THE CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP
IN
AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Recommendations by
Discussion Groups on

Economic and Social Issues
Political and Strategic Issues

Inaugural Programme of
The Africa Leadership Forum

Ota, Nigeria
24 October, to 1 November 1988
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Report of the Discussion Group on Economic
And Social Issues Confronting African
Leadership

Chairman: Pierre-Claver Damiba

The Main Issues

Various development programmes have experienced a number of setbacks in the region since independence. A very important factor that contributed to this failure is the perpetuation of inherited colonial structures, which are often ineffective. This could be added to the problem of the continuing fragmentation, fragility and external control of the development process; poor social and economic infrastructure; and the concentration of the benefits from development in the hands of just a few. One last point in this regard is the diminishing relevance of primary products on which export earnings have long depended; and the many social and institutional discontinuities that constrain effective development administration.

Africa faces today a deep and deepening crisis. Compared with other developing nations of Asia and Latin America, Africa now risks being marginalized in the world. In drawing upon the experience of other regions, care must however be taken to avoid easy generalizations about new determinants for Africa’s economic and social transformation.

Any serious rethinking of Africa’s development strategy must pay attention to the following factors:

a) capacity building,
b) food security,
c) external debt burden,
d) international trade and payment relations,
e) efficiency of trade investments,
f) regional and sub-regional economic integration,
g) consideration of expenditures on arms and armaments, and
h) concern for the very poor and the vulnerable groups in the process of structural adjustment.

Each of these factors is important, individually and collectively. Given the objectives of the African Leadership Forum, emphasis should be given to the first factor, namely the capacity-factor, building and food security.

**Capacity Building**

African development problems are as complex as they are multi-faceted. Their resolution ultimately depends on the capacity of people to understand what is happening around them, both internally and externally. They must possess enhanced ability to be able to take appropriate steps and cope with a variety of problems surrounding them.

At the higher levels of leadership, Africa must take a leaf out of the books of other nations. It must equip itself with the intellectual and scientific capacity and the knowledge base to formulate long-term strategies. It must upgrade considerably its ability to analyse economic and social issues correctly and to implement such policies with the necessary political vision.

Unlike other parts of the world, Africa at present has no high-level think tank, no institute or a centre that engages in long-range studies, policy formulation and analysis. As a first step, therefore, the Forum should initiate action and extend assistance and collaborative efforts towards creating an African Centre or Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies.

Such a Centre or Institute should be a think tank with a small, highly professional staff of, say, three dozen social scientists and policy experts in a variety of disciplines, who are provided with the necessary financial resources, and up-to-date library and other research facilities. The institute must enjoy the general support or goodwill of African governments, while there is only minimal direct government involvement in its affairs. Such a high-quality institution with arms-
length relationship with the government, and which is at the same time
dedicated to policy formulation and analysis, would be a crucial first
step for African nations to acquire the necessary institutional and
intellectual development tools for the decades to come.

Past and current attempts aimed at bringing about similar or related
institutions in the region were reviewed. Participants commended the
offer of Mr. Pierre-Claver Damiba, on behalf of the UNDP, to provide
the necessary support and seed money for undertaking a plan of action
for the proposed Centre or Institute. The benefits to be derived from
such an institution would take shape in the long term, and the Forum
should take an early decision now to bring it about.

**Food Security**

The serious food and nutrition situation in Africa calls for immediate
new and practical policy initiatives. Such an action, the group noted, is
feasible in the realm of farmer cooperatives integrated with agro-
industrial entrepreneurs.

It would be necessary to aim at the complete involvement of local
farmers in this regard, avoiding their displacement and offering them
maximum encouragement and incentives. Focus should also be directed
at areas that initially require only small and accessible capital, in order
to avoid big size projects that would require foreign loans.

An integrated production-oriented programme for addressing the
African food situation would involve four important components:

A) Setting up of farms by various agro-ecological locations and
in various sizes. These would need to concentrate on one or a
few major crops: staples, roots/tubers, fruits/vegetables,
medicinal plants, animals and cash crops.

B) Workshops that can provide and service the needed farm
equipment including minor fabrication, production of spare
parts and effective repairs and maintenance.

C) Agro-industries that would minimize the present gross waste
as a result of poor post-harvest preservations. Experiments
with the plants could focus on more efficient storage and extraction culture and also provide the missing technology that would bridge the gap between the farms and distant markets.

The importance of farming by primary and secondary schools was also considered. Reintroducing and rein-forcing the farming culture into all schools and rural and semi-urban communities would yield the double benefits of increasing aggregate food supplies and inculcating the love of farming in the citizens early in life. As might be ecologically appropriate, primary schools in general could be encouraged to concentrate on light vegetables and fruit farming, while secondary schools in general could take on the cultivation of the heavier crops.

The Forum is enjoined to consider the importance of providing further policy guidelines and possible implementation procedures in this priority area: Africa’s food security in a modernizing agricultural world.
Chairman: Francis M. Deng

Introduction

The group began by considering a conceptual framework for its discussions, particularly the issue of whether leadership should be conceived broadly to include different types of leaders such as youth, women, community, academic or business leaders, and at all levels, from local through district and provincial or state, to national and international levels. The group decided that given the short time available, it would be more fruitful to focus attention on leadership at the national level, which had implication for both the local and global levels. It was stressed, however that the problems and the challenges confronting leaders at all levels were essentially of the same nature.

The group also agreed to select for consideration certain themes emerging from the lectures and plenary discussions, especially the addresses by President Ibrahim Babangida and General Olusegun Obasanjo.

The Problems

The group reviewed in depth critical areas of problems confronting African leadership. In particular, it addressed the problem of the declining quality of life in Africa. These problems could be summarized as follows:

- A pervasive and debilitating malnutrition problem.
- A backward and fragmented agriculture. The weakest industrial base in the Third World.
- Environmental degradation reflected in a losing war against desertification.
Withering features of the modern society to which Africans have been introduced.
A debilitating debt problem.
Intervention by international financial institutions and their expert advisers who are assuming control over the management of African economies.
A pervasive atmosphere of domestic unrest, tensions and conflicts, which have oftentimes resulted in civil wars.
Interstate conflicts resulting from border problems or the activities of dissidents or rebel groups across the colonial boundaries.
A chronic state of instability resulting from these internal and regional tensions and conflicts.
An increasingly marginalized position in the geo-political dynamics of the global scene.

Furthermore, the problems of corruption at all levels, mistrust of the leaders by the people, and general cynicism towards government affairs were also highlighted. With respect to corruption, public office-holders in Africa have to operate within two contexts. The first is that of the general public, which condemns corruption. The other is that of the private domain, the ethnic group or the extend family, which benefits from the fruits of corruption and therefore encourages it. In those circles, an office holder who does not deliver is often thought of as weak, foolish or at best naïve.

The problem of corruption and of the expectation of the members of the ethnic group and the extended family were also seen as tied to the problems of poverty and the role of a leader as a provider. Since public office holders often do not have enough of their own to give, the temptation to misappropriate public wealth may be irresistible. The same problems of poverty also applied to the distribution of national wealth. How could leaders get a consensus from the masses when opinion is generally influenced by the allocations leaders make to the various constituencies from a national cake that is grossly insufficient in the first place?
On the issue of cynicism, serious doubts were expressed about the effectiveness of leaders under those circumstances: How could the leaders mobilize people who have developed such a cynical view of leadership? How could the leaders with such a disadvantage get the people to be productive?

African leaders tend to display an attitude of contempt and disregard for the people, even as they claim to govern in the name of the masses. It was argued that in developed communities of the democratic world, leaders of all types – political, social, economic, educational and religious - know that they are in the public eye and are subjected to a 24 hours vigilant scrutiny. In those communities, a leader is seen as a servant of the people, and he who serves best is loved most. The public becomes the guardian of the society and of the leaders themselves. In Africa, it was observed, servants often abuse the public they serve; even a bus driver bullies the passengers. The African public often tolerates this abuse for too long and tends to explode against bad leaders when it is too late.

Closely linked with the problem of abuse of the public by contemptuous leaders is the disrespect for human dignity. It was argued that the age of slavery followed by colonialism had left deep scars in the African sense of worth and human dignity. The era of independence in Africa coincided with the period of the Cold War and ideological rivalries and conflicts between East and West. These new powers found Africa a convenient battlefield for their cold war. African leaders on their part were ill-prepared to handle this new colonial onslaught and were consequently manipulated by those foreign powers. This new assault on the continent has taken a heavy toll of life and ushered in more chaos than order in all walks of life.

The political elites in Africa do not communicate sufficiently with the masses and even when they try, the gap between them in material terms is such that communication is difficult and even rendered meaningless, especially as the elites are often too remote from the aspirations of the people.
The causes

The causes of the political and strategic problems outlined above are varied. In many instances, they are implicit in the problems and can be inferred from the way the problems are presented. Some of the causes can be outlined as follows:

It has now become increasingly evident that colonial masters in Africa skilfully surrendered political power while maintaining economic control. Africa therefore became politically independent while still economically in bondage.

Even with the newly acquired political independence, African leaders assumed their role with a false start. Political power was seen as an end in itself rather than as a means for serving the people and producing tangible results in development and nation-building. The high ideals of serving the people and nation-building remained largely the subject of polemics and rhetoric.

Consistent with ambitions for power as an end in itself, African leaders failed to develop institutions that would translate independence into popular democracy and liberty. They failed to accommodate dissent and tap the energies of the people for economic and social development.

Power became concentrated not in a political party, but rather in the individual leader. And the leader himself was often not viewed as a representative of the nation as a whole, but rather as a member of a particular family.

As a consequence of this, ethnic, cultural and religious barriers were not harmonized through equitable and impartial balance of interests. Disparities, rather than diminishing with independence, were deepened and widened.

Within the wider regional framework, national boundaries which had artificially been demarcated by colonial powers, breaking groups apart concomitantly and multiplying conditions of internal differences characterized inequities, were considered so sacrosanct that genuine
grievances of injustice and maltreatment by minority groups within these boundaries were completely disregarded.

Consequently, resistance to inequities and the concentration of power by dominant groups or dictatorial rulers was suppressed with greater abuse of force.

The result was gross violations of human rights and the repression of the energies of the people, which could have been constructively released for development and nation building.

On the larger regional scene, civil wars, mass movements of refugees, aggravated by food scarcity and distribution, became the prevailing features of the Africa scene.

On the smaller individual scale, qualified citizens began to see personal security and better opportunities for employment in foreign countries.

The Challenges

The challenges for Africa and for its leadership logically emanate from the perception of the problem and the underlying causes as presented above.

President Babangida articulated the challenge when he said, “The attainment of our goals…center on the uplift of the quality of life of our people”.

And in the words of General Obasanjo, “Our recovery must therefore begin with a recuperation of those values which are the foundation of every human society, which is in turn the foundation of social creativity.”

In elaborating the point, General Obasanjo stressed the need for democracy, explaining that “the point at issue is not the forms of democracy, but the content of democracy; to ensure that one tribe is not privileged over another; that one region is not developed at the expense of the other; and that the classes do not lord it over the masses – that is
the challenge. Once the state is seen to be truly above partisan interests and even-handed in its dealings between the competing interest groups, we would have begun the process of endowing our political institutions with the necessary legitimacy, which is their ultimate safeguard against violent overthrow.”

General Obasanjo, Stressing the difficulties involved, especially in the context of structural adjustment, added: “But that is precisely when the need for equity and fair play becomes even greater.”

The task of nation-building in the framework of diversity and disparity dictates on the leaders the need to foster consensus and break down community barriers. Only then would we begin “the process of endowing political institutions with the necessary legitimacy, which is their ultimate safeguard against violent overthrow,”

In other words, the objectives that the African leaders are called upon to pursue include:

Commitment to development, national welfare, and a fair distribution of resources;
Promotion of peace and security;
Releasing the energies of the people for construction work;
Protection and promotion of human dignity;
The development of an educational system whose context and objectives reflect African realities and aspirations;
Fighting corruption at all levels, especially within the ranks of the leaders;
Planning on the basis of knowledge, information, and proposals generated from within Africa and not from outside sources.
Fostering a leadership endowed with the attributes of courage and self-confidence, combined with tolerance, honesty and humility.
A leader in a pluralistic framework must rise above factionalism and be seen to represent the entire spectrum of the polity.

The Strategies

The field of education is, perhaps, the most critical in correcting the attitudes of leaders and the people at large. Emphasis was therefore laid
on “the crisis of knowledge discontinuation” and the African tendency to disregard traditional knowledge and go outside the continent in search of knowledge. A case was cited in which foreign experts, after studying local methods of producing rice, concluded that the techniques used by the local African farmers were appropriate to their local conditions. Africans, it was argued, must utilize the indigenous resources of knowledge for mobilizing the people for development purposes. Modern forms of education should not be allowed to marginalize the masses and undermine their resourcefulness in the development process. Under the prevailing approaches, popular knowledge accumulated over thousands of years and passed down from generation to generation is being dismissed as irrelevant in favour of what is assumed to be the “proper” sources of knowledge from outside. The idea is not to dismiss modern external sources of knowledge, but rather to develop an African educational system whose content and objectives are oriented towards the African environment and derived from a multiplicity of sources, not least the indigenous sources of knowledge and technical know-how.

The challenge of orientating education to the African context should be seen as a part and parcel of building on the indigenous African cultures, including values, institutions and patterns of behaviour. Development must be seen not so much as a process stimulated by external inputs, but rather as a process of self-enhancement from within, building on material and human resources available to the people from the grass-root level of the farmer to the level of the national decision-makers.

In this connection, the authority of a ruler in traditional society may be too remote from the daily life of the people and is exercised only to regulate relations between people, with the Chief intervening only in the case of conflict for the purpose of mediation and reconciliation. Beyond that, the Chief is a provider for the needy and a source of welfare to his people. A proverb from the Sudan was cited to the effect that “The Chief is the father of orphans.” According to another proverb from the Sudan attributed to a Chief and emphasizing the value of generosity, “What is given circulates; what is consumed is wasted.”
Apart from these positive benefits from the leadership, groups, families and the individual were autonomous and self-reliant. In contrast, the lives of the people in modern Africa seem to be invaded by the ever-present authority of the Government. This has been oppressive, repressive, debilitating and conducive to dependency.

The participants noted that local government could be seen as one way of encouraging a return to the autonomy of the local community and reducing the presence of the central government. Much however still needs to be done in this regard. It was noted for example that whereas Britain has 1900 local government units for a population of 48 million inhabitants, Nigeria has only 304 local government units for its population of about 120 million.

With respect to the role of leadership in the development process, there is the problem of the inadequacy of the data available to leaders on the basis of which sound decisions could be made. The data available were usually scarce, poor and outdated. This is an area in which remedy is urgently needed.

While appreciating the critical role of education and database, the group also argued for giving high priority to the ethnic and cultural problems of nation building. In particular, stress was laid on the issue of ethnic, cultural and religious diversities and the tensions and conflicts, which often result from the disparities and inequities characterizing such diversities.

It was also argued that education is in itself a way of addressing these aspects of the challenge of nation-building. Much depended on the leaders and the extent to which they play an even-handed role in balancing the interests of the various ethnic, cultural and religious groups and be seen to do so. An example was given of a case in which the claim of one group to introduce a system of religious courts threatened national unity and how the leader of the country involved endeavoured to explain the dangers to all concerned (in the decision process) until he was able to achieve a consensus and avert the crisis.
Much of the discussion focused on ways and means of sensitizing the leaders to the moral imperatives of leadership, checking the abuse of power, and fostering the values of respect for the will of the people and their human dignity. It was argued that unless the public knew their rights, the abuse of power by the leaders would not be easy to check. The public must therefore be alerted and made aware of such abuses in order to be prepared to check them. The need for Africans to build on their cultural values and the constraints they place on the leadership was also emphasized. In this connection, the group expressed interest in some of the proverbs and sayings that were given as examples of general assumption and expectations which people have about leaders. It was agreed that such expressions of folk literature, some of which express classic cultural values, and others which reveal shrewd and pragmatic adjustments to contemporary realities could be very useful not only in understanding the situation, but also and perhaps more importantly in facilitating effective communication between the populace and the leadership. The following examples of such proverbs were given from different countries in Africa:

“A Chief is a Chief by the people”, (Lesotho), an argument for democracy and a leader’s responsibilities to his people.
“A bull gets over-powered by a multitude,” (Lesotho), emphasizing the importance of unity.
“The children of a quail beckon each other with a whistle,” (Lesotho), pointing to corruption.
“A bird builds its nest with feathers of another,” (Lesotho), referring to taking advantage of others.
“If you think you are creeping, there is someone lying flat on the ground watching you,” (South Africa), indicating a warning against corruptive social exercises.
“Cleverness always returns to its father”, (Sudan), referring to the stories of the fox who loses in the end, despite his short-term advantages of outwitting others.
“Power is like a stick, put it down and someone will pick it up and beat you on the head with it”, (Sudan), referring to the tendency of rulers to cling to power.
“A hen that neglects her chicks will loose them to the hawk,” (Nigeria), a warning for accountability.
“A person who milks a cow without feeding it, will lose it”, (Nigeria), referring to the importance of the leader taking care of his followers. While some of these proverbs that have positive messages can be used to uphold and reinforce the moral and cultural value of leadership, those with a negative, though perhaps pragmatic, message need to be understood as expressions of prevailing realities and practices that need to be watched and countered.

Periodic reports on leaders and the extent to which they live up to postulated goals in their performance might be a way of making them accountable.

Government leaders should perhaps have regular “sessions of introspection” during which they can examine themselves according to some rules of conduct which would have previously been laid down.

Beyond such methods of accountability, leaders should be exposed to some forms of political and strategic training. This could take the form of discussion fora for exchange of views and experiences among leaders with the participation of knowledgeable and respected resource people.

Within the wider international framework, African leaders must be self assertive, in an enlightened pursuit of Africa’s interests in the global arena.
Despite over a quarter of a century of political independence, Africa’s aspirations and hopes remain today largely unfulfilled. This has not been, however, a period of unmitigated failure in the history of the continent. There have been successes in education, public health, import substitution industries, and in the continuing process of decolonization. The problems of development, peace and security, the health of the world economy, and improving the environment are interrelated global issues, as they do not admit of piecemeal solutions.

And yet all countries find that in the absence of true global cooperation, they have to tackle particular aspects of them. At the national as well as the regional level in Africa today, the inadequacy of information, data, and resources further complicates an already daunting problematic state of affairs.

African leaders have frequently come to leadership positions with limited experience. Though most of them have often battled on, confronting their awesome problems of development and nation-building essentially not only unprepared but unaided, their efforts have been, at best, only a qualified success.

It is quite clear therefore that Africa cannot afford to continue its journey with ill-prepared and unassisted leaders. Those on whom the burden of leadership will fall in future must fully comprehend the nature of their responsibilities, duties, and obligations. In other words, they must be given all the necessary exposure and carefully planned preparation to be able to meet the challenges that they will inevitably face.

This new task is all the more apparent when one considers the level of preparedness of our leaders of tomorrow who are clearly not bothered by anything other than the pursuit of their professional careers. They have little time to devote neither to acquiring a comprehensive knowledge of their own countries and their region nor of the cultures of
their diverse peoples. They neither have the time to learn about and understand the actions taken by their present leaders where they do not impinge on their own areas of expertise.

Most young potential leaders have focused primarily on single issues, lacking time to look at wider, critical regional and world challenges. The time for comprehensive study and reflection, for sharing experiences with persons inside, let alone outside their countries, region, and field of concentration is very limited. Opportunities for such detached discussions and contemplation are even rarer.

This problem is however not helped by the dearth of private institutions in Africa that are devoted to preparing potential leaders with that essential global outlook, which will enable them to cooperate within and across national, regional, and institutional boundaries. Furthermore, it has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, in many African countries to gain access to relevant and timely information on most national, regional, and global issues.

Experience in and out of Government and in international forum bears out this situation, one that must definitely be addressed and remedied. One solution in this regard is to launch the “Africa Leadership Forum”, and to charge it with the task of conducting a series of meetings which may be national, sub-regional, regional and international in dimension and may vary in duration. The purpose will be to enhance the knowledge and awareness of current and young, potential African leaders, placing special emphasis on diagnosing apparent failures of the past; on understanding multiple dimensions and complex interrelations of local, national, regional, and global problems; and on seeking out appropriate solutions.
**Objectives**

The purpose of the forum is to encourage a thorough diagnosis, broad understanding, and an informed search for solutions to local, regional and global problems, taking full account of their interrelationships and mutual consequences.

To that end, the Forum will develop, organize and support programmes for the training of young and promising Africans with leadership potential so as to expose them to the demands, duties and obligations of leadership positions and to prepare them systematically for assuming higher responsibilities and meeting the challenges of an interdependent world.

The Forum will also endeavour to generate greater understanding and enhance the knowledge and awareness of development and social problems, within a global context, among young, potential leaders from all sectors of society, cutting across national, regional, continental, professional and institutional borders. This may foster close and enduring relationship among participants, relationships promoting life-long association and cooperation.

Furthermore, the Forum will support and encourage the informed search for appropriate and effective solutions to local and regional African problems and to global problems from an African perspective – within the framework of global interdependence. This will nevertheless include the consideration of phased action programmes, which can be initiated by various countries, sub-regions and institutions in the continent.

In addition, there will be specific weekend seminars organized as Farm-House Dialogues to be held quarterly.
Financial Aspects

The Forum wishes to acknowledge with gratitude the financial contributions it received in 1988 from the Government of Japan, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Carnegie Corporation of New York and Mr. Victor Mpoyo.