17 *Leadership for whom? Interrogating the effectiveness of leadership programmes in Africa*

Ajibola Adigun

Overview

Since Chinua Achebe's pronouncement that Africa's problem is one of leadership, several interventions have been proposed. More than four hundred leadership programmes in Africa claim to develop leaders. Leadership for whom? This chapter examines different leadership programmes and how their goals may be at odds with real development and may fall short of the requirements for real transformation. The chapter interrogates the efficacy of these leadership-for-development programmes, drawing on the African Youth Leadership Study and participant observation in several leadership programmes. Combining both ethnographic primary sources and secondary evaluation of leadership programmes, the chapter finds that although most leadership-for-development programmes say they are transformational, they lack the critical elements of transformative leadership. While they are good for the participants, few programmes yield a transformative element for their communities. This is a result of resource constraints and conflict about goals among funders and participants.

Introduction

Chinua Achebe (1984, p. 1) claimed 'Africa is what she is because her leaders are not what they should be'. Historically, the widening gap between the rulers and the ruled in Africa – an epochal structural change exacerbated by colonialism (Ekeh, 1980) that still exists in the present – made leadership as management the focus of most educational programmes in the heady years of initial independence in African countries. It was taken for granted that with education, a crop of leaders capable of managing the affairs of the people would emerge. This 'talented tenth' were to replace the White colonial officers in running the affairs of the independent African states (Altbach & Kelly, 1978).

First-generation African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Julius Nyerere, and Jomo Kenyatta were awarded scholarships to study in Western institutions and were trained in this mould. The distance made little difference: other incipient elites were trained in colonial universities at home (Hargreaves, 1973). The Edwardian model of universities in Britain, with hall wardens and

hall masters in halls of residence, standing *in loco parentis*, were transported in large numbers to the colonies. The syllabi were imported wholesale, and the first degrees awarded were often degrees in classics, philosophy, and European languages, along with core science subjects. Professional studies would come later, with the nationalisation of universities after the first wave of independence in African countries.

The training of these incipient elites had begun much earlier in mission schools. As Bassey (2009) describes it, Western education in higher institutions was the pathway to political elite status in Africa. The military interregnums notwithstanding, most of those who led the countries during the early independence era were also trained in foreign institutions. In African countries where the military took over the running of the affairs of the state, centralisation of power and command-and-control further undermined the democratic political processes taught in Western institutions.

When incumbent rulers proved too radical, like Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, they became unpopular with the West, especially under the cloud of the Cold War. Subsequently, the use of grants and scholarships to tame radicalisation became popular in willing countries, and pliable citizens took advantage of them. These forms of planned dependence (Samoff, 2001; Samoff & Carol, 2004), or neocolonialism (Nkrumah, 1965) continued the tradition of training managers in the colonies for the benefits of governments and citizens in the metropoles.

Over time, this orthodoxy has merely changed names. It remains popular today as it follows the Western path in development discourse, from Robert Solow's stages of growth, which placed a premium on factor accumulation in developing countries (Solow, 1956, 2001), to modernisation and, more recently, the hype for market-based economies and the consequent championing of entrepreneurship.

It was taken for granted that with education came development, premised on the theory of human capital development. But the results of the educational focus on management have made non-starters of all attempts at development because the structural deficiencies in African polities have not been addressed (Ake, 1989).

These types of management as leadership programmes and education for management programmes have delivered sub-par results as they have not been able to entrench African polities in African societies, which often results in failures in the public service. Often, they ignore the building of sustainable democratic institutions, which require home-grown, organic practices as well as time for a process of social interaction and relationship building. Persons- and position-based styles of leadership have delivered mixed results in development, as in sustainable peace (Olonisakin, 2007).

They have enshrined different forms of authoritarianism, first in the schooling system and, as a result, in the violence perpetuated in the larger society (Harber, 2004; Harber & Mncube, 2012). For instance, as Ibhawoh (1999) shows, the authoritarian imposition of the structural adjustment programmes in Africa – a group of economic reforms to which governments had to adhere in order to obtain loans from the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund – had social costs that still persist, especially in Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya, where campuses were shut down and student leaders arrested for protesting the costs attendant on the removal of government subsidies in education. It is no wonder that despite all the developmental goals set, Africa has missed most of them. Africa is the poorest continent. The least connected. The least educated. The fastest to die.

Africa, which is the continent with the youngest population, has the oldest leaders. The average age in Africa is 19, while the average age of African leaders is 65. The potential for development is dampened by the realities of poverty and the widening gap between the rulers and the ruled. The Globe Project of the Wharton Business School (Wanasika, Howell, Littrell, & Dorfman, 2011) found that middle-level managers in sub-Saharan Africa scored high in the power distance between those they managed and themselves, and that they were a class unto themselves, as they scored high in in-group collectivism. They scored low in performance orientation, which is the most important task of a manager. It is no wonder then that the manager-as-leader model in Africa has yielded dismal results. The project concluded that Africa needs institutions and systems that train the kind of leaders that Africa needs.

As the African Youth Leadership Study (AYLS) shows, there has been a proliferation of leadership-for-development programmes to address this leadership challenge (Strong & AYLS Research Team, 2019). Most leadership curricula miss out some very important aspects. Untransformed systems and institutions only lend themselves to extractive purposes, as we have seen in the past decades of leadership programmes in Africa. Some of these programmes are undemocratic in their practices and may not take into account cultural fit or the priorities of the societies and students in the programmes.

This chapter traces the previous iterations of African leadership programmes from the postcolonial era to the present, exploring how they have changed, how they have not had an impact on the kinds of leaders Africa had and currently has, and how present-day leadership programmes are not fully engendering transformative leadership, despite their claims. The chapter uses the evidence presented to argue that the dearth of transformative leadership, despite all the schools and efforts to train good leaders, is because these programmes do not fully commit to the critical elements in transformative leadership as conceived by Shields (2010).

A review of leadership programmes in Africa

The consensus that there is a leadership challenge in Africa is not undisputed. The Africa Leadership Study shows that in 2019 there were 444 youth leadership for development programmes (YLDPs) in 105 locations across the globe that had as their mission the offering of training, support, or development to African youths with the aim of cultivating leaders for Africa's development (Strong & AYLS Research Team, 2019). The Mo Ibrahim Foundation Prize for African Leadership is worth more than the Nobel Prize. The Ibrahim Prize awards US$5 million, paid out over 10 years, while Nobel Prize laureates receive less US$2 million. The Mastercard Foundation has spent more than US$700 million in scholarships for students in the Middle East and Africa, and there is a Mastercard Foundation scholarship for Africans studying at the University of Pretoria in South Africa. There is also a university dedicated solely to leadership education, namely the African Leadership University in Rwanda.

From the African Leadership Academy, designed for high school students, to the Tutu fellowship, designed for youths who are already leaders in their sectors, the formats of the schemes are varied, as are the targets. From universities dedicated to building leaders for Africa, like the African Leadership University, funded academic immersion programmes like the Schwartzman scholarship in China, to short-term online schemes like the Young Africans Leadership Initiative Network, the length, medium, and target of these leadership-for-development schemes are varied.

The AYLS has identified six types of YLDPs around the world: brick-and-mortar institutions, short-term programmes, scholarships and grants, conferences and meetings, networks, and online learning (Strong & AYLS Research Team, 2019).

Brick-and-mortar institutions are educational institutions where students receive face-to-face instruction from faculty and staff, as well as peer-to-peer interaction. In some instances, brick-and-mortar institutions may have an online or digital component in addition to in-person instruction. They grant a certificate, diploma, or qualification after successful completion of a course of study. These institutions offer various levels of education, from primary to tertiary. Examples of this type of youth leadership initiative include the Noble Hall Leadership Academy for Girls in Nigeria, the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa, the Nova Pioneer Education school network in Kenya and South Africa, and the African Leadership University in Rwanda.

Short-term programmes provide participants with training or experience related to leadership, academics, their professional career, or another area of skill or capacity building. They are often shorter than 12 months, but may be longer than 12 months if they are internships. They take various forms, such as the year-long Obama Foundation Leaders' programme, where 200 participants are selected

to grow a global network of innovative and social change-makers who convene over five days at an inaugural summit, and then participate in several activities over the year. The Chatham House Academy Africa Fellowship offers fellows a stipend and media training, career mentorship, and weekly discussions over a 10-month fellowship period.

Scholarships or grants provide full or partial financial support for an educational programme or project or for a non-profit or business initiative that the scholarship/grant organisation identifies as part of its mission to support young African leaders. An example is the Äänit Prize, launched recently by the Mandela Rhodes Foundation, which supports initiatives that can deliver positive social impact for Africa's most marginalised populations. The prize is open to alumni of the Mandela Rhodes Scholarship and African recipients of the Rhodes Scholarship since 2015. The grant is awarded to businesses or non-profit projects that will deliver social impact, that are considered feasible and sustainable, and that are run by people with the capacity to succeed.

Conferences or meetings are thematic gatherings that bring together individuals with shared interests for the purpose of sharing knowledge, networking, or making decisions based on their shared interests. Events are convened by an organisation or sponsoring body with youth leadership for development as an aim, and participants may be required to be members of the body or pay attendance fees. They are convened on a regular basis and usually last for less than a week. The African Leadership Network Annual Gathering, which is hosted in different African cities by the umbrella organisation of the African Leadership Academy and the African Leadership University, bring together over four hundred participants who are desirous of effecting positive change in Africa.

The networks being promoted connect individuals and organisations who share similar interests, activities, and missions related to education, leadership, youth, or development in Africa. Membership is often required, and a vetting process is made through an application process. The most popular of this type of programme is America's Young African Leaders Initiative, with four regional leadership centres in Accra, Ghana; Dakar, Senegal; Nairobi, Kenya; and Pretoria, South Africa, hosted by the United States Agency for International Development.

Online learning facilitates knowledge sharing, training, and support for the development of leadership skills using online or digital technologies. It may offer certification, virtual conversations on social media, or mentorships. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, some of the other types of YLDP have had to assimilate online learning models as an integral part of their offering due to restrictions in movement and social gatherings.

These six formats of YLDPs are not cast in stone. Brick-and-mortar institutions and scholarships have alumni associations that meet regularly in summits and

virtually to strengthen their networks. Grants, such as the ones from the Tony Elumelu Foundation, combine a grant with online learning, a mentorship platform, and a summit.

The leadership challenge in Africa

The Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership has remained unclaimed for more years than it has been awarded. When the prize was instituted by the South Sudanese billionaire Mo Ibrahim and his foundation in 2007, the aim was to wean African leaders off external motivation from outside of the continent, which often resulted in them doing what is required by external funders rather than what works for the people. Since 2007, the award has only been made six times. The need for the prize in the first place, and the lack of deserving laureates, illustrates the challenge of leadership in Africa.

Chinua Achebe writes that the problem of Nigeria (and Africa) is simply and squarely the problem of leadership. In his words: 'The inability to rise to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of leadership, is the problem of Africa. Africa is what she is because her leaders are not what they should be' (Achebe, 1984, p. 1). The dearth of leadership that is transformational enough to translate into peace and sustainable development, and visible and enduring enough for a better existence for the majority of citizens, has been the cause of the state of underdevelopment in which Africa finds itself. The consequences are dire. Africa remains the problem child of the world, with more poverty and sickness than any other place.

Cilliers (2021) points out that since 1960, the gap between the GDP per capita in Africa and the rest of the world has been growing. African GDP per capita was 50 per cent of that of the rest of the world in 1960, and it fell to below 40 per cent in 1986, and below 30 per cent in 2011. According to Cilliers (2021), average GDP per capita actually declined by more than US$600 from 1980 to 1995. Then, from 1995 to the global financial crisis in 2008–2009, Africa experienced its most sustained period of growth since 1960. However, it is projected that by 2040, GDP per capita in Africa will amount to less than one-quarter of the average for the rest of the world (Cilliers, Bello-Schünemann, Donnenfeld, Aucoin, & Porter, 2017).

Africa Rising and leadership programmes

Why has the leadership problem in Africa remained intractable despite all the efforts of the past and those taking place in the present? It is the argument of this chapter that the leadership challenge and the development challenge in Africa are one and the same. Using data gathered from participant observation in two YLDPs, an evaluation report of the Mandela Washington Fellowship,

and the AYLS longitudinal study, the chapter concludes that most YLDPs are transformational, lacking the ethical and critical dimensions of transformative leadership required for Africa's development.

If Africa is not what it should be because its leaders are who they are, it is imperative to consider the kinds of leadership programmes to which they have been exposed. By doing so, we may come to the conclusion, as Ake (2001) does, that it is not so much that leadership or leadership-for-development programmes have failed as that they never began. It is therefore necessary to find out why transformative leadership programmes were not implemented.

To be clear, transformational leadership and transformative leadership are not the same. Shields (2010), in a review of the literature, submits that transformational leadership, with its four components of setting directions, developing people, redesigning organisations, and managing instructional programmes (Leithwood, 2017), lacks the ethical and social justice dimension of transformative leadership. The distinction between transformational leadership and transformative leadership may be compared to the distinction between growth and development. There may be incremental growth in GDP without corresponding improvement in the lives of citizens. Growth counts numbers, while development counts impact.

Transformative leadership depends on ethical behaviour, democratic processes, and sustainable change. According to Weiner (2003, p. 89), '[t]ransformative leadership is an exercise of power and authority that begins with questions of justice, democracy, and the dialectic between individual accountability and social responsibility').

To what extent then do the YLDPs deliver on the seven major elements of transformative leadership, as outlined by Shields (2010)? Do they combine both critique and promise? Do they contest existing power structures and acknowledge the existence of power and privilege with the goals of making them more equitable? Do they emphasise the importance of the use of private capacities for the benefit of the public good? Do they have as their ends a focus on equity and justice and, in so doing, do they show moral courage and personal conviction in their pursuits?

Ake (2001) argues that the idea that a combination of the colonial legacy, social pluralism, corruption, poor planning, incompetent management, and low levels of saving and investment caused Africa's underdevelopment is misguided. These factors are impediments to development, but they are not the core of the problem, which is that development was never at the heart of these missions. William Easterly (2001), a development economist who worked with the World Bank, confirms Ake's contention. Instead, leadership for development needs to acknowledge the need for moral courage, ethical clarity, and the use of private capacities for the public good as critical elements of leadership.

Transformative leadership as development

Previous attempts at training elites and leaders for the continent have focused on replicating the colonial masters – 'Black skins, White masks' as Fanon (1986) describes them – those who merely replace the colonial officers as managers of resources meant to be shared. Instead, they become hoarders of goods, and their positions of privilege are seldom critiqued, which is a requirement for transformative leadership (Shields, 2010). Most YLDPs fare little better. In an evaluation report of the 2014–2018 cohort of the Mandela Washington Fellowship, the flagship programme of the United States Young African Leaders Initiative, embassies' staff noticed a disturbing trend of a feeling of primacy among participants in the programme, which they found disconcerting (Philbin et al, 2020).

Consent matters for transformative leadership. Consent matters for real development. As Easterly (2001) makes clear, development cannot be coerced. Four decades of several interventions to bring development to Africa, ranging from foreign aid to investment in technology transfer and the buying of machines, to controlling population growth, conditional debt forgiveness, and the structural adjustment programmes, have delivered little.

Two decades after Ake (2001) averred that it is not so much that development had failed as that it never began in the first place, conditions are even worse. Real incomes are lower than they were four decades ago. The average African per capita income (excluding South Africa), inflation adjusted, is US$315, lower than it was in 1960 (Hanke, 2001). Health prospects are even poorer. While life expectancy has risen overall globally, it has risen the least in Africa (Unesco, 2020). Africa has become the epicentre of poverty and disease in the world, and conflicts have ravaged the little infrastructure that remains. There is an education crisis from elementary to higher education. The continent missed the 2015 deadline for universal basic primary education set as one of the Millennium Development Goals, and is already missing milestones set for the new Sustainable Development Goals. There has been neither development nor sustainable development, because no positive transformation has taken place overall on the continent. On the contrary, things have deteriorated.

Furthermore, and adding insult to injury, the continent is portrayed as having 'potential', particularly in the area of youth development and democratisation. However, new waves of democratisation celebrated on the continent have hit a governance bottleneck. The Mo Ibrahim Foundation (2020) reports that governance – the provision of political, social, economic, and environmental public goods and services that every citizen has the right to expect from their government, and that a government has the responsibility to deliver to its citizens – has declined over the past decade. Similarly, while Africa has been lauded for emerging almost unscathed from the Covid-19 pandemic that

ravaged continents with older populations, precisely because of the youthfulness of its population, African youths remain impatient for transformation. The rise of youth-based movements in Africa like #FeesMustFall in South Africa and #EndSARS in Nigeria are not unique: there are many examples across Africa.

YLDPs may yet fail in their target for the future leadership of the African continent if they fall into the same traps as previous efforts. Education matters, but education for what and for whom? If the evaluation report of the Young African Leaders Initiative is anything to go by, some of the programmes are only personal development exercises for the individual students (Philbin et al., 2020). While some of the participants may have intrinsic motivations to return to contribute to the continent's development, these traits and skills have usually been honed in their home country before their participation in these YLDPs. As Strong (2017) notes, when institutional support is given to African youths to obtain practical experiences in their schools, they latch on to it. Most participants in YLDPs report personal and professional gains. What is in doubt is if these personal gains are deployed for societal good.

In her testimony to the United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Strong (2020) asserts that the proliferation of youth protests in Africa are a demonstration of the call for transformational social change. In her three recommendations on how the American government should engage with African youths, two were about how to promote youth-inclusive leadership opportunities and give support to youth leadership development initiatives in their home countries.

Participants in YLDPs who are appointed as leaders and receive personal benefits without concern for the collective will only join the network of the old guild. As it is, there is a new trend of using YLDPs as a recruitment tool in Nigeria. Several programmes in Nigeria have been run by presidential hopefuls. These include the Kashim Ibrahim Fellowship of Governor Nasir El-Rufai of Kaduna State, which offers participants a chance to shadow public servants at work while building professional competencies (Shibayan, 2020); former World Bank Vice President Oby Ezekwisili's School of Politics, Policy, and Governance, which aims to build a pipeline of transformational leaders (School of Politics, Policy, and Governance, n.d.); and London School of Economics and Political Science Professor Kingsley Moghalu's Elevate New Voices Summit, which mobilises youths for transformative leadership (*Vanguard*, 2021).

Conclusion

Development in Africa demands transformation. Youth-led movements like #EndSARS and #FeesMustFall are protestations against police brutality and the colonial legacies of statist control of policing, and against colonial pedagogical continuities in higher education in South Africa. YLDPs that fail to engage with

how the dire conditions in Africa came about will only be making leaders in their own image, inwardly focused on leadership styles and forms rather than on transformation. Development demands proper diagnosis, and the Socratic invocation to know oneself must be at the heart of the continent's transformation. Colonial legacies that drew arbitrary lines on the continent have left communities perpetually in conflict and individuals in conflict with themselves. They not only hamper intra-African trade, but also continue the colonial legacy of Africa as a supplier of primary products to the metropole. Resolving the issues of the flight of human capital, trained using meagre resources, to the West, and the continual dependence of the continent on aid, must start with the widening of the social base of state power. Like the racial integration of Africa's political leaders during independence (Ake, 2001), YLDPs that do not seek to transform the institutional designs that allow the inequities in Africa to persist are merely recruiting incipient elites.

Most of the funders of YLDPs are neither concerned with nor committed to issues of radical social change, although most claim to have progress and development as their goal. In a review of selected YLDP course content, most defined development primarily in consonance with their principal donors. Where donors were primarily private companies, development was defined as ethical entrepreneurial endeavours. Where programmes were government-funded, they defined development in terms of capacity building. Most focused on the individuals delivering change, especially for themselves. How this will translate into radical transformation of societies will be a requirement for YLDPs if they are indeed to succeed in bettering the continent.

#LeadershipDemandsSacrifice

Despite many leadership-for-development programmes in Africa, challenges remain. Participants report personal gains, but many resist the personal sacrifices transformative leadership demands. Most programmes gloss over this.

Questions for discussion

1. What personal sacrifices are required of those who aim to be transformative leaders?

2. How do we challenge aspiring leaders to make these sacrifices? What is in it for them?

3. How could the so-called elite-disconnect (that is, the entitlement that those who participate in leadership programmes display, and the way that while personal gains are recorded, this seldom has an impact on society) be prevented?

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