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Panel Session Title: *Transformative leadership for Africa's sustainable development*

Discussion Note

Prepared by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)

This Discussion Note was prepared by the African Capacity Building Foundation to form the basis for discussion during the Panel Session. Ideas presented here are intended to stimulate further conversations and research, and do not represent firm conclusions or positions endorsed by ACBF.

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1. Introduction

African leaders are well aware of the urgency and challenges of socioeconomic transformation. This recognition is demonstrated in their adoption of the Agenda 2063 which identifies seven aspirations and 20 goals. This was followed in January 2015 by adoption of the Agenda's First Ten-Year Implementation Plan (2014–23). In September 2015, the international community adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the auspices of the United Nations Agenda 2030. African member states also committed the continent to implementing the 17 goals and 169 targets set out in of the SDGs within the framework of their national development plans.

In both Agendas, accelerating Africa's productive transformation is a strategic development objective. Productive transformation is defined as the diversification into new products and higher value-added activities as well as in technological upgrading, the creation of more productive and better jobs and employment patterns that result in rising wages and poverty reduction.[1] It is imperative as it translates into economic diversification and sophistication by creating new products and higher value-added activities, improving productivity and creating decent jobs. The African Union through Agenda 2063 and 2030 envisions African countries transforming the structure of their economies to create strong, robust and inclusive growth generating jobs and opportunities for all[2].

Agenda 2063 and the Ten-Year Implementation Plan also recognize the critical role of transformative leadership in Africa's sustainable socio-economic transformation. The 2019 Africa Capacity Report (*ACR2019*), which is ACBF's flagship publication and is themed *'Fostering Transformative Leadership for Africa's Sustainable Development,'* defines transformative leadership as leadership that brings about positive radical changes. In a development context, it is leadership that engenders widespread, demonstrable improvements in peoples' lives as evidenced by rising incomes, longer life expectancies, comprehensive social safety networks, and universal access to basic services. In this regard, transformative leadership requires developing and persuasively communicating an agenda for long-term success, fostering supportive institutions, and creating short-term opportunities as an additional incentive. Moreover, transformative leadership must inspire and mobilize the population, deploy the best technical capabilities to implement the transformation program, and cultivate the necessary political coalition to ensure sustainability.

Historical evidence, too, indicates that successful transformation has occurred mostly in countries that were governed over long periods by a capable, credible, and committed government under strong political leadership – a leadership that is skilled in devising and advancing growth strategies and mobilizing and motivating people to make the necessary sacrifices.[3]

Transformative leadership could hence play a strategic role by supporting initiatives aimed at accelerating productive transformation which include industrializing the African economies,

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[1] Nübler, I. (2014). *A theory of capabilities for productive transformation: Learning to catch up. Transforming Economies: Making industrial policy work for growth, jobs and development*. United Nations (UNCTAD and ILO).

[2] AU (African Union). 2015. Agenda 2063 Framework Document: The Africa We Want: Addis Ababa.

[3] ACBF. 2019. *Africa Capacity Report. Fostering Transformative Leadership for Africa's Development*. ACBF: Harare.

promoting the creation of innovative technical solutions to the challenges faced by countries, modernizing the agriculture and extractive sectors as well as developing global value chains for African products.

This Discussion Note presents an outline of some of the key issues, challenges and possible solutions to addressing the transformative leadership challenges facing the continent especially with regard to developing and implementing public policies that can accelerate productive transformation. This builds on ACBF's 28 years of supporting capacity development efforts on the continent. The Note also poses questions that will act as food for thought for African leaders, policy makers, researchers and stakeholders so as to share country, regional and continental experiences and provoke further research.

2. Key issues and challenges

Although improving in some countries, poor leadership has been highlighted as a major obstacle to Africa's socioeconomic development. At the helm, political leadership sets the tone, attitude, and behavior in policy design and implementation and management of resources for promoting national development as well as influencing the kind of leadership that emerges in the other spheres (private and non-state actors).

Africa faces several challenges in transformative leadership development. First, leadership across African countries does not have a uniformly deep understanding of the substantive issues of development and transformation. While leaders at the highest levels sometimes have a good grasp of the structures and dynamics of governance needed for socioeconomic transformation and of the major internal and external factors that shape countries' development prospects, it is not always true at lower levels. Moreover, there is significant ideological fragmentation across the continent despite the African leaders showing some commitment to economic integration and strong political collaboration.[4]

Additionally, there is continuing tension between the endogenous wisdom and experience and the knowledge inherited from the continent's colonial history. This is compounded by the impact of religions (in particular Christianity, Islam, and animism) on the ideological values of development. These different forms of fragmentation have brought great ideological divergence to development and transformation perspectives.[5]

Second, most of the institutions and processes for developing transformative leadership capacities have not fully bloomed. While leadership capacity building is implicit in national development strategies, there are very few comprehensive and explicit national leadership capacity development policies or strategies. Across the continent, policy processes still borrow widely from external ideas and institutional forms. Institutional forms of governance have not been fully adapted to African culture and values. At the technical level, countries have in place a full panoply of

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[4] *Ibid*
[5] *Ibid*

administrative entities that duplicate the form of similar entities abroad, but they do not necessarily perform these functions effectively.[6]

In most countries, leadership development initiatives have been hampered by lack of technical, financial, and human resources. Most initiatives have struggled with finding the resources they need to attain their objectives. The country studies from ACBF's Africa Capacity Report 2019 point out that most capacity building institutions need their own capacity upgrade in human resource development, technology, and infrastructure.

Third, networking is weak across leaders in political, public sector, bureaucratic, business, religious, traditional, labor, and civil society spheres. This is largely because leadership mentoring and capacity development are not institutionalized or internalized. Accordingly, there is almost no sharing of best practices and experiences except in informal contexts that are not taken seriously.[7]

Finally, the widespread lack of a transformative mindset among the continent's leaders and their inability to lead by example frustrates the transformation drive. The country case studies highlight corruption at the leadership level as a major example of an inappropriate mindset.[8]

These capacity gaps need to be addressed so that African countries do not only have good public policy environments for productive transformation; but that leadership is able to implement these policies and achieve sustainable development.

3. Some Proposed Recommendations

Transformative leadership is at the core of implementing policies and programs related to productive transformation. Transformative leadership cuts across public, private, traditional, and civil society organizations. Building transformative leadership capacity is a Herculean task requiring resources, commitment, and support from political, bureaucratic, business, religious, traditional, trade union, and civil society leaderships. However, unless capacities are built for a transformative leadership in Africa, that can spearhead effective public policies for the productive transformation envisaged in Agenda 2063 and the internationally agreed SDGs, Africa will largely remain stagnant.

The following should hence be considered:

- Amidst competing priorities, African countries should create dedicated budgets for leadership capacity development in all key domains. Leadership capabilities, systems, and processes must be strengthened in policy entities such as economic planning and finance and entities responsible for social, health and education policies. Equally important is the leadership capacity for ethical and compliance oversight, such as ombudspersons, anticorruption institutions, and audit entities.

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[6] *Ibid*

[7] *Ibid*

[8] *Ibid*

- Given the economic importance of business leaders, and the social and cultural importance of religious, civil society and traditional leaders, strengthening their capacities is as essential to drive transformation.

- Countries should institute measures for building social capital and strengthening networks that embrace political leaders, traditional leaders, top public sector managers, the media, civil society organizations and trade unions, academic institutions and think tanks, professional standards organizations, business associations, and religious bodies.

- It is also critical for the continent to nurture leadership succession through inclusive capacity building exercises involving young people.

- At the continent and regional levels, the leadership capacities at the African Union/African Union Commission and the regional economic communities need to be strengthened through immersion in strategic visioning and change management approaches.

- Promoting coordinated leadership capacity development initiaves across countries is important for sharing lessons of what works or not.

4. Selected questions for discussion

- How can leadership in Africa be associated with productive transformation? What leadership is appropriate to African context for the sustainable development of the continent?
- What kind of progress has been made toward transformative leadership for productive transformation in Africa? Which countries stand out and what kind of policies have they adopted? What kind of avenues can be explored in order to sustain this progress?
- In developing transformative leadership, which bodies should be tasked with the work? What specific roles should each institution play? At what levels should each institutional body operate?
- How can African countries be encouraged to dedicate more resources towards building transformative leadership capacities?
- What are some of the good examples of transformative leadership (political, private and non-state actor levels) at continental, regional and national levels that are worthy sharing?

NOTE: For more on how to foster transformative leadership, see the '*2019 Africa Capacity Report: Fostering Transformative Leadership for Africa's Development*,' which will be launched during the STC meetings and will be available on the ACBF e-library soon after the launch: https://elibrary.acbfpact.org/

About the African Capacity Building Foundation

Established in 1991, ACBF builds human and institutional capacity for good governance and economic development in Africa. It is the African Union's designated Specialized Agency for Capacity Development in Africa since January 2017. To date, the Foundation has empowered people in governments, parliaments, civil society, private sector and higher education institutions in more than 45 countries and 6 regional economic communities. ACBF supports capacity development across Africa through mobilization and leveraging of resources for capacity development; grants, investments and fund management; knowledge services; promoting innovation in capacity development and capacity development advisory services. The establishment of ACBF was in response to the severity of Africa's capacity needs, and the challenges of investing in indigenous human capital and institutions in Africa. ACBF interventions are premised on four principles: the centrality of capacity to the development process in Africa; the critical role of a partnership and demand-driven approach in tackling capacity challenges; African ownership and leadership in the capacity development process; and a systematic, sequenced and coordinated approach to the capacity development process that pays attention to capacity retention and utilization. For further information go to: www.acbf-pact.org