

The South African Institute of International Affairs



Leadership and Skills

Building Blocks
of African Development

By John McKay

Series editor: Elizabeth Sidiropoulos

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**The South African Institute
of International Affairs**

Global Best Practice

**Leadership and Skills:
Building Blocks of African
Development**

John McKay

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Editor's Note

When the project on Global Best Practice was conceived, the intention was to commission a number of country case studies from around the world, to investigate four crosscutting themes and their impact on particular issues/sectors. These issues were: first, the impact and role of the external environment; the role of leadership and expertise; the role of political and social infrastructure; and the role of the macro-economic and financial environment.

Some of the country cases studies were published in a special issue of the *South African Journal of International Affairs*, while others were published as part of the series on *Global Best Practice*. A full list of these is found at the back of this report.

Well-grounded institutional infrastructure and a stable external environment are important elements in assisting countries to succeed. However, the role of good leadership, political will and vision of where a country should be in the medium to long term and how to get there are ingredients that have been sorely lacking in many African states since decolonisation. If you will, good leadership can define how one uses the existing political and social infrastructure, the external and macro-economic environments to best realise developmental growth for a country's citizens.

This paper focuses on exactly this issue of leadership, and its related corollary of education, drawing on the various case studies of the project. Good governance, the mantra of this decade, requires committed political leadership, if it is going to succeed and become rooted in a society. Good governance is increasingly recognised as the most important route for developmental success. In large part, what this means is that one recognises the responsibility for getting out of Africa's quagmire lies firmly with the leadership and society of Africa. The question leaders should be trying to address is what interventions they should make that are within their powers and capabilities that will make some difference to poverty and suffering.

Leadership is also about encouraging innovation, and how best to position a country in the global economy. This necessitates being able to think ahead and being constantly proactive in anticipating change. For example, the lessons from Chile are that seeking to insulate a society from globalisation are not long-term sustainable options. At the same time, open economies, without skilled management of policies and their implementation, do not ensure prosperity for all citizens. Rather, these need to be coupled with political leadership that anticipates the threats and opportunities and a capable state, that intervenes effectively in areas where markets may not be the best vehicles for delivery.

In the African context, a mind-set change is also needed away from the politics of 'brotherhood' and the 'lowest common denominator', which have characterised African politics for a long time and have provided protection for 'rogue' leaders from their own people.

While the focus of this paper is on political leadership, it is also important to underscore the role of good leaders in the many spheres of civil society – the private sector, the trade unions, the faith-based organisations, the non-governmental organisations, and the think-tanks. In Africa, civil society is becoming more vocal and demanding governments and leaders deliver on their promises. Civil society played an important role on the third term issue in Zambia; it has been strong in mobilising on HIV/Aids in South Africa. One can argue that the crackdown in Zimbabwe since 2000 was a result of the successes of the civic movement in opposing Mugabe. But as we know, principled causes without good leaders will not win wars.

Africa has been hesitant about promoting strong leadership, seen as necessary for shared development to take root. Too often, strong leadership has meant authoritarianism, violence and control of the levers of power for very narrow purposes. But strong leadership, like strong government, should not be a value-laden term in and of itself. McKay examines these issues in his paper comparing and contrasting African with Asian experiences in particular and highlighting the necessity for a more vigorous discussion of these issues in the continent. As McKay emphasises, the most 'serious challenge facing

governments is to design and implement systems that bring together all of the elements required to achieve development'. Leadership is a vital ingredient in this development process.

SAIIA's gratitude goes once again to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which has been a long-time partner of the Institute in our research programmes. Particular appreciation must go to Dr Thomas Knirsch and Ms Andrea Ostheimer, and to the new resident representative, Dr Werner Böhler for their support. I am also grateful to colleagues at SAIIA, in particular Mr Siphon Seakamela and Ms Nandile Ngubentombi, who both worked on the studies; Ms Romy Chevallier; Mrs Anne Katz; Ms Leanne Smith; Ms Luleka Manguku; and Ms Pippa Lange.

Elizabeth Sidiropoulos
Series editor

Leadership and Skills: Building Blocks of African Development

John McKay

The challenge to our leadership is to inspire extraordinary aspirations, to break out from the confines of our borders, limitations and mind-sets. Leadership must discern, reconcile and maximize the complementarities of regional integration, competitiveness and community building while mitigating their inherent contradictions. We need to lead our competition into positive sum situations; preserve our national identities and cultural diversity within the Southeast Asian community; blend our national interests with the regional interests; and craft balance in the exercise of national sovereignty with shared responsibility and a sense of community. These are the challenges of our times that require leadership to lift our vision to higher sights and raise our deeds to new heights.

Ong Keng Yong, Secretary General of ASEAN¹

Good leaders globally, not only in sub-Saharan Africa, guide governments of nation-states to perform effectively for their citizens. They deliver high security for the state and the person; a functioning rule of law; education; health; and a framework conducive to economic growth. They ensure effective arteries of commerce and enshrine personal and human freedoms. They empower civil society and protect the environmental commons. Crucially, good leaders also provide their citizens with a sense of belonging to a national enterprise of which everyone can be proud. They knot rather than unravel their nations and seek to be remembered for how they have bettered the real lives of the ruled rather than the fortunes of the few.

Robert Rotberg²

¹ Ong Keng Yong, 'Leadership challenges in the 21st Century Southeast Asia: Regional integration, competitiveness and community building'. Opening address at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Leadership Forum, Kuala Lumpur, 22 March 2004.

'Leadership', 'governance' and 'capacity building' are among the most frequently used buzz words of our age. Such concepts, for example, are frequently cited in the report of the Commission for Africa,³ the group set up by the British prime minister, Tony Blair, 'to generate new ideas and action for a strong and prosperous Africa'. Yet the concepts of leadership and governance are rarely explored in any detailed way; nor are the links to other desirable innovations such as the development of skills and the generation of human capacity made clear. Rather, such ideas are assumed to be universally understood and applauded, and the causal mechanisms are seen as self-evident. Thus, they are recited seemingly endlessly as part of a kind of mantra to cast out all evil, along with the related and equally nebulous overarching goals of 'democracy' and 'freedom'. This is not to say, of course, that such goals are not laudable and important: they certainly are. But unless their philosophical and policy content is scrutinised very carefully and their latent ideological foundations exposed, such phrases are in danger of becoming virtually meaningless. Also, we must be careful not to overestimate the transformative power of any single factor, such as democracy or good governance, to achieve by itself a new era in development in Africa or elsewhere. Such unrealistic hopes will certainly end in disappointment. Rather we should be asking what kind of leadership is needed, to achieve what kind of goals, and what kind of skills can provide what kinds of results, under what conditions and in combination with what other essential ingredients.

In this short summary of the evidence coming from the existing best practice case studies, I want to explore some of these more detailed and operational issues. The case studies can only hope to give hints on these important issues, but that in itself will be a useful contribution, I believe.

² Rotberg R, 'The roots of Africa's leadership deficit', *Compass: A Journal of Leadership*. Belfer Center for Science & International Affairs, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, October 2003, pp.28–32.

³ Commission for Africa, *Commission for Africa: Final Report*, available at www.commissionforafrica.org, 2005.

To focus the discussion, I want to look in particular at some key questions.

- What roles do leadership, skills and expertise play in the successful adoption and implementation of effective development policies?
- In the development process, how important are strong leadership and political will to the implementation of policies that may initially be unpopular with some groups in society?
- What kind of leadership is needed in democratic societies (which may have a range of competing interests), and how does this differ from leadership in more authoritarian systems?
- How are skills and expertise nurtured and channelled effectively?
- How can effective alliances be developed with important groups such as the business community and the trade unions?
- How can leaders judge most effectively when it is time to change their approach or modify specific policies?
- How can leaders ensure that certain key policies can continue, even after a change in leadership?

Before these questions can be discussed, an even more fundamental concept must be examined. This is defining just what leadership is and what makes an effective leader.

What makes a good leader?

I started this paper by quoting two eminent authorities, one for Asia and one from Africa, on the question of leadership. Ong Keng Yong⁴ describes the major issues he sees as facing the nations of Southeast Asia, and the qualities of leadership that will be necessary to meet these goals. By contrast, Robert Rotberg⁵ tries to account for what he sees as a serious deficit in leadership in Africa. Yet both isolate important common features. They recognise that the task of the

⁴ Ong Keng Yong, *op. cit.*

⁵ Rotberg, R, *op. cit.*

modern leader is a difficult, complex and multi-faceted one. They point out that in an increasingly globalised and integrated world, competition is integral to the reality of daily life. In order to deal with this new environment, nations must have their basic structures — such as education, health, legal systems and a range of other government services and support mechanisms — working effectively to serve the needs of the economy and the general community. Many nations in a post-colonial situation are still grappling with issues of national identity, which are complicated by internal ethnic and tribal divisions. The perceived importance of regional co-operation of various kinds provides yet another complication as well as an opportunity. This list is now a standard one, but what is striking about these two quotations is their identification of leadership as a very special ingredient in the development process.

Leadership provides the vital spark that can lift societies above their current aspirations and performance levels into new areas of possibility. In this sense, the good writing about leadership goes further than much of the now voluminous literature on governance. Good governance is about creating rules and procedures for efficient government. It stresses important issues such as transparency and accountability, and is designed to get rid of the serious problems of corruption and nepotism. Leadership at its best uses the tools of good governance, but essentially goes beyond this level and concentrates on bigger issues such as strategic goals, mobilisation and the distribution of the benefits of growth. Vision is the crucial element here.

Ali Mazrui⁶ has characterised the new emphasis on good governance in Africa as a *housekeeping* style of political power, one that is 'minimalist in its sense of purpose'. There is, he suggests little genuine leadership in this approach — it is 'more verbosity and less vision'. He contrasts this method of government with a number of other possible pillars or styles of leadership.

⁶ Mazrui A, *Pan-Africanism, Democracy and the Leadership of Africa: The Continuing Legacy for the New Millennium*. Binghamton: Institute of Global Cultural Studies, State University of New York, 2000.

- *The charismatic leader* relies on considerable personal magnetism to achieve results, and hence is very personal in style and appeal to the population.
- *The mobilisation leader* may also be charismatic, but the aim here is to draw forth great efforts from the masses and harness this energy for national development.
- *The reconciliation leader* seeks areas of compromise and consensus from people holding a range of disparate views or goals.
- *The disciplinarian leader* tries to bring a no-nonsense style to the running of the nation, and relies on the desire of at least some people to follow a harsh, austere leader.
- *The patriarchal leader* symbolises the venerable elder and seeks authority on that basis, attempting to bring a moral style to the search for new directions and essential compromises.
- *The technocratic leader* brings technical expertise of some kind to the office, and favours technical solutions to the nation's problems.
- *The personalistic leader* attempts to appear as the personification of power and demands unquestioning political allegiance.
- *The monarchical leader* takes the personalistic style a stage further and tries to create a divinely ordained and aristocratic tradition. This may even involve the establishment of a dynasty of leaders drawn from the same family.
- *The philosopher-king leader* draws on the authority of the pre-colonial sage, but gives it a modern character. This may involve the promulgation of a new national ideology or philosophy. Such leaders often use honorary doctorates as part of their preferred titles as heads of state.
- *The warrior leader* also draws on a pre-colonial form of authority, emphasising skills in combat, self-defence and manhood. Many former liberation fighters have tried to emphasise these qualities once independence has been gained for the country.

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A major problem in seeking to establish a level of leadership that stresses long-term visions and a break with the immediate past is that many African nations have had more than their fair share of charismatic leaders who have preached a new philosophy that promises to carry society to new heights. Most of these national saviours have turned out to be mere selfish autocrats who have achieved nothing of substance, and this has made it doubly difficult for any new visionary leader to be taken seriously. This is a vital issue, because good leaders can be effective only with the backing of motivated followers.

It is also important to look at the particular attributes that make for a good African leader, someone capable of creating trust and motivation. Leadership styles are particularly culture-specific, and not easily transferred to different political and social contexts. In a recent and very controversial study, Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar have argued that in Africa, religious and spiritual factors are intimately linked to notions of power.⁷

... politicians and wealthy business people in Africa are widely believed to have more spiritual power than the average person. Our point, however, goes further than this: the tendency for politicians to seek spiritual power, and for spiritual leaders to develop substantial material power, show distinctive patterns in continuity with systems and ideas rooted deep in Africa's history.

One does not have to accept everything about the arguments in this provocative book to concede that the cultural contexts in which African leaders must operate are rather different from those in other parts of the world. Thus we must be doubly careful in trying to transfer the leadership experiences from very different situations, however successful, to Africa. This note of caution is important here because in the case studies considered in this survey, concepts of leadership are shown to be very different in other continents, particularly Asia. In Linda Low's study of Singapore and my own paper on South Korea, it

⁷ Ellis S & G Ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, p.99.

is not surprising that the discussion is dominated by two towering, larger-than-life leaders — Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore and Park Chung Hee in South Korea.

Both nations have achieved remarkable economic progress in just a few decades. In 1961, when Park Chung Hee came to power, South Korea was perhaps the poorest country in Asia, and well below the level of development of African countries such as Ghana. It had been devastated by the Korean War (1950–53), and most commentators confidently predicted that it would be the most depressed Asian economy for the foreseeable future. Yet by the late 1990s it had achieved a per capita income of \$10,000, and was only the second nation to be admitted to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Similarly, Lee Kuan Yew inherited a very poor country when Singapore was forced to break away from Malaysia in 1965. The economy was tiny and unproductive, foreign exchange reserves were almost non-existent, and skills levels were generally low. But by the 1990s Singapore was among the most prosperous nations in the booming Asian region, with one of the largest foreign exchange reserves and perhaps the highest per capita income outside Japan. Both leaders had the drive, energy and skill to transform their nations, what Linda Low has called ‘turning adversity to advantage’.⁸

In both South Korea and Singapore, leadership also involved the creation of a state apparatus that could plan, initiate and co-ordinate national development. Both leaders centred the implementation of their vision on a strong, centralised industrial policy, and in both cases the lead agency was called the Economic Development Board. This similarity of terminology was no accident, as there was a great deal of exchange of information as well as simple copying of the successful strategies of other countries in East Asia. In the final analysis, there was much reliance on the Japanese model.

⁸ Low L, ‘Issues and challenges in Singapore Inc: A Qualified Success Story’, in *Public Sector Governance, Singapore and the Czech Republic*, SAlIA Global Practice, Report 4, 2005, p.8.

In the current environment, such high levels of government intervention in the development process are somewhat out of fashion, although there are still some strong supporters of such an approach. In what is now becoming a very influential and much-quoted study, Ha-Joon Chang⁹ questions why the international development policy establishment do not recommend the policies that were used over several centuries by the nations that were most successful in their development. Why is it that today's 'best practice institutions and policies' are so at odds with this historical experience? Is there a deliberate policy at work here of 'kicking away the ladder', as the rich countries deny the poor access to the very methods that were so successful in the past?

Returning to African development, the sad fact is that there is simply no leader in Africa who has been able to preside over such success stories. Rather, as Tim Hughes has clearly shown in his study of Ghana, charismatic leaders who promised much have achieved little. Indeed, Kwame Nkrumah inherited a much more promising economy and society than either Lee Kuan Yew or Park Chung Hee, but engineered a disaster, in the process giving the concepts of charismatic leadership and national vision a bad name.

Many such leaders in Africa have not only been disastrously authoritarian, but have also used the most brutal methods to stifle dissent and to inhibit the emergence of a strong civil society. Both Singapore and South Korea were also subjected to very tight authoritarian rule — indeed Singapore is still a virtual one-party state, but in both cases there was a concentration on education and welfare as well as dramatic economic growth. Both have been remarkably egalitarian societies for most of their recent history, a point I will return to later in this survey. In comparison, not only have Africa's leaders been generally ineffective, but the stunting of any development in civil

⁹ Chang Ha-Joon, *Kicking away the Ladder: Development Strategy in Historical Perspective*. London: Anthem Press, 2002.

society, as Rotberg¹⁰ has argued, has ensured that corrupt and disastrous leaders have been allowed to remain in power.

Is it the African reverence for 'big men', a hangover from pre-colonial reverence for chieftainship, that turns democrats into despots and persuades obedient electorates to support the pretensions of their peers turned potentates? Africa for the most part lacks a hegemonic bourgeoisie — a business class that is independent of government and capable of thriving without patronage and contracts: such independence lessens the zero-sum quality of a ruler.... African leaders and their followers largely believe that the people are there to serve their rulers, rather than the other way round.

These are broad and important issues that I will return to in the concluding section.

The role of leadership and skills in the successful implementation of development policies

The case studies, from Africa and elsewhere, highlight many ways in which good leadership has been essential to the implementation of productive development policies. One predominant concern at present in much of Africa is the development of effective responses to the devastation caused by HIV/Aids. Botswana has the highest rate of infection in the world (although it has also been among the best economic performers in the whole of Africa), and its government has received much praise for its approaches to fighting the disease. In her case study of Botswana's approach to this problem, Dianna Games argues that good leadership has been a crucial factor. Some key elements in the leadership given by the president and his government were the following.

- The government quickly recognised the problem posed by HIV/Aids and developed an immediate response. This is in marked contrast to

¹⁰ Rotberg R, *op. cit.*, p.32.

the policy of denial followed by some of the governments of other countries in the region, even in the face of overwhelming evidence.

- There was a recognition that effective responses had to be based on the best possible evidence, so a good deal of effort was put into identifying rates of infection, isolating particular concentrations of sufferers, and collating relevant statistics.
- The president committed himself to public advocacy, both at home and abroad, stressing the need for a social revolution in the country, and emphasising the role that foreign assistance could play.
- While recognising that HIV/Aids is a medical problem, the government also stressed some of the key structural determinants of infection — poverty, gender inequality, socio-cultural beliefs and so on — and attempted at the same time to tackle these broader issues.
- While it assumed a central role, the government also recognised that it did not have all the skills or resources needed for the fight. It therefore built partnerships with experts to provide these missing ingredients.
- All ministries were involved in preparing responses to the crisis. While the health authorities were central, it was recognised that a ‘whole of government’ approach was essential.
- The government also worked with influential private sector organisations, and these have also played an essential role.

The case study of Senegal also presents an example of a relatively successful campaign against HIV/Aids, but in this case the country had, and still has, a rather low incidence of infection. The study seeks to explain why the nation has been successful in maintaining this situation. Many of the same factors identified in Botswana are also apparent here. The government recognised the potential problem as early as 1986, and there was no denial or cover-up. The scientific and medical communities were involved from the beginning, limiting the damage caused by fear, emotion and prejudice. President Abdou Diouf played a strong personal role from the outset, guaranteeing funds for the campaign and acting as a vocal advocate. The

government initiated a multi-sectoral approach, involving religious leaders, NGOs and community groups. Pragmatic negotiations held with Muslim and Catholic leaders reached a tacit agreement that clerics would recommend abstinence and fidelity, but would not oppose the government's promotion of condoms. In return, it was agreed that campaigns advising the use of condoms would be modest and stress responsible sexuality. The whole range of community organisations, including youth groups and sporting clubs, was recruited to assist in the campaign and all have been very active. In all of this, government played a central co-ordinating and leadership role.

Another example of the key role that leadership and the harnessing of skills can play in policy formulation and implementation is given in the case study of Lesotho written by Siphso Seakamela, which looks at the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. Again the lead of government was crucial. In part this involved the creation of a stable and supportive macro-economic management system. The financial sector was modernised, essential infrastructure was improved and need skills were provided. But steps were also taken to recognise the link between the development of the small, micro and medium enterprises (SMMEs) and poverty reduction policies. A range of special funds and other support mechanisms was introduced to encourage both local entrepreneurs and foreign investors.

The issue of sound macro-economic management was also emphasised in a number of other studies. In the case of Chile, for example, Lyal White notes how government policies have been used to control inflation, regulate and encourage foreign investment, and to encourage the transition to a market system. In Singapore, the lessons that have been learned from the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and from earlier downturns in the economy have been studied in great detail, and an institutional framework for crisis management has been developed to counter such threats in the future. This is an important pointer, because any country integrated into the global system will inevitably suffer periodic bouts of instability, which are particularly dangerous in cases where governments are managing the transition from one system to another. Any such structural change needs to be

handled most carefully, as the cases of Chile and the Czech Republic demonstrate.

But perhaps the most serious challenge facing governments is to design and implement systems that bring together all of the elements required to achieve development. This does not involve just one sector, but the entire society, and involves the whole gamut of economic, political and social institutions. The study of India makes this point very clearly. The successful implementation of agricultural development has necessarily involved the whole package of technologies and research, extension and credit services, and much more. The case of Ireland is also instructive: it is now the largest exporter of computer software in the world, and this status has been achieved in large part through massive investment in the development of skills and in systems of innovation. But much more than that has been required. The positioning of Ireland in the European Community, the creation of a broader international financial centre and a taxation regime have also contributed to its success.

The importance of political will in strong leadership

As was noted earlier, Africa has had more than its fair share of strong, 'charismatic' leaders, most of whom have turned out to be at best ineffective narcissists, or at worst unregenerate tyrants. It is hardly surprising then that 'strong' leadership is somewhat out of favour. This is reflected in all of the case studies of contemporary leadership in Africa. Yet there is no real mention of the phenomenon, nor even of the importance of political will in a leader. This is an interesting omission, given that the two Asian countries represented in the case studies where strong leadership was definitely an indispensable factor — South Korea and Singapore — have both enjoyed rates of growth far in excess of anything achieved in Africa. Both Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore and Park Chung Hee were very strong leaders. Most commentators would argue that they were in fact authoritarian. But the results they achieved were breathtaking. Both had a clear long-term vision, and drew up a detailed road map of how to reach their goals.

These blueprints were characterised by their level of detail and their comprehensiveness.

In the case of South Korea, the work of Kong¹¹ has introduced the concept of *hyper-developmentalism* to characterise a highly nationalistic, export-driven system that is based on an intense government–big business (*chaebol*) partnership. But this approach has been taken much further in a pioneering study by Kim,¹² who has analysed detailed records from this era. In particular she has gained access to some of the officials then at the core of the programme and its implementation. Her results make it clear once and for all just how specific the planning was, particularly in the phase of heavy and chemical industrialisation after 1972. This was not a blueprint only for the economy, but involved all sectors of society, and also included in its scope foreign and defence policy. The goal was to create a prosperous, strong and self-reliant nation, that would be free from outside interference, especially from the United States, and able to defend itself effectively against any threat from North Korea. The development of new industries, especially five new product groups, was the immediate aim. However, in order to achieve the planned targets, it was essential to transform the nation through broad economic reconstruction, intensive skills training for the work force, national land development and the creation of a strong national defence capability. The plan identified a target of \$10 billion for exports by 1981, and outlined a 12-point framework for meeting this goal. This covered key areas such as the selection of leading businesses, industrial structure, industry model, technology development, national land planning, industrial law, and co-operation between the government and the people.¹³ The planning approach

¹¹ Kong Tat Yan, *The Politics of Economic Reform in South Korea: The Fragile Miracle*. London: Routledge, 2000.

¹² Kim Hyung-A, *Park Chung Hee's Self-Reliance Ideology, 1961-1979: Modernization and National Restoration*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Division of Pacific and Asian History, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1997.

¹³ Kim Hyung-A, *op. cit.*, pp. 328-373.

used was very precise, even scientific. O Wonch'ol, the senior official in charge of the programme, argued that his aim was to leave as little as possible to chance, using an engineering approach that left no room for either politics or emotion. He also suggested that an authoritarian style of government was essential, at least in the short term, to give the technocrats a free hand to implement agreed plans without political interference. Thus, to O Wonch'ol, the repressive Yusin constitution introduced at this time was an integral and necessary part of the drive towards industrialisation.

Space does not allow for further discussion of this fascinating story, but the basic point I am trying to make is that there was a strong internal coherence in the Korean system from 1961 into the 1980s, and especially after 1972. The government was quite clear about how all the pieces fitted together to create a working whole, and this included areas well beyond the reach of many conventional concepts of economic planning. What was involved was nothing less than the transformation of an entire society.

Such an approach is rather out of fashion, and many would argue that African countries simply do not have the capacity for such an ambitious undertaking. But it is worth remembering that in 1961, when South Korea embarked on this programme, it was poorer than nearly all African countries at the time.

Linda Low has identified many similar features in the Singapore experience, emphasising the benefits of strong leadership in that context. These policies were certainly not in line with current neo-liberal thinking, nor was there much transparency in the system. But, as in Korea, the results in terms of economic growth provided sufficient legitimacy in the eyes of the vast majority of the population. Linda Low stresses the inclusiveness of the process in Singapore, despite its relatively authoritarian nature. Promotion into government and the civil service was widely seen as being based simply on merit; wages were seen as fair, industrial relations were harmonious, and a strong feeling of social trust was engendered. It should also be remembered that this system has survived relatively intact right down to the present.

Leadership in democratic societies

This discussion of strong leadership in two Asian nations raises important questions about whether such approaches are feasible in democratic governments, and whether policy approaches are necessarily different in democracies. During Asia's powerful push towards prosperity, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a lively debate about whether democracy might in fact inhibit development, especially in the early stages of growth. Part of the counter-argument was whether strong, authoritarian rule prevailing in much of Asia at this time might not be the most effective form of government, provided that such rulers were mindful of the need to look after the entire spectrum of society rather than simply a small powerful elite. This view was put in a typically strong fashion by Kishore Mahbubani, Singapore's long-serving representative in the United Nations:¹⁴

A calm and dispassionate look at Third World conditions suggests that a period of strong and firm government, one that is committed to radical reform, may be necessary to break out of the vicious circle of poverty sustained by social structures that contain vested interests opposed to any real changes. Japan was able to go into high growth after World War II in part because of the wide-ranging socio-economic reforms that General MacArthur imposed. No democratically elected Japanese government could have done what he did. By contrast, the failure of the United States to carry out similar socio-economic reforms in the Philippines is one reason why the economy of that country has not developed well in the post-war years.

Once again, such thinking has gone out of fashion, especially since the advent of the Bush doctrine that freedom and democracy are essential prerequisites for every kind of development — economic, political and diplomatic.

In Asia, the debate on these issues still rages, but the terms of the dialogue have changed somewhat in recent years. Now with a self-

¹⁴ Mahbubani K, 'The West and the rest', *The National Interest*, 28, Summer 1992, p.48.

confidence that derives from many years of rapid growth, a number of Asian commentators are questioning the right of the West to impose its terms and historical experiences on the rest of world. A series of studies have suggested that a distinctively Asian approach to both human rights and democracy might be more appropriate and effective, and that Asian traditions such as Confucianism are perfectly compatible with ideas of modernity and progress.¹⁵ In a controversial study, Sylvia Chan¹⁶ has argued that the (two way) relationships between democracy and development are complex and culture-specific. A critical first step in any analysis is to separate the two halves of the phrase 'liberal democracy'. She argues that liberalism and democracy do not necessarily go together, and that the two forces usually work against each other. The key to any specific situation of reform, in either the political or economic realms, is the nature of the institutional framework.

According to Chan, the successful system that emerged in East Asia arose from a particular historical, institutional and cultural context. Rather than looking at a broad term such as democracy, she argues that we need to consider the particular economic, civil and political liberties that were necessary to achieve the movement towards new economies and societies. The form of democracy that is emerging from such a process is unique, and is conditioned by the underlying institutional framework. She suggests that the 'liberalist triumphalist position' has yet to be tested by new formations whose shape is only now beginning to emerge.

It would be wrong to suggest that such views are unchallenged, either in Asia or elsewhere. Critics have argued with some justification that high-sounding defences of authoritarian regimes are usually used

¹⁵ See, for example, Tu Wei-Min (ed.), *Confucian Traditions in East Asian Modernity*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1996; Bauer J & D Bell, Daniel (eds), *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; and Bell D, *East Meets West: Human Rights and Democracy in East Asia*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

¹⁶ Chan S, *Liberalism, Democracy and Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

to excuse inexcusable behaviour. But what I am suggesting is that, as in all stages of its recent political and economic history, a very active dialogue on these issues, which is enlivened by a growing amount of literature on the subject, is taking place in Asia. The outlines of this ideological contest have been set out clearly in a new book by Mark Berger.¹⁷

It is unfortunate, then, that the case studies on Africa are almost completely silent on these critical issues. There is much discussion of the need for good governance, and this is undeniably important. Given Africa's unfortunate recent history, perhaps this is a necessary first step, and certainly an important improvement. But the international experience, from Latin America and from Asia, suggests that improvements in governance can go only so far, and are unlikely to produce the development transformations that are so badly needed in Africa. It is to be hoped that a more profound debate could emerge on the nature of leadership and democracy in Africa, producing ideas on the precise forms that can emerge from the various institutional and historical legacies of various parts of the continent.

Such a dialogue will have to deal with a whole range of issues. One crucial area concerns the time horizons adopted by policy-makers. In Africa the understandable distaste for authoritarian rulers and for others determined to cling to power at any price has resulted in the installation of presidents for fixed and often short terms. Even if rulers are able to stand for re-election, the need to make an immediate appeal to voters can be disruptive of the long-term reforms that are necessary for national development, as is illustrated by the Asian experience. I will return to the question of continuity in policy later in this paper.

¹⁷ Berger M, *The Battle for Asia: From Decolonisation to Globalisation*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2004.

Nurturing and channelling skills and expertise

Internationally it has been demonstrated time and again that education, skills and expertise are essential components of successful development strategies. This is also shown in these case studies, but once again it is the examples from outside Africa that are most telling. The success story that is modern Ireland was built on education, skills development and research and development (R&D). As Hugh Swift notes, *The World Competitiveness Report* ranks Ireland first in the world for its education system, which has been designed to meet the needs of a competitive economy. Some 57% of all graduates are trained in engineering, science or business, and Ireland now produces more Institute of Computer Technology (ICT) graduates than does Germany. The Science Foundation Ireland has stimulated research, and in particular has generated creative links with researchers in other tertiary institutions. Strenuous efforts have also been made to lure highly-skilled members of the Irish diaspora back to their country of origin.

The case studies from Asia make similar points. The investment in education in countries like South Korea and Singapore has been massive, and this has been a major contributor to their economic success. In these societies the dominant Confucian legacy has been especially conducive to such initiatives. Asian parents regard the education of their children as the number one priority, and firmly believe that skills and expertise are the keys to advancement. Thus there has been strong community support for these national efforts to upgrade educational skills, and individual families have also made their own investments in the education of their children, often at great cost to their immediate welfare.

As I noted in my case study on the role of education in South Korea's development, the expansion of the educational system at all levels was extremely impressive. By 1975 elementary school enrolments had reached almost 5.6 million, an improvement of 410% over numbers in 1945. Given the neglect of post-primary education during the period when South Korea was under Japanese colonial rule, it is not

surprising that the rates of growth in other parts of the system were even higher. During the same period, numbers in middle schools grew by 709%, in academic high schools by 1,287%, in vocational high schools by 1,432%, and in higher education by 3,794%. The range and intensity of vocational training of various kinds were also increased. These included a very large agricultural training and extension programme. Adult literacy courses were expanded very rapidly. Thus, by 1970 adult literacy had reached 88%, compared with 22% in 1945. But a serious attempt was also made to improve the quality of education as well as the numbers of students in the system. In higher education, for example, the new regime introduced salary increases for staff, foreign study opportunities, research grants and a range of curriculum reforms.

In terms of total investment, Korea moved quickly ahead of all other developing countries in terms of educational outlay both as a percentage of GDP, and per pupil, which is a rough measure of educational quality. Between 1970–85 real expenditure per student rose by 355% in Korea, compared with 38% in Kenya and 13% in Pakistan. Funds were also allocated to the removal of the gender gap in enrolment. Universal primary education was achieved by 1965, and by 1985 secondary education had been extended to 88% of the population. As a number of commentators have argued, the extension of education to females has far-reaching and very positive effects for the development process. This is one area in which East Asia has been well ahead of other developing countries at similar levels of per capita income.

But it is not merely the increase in the numbers in various parts of the education system, nor even the gradual improvement in quality that should be emphasised. Rather, it is important to recognise the various ways in which education was integrated into the broader goals of development. Five policy issues were the hallmark of the approaches followed during this crucial period. There were, first, a strong human capital approach, which stressed the centrality of education and skills in all aspects of development. The second was to establish a close relationship between planning targets for education

with those for job creation. The third entailed the realisation that once started on a path of export-oriented industrialisation, restructuring and change would be permanent features of Korean life, with special implications for education. Fourth was the recognition of education as a key mechanism for the economic and social mobility of individuals. Fifth and finally, the role of education in creating the national identity, cementing national determination to succeed, and legitimating the regime was acknowledged.

The Korean government had a clear idea of the importance of human capital in the achievement of development in all sectors and at all levels. This is an area that has received much attention in the literature on Korea's educational policy. Amsden,¹⁸ in her analysis of the Korean approach to development, makes much of the concept of *late industrialisation*, arguing that newcomers must use techniques that have already proved successful for *industrial learning*. Such processes are very different from those used by the initial industrialisers in Europe and North America. Hence there may be more lessons to be learnt for those arriving at the industrialisation stage even later. In such circumstances, she argues, the presence of a well-educated labour force, both white- and blue-collar, becomes even more crucial. Using a number of international comparisons she demonstrates that at all levels the Korean labour force was better educated than that of any of its competitors. By the late 1970s adult literacy had reached almost 100%, and the large majority of process workers (almost 75%) had some secondary education. Similarly, Korean managers and engineers were well educated by the international standards of the time. In contrast with the situation in earlier stages of industrial development in other parts of the world, the phenomenon of the university-trained engineer and manager became commonplace in Korea, something which Amsden argues is integral to a new development in global change. As in Japan during the earlier stages of its own industrialisation, the clear emphasis in Korea was on catching up with

¹⁸ Amsden A, *Asia's Next Giant: South Korea and Late Industrialization*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

the more advanced countries. This involved acquiring (often by copying!), applying and improving already existing Western— or, in Korea's case, Japanese — technology. This required quite different skills from those used in, for example, the British industrial revolution, and those with a good education had a decided advantage, she argues. The weakness in this system, as has often been acknowledged, is that few managers had had the time to acquire adequate levels of experience. Special attention was therefore provided to compensate, often through the importation of foreign experts who could give advice, especially in the early stages of industrialisation.

One of the major functions of the economic planning and co-ordination organisations was to ensure that when new jobs were created there were sufficient numbers of workers with the right level and mix of skills to fill them, and that schools and universities did not produce large numbers of graduates in fields in which employment was limited. Thus, there was an attempt to match supply and demand, to ensure the best possible balance between economic development and skills formation, and to avoid the creation of a large pool of qualified but unemployed graduates. (This is a situation commonly reported in South Asia, for example.) This was possible because the government kept tight control over growth in the economy, and was able to direct sectoral development through its strict management of the financial system. Similarly, the budgets, course sizes and gender mixes of the schools and universities were closely monitored and controlled. One of the slogans for the 1960s was 'education for economic development', and care was taken to keep the two closely synchronised, although of course this match was not always perfectly achieved.

As in the case of Ireland, the Korean government has gone to great lengths to attract members of the Korean diaspora with particular skills and expertise to return to the homeland. For example, Korea's breakthrough as a producer of semi conductors, now a major export item, depended on three Korean scientists who were brought back from the United States, bringing with them some vital technological knowledge. As a result, Korean companies were able to make a

massive leap forward in technical innovation. This is an area in which Africa might profitably learn from international experience, given the very large number of Africans working in the industrial countries. (This is a point made by Tim Hughes in his study of Ghana.)

Again, it is disappointing that the African case studies do not chronicle equivalent advances in education. Far too often the dominant neo-liberal orthodoxy has frowned on government investment in this sector. High debt levels have also inhibited progress in this area. In most countries the education of girls has been particularly neglected. As Govender¹⁹ has noted, the story of education in Africa is a tragic one. However, the lessons to be learnt from the wider and local experiences are clear, and should direct priorities once the resource constraints have been solved.

Developing effective alliances

Even the most active and effective governments cannot achieve strong development results by themselves. They need the support of all sections of the population, in particular the business community and a wide range of community organisations. Here Africa does have some success stories, and these are recorded in a number of the case studies.

Reference has already been made to the successful fight against HIV/Aids recorded in the case studies on Botswana and Senegal, which involved co-operation between governments and a range of other groups, especially community organisations. Reference has also been made to technological co-operation in various countries between governments, the tertiary education sectors, and their respective business communities.

Co-operation of this kind has also been important in the development of SMMEs, a priority in many countries. In Lesotho, successful SMME support networks have been established, partly for

¹⁹ Govender P, 'The tragedy of education in Africa' in Govender P & S Grudz (eds), *Back to the Blackboard: Looking Beyond Universal Primary Education in Africa*. Johannesburg: South African Institute of International Affairs, 2004, pp.1–30.

mutual help and partly to channel government funding and advisory services. In Brazil, a special SMME body (Sebrae) has been set up for similar purposes, but also to provide help with new technology. In Chile this type of collaboration has been extended throughout the economy, bringing various interest groups together to devise and implement new strategies.

Increasingly, the development of productive strategic alliances involves linkages with various kinds of organisations, both international and national. Aid donors, international NGOs, groups lobbying for debt relief, and international agencies such as UN bodies are clear examples. Again, the fight against HIV/Aids described in the case studies of Botswana and Senegal provides useful examples. As noted earlier, the study of Mozambique also emphasises the role of external engagement and diplomacy. In part this external orientation reflects the country's dependence on financial support from overseas, but it also shows an increasing desire to move away from a failed socialist model and instead attract foreign investors.

Moving in new directions

The case of Mozambique's reorientation of its entire political and economic model highlights one of the most difficult tasks facing a government, that of facing up to the fact that an old policy has outlived its usefulness and must be replaced with a set of new ones. But this has happened in a whole range of countries, in Africa and elsewhere. In a globalising world in which competition is now the norm, pragmatic approaches to policy setting are becoming much more common. This process need not be seen as a one-off, traumatic event for a government, as it was in the past. As I noted in the case of Korea, one of the earliest messages of the reforming government in South Korea was that the community would have to get used to regular changes of direction and emphasis, as external environments were modified and old structures lost their viability. Restructuring became accepted as a constant process, with all of the flow-on effects into the education system, job retraining mechanisms and so on. The case

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study of agricultural development in Israel makes a similar point. That country moved from an early emphasis on food security to a programme of diversification; then to a new orientation towards the market; and then to a strong emphasis on exports. In all of these changes it was important to build a political consensus on the need for change and to introduce new programmes to bring it about. Linkages to research organisations, agricultural extension services and the private sector were again essential.

The case study of corporate governance reform in South Africa is also instructive here. These reforms were seen as essential to keep the economy competitive, but they had to involve the consent of all of the stakeholders in the process. A code of corporate practices and conduct was drawn up, again after wide consultation. As in a number of Asian countries, support for such reforms was built by persuading various groups that compliance and enforcement were essential for national prosperity.

The study of Ghana also represents a fascinating example of these processes at work. Following a long period of authoritarian and military rule, the country was forced to acknowledge the structural problems in the economy. However, not for the first time, the invitation to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by the government to provide a structural adjustment loan and advice on an accompanying package of reforms provided the external catalyst for internal change. The reforms have been linked to a poverty reduction strategy, and have made progress through a careful process of consultation and consensus. This approach contrasts with the technocratic and authoritarian methods adopted in the past, and its success suggests that this is a better way to tackle necessary policy transformations.

Ensuring continuity in policy

Earlier I mentioned the problems that the movement towards democracy created for policy continuity. In many situations,

development and change depend upon long-term strategies, often implemented in a series of well-defined stages. International experience has shown that policy co-ordination is vital to this process. Good policy reforms are necessary, but to be effective they must be implemented at the right time and in the right sequence. Such sequencing is often not possible if governments are rushing to show results before the next election. The onset of the Asian economic crisis of 1997 can be explained in part by the premature implementation of reform, undertaken in the wrong sequence, in response to political pressures both local and international.

Governments in Africa need to be aware of these problems. The solution in some Asian countries has been to entrench particular parties in power, so that even though the leader may change, the overall philosophy and strategy continues. The strong role played by the professional officers in the civil service in most Asian countries has also been part of this process, as the case studies of both Korea and Singapore demonstrate. But perhaps the most important element in countries like these has been the creation of a national consensus about where the nation wants to go, and about the need for constant reform and change to arrive at that destination. Such a national accord will not be easy to achieve in most African nations, but there are signs of progress in some of the cases presented here.

Conclusions

The case studies considered in this paper give a fascinating insight from a variety of perspectives into the importance of leadership and expertise if the search for development is to be successful. Leadership, as we have seen, is a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Good leaders come in various guises, and while all nations can learn from the others, leadership qualities must reflect local conditions, history, institutions and political realities. Leaders must also be able to build a consensus for change — good leaders are very dependent on good, motivated followers — and this is also a very particular and local matter. As I have noted, the Confucian legacy in East Asia has been

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particularly conducive to particular philosophies of change and to the emergence of special kinds of leaders. This dominant cultural heritage has also encouraged the massive investment in education and skills formation that has taken place in the region, with such spectacular results.

Africa can learn from all of this, but essentially each nation must define its own pathway to the future, guided where appropriate by overseas models, but also with a clear understanding of its own unique heritage and future.

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