UNPLUGGING THE LEADERSHIP QUAGMIRE: THE CASE FOR DEVELOPING NATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article predicates the leadership dilemmas and progress made by many African countries since independence of individual nation states. The concept, leadership has evolved over decades with several authors attempting to have one universally accepted definition, even though this is difficult. Put simply, leadership is the ability to have influence over people towards the effective achievements of goals and shared vision. Further elucidation will depend on the institution and the context, which in this article, is leadership in the African context as well as those in the Western arena. The comparison of countries exhibiting exceptional leadership accomplishments on the one hand and countries in dire straits on the other hand will further provide an understanding of the importance and benefits of real or perceived good leadership. The article will suggest the adoption of a leadership model most suited for the continent, as it contains the elements that are appropriate for a leadership paradigm that could work in Africa. This article further interrogates the assumption that, decision-making and policy analysis in the public sector realm can be 'rational', against the inherent messiness of politics in the developing world. In this article a thorough examination of the role of different conventional players in the policy process is made, in respect of their capacities to rationalise policy outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

The interpretation and cultural nuances behind the concept of leadership are not only questionable but are subject to different meanings to different people. Yet, within the organisational context, there are specific boundaries that must be adhered to in order to inculcate certain values. Leadership at a political level is not excluded from democratically instated norms. The failure to maintain order in a constitutional framework for the personal gain of individuals tends to create a recipe for dictatorship in any modern

thinking process. The same hold for leadership at nation states and those of international dimensions.

The importance of maintaining effective leadership is a regular topic in the business world as well as in the political arena around the globe. International organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and super powers for instance the United States of America (USA) and Great Britain have put it upon themselves to be of assistance and ensure that all countries are governed by principles upholding regular and free elections, universal suffrage, multi-party system, rule of law, sovereignty, the protection of human rights and peace and security.

The Western world and its values have affected Africans deeply. The article will firstly make an analysis of leadership in the African context, and the leadership challenges facing South Africa in particular. Developed countries have always reviewed our continent as a place plagued by corruption, dictatorship, military coups, rebellious leaders, greediness, misuse of power, incompetent leadership, politically as well as economically ineffective leaders who undermine their own democracies. Right now, Zimbabwe is used as a classic case of this by the Western world (Masango, 2003:313). Classical theory of leadership identifies the conventional styles of leadership (i.e. *Laissez-Faire*, Transactional, and Transformational leadership styles); this provides literature on the composition of the elements that contributes to classification of leadership. African leaders and academics have consequently called for a new model of African-centered leadership, unique to the issues confronted by African countries as well as the values pertaining to the African continent. Among a plethora of challenges faced by the countries in Africa, brain drain, service delivery, HIV/AIDS, poverty, food security, the lack of financial, economic and political independence and instability, are prioritised. Finally, the article recommends the adoption of a new leadership model known as transformational African leadership. The model will assist in the un-raveling of problems affecting African countries, specifically when dealing with the legacies of colonisation.

LEADERSHIP – A CRYPTIC PERSPECTIVE

In an attempt to comprehensively understand the dilemmas that leadership is faced with, it would be of importance to firstly define what leadership is. Lussier and Achua (2007:5) acknowledge that there cannot be a universally accepted definition of the concept, leadership, because it is complex. For the purpose of this article, *Leadership* is defined as the influencing process of leaders and followers to achieve organisational objectives through change (Lussier and Achua, 2007:6). In this definition, it is clearly stipulated that five aspects are taken into consideration, and they are; influence, people, change, and the relationship between leaders-followers.

More clearly, Heywood (2002:348) makes an assertion that leadership can be understood either as a pattern of behaviour or as a personal quality. As a pattern of behaviour leadership is defined as the influence exerted by an individual or group over a larger body to direct its efforts towards the achievement of desired goals. As a personal attribute, Heywood (2002:348) refers to leadership as the characteristics that enable a

person in a leadership position (leader) to enforce influence over the others. To put this into context, leadership is the ability by a legitimate structure (group) or an individual in an attempt to influence others, be it in the same group as they or externally. Various styles of leadership exist, and they are differentiated by the behavior and manner in which the leaders seek to achieve their goals.

A plethora of contributions to the understanding of leadership are recognized in the Western as well as in the African societies. A leader is a person who has the ability to guide or influence a group. According to Nahavandi 2000 in Masango (2003:313-314), leadership in the African perspective is understood as a group phenomenon. Thus, there are no leaders without followers. Leadership always involves interpersonal influence or persuasion. Leaders use their ability to influence as a guide to groups of people through a certain course of actions or towards the achievement of certain or particular goals. To contextualise, in Africa, a leader is someone who can influence individuals and groups within communities by creating those perceptions of support to establish their goals and leading them in the achievement of these set goals.

AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE; *DIRE STRAIT* OR EFFECTIVENESS?

In an era of civil-military democracy which has plagued most of the African continent, one is easily pressured to question the viability of the acronym, *civil-military democracy*. This conceptual terminology is a contradiction to the noble concept of democracy. However, despite the depressing images of ineffective leadership that some African countries are plagued with; examples of effective continental African leadership have emerged in the recent decades. Notably the best example of good or perceived good leadership in Africa is Botswana. The answer to its success in stabilizing the democracy lies in its visionary leadership style practiced by Botswana's first President Sir Seretse Khama. Khama's drive in collective leadership which is deeply rooted in his background as a member of the Bamangwato clan. These values are rooted in tolerance, integrity, political accommodation and compassion. Modest, unostentatious as a leader, and a genuine believer in popular rule Khama forged a participatory and law-respecting political culture that has endured under his successors, Sir Ketumile Masire and Festus Mogae (Rothberg, 2004:15). Owing to the foundation laid by Sir Khama, democracy in Botswana has flourished highly since independence in 1966 through defending human rights, encouraging civil emancipation and actively promoting its citizens' social and economic development remained and holds the coveted title of the richest country in natural resources in the continent due to diamond mining.

The Pretoria Quagmire: challenges specific to South Africa

South Africa can credit its successful transition from the oppressive rule under the apartheid government to a newly democratic state to the visionary and transformational leadership style of President Nelson Mandela. The Mandela administration faced issues of a stagnant economy with high and rising unemployment, high inequality between and within the different race groups and widespread poverty: moreover South Africa remained a violent

and polarised society (Freund & Padayachee, 1998:1174; Carter & May, 2001:1988). All these problems would not have been addressed and dealt with appropriately if it was not for the leadership style of Nelson Mandela which is predicated on political accommodation and restorative justice. Rotberg (2004:15) concurs with this assertion and further adumbrates that without Nelson Mandela's adherence to the rule of law, his insistence of broadening and delivery of essential services, and his emphasis on moving from a command economy toward a market-driven one, South Africa would probably have emerged from apartheid as a far more fractured and autocratic state than it did.

Entering the second decade of national emancipation South Africa is faced with twin tower challenges within which it operates: an increasingly competitive environment in a rapidly global international economic arena along with a variety of challenging political circumstances and changes to the political landscape. The South African government is faced with challenges ranging from HIV/AIDS, service delivery, job creation, corruption, the political and administrative interface, and co-ordination of intergovernmental relations and the lack of racial transformation. All these noted problems are solvable by transforming the leadership paradigm.

As a country noted as a good example of effective leadership, South Africa is not immune to leadership problems. The most notable leadership battle in South African history occurred during the build up to the 2007 ANC's elective watershed conference. This election culminated in the occurrence of a series of events that changed the political landscape in South Africa, i.e. Thabo Mbeki's recall as the President of Republic by the ANC, consequently Parliament was reshuffled as a result of members resigning as a sign of allegiance to Thabo Mbeki and the forming of a break away party by former disgruntled members of the organisation. All these changes have had a positive impact on the growth of the political landscape in South Africa. This is a selective recipe for a vibrant democracy and as such, keeps the political and administrative governance imperative in check, thereby creating a democracy that is vibrant and not stagnant.

GLOBAL LEADERSHIP PROBLEMS

At the turn of the century leaders of countries around the world, converged at the United Nations Summit to map out the fundamental tasks confronting humankind around global development issues. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are aimed at confronting the question of extreme poverty in the world, where close to two billion people are forced to exist on fewer than two Dollars per day. These goals are to be reviewed in 2015 and finally in 2025, include amongst others, the following: the eradication of abject poverty, the achievement of universal primary education, the reduction of child mortality, to improve maternal health, the promotion of gender equality, the combating of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, to ensure environmental sustainability and the development of global partnerships for development.

The answer to some of these challenges has been the pursuit of changing the direction of leadership of the government from one that's goal orientated to a more transformational leadership style in line with the democratic government's vision. In an attempt to address

such challenges, Heywood (2007:376) distinguishes between the different conventional styles of leadership, as follows;

- *Laissez-faire* Leadership
- Transactional Leadership
- Transformational Leadership

An analysis of the conventional leadership styles will be detailed in this section, along with advantages as well as the disadvantages. For the purpose of this discussion, only the *Laissez-faire*, Transactional and Transformational leadership styles are to be employed in providing a detailed analysis of what leadership is, or good leadership ought to be. This comparative analysis will assists in not necessarily choosing the best leadership style, but the most appropriate alternative style of leadership, depending on the circumstances.

Laissez-Faire Leadership

De Vries (2001) argues that a *laissez-faire* style is associated with the leaders who tend to delegate authority to subordinates, and consequently fails in providing direction to the subordinates. This is caused by the reluctance of the leaders to intervene in matters outside their direct responsibility, i.e. the *hands-off approach* where someone has been delegated to perform some duties and performance is not regulated or managed.

Advantages of Laissez-faire

- Subordinates have a sense of belongingness, as they are given greater responsibility, and this fosters good relations, harmony and teamwork amongst the subordinates.
- It can allow leaders to effectively concentrate on the political and electoral matters by relieving them of managerial burdens.

Disadvantages of Laissez-faire

- It often leads to weak co-ordination of government policies, if an effective structure ceases to exist (e.g. the South African National Planning Commission).
- Ministers and super-ordinate officials, such as directors-general are being given too much scope to pursue their own interests and initiatives; this result in senior officials being ineffective managers.
- As the leaders abdicate responsibilities, they often avoid making decisions.

Transactional Leadership

A transactional leadership style is when a leader is *hand-on* as a result of the power vested to perform certain tasks, hence the adoption of an active and a positive role in relation to policy-making and public management and administration (Heywood, 2007:377). Kakabadse and Kakabadse (1999:5) point out that this leadership style is characterised by the skill and ability required to handle the more ordinary, operational, day to day transactions of daily life, such as evaluating the performance of subordinates in relation to the productivity of

an organisation. Transactional leadership maintains the *quid pro quo* approach, where the subordinates are punished or rewarded for a certain task performed or not performed.

Advantages of Transactional Leadership

- It is practical and allows for tactical flexibility.
- It ensures efficiency in so far as the performance of the subordinates is concerned (i.e. the subordinates are aware that they are being closely monitored, as a result they would tend to perform optimally).
- Leadership tends to manage the intervention only in cases where, the standard performance by subordinate is not met.

Disadvantages of Transactional Leadership

The *hands-on* approach might compromise the relationship between the leader and the subordinate, because of the powers vested in a leader (i.e. in an event where a subordinate fails on a particular task, the leaders tends to strictly reprimand without implementing corrective measures).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a style that is characterised by a leader who possesses visionary or inspirational elements, and uses them when providing leadership. More often than not, transformational leaders would attempt to mobilise support from within government, their parties and the general public for the realisation of their personal vision (Heywood, 2007:377). In an organisational dynamic, transformational leaders tend to be charismatic to their subordinates; as a result they inspire them. Bass (1990:21) argues that transformational leadership creates charismatic leaders, and consequently leaders who possess great power and influence. As Bass (1990:19) puts it, the role of transformational leaders is to inspire, energise, and intellectually stimulate their subordinates, however as he argues, leaders can learn the techniques and obtain the qualities they need to become transformational leaders.

Advantages of Transformational leadership

- The charisma in leadership provides vision and sense of mission, instills pride, gains respect and trust.
- The inspiration, ensures that higher expectations with regards to performance are clearly communicated.
- Transformational leadership promotes intelligence, rationality and careful problem analysis and solving.
- Leaders tend to give personal attention to subordinates, treats each employee individually and often provides coaching and advice.

Disadvantages of Transformational leadership

- When leaders fail to inspire the subordinates, the planned task is destined to fail, despite the efforts taken by a leader to transform the situation.

- Communication breakdown caused by rhetoric, would ensure failure of the vision that the leader holds, this culminates in subordinates being confused of which tasks to perform.

Owing to the abovementioned comparison of leadership styles, it could be deduced that a leader is tantamount to a teacher, in a sense that they both ought to provide direction to the followers, i.e. subordinates and learners. William Arthur Ward, the classical American author once said *"A mediocre teacher tells, a good teacher explains, a superior teacher demonstrates and the best teacher inspires"*. This notion simply points out that for a teacher or leader to be regarded as the best; he/she must possess the ability to inspire those whom they lead. Denhardt and Denhardt (2006:8) contend that leadership is about change, or simply moving people in new directions so as to assist them in realise the new vision. To be able to perform such an act, leaders should be able to encourage and inspire the subordinates.

Too few African countries are encouraged by the fruits born by effective leadership as epitomised by Sir Khama and Nelson Mandela. However not all African countries fall within the rot of despondent leadership, countries such as Ghana, Lesotho, Mali and Senegal have shown impressive potential and such prospects should be cultivated.

WAY FORWARD: A NEW DIRECTION?

Issues pertaining to leadership are inextricably linked to generic issues that are of concern to the international community, and as a result leadership could be the determining factor in terms of the achievement of the international goals, through regional integration. Consequently, leadership issues in a particular country cannot be confined to that country alone, as globalisation and its impacts are the order of the day. Regional integration is where a regional agreement is entered into by member states to enhance regional co-operation, through the usage of economic, legal and political policies. Regional integration is fostered through institutions such as the European Union, Southern African Development Community, and New Partnership for Africa's Development, among others. These organisations were established in the view of safeguarding against members' isolation in terms of the economic and political participation in the global arena. Furthermore, this lead to the paradigm shift, which leads to African leaders adopting specific beliefs pertaining to leadership and encouraging co-operation. A need arises for the establishment of a leadership style that supports the African value system as well as pursuing the developmental agenda of the continent. Transformational African leadership could possibly be the answer to the leadership quandary in Africa, as explained below.

Transformational African leadership as a panacea for reform

The valuing of diversity and inclusion will promote efficiency in government administrations, and the absence of integration of unique diversities and differences can lead to a lack of trust and a lack of confidence in government. Nigeria is an example of a country that

from time to time faces massive ethnic and religious clashes that have lead to catastrophic deaths. In the South African situation the principle of *Ubuntu*, meaning a person's humanity is measured according to their relationship with others and the saying "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*", translated as a person is a person through other people contends the endorsement of an inclusive culture and neighborliness. One other important value of leadership in the African context is courage.

Upholding good governance in African countries is not the sole responsibility of one organisation, it is a collective effort by a conglomerate of entities, namely the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Union (AU). A further organisation that was established with the main purpose of promoting better leadership is known as the African Leadership Council. This leadership council comprises past and present African leaders, who promulgated a Code of African Leadership with 23 commandments. The theory behind the establishment of such a body was to propose a series of courses to train political successors in the art of good governance and thus promote effective leadership. The Code of African Leadership sets absolute leadership standards that identify a good leader as adhering to the following standards: delivering security of the state and of the person, promoting the rule of law, good education and health services, and a framework conducive to economic growth. Such leaders should encourage public participation, dissent and disagreement respect human rights and civil liberties, strengthen the rule of law, the promotion of policies that eradicate poverty and improve the well-being of their citizens, ensure a strong code of ethics, refuse to use their offices for personal gain, oppose corruption and bolster essential personal corruption (Rotberg, 2004:17).

A Policy Dimension – Attacking the Elephant

Just like many other concepts, defining public policy carries a diversity of opinion. But perhaps the simplest, and most pervasive definition, comes from Thomas Dye (1998:3) who looks at public policy as 'whatever governments choose to do or not to do'. This focuses not only on government action, but also inaction, given that it is only government that can *authoritatively* act on the whole society. If indeed the intention behind public policy is to ensure decisions (including the allocation or no allocation of resources) that can impact on the society, then, rightly as Dye argues, even government inaction can create that impact. In essence, public policy-making processes relates to the series of steps, taken by a government to solve problems, make decisions, allocate resources or values and in general, do things that can influence change to the citizens. Policy analysis relates to that effort, in trying to understand, what governments do, why they do it, and the difference, if any, it makes (Dye, 1998:6).

Recent advocacy on governance and development calls for an effective and transparent system of public administration involving: effective and efficient public agencies, public officials and public policies, all of which are fundamental in creating a viable environment and regulatory framework. The relationship between public policy and governance is such that, the former is seen as a mechanism through which the objectives of the latter can be achieved. Thus, public policy plays a pivotal role around which governance

rotates. Governance utilises policy as a major tool in addressing the social-economic and political needs of the citizenry.

The quest for good governance imposes demands on policy makers and public policy to; create an effective state that can enable an environment for economic growth and equitable redistribution, foster civil society participation, cohesion and stability, and enable the private sector to play an independent and productive role in the economy (Hamdok, 2003:17). This makes public policy relevant as a governance tool, on the basis of which development can be achieved. Generally, good governance involves reforms geared towards improving accountability, transparency and responsiveness; to make the policy process more effective (more rational and equitable) for optimisation of service delivery (Brinkerhoff, 2005:194).

The current wave of good governance advocacy in the developing world, especially under the aegis of the IMF, World Bank and other multilaterals is arguably part of the attempt to address the development gaps, by helping to streamline government agencies to develop and implement sound political and socio-economic policies necessary for development. Earlier series of neo-liberal reforms emphasised stabilisation and structural adjustment at the expense of domestic institutions in the Third World (Hamdok, 2003:15). This was later to be broadened to involve wider public sector reforms with the objective of enhancing capacity for public institutions.

This background stimulates the debate on two issues. Do the foreign mechanisms to the policy process in Africa enhance 'rational' policy making? Secondly, whether the effort to democratise the state in Africa; to move away from the undemocratic orientations of the pre-colonial and colonial era; makes it better for policy, to run away from the inherent messiness of politics toward *rationalism*.

In trying to answer the above issues, one needs to understand the dynamics of decision-making and policy analysis in the public sector domain by examining the role of the various groups and players that conventionally constitute the policy process. Hence, the role of several actors like; the mass media, donors, interest groups/ political parties, institutions and public agencies, non-governmental organisations and other civil society organisations (CSOs); becomes pertinent. Secondly, evaluation of the capacities of these role players and the environment under which they operate, help to determine whether they propel *rational* policy making or help to extend the interests of the few ruling *elites*. However, before engaging this wider debate, an articulation of the theoretical underpinnings of the rational model of policy making, as well as the general overview of the structure of government in the Third World is necessary.

Rational Model of policy making – a theoretical exposition

A policy is considered rational, if the difference between the values it achieves and the values it sacrifices is positive and greater than any other policy alternative (Dye, 1998:25). The rational model stresses that, for any sound policy, value preferences and policy alternatives must be identified and their respective possible consequences be analysed in order to come up with the most efficient and effective policy. In principle the model

requires that policy output should represent *maximum social gain*, emphasising that, a government chooses policies that result into gains to society that exceed costs by the greatest margin (Dye, 1998:24).

The rational model of policy making and analysis is developed out of the Rational-Comprehensive Theory that underlies multiple bases, which involve reasoned choices that can lead to different courses of action to solve public problems. These include the following forms (see Dunn, 1994:274);

- *Technical rationality.* Based on reasoned choices that involve the comparison of alternatives according to their capacity to promote *effective* solutions for public problems. For example, comparison between solar and nuclear energy technologies.
- *Economic rationality.* Based on reasoned choices that involve the comparison of alternatives according to their capacity to promote *efficient* solution for public problems. Choices involve comparison of alternative in terms of their total costs and benefits to the society.
- *Legal rationality.* Based on reasoned choices that involve comparison of alternatives according to their *legal conformity* to established rules and precedents. For example, the award of public contracts according to whether companies comply with law against racial and sexual discrimination.
- *Social rationality.* Choices made on comparison of alternatives according to their capacity to maintain or improve valued social institutions. For example, choices based on; enhancing democracy, human rights and participation.
- *Substantive rationality.* Reasoned choices characterised by the comparison of multiple forms of rationality – technical, economic, legal, social – in order to make the most appropriate choices under given circumstances.

In order for policies to be rational and comprehensive at the same time, according to Charles Lindblom (1968), they have to meet several conditions of decision making (Dunn, 1994:275). In principle, an individual or collective decision maker must: identify all policy problems on which there is consensus among all stakeholders concerned; define and consistently rank all goals and objectives whose attainment would represent a resolution of the problem; identify all policy alternatives that may contribute to the attainment of each goal and objective; forecast all consequences that will result from the selection of each alternative; compare each alternative in terms of its consequences for the attainment each goal and objective; and then, choose that alternative which maximises the attainment of objective.

As to whether the above rational prescriptions can pass the litmus test of a typical policy process in Africa, one needs to look at the common elements that constitute the organisational structural arrangements and policy orientation in Africa.

Structure of government and policy in Africa – overview

The desire to satisfy human needs and address societal problems, generally explains the need for public policies. But the capacity of the Third World governments to fulfill human needs in

their respective nation states according to Olum (2002) depends on the nature of the social, economic and psychological dimensions of political life as well as the outlook of major institutions and structures of the political system. The policy dynamics in the developing nations – which are christened poor countries – borrow a leaf from the inherent structural arrangements that characterise centralised legacies of the colonial era. At the same time in focus, Mukamunana and Kuye (2005:594) arguing the case for an African policy targeting scenario suggest that "adherence to good governance and economic policy" are vital towards the procurement of a viable policy making partnership and process for the continent.

Third World countries, according to Yasin Olum, posses a three-tier institutional arrangement, consisting of the major network, minor networks and the masses (Olum, 2002:1). The major network consists of the power elite of a country in national government institutions and the top industrial – entrepreneurial leadership. This network extracts political support and resources from the general population, to which they are linked by the several minor networks. The minor networks consist of the middle-echelon that connects the major network with the masses. These exist both in the cities and the countryside and help perpetrate the patron-client system in exchange for personal rewards. The masses consist of the bulk population which is usually disorganised and unrepresented in the power structure. The masses supply the national system with the human and other resources, hardly, effectively participate in directing national decision-making, other than in more or less the symbolic exercise of voting.

This structural arrangement is important in understanding the power relations, behind which, public policy is often designed and shaped. Two worthy noting elements have arisen out of this structural orientation. One is that it promotes political institutions and sometimes constitutionally recognised structures that are inspired by less, if no, desire to devolve powers among the several competing agencies (Olum, 2002: 2), and in the next fold it heralds the patron-client system which has been a recipe for undemocratic traditions that have characterised most poor countries in Africa – which is later replicated in the way policies are made.

It should be noted that in Africa, the indigenous pre-colonial systems were centralised types and the European system of colonial administration did nothing to change this inclination. Consequently, many countries acquired independence without much orientation on the virtues of separation of powers and democratic governance. When these countries attained independence, public employment expanded rapidly as the new governments Africanised state administrations and nationalised leading enterprises (Addison 2003:56). The expanded state jobs gave considerable power of patronage to the political leaders and created a form of acquaintance where the jobs were distributed to members of the population in consideration of loyalty to the rulers of the day.

By 1980 this new *social contract* according to Addison (2003:57) promoted single policy political systems in the majority of the newly independent states in Africa, breed dictatorship, corruption and institutional decay as patronage accelerated with rent seeking siphoning talent and resources out of the productive economy. By 1988 only eight African countries had multiparty constitutions compared to forty five in 1999 (Addison, 2003:57) when the rising force of neo-liberalism and donor demands for democracy had taken stronger roots.

This background therefore, suits the foregoing debate that seeks to interrogate the proposal as to whether decision-making in such nations can be made more *rational*.

THE POLICY TRAJECTORY

Role of institutions

Institutions are relevant to the policy process. Policies are seen as institutional outputs since most public policies are authoritatively conceived, formulated, implemented and enforced by government institutions (Dye, 1998:15). Whereas the traditional public administration tried to demarcate the role of the government bureaucracy as only responsible for implementing policies made by the legislature and other political organs, these public officials in government agencies make vital policy inputs. For example; when there are legislative gaps during implementation or resource inadequacies public officials in such government institutions make policy adjustments and choices that suit situational imperatives. Secondly, the role of public institutions involves the task of balancing the statutory/legislative intent and executive priorities before putting policies into practice. In addressing this complex quagmire, Kuye, 2005 notes that "intellectual discussion is good up to a point, but within the comparative contexts, it should be able to stretch the analytical capability of the academic and the practitioner communities well beyond their limits..." (Kuye 2005:535).

With the advocacy of good governance and institutional capacity building, several developing countries have established specialised central planning agencies charged with the task of setting the goals for public policy-makers to follow. Likewise, countries like Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, among others, embraced decentralised planning through local government units (Crook, 2003:3-5). While it may be too early to have full performance indicators of decentralised planning towards institutional responsiveness – congruence between community preferences and public policies (Crook, 2003:3), at least the existence of some participatory framework in the form of integrated development plans (IDPs) at local levels can be a stepping stone in strengthening central planning and society priorities. This confirms that institutions play a role in redirecting and legitimising policies, and if accorded support to exhibit professionalism, they can enhance chances of rational policy output.

Indeed, a successful policy assumes the existence of effective domestic institutions and stakeholder arrangements. These are nonetheless, rare or different in operational dynamics in the developed world; and where they exist, they tend to be associated with complex organisational problems (Olum, 2002), which make formal rationality difficult. The dominant feature of public institutions is typified by hierarchies of principal and agent relations, as well as structures associated with complex system of political power relations. For example, ordinarily the citizens are the principals of the parliament, which in turn is the principal of the cabinet. While line ministries at the centre may be principals for local governments, they are also agents of the cabinet which in turn is an agent of the head of state (Hamdok, 2003:17). In situations where institutions are weak, Durevall (2003:131) indicates that, such a formal framework (of principal-agent relationship) tends

to be displaced by informal lines of authority based on patronage, ethnic affiliation and corruption. In essence, the complex nature of public institutions makes policy making overlap the requirements of rationalism.

Where institutions are locked in poor power relations, rational policy succumbs to the whims of individuals at the helm of political power. For example, recent newspaper reports from Uganda have echoed public outcry criticizing the President for allocating prime pieces of public land to foreign investors in the capital city Kampala in disregard of established procedures and institutions like Kampala City Council and Uganda Land Commission, which are considered to have legislative mandate to allocate such public land (*The Daily Monitor*, Tuesday 5th September, 2006). Uganda hosted the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2007 and part of these land allocations where said to be for hotel developers in preparation for the summit.

This serves to justify that public institutions cannot be understood outside the broader context of the state and its politics. In reality, the policy making process illustrates that *administration* and *politics* cannot be clearly delineated (Bryner, 2003:301). The centrality of public institutions in the policy process is met with the daunting challenge of trying to satisfy competing and often contradictory values from the state machinery and the various stakeholders. In short, the nature of public institutions makes policy making and analysis more bent on *politics* than *rationalism*. This can be exemplified by the following elements that tend to associate with public institutions.

- Emphasis in the public sector tends to be hierarchical, emphasising authority, protocol, and seniority. An order from a national President or Minister for example, could constitute policy. Yet, the ideals of *rationalism* demand that major policy decisions arise out of discussions based on evaluation of values, research and data, rather than the impressions of individuals.
- Moreover the constituencies of public organisations tend to be political and yet, the political leaders in many developing countries is predominantly preoccupied by survival. Efficient management styles may be compromised for political expediency. For example, it is no exaggeration to say that several managerial, technical and proficiently demanding appointments are made in the interest of enlarging the political base for the wielders of state power.

Role of outside partners – Donors

The recent emphasis on *good governance* as a policy framework and an ingredient of Africa's reform process has been initiated and spearheaded by donors, rather than the nation states. From the structural adjustments of the 1980s to the reforms of the 1990s, the global multilaterals have been part of the policy process in the developing world. By the end of the 1990s, major modifications in macroeconomic and sector policies of many developing countries especially in Africa, required consultation, if not approval, from either the IMF, the World Bank, the African Development Bank or major bilateral donors (Heijden, 2003:86). Given that these foreign-driven policies have in some cases overshadowed indigenous preferences, there has been considerably a very big blame on donors and multilateral agencies for domestic policy failure in Africa. Kuye

(2005:6) suggests "that although the crisis of the developmental state in African countries poses a critical problem, it should be noted that the central role of the state in public administration, development planning and economic management should have a strong resonance in the activities of most African countries…"

While opening up national borders to infuse in outside-led policies would not be bad per se, since it subjects local culture to scrutiny and enhances economic openness, accountability and opportunity for better practices, the problem however, is that, these policies alienate ownership from the local population.

Secondly, the increased donor involvement in design and management of public sector programmes and policies has led to loss of zeal and commitment on the side of the domestic public officials in engaging substantively into the policy process *rationally.* Olum (2002:6) presents that, a nation's intellectual resources are prevented from acting on a local problem for as long as a foreign *miracle* is being developed, and yet, one can best solve a policy-related problem, when he/she has "interacted and become immersed in its very nature".

Thirdly, nation-states have been subjected to several try-and-error frameworks, beyond their socio-economic stature and policies that are inconsistent with their developmental needs, in a way that does not suit rational policy making. The remark of the former Executive Secretary to U.N. Economic Commission for Africa- Adebayo Adediji cited in Callaghy (1998:41) emphasises this point:

> The donor countries that encourage African to take the democratic path are also the countries that are encouraging Africans to adopt economic policies that alienate the people that make development extremely difficult because of their misunderstanding of the nature and causes of Africa's economic crisis.

The other problem is that, the foreign inspired policy framework for *good governance* has become unrealistically long with the agenda issues continuing to expand from time to time, owing to too many stakes and players including; International Financial Institutions, a variety of donors, NGOs, CSOs, intellectuals, citizens, among others. With the issues becoming too many and multifaceted, the agenda becomes problematic, since it calls for improvements in virtually all aspects of the public life (Grindle, 2005:525). Under such a crowded environment of players and interests, rationalism in policy making falls by the way-side and power politics takes a centre-stage.

Nonetheless, while the question of ownership of development policy has undermined much of the donor led reform advocacy in Africa, the practices of several African regimes have curtailed progress. Addison (20003:56) argues that "donors can influence countries that are stuck in partial reform equilibrium, but only when internal political dynamics can succeed in changing national leaderships".

As such another of view should be considered. In some vivid cases, the donor led policy reforms have inspired development initiatives. For example, several countries have bolstered their revenue generation through institutional innovation (under donor conditions) where high level autonomous revenue authorities were created. Uganda, Mozambique and Ghana are major cases in point. In Uganda the ratio of revenue to GDP rose from 5% in mid 1980 to 12,1 in 1998/99. In Ghana from 11,3% in 1991 to 16,2% in 1998, while in

Mozambique customs revenue rose to US$ 198 million in 1999 up from US$ 86 in 1999 (Addison, 2003:69).

Be that as it may and notwithstanding the above debate on the successes and failures of the donor-led policy paradigms, one fact remains that, the inherent messiness of international politics militates against the conventional mechanisms of ensuring that decision-making and policy analysis are made *rational* within the framework of a nation-state and its institutional capabilities.

Role of the media

The media is a major source of information and prime watchdog of society. Both the electronic and print media are critical forms of mass communication. The media power is derived from the fact that they are both players and referees in the game of policy making and they influence society's opinion vividly. The competition between government and the media normally stems from the need to win and control public opinion. The media tends to capture the citizens favour against the public bureaucracies because of its easier interface with people and quicker flow of information.

The role of the media in public policy making is such that it: identifies issues and sets the agenda for public discussion; plays arbitrator between the citizenry and the decision makers; influences attitudes and values towards policy issues, and; assumes power on behalf of the public to watch over policy process, analysis and implementation.

While dealing with policy matters, most government agencies are interested in smooth and stable reactions from the public. Yet the media tend to like news that have emotional rhetoric, shocking, incidents, dramatic conflict, over drawn stereotypes and sometimes over blow complex problems such as inflation, government spending and foreign policy (Olum 2002). This brings them to direct collision with government machinery, which views the media as a mechanism that distorts governments' relationship with the people and creating some form of instability.

The result of this has led to sour relations between the state and the media and in several developing countries the state agencies pounce at the media by enacting *draconian* laws that restrict them from free reporting. In extreme cases, various forms of intimidation are meted out in order to gag the press. Human rights abuse records in developing countries are not in deficit of cases where members of the press have been mysteriously arrested, tortured or even murdered. At times their operating licenses are revoked as a way of silencing their critical analyses. Such actions only serve to deter the media's role in the policy process and frustrate effort towards rational policy analysis.

Role of interest groups and political parties

The role of interest groups and political parties in policy making features prominently in the governance discourse. They are expected to gather interests from various stakeholders in the population; aggregate them, help set the agenda and press demands upon a political system, which are eventually transformed into policies. Such groups constitute

a check and balance on the would-be excesses of public institutions, and therefore, help to foster a democratic dispensation and by pressing upon the state to undertake good policies that benefit the entire population.

The relationship between the state and the rest of the population (e.g. civil society, private business) is that the former ordinarily promises to create enabling environment in form of policy (stability, public goods, and property rights) in exchange of votes and taxes from the latter. However, just like in any other contract, fulfillment of the agreed positions depends on how well organised the parties are (Addison 2003). This is where the relationship between the state and the population causes dilemmas that affect rational policy making and the success of the entire policy process.

A successful policy process requires democratic public participation; where policy makers and the public continually engage in dialogue, examine the consequences for fundamental values, as well as sharing burdens and benefits (Bryner, 2003:304). Unfortunately, parties and interest groups are frequently controlled by the government itself through several legal and illegal restrictions, as well as manipulation, all of which deny them viable space for effective participation.

In essence, citizen participation in decision-making and development programmes remains largely a *cosmetic* show and a mockery exercise in many parts of Africa with very little, if no, effective means of empowerment (see Narayan, 2002; Blair, 2000; Mamdani, 1996). At the height of it all, is patronage and clientage relations that benefit a few elites and strong sections of the society. Indeed as Mamdani (1996) has argued, "the African patrimonial state has perpetuated a rule over subjects rather than a rule by citizens" (Francis and James, 2003:327). In such an environment participatory policy making (as an ideal element of rational policy) is more of rhetoric than reality.

The feeble nature and structure of interest groups in developing countries militate against their effective participation. While the number of NGOs and other CSOs continues to increase in several localities elsewhere in the developing world, they are continuously accused of colluding with local bureaucrats and representing the *elitist* preferences. Generally, their weak internal structure, and lack of broad and genuine representation of the *people's voice* sometimes makes them susceptible to manipulation and renders their position rather superficial in the policy process.

Similarly, the weak socio-economic position of the wider public in the developing world; accentuated by high illiteracy rates, alarming unemployment levels and abject poverty obstructs any sense of meaningful participation. The poor education system that is devoid of linking knowledge to production, the horrible human rights record and difficult means of livelihood exacerbates the low levels of their civic competence. This undermines participatory *rational* policy making and surrenders it to the whims of a few *elites*, whose preoccupation is normally based on designing schemes that ensure their continued stay in power.

Dilemma of nation-state politics

Nation-state policies and political conflict have exacerbated 'irrational' policy making in African states. Most governments in poor nations are not only captured by corrupt

elites with a poor history of non-fulfilment of their promises, lacking legitimacy in the eyes of their citizenry, but they are also locked in conflicts that consume their energies and resources (Grindle, 2004:539). Several countries continue to have increased military expenditure against donor restrictions and the demand for pro-poor policy development initiatives. According to Tony Addison (2003:68), Zimbabwe had spent US$ 200 million by 2000 since its involvement in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1998. Uganda and Rwanda have had military spending accounting for over 5% of their GDP, although other estimates put Rwanda's at 8% in 1998 with the IMF disputing the figure as the country was believed to be hiding their real spending (Addison, 2003:67-68).

The other handicap is the general lack of a democratic culture in many governments and state institutions. Until recently, most governments have been ascending to power in rather haphazard fashions involving; protracted civil wars, military coups, violent elections marred by rigging, all of which tend to strain society relations along racial and ethnic divide. This has tended to lead to damaging mistrust, heightened politics of seclusion and despotism. Such political traditions rarely create opportunity for *rational* policy process, as virtually all important decisions are parachuted from above. Olum (2002:6) posits that, "in the third world regimes, dissent is suppressed and ideological conformity is imposed during all stages of decision making", yet, a rational government wrestling with a complex problem "should take pains to ensure that dissent is protected, encouraged or even institutionalised in order to avoid as many errors as possible".

Other internal policy dilemmas have tended to promote policies of ruling regimes at the expense of common citizenry interests. According to Heijden (2003:78-79), Zambia's consistent social and economic decline in the 1980s and 90s that saw the incidence of extreme poverty rising to 58% in 1996, has had to do with policies of its post-independence governments that put the achievements of non economic objectives ahead of those concerning the raising of peoples income and well being. He argues that both the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) governments were preoccupied by pursuit of party and patronage interests that manifested in their resistance to embrace fundamental policy reforms. This perhaps explains why countries that were not directly affected by civil war and military conflict, such as Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Côte d'Ivoire and Zambia experienced continued institutional decay and failed to achieve prospective growth, partly due to domestic factors like declining levels of civil service, corruption and politics of exclusion (Hamdok, 2003:23)

Another dilemma to successful rational policy making is the endemic corruption that rocks institutions in many developing countries. Hamdok (2003:18) argues that, where a government has a reputation for corruption, it is difficult to convince a population that its policies, however good they might appear to be, will be successful. This low credibility on the side of a government and its institutions does not only alienate the population from supporting public policies, but also exerts high costs on policy implementation, and renders them to fail.

It is emphasised once again, that public policies are essentially political in nature. Deborah Stone argues that fundamentally, policy making is the "struggle over ideas", a "contest over conflicting, though equally plausible, conceptions of the same abstract goal

and value", such that the task of policy makers is to "reveal and clarify the underlying value disputes so that there is a move toward some reconciliation" (Stone, 1997:11-12). She emphasises that policy making is about changing people's behaviours and that each policy effort takes place within a particular political arena. This means that policy making undertakes to capture public order and norms, and it is on this basis, that possibly even autocratic regimes, will always struggle to justify rather *handmaiden* policies in the name of the *people* or as *pro-people*.

Indeed different policies have different political relationships and processes. Some policies are made to satisfy particular groups temporarily only to suit short term political motives (especially those at the helm of state power). For example, waiving of taxes, giving subsidies tend to be specific to a target population. Bryner (2003:303) argues that the legislators who make such policies normally have considerable interest in ensuring that recipients can trace the origins of the benefits given to them. He posits that, the legislators may only be interested in winning the next election.

The above is a clear case of the politics of policy making and the rationality of it. In Uganda, close to and during the peak of the 2006 presidential election campaigns, the demands for new districts were hastily supported by the incumbent president, Yoweri Museveni and since then, more than 20 district statuses were granted to several poor localities without much consideration on their economic viability and the increased strain on funding such local structures. Each one of the new districts, requires a huge administrative expenditure on establishing and sustaining council structures and committees, office blocks, salaries and allowances to staff and councillors, all of which put additional strain on a country with a huge debt burden of $4,6 billion, a debt amortisation of $115 million per financial year, and whose national budget is being over 50% supported by donors (*The Daily Monitor*, August 21, 2006). Whereas it may be argued that these new structures will create jobs and extend the sharing of the "national cake", Crook (2003: 10), wonders whether it is not simply "spreading the jam too thinly" and an ineffective use of scarce resources to create large numbers of under-financed and ineffective local authorities.

Rationalism – the inherent limitations

The preceding articulation indicates that policies in the developing world are politically entrenched and that other institutional and structural limitations overshadow the belief that decision-making and policy analysis can be made more *rational*. It is emphasised under this section that the rational model of policy analysis has its inherent limitations, owing to the gap between its assumptions and the practical realities associated with policies. The following issues highlight this deficiency.

- *Firstly,* public policies are intended to address a variety of needs and societal problems. Nations and policy making organs usually have broad social, economic and political objectives ranging from; improving household incomes, employment, education, health care, infrastructure; to political stability, law enforcement, crime reduction, among others. This makes it harder to rank goals in the public sector realm than it is

in the private sector, where the economic bottom line provides a natural focus (Keith Lesley, 2004).

- *Secondly*, the process of making public policies is not particularly precise, since it is not always possible to identify with precision the nature of the problems and the policy responses required to address them (Bryner, 2003:301). Yet the rational model requires thorough identification of problems and evaluation of policy alternatives, as well as their outcomes in order to determine the most efficient and effective of them.
- Thirdly, rational policy analysis requires clear goals and standards against which policy outcomes can be measured. It assumes agreement on the substantive measure of societal benefits from the policies. But this clarity is often lacking and as Bryner (2003:304) puts it, "the lack of consensus concerning what kinds of policies should be pursued and what role government should play in economic and social activities, makes judging policies nearly impossible".
- It should *fourthly* be stressed that, policy is a continual process of identifying problems, formulating responses, evaluating achievement of objectives, and again re-evaluating to consider modifications and improvement from time to time (Dunn, 1994:272-275). Yet, achieving the multiple forms of rationality (technical, economic, legal, social substantive) as required by the *rational-comprehensive theory* assumes a conclusive process, which is never always the case.
- Lastly, in theory rational policy making assumes that the technical analysis of competing choices is made rationally by substantively weighing the net social economic gains. In reality policymakers try to maximise their own rewards – power, status, re-election and money. (Dye, 1998:25) and analysis is politically entrenched, where public agencies are "caught in the middle of a political tug of war over evaluating and reshaping public policies" (Bryner, 2003:302).

CONCLUSION

The leaders of developing nations are not under attack. Rather, this article has attempted to elucidate that the concept of leadership must be unplugged within the confines of contextual viewpoints and interpolations. It is further surmised that a leader is technically the *chairperson* of a board whose regulatory governance statutes are defined constitutionally.

Although decision-making and policy analysis are largely informed by a political process, the leadership agenda must be informed and fine-tuned by the nature and structure of the existing political environment. The role of the different actors in the policy process including public bureaucrats/ agencies, the donors, mass media, interest groups and civil society has been examined; also pointing to the fact that, politics overtakes the conventional *rational* model.

It has been demonstrated that, given the nature of policy making in the public sector realm, it is difficult to evaluate policies on the basis of elements like economic cost-benefit or substantive rationality, because the value systems are rather problematic. This leaves procedural values like pluralism, openness and participation to constitute the basic

measure. These are largely political – democratic values, which are also unfortunately, often lacking, given the undemocratic traditions of the *state* and its agencies in most developing nations. In dictatorial traditions therefore, *rational* policy making does not thrive, as goal setting becomes an expression of personal convictions of the political leaders and the closest advisors. As a result, decision-making and policy analysis based on the *rational* model remains largely encumbered.

In some countries where participation and devolution of powers have taken strong root, decentralised planning supplements and strengthens central planning. All effort should, therefore, be made to promote a democratic dispensation in all government spheres. Governments should have the political will to building viable institutions that are independent and free from political manipulation if professionalism and rationalism in the policy process are to be enhanced. Part of strengthening institutions requires that the appointed officials be equipped with the necessary training and skills, owing to their central role in the policy process. Likewise, paying a viable living wage and a competitive market value salary will facilitate the infusion of *new blood* within the public service and at the same time allow public servants to build formidable institutional capacities. It is important that government strives to gain credibility and trust through accountability, transparency and fulfillment of its promises. It should thus, open up political space for contestation and allow dissenting views from interest groups and the media to enrich debate and widen policy options. Citizen and civil society participation are still crucial, but it should outlive the mockery exercise of *consulting* the people only during election time.

In the classic world of governance and leadership, the adage is premised around the notion that "to manage is not to control". But the notion of control is also debatable. This article has created a panacea for unplugging the debate. The leadership debate continues.

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