BUILDING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP SKILLS
for Africa's Transformation through its Universities

From the Secretariat of African Community of Practice on Management for Development Results at the African Capacity Building Foundation

Case Study
N°83

SYNOPSIS

African universities are a major avenue for developing effective leaders across the continent. But the universities will need to design and roll out innovative programs to enhance Africa's leadership capabilities. Effective leadership development depends on the next generation's exposure to meaningful experiences; access to mentoring and training programs; modalities for local participation; and identify and groom possible future leaders at an early stage.

It is critical for African universities to nurture highly skilled and well-informed, accountable, and courageous leaders to spearhead efforts to promote good governance and stimulate economic transformation in their countries. It also suggests a framework that can be adopted by African universities. The paper is based on a desk review and on a critical study and analysis of the published literature.

Among the key findings: A clearly defined training model and delivery mechanism responding to African leaders' capacity needs, holistically, is critical. It proposes a framework that can be adopted by African universities, highlighting the Public Sector Management Training Programme (PSMTP) implemented by the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) with funding from the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and others.

The key lessons: Given the global challenges and opportunities confronting Africa and the needs and demands for effective leadership, it is imperative that there is an institutionalized system to train effective leaders. PSMTP/GIMPA has demonstrated how a university can develop leaders. Other universities should follow that success and African institutions and development partners should support those initiatives.

The main recommendations: Universities should promote an understanding of economic, political, and social issues to enable future leaders to make informed decisions or evaluate their performances objectively. Among other steps, African universities need an institutionalized system to train effective leaders; solid buy-in and support of African governments; indigenous leadership styles integrated into modern approaches; and a focus on individual leadership development that benefits the whole of society.

Introduction

Leadership is critical for society to progress because failures of leadership—whether within society, certain groups, or organizations—have dire consequences for societal development as a whole. Poor leadership inhibits innovation, the courage to challenge the status quo, and the capacity to mobilize and use opportunities to expand the economy and promote democratic change (Bolden and Kirk 2009).

Leadership development is critical for capacity building in Africa (Malunga 2004). Acquisition of

leadership skills has the potential to increase Africa's competitiveness in the rapidly growing global knowledge society, resulting in good governance and policy decisions that will transform African economies. Leadership is vital to shared growth and transformative change in Africa.

For these and similar reasons, this paper argues that it is critical for African universities to nurture highly skilled and well-informed, accountable, and courageous leaders to spearhead efforts to promote good governance and stimulate economic transformation in their countries. African universities must lead the way in strategic leadership development to transform knowledge, bolster intellectual capital, and enhance capacity for effective decision making under varying strategic and risk scenarios, according to Hanson and Léautier (2011). These authors further argue that African universities need to transcend their current "modern" system of education to a postmodern perspective that recognizes collaboration and knowledge as valued skills.

Discussing some of the major challenges facing African universities in implementing a leadership-development agenda, the paper acknowledges that developing leadership depends on exposure of the next generation to meaningful experiences; access to mentoring and training programs that will transfer knowledge to them; modalities for local participation; and the ability to identify and groom possible future leaders at an early stage (The GREEN Resource 2008).

Although globalization presents opportunities for Africa, harnessing them is part of the challenge for Africa's leadership. Even though most of the continent's development challenges are grounded in poverty dynamics, evidence from countries like Botswana and Rwanda shows that these challenges can be overcome with the right leadership.

A clearly defined training model and delivery mechanism that responds holistically to the capacity needs of African leaders is critical. This paper suggests a framework that can be adopted by African universities. It highlights the PSMTP implemented by GIMPA with funding from ACBF and others.

PSMTP has produced a cadre of middle and senior public sector officials and managers from five Anglophone West African countries (Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone) who are playing leading roles in their countries' development.

Drawing on the literature, the paper discusses strategies and tools needed by African universities to build leadership skills for Africa's transformation. It highlights challenges and opportunities that these universities face. Using the PSMTP/GIMPA model, it proposes strategies that can be leveraged by African universities.

The paper is based on a desk review, and on a critical study and analysis of the published literature. It also refers to reports and bulletins from ACBF and other development partners.

Africa's leadership landscape

At independence, the prospects of Africa's economic development were promising because most of its economies hinged on modest foundations, mainly in mining or agriculture that had the potential to be expanded and leveraged toward faster industrialization. But most African economies faltered, and few made any progress in industrializing beyond a skeleton of the inherited colonial economy.

In recent times, however, some signs may indicate that much of the continent is perhaps again on a more positive growth path. Undoubtedly, Africa's weak story has provided international development practitioners with a much-needed laboratory for designing "quick fixes" with minimal real-world impacts in solving Africa's socioeconomic challenges.

We argue that the need for universities to train transformational leaders to put Africa back on track seems to be the most promising option—and one that has gained currency in global discourse (AAU 2009).

Empirical data on leadership in Africa are rare (House and others 2004). For instance, in the GLOBE study, leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa is presented on only one page of the entire book (Chhokar and others 2007). On leadership styles, a preference was shown for charismatic/value-based, team-oriented, participative, and humane approaches—though perhaps with the exception of the last, this is not much different from profiles across much of the rest of the World (Harvey 2002).

For most African countries, leadership styles have appeared authoritarian/paternalistic, bureaucratic, centralized, conservative, change resistant, and reluctant to deal with performance issues. Blunt and Jones (1997) remarked that, in the past, African leadership was influenced by highly centralized power structures, high degrees of uncertainty, an emphasis on control mechanisms rather than organizational performance, bureaucratic resistance to change, acute resource scarcity, individual concern for basic security, and extended family and kin networks.

Jackson (2004), however, through collaborative research in African nations, demonstrated that African leaders tend to be highly skilled in many aspects of management and leadership, in particular dealing with cultural diversity and multiple stakeholders, and enacting "humanistic" management practices. For Jackson, key values that shaped leadership and management in Sub-Saharan Africa included sharing, deference to rank, sanctity of commitment, regard for compromise and consensus, and good social and personal relations. He also highlighted the "hybrid" nature of management and leadership practice in Africa—shaped through a complex and multi-layered sociocultural lens.

In recent times, emerging leadership styles across Africa appear to reflect a hybrid leadership system that combines the virtues of western leadership cultures with those of indigenous African leadership.

African universities and leadership development

So how do universities fit in? Effective leadership entails organizing and mobilizing people and resources to achieve a particular end or goal, in given institutional contexts of authority, legitimacy, and power (Bolden and Kirk 2009). The core values of effective leadership include moral purpose and commitment to serving one's country; respect for the rule of law and tolerance; and honesty, integrity, and fairness (Harvey 2002; Lyne de Ver 2009; Ntibagirirwa 2003). These values can be attained largely, but not exclusively, in universities as these institutions provide the initial motivation to pursue a developmental career. Thus good leadership qualities are inextricably linked to university education.

As a base for examining the role of African universities in developing the skills, values, and networks of leaders capable of pushing the political and economic reform agenda forward, table 1 summarizes links between leadership qualities and university education.

Table 1. Links between leadership quality and university education

Leadership quality	Links to university education
Honesty, integrity, and fairness	School culture and values; multicultural school environment; diversity of student population; overseas study
Moral purpose and commitment to serving one's country	School culture and values; exposure to poverty through student diversity; sense of privilege created and of debt to society; avenue for intellectual and political debate
Courage	Sense of being groomed for leadership; school culture; leadership opportunities; student

	activism; study of history; belief that role of intellectuals is to provide leadership for change
Discipline, focus, and determination	School culture and values; discipline-related psychological orientation (for example law)
Goal orientation and strong sense of responsibility	Leadership opportunities; sense of being groomed for leadership
Consultation and teamwork	Extracurricular activities such as sports and debating clubs; boarding school interaction
Collaboration, collective action, and conflict resolution	Diversity of student body; extracurricular activities; student activism course content (for example African studies course)
Critical thinking and analytical insight	Teaching quality and methodology; debating clubs and on-campus debate; broad curriculum; close interaction with lecturers; subject choice (for example law, economics, politics, philosophy)
Technical competency and knowledge	Teaching quality and methodology; on-campus debate; broad curriculum; close interaction with lecturers; extracurricular activities; subject choice (for example law, economics, politics, journalism)

Source: Lyne de Ver (2009).

Grounded in the above observations, the paper now looks at PSMTP/GIMPA, which highlights some of the strategies for enhancing African universities'

capabilities in developing leadership in a contextually sensitive manner while fostering engagement with a wider process of socioeconomic and political change.

PSMTP/GIMPA

GIMPA is the leading management development institution in Ghana with a vision of becoming a world-class center of excellence. Over the years, GIMPA has demonstrated consistency of purpose by providing high-quality programs and services, employing skilled faculty, following customized educational approaches, and cultivating a client-centered learning environment.

In September 2005, GIMPA and ACBF signed an agreement by which ACBF supported GIMPA to host PSMTP for Anglophone West Africa. Under this agreement, GIMPA set up a master's degree program in Public Sector Management in partnership with the five Anglophone West African countries.

The main goal of PSMTP was to enhance the performance of the public sector through the provision of balanced, academic, and professional training to promote more effective leadership for socioeconomic development in the five countries. Participants were drawn from among middle and senior managers with practical experience. A few are offered scholarships.

The governance structure of PSMTP is a project steering committee that provided oversight and policy direction and a management team that is responsible for day-to-day management.

To ensure effectiveness and impact of PSMTP, GIMPA (supported by ACBF) provided all the physical facilities and teaching resources (material and human), including instructional equipment and regular collection and integration of stakeholder feedback.

The PSMTP curriculum includes: Background and Perspective on Africa's Public Sector; Strategic Planning and Management in the Public Sector; Public Sector Resource Management; and Global and Regional Perspectives and Experiences in Public

Sector Management, which is related to areas of critical human resource needs of participating countries. To ensure assimilation and value addition to participants' skills, the program used a combination of training methods, such as regular lectures; participatory class discussions; hands-on exercises; seminars; and individual case studies.

Outcomes and overall assessment

PSMTP made progress toward its three key objectives: strengthening the master's degree program to meet current and emerging issues in the public sector; enhancing the institutional and human capacity of GIMPA to meet similar issues; and strengthening the institutional and human capacities of Institutes of Public Administration (IPAs) to deliver in-country PSMTP.

The program has recorded increased demand for admission and by the number of fee-paying participants, including those from the private sector and civil society bodies. This is due mainly to the program's renown, given positive feedback from stakeholders, including graduates.

Most participants were promoted in their organizations. Also, the program encouraged participation of smaller countries via a quota system for scholarships and for women.

Another outcome is the continual adaptation and responsiveness of the training curriculum and modules to leadership needs. The program is tailor made, designed to respond both to broader leadership challenges and to issues in each beneficiary country.

Lessons learned

A key lesson was that close collaboration with IPAs in countries was vital for training a critical mass of leaders and for ensuring sustainability of the intervention. The strengthening of the human and institutional capacity of the IPAs as part of the program helped enhance their capabilities in delivering timely and quality training services to a critical mass of public sector officials in the country at a relatively cheaper cost. But it was evident that

the IPAs will need continuous support and commitment of governments to maintain services.

Following the success of the PSMTP model, other development partners have shown interest and provided resources for some of the training organized by the institution. They include the Economic Community of West African States, African Development Bank, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, World Bank, and Danish International Development Assistance.

The project completion report showed that a significant number of graduates have been promoted to top leadership positions in their organizations after completing the program. These graduates are reported to show a high sense of reliability and dedication, attributable to their newly acquired skills. Anecdotal evidence indicates that graduates have become leaders and change agents in their countries.

Policy implications

The development of effective leaders in the continent will require a multifaceted approach that considers the core values of effective leadership (see above). It will also involve instilling a sense of collective responsibility to their countries, and recognizing the need for participatory leadership, patriotism, and reconciliation.

PSMTP also indicates that African universities possess the potential for leadership development, suggesting that they can foster meaningful learning opportunities through collaborative initiatives that respond to the hard and soft skills required. To this end, skilled and experienced human resources, physical infrastructure, an enabling learning environment, and implementation modalities that foster interaction among leaders during and after training are critical.

Given the dearth of leadership development models to communicate values-based leadership, African universities can take a cue from PSMTP/GIMPA by, for example, conducting research and identifying

unique approaches that produce the skills that most fit their own county context.

Learning from the successes of the GIMPA, leadership training programs in other countries can leverage its strategies and achievements to enhance delivery and impact of their interventions. The development of fit-for-purpose capacity-building programs is, however, incremental and requires patience.

More widely, leadership development needs to emphasize the importance of involving citizens in addressing national challenges through meaningful participation, which encourages them to commit to the solutions identified. Bourgon (2009) suggested that universities should take steps to encourage social innovation; leverage the power of networks to connect actors; initiate alternative problem-solving approaches in new ways; and create hospitable environments that promote exploration and experimentation.

There is increasing recognition of the vital role of research, information and communications technology (ICT), and learning in national social progress and development (Hanson and Léautier 2011). University managements are therefore required to provide the motivation and institutional policies that promote quality teaching and research that is vital for the next generation of leaders.

Given the ethnic and other sociocultural diversity on the continent, leadership development in Africa should encompass management of diversity, prevention of violent conflicts, promotion of resolution, and reconciliation. Programs should engender better understanding of national development issues, and promote mutual trust and national consensus building, beyond enhancing the abilities of potential leaders.

Challenges

Securing reliable financing and support of African governments is a big challenge. PSMTP/GIMPA depended heavily on funding from ACBF, but it was committed for the long term (ACBF 2005). But few organizations are willing to do that. It is therefore imperative for African governments to increase their commitment and financial support to universities.

Weak infrastructure and loss of intellectual capital at African universities is a further obstacle, as Sutherland-Addy (1993) pointed out long ago. Many African universities are drained of experienced faculty, lacking equipment and teaching materials, and housed in shoddy buildings (ACBF 2007).

But increased demand for tertiary education has enabled some public and private institutions to mobilize resources to improve infrastructure and provide targeted training. There is also an increasing call on African governments to increase their financial support to tertiary education.

Other hurdles include the transition from an information to a knowledge economy; the HIV/AIDS epidemic; intrusion of politics into academia; and an explosion in the number of students enrolling in tertiary education.

Opportunities

Regardless of this perhaps grim picture, there is a renewed vision and evolving strategy for African universities, triggered by the possibilities of globalization and technology, as well as by an influx of a newer generation of academicians, trained abroad yet who have come back to Africa.

The innovative and competent style of the younger generation of academics, recent developments in ICT (including the Internet and mobile communications), and steady growth in the number of strategic alliances and exchange programs between African and non-African universities (mainly from North America and Europe) have all increased demand for new knowledge and modes of its production and dissemination.

Sawyerr (2004) and ACBF (2007) observed radical transformation of the production, use, dissemination, and recreation of knowledge by universities and other higher education bodies. According to AAU (2009) reports, such partnerships and creative collaborations are making way for the

establishment of a "dual structure" in which university departments and schools are supplemented by centers engaged in knowledge application, locally and globally.

Most African universities are consequently reforming the delivery, context, and pedagogy to include the adoption and use of e-technology and knowledge management to align interdisciplinary learning and instruction to lived experiences and issues. Examples include PSMTP itself; and the myriad African self-directed learners who access the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Open Course Ware from some 54 mirror sites at university campuses across Africa, for its knowledge products and toolkits (Matkin 2005).

Globalization presents an opportunity for African universities to synergize their knowledge management through collaboration and knowledge sharing. They need to understand and harness the impacts of globalization to minimize its negative effects and maximize its positive outcomes for development. Creating and maintaining networks and partnerships, mastering negotiation techniques and alliances, and understanding global institutions such as the United Nations, Bretton Woods Institutions, and the influence of regional power blocks—as well as international financial and market systems—need to be considered by African universities. Indeed, their growing collaboration with similar institutions from outside the continent and the fast pace of technology change are some of the factors that stimulate dynamism in leadership-training curricula and delivery modes, and that engender flexibility in teaching systems (Hanson and Léautier 2011).

E-learning has become highly attractive to students and faculty due to flexible access to tertiary education, pedagogical innovations, and lower costs. It also offers learners the chance to access information and performance-assessment resources that are not constrained by training design or delivery mechanisms.

African universities can take advantage of these approaches to develop the next generation of leaders by offering high-quality instructional services regardless of learners' location, family or cultural background, or disability. Africa needs to replicate its proven capacity in its e-banking and rural information systems (Brown and Molla 2005; Boateng 2006; Karamagi-Akiiki 2006).

The growth in Internet communication and widespread access to mobile phones have transformed how knowledge is communicated such that many African universities employ ICT and knowledge-management tools as part of their standard teaching. Central is the fact that e-learning has proven itself as a tool that increases access to and quality of education; is cost effective; and has the capacity to reach a wider audience spread over time and space without compromising teaching quality.

Conclusion

Given the global challenges and opportunities confronting Africa and the needs and demands for effective leadership, it is imperative that there is an institutionalized system to train effective leaders.

PSMTP/GIMPA has demonstrated how a university can develop leaders. Other universities should follow the success of that lead. But to scale up those successes across Africa, leadership skill development programs will require the buy-in and support of African governments, increased enrollment by participants, fee-paying options, fee rebates, and vigorous marketing of the PSMTP model.

Given that Africa is undergoing multiple transformations, leadership-training initiatives must respond to them to produce a new generation of leaders. Universities must adopt pragmatic steps to integrate indigenous leadership styles into modern ones to craft a hybrid approach that fits properly into the individual country's context, considering its cultures and ethnicities. Universities also need to employ ICT tools to formulate and implement the policies and decisions.

Beyond using state-of-the-art facilities, universities should promote an understanding of economic, political, and social issues to enable future leaders to make informed decisions or evaluate their performances objectively. As leadership development is a dynamic and continuous process, universities should approach it as a life-long process and provide curricula and learning environments that respond to changing needs and demands.

Finally, in their efforts to provide leadership skills to the next generation, universities should adopt an experiential approach; emphasize articulation and inculcation of values; focus on individual leadership development that works to the benefit of all society; and view leadership development as a long-term process that plans for succession in advance. Regardless of the institutional, political, and demographic constraints and resource challenges, African universities are uniquely positioned to improve their knowledge management status, strengthen private–public partnerships, and exploit advances in ICT to scale up their leadership development.

References

ACBF (African Capacity Building Foundation). 2005. Appraisal Report on the Association of African Universities—Capacity Development Program for the Revitalization of Tertiary Education Institutions. Harare, Zimbabwe: ACBF.

_____. 2007. The African Capacity Building Foundation's Support to Tertiary Education and Training in Sub-Saharan Africa. Harare, Zimbabwe.

_____. 2010. Project Completion Report: GIMPA Public Sector Management Training Program. Harare, Zimbabwe.

Blunt, P., and M. Jones. 1997. "Exploring the limits of Western leadership theory in East Asia and Africa." Personnel Review 26 (1/2): 6–23.

Boateng, R. 2006. "Developing E-Banking Capabilities in a Ghanaian Bank: Preliminary Lessons." Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce 11 (2): 1–11.

Bolden, R., and P. Kirk. 2009. "African Leadership: Surfacing New Understandings through Leadership Development." International Journal of Cross Cultural Management 9 (1): 69–86.

Bourgon, J. 2009. Understanding the Public Leadership Environment: Preparing People to Serve People in the 21st Century. In Commonwealth Association for Public Administration & Management (CAPAM) featured report: Building Public Service Leadership Capacity. Ottawa, Canada: CAPAM.

Brown, I., and A. Molla. 2005. "Determinants of Internet and Cell-phone Banking Adoption in South Africa." Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce 9 (4): 1–9.

Chhokar, J. S., F. C. Brodbeck, and R.J. House (eds.). 2007. Culture and Leadership across the World: The GLOBE Book of In-Depth Studies of 25 Societies. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gmelch, W. H., and J. Sarros. 1996. "How to work with your dean: Voices of American and Australian department chairs." The Department Chair 6 (4): 1–19.

The GREEN Resource. 2008. The Development of Leadership Capacity in Higher Education. Wollongong, Australia: University of Wollongong.

Hanson, K., and F. Léautier. 2011. "Enhancing institutional leadership in African universities: lessons from ACBF's interventions." World Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management, and Sustainable Development 7 (2/3/4): 386–417.

Harvey, M. 2002. "Human resource management in Africa: Alice's adventures in Wonderland." International Journal of Human Resource Management 13 (7): 1119–1145.

House, R. J., P. J. Hanges, M. Javidan, P. W. Dorfman, and V. Gupta. 2004. Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Jackson, T. 2004. Management and Change in Africa: A Cross-Cultural Perspective. London: Routledge.

Karamagi Akiiki, E. 2006. "Towards improving farmers' livelihoods through exchange of local agricultural content in rural Uganda." Knowledge Management for Development Journal 2 (1): 66–75.

Lyne de Ver, H. 2009. "Conceptions of Leadership," Development and Leadership Program (DLP).

Background Paper 4. Canberra, Australia: DLP. www.dlprog.org (accessed November 20, 2015).

Malunga, C., and C. Banda. 2004. Understanding Organisational Sustainability through African Proverbs. Washington, DC: Pact Publications.

Matkin, G. W. 2005. "Open Courseware is Here. Where are you?" University Business 8 (8): 1–3.

Ntibagirirwa, S. 2003. "A wrong way: from being to having in the African value system." In Giddy, P. (ed.), Protest and Engagement: Philosophy after Apartheid at a Historically Black South African University. Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy. www.crvp.org/book/Series02/II 7/chapter_v.htm (accessed October 17, 2015).

Sawyerr, A. 2004. "Challenges Facing African Universities: Selected Issues." African Studies Review 47 (1): 1–59.

Sutherland-Addy, E. 1993. "Revolt and Renewal: Reflections on the Creation of a System of Tertiary Education in Ghana." AFTHR Technical Note No. 10. Washington, DC: World Bank.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS