned with bossing and playing the cop?
- Is leadership concerned with shaping values and instilling them through a culture conducive to achievement and excellence led by the leader himself or is it paying no attention to organizational values, considering them new-fangled nonsense?
- Is leadership concerned with achieving a major paradigm shift making the public service more mission-oriented, dynamic and resilient in a rapid changing environment?
- Is leadership concerned with exerting big effort in making incremental but significant changes encompassing not only structural and systems changes, but changes in values and in the mind set of civil service, or is it satisfied with maintaining the status quo?

The answers to these questions determine the roadmap to effective leadership.
The Changing Role of Public Sector Leadership:

The role of modern governments in Africa is indeed very complex, what more with the current issues of global interdependence, the communications and information technology revolution and the expectations of the public to be more involved in the decisions that affect their lives. With the advent of the Internet and open government, we need to acknowledge that the days of policy making behind closed doors might well be numbered.

As the buttress of government, the public service should work towards ensuring an effective administrative framework that delivers goods and services efficiently, maintains security, law and order and ensures access, fairness and justice – all of which are critical to a government that governs. Hence the leadership function within the public service is crucial, while being well informed and able to deal with complex social problems it must recognize that in the future technology will have a profound impact on governance; that societies and the organized entities within them must be characterized by the learning mode; and that human resources rejuvenation is the key to renewal of the public sector. Despite huge strides in socio-economic development, leaders must be ready to continue to address fundamental public policy issues of poverty, education, housing, security and health effectively as these will continue to dominate the public agenda. More importantly they will have to grapple with the dilemma of how governments can remain credible and focused when significant resources not in their control or are assigned to organizations with limited ability to carry them through and lack accountability to the government. Leadership through good governance must be able to manage diversity, identify and develop key strategic areas, seek and nurture productive partnerships and focus on outputs as well as outcomes. The key leadership role would thus be to seek ways to build the necessary institutional, human resources and technological capacity to support governance. The public sector leadership should equally measure up to the requirements of a quality culture in African organizations, a culture that gradually moves out of its traditional boundaries and transcends them to embrace compelling shifts in structure and content that address issues such as strategic vision and strategic planning, reengineering organizations by leading change, managing knowledge, internalizing quality, entering the digital age, building partnerships, managing for accountability and getting values and ethics right.

Public sector leadership should respond to the real and daunting challenges facing African governments and enhance their capacity to deal with them. The key factor here is to differentiate between leading and managing. Leaders in the public service need to be constantly reminded of the need to go beyond management. In the words of Warren Bennis “management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.” Effectiveness is what should be sought in programmes undertaken in the public service or for that matter in any other field of work. And effectiveness is very much a function of leadership. For effectiveness is not so much about the effort that went into carrying out a plan of action. Rather, it is whether the effort went into an action plan that is headed in the right direction in the first place. This kind of metamorphosis, that is from management to leadership, is going to have to deal a lot with the intrinsic or personal elements of the individual leader. That is why it is equally critical to pay a lot more attention to the personal attributes of leaders in hoping to achieve what we want the public service to achieve as a whole.
**Personal Attributes of Leaders:**

Some of the personal attributes of leaders compiled by Edwin A. Locke developed from an integration of recent works on leadership consist of four key parts:

1. **Vision**
2. Implementing the vision
3. Motives and traits
4. Knowledge skills and ability.

1. **Vision:**

Vision is a vital leadership component, leaders’ drive motivation to lead, experience and intelligence provide them with the capacity to:

- Define what their organization should strive to be and to do;
- Articulate that vision succinctly;
- Formulate a strategic visions that specifies the means by which the vision will be attained;
- Promote commitment from their followers by communicating in a manner that is both clear and compelling.

2. **Implementation of the Vision:**

Implementation of the vision is a requirement for leadership success. A vision that is not implemented remains only a dream. The effective leader takes steps to ensure that the vision is translated into specific actions, which usually are accomplished with the help of managers and their subordinates.

Effective implementation actions fall in six categories:

- Structuring;
- Selection, training and acculturating of personnel;
- Motivating;
- Managing information;
- Team building;
- Promoting change.

3. **Motives and Traits:**

**Effective leaders:**

- are full of drive, energy and ambition;
- are tenacious and pro-active in pursuing their goals;
- Want to lead – they do not crave power for the sake of dominating others but for the sake of achieving an overarching goal;
- Are honest and have integrity;
- Have a high degree of self-confidence, which enables them not only to undertake grave responsibilities and generate confidence in others but to cope with many potentially stressful situations with equanimity;
- Are often creative;
- Are strategically flexible;
- Are sometimes charismatic.

4 - Knowledge, Skills and Ability:

- Extensive knowledge of their discipline, technology and the organizational environment in which they are working;
- A variety of skills. Because of the relational nature of leadership “people skills” are important. These include listening, communication network building, conflict management, and assessment of self and others. Problem solving, decision-making skills are also vital;
- Cognitive ability, specially the intelligence to process a large amount of information, integrate it and draw logical conclusions from it.

The Soft Stuff of Leadership:

And soft is hard! Tom Peters in “In Search of Excellence” has summed up the characteristics of excellent performing organizations in the following:
1. Bias for action;
2. Closeness to the customer;
3. Obsession with quality;
4. Instilling unique values;
5. Productivity through people;
6. Encouraging innovation;
7. Stick to the knitting;
8. Simple form, lean staff.

In his sequel “A Passion For Excellence” Peters Shows how that passion is borne by leadership that makes excellence real, through real people who are made to deliver, because they want to deliver. It is the organizational culture shaped by those leaders that makes the entire system obsessed with achievement and excellence.

Here comes the soft stuff of leadership. I have developed a model out of the letters of the word “Leadership” in an attempt to get to the heart of the soft stuff of leadership. The model depicts LEADERSHIP as:

L = Love
E = Empathy
A = Attention
D = Dedication
E = Enforcement of Values
R = Reward
S = Synergy
H = Hoopla
I = Integrity
P = Perseverance
Love:

That is demonstration of love, real love to the organization he leads, love of vision, love of people to be reciprocated, love of the values he preaches – love that permeates the entire system.

Empathy:

The need to adopt a human approach in all actions, to strengthen not just the minds of followers but also their hearts by shoring up confidence in themselves and their abilities, understanding their difficulties and appreciating their contributions, celebrating their achievements and publishing their successes! It is heightening confidence and involvement of followers both in the organizational as well as the national agenda.

Attention:

Leaders pay attention to their people throughout the hierarchy. People need to stick out, to be noticed to be respected. Effective leaders provide that … Examples of first name basis, no reserved parking, skunk works, improvement teams and inverted organizational charts are examples of the effort of leaders to mobilize the human resource by paying attention to them and treating them with dignity.

Dedication:

Leaders provide the role model in their dedication to work, to the vision they preach, to the values they hold dear. They are very careful that words match deeds; that their one thousand little actions day in and day out are being observed by their people and that they also provide reinforcement to the value system or they become mere show business that results in sarcasm and disbelief in leadership.

Enforcement of Values:

Leaders formulate values, and not only preach them but do them. The leader becomes a value shaper par excellence, and he compromises on anything except the values set. He exerts every effort to instill values throughout the system and engage all people in the organization to rally behind them. As Ray Kroc of MacDonalds says “Watch the number of times I repeated MacDonald’s value of “quality, cleanliness, value and service;” if every time I said it a brick was made, I would have built a bridge over the Atlantic Ocean! Just imagine how often he might have repeated the value.

Reward:

Effective leadership rewards good contribution, and rewards it immediately. Immediacy creates trust and revitalizes energies. Lack of appreciation creates resentment and triggers anti-creativity. Fairness is also key to rewarding. Leaders make sure that reward is well deserved. Rewarding could be to all individuals, to a group, or to the entire organization and it could take different forms.
Synergy:

It translates to one plus one equals three! Effective leaders seek synergy of ideas to perfect decision-making, to create involvement and to ensure commitment.

Hoopla:

Effective leaders tend to break the monotony created by daily work routines. They engineer events to have fun, to make a break, to renew blood and to revitalize the soul... but all this is integrated around the value system so that fun itself becomes productive!

Integrity:

To live the people message, to live leader-as-servant requires total integrity. A leader should always be confident in his beliefs, and to live them with integrity, as Peters says “You don’t lose your dignity if you wear coveralls and if you believe in people you likewise do not lose your dignity if you admit mistakes.”

Perseverance:

Leaders believe in all of the above; they don’t pay them lip service but do them as role models and persevere in instilling them in all to become bone-deep beliefs in the entire system!

Tackling Capacity Needs:

The African Capacity Building Foundation states:

“The development challenges for Africa to be addressed, and for the enhancement of leadership capacity, capacity needs have to be decisively tackled. The availability and effective utilization of the requisite capacity will determine the continents’ ability to meet these challenges in the new millenium. Therefore sustained structural transformation in Africa in the next two decades requires a significant leap in the quantum of support and commitment to capacity building as well as reforms for effective utilization of such capacity.”

For the benefit of the forum discussion, I will hereby reproduce the African Capacity Building Foundation’s view on the capacity dimensions of Africa’s development challenges on a sectoral basis.

Sectors and Capacity Needs:

African countries fully recognize the need for market-based, private sector-oriented economic systems and policies. They are also aware that an autonomous, vibrant civil society is a key building block of a potent Africa. The public sector, especially, at the central level, must retain a strategic place and role precisely to enable the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to play their developmental role in a constructive, synergetic and sustainable manner. Given the foregoing challenges, the corresponding capacity implications, especially, at the level of the key sectors are obvious. These are as follows:
The Public Sector:

To effectively lead the process of tackling the development challenges, the public sector in Africa must be strengthened to perform the key functions of a capable state in support of poverty reduction, equitable development and participatory governance. Given the present state of the public sector on the continent, it need enhanced capacity to:

- Successfully design and implement development policies and programmes;
- Provide efficient, cost-effective and responsive public services;
- Promote, through policies and programmes, a sustained environment that will facilitate the emergence of a strong and vibrant private sector and civil society a policy environment that will allow for a good measure of predictability in the direction of adjustment of socio-economic policies in response to the development challenges;
- Establish and manage an effective and transparent regulatory and legal framework to guide the growth and development of the private sector, reward innovativeness and risk-taking, and adequately protect consumers and the environment;
- Address, more vigorously, the issue of transparency and accountability in public service;
- Enhance institutions that promote and enforce the rule of law for legitimacy, social stability and the protection of property rights;
- Enhance the role of civil society in development policy management, and constructively engage all other stakeholders in dialogue in order to promote participatory development, consensus building and responsive governments;
- Put in place a sound framework for managing public resources and attendant issues such as decentralization, fiscal federalism, debt, poverty reduction and intergenerational equity;
- Manage the changing role of the public sector in the context of globalization, market economy, multiparty democracy, and information revolution, which have significant implications for openness in public sector management, innovation and the spread of best practices in development policy management;
- Cultivate and nurture an environment that will accelerate poverty reduction and sustainable development.

The Private Sector:

As regards the private sector, capacity is needed for it to carry out the following, among others:

- Provide efficient and competitive services;
- Compete effectively in the global economy;
- Dialogue effectively with other stakeholders in development especially, the public sector and civil society in order to influence the policy agenda;
- Perform functions traditionally a monopoly of the state;
- Enhance good corporate governance and social responsibility;
- Establish codes of best practices;
- Improve productivity and output;
- Promote adaptation and application of science and technology;
- Undertake research for development;
- Bridge the digital divide by promoting information technology.
Civil Society:

To play an effective role in efforts to address the development challenges, civil society in Africa in the 21st century has to emerge as a strong voice in the development process. It has to play a vital role in mobilizing and articulating social demands and providing countervailing influences to elicit accountable performance and transparency in the public and private sectors. It thus requires capacity to contribute effectively to formulation, implementation and responsiveness/accountability of development policies and programmes. To this end, it will require capacity for the following, among others:

- Independent, professional policy analysis and research;
- Strengthening of non-governmental organizations and their networks;
- Effective interface with the public and private sectors;
- Provision of support to development policies, strategies and programmes for poverty reduction;
- Participation in, and monitoring of, public service delivery in the search for accountable, transparent and efficient government.

Additional Strategic Areas:

Beside the foregoing, there are numerous additional areas of capacity needs in which strategic interventions are directly needed in the efforts to tackle the development challenges. Some of these include:

- Conflict prevention, resolution and management;
- Enhancement of governance institutions and practices;
- Improvement of national statistics;
- Strengthening of consultation among stakeholders and participatory development;
- Rehabilitating educational institutions and systems, and reforming curricula for relevance to development challenges;
- Fostering regional cooperation and integration;
- Strengthening of regional institutions for the provision of regional public goods;
- Strengthening of special initiatives geared towards:
  - Designing, implementing and monitoring poverty reduction policy strategies and programmes;
  - Speeding up the recovery of post-conflict countries;
  - Setting up institutional networks, collaborative and exchange programmes;
  - Enhancing capacity for international negotiations.

The foregoing provides some indications as to the breadth and depth of capacity needs that face Africa in the decades ahead, if it is to provide a robust response to the development challenges.
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