REIMAGINING AFRICAN LEADERSHIP: THOUGHTS ON STEERING AFRICA

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"I am the spirit indigenous of a time that existed before me
Who understood that time was nothing but
A space that existed before me
To give opportunity to the man that existed after me
You have to understand that for me to be an African
I have to be something that breathes
Oh, of everything that lived before me..." – Larry Kwirirayi, "Afr-I-Can"

I like to think that every human being has a spark within them. That spark, believe it or not, is capable of achieving great things. It has the potential to bring momentous change, change that is everlasting. In Africa, we can probably find over a billion of these sparks, waiting patiently to be brought to light and to bring forth the change that is desperately needed. But what does it take to set our course on fire? Is there a certain type of person, or skill set that is required to ignite the fire within every individual on this continent. If so, is it any different from anywhere else in the world? Personally, I'd like to think that yes, leading Africa is a different affair. Consequently, our legacy, history and future as a continent are different from the rest of the world, and thus require a unique type of leadership.

To begin this conversation, we find that Africa is a continent that is marred by a tragic history, that of colonialism. Colonialism left a huge scar on the African continent - politically, economically and socially. It has had a lasting impact on Africa, particularly on our self-esteem and how we view our heritage as Africans. Our way of life has been shaped in order to emulate that of Westerners. Africans all over wish to speak and eat and live like Westerners. From the music we listen to, to the clothes that we have donned on our backs; everything we do has been shaped by an outside perception of beauty. I believe that one of the key aspects in leading Africa is to reconfigure our imagination on what it means to be an African. African leadership needs to reengage Africans with their cultural heritage to find confidence within themselves and the value they hold to the continent that bred them. Pushing African culture to the forefront among Africa's youth will need courage from African leaders. It requires an extreme self-belief on the part of the leader and the ability to lead both from the back and front; letting the nimble footed race ahead while making sure the slow remain as part of the herd. We need a sound leadership that redefines our identity from that of lesser beings to that of human beings with the agency to achieve anything that they set their minds to. This continent cannot afford to have youth second guessing themselves and their position in the world as people. Our leaders should thus, utilize education as a force to spearhead this change of heart within Africa and inspire us, the youth to believe in ourselves.

In order to reengage our confidence in being "African", leaders need to reevaluate the position of culture in the political and socio-economic systems under which our countries are governed. Is the way our countries are run compatible with the way our societies work? Are there any cultural institutions that are still standing that need to be taken into consideration? Should cultural institutions on the wane be revived? When leading Africa, such questions need to be answered. The answers provided will help create a framework under which our leadership operates. Not only that, these answers will establish the philosophical context under which we assume our role as part of the global community and creators of a new world order, as opposed to being bystanders in the dynamic history of our world. Take for example Ubuntu, one of the most well-known African relational philosophies. Ubuntu identifies our common humanity and equality despite the differences that might exist between people. As a value, it allows individuals to look beyond themselves and validate their existence through the existence of others through the phrase "I am who I am because we are". Imagine if such a relational philosophy could be used in how we define entrepreneurial capitalism in Africa given the correct policies in place. Would we not thrive as a continent if the pursuit of the community's interest brought about sustainable economic and developmental growth? Wouldn't matching our culture and societies with our political and socio-economic systems bring about the latent potential within Africa, and deliver the goals that the continent aspires to achieve?

With that being said, you realize that Africa is on a different developmental path from the rest of the world. Our challenges are vastly different and the way we approach these problems will define our trajectory, and ultimately our destiny as a continent. Alongside the rapid development occurring on our continent that has seen us leapfrog most technical advancements, we face the threat of diseases such as malaria and HIV, extreme poverty and looming climate change. Our population is booming, and employment challenges resulting from this are real and assured. However, Africa has all it needs to thwart these threats. Its leaders will need to manage the abundant natural resources on the continent to provide economic opportunities for all. These resources are ours and Africa's leadership should not be ashamed to claim them, and as they do so, need to be entrepreneurial in identifying how we can best utilize our assets to achieve prosperity.

In as much as Africa is a continent that requires and provides the opportunity for a unique type of leadership, we cannot ignore the fact that our continent does not exist in a bubble. Technology through internet connectivity has opened a new gate of reality. Our youth are being exposed to the outside world more and more and are learning about other cultures other than their own, in and outside the continent. This new knowledge is shaping the way Africans think about the world and their responsibility to our planet. The African leader has, therefore, the unique challenge of keeping the African agenda a top priority in the minds of Africa's youth. In order to do so, African leaders need to exploit new media that has taken the world by storm. The potential capabilities that information technology carries in Africa are enormous. African leaders should be pushing the ICT age in Africa because if we do not participate now, we will not be part of tomorrow's reality. As members of the global community, we should emphasize the need to project our African view to the globe and influence the world view. This can be done through harnessing mobile cellular access in Africa in order to share our stories and vast contributions internationally as well as provide unique innovations to challenges that involve access to services and resources.

With globalization, we find that Africa occupies a space in the world where it is required to work with the rest of the globe. Some of the issues that we face on the continent are common issues that are faced elsewhere on Earth. Being common problems, they require common solutions that require collaboration from Africa's leaders and other leaders in the world. Thus, we will need to collaborate with the rest of the world in the way that we solve these problems in an endeavour to preserve the planet for future generations.

Finally, Africa is a rich continent, with a diverse array of history, culture and people. Its resources, human and natural, are what it needs to take off. Leading it is not only a challenge, but an honour that most people would dream of experiencing. What it takes is for current and future leaders of Africa to appreciate that this space that they hold or will hold, existed before them so that they could create opportunities for the generations that will exist after.