

State Capability and Leadership Development: Some Initial Reflections

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When reflecting on leadership development and state capability in Africa, it is important to make a distinction between ‘political leaders’ and ‘functional leaders’. ‘Political leaders’ everywhere in the world, emerge from society. No system of training, educating, and capacity enhancement can produce ‘political leaders’, such as those we presently have in the continent. ‘Political leaders’, good and bad, emerge from society; they are not trained and cannot be trained. However, they can be better informed through various mechanisms, such as advisors/advisory groups, special committees and think tanks. They can also learn on the job, from their personal experience and from the experiences of others. This, however, does not constitute formal training or capacity enhancement as ordinarily done by Management and Leadership Development Institutions.

In view of the distinction made, between political leaders and functional leaders, it would be more appropriate, that as we engage on any state focused leadership development endeavour, we focus our attention on building the capabilities of ‘functional leaders’. That is, on those individuals who are tasked with the responsibilities if given effect to policies and who are responsible for managing government and its institutional machinery. The central challenge here, is how do we improve the qualities of such individuals, so that they can be effective in the transformation of our ‘weak states’, to what Professor Wiseman Nkuthlu of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) refers to, as a ‘capable state’ or, as others prefer, a ‘developmental state’.

There are substantive differences between, on the one hand the World Bank (WB) driven notion of a ‘capable state’, versus the caricature of a ‘developmental state’. The basic difference lies in the fact that references to a ‘developmental state’ are rooted in a commitment that we need in Africa, as with other regions, a state that proactively intervenes to enhance our collective existence and that works at eradicating poverty. If the ‘development state’ is the premise from which we begin, then the challenge is how do we go about developing and enhancing the capacities of the ‘functional leadership’ to transform ‘weak states’ into a ‘developmental states’? As we engage in this, it’s important that we recognise that the ‘functional leadership’ in the continent face major difficulties of transforming the “weak state” to “developmental states” in the context of deep structural problems. These include, amongst others, to transform:

- fragmented communities and nation into cohesive and coherent communities and nations, thus giving effect to nations of nationhood and national unity;
- deeply underdeveloped, dependent and poor economies towards developmentally sustainable economies that are fundamentally self reliant;
- uncertain and unpredictable economic environment towards economic environments that are amenable to a long term sustainable developmental plans;

- deeply unequal societies, characterized by widespread poverty towards societies where there is a more equitable distribution and where poverty is substantively reduced or eradicated ;
- weak and dysfunctional state structures and institutions towards more rational, relevant and effective state institutions;
- undemocratic, intolerant and ego centered mind sets, cultures and behavior (developed during the one party state) amongst communities and individuals towards open, tolerant and committed cultures and democratic behavior;
- from communities ravaged with deadly and debilitating diseases to communities with basic health facilities and standard of living and healthy livelihood; and
- from communities impacted by economic disruption, frontal attack by foreign cultures and disoriented value systems, towards communities which are guided by integrated national value system.

In view of these transformation challenges, we need to enhance training capacity to produce leaders who can face and cope with these problems in an open democratic manner and with the cooperation of different sections of organized civil society. We need to be optimistic and stand forward with the belief that it is possible to up-grade the existing leadership cadre as well as produce a future committed leadership. That is, functional leaders who will be able to transform our existing crises ridden situations and resolve some of these problems and contradictions, by transforming existing weak states into developmental states.

This transformation can be brought about through a commitment to self-reliance. Central to this will be enhancing the capabilities of our existing training institutions. This includes our Management Development Institutions (MDI's), our Institutions of Public Administration (IPA) and our Universities or regional capacity development organisations and non-governmental organisations. In so doing, we need to recognise what all our existing institutions are doing. In the case of DPMF, a number of programmes have been initiated to enhance the capacity of 'functionaries'. Of these, three particular initiatives are relevant to any leadership capability development effort. These include, amongst others, the following:

1. ***Policy Sensitisation Workshops:*** These workshops bring together functionaries from regional organisations, to sensitise them on important topics, such as, conflict management; long term strategic thinking and planning; dealing with diversity and nation building; regional integration; public service reform and policy analyses, and democratic governance.
2. ***Exchange Forum for Development Management Institutes:*** These forum meetings seeks to enhance the capacities of MDI's by encouraging dialogues that

assist the MDI's and IPA's to re-examine their curriculum and research to incorporate unfolding issues that are reflected in the policy sensitization workshops. The forum also serves as a platform to exchange experiences and good practices and enhances the possibilities for cooperation and support for weaker institutions. The forum is in the process of being established as a formal network.

3. ***Establishment of a Governance Institute:*** Recognising gaps in governance and public policy, the DPMF has been negotiating with various partners to establish a regional training institute of "Public Policy and Governance". In addition to various research engagements, the institute would focus attention on the development of specific and tailored programmes for policy-makers in the region.

This is only some of what is being done by DPMF. Other partner institutions in the continent also have substantive programmes that can contribute to the capacity development of functionaries. However, taken together, we still need to do much more to upgrade existing programmes and institutions. In particular we need to pay careful attention on the need to establish indigenous institutions. Ultimately it is the national Development Management Institutes (DMIs) that need to enhance their capacities. Without them becoming effective institutions, regional and global programs will not become effective. The establishment of the network of MDI's provides a good opportunity for this. We also need to enhance further dialogue and joint planning, hence, the planned collective discussion on leadership that UNDESA is initiating, will be an important step forward.

As we engage in the process and exercise of building leadership capabilities, it is important to challenge negative perceptions of the continent and debunk the externally originated theory that Africa has bad leaders and that these leaders are responsible for the deep economic crises facing Africa. Such a theory oversimplifies the realities that confront many African governments and underestimates the impact of externally imposed reform policies. To illustrate the correlations, we need not look further than Latin America. The parallels are startling and substantive and link directly to the consequences that emanate from the 'Washington Consensus' and not to the simplistic notions that Africa has bad leaders.

The neo-conservative policies in Latin America have failed to produce sustained growth and have made the region more vulnerable to outside forces. They have increased unemployment, poverty and inequality. The Latin American consensus is that the deep economic and social crisis is directly related to the 'Washington consensus' which movements in Latin America refer to as a "damaged brand." The consequence of the 'Washington consensus' is also a growing fear from the West (US and Europe) that 'Latin America' is sinking back to populism and/or anti-market leftist nationalism".

The important parallel with Latin America is that the history of economic growth and decline in that region is exactly the same as that of Africa. This means that the deep and profound economic crises and its consequences in Africa is replicated in Latin America

and also in some parts of Middle East as well as part of Asia. The African crisis is therefore not unique but part of a world problem caused by the advance and deepening of globalization and its intellectual underpinning, the 'Washington consensus'.

African leaders could not have caused these deep economic crises and its consequences. There are, of course, African leaders who have caused other problems and have engaged in very oppressive practices but they did not cause the fundamental economic problem and its consequences. However, to divert attention from the fundamental economic problem and the overall consequence of globalisation in Africa, western propagandists have asserted continuously, the notion that Africa leaders, especially political leaders, have caused the African crises. The consequences is our own leaders, when reflecting on the training of future leaders, often replicate such propaganda. In taking forward the reflection and commitment to action, it would be wise that we confront such propaganda and negativity, as embodied in the following quotations:

“... the struggle of most African nations in the throes of hunger, disease and war continues ... to effect a meaningful cure, a proper diagnosis of the primary cause of the ailment is pertinent ... we at the ALF, through informed research have situated the seeming inability of Africa to properly harness its resources to the insipid air of lethargy that has dogged its leaders for several decades now.” “Apparently the rashes of violence that streak across the continent ... are traceable to the orgy of leadership crises that has become synonymous with the continent.” “It is an empirical fact that African leaders, nay rulers, north, east, central, south and west have failed to live up to the expectations of their people.” “The beleaguered and oppressed masses thus became the victims of the scapegoat of history and power. They became recipient of the socio-economic and political harshness unleashed upon them by first, the colonialist and, now, their black leaders – a situation that left them despondent. Is Africa cursed with bad leaders? Are Africa’s woes insurmountable?”