Effective leadership and sustainable development in Africa: is there “really” a link?

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Abstract

Purpose – The paper aims to review the concept of leadership as practiced in the West and in Africa, and goes on to establish the link between these two approaches and sustainable development in Africa. It does this with the view of assessing their implications for the attainment of sustainable development on the continent through a developed leadership–impact–effect conceptual model.

Design/methodology/approach – In seeking to achieve its purpose, the paper uses a literature review approach to assess the leadership orientation in the West (particularly in relation to effective leadership) as against the studied leadership situation prevalent in the African continent to find out their impact on development (sustainable).

Findings – Findings from the paper reveal a great disparity between the leadership situation in the African continent and the attainment of sustainable development. It also affirms a link between effective leadership approaches, like the transformational leadership approach, and the attainment of sustainable development.

Practical implications – Based on the findings, it is recommended that African leaders resort to effective leadership styles, with a great emphasis on the transformational style, which integrate creativity, vision and participation, as it attempts to create sustainable development for the citizenry in the continent.

Originality/value – The paper demonstrated the relevance of effective leadership in ensuring sustainable development in Africa and as a tool for achieving economic growth and development.

Keywords Culture, Sustainable development, Africa, Effective leadership

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The performance of any nation, in seeking to achieve its set goals, to a large extent depends on its leadership. The reason being that effective leadership translates into prudent public policy formulation and implementation, as well as good public service delivery, to meet the needs and aspirations of citizens. In this post-independence period, there have been ceaseless searches for the rationale behind the depressing trajectory of African economies. Some Asian economies (South Korea and Malaysia) that were in some decades past faced with similar development challenges are currently being hailed as “economic miracles” (Akyuz and Gore, 2001 as cited in Kuada, 2010), while the situation in Africa is been described as a “disaster” and a “tragedy” (UNCTAD, 2004 as cited in Kuada, 2010). The reasons cited for such poor performance in Kuada’s (2010) study include institutional and structural weaknesses (Yeats et al., 1996; Killick et al., 2001), limited attention to private enterprise development (Fafchamps et al., 2001), poor governance
(Nwankwo and Richards, 2001), management incompetence (Kamoche, 1997) and limited staff motivation (Okpara, 2006; Okpara and Wynn, 2007). Indeed, according to Ochola (2007) and Everest-Philips (2012), Africa’s poor economic development despite its vast wealth or resources is as a result of weak leadership. Ochola (2007) further opines that leadership in Africa is typically ineffective and characterized by susceptibility to the complex global economic system. Paradoxically, the majority of the elite group in Africa who rise to leadership positions appear to have been educated in Western countries, but still lack the capacity to adapt or translate the ideas they have learned to address Africa’s development challenges.

In hindsight, this scenario exposes the flaws in the argument that African leaders will be more efficient and effective if they approximate Western practices. However, research has shown that there exist successful leadership practices all over the world (Whitley, 1994; Sørensen and Kuada, 2001). The divergent perspectives outlined above provoke several debates and intellectual expositions. Disparity in the level of development, and for the purposes of this study, sustainable development, in Africa and that of Western countries are obvious and constantly deepening. But to what extent could this canker be attributed to leadership? Similarities in leadership flaws and under-development across the African continent as opposed to the happenings in the Western context place culture at the center of this leadership-development discourse (Leonard, 1987).

In view of the above issues raised, this paper seeks to conceptually ascertain how leadership as pertaining in Africa and effective leadership as practiced in the West are linked to the attainment of sustainable development. It further goes on to provide an overview of the leadership landscape in Africa to bring to bear how leadership is conceptualized and practiced in Africa.

The concept of leadership
A review of the leadership literature provides one with a plethora of definitions and theories, all of which are defined or propounded to suit the perception of the authors who suggested them, or as descriptions of the leadership landscape that existed during certain eras or periods of human life. This dynamism or unsettling nature of discourses on the concept of leadership may be attributed to the dynamic nature of the concept itself. The construct of leadership, as a determining factor to the realization of collective goals fueled by man’s insatiable needs dictated by changes in time and also its interaction with a wide range of entities (individuals, assets and community) with different demands and behaviors must always seek to catch up to ensure its relevance, hence, its dynamic nature. Therefore, an attempt to hazard a definition that comprehensively captures or encapsulates what leadership is about would be an exercise in futility. However, an examination of the various theories (with a greater focus on contemporary ones) that have emerged on leadership provides some foundation to its understanding and appreciation.

Older theories on leadership looked at the concept on a wide spectrum. Some of these theories personalized the concept looking at it as a role only attainable by individuals born with certain innate qualities or personal characteristics – Great Man and Trait theories. Some also looked at it considering the behaviours or the actions exhibited by individuals in such leadership roles – Behavioural theory. Finally, also others looked at it as a process that is context-specific in nature – Situational and Contingency theories.
However, these theories suffered several flaws as they solely focused on the role of the individual (leader) in achieving set organizational goals, neglecting the importance of the contributions of followers and the need for enhanced relationship between leaders and followers for effectiveness in goal attainment, hence, leading to the emergence of newer theories that were more ideal and effective.

Cooper and Nirenberg (2012) looked at leadership effectiveness from two perspectives: one looked at the perception of leadership effectiveness from a small social group perspective, while the other looked at it from a larger social group perspective (e.g. political arena) with complex structures. According to Cooper and Nirenberg, effective leadership within the small social group perspective would mean “the successful exercise of personal influence by one or more people that results in accomplishing shared objectives in a way that is personally satisfying to those involved” (p. 1). In the larger social group, they said:

[...] it is the successful exercise of attempts at personal influence by one or more people that results in accomplishing organizational objectives congruent with a mission while earning the general approval of their constituencies (in the case of political leadership) or stakeholders (in the case of business and civil society organizations) (p. 1).

According to Cooper and Nirenberg (2012, p. 5):

[...] leadership effectiveness is fundamentally the practice of the following principles: build a collective vision, mission, and set of values that help people focus on their contributions and bring out their best; establish a fearless communication environment that encourages accurate and honest feedback and self-disclosure; make information readily available; establish trust, respect, and peer-based behaviour as the norm; be inclusive and patient, show concern for each person; demonstrate resourcefulness and the willingness to learn; and create an environment that stimulates extraordinary performance.

Some contemporary theories on the concept of leadership, such as transformational and transactional leaderships, have emerged in a normative literature that presents an ideal leadership approach that is linked or connected to effective leadership. These two types are evaluated positively in a meta-analytic study by Judge and Piccolo (2004 as cited in Lai, 2011) – although the former approach was found to be only partially linked (contingency reward) to effective leadership. Other findings have also shown transformational leadership to significantly influence performance at the individual, team and organizational levels (Wang et al., 2011 as cited in Lai, 2011), thus, further affirming the link between transformational leadership and effective leadership. According to Bass (1985 as cited in Rowold and Schlotz, 2009, p. 36), “transformational leadership emphasizes higher motive development, and arouses followers’ motivation and positive emotions by means of creating and representing an inspiring vision of the future”. Warrillow (2012 as cited in Odumeru and Ifeanyi, 2013), described transformational leadership as leadership that “creates positive change in the followers whereby they take care of each other’s interests and act in the interests of the group as a whole” (p. 356). Thus, transformational leadership explains leadership that adopts an effective combination of a holistic and individualistic approach to meeting the collective goals and ambitions of a group. Indeed, it could be described as leadership with full knowledge of how dependent the attainment and sustenance of a collective goal is on the relationship and performance of the individual constituents of a system.
Transactional leadership, on the other hand, refers to leadership based on the attainment of mutual benefits by leaders and followers through an exchange process (Bass, 1985). In painting a picture of what transactional leadership truly represents, some injustice is committed to the theory as most authors project it to be more preoccupied with goal attainment (goal oriented) and less concerned about people. Although this assertion may have validity, it is not entirely true, as some correlation exists between some dimensions of this style of leadership (contingency reward) and individual task performance (Wang et al., 2011 as cited in Lai, 2011). In considering Victor Vroom’s expectancy theory (1964), for any leader (transactional) to successfully motivate employees to perform, he/she would have to ensure that the needs of individual employees are considered and matched with those rewards or incentives that would motivate them to perform (Kuada, 2010); thus, requiring some level of emotional intelligence on the part of the leader (transactional).

However, in an assessment of these two model approaches, some traces of the traditional perception of leadership as postulated by the older theories can still be noticed in the transformational and transactional leadership theories. A critical look at the transformational and transactional leadership theories still portrays that personalized notion of leadership, where leadership is seen to reside in an individual or group of people, especially at the top, and not as a process involving the whole (Sinclair, 2007; Cooper and Nirenberg, 2012); thus, attributing the attainment of set organizational goals to leaders’ vision and ability to influence others. Indeed, according to Nikezić et al. (2012), the transformational leadership style is linked to Max Weber’s charismatic leadership approach, where such leaders are perceived as beings with exceptional traits not found in other people. Another issue Sinclair raised that could be linked to the transformational leadership style is the assumption that all great leaders must have a vision – as captured under the transformational leadership style. According to her, some acknowledged leaders, such as Gandhi, “built their leadership, instead, on some principles of living, and knew that the exact shape of transformation would emerge through collective effort” (p. 66). However, it is not to say that Sinclair advocates for visionless leadership, but rather seeks to warn against the possibility of people placing the relevance of leadership solely on the attainment of organizational goals, which, in turn, inadvertently leads to the development of a leadership mindset that is solely goal oriented and thus would adopt any means necessary to achieve set targets, even when these means are unethical and unsustainable. To Sinclair, as leaders are en route, they may find themselves in an unanticipated circumstance in which they must demonstrate leadership by pausing and recognizing the situation at hand. This philosophy of Sinclair postulates that the vision that leaders put across to their followers may be threatened by unanticipated obstacles in the present which leaders have to overcome now. Thus, leadership should not be perceived as solely the attainment of goals but also a learning process which would, in turn, lead to the development of resilience in both the leader and followers.

Furthermore, the idea that transactional leaders are able to influence the behaviors of followers toward the attainment of set goals by way of rewards, projects the transactional leadership style as one that perceives followers or human resources as means or instruments to reaching an end (Sinclair, 2007). Such a form of leadership although perhaps effective in the short-term may lead to unethical and unsustainable behaviors in the future (Hargreaves and Fink, 2003). For instance, considering a
hypothetical situation where all members of a group have reached self-actualization (Abraham Maslow need’s theory), and thus, are not faced with any order of needs, does the group crumble due to the impossibility of the leader identifying a need factor to motivate members toward set goals? Or with what would the leader transact or engage in such exchanges with members toward goal attainment?

To conclude, although these two leadership styles (especially transformational leadership) have been proven to be linked with effective leadership, it is important for a “critical understanding of leadership that questions the very intent and assumptions of most leadership thinking” (Sinclair, 2007, p. 66). In view of this, Sinclair thus poses the following questions as the way forward to understanding leadership:

What are the purposes to which leadership is being put? Who benefits from those purposes? Who or what may suffer or be adversely affected, perhaps in subtle and not immediately obvious ways? Does leadership act to entrench (for leaders or followers) ways of working and living that are so pressured and materially focused that they are, in the end, unsustainable? (p. 66)

The link between sustainable development and effective leadership

The concept of sustainable development was popularized by the World Commission on Environment and Development in the Brundtland report as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). However, many scholars have given several interpretations to the concept. According to Malia and Clarkson (2009), the sustainable development concept is complex and multifaceted. The various perspectives on this subject are embedded in people’s own beliefs regarding sustainable development. No wonder sustainable development is viewed by politicians in terms of community projects; by businesses as goods and profits; by environmentalists as a means of enabling efficient use of natural resources; and by the masses as a means of meeting their needs as well as a strategy for alleviating poverty.

Sustainable development defies a single definition due to its multifaceted and multidimensional nature. Two major schools of thought, however, attempt to tackle the concept in a better perspective. According to ecologists, sustainability literally refers to the preservation of the state and function of the ecological system. Meanwhile, sustainability is considered as the maintenance and improvement of the lives of humans by economists.

However, Mckeown (2002) proffers that the central tenet of sustainable development reveals three distinct components: environment, society and economy that are intertwined and not separated. Thus, achieving sustainable development requires a more balanced relationship among the environment, society and economy in pursuit of development and improved quality of life. Robert Solow summarizes the concept of sustainable development by suggesting that sustainability cannot be expressed by any means less than a sanction that preserves productive capacity for posterity (Solow, 1986, 1999).

Sharma et al. (2009) conducted a study that examined the constructs that affect sustainable development among Village Development and Security Committee members in Malaysia. The study revealed that leadership was perceived as imperative in promoting sustainable development by the rural community leaders. The study identified that effective leadership helped the villages to develop in times of peril the
capacity to overcome the social and community challenges that confronted them and granted them the ability to meet the needs of the people. This points to the fact that it is important for leaders to be visionary and have a wider perspective of issues that confront them beyond their immediate environment to satisfy the tenets of sustainable development. This attitude grants leaders an edge to conquer the challenges and problems of current times while having the ability to implement decisions that are timely, complete and responsive. The study also revealed that the absence of good leadership could lead to situations where activities in the villages would stagnate and move out of order. This construct could be supported by the need for management control in organizations that shapes individual behaviours, coordinates resources, both human and material and directs the efforts of the individual workers toward the achievement of the organizational goals. This helps to produce maximum benefit and helps in the growth and survival of the organization. The same could be said of effective leadership if it is replicated at the national level. Effective leadership has the propensity to coordinate the resources of a country to promote sustainable development. Similarly, Perren and Burgoyne (2001) identified a set of key management and leadership abilities from a study that was conducted by the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership on leadership qualities that impact upon sustainable development. From the study, eight meta-groups of three generic categories were deduced from 83 distinct management and leadership abilities that were identified. These three categories and groups were as follows:

(1) Thinking abilities: ability to think strategically.

(2) People abilities: self-management, managing and leading people, direction and culture, managing relationships.

(3) Task abilities: managing information, managing resources, managing activities and quality.

From the findings of the above study, it is evident that peculiar leadership skills are required for sustainable development to be realized in any setting. These skills and abilities involve a leader’s ability to be visionary, have control over people and also manage tasks in a way that ensures efficiency and effectiveness.

Leadership experienced in post-independence Africa, however, has manifested several instances of incompetence, ineffectiveness and unresponsiveness to the needs of present and even future generations. To gain full insight into the issue, there is the need to comprehensively look or assess the leadership landscape in Africa pointing out those elements that pose restrictions to its effectiveness.

Overview of the African leadership landscape

Leadership in Africa: the “topsy-turvy”

According to Nasir (2010), there have been several anomalies under the stewardship of post-independence African leaders. In his view, infrastructural development in many African countries has fallen into disrepair and currencies have grossly depreciated in the midst of high costs of living compounded with unemployment, poor healthcare, falling educational standards and lower life expectancies. In view of this, Nasir argues that ordinary life has been put under pressure coupled with the deterioration in general security, increased crime and corruption and the diversion of public funds into
concealed off-shore accounts, as well as prevalent civil war emanating from officially sanctioned ethnic discrimination.

A World Bank report in 1989 blamed Africa’s underdevelopment and devastation on “the crisis of government” (Alemazung, 2011). This is supported by statistics on how leaders left office in Africa over the past four decades through coups d’etat or invasions and elections (Arthur, 2000) (Table I). Again, Barka and Ncube (2012) held that the low or negative per capita gross domestic product (GDP) growth of certain Sub-Saharan African countries, as independence was as a result of their experience of more military coups than countries that had higher per capita GDP growth rates.

In addition to the above, many scholars have opined that the culture of Africa is also responsible for the leadership practices experienced on the continent (Leonard, 1987; Jackson, 2004; Bolden and Kirk, 2009). For instance, Leonard (1987) asserts that the differences between organizational behavior in the continent and the West are as a result of fundamental distinctions in leadership thinking and not merely managerial failures. According to Kuada (1994), the leadership thinking in Africa is more of the sovereign-subject approach, where leadership poses high restrictions on the ability of followers to be creative and independent in thinking – quite contrary to what pertains in the West. Kuada argues that the principal function of the loyal employee in Africa is to serve as a buffer for the immediate superior. For this reason, such a loyal subordinate is expected to do all he or she can to blame others, not excluding himself, to protect the image of his or her boss. A similar situation occurs where employees share mutual concerns but pretend they know nothing about the situation at hand and so conceal errors. Argyris (1990, 1993) has described such defensive behaviors as “skilled incompetence”.

According to Alemazung (2011), all societies in the world require positive development in terms of socio-economic and politico-cultural dimensions of their countries. In societies where people live in freedom and prosperity, leaders of such societies broadly give priority to issues upon which the common good of their people depends, resulting often in a further developed and even more free people. Leaders in such societies often serve their people by working hard to place national interests above their personal interests being mindful that the huge price they pay for projecting their interests above that of their people, even to the extent of losing the opportunity to serve their people. Alemazung further opines that political development in Africa has been influenced and characterized by flaws most often in the form of attitudes of political actors, which over time have become frequent and peculiar to the continent. In its extreme, these trends in leadership flaws have become part of the political culture of the African system. Even though these weaknesses are common beyond African systems,

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Coups d’état</th>
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<td>1960–1969</td>
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<td>1970–1979</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>1980–1989</td>
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<td>2000–2012</td>
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Source: Arthur (2000) and Barka and Ncube (2012)
the dimension in which they manifest themselves in Africa and the impact they have on the socio-economic and political evolution is not only peculiar but deplorable for the continent. These leadership flaws according to Alemazung can basically be categorized into: unconstitutional leadership behaviours, unaccountable political leadership and weak multicultural political systems.

**Unconstitutional leadership behaviours.** Alemazung raised several leadership issues that border on disregard for the respective constitutional provisions by some political African leaders. According to him, the seizure of power and rule by oppression are both common phenomena in Africa that greatly influence political developments on the continent, especially the transition to democracy. Wangomeby (1985) described the 1960s as the “decade of coups in Africa”. The majority of coups during this period involved military takeover, and by 1975, an estimated half of all countries on the continent had military or civil-military-led governments. Election, as the mechanism to select rulers, was greatly undermined and “disqualified” in unitary/centralized states of post-independent Africa. Within the period 1960-1970, more than 20 coups were conducted in Africa. Examples found in the 1960s coup decade include the following: in Togo, Etienne Eyadema killed President Silvanus Olympio in 1963 and later in 1967, took over and stayed in power through a repressive and tyrannical rule until his death in 2005 (Meredith, 2005); in Congo-Brazzaville, the government of Abbe’ Youlou was overthrown in August 1963; in Dahomey, Colonel Christophe Sogho overthrew President Maga in December 1963; again, the overthrow of President David Dacko of Central Africa Republic in January 1966 and that of President Kwame Nkrumah by General Ankrah in February 1966 are just a few of the total number of coups in the continent. Indeed, in Malawi, the president, Kamuzu Banda bluntly made a statement to the effect that he was ready to detain up to ten thousand or one hundred thousand to maintain political stability and efficient administration in the country (Meredith, 2005). Unfortunately for Africa, these leaders neither ensure political stability nor do they run efficient administrations as a result of greed and love for power. De facto autocratic rule combined with an absence of de jure democracy is partly due to a leadership culture of “president for life” or access to power by coup which emerged in these societies and established itself through a “political socialization” process that characterised the post-independence elite rulership generations.

Again, the egoistic style of rulership in pursuit of personal interest and preservation of power has also encouraged the “family-nization” of state powers and institutions in Africa. Gabon is a good illustration of the genesis and emergence of “love for power” and “family-nization” of politics. Gabon’s former president, Omar Bongo took power in 1967 upon the death of the country’s first president, Leon Mba. Bongo later dissolved all political parties and established his Parti Démocratie Gabonais (PDG) as the only political party of the country and the only forum for political dialogue and criticism (Yates, 2005). From this period until his death in 2009, Bongo, besides being the president, still occupied many ministerial positions.

In response to criticisms in the 1980s for his numerous ministerial occupations in addition to the presidency, Bongo decided to appoint his children and other members of his family to ministries so as to retain control of these ministries. While Bongo was running the country with his family, he also did what his counterparts in Democratic Republic of Congo and Togo did by simply preparing his sons to eventually inherit the presidency upon his death. In Togo, in February 2005, after the long serving tyrant ruler,
Gnassingbe Eyadema’s death, he was unconstitutionally succeeded by his son Faure Gnassingbe. The people of Togo, as well as the African Union and external powers, protested against this gesture and the disrespect for the state constitution.

Unaccountable political leadership. Leadership in Africa is seriously plagued with issues of corruption and unaccountable governance. According to a report by the BBC’s Africa Analyst, Elizabeth Blunt in September 2002, corruption in Africa was said to cost the continent nearly USD150 billion. Corruption and embezzlement of state resources belong to the worst examples of immoral practices of political societies in Africa and places the continent at the fore front of the world corruption league table. Thus, bad governance in African countries can also be considered to result from the lack of statesmen in the position of governors. Corruption and state robbery is endemic in almost all African countries and is a serious flaw in African leadership. In addition to corruption, kleptocracy and the unjustified amassing of state resources by some irresponsible leaders have stunted development and exacerbated the level of poverty. Furthermore, embezzlement of state funds accounts for a meaningful proportion of funds that could have helped improve the impoverished state of Africa if properly invested in developmental projects. In 2009, Transparency International (TI) filed a case against three African presidents for embezzlement. According to TI these leaders, Omar Bongo of Gabon, Denis Sasou Nguesou of Republic of Congo and Teodore Obiang Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, embezzled millions of euros from their respective countries. It must be noted that despite the oil produced in Gabon and Equatorial Guinea and with a population of < 2 and < 1 million, respectively, a vast majority of the people in these countries live in abject poverty.

Weak multicultural political systems. The forced unification of diverse ethnic groups and cultures into “nation-states”, an outcome of the colonial arbitrary division of the continent, is one major characteristic of modern African states. Eboussi (1997) asserts that Africa as a continent has a unique make-up known as “nation of nations” which considers the ethnic groups in each nation as micro-nations. The diversity in ethnic groups in many of the new independent states has resulted in the creation of parties along ethnic lines. Ethnic division in Africa laid the foundation for tribalist-politics which, in turn, encouraged clientelism and neo-patrimonial politics. The result is a political setting that opposes democratic states and hampers their respective transitions to become successful and functional democracies (Bayart, 1993). Democracy’s characteristic value on equality and rule of law poses a threat to the advantaged and privileged power holders and their political clients in ethnically divided societies in Africa. Due to fear of losing power, rulers rely on division resulting from the ethnic plurality as a mechanism for consolidating their stay in power in a neo-patrimonial order (Acemoglu et al., 2004). Clapham (1985, p. 57) postulates that “one of the strongest, most alluring, and at the same time most dangerous forms of clientelism, is the mobilization of ethnic identities”. Ethnic division provides a fertile ground for political mobilization along patron-client networks. Moreover, ethnic division or tribalist-politicking has a disenfranchising effect on democracy “because it deprives voters of the power to hold their politicians truly accountable through common action with other voters across the land” (Lonsdale, 1986, p. 141).

Contrary to patrimonialism defined by Max Weber (1978) as a system where military and administrative personnel owe their positions of responsibility to the ruler, neo-patrimonialism in Africa combines elements of patrimonialism and rational...
bureaucratic rule (Clapham, 1985; Bratton et al., 1997; Erdmann, 2002). Unlike in patrimonial systems where there is one patron, the ruler, neo-patrimonialism revolves more around the arrangement of services and resources between clients and political patrons. Exchanges in neo-patrimonialism involve the transfer of public resources (e.g. money, ministerial positions and contracts) by the political patrons as a reward for loyalty or support from the people (Weber, 1978). Clientelism, another side of neo-patrimonial rule, is basically the exchange of services or state resources for political support from ethnic-based politicians serving as clients to the ruling patron. Thus, in most countries, where the transition processes of the second liberation is stalled, there still exists the challenge of breaking down this clientelist network in favour of de facto democratic institutions.

Discussion
A critical assessment of the African leadership landscape as captured above portrays a leadership landscape marked by every single characteristic of bad leadership. The leadership landscape of Africa paints the picture of one that is struggling to meet the needs of the present, let alone those of the future. The idea of sustainable development looks at sustainability from three development dimensions – economic, social and environmental in relation to two time frames – the present and the future. It advocates the balancing of these three dimensions to ensure the sustenance of the human race presently and in future. In view of this, there has been a clarion call at both national and international levels for a change in consumption and production patterns to ensure the availability of resources for future consumption and production. To achieve this, leadership at both national and organizational levels would have to adopt leadership styles that engenders a sense of shared responsibility toward the attainment of this goal; one that is focused on the long-term, and thus would establish systems that would persistently ensure the pursuance of this goal in the future; one that understands the need for collective effort (at both national and organizational levels) toward the attainment of the sustainability goal; one that is willing to learn; and, finally, one that is in itself ethical, and thus would impress upon followers the need to behave in a like manner. This is in view of the fact that the sustainable development agenda is one that requires an all-hands-on-deck approach by way of a collective leadership approach between players in industry (including civil society groups) and government.

However, as can be gathered from the African leadership landscape presented above, it is evident that leadership in Africa lacks this approach to governance or leadership. This situation thus shrouds the possibility of Africa attaining sustainable development. Thus, for African leaders, in both industry and government (especially government), to succeed in forging-on toward the attainment of such a goal, they would have to conduct themselves in a responsible, transparent and accountable fashion as captured under the concept of good governance.

The current study in its bid to aid with the proper understanding and appreciation of the impact and effects of the current African leadership approach and contemporary leadership approaches (transformational) on sustainable development provides the LIE conceptual framework in Figure 1 below. The framework shows two main leadership styles; one built on a desire to get a particular job done and make a living while the other is built on man’s need for meaning (Covey, 1992). The former results in poverty and
slows down development due to policy failures, lack of trust in leadership and incompetence in dealing with changes that arise from the external environment in the areas of technology, economic transformations and politics. These qualities are usually the hallmark of the transactional leadership style.

The alternative approach involves a leadership style that manages resources, is visionary and ethical, and more oriented toward long-term goals without compromising human values and principles. Furthermore, it is motivated by a vision to achieve goals in the midst of changing environmental factors and the need to involve all stakeholders in the governance process. It reflects the characteristics of the transformational leadership style. The effects of this kind of leadership coupled with coordination and participation of all concerned would potentially lead to improvement in economic efficiency, social cohesion and environmental responsibility. These are the three basic indicators of sustainable development (World Bank, 2005). The achievement of sustainable development is observed as a cyclical relationship with planning and implementation and monitoring of the strategies as key responsibilities of the leader.
Conclusion
In conclusion, for African leadership to succeed in its pursuit of sustainable development, it must adopt an effective leadership style that is more skewed toward transformational leadership. This is in view of the fact that this leadership approach is more strategic, collaborative, adaptive, ethical and sustainable; thus, portraying an approach oriented toward correction of various weaknesses in the political and administrative systems of Africa.

However, in the adoption of such an approach to leadership or any other approach, African leaders and Africans as a whole must bear in mind the following questions as proposed by Sinclair (2007, p. 66):

What are the purposes to which leadership is being put? Who benefits from those purposes? Who or what may suffer or be adversely affected, perhaps in subtle and not immediately obvious ways? Does leadership act to entrench (for leaders or followers) ways of working and living that are so pressured and materially focused that they are, in the end, unsustainable?

All in all, one can vehemently affirm that it all boils down to effective leadership and as the old Nigerian adage goes, “a fish starts to get rotten from the head”, meaning that if the top of the pyramid is good, obviously the bottom will more likely be good too. Hence, in the absence of effective leadership, sustainable development initiatives cannot thrive.

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Further reading


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