



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

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LAUNCH OF THE AFRICAN UNION LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

Remarks

By Carlos Lopes

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H.E. Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the African Union

Commission;

H.E. Mr. Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank;

Mr. Mkhtar Diop, Vice President of World Bank Africa Bureau;

Mr. Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union

Commission;

Mrs. Fatima Aycl, Commissioner for Trade and Industry of the African Union

Commission;

Prof. Calestous Juma, Harvard Kennedy School Moderator;

Ms. Lupita Nyong'o;

Ladies and Gentlemen

The African Union Leadership Academy has come at a critical moment when the implementation of Agenda 2063 is taking shape. The extent and magnitude of Agenda 2063 calls upon not only traditional education to produce knowledge and operate change but also other types of education generating both hard and soft skills of which leadership. Agenda 2063 is an emanation of the African leadership like the Organization of the African Unity, today African Union and its related pan African institutions. A successful implementation of Agenda 2063 requires a shift in the leadership perception to bring about the change it entails.

Developing leadership and entrepreneurship in youth is particularly indispensable. Agenda 2063 is a huge and long train of change. Like any change, Agenda 2063 may arise both excitement and

anxiety. The amount of leaders who worked tirelessly to frame this vision is not sufficient to have all African people adhere and deploy necessary effort to make it a tangible reality.

The Africa structural transformation needed to deliver on the Agenda 2063 requires a transformational leadership. There is an imperative need to develop leadership skills and to engender leaders at different levels.

Change is one of the primary motives behind transformational leadership which is “characterized by the ability to bring about significant change in followers and the organization”. The single biggest way to impact an organization is to focus on transformational leadership.

“There is almost no limit to the potential of an organization that recruits good people, raises them up as leaders and continually develop them”. (John C Maxwell - 2001). “A style of leadership in which the leader identifies the needed change, creates a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executes the change with the commitment of the members of the group.”(BusinessDictionary.com). “A leadership style that involves generating a vision for the organization and inspiring followers to meet the challenges that it sets. Transformational leadership depends on the leader’s ability to appeal to the higher values and motives of followers and to inspire a feeling of loyalty and trust.” (Encyclopedia.com).

Effective leadership and transformational leadership in occurrence is not all about a random genes acquired involuntary by birth, but rather a culmination of dedicated learning and deliberate practice to operate change and inspire next generation of leaders. Training to transformational leadership is a must.

Often leadership has been perceived as innate as opposed to acquired leadership skill throughout a deliberate learning and practice. I will argue that while some individuals might have innate preconditions to lead, effective leadership requires a deliberate learning and practice. It is certainly that shift in leadership perception that underpins the African Union Leadership Academy we are celebrating the launch today.

At a certain time, our talented musicians in the continent pretended to have music in their blood and genes, up until they confronted themselves to the necessity of communicating the musical language to others in their value chain (Recording Professional Studio, Duo Contract with other professional performers). Recording in ultra-modern studio requires a minimum initiation to music language. Hence, even the most talented musicians have bowed to the imperative of basic music lessons to translate the talent into a piece of musical art transmittable from a continent to another, from one generation to another. Beyond lessons, what really sets talented musicians or any

other performers apart from the crowd is the amount of time in deliberate practice rather than 'genetic talent' itself.

The same applies to the need for us to take advantage of education. There is no short cut. Africa Structural transformation requires a transformational education susceptible to respond to the challenges of our time of which climate and poverty alleviation. In this line, Science, Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM) have become very prominent to increase productivity and adapt to and mitigate climate change.

Developing leadership and entrepreneurship in youth is indispensable. Agenda 2063 is a huge and long train of change. Like any change, Agenda 2063 may generate both excitement and anxiety. The amount of leaders who worked timelessly to frame this vision is not a guarantee of success on its own. To make it a tangible reality it is about collective leadership.

More transformational leaders are needed. These types of leaders intend to stimulate the growth and development of their followers, their organizations, and themselves. When transformational leaders look at their followers, they see the next generation of leaders.

History has shown the tenacity of African youth. Some of the most renowned figures of Africa's independence struggle started their

political engagements as young adults. By the time he turned 37, Kwame Nkrumah was deeply involved in the planning of the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester. Abdul Gamel Nasser, at 35, was a colonel in the Egyptian army and became President at 38. Frantz Fanon at age 27 wrote his first book to worldwide critical acclaim. Other leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Patrice Lumumba and Modibo Keita were all, in their youth, thinkers and change makers, recognized for their contributions. Indeed, my own mentor, Amilcar Cabral, by age 26, had founded several student movements dedicated to promoting the cause of liberation of Portuguese colonies in Africa. When he died at the age of 46, he had achieved more than many people do in several lifetimes. These are only a few examples of 20th century African leaders who, during their youth, were and continue to be a source of inspiration to Africans and the world at large.

By comparison, how well are today's African youth leaders supporting Africa's transformation process? Our youth is still struggling to make their voices heard in all spheres of influence. For example, the current median age of African leaders is 3 times the median age of the African population. African leaders seem to be less willing today to open up space for political engagements. This is what the Africa Leadership Academy will contribute to change.

I thank you.