



POLICY BRIEF

BUILDING BRIDGES: TOWARDS INCLUSIVE INTERGENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Inspired by a keynote address delivered by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and discussions by Professor Mojeed Alabi, University of Ilorin and Professor Obijiofor Aginam, United Nations University, Tokyo at the fourth Ibadan Sustainable Development Summit, 13th August, 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief provides a succinct appraisal of the African leadership crisis with specific reference to issues relating to the non-inclusive character of political representation within the African polity. It mainly posits that Africa needs to evolve an equitable and sustainable leadership system built around inclusive intergenerational combination of skills from all segments of the society. This it maintains can be achieved through the use of affirmative action, introduction of mentorship programmes and the evolution of deliberative democratic ethos. Understanding leadership from a representational perspective will help Africans appreciate the importance of having an inclusive approach to leadership rather than simply hoping that one generation should replace the other without any substantive contribution from members of the various generations of leaders.

INTRODUCTION

It has become apparent that the absence of effective political, economic, social and environmental leadership at the individual and institutional levels in many African countries is a major hindrance to sustainable socio-economic development on the continent. This is despite the glaring imperative of having effective institutions and expertise to govern

development. Yet, Africa's journey towards evolving exemplary visionary leadership remains mired in negative circumstances that undermine the progress of the continent. Amongst a long list of leadership challenges in Africa are problems associated with intergenerational succession of leaders, poor management of public and private institutions, high-level corruption, weak governance and accountability structures, and so on.

Consequently, addressing these myriad of challenges is crucial for sustainable development in several African countries, not least in Nigeria where the crisis of leadership has caused enormous discontent amongst the citizens. This policy brief provides a succinct appraisal of the African leadership crisis with specific reference to issues relating to the non-inclusive character of political representation within the African polity. It posits that Africa needs to evolve an equitable and sustainable leadership system built around inclusive intergenerational combination of skills from all segments of society. An understanding of leadership from a representational perspective is offered and recommendations on how an inclusive intergenerational leadership can be achieved are provided.



LEADERSHIP: THE TROUBLE WITH AFRICA

In 1983, the late literary icon Prof. Chinua Achebe in his book, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, summarised Nigeria's problems as being intricately associated with leadership failure. Like Prof. Achebe, many Africans agree that indeed Africa ranks poorly on the leadership scale. The hope of having a prosperous continent after independence under altruistic leaders has been largely dashed with a litany of broken promises. Although the lack of adequate political, technical and administrative expertise at independence greatly affected the development of most of the countries in the early days of independence, Africa's post independence development experience has been quite unimpressive. Today, there is a high level of corruption and indiscipline on the part of political representatives and many citizens have become embittered by the constant display of what is now often referred to as the 'culture of impunity' particularly in the African context. The leadership problem is thus considered a major albatross to sustainable development in the continent.

Unfortunately, the problem of poor leadership in Africa plagues the exercise of authority in various spheres of life, from the political to the economic, social and environmental spheres as well as in the public and private sectors. This is not to argue that there are no exceptions of good leaders in Africa, but the fact remains that these examples are rare for a continent of over 300 million people. The latter point relates to some of the issues raised by the former Nigerian President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, while answering questions arising from his keynote address at the fourth Ibadan Sustainable Development Summit on 13 August, 2013. According to Chief Obasanjo, even though it is fair to maintain Nigeria has been unfortunate in having good leaders who criss-cross generations, when examined critically, Nigerians should be able to identify leaders who have done well. The issue, however, is the apparent lack of adequate leadership succession plans for younger generation of Nigerians to replace the older ones. Hence, navigating generational leadership interchanges in Nigeria has become a

major challenge the country needs to overcome. This is applicable to many other African countries.

INTERGENERATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA: TOWARDS INCLUSION

Understanding leadership from a representational perspective will help Africans appreciate the importance of having an inclusive approach to leadership rather than simply hoping that one generation should replace the other. More so, if the definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" is aligned with the leadership aspirations of the people, developing an inclusive intergenerational approach to leadership is important to sustainable development in Africa. Hence, as many representation theorists believe that The Concept of Representation, which identifies four dimensions of representation (formal, descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representations), can aid our understanding of leadership from a representation perspective.

Formal representation refers to the institutional arrangements governing the selection of representatives, descriptive representation connotes the similarities between the represented and the representatives, substantive representation describes how the actions of the representatives reflect the wishes of the represented, and symbolic representation mirrors the levels of satisfaction of the represented with the actions of their representatives. When combined, the various types of representation can produce equitable access to leadership and governance in general. For instance and in relation to the African context, formal representation would entail having electoral rules that allow various individuals regardless of their ethnic affiliation, creed or economic status access to electoral positions. Descriptive representation would mean among other things that there is adequate gender (especially women) and generational representatives in positions of authority. Substantive representation would encompass the protection and promotion of issues directly affecting the lives of the people and finally symbolic representation would relate to people

feeling that the public interest is paramount for their representatives. This, so far is not the case in many African countries. Women remain highly underrepresented, the youths mainly lack the resources to effectively participate as decision makers and the few elites amongst the older generation dominate the political space, thereby producing a feeling of discontent amongst majority of Africans. This trend can however, be corrected if politicians, policy makers and citizens in general consider the following policy recommendations:

1. The use of affirmative action

There is a need to ensure that policies promoting affirmative actions for marginalized groups in the political arena are enacted to ensure younger people are allowed access into the political arena at all levels. Young men and women can actively be encouraged to take up positions that are reserved for people belonging to the younger generation. In particular, encouraging women to participate in politics in Africa needs to go beyond simply calling for their involvement to ensuring that they are guaranteed certain percentages within political parties and governmental structures. Similarly, in order to encourage intergenerational exchanges, the use of affirmative action should not be introduced to undermine the potential contributions of people from the older generation.

2. Introduction of mentorship programmes

Without doubt, the African leadership problem cuts across all generations. Nevertheless, the continent still has some good leaders at local and national levels whose contributions can still be harnessed through mentorship programmes for the youths to tap into. Political parties and civil society organizations can create mentorship programmes through which members of the older and younger generations can exchange ideas in a mutually beneficial way. The importance of such programmes cannot be overemphasised given the benefits that the whole society can derive by facilitating and encouraging such programmes. However, it is necessary to note that having mentorship

programmes for the youth is not enough and it would be necessary to introduce leadership courses into the educational curricula as a whole, where values of honesty, transparency and accountability will be promoted.

3. Evolving a deliberative democratic ethos within the polity

Many African countries have so far not been able to evolve a democratic system that allows citizens to freely discuss and debate issues affecting their lives as free and equal persons. Rather, the current system of electoral democracy makes participation in politics for many people merely a periodic ritual involving elections and voting. This has significantly decreased the chances of having intergenerational interaction between citizens who can exchange their point of view through deliberations on national issues. Hence, it is imperative for civil society organizations, political parties and governmental institutions to evolve deliberative democratic ethos in governance through avenues like deliberative polls and days. This will encourage several individuals and groups across generational divides to openly debate and interact with one another in a constructive manner.

CONCLUSION

In closing this policy brief, it is important to note a very important fact: the age or gender of any representative does not necessarily translate to representation of people of that age or gender. This means that, it is not entirely the case that people considered youths or older would necessarily represent members of that generation as the African experience vividly illustrates. However, the crucial point this policy brief has sought to make relates to the imperative of evolving leadership practices based on the principles of accountability and probity. Yet the greatest safeguard against the abuse of leadership positions is the consciousness of citizens and their readiness to demand their rights from those who represent them. To this end, an inclusive approach to leadership from an inclusive representational perspective has the potential of raising the stakes for all generations, young and old, men and women alike.

CALL TO ACTION

The following recommendations are made towards building inclusive intergenerational leadership for sustainable development in Africa:

- Combination of integrity, diligence, experience, passion and less of primordial sentiments in the evolution of transformational leadership
- Mentoring schemes for different strata of the society to raise new generations of leaders
- Updating of knowledge and skills are paramount for sustainable leadership
- Holding political offices does not necessarily translate to good leadership. We need to devolve political offices from good leadership. The fact is, many attain political prominence without the requisite leadership ingredients.
- Citizens must deliberately demand good governance from leaders. It is not an option. It is mandatory.

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