

Leadership and governance issues in the regional economic communities of the African Continent

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ABSTRACT

Most of the best-known models of leadership have been developed in the Western industrial contexts, particularly in the United State where the dictum that there is one best way has influenced the thinking around leadership issues across the world. The implicit philosophy that assumes that leadership competencies reside in individuals is not relevant in context to issues of leadership in the African continent. African leadership has always been built around partnership. The issues of leadership in Africa have often been marred by negative publicity from both Africans and non-Africans mainly because of the contemporary views of leadership that are entwined with notions of heroism. The society has often seen leadership as an inherently individual phenomenon. Western countries present themselves to Africans as all-knowing, when in fact their perspectives on issues of leadership in Africa are influenced by the often distorted views of Africa as a place of death, disaster, disease and despair, the so called four Ds of the African apocalypse (Hunter-Gault 2006:107). This article contends that Eurocentric models of leadership that facilitated the establishment of organisations such as the European Union (EU) cannot be replicated in the African Union (AU) and all the sub-regional economic communities (RECs) in the continent. This is because of the unique conditions in Africa. These conditions call for the leaders who see themselves as part of the shared trusteeship in partnership. This article is built around the notion of collective leadership that characterise true African leadership.



INTRODUCTION

Over the years many African leaders have put immense zest and adopted, often without question, abstract development paradigms developed in the West. Many of these programmes are developed by individuals or organisations, which do not understand cultural or practical nature of life for most Africans. This article argues that development must be understood as a cultural process. The result of ignoring this culture and copying indiscriminately from elsewhere leads to a failure on the part of African leaders. Sustainable development cannot be conceived in foreign abstracts. It can only be realised if it is premised in the historically sustained cultures of indigenous people.

Issues of leadership in the African Union (AU), regional economic communities (*RECs*) such as SADC, ECOWAS, COMESA, North Africa and global perspectives are often discussed without taking into account the role of history and indigenous solutions. Corruption and governance, culture, democracy and economic freedom are raised in this article as some of the leadership issues that are often identified by the West as indicators of poor leadership in Africa. This discussion concedes that these are core issues of leadership, but argues that they are not unique to Africa. This article promotes collectivism as one of the best notions of African leadership and further analyses issues of leadership within African organisations in the African context. A brief account of what these organisations stand for, how they were formed, and their objectives in carrying out the African mandate to the rest of the world are explored.

Current leadership issues within these organisations form the crux of the discussion in this discussion. The three historical eras that assisted in shaping up leadership issues in Africa are juxtaposed with the impact of history on contemporary leadership in the post colonial period: The main intention is to highlight the fact that although their formation and operations are based on Western models, it would be erroneous to analyse issues of leadership in the AU, the three *RECs* and North Africa using the Western contexts. The inclusion of the two sub-topics on the three historical eras, which influenced leadership in Africa as well as the impact of post colonial history on contemporary leadership in Africa, is not intended at deviating from the topic under discussion. They are strategically incorporated in order to narrate the origin of African leadership and to demystify some of the existing myths about leadership in Africa. The arguments also recognise and do not in any way underestimate the fact that there are some salient challenges confronting leaders in Africa, but contends that most of these challenges are surmountable. To add to the body of knowledge, recommendations are made at the end of this article in the form of five strategies on how African leaders can deal with some of these leadership challenges in the AU, the three *RECs* as well as North Africa.

LEADERSHIP ISSUES IN THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)

The African Union (AU) is an intergovernmental organisation consisting of 52 African states. The only African country that is not a member of the AU is Morocco. The AU was established in Durban-South Africa on the 9th of July 2002 by its first chairperson former President Thabo Mbeki. The historical foundations of the AU originated in the Union of African States, an early confederation that was established by Kwame Nkrumah in the 1960s, as well as the subsequent

attempts to unite Africa, including the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 and the African Economic Community (AEC) in 1981 (*Wikipedia Encyclopaedia*).

The Assembly of the African Union makes the most important leadership decisions of the AU. The AU also has a representative body, the Pan African Parliament (PAP), which consists of 265 members elected by the national parliaments of the AU member. The AU's secretariat is the African Union Commission. In 2009, during the African Union's meeting, it was resolved that the African Union Commission would become the African Union. Other structures within the AU include the Executive Council, which is made up of foreign ministers; the Permanent Representative Committee (PRC) made up of ambassadors to Ethiopia, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) which has fifteen members elected on the regional basis by the Assembly and has similar intent and operation to the United Nations Security Council as well as the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), a civil society consultative body. The main administrative capital of the AU is Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Other structures are hosted by different member states. For instance, the African Commission on Human and People's Rights is based in Banjul, Gambia. The NEPAD and APRM secretariats as well as the PAP are based in Midrand, South Africa (*Wikipedia Encyclopaedia*). The AU's leadership faces a myriad of issues to deal with. These issues include:

- health issues such as combating malaria and the AIDS/HIV epidemic;
- political issues such as confronting undemocratic regimes and mediating in many civil wars;
- economic issues such as dealing with recurring famines, desertification and lack of ecological sustainability; as well as
- legal issues regarding Western Sahara

In an attempt to address the leadership issues stated above, the AU has set out the following objectives for all its leading institutions:

- to accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent;
- to promote and defend African common positions on issues of interest to the continent and its people;
- to achieve peace and security in Africa; and
- to promote democratic institutions, good governance and human right

To bolster their intentions for the advancement of African issues by Africans, the leaders within the AU have adopted a number of important documents establishing norms at continental level. These include the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption (2003); the African Charter on Democracy, Election and Governance (2007), as well as the New Partnership for Africa's Development and its associated Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. (*Wikipedia Encyclopaedia*).

LEADERSHIP ISSUES IN THE REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES: SADC, ECOWAS AND COMESA

According to Olivier (2009:9) regional economic integrations seem to be working well in the developing world. North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement and the European Union both



see an effective integration and considerable gains from these integrations. However, it appears that most *RECs* in Africa are battling with integration mainly because of leadership issues. According to Dupont (2006:1) the idea of an economic grouping embracing all the states in Africa emanated from the United Nation Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). A continent-wide union was deemed to be too ambitious, therefore the ECA divided Africa into four sub-regions - North, West, Central and East – regarded as being large enough to be economically viable and were meant to form units of economic communities. Uzodike (2009:27) asserts that African leaders to create synergies across national boundaries in order to surmount three challenges, viz, base the formation of regional economic communities in the 1960s in Africa on the effort:

- economic stagnation and the promotion of African development through autonomous mechanisms;
- associated global economic dependence and marginalisation; and
- pressures exerted by the forces of globalisation.

Uzodike (2009:27) points out that the formation of regional economic communities is not unique to Africa. He explains that, as a development strategy, regional economic integration has been a dominant feature across the world. Its historic provenance can be traced back to Europe. For example, similar schemes have also been initiated in Asia – the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and in North America – the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Currently there are 14 *RECs* in Africa; they are characterised by overlapping membership and mandates (*Appendix I & II*). The framework of the African Economic Community (AEC) Treaty (1991) and the AU endorse eight *RECs* as the building blocks for Africa’s economic integration. Three of these *RECs* – SADC, ECOWAS and COMESA are profiled below:

SADC

The Southern African Development Community is made up of 14 member states. Prior to the formation of SADC in 1992, the bloc was called the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC), whose focus was on functional cooperation in key sectors. The 1992 SADC Treaty redefined SADCC to SADC changing the organisation from a loose association towards a legally binding arrangement (Saurombe 2009:100). Uzodike (2009:32) summarises the objectives of SADC as follows:

- promotion of social, economic, political and security cooperation among its member states;
- promotion of self-sustaining development on the basis of collective self-reliance and the interdependence of member states; and
- strengthening and consolidation of historical, social and cultural links among people of the region

Although SADC has made significant progress in the fields of trade, agriculture, energy and transport, there are outstanding issues and challenges that call for decisive leadership. Saurombe (2009:103-104) identifies the following issues as critical for the SADC leadership

to deal with: After 1996, the region expected South Africa to take a leadership role on both the economic and political front. The opposite has happened with South Africa preferring to have close economic ties with the EU, USA and the emerging forces of Brazil and India. Multiple memberships amongst member states also retard the emergence of leadership and implementation of agreed protocols. The secretariat has no legal basis to ensure accountability and enforcement of decisions. The SADC has inadequate technical and analytical support to help with the regional integration agenda. Participation of civil society in the integration agenda is inadequate (Saurombe 2009:104).

ECOWAS

The Economic Community of Western African States was created in 1975 with the purpose to become the most important international economic instrument for economic cooperation and development in West Africa. The overall objective of ECOWAS is to promote cooperation and integration, with a view to establishing an economic and monetary union as a means of stimulating economic growth and development in West Africa. According to Dupont (2006:8) ECOWAS transcends the simple desire for cooperation among the people of West Africa, it is deemed as the first major successful effort in the sub-region's quest for collective self-reliance. Dupont (2006) further elucidates that as part of their colonial legacy, the West African countries belonged to either of two currency zones - the *sterling* area and *franc* zone. The Anglophone countries were protected under the Commonwealth preference system, while the Francophone countries were under Yaoundé Convention (Owen 1996:234). Therefore, West African nations felt that it is only through common efforts and resources that they could have a say in world affairs. As with every regional organisation, ECOWAS had to deal from the beginning with the inherent problems, for instance the effective co-ordination of policies throughout the region and the need to assist some countries to surrender some sovereign powers in the decision-making process (Uzodike 2009:29).

ECOWAS leadership is best known for its achievements in political and security realm (Ijeoma 2002). Its success in peace and security matters is exemplified by its peacekeeping role in Liberia and Sierra Leone through the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). At its recently held 36th Summit in Abuja Nigeria, UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon commended ECOWAS leaders for continuing to deepen integration and addressing socio-economic and political issues facing the region. He however noted that leaders in West Africa are faced with a myriad other issues such as food security, climate change, drug trafficking, organised crime, global crises and unconstitutional changes affecting the rule of law and good governance (Tarawalie & Temple 2009:2)

COMESA

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa is preferential trading area with 19 member states stretching from Libya to Zimbabwe. COMESA was formed in 1994, replacing a Preferential Trade Area, which had existed since 1981. It is one of the pillars of the African Economic Community. In 2008, COMESA agreed to an expanded free-trade zone including



members of two other African trade blocs, the East African Community (EAC) and SADC (Adar & Ngunji 1994:304).

According to Uzodike (2009:31-32) the objectives of COMESA include the joint development of natural and human resources; trade promotion through the elimination of all barriers to trade; the harmonisation of macroeconomic and monetary policies and the promotion of peace and security in the region. The success of any trade and investment regime is based on the credibility of its leadership. On this score COMESA has its fair of leadership issues. The creation of institutions to promote co-operation and development, the attainment of a free trade area in the year 2000, followed by the launch of the customs union and increased intra-regional trade are some of the most remarkable achievements of COMESA's leadership. Wildermuth (2009:15) lists other issues that need to be addressed by the leaders of COMESA. These issues are trade liberalisation that does not provide special incentives to COMESA members, similar Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) policies and proliferation of multiple economic unions, political instability, inadequate transport systems, and a myriad of economies within membership countries, war and environmental issues in the region.

LEADERSHIP ISSUES IN NORTH AFRICA AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

According to Daoud (2009:15) while there are generally good reasons for optimism in the economic integration within this region, the prospects of political and security perspectives are calls for a great deal of uncertainty. The concept of a united North Africa has been debated in this region since the early 1920s, although momentum waned during periods of political rivalries and territorial disputes. Virtually all countries in this region have seen their regimes further entrenched in their power (Owen 1996:23). Traditional rivalries between Morocco and Algeria and the unresolved issue of Western Sahara's sovereignty have been major hindrances towards North African leaders achieving the much sought-after unity in this region. (The Africa Report 2009)

Another common feature with regards to leadership within this region, is the leaders who tend to hold on to power for too long as well as the dynastic trend with most of the Arab regimes. To set examples, Algeria and Tunisia recently held presidential elections, which saw landslide victories of two ageing leaders. According to Daoud (2009:15) this is a classic example of a fallacy by African leaders to think that they will always be remembered as champions of their country's economies. On the issue of the dynastic trend, recent speculations suggest that the leaders of both Algeria and Libya favour the promotions of their immediate family members to assume leadership in their respective countries when they retire. This is another trend that is fast becoming very common in Africa (http://www.north-africa.com/naj_news/index.1html).

PARTNERSHIP IN LEADERSHIP – A PANACEA FOR AFRICAN LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES

Africa has produced exceptional leaders, including nine Noble laureates – six peace awards (i.e. Wangari Maathai from Kenya; Kofi Annan from Ghana; Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela,

F W de Klerk and Desmond Tutu all from South Africa) and three awards for literature (i.e. Wole Soyinka from Nigeria and Nadine Gordimer and J M Coetzee from South Africa). However, African leadership has been distorted by over-concentration on some of these great world-class leaders instead of grooming a generation of young leaders who can meet the new challenges of global competitiveness. According to Sadler (2003:7), one of the problems that occur frequently in the literature on the subject of leadership is the natural and understandable, but potentially misleading, focus on people of stature instead of the collective when leadership issues are discussed. This is a common problem in Africa.

Sadler (2003:7-8) further argues that there are many dedicated, ordinary and effective leaders in organisations and communities of all kinds who inspire others, sustain them through difficult times, lead them into new uncharted territories, but will never be categorised as great leaders by global perspectives. In this article emphasis is put on the fact that great leadership cannot be equated to individuals but partnerships. There are many definitions of leadership. Sadler (2003:171) refers to leadership as a social process, a personal quality, a role in groups and organisations when used as a collective noun to those responsible for the destiny of a country or an organisation. This is the most relevant definition for the purpose of the chosen topic in this exposition as it emphasises partnership. Kuye (2009:4) asserts that it is expedient to perceive leadership as a long-term relationship or partnership between leaders and group members. To emphasise the importance of this partnership, Kuye (2009:4) identifies four key factors, which are necessary for a valid partnership to exist in an organisation, namely:

- *Exchange of purpose.* Every worker or group member at every level should be able to define the vision and values of the organisation. It is through communication with people at all levels that the leader can talk about a widely accepted vision.
- *A right to say no.* People should have the guts to express a different opinion without being victimised. People can lose in a debate when given space to air their views, rather than depriving them an opportunity to debate issues.
- *Joint accountability.* Partnership creates an opportunity for each person to be responsible about the outcomes and the present scenario. In practical terms, it implies that everyone is accountable for the success and failure of the organisation.
- *Absolute honesty.* Failure to tell the truth to one another is deemed as an act of betrayal in a partnership. Distribution of power makes people to be more likely to tell the truth because of the feeling of vulnerability.

The concept of leadership as a partnership is appropriate for a topic that deals with leadership issues in the organisational set up such as the AU, RECs and North Africa because it strives for empowerment and team building. Reference to leadership in terms of partnership is expedient also because it is linked to an optimistic view of group members being referred to in the theory of stewardship. This is the theory where leaders are viewed as custodians of the interest and wellbeing of those they serve as leaders. Block (1993:6) concurs with this view and defines stewardship as the willingness to be accountable for the well-being of the larger organisation by operating in service, rather than in control. In simple terms, stewardship is accountability without control or compliance. Khoza (2007:24) attests to the notion of leadership in partnership when he infers that a constellation of values which characterise African leadership through partnership are captured in South African vernacular expressions such as:



- *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which translates into a human being finds genuine human expression in humane partnership with other humans (I am because you are, you are because we are).
- *Motho ke motho ga ana bosetlhane*, which translates into-a person is a person regardless of structure or stature (Human life is of equal value).

These African expressions define the values that are in stark contrast with the Western worldview on issues of leadership. These views are predicated on Social Darwinian philosophy, which holds that economic progress is the story of competition and the survival of the fittest. It implies that some groups dominate; other groups fall behind (Dalglish 2009:52).

Much has been written about uncomplimentary attributes of leadership in Africa, but very little effort has been made to develop a profile of positive leadership that is required in confronting the continent's leadership challenges. This discussion is also avidly intended at providing that positive profile about African leadership, notwithstanding that there are some salient leadership challenges within some of the organisations in the continent. According to Salim Ahmed Salim, former OAU Secretary-General (2002:13), Africa is littered with failed institutions, mostly due to bad leadership. Salim Ahmed Salim further elucidates that conflicts have been provoked and sustained by leadership issues and sometimes the narrow interests of a given leadership have determined the entire destiny of African nations and societies. In South Africa recently, the former national speaker of parliament and ANC veteran, Frene Ginwala has lashed out at poor leadership (*Sunday times*, 6 December 2009). Alaa Al Aswany, a renowned Egyptian author, has also recently criticised the state of leadership in Africa by claiming that a generation of leaders in the mould of Kwame Nkrumah and Abdul Gamel Nasser do not exist any more in Africa (*The Africa Report*, December 2009). The veracity of these assertions and other views, which are based on individualism concerning issues of leadership within the continent, are challenged.

Over the years, Africa has seen how political parties, the military, the executive bureaucracy and even the international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF have usurped the leadership of some of the African societies (Legrain 2003:198). African organisations need to face up to their challenges and it is important that the leadership issue is given due attention by academics. The role of leadership needs to be clearly perceived, appropriate modalities of nurturing and appointing dynamic leaders have to be developed. Very critical is the need to foster accountability and transparency in the exercise of leadership functions in Africa. A major challenge is for African leaders to transcend the notion of leadership being a personalised preoccupation to the building of culture of leadership as an institution. According to Bennis and Nanus (1985), all leaders share three things in common:

- They face the challenge of overcoming resistance to change. Some try to do this by the simple exercise of power and control, but effective leaders learn that there are better ways to overcome resistance to change. This involves the achievement of a voluntary commitment to shared values in partnership with their followers.
- A leader often should broker the needs of constituencies both within and outside the organisation. The brokering function requires sensitivity to the needs of many stakeholders and a clear sense of the organisation's position.
- A leader is responsible for the set of ethics or norms that govern the behaviour of people in the organisation. Leaders can establish a set of ethics in several ways. One

way is to demonstrate by their own behaviour their commitment to the set of ethics that they are trying to institutionalise.

Is it relevant to pursue Africanness in a global village? The answer to this question is an emphatic Yes! It is extremely relevant in a myriad of ways. Scientists maintain Africa is a cradle of humankind and that all human ancestors can be traced back to this continent. Africa is fraught with a myriad of diversities, ranging from cultural, geographic, economic and political diversity. It features largely emerging economies and rapid political, economic and social development (*Sunday Times*, 13 July 2002) The bone of contention emanates from the premise that given the impact of history on leadership within the continent, African leadership issues should be defined and understood according to African circumstances, values and beliefs, even in the face of globalisation. Below is a brief overview of leadership issues within the AU and the RECs. North Africa has only one REC namely, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) which consists of five member states and excluding Egypt, a member state of COMESA (*see appendix I*). As per instructions in the title of this research, AMU is not mentioned in concomitance with other RECs that are stipulated within the topic under the discussion. Therefore a general analysis is forwarded of issues of leadership and global perspectives in North Africa as a region.

HISTORICAL ERAS WHICH INFLUENCED LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

According to Masango (2002:708) Africa has a rich heritage of leadership that may be lacking in uniformity. This heritage has many similarities, but there are also differences from time to time and from one African country to the other. Masango (2002:708) further points out that these differences in leadership were brought about by two dominant religious faiths namely, Islam and Christianity as they were introduced in Africa. As a result, three historical eras are identified namely, the African religions era, the Christian era and the Globalisation era. Each era is characterised by distinct contribution of how leadership should be understood in the African context and challenges some of the existing myths about African leadership.

Globalisation era

Stackhouse (2000:202) defines globalisation as an act of making something global, worldwide in scope and application. This definition implies that globalisation in the secular world has to do with the spread of economic and cultural realities which are generally associated with the capitalist and free market forces of the highly industrialised Western countries. Leaders who have a vision that transcends their borders direct globalisation. The new world order has opened greater participation of Africans in a global village. The new generation of leaders are sharing, discussing and working for this new world order, even though the economic circumstances are different. According to Mugambi (1997:23) these economic imbalances make western leaders, by virtue of their economic power to control the political and economic machinery of the world.

In Africa the creation of the organisations such as the AU, SADC, ECOWAS, COMESA as well as NEPAD came into being as result of African leaders realising that there is a need



for cohesion among African leaders and Africa needs to speak with one voice in the global arena. This has made African leaders to confront global challenges collectively. Globalisation era has forced African leaders to a method of deconstruction. African leaders are able to redefine their leadership according to their own African values during this era. This era of self rediscovery has been more than just empowering for African leader, it has brought a new re-awakening, an African Renaissance, which is in the same mode as Europe's era of enlightenment (Masango 2002:717)

IMPACT OF HISTORY ON CONTEMPORARY LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA – POST COLONIAL PERIOD

Much of African history on leadership issues has been defined through the eyes of its colonisers, who through self-interest and lack of cultural understanding have produced a one-sided, biased account. These limited views neither encompass nor accurately portray the history of the African continent. However, colonial history is expedient in that it elucidates the myths that persist today – myths that make it rather difficult for Africans to feel confident in the global world and which condone the continuance of autocratic, paternalistic and exploitative leadership (Dalglish 2009:45).

The colonisation of Africa began in the 15th century. The extent and kind of colonisation varied from one African country to the other depending on the European coloniser involved. Portugal was the first country to discover the route around Africa and colonised countries such as Angola and Mozambique. Other countries such as Britain, Germany and France followed suite by trading with Africa and ended up taking control of African resources as conquerors rather than traders. They took control of the supply chain and each had their own way of dealing with these African countries that were deemed as sources of valuable raw materials, international power and a market for industrial products. According to Dalglish (2009:47) Africa has been a pawn in the politics of Europe and the industrial revolution. The Europeans had meagre if any interest in Africa other than a political and economic asset. In many cases, colonial power left the governments of their colonies in the hands of large companies and it became extremely difficult to divorce business from politics. Dalglish (2009:47) further states that the development of social Darwinism and the *science of race* in Europe in the 19th century brought to light a dictum that Africans by their nature were substantially different and inferior to Europeans and therefore could not expect to be treated in the same way as Europeans. This is the myth that has persisted and hence created doubts that Africans are incapable of handling their own leadership issues. Since colonisations, grand plans have been made by African leaders to show that they are capable of handling the continent's issues. Notable among these are Lagos Plan of Action and the Full Act of Lagos (1980), the Abuja Treaty (1991) and the 2001 New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Many African leaders waged an arduous liberation struggle throughout the 20th century. Such leaders included Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Milton Obote of Uganda, Samora Machel of Mozambique and Nelson Mandela of South Africa to name only a few. These leaders were purpose-driven individuals determined to liberate their people. They were often deemed as freedom heroes who were considered to be infallible

but who had limited experience and know-how in issues pertaining to governance. Most of these leaders erred by trying to emulate foreign practices they saw elsewhere without understanding the foundations on which those practices were built. Ayittey (2005:402) argues that although these were outstanding African leaders of all times, they were not infallible. He concedes that in the beginning those leaders all meant well but cautions that good intentions were not adequate. After the attainment of independence many of these African leaders lost their appeal to their citizens. The people could no longer identify with them and abruptly wanted to get to the next stage, from liberation that the independence struggle was all about to eradication of poverty (Ayittey 2005:402-3).

As Prah (2005:12) aptly puts it, the running of ideological war is very different from the day-to-day governance of a country. Few independence leaders were able to make a successful transition from liberation heroes to governance of their respective countries. During colonial times, indigenous population had little role in the leadership issues. They had many past examples of rulers, indigenous and foreign, but few examples of leadership to act as role models in the development of their communities. The infrastructure left behind by the colonial governments varied from country to country, as did the knowledge base that enabled the population to maintain the infrastructure. Many African writers have echoed these sentiments about leadership issues on the continent. To adduce one, Kenyan prominent writer, Kwesi Kwaa Phra (2005:12) argues that African postcolonial elites have consistently failed to provide leadership that is needed to improve the quality of lives of the people. The absence of self-reliant creativity, self-assertiveness and cultural confidence on which to construct a developmentally sound approach to societal problems has consistently constrained effective poverty elimination efforts in Africa (Phrah 2005:13)

SOME COMMON ISSUES OF LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Ranges of issues, material and psychological are raised in an attempt to dispel them as *facts* concerning issues of leadership in the African context. According to Dalglish (2009:50), people make decisions on the basis of perceptions and beliefs, and these may present a biased assessment concerning leadership issues in Africa. The three issues of leadership which are often viewed to be exclusively applicable to issues of leadership in Africa are:

- sovereignty of African member states in the AU and the RECs;
- corruption and governance;
- Culture; and
- lack of democracy and economic freedom.

This article argues that although the above-mentioned issues are core issues of leadership and require immense attention, they are by no means unique to Africa.

Sovereignty

According to Olivier (2009:9), African leaders, in spite of the notions of African unity and pan-Africanism often stick rigidly and evangelically to the Westphalian model of absolute



national sovereignty. For these leaders, the sharing of sovereignty is verboten. Olivier (2009:9) further infers that the leaders of the AU and all the *RECs* in the continent often reduce regional integration to intergovernmental co-operation. He adds that to a varying extent, the leaders of the *RECs* have facilitated and promoted economic co-operations, but have played second fiddle to the whims of member states. This is the problem that pan-Africanism and African unity fail to address. This is also the reason why the idea of regionalisation of Africa is a failure (Olivier 2009:9)

In the light of the foregoing assertions as well as increasing pressures of globalisation, two myths exist. The first myth is that the formation of the European Union (UN) has reduced the difference between the French, Irish and Germans (Schneider & Barsoux 1997); Du Brin & Dalglish 2003). The second myth is that, with the advent of symbols recognised across the world and the use of English as a universal language, a fallacy has arisen that cultures are converging, that the world is becoming one. This is not the case, in fact it has meant that the countries should learn to work together mindful of their differences while maintaining their sovereignty. This should also be evident in the organisations of Africa, where, it seems almost as though the pressure for homogeneity in the process of globalisation is creating a desire for divergence rather than convergence. The rationale behind integration is that acting on their own most African member states are destined to remain vulnerable, marginalised beggar nations (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Triandis 1972).

Corruption and governance

According to Hornsby (1994:193) corruption means immoral, deprived or dishonest practices of persons. This definition carries within it elements of culture and morals. Dobel (in Werner 1983:147) concurs with that definition by pointing out that corruption from an organisational point of view, is essentially illustrated by specific cultural attitudes such as loyalty, morality and usurpation of public good. This is singled out as a significant problem for African leaders serving in the AU, the *RECs* and North Africa. Not only does it slow down the rate of growth but corruption also damages the reputation of African leaders and impairs their ability to bring about the changes required by the African people. To bring about changes, African leaders need to distance themselves from corrupt behaviour and put mechanisms in place to reduce it whenever or wherever it exists in their societies (Ayittey 2005:23, Sachs 2002:322)

Kuye (2009) defines governance as the process whereby elements in society wield power, authority and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life and economic and social development. It is a broader concept as opposed to government whose principal elements include aspects such as a constitution, legislature, executive and judiciary. It has no automatic normative connotation. Kuye (2009) further identifies five characteristics of good governance, *viz*, consensus orientated, equity, inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, as well as accountability. It is impractical to attain good governance in its entirety, as very few countries have not been able to achieve it entirely. However to ensure sustainable human development, leaders should strive to actualise good governance.

There are constant accusations about corruption and poor governance on the part of most African leaders. This is viewed as the primary cause of multiple social problems in Africa (Ayittey 2005:114; Sachs 2002:318). This is a belief carried by both Africans and non-Africans. Belief that governance is poor in Africa or Africa is devoid of strong leaders is

seen as a major hindrance to development and foreign investment (Ayittey 2005:117). Sach (2002:318) concedes that governance in Africa is poor (by any standard), however it is by no means the only, or even major, cause of underdevelopment. Sachs (2002) continues to argue that much of the overwhelming prejudice against Africa has been grounded in what he describes as overt racism. Most poor countries have governance and corruption indicators below those of high income countries. Governance and high incomes complement one another. Good governance raises incomes and higher incomes lead to good governance. Governance is better in high income countries because a more literate and rich society is better equipped to keep the government on its toes and honest by being a watchdog. Rich societies can afford to invest in high quality governance because they have enormous revenue receipts and a better educated civil service that does not live with job insecurity in an environment without social services (Sach 2002:320-321).

Sach (2002:318) further argues that governance is poor in Africa because Africa is poor. He points out that poor governance decreases economic growth, and slow economic growth and instability leads to poor governance. Sach (2002) asserts that there is no evidence that African countries are distinctly corrupt by the standards of very poor countries. He alludes that formal statistics indicates that African countries grew around a meagre 3% less rapidly than other developing countries at the same level of income and governance. This suggests that leadership issues concerning corruption and poor governance cannot be construed as the main contributing factors to slower growth rate and underdevelopment in Africa. According to Sachs (2002:320) other factors are at play, these factors have to do with adverse geography and deficient infrastructure.

Lack of democracy and economic freedom

The absence of democratic processes in Africa and other poor regions is also misconstrued as a fact when dealing with issues of leadership in African organisations and sub-regional organisations. According to Burns (2003: 229), by the early 1990s the concept of democracy was spreading across the continent. By the year 2003 Freedom House had categorised 11 African countries as free, 20 as partly free and 16 as un-free. Africa's share of free and partly free countries at 66% actually stands above the average for non-Africans and low-income countries. Sachs (2002:354) argues that democratisation does not reliably translate into faster economic growth. He cites China as an example of a country that does not practice democratic principles and yet having a rapidly growing economy. Sachs (2002) sentiments are echoed by Cilliers (2009), who questions total faith in democracy by asserting that however desirable democracy may be, political liberation does not ensure economic regeneration or popular welfare. He adds that Africans in new democracies do not perceive substantial improvements in their economies and report very few advances in living conditions (*The Africa report*, December 2009:36)

The evidence of the Chinese scenario annotated above suggests that market economies out perform centrally planned economies. But caution should be exercised against the perception that free market ideologies have all the answers for development. At the extreme, free market ideologies maintain that the markets should rule every part of the economy including essential services such as health, education, social security, water, energy and infrastructure. They argue that shortcomings in growth can be accounted for by the lack of



free markets. Dalglish (2009:52) insists that every developed nation relies on government provision of the types of essential services mentioned-above and the provision of such essential services appears to be the only way to ensure that all members of society have access to those necessities of life. Africa cannot be expected to be an exception. Formal statistics indicate that African countries grew less rapidly than countries in other continents at the same level of economic freedom by about 3% per year (Sachs 2002). In the light of all the points raised, it can be deduced that it would be erroneous to construe the lack of democracy and economic freedom as a leadership shortfall on the part of the leaders of the AU, the three RECs (SADC, ECOWAS and COMESA) as well as leaders of North Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW LEADERS CAN CONFRONT ISSUES OF LEADERSHIP IN THE AU, RECs AND NORTH AFRICA

To overcome most of the issues of leadership with the organisations of Africa, which often reflect the views articulated there are a number of strategies that leaders can adopt. The first strategy is for leaders to *listen to those around them*. As Burns (2003:239) rightly puts it: It is by listening not to the voices of the past but to the needs of the impoverished and recognising them as actionable needs that a leader can marshal and direct resources, both material and psychological, to find solutions.

The second strategy is for leaders to *promote sustainable development*. Dalglish (2009:54) rebukes African leaders to desist relying on examples of poor sustainability practices of developed countries in the past. Many of these developed nations face the prospects of having to change the patterns of behaviour and consumption of their communities to ensure sustainability and survival. African leaders should build sustainability on their own plans drawing on the best of what technology has to offer.

The third strategy is for some of the African leaders to *overcome negative characteristics*. In Africa there appears to be an obsession with power rather the use of power. According to Uzodike (2009:36) a notable negative characteristic that is widely acknowledged is the lack of political commitment on the part of African leaders to cede their control over fiscal and monetary issues to RECs. *Essential* to successful integration is the principle of shared sovereignty, which requires that member states of both the AU and RECs surrender aspects of their sovereignty to a centre. Ayittey (2005:407) lists some the examples of these negative characteristics as posturing, intolerance of dissent, indifference to the welfare of their citizens, subordination of national interest to personal aggrandisement, misplaced priorities, poor judgement, reluctance to take responsibilities for personal failures and a lack of vision and understanding of even the basic and elementary concepts such as democracy, fairness, rule of law, accountability and freedom. In order for the new generation of leaders to achieve different results from what the leaders of the past had achieved, they have to behave differently.

The fourth strategy is for African leaders to *recognise the reality of globalisation*. African leaders should take responsibility for the behaviour that is not acceptable within the current global community. The former President of South Africa sent a very stern message to the delegates at the 35th OAU summit in Algiers when he stated that African leaders who took power by coup d'état would be banned from future OAU summits. He expressed impatience

with those leaders who simply wailed that globalisation was passing Africa by: "There are sufficient natural and human resources in Africa. Leadership, realistic policy framework and good governance are essential. Others cannot do it for us" (Ayittey 2005:426).

The fifth strategy is for leaders to make a *personal commitment*. African leaders are confronted with huge challenges with often only negative or irrelevant role models. As De Tocqueville in the 19th century has alluded to this by pointing out that the most perilous moment for a bad government is when it seeks to mend its ways. Only consummate states craft can enable a king to save his throne when after a long spell of oppressive rule he sets to improving the lot of his subjects (De Tocqueville 1840, cited in Sampson 1987). The future of African leadership hinges upon leadership that makes a commitment to the wellbeing of all followers. Changing the past is impossible, but the future is in the hands of the new generation of African leaders.

CONCLUSION

In the light of all the issues of leadership raised, there is a consensus concerning the conclusion that the RECs including the AU and North Africa have made some (albeit modest) achievements with respect to stipulated economic objectives. However, the record of integration in Africa also shows the lack of progress in other areas. African leaders have failed to galvanise support for the integration process. This is because all the efforts at integration by the leaders in the AU, RECs and North Africa have been confined to intergovernmental circles, excluding the ordinary people, civil society from this process. The future of leadership in these African organisations hinges upon the commitment by leaders to form partnerships with the people in their communities. Leaders who live by the tenets of consultation, persuasion and accommodation are required. These are leaders who shun coercion and domination. Ancient and modern history has witnessed the achievement of these African leaders in all spheres of life, social, economic, religious, scientific and political. It can be deduced from the discussion in this paper that these leaders were in Africa before colonial oppression and they will be in Africa long after Western domination has ended.

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