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Let us re-brand and develop our human capital December 15, 2011

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The last week was marked by two functions that are worth noting. On one hand was the World's Anti-Corruption Day and on the other, The Capital Holders and Investors Forum, Nairobi. It is highly unlikely for investments to thrive in an environment fraught with corruption and hence the need to put the two in perspective.

Meanwhile, in team building training, there is a common exercise referred to as 'the water fill.' Teams are made to compete in filling a drum of water, sometimes using holed containers. The water is drawn some distance from the point of filling. Speed and creativity is vital here, in order to achieve fast timings. The exercise is hilarious to observers but very challenging to the participants. Seemingly, this exercise reflects the situation pertaining to our African situation.

In every forum involving African leadership – whether business or political – one of the main items on the agenda is to consider what ails Africa and how the situation can be redressed. In most cases, leader after leader gives his/her views and the matter ends there. The forums turn out to be talk shops because not much is ever implemented thereafter. So, as stakeholders of Africa, we all need to get concerned rather than continually leaving our destiny elsewhere. What actually ails Africa, if we can all ask ourselves?

Philosophy lessons bring out some seemingly contemptuous insinuations by Lucian-Levy Bruhil a European philosopher of yesteryears. Much as we have decided to burry our heads in the sand rather than face the truth, it may be helpful to take heed of the philosopher's remarks however unpalatable. Bruhil says that Africans are illogical thinkers and therefore primitive. Worse still, their actions are guided by occult or magic. This does not sound unfamiliar. Or does it?

On the other hand, going by lessons from Professor Mbiti, the African religion icon, one may tend to violently disagree with the erstwhile European philosopher. This professor says that Africans are overly religious. In fact, every activity of the African is accompanied by prayer and thanks giving to God.

Indeed, childbirth, marriage, planting, harvesting and so on used to be marked by serious communal prayers. Absence of rain, occurrence of disease and other calamities could attract serious religious activities to beseech God's intervention. But, that was then. Our societies were guided by age old values which were practiced religiously. What is happening today?

Needless, to apportion blame, we need to ask whether we could be victims of fast-tracking of the African 'civilization.' Could aping of our Western brothers and sisters have caused more harm than good to the society? More appropriately, have we tried to copy other people's values and abandoned ours to our own detriment? The answer may certainly not be surprising.

Indeed, there were value systems that guided African education, religion, government, procreation and even economic activities amongst others. Sadly most of the value systems have in the course of time, become subject to erosion and societal decay. It is no wonder then that there have been endless meetings aimed at finding solutions to problems that we have largely created, maybe out of sheer ignorance.

Probably, it is time for us to start analyzing our behaviors vis a vis the values that so strongly helped us to progress earlier on, even in our own naivety. We may find that the solutions lie squarely on our feet. There are many reasons which lead to this conclusion. Sadly, they cannot be addressed exhaustively in this article. However two of them, have fundamentally given rise to our woes and therefore need to be highlighted.

Firstly, the practice of leadership in the African context could be a challenge. Leadership as practiced in the civilized west is a selfless process of bringing change and progress in the interest of the society. The process holistically addresses all the challenges encountered by the citizenry. In fact, the efforts of all in leadership are geared towards bringing continued progress.

That is why Tony Blair the Labour British Prime Minister (1997 – 2007) handed over leadership to Gordon Brown, probably after realizing that his ideas were becoming ineffective. Ironically, Gordon Brown was to be kicked out by David Cameron (Conservative Party) in 2010, after only 4 years at the helm. In the US, President Obama is currently strategizing on how to win the hearts of Americans in 2012, especially haunted by poor economic realities, which have led to unprecedented high unemployment levels. What about our African setting?

Needless to venture into the intricate details, leadership in Africa could be a different ball game. It is mostly about pursuing personal interests and agendas of backers at the cost of the welfare of the citizens. Personal enrichment therefore becomes a key objective compared to the business of leading. Leadership, if we can borrow wise counsel from Author John Maxwell, entails being in office to serve the interests of all. Further, integrity accounts for 71% of the attributes expected of those in leadership. So, are African leaders in the business of leading?

Then, most African countries experience crises after crises. The leaders become crises managers who are invaluablely unable to embrace innovative leadership that could yield consistent progress. The latter leadership could strategically suppress or better still foresee and deal with the calamities constantly experienced.

Secondly the attitudes and approaches of our leaders have brought forth poor cultures, which have largely been embraced by the citizenry. Actually, how can citizens be any better than the leadership models? The citizenry have largely taken to the leaders. It is about making money in whichever way possible, by both the natural and corporate citizenry. Work ethics has largely lost meaning to the majority. Thus, those who are nowhere near money minting opportunities become bystanders.

The employed become de-motivated, therefore unleashing only 10-20 per cent of their performance potential, as advocated by Author Zig Zigglar and other management gurus. Therefore, in a 40 hour working week, effective work efforts translate to only 4-8 hours. Elsewhere, the unemployed booze themselves to death. What a waste of man hours and time resource? How then can Africa grow when the resources are so poorly utilized or allocated?

Obviously, the world wealth is made in organizations. Therefore, let all organizations and institutions go to back the drawing board. We need to re-focus our work ethics. We need to re-examine our leadership and motivation approaches. For a start, we need to realize that the human is the utmost of all other resources in this knowledge era of the 21st Century. Let us re-brand them all by aligning talent and work ethics. Let us reward the human resource for performance. Let us retain our human capital by putting an end to brain drain. Only then shall we be on the path towards conquering the poverty enemy that Africa has continually imposed on itself.

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