**LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNMENT IN AFRICA:**

**OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES**

**Delivered at**

**The Young Political Leadership School Africa Meeting**

**Held in Monrovia 15 October 2019**

**By**

**Toga Gayewea McIntosh, (PhD)[[1]](#footnote-1)**

Africa captivates the world’s imagination, for good or for ill. To some, it is the birth place of mankind, a continent with profound historical importance. To others, Africa is yesterday’s sad story - a continent burdened by the history of slavery and colonial domination, overtaken by peoples of other nations in their march towards progress. And yet to others, Africa is the new frontier in the relentless march of globalization. With an African land space hosting a little over a billion consumers, Africa provides a profitable market. Young Africans, what would you say Africa is to humanity in present day Africa? What would we say?

Mr. Executive Director and members of NAYMOTE

Officers and Members of the Young Political Leadership School Africa

Members of the High Table

Distinguished Participants

Invited Guests

Members of the Press

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

**I. Introduction**

The quality and diverse composition of participants in this hall, and the extra-ordinary feat of the organization of this event, are testimonies that a bright future lies ahead of the African region and its peoples. This accolade explains the feelings of humbleness, gratefulness and gratitude that came over me when your letter of invitation to make few remarks at his great gathering, was received. It is indeed an honor for me to be in your midst this morning. It allows me to once again put on my thinking hat in our collective search for answers to Mother Africa’s quest for a more prosperous future. The general theme that you asked me to speak on is “**LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNMENT IN AFRICA: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES”.** This theme brings to bear what seem to be three inter-connected issues: survival, growth and viability of a nation-state within the continent of Africa.

It is a contemporary theme that could be discussed from different angles and within different settings. What we would like to do this morning with you, is to highlight linkages, influences and effects of a strong and purposeful leadership team for ensuring sustained development process and outcome in any African country***.*** In doing so, ***w***e shall briefly focus on three primary challenges, around which all other leadership challenges evolved. We shall conclude with a set of suggestions for African Leadership Teams to effectively exploit available global opportunities to meet these challenges for maximum results. Our goal is to share with you a vital take-away message that: ***EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP BREEDS EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE; AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE BREEDS EFFECTIVE RESULTS FOR COUNTRY AND PEOPLE.***

My objective today is to lift the veil on the collective consciousness of African leaders and reposition our young African minds for positive action. We humbly submit that the continent’s future would be determined by a confluence of domestic leadership, public policy and private capital, and not by international organizations. Africa has no automatic future. The Continent will have a future that it shapes by itself. The revered Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. imparted a few words in his lifetime that are of relevance to the African nations today: “change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle”.

**II. Primary Challenges Confronting National Leadership**

Ladies and Gentlemen

African Nations are faced with three primary challenges in this continuous struggle: (a) getting a good grip and understanding of the responsibilities of Government to the Nation; (b) developing, consolidating and utilizing required capabilities to effectively and efficiently execute the responsibilities; and (c) positioning Africa in the global space for economic transformation. Permit me to sketch out the essence and scope of these challenges.

***(a) Understanding Government Responsibilities to Nation***

“National Development” is the simultaneous upward movement of three interrelated indices or parameters from one period to the next, within any country whether developed or developing. One is the “base” - a composite of institutions, policies and systems working properly to ensure effective and efficient governance. Two is the “middle”- a composite of programs and projects designed and executed to ensure a sustained and inclusive process of production and distribution of quality goods and services. Three is the “apex” or “crux” of the entire process – a composite of development dividends that enhance economic, social and political wellbeing of the nation’s people. In real terms, effective leadership for effective governance rest on the way in which the leaders manage each of these interdependent variables.

This may sound simple, but the logic is so true. National development dividends need to grow because the population within the nation state grows. For example, if the nation’s economy grows at a slower rate than its population, the standard of living of the people will decrease. Let’s think on this a little bit further. The aggregate wealth of a nation is like a big bowl of fufu and soup to a family. If shared amongst three children, each will get a third of the share. To increase the number of children around the bowl, with no additional fufu and soup added, will result in each child getting a smaller share to eat. The more children added, the smaller shall be the shares to each child; and the more soup and fufu added the bigger the share. This is so true of the economy. Several macroeconomic fundamentals must be well understood and managed for positive results. To effectively play the above-mentioned roles, the leadership team, led by an abled captain, must take on and discharge a set of responsibilities. .

An increase in economic growth provides the necessary opportunities for reduction of poverty. Let us be mindful that obtaining economic Growth is necessary, but certainly not a sufficient condition for ensuring an enhanced social wellbeing of the nation’s peoples. The relationship between economic growth and distribution must therefore be clearly understood and incorporated in policy and program formulation and execution. Fist, the leadership team must chart a national strategic direction; develop appropriate policies, programs and projects. Second, the team must lead the implementation and monitoring process of approved public policies, programs and projects. The challenge is ensuring the effective management of finance, human, and institutions within the context of a range of public and private sector priorities, activities and constraints. This joggling calls for a purposeful, credible, knowledgeable and transparent leadership ready and willing to demonstrate statesmanship and moral responsibility.

***(b) Consolidating and Utilizing Required Capabilities***

This brings us to the second major challenge. Putting together and effectively utilizing the required skills, knowledge and attitude to simultaneously move the three interrelated indices or parameters over a prescribed period. Such a team is one to be led by a skillful, selfless, and results-oriented leadership at various and all levels. Failure to assemble and effectively lead the right team would fail in bringing about the right balance between the public and private sectors. To put this into a proper context, let us for a moment imagine how a very good urban developer team leader would proceed when required to put together a strong design team. His/her goal for success would be to assemble a specialization-oriented integrated design team cable to produce a blueprint. Secondly, the team must be capable to provide managerial supervision and technical inputs into the construction process of the desired city with a high degree of efficiency and effectiveness. To achieve this twin-goal with quality results, a good and purposeful leader would bring on board, in the right numbers, reputable and tested architects; project managers and supervisors; structural, mechanical, civil and electrical engineers; and skilled artisans. If and when required, he/she would call on a team of consultants to provide specialist advice.

This is analogous to a results-oriented national leader bringing together the national dream team to deliver on results. The assembled team should be skillful and knowledgeable enoughto (a) objectively analyze prevailing and anticipated situations; (b) evaluate associated pros and cons for each situation; (c) assemble the required human and financial capital; develop adequate policies, systems and institutions; and (d) deliver on results that would enhance peoples’ economic, social and political wellbeing.

Where the greatest shortage exists is *having a critical mass of development managers* equipped with appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes to *LEAD* and *DRIVE* the process of social, economic, and political growth and transformation within Africa *on*a sustained basis. Such leaders must understand sequencing and managing strategic policy; programs and institutional interventions.

***( c)*** ***Positioning Africa in the global space for economic transformation***

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Africa emerging on the global land scape matters! PositioningAfrica in the global space for economic transformation matters! Africa’s fight for effective positioning and staying engaged is enhancing capacities for sustainable development, through an effective continental integrated arrangement is faced with a “paradox” that African and non-African political leaders don’t want to talk about. This paradox, which underpins our inter-relationship with other regional blocks, centres mainly around the on-going fight between the developed world and Africa for regional resources, particularly those resources whose exploitation and utilization greatly influence growth and development within a particular geographic space.

Over the last 2 decades or so, the socio-economic gap between the developed region and the Africa region progressively widened. Several factors can be said to have influenced this divergence and the rate at which the gap increases.

* 1. Our weaknesses in effective planning, developing and utilizing requisite African capacities is a major factor
  2. Our un-coordinated approach to push from within, in a concerted way, is also a major factor.
  3. Africa’s inabilities or reluctance to overhaul existing and harmonize approaches, strategies and policy directions, knowing fully well that the world is not waiting for us is yet another factor.

The result is that, Africa finds itself caught up in a scale-balancing paradox. With the lower end of the scale being pushed upwards on the development ladder to bring it into balance and thereby close the inequality gap, those non-interested parties would fight tooth and nail to resist this upward movement. This paradoxical fight is intensifying yearly and the Young Political Leadership School Africa, and our many other young African men and women and future leaders must take on this fight to the desired finish line.

Traditional Development Partners appreciates the widening gaps that exist between our fragile countries and theirs on the *“development ladder”*. The more the gaps grow the more wealth our partners accumulate on the backs of our weak development management capabilities. In essence, the effective and efficient management of elements, issues, interventions and surrounding circumstances along the development path is vital to efforts in not only narrowing of the inequality gap, but also in the region’s upward movement on the development.

Success is a matter of strategy. Strategy is about shaping the future. It is about how to create the future of our imagination. Strategy is a game plan to get from a current state to a desired end state. It is a necessary tool for long-term success by good leaders towards achieving transformation. It is about vision first and planning. More often than not, governments tend to focus on political strategy- this is only a subset and a short-term one ---wining and staying in power! Effective governance ensures that values are delivered to the people by the government.

This is where strategic planning and programming come in. Specific issues and challenges must be understood the available strategic options for addressing those issues identified. Many African countries have been planning for decade but clearly they have been planning without the right sort of thinking; without strategic intent. That “how” is the difference between dreaming and visioning and bridging the gap in between. Success in developing strategy lies in the systematic commitment to its component parts: a clear and shared vision; distinct and imbibed values; focused objectives; strategy design; implementation and coordination; monitoring and evaluation; consequence management; continuous impact assessment; and strategy re-validation. For Africa and its constituent countries, the articulation of clear objectives with distinct milestones will be essential for success.

**III. Opportunities Available for Africa to Advance on the Development Ladder**

Ladies and Gentlemen

Are there opportunities for the African Leadership Teams to understand the nature and scope of their respective and collective responsibilities to Nation and people? Put another way, does the African Leadership Team have within its grasps ample opportunities to move the region development indicators from the current state to a upper level? ***Yes there are!***

Are there opportunities for the African Leadership Team toinstitute measures that would enhance economic, social and political wellbeing of the African people? Simply put, does the Liberian Leadership Team have within its grasps ample opportunities to consolidate and utilize required capabilities that would promote and embark upon a sustained and inclusive process of production and distribution of quality goods and services? ***Yes there are!***

These opportunities are within the African land space. Some are glaring with smiles at the leadership team, but the team is busy looking elsewhere in empty space for them. Some are hidden from clear view of the leadership team, and a little dedicated search here and there would unveil their golden presence. Some of the available opportunities are floating in the air around the leadership team begging to be assembled and deployed for national and regional development, but the team is busy looking beyond the ocean to distance lands.

Two sixty-four dollar questions facing us as Africans: why are these windows of opportunities not exploited, and does Africa still have the time to rise up to the occasion? Yes we can rise up to the challenge with more vigor than we had ever mustered.

**IV Concluding Remarks**

Ladies and Gentlemen

I submit, in concluding, that our leaders and thinkers do not lack the understanding of what exactly the obstacles are to our development processes in Africa. The problem is that we have not understood these challenges at a depth where the difference is made. The real challenge is to just get on with “doing it”. The real problems are foundational and can only be addressed by a transformation that begins with the mind, the way we Africans think. We need to think it through. These must be embedded in governance thinking and architecture in Africa. The reality is that African nations are negotiating from a position of weakness, and what they are negotiating for is ot in the interest of the nations they are negotiating with.

I also submit that Africa’s rise has not yet happened because the factors that will drive the continent renaissance are not yet in place. A re-invention of the African mind; a re-invention that imbues it with a world view, mental infrastructure; a philosophical foundation for its prosperity in which Africans think through the world and their place in it before they embark on action. Success would depend on the constant availability of critical mass of development leaders, thinkers, programmers and promoters, fully equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitude required to collectively and effectively diagnose, plan, program, execute and monitor relevant national and regional development institutions, agendas, policies, processes, systems and outcomes.

The underlying message is implied from two arguments. First and foremost African leaders and development managers must understand and deal with the intricacies of bringing towards a balanced state the unbalanced scale of development inequality that currently exist between the region and other regions. At best, an acceptable level, progressively narrowing of the inequality gap,can be reached over time given a critical mass of development managers and practitioners with a common vision and on the same mission.

You have a voice and a place in Africa’s future and in its transformation process. Let us keep before us what president Barack Obama advised when he said the “future rewards those who press on. I (B.O.) don’t have time to feel sorry for myself. I don’t have time to complain. I am going to press on”. We have to press on.

The encouraging news is that Leadership Teams in many African countries have successfully identified and exploited sources of opportunities available to push their respective development agendas. How did Botswana, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ghana, Seychelles, Mauritius, Cabo Verde, and Morocco transform their respective economies and development trajectories? Are there useful lessons to guide other African countries in their own transformation drive? ***Yes there are!*** ***Can Africa rise up to the challenges? Yes Africa can!***

Then what are we Africans waiting for! African Leaders, both public and private, please get on board the progressive wagon team! Please get a good grip and understanding of your assigned responsibilities to Nation and people. We do call on you to intensify your efforts and commitment in developing, consolidating and utilizing the required capabilities. Aggressively define, fight and take your strategic slot in the global economic space. Please, in taking on these challenges, do not forget that ***EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP BREEDS EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE; and EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE BREEDS EFFECTIVE RESULTS FOR COUNTRY AND PEOPLE.***

I leave you all with seven words of encouragement to all of Africa from the legendary African son Madiba Nelson Mandela: “It always seems impossible, until it’s done”!

Thanks for the opportunity and for your kind attention.

***LONG LIVE AFRICA!***

1. Dr. McIntosh is former Vice President, ECOWAS Commission; Former Foreign Minister and Economic Planning Minister of Liberia, and Former Executive Director on the World Bank Group Board of Directors. , [↑](#footnote-ref-1)