

Current leadership challenges in Africa

The Case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo

M M Tshiyoyo

School of Public Management and Administration
University of Pretoria
South Africa

ABSTRACT

For decades the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been through coups d'état, civil wars, rebellions, political turmoil and instability, and it also faced aggression from its neighbouring countries in recent years. Although the DRC is a vast country which is endowed with various mineral and natural resources, the indicators of the UNDP (2011) have ranked the country last on the list. One would not understand how a country that is potentially the richest on the continent can rank among the poorest countries on the world.

This article examines leadership challenges and governance imperatives in the DRC focusing on the current leadership issues. This is done in order to clarify the extent to which leadership challenges impact on governance and hamper development. This analysis is essential as it will pave a way for one to examine the governance imperatives and come up with suggestions that might assist in addressing the challenges the DRC is faced with. The article relies on the available literature review and the author proceeds to the analysis of the trends and developments taking place in the continent and particularly in DRC in order to demonstrate how the past has affected the current situation in the DRC. In its conclusion, the article considers that a transformational and authentic leadership style is essential in creating an environment that promotes the attainment of governance requirements for the development of developing countries, in general, and the DRC, in particular.

INTRODUCTION

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 taken it upon themselves to be of assistance and ensure that all countries are governed by principles upholding regular and free elections, universal suffrage, a multi-party system, the rule of law, sovereignty, the protection of human rights and peace and security (Kuye 2010:262). One can assert that governance implies a complexity of activities, pluralistic in nature, inclusive in decision-making, set in a multi-institutional organisational context, empowering the weaker sections of society, and geared to achieve the generally accepted common good. Finally, it is founded on the four pillars of legitimacy, transparency, accountability, and morality/spirituality (Olowu & Sako 2002:39).

Different systems need different kinds of leaders and different countries, with different cultural backgrounds and at different stages of development, need different systems (Nixon 1982:340). Nevertheless, policy is influenced by internal and external factors. A government policy direction may depend on factors such as war, the environment and public opinion and thus invariably affect development. The African continent has come under the spotlight in recent years in terms of its seemingly slow growth especially when compared to other developing economies such as Asian countries like India and South American countries like Brazil. The African Development Bank (ADB 2001) still identifies governance issues, such as corruption, civil conflicts, political instability, respect for human rights and dignity, and fiscal issues, such as debt and debt servicing, as core factors that will determine the pace and level of development in Africa (Kuye 2011:175).

Tshiyoyo (2011:104) notes that the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a vast country endowed with huge natural and mineral resources. But for decades the DRC has been through *coups d'état*, civil wars, rebellions, political turmoil and instability, and it has also faced aggression from its neighbouring countries in recent years. All these events have impacted negatively on the state and have provoked the decay of public institutions, making the country one of the notorious failed states of the world. Consequently, Zagorski (2009:476-477) insists that if any country deserves the sympathy of the outside world for the injustices heaped up on it during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is the Democratic Republic of the Congo (hereafter referred to as the DRC). Its colonial experience was among the harshest and most tragic in Africa. Its independence era government was among the world's worst. Efforts of the world community to correct problems that outsiders had been instrumental in causing were fitful at best. In this context, one would want to find out how a country that is potentially the richest on the continent can rank among the poorest countries in the world.

This article examines leadership challenges and governance imperatives in the DRC focusing on the current leadership issues. Consideration is given to the historical background of the DRC in order to find a way of looking at the challenges the country is currently facing in terms of leadership. The article relies on the available literature review and the author proceeds to analyse the trends and developments taking place in the continent and particularly in order to demonstrate how the past has affected the current situation in the DRC. This is done with a purpose of clarifying the extent to which leadership challenges impact on governance and hinder development. This analysis is essential as it will pave a way for one to examine the governance imperatives and come up with suggestions that may assist in addressing the challenges the DRC are faced with. Nevertheless, the article considers that a transformational and authentic leadership style is essential in creating an

environment that promotes the attainment of governance requirements for the development of developing countries such as the DRC.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP

Contemporary theories of leadership focus essentially on organisational and inter-organisational contexts and settings. According to Shafritz (2000:193), these theories can be categorised roughly into two types. One type is based primarily on personal attributes and abilities. These include the charismatic and *transformational* leaders whose influence is based on such attributes as intellectual abilities, expertise, and experience. The other type includes the so-called *transactional theories of leadership*, in which influence is based on an explicit social contract, for example, an employment agreement with stated wages, salaries, and working conditions, or a labour contract. Bass (1985) proposes four types of behaviour that he argues are associated with transformational leadership: charisma (idealised influence); inspiration; intellectual stimulation; and individual consideration.

If leadership is what stated above, one would like to find out if leaders ever existed in the DRC. For instance, the country is endowed with numerous natural resources and it possesses a viable workforce that can be maximised to capitalise the country's wealth, but it currently ranks among the poorest countries in the world. In this article the author argues that true leaders would have assisted the country to put in place a system that promotes good governance and provides the stewardship needed for a proper running of public affairs in the country. This has never been possible, because the DRC is considered to be a failed state. It is therefore essential that the next section examines the various eras the country has experienced.

CRITICAL ERAS IN THE HISTORY OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

There are three critical eras that have influenced leadership style in the country. These eras consist of the colonial era, the independence era and the second republic era. The aftermath of the second republic era may be subsumed within the last critical era for the purpose of this categorisation. There is a correlation among these three periods.

Leadership during the colonial era

From the colonial era, the major legacy Europe left for Africa was not democracy as it is practised today in countries such as England, France and Belgium; it was authoritarian rule and plunder. On the African continent perhaps no nation has had a harder time than the Congo in emerging from the shadow of the past (Hochschild 2002). Hochschild (2002) observes that when independence was obtained, the country fared badly. During the colonial era some Africans were being trained for that distant day; but when pressure grew and independence was granted in 1960, in the entire territory there were fewer than 30 African university graduates (Meredith 2006). As a result, the Congo accessed its independence not

having enough cadres to take over from colonialists. This lack created many of challenges the country faced in the next era.

Leadership during the independence era

Congolese independence in 1960 was primarily an expression of the anti-colonial struggle that saw the emergence of new independent nations worldwide. Arnold adds that it is clear, judging from the current performance of African countries, that the legacy they inherited indicates that on granting independence most colonial powers had clearly not focussed on developing infrastructure. Most of the former colonial countries were starting from tiny underdeveloped economic bases. As a result, the independence of emerging countries was hollow and the countries could therefore not achieve sustainable development. This desperate situation forced the leaders of emerging states to seek compromises with their former colonial masters (Arnold 2005).

It is essential to note that a short while after independence the Congo entered into a turbulent phase that was characterised by political instability, rebellions and civil wars that destroyed the fragile legacy of colonialism. What the country went through during its first months of independence, somehow determined what has been going on in that country for the past five decades.

Leadership during the second republic

A few months after its independence in June 1960 the DRC plunged into deep political crisis and social instability. Hence, after the assassination of Patrice Emery Lumumba (Prime Minister at independence) the second republic era started with the *coup d'état* led by Colonel Joseph-Désiré Mobutu (who later renamed himself Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu wa za Banga) in 1965. Mobutu's rule appears to confirm the theory postulated by Frantz Fanon (1963:170-176) regarding the collaboration of the colonialists and certain national elements. For instance, the prolonged life span of Mobutu's dictatorship underscores the power and strength of the collaboration. During the second republic that existed for over three decades, the Congo did not ever hold democratic elections; multi-party democracy was not allowed up until 24 April 1990. Mobutu's autocratic regime dedicated its bankruptcy to three blatant orders of disorder, namely, the order of subversion, which bases society on the will of the arbitrary power of a person presumed absolute, because he is armed; the order of corruption, which institutes private law to replace the law of labour and the law of society; and the order of perversion, because it rebels against everything relating to value (Kinkela 1993:139). The second republic could have not survived for so long without the support Mobutu received from Western powers. This situation confirms Frantz Fanon's theory on compromise.

Fanon's theory on compromise and collaboration between the colonisers and the elite of the colonised society is relevant when one examines leadership in the aftermath of independence, mainly the second republic as the first republic did not last long because of rebellions and political turbulence. Frantz Fanon's theory (1963:170-176) argues that compromise involves the colonial system and the young nationalist bourgeoisie at one and the same time. Fanon's view is particularly instructive as it focuses on the collaboration of what he refers to as a *national bourgeoisie* in the pacification of the masses. The arrangement



hastily made between the colonisers and certain elements of the colonised societies who stood to benefit at the expense of the overwhelming majority created the foundation for the *status quo* in many developing countries. This relationship is a precursor of the unjust, unfair and unacceptable world order in which the benefits of the process of globalisation are accrued largely by the developed countries. The tendency to seek out collaborators capable of protecting one's interests is old and can be traced back as far as the period of slavery, where some chiefs sold their subjects in return for personal benefits.

Leadership in the aftermath of the second republic era

According to Vlassemroot and Romkena (2007:31), the present political leadership in the DRC does not really differ from the leadership during Mobutu's rule. Political power is still largely exercised through networks of patronage. Even if the peace process aimed at instituting a different culture of governance, the end result has seemed merely to be a confirmation of former practices rather than the start of a fresh political system based on accountability, transparency and democratic representation.

The context in which leadership evolves in the DRC can be more readily understood in the light of the history of leaders before and after independence. Since independence in 1960 the country has been faced with institutional and structural problems that have, to a considerable level, shaped the environment in which leadership emerges.

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

The effectiveness of leadership is determined by leaders' ability to overcome the challenges they are faced with in practice. Given the particular context of the DRC, leadership development becomes problematic owing to political, social, economic and environmental factors. Some of the impediments that fall under these categories and which hinder the development of an effective leadership in the DRC are briefly highlighted below.

Governance by predation

Given the predatory behaviour of rulers, it is difficult to enforce the rule of law as there is neither consideration nor respect for the institutions of the state. This behavior, which has persisted in the country's system of governance for the last fifty years, has destroyed the ruler-citizen relationship as the citizens no longer have confidence in their rulers. This has tarnished the image of the public service, which is also incapable of delivering the basic public services to the citizens (Tshiyoyo 2011:109).

Instrumentalisation of the administrative system

"Instrumentalisation" is a dynamic and constant process, notably in strategic areas targeted for reform. The state manifests itself via the administration for security purposes, for example, which is one of its fundamental sovereign prerogatives. In the DRC, the administration is

instrumentalised to reinforce and stabilise political elites (Diouf 2002:33). Given the fact that administrators strive to prioritise political elites' interests above all, it is difficult for an effective administrative leaders to emerge in the administrative domain because public servants are only concerned with serving politicians rather than serving the society.

Corruption

The persistent logic of politics for private gain is probably most visible in Congo's natural resource sector, but other sectors are also skilfully exploited. Most administrative departments have developed their own structures of predation, often based on the creativity of those leading them (Vlassemroot & Romkena 2007:34). The persistence of corruption poses a serious threat to the rise of effective leadership in Congo because leaders will come forward to pursue their own interests and also because corruption paralyses the functioning administrative structures (Nzongola-Ntalaja 1986:52-53).

Lack of a genuine leadership

The problem in the DRC is that from the beginning leadership was imposed by people and forces external to Congolese society. For instance, each regime (head of state) came into power just to fill a power vacuum but never to change the underlying structure of a modern nation-state (Bakaly Sembe 2006:296). As a result, there is an absence of a truly independent national leadership in the country. The troubled Congolese history since the independence made it difficult to develop a leadership that concentrates on national priorities rather than focusing on its own interests or the interests of external backing forces (Wamba-dia-Wamba 2003).

Lack of political culture in the DRC

The long autocratic rule of Mobutu Sese Seko left the Congo without real leaders entrusted with a strong political culture. In most cases, leaders (politicians basically) lust after power not because they have a specific goal or vision they are intending to achieve but only to get rich or richer by any means. For them, public office equates to a golden opportunity for embezzling public funds and misusing public properties. In addition, the members of opposition parties find it difficult to support the government even when its actions are directed towards the welfare of the population or national interests. In this context, governance becomes problematic.

Traps of development

Apart from all the above-mentioned challenges, the last challenge relates to the development traps that are characterised by the conflict trap, the natural resources trap, the trap of being virtually landlocked with bad neighbours, and the trap of bad governance (Collier 2007). The DRC is facing all the afore-mentioned traps. For many years the country has not been able to deal with these traps adequately and there is a lack of strong leaders who can effectively tackle these challenges and establish a system that promotes good governance.



In this article the author insists that because of the challenges mentioned above it follows that the situation in the DRC is serious. But as much as this state of affairs is dire, one needs to also acknowledge that it can be addressed. It will require a change from within, meaning that Congolese people at all levels of the society, and particularly those in positions of power, must be aware of the danger the country is facing and they should rise in order to ensure that things are done in a proper way. especially when it comes to the management of public affairs. Most importantly, this will require the rise of strong leaders who will attempt to reverse the circumstances that have failed the DRC.

IMPERATIVES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND GOVERNANCE IN THE DRC

Mule (2001:74-75) suggests particular imperatives for any state that wishes to find a path to good governance. He identifies the following actions as the imperatives for good governance: create a strong nation-state, foster good leadership, ensure stable and representative constitutional arrangements, defend the role of the state, build capacity and strengthen empowerment, and ensure free and fair elections. Based on the context of the DRC, the following are some of the imperatives one needs to attend to in terms of enabling good governance.

Creating a strong nation state

The greatest challenge in Africa is the creation of a stable, viable, durable nation state. Without the nation state there can be no meaningful talk about governance. Creating a strong nation should be a priority given the state's failure in the DRC. This will require the establishment of a government that strives to maintain peace, law and order; to defend and enhance individual liberties; to maintain checks and balances; and to foster a growing economy. Without good leadership, nothing will happen (Mule 2001:74-75).

A good leadership is characterised by skilled and devoted leaders who strive to achieve better results for their societies. To be successful in this endeavour, leaders must find ways to protect their people, guarantee a voice to all citizens, and make it possible for the economy to grow and the people to prosper. Good leadership in the context of the DRC will promote peace and stability, feature inclusive rule and which will create an environment that enhances the betterment of living conditions of all. In this context, the end result will be the establishment of a system that ensures good governance.

Defending the role of the state

There has been extensive debate about the state and its role. In many cases the state has been seen as the villain; it is now becoming clear that the state is important and what is needed is a good, effective, efficient, but just state (Mule 2001:75). In the DRC, the role of the state should be the one of a protector and regulator. It is very important to have good governance to build capacities and empower the poor and the excluded, and to empower the state itself. It is therefore imperative that the state should empower itself to do the job that it is supposed to do.

Ensuring free and fair elections

Goodwin-Gill (2006:viii-x) argues that in any state the authority of the government can only derive from the will of the people as expressed in genuine, free and fair elections held at regular intervals on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage. States should take the necessary legislative steps and other measures, in accordance with their constitutional processes, to guarantee the rights and institutional framework for periodic and genuine, free and fair elections, in accordance with their obligations under international law. In addition, states should take the necessary policy and institutional steps to ensure the progressive achievement and consolidation of democratic goals, including through the establishment of a neutral, impartial or balanced mechanism for the management of elections. Finally, states must respect and ensure the human rights of all individuals within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction. Mule (2001:75) adds that it is important that there will be free and fair elections regularly and this is a controversial point for governments which are formed after the elections to be inclusive. In the West, there are many *winner takes all* government systems where the political party that wins an election forms the government. In Africa, this approach can lead to problems because African nations typically have multi-ethnic societies. Voting patterns tend to be ethnically determined. When a government, even if it is a majority government, excludes the opposition, it excludes a very significant part of that society. This creates the possibilities for crises. Hence, for governments to be really accepted, they should be all inclusive, and they should be in coalition or compose proportional governments.

On 28 November 2011, the DRC held its second democratic elections in more than four decades. According to Melmoth (2012:59-60) after a presidential election which was declared unreliable by the Carter Centre, European Union, the Congolese Catholic Church, some major civil society organisations as well as an alerted Diaspora, which voiced its opinion from Canada to Australia, even protested violently in Belgium, DRC began 2012 with the controversy surrounding the elections. In spite of the pressure, Kinshasa's regime has not conceded anything. Instead it acknowledged some irregularities and Etienne Tshisekedi, the historic opposition leader, who held second position with 32 %, is confined to his residence where he even proclaimed himself the winner of the elections. This implies that the 2011 presidential and legislative elections brought pre- and post-election tensions that have divided internal and external players in DRC's public affairs. This situation is not new in the African context, because many countries that have held elections have manifested this problem. In this article, the author stresses that elections are of great significance as they give legitimacy to the rulers; but elections should not be considered as an end in themselves. Rather elections should pave a way for peace, stability and development. For instance, the electoral process should inspire a renewed effort to militate the integration of different stakeholders and forming a government of national unity which will mobilise the country towards the path of stability and development. What happens often is that elections are used by African leaders as means to hold onto power even when governments have not been able to implement a single policy towards enhancing the living conditions of citizens.

The responsibility that rested upon the winners of the 2011 elections, be it at the presidential or the legislative, was to operate differently as they did previously because the Congolese people deserves to have a civilised state which is ruled according to basic principles of good governance.



CONCLUSION

This article has examined leadership challenges and has also outlined governance imperatives in the context of the DRC. The article first explained the context in which leadership has evolved in the DRC through a brief overview of the country's history. This survey introduced a discussion by providing an overview of the concept of leadership followed by the critical eras in the history of the DRC, leadership challenges and the imperatives of public administration and governance in the Congo. The article has argued that governance is about affecting the frameworks within which citizens and officials act and politics occurs, and which shape the identities and institutions of civil society. It is in this context that one may then consider governance as the institutional capacity of public organisations to provide the public and other goods demanded by a country's citizens or their representatives in an effective, transparent, impartial, and accountable manner, subject to resource constraints. It is claimed that, when the historical background of the DRC is considered, governance should be concerned with the government's efforts to strengthen the organs of the state in order to tackle the socio-economic crisis that has paralysed most of public institutions and then impeding the proper functioning of the state's apparatus. Given the state's failure in the DRC, creating a strong nation should be a priority. This will require a leadership which is transformational in nature and leaders that will provide stewardship needed to put the country on the track of development.

A transformational leadership style is essential, as leaders will strive to revitalise the country through the renewing of the mind set of rulers and followers. Although the DRC's crisis seems dire, there is however hope that, with good leadership, the country can rise up again and become a major player on the continent. This hope is nurtured by some of the best practices given as evidence by some African countries that are striving to make a difference by disposing effective leaders who are in turn striving to put their respective countries on the path of stability and development.

REFERENCES

- Arnold, G. 2005. *Africa a modern history: on compromise of the new political leaders*. London: Atlantic Books.
- Bass, B.M. 1985. *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York: Free Press.
- Bakaly Sembe, G. 2006. The limits of state power in Africa: A case study of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Newport, Wales. http://www.congovision.com/livres_mputu4.html (accessed 14 April 2007).
- Burns, J.M. 1978. *Leadership*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Collier, P. 2007. *The bottom billion: Why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Diouf, M. 2002. Les poissons ne peuvent pas voter un budget pour l'achat des hameçons. Espace public, corruption et constitution de l'Afrique comme objet scientifique. *Le Bulletin de l'APAD*, 23–24:23–41.
- Fanon, F. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth: On compromise and collaboration of emerging national states*. London: Penguin.
- Goodwin-Gill, G.S. 2006. *Free and fair elections*. New expanded edition. Geneva: Inter Parliamentary Union.
- Hoschild, A. 2002. *King Leopold's ghost: on the legacy of colonial rule*. London: Pan.

- Kinkela, V.K. 1993. Rapport final des travaux de la Conférence Nationale Souveraine. *Zaire-Afrique*, 273:135-199.
- Kuye, J.O. 2010. Unplugging the leadership quagmire: The case for the developing countries. *Journal of Public Administration*, 45(1.1):261-282.
- Kuye, J.O. 2011. Leadership and governance imperatives in a developmental state: The debate for a public policy dialogue. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 4(1):170-185.
- Melmoth, S. 2012. RD Congo: un géant à l'arrêt. *African Magazine* (Février), 317:59-60
- Mule, H. 2001. Challenges to African governance and civil society. *Public Administration Development*, 21:71-76.
- Nixon, R. 1982. *Leaders*. London: Sidgwick and Jackson.
- Nzongola-Ntalaja, G. (ed.) 1986. *The crisis in Zaire: myths and realities*. New Jersey-Trenton: Africa World Press.
- Olowu, D. and Sako, S. (eds.) 2002. *Better governance and public policy: Capacity building for democratic renewal in Africa*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press.
- Shafritz, J.M. (ed.) 2000. *Defining Public Administration: Selection from the International Encyclopaedia of Public Policy and Administration*. Cummor Hill, Oxford: Westview Press.
- Tshiyoyo, M.M. 2011. Civil service in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. *African Journal of Public Affairs*, 4(1):103-113.
- UNDP. 2011. Human development report 2011. Sustainability and equity: a better future for all. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
- Vlassemroot, K. and Romkena, H. 2007. *Local governance and leadership in Eastern DRC* (May). Goma: Oxfam-Novib.
- Wamba-dia-Wamba, E. 2003. The failure of an African political leadership (18.07.2003). Interview. <http://www.zmag.org/content/Showarticle.cfm?Sectional/> (accessed 14 April 2007).
- Zagorski, P.W. 2009. *Comparative politics: continuity and breakdown in the contemporary world*. London and New York: Routledge.