



12

Re-setting the Priorities

Realizing the Nature of the Problem

Recollecting my memories when I first stepped on to African soil in 1973 and then returning back in 2001 and again in 2011, I found out that there are two clear trends taking place: one was urban growth, while the other was the levelling-up of freedom of expression and the means of communication. But the manner in which these were unfolding was quite different from what I expected or was used to seeing in my native country and other regions.

In most cases, I noticed deterioration rather than improvement in the overall orderliness, infrastructure management and environment of urban centres. An observer would note: 'Although Sub-Saharan Africa is the least urbanised continent, its rate of urbanisation is among the highest in the world. While urbanisation can be a welcome engine for socio-economic development, innovation, and employment creation, it can also bring about a number of challenges, most of which are manifest within the sphere of urban environment ... [which are] crowded living conditions; poor disposal of wastes; inadequate basic infrastructure;

pollution of water and air; and the decline of the urban green frame.¹ And I would add to this the unbelievable traffic congestion and chaos.

Another striking feature was a noticeably greater extent of freedom of expression enjoyed in the countries compared to the past. By and large, this is the effect of globalization and the spread of technology. The acceleration in usage of the Internet and mobile phones in the region is remarkable and the flourishing of mass media in terms of the number of outlets and variety available is something that was unimaginable in the old days. This is not to negate the reality that sometimes oppression of expression is exercised for political purposes by rulers, but largely such a liberal trend is evident.

As countries increasingly engage with the outside world, and managing public and economic affairs becomes as complex as ever, they need to have stronger capacity in this regard. But this not being the case, we see the unruliness, disorganization and mismanagement of affairs that is typical of Sub-Saharan Africa today. At the heart of the problem lies the tendency of 'right here, right now': people trying to merely 'adapt' to (rather than tame or overcome) the circumstances or environment in which they find themselves, or wanting to settle things now, opting for 'immediate' rather than 'delayed' gratification.²

Everything is relative and no society is perfect or doomed. But attitudinal orientations matter. No matter how far our times and technologies have evolved, and however old-fashioned it may sound, the importance of the human mind and determination cannot be emphasised enough. As the moral of Aesop's Fable on the tortoise and the hare would tell us, individuals can beat seemingly formidable odds, while people can quickly end up as losers despite their physical or material advantage over others. There is a good chance that a society enjoying an abundance of natural resources and other means, but lacking sincerity and commitment would fare worse than a society which has the opposite traits.

Since people's actions are in the end derived from their perception, attitudinal orientations and goals, despite all the hoopla and excitement over new ideas, technologies and innovations, if any meaningful development is to occur, it has to be accompanied by a mindset change in the people. By development, we are talking about positive changes that

are accountable and visible. It can take many forms that are discernible: the cleanliness and orderliness of living quarters and the neighbourhood and public facilities; the improvement of infrastructure and the delivery of service; improved education and health facilities; enhanced economic activity, productivity and income generation, etc. Hence, if such improvements do not happen, with or without foreign assistance, it means that people are not being responsive and something must be done about it.

There is plenty of blaming going on, but at least people are recognizing that there are problems. Many African leaders have their fair share of frustrations with the lack of progress being made in terms of development. For instance, as reasons for Africa's underdevelopment, Uganda's President Museveni has blamed poor education, underdeveloped human resources and skills, a lack of indigenous entrepreneurs, hindrance to private businesses, small markets and inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of energy resources. He also cites tribal, religious and gender ideological disorientations, a lack of industrialization and a lack of viable pillars in the judicial and defence sectors leading to a collapse in the state's authority.³

The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) meeting held on 26 August 2016 in Nairobi adopted, as Africa's development blueprint guide, President Museveni's paper on Africa's ten bottlenecks: ideological disorientation; a weak state exemplified by a weak army; human resource underdevelopment; poor infrastructure; a failure to industrialize; fragmented markets; underdevelopment of the service sector; undermining of the private sector; a laissez-faire attitude that is crippling the agriculture sector; and past shortcomings in democracy.⁴ African leaders and elites seem to understand what their countries are lacking, but the obstacles that were identified can be seen largely as the outcome and not the causes of more deeper and fundamental problems.

Some mention that the top seven reasons why Africa is still poor are civil wars and terrorism, unending corruption, an education and knowledge gap, poor health and poverty, geographical disadvantages, international aid and unfair trade practices.⁵ Greg Mills mentions in *Why Africa Is Poor* that the main reason why Africa's people are poor is because their leaders have made this choice, not because of all the things

cited as lacking or being blamed for this: African rulers have externalized their problems, blaming donor countries and bodies for all their unaccomplished ills.⁶

Those who subscribe to mainstream economic liberalism tend to define the essence of economy too simply or narrowly: in terms of free market mechanism. But what is much more important to developing countries is 'effective capitalism'. 'Markets' existed since the beginning of human civilization and are nothing new or special. In theory, a market is nothing more than a supply-and-demand mechanism. It is of course the most basic means or medium for the exchange of goods and allocation of resources, but in order for wealth creation and economic prosperity in a society and nation to come about, so many more things are needed, like the robust entrepreneurship of business leaders, a skilled and devoted labour force, socio-political stability and security, capital mobilization, an appropriate role played by the government (like 'strategic oversight' or guidance in industrialization), a positive 'national ethos' or work ethic, technology, social capital, good governance, a favourable natural endowment, geographical conditions ... and the list goes on.

The reality is that it is not that simple to treat everything in a dichotomic context: liberal (good) and protectionist (bad). And governments can indeed play a key role in economic development if they act as facilitators and drivers of effective capitalism. What matters is keeping politics out of the economic realm as much as possible. Fostering competent and disciplined bureaucracy insulated from political influences is a good way to start and it is never too late to do so. South Korea's case is a vindication of the 'holy trinity' of economics: markets, corporations and government. Reforming government is the way to go, not doing away with it.

There is no question that the national rulers are the ones most responsible for their country's state of development. But we should not underestimate or overestimate their ability. We can talk about the issue of too much 'political correctness', but we should also be aware of the flaws of 'intellectual correctness' or 'academic correctness', which places all the blame on the rulers and portrays the masses as victims. This can be more detrimental than meets the eye. We should also note Joseph

de Maistre's quote that 'every nation has the government it deserves'. And the following observation has also makes a salient point: 'the leaders of any given society, club or country are just the picture of that society, club or country at large ... People are trained by the society. The value system of that given society is what teaches them what to believe, how to behave, what to pursue with their lives and how to lead their people'.⁷

The leaders of states get their agendas implemented through their teams of elites and civil servants, and ultimately through the workings of the people. The rulers cannot control everything and cannot be effective in managing their economy and other affairs if they are not sufficiently supported by many layers of 'collaborators'. South Korea would not have achieved an economic miracle if it were not for the sacrifice of hardworking people and the enterprising private sector, as well as its bureaucrats.

The state leadership should be the key drivers of development as well as its last bastion. But still, many African leaders are corrupt and abusive of their power, and seek to maintain the status quo. It is also true that any leader with a reasonable mind would dearly want to prove their worth through economic performance, as the pressure is mounting on them to deliver whatever they can to satisfy the rising expectations of the masses. Therefore, economic performance is deemed to be the surest answer to achieving political success. In most cases, African leaders come short in terms of their goals because they are stuck in the comfort zone of compromising with reality even before earnestly attempting to produce results. Thus, it takes much more than the simple decisions of leaders.

While it is easy to destroy what was achieved in an instant, it would require mammoth efforts to rebuild whatever has been undone. Raila Odinga, the former Prime Minister of Kenya, spoke on the day of the Centenary of Nelson Mandela's birth that Africa's ills can no longer be blamed on the colonial legacy, but rather that Africa's deterioration has been brought about by bad politics and African leaders abusing their power. The main root cause of Africa's continued poverty is undoubtedly the mindset issue, which hinders positive action being taken. But the prospect of confronting the root causes may be daunting for

political leaders, policy-makers and even civil society. Many African nations are by no means static. On the contrary, you see so much vibrancy in individuals when they *come together* in social life—cultural events, social gatherings, public celebrations, commemorations, etc. What is desirable (and it could be a strategic move) is to induce the people to show an equal level of liveliness and passion in their workplaces and businesses.

For this purpose, ‘leaders’ are always needed in every corner and level of society. When the people, especially the poor, are left on their own, they feel powerlessness and alienation, but when they come together as an entity, they form a sense of social belonging and can suddenly feel inclined to act. This holds true both in rural-communal areas and semi-rural urban localities. In such an environment, a ‘communal’ approach such as that adopted by the *Saemaul Undong* can be effective in driving people to act in the pursuit of shared goals. Motivation and confidence can be built up easily through associations. However, when their orientation is misplaced and becomes primarily ‘transactional’, and matters are settled in courts, the society is likely to further degenerate and it will be difficult to turn back the tide. That is why initiatives like mindset change campaigns need to be executed, with leaders setting examples.

Figure 12.1 below illustrates the persistent gap between the developed world and Sub-Saharan African countries. The y-axis represents the level (quality) of the social and institutional fabric, as well as the technical, productive skills. Since independence, the overall level of the social and institutional fabric of African countries in terms of social capital, civic values, governance, respect for norms and regulations, etc. has remained largely unchanged at a low level. Hence, there are still big gaps that need to be reduced. The curves are rough depiction of the estimations of the levels assessed.

Of the two gaps—that in the social and institutional fabric, and that in skills and technology—the latter can have particularly deep repercussions on African countries in the low end as having a competitive edge in terms of skills and technology on a global scale is of great importance today.

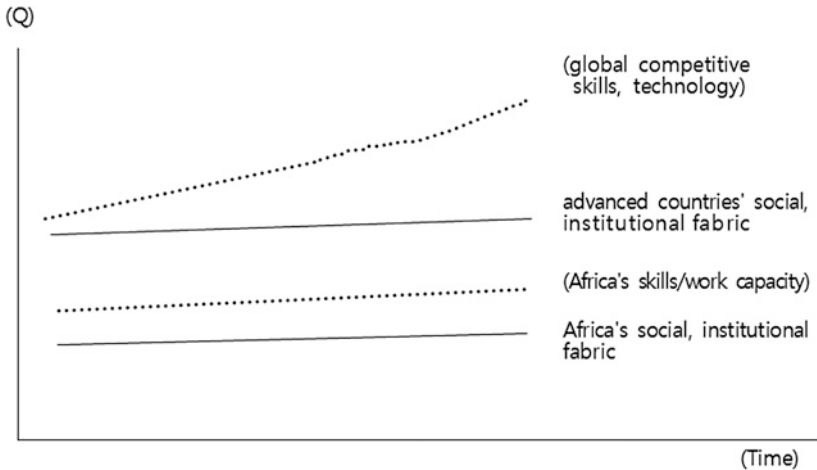


Fig. 12.1 Development gaps: the problem of being transfixed

The upper dotted line in Fig. 12.1 represents the global competitive skills and technology (mainly for business) level, which is much higher than that of Sub-Saharan Africa. The trend is that the gap between the world's and Africa's skills and work capacity is widening.

What this implies is that Sub-Saharan Africa, which is open for business, is exposed to and can partner with foreign and multi-national companies with the highest competitive capacity, skills and technology. And there is an increasing number of visits between Africa and the rest of the world. So, there seems to be good exposure and opportunities for Africa to make up for its weakness by way of opening up its markets.

However, this will not resolve the problem of poverty because the fundamental gap will continue to exist under the circumstances. Without a proper policy, governance and mindset in place, it will be difficult not only to 'harness' foreign businesses, but also to properly 'support' and utilize them so as to reap the maximum level of mutual benefits.

There is a good example in Latin American countries that missed the opportunity to achieve rapid economic growth and successful transformation in the early stages of development due to their unsuccessful import substitution policies, premature introduction of foreign direct

investment and heavy reliance on multi-national corporations. Many of them are now paying the price for repeated missteps, like not being able to industrialize at auspicious moments, and giving into populism and the demand for welfare surpassing the means, as well as a failure to curb corruption.

Liberalization or globalization cannot be all bad for Africa. But when countries use these forces to forgo their own responsibility while trying to find solutions in foreign partners, the possibility of attaining economic viability in the context of self-empowerment will be diminished. Without addressing mindset and fundamental challenges, they will drift further away from the desired path of development.

Attitudes and Work Ethics

Attitudes and work ethics do matter—very much in fact—regardless of whether we are in a traditional working environment or high-tech sectors, and most likely also AI industries in the future. Basically, in the labour-intensive economic structure that characterizes Sub-Saharan Africa (only South Africa has a very capital-intensive industrial sector), the work ethic assumes a great significance. But even in capital- and technology-intensive sectors, where the cost of human failure in decision-making or management could be far greater, attitudes and ethics are deemed all the more crucial. People may not be amply aware that no matter how far machines, automation and artificial intelligence can be advanced, there is still room—and considerable room at that—for human interventions, as even the most sophisticated robots cannot replace humans (there are already troubles surfacing in relation to overmechanization).

As long as we choose to remain as ‘humanity’ irrespective of technological innovations, we cannot do away with norms like work ethics. Thus, many things depend on human attitudes and they can impede or stimulate progress. If people do not have the ‘proper’ set of attitudes, all the natural endowments available or all the technical and institutional support offered would quickly lose their value. Sub-Saharan Africa is an ironic case in that it probably has the largest ‘untapped’ and most

‘concentrated’ fertile land mass in the world, but its agricultural output is one of the lowest in the world.

And how are Africa and international organizations trying to cope with the situation? The common solutions that are sought seem to be mainly technical and material, and such a pattern of recourse seems to be stubbornly followed in spite of repeated setbacks. Acquiring ‘knowledge’ is crucial, and knowledge and attitude go together, but considering that the methods used have barely improved, there must have been a serious neglect or a blind-sight in the efforts. Or it may be that the international community, having not yet found a better alternative, has no other choice but to continue its course.

In 2015, the African Development Bank recommended that Africa can boost agricultural productivity by doing the following eight things: develop high-yielding crops; boost irrigation; increase the use of fertilizers; improve access, regulation and governance; make better use of technology; adopt genetically modified (GM) crops; reform land ownership with productivity and inclusiveness in mind; and step up integration into agricultural value chains (AVCs).⁸ This all sounds fine in theory and would go down well with conference attendants, but from the perspective of policy-makers and farmers, how helpful will this be? Such a long shopping list of the things that ordinary people can hardly manage to undertake cannot be the best practical solutions.

An increasing number of experts seem to agree that natural endowments, physical resources or even technical know-how do not matter greatly in terms of making the difference in the absence of a positive attitude or mindset in the locals. For instance, Piet van Asten explains that an in-depth study shows how farmers in East Africa make decisions in farming is depended on how they perceive reality rather than the actual conditions on the ground, and given that attitudes of farmers plays an important role, understanding their attitudes will provide insights into their actions, and thereby some clues as to what can be done to assist them.⁹ But understanding attitudinal traits is one thing and deciding what to do about it is quite another.

Naturally, such an attitudinal issue is not confined to farmers, but affects the whole spectrum of society. In this book, I have tried to dissect the meaning of ‘mindset’, which is a broad and general concept. And I

think it boils down to 'attitudes' and 'work ethics' from a developmental perspective. There are many nuances to the word 'attitude', but from the point of view of development, it can be defined as 'a manner of thinking, feeling, or behaving that reflects a state of mind or disposition the way a person views something or tends to behave towards it, often in an evaluative way'.¹⁰ Different people see and respond to problems in different ways and for different reasons. The issue of being 'transfixed' is not only a problem for Africa, but is also a factor in the approach of the international community. Things will remain static when activities only touch upon what is on the surface, without going deeper to address the root causes. In just about everything, 'rationality' is assumed and the efforts to bridge the 'divide' have been dismal at best, so the 'parallel' continues.

Essentially, there are two dimensions to Africa's needs: first, the improvement of basic conditions and quality of life; and, second, sustainable economic development. The former concerns the basic human needs and rights of the people, while the latter concerns more mid- to long-term tasks of nations, like achieving structural change in the economy.

However, it is true that the mainstream donor community is seen to be principally focused on the former while 'neglecting' the latter. On the other hand, China, an emerging donor, literally confines itself to the 'hardware' sub-division of the latter, like infrastructure construction and energy development projects. What seems to be increasingly evident is that the promotion of the former (the fulfilment of human needs and rights) does not necessarily lead to progress in the latter (sustainable economic development). Equally, it is certainly the case that Sub-Saharan African countries are in dire need of physical infrastructure, but infrastructure constitutes just one of the many things necessary for national development, and the issues related to the construction of infrastructure, like corruption, rises in the cost and delays of work, poor management, etc., revert back to the question of governance, the ethics of individuals and the norms of society. As such, there is no quick fix or a means of circumventing the fundamentals.

Only the people of Africa can do what it takes to effectively close the perennial poverty gap, although the international community can certainly help. Without wasting more time and resources, we should come to terms with the fact that the principal root cause of Africa's poverty is

the mindset issue, and therefore we should re-align our efforts to tackling this matter. Recently, I have discovered a casual way of getting my message across and starting a conversation without sounding too blunt or judgemental (or undiplomatic): I would say ‘I think the reason why Africa remains poor is not necessarily because people lack the resources or the means, but rather, it’s more due to the management problem’. No one objected and people could not agree with me more.

I was recently reminded, once again, that we too often take it for granted, or presume, that others’ thoughts, behaviours and needs are the same as ours, when in fact they may not be. I heard from a number of experts from international aid agencies that in order to ensure effectiveness of aid programmes, donors must understand the culture and attitudes of the locals. I have had an opportunity to consult with the representatives of UN specialized agencies, who told me that the international development community makes the common mistake of pursuing an individual-oriented approach when the typical characteristic of African locals is familial or communal in nature—in other words, that people’s actions are bound up with their kinship.

During the discourse, the head of the UNDP office in Uganda told me about some interesting episodes that occurred with a number of projects to assist women and girls in the rural region. They provided borehole pumps to the villages to save them from walking many kilometres a day just to fetch water. However, it turned out that the girls were not using the pumps in their villages, but instead were continuing to fetch water from the remote water sources. The explanation for this was that they wanted the privacy and ‘free time’ by themselves, to meet and chat with their friends, perhaps to escape boredom (or the shackles of their in-laws) or to refresh themselves. As such, the organization decided to provide bicycles to girls, but this did not work either, and men were using them instead. Another story was about young women shunning newly built latrines in or around their homes. It is said that women do not feel comfortable either sharing or being seen using the same latrine with other family members or relatives, especially the elderly; they would rather find remote places.

Therefore, the advice of these experts was that before we, the donors, embark on assistance programmes, we should consider the culture and

attitudes of the beneficiaries to ensure that these programmes have the desired impact on them. They also suggested that mindset change takes time, and we should expect the results to come slowly and gradually. I was all ears and their arguments made good sense to me. I thanked them for enlightening me about what I have not known before.

But later that day, when I tried to figure out what lessons could be taken away from the meeting, I realized that the perceptions within the international development community can also be highly divergent. I could not brush off the feeling that what these international aid officials were suggesting implicitly was that their logic and methods were essentially geared towards maintaining the status quo. More agents of change, not less, are needed. There is every reason to acknowledge and take local cultures and practices into account, but there is also a danger that by doing so, we could fall into the trap of perpetuating the status quo, which is exactly what development efforts should fight against.

Currently, there are basically two different trains of thought underlying international aid and development with respect to Africa. As mentioned earlier, one is about prioritizing basic human needs and their rights; the other is about prioritizing the building of physical infrastructure. People might think that this covers the essentials, but it does not. In fact, there is a big blind-spot in the existing development architecture, a third arm which we can call mindset change or a 'power-of-the-mind' approach or empowering the people with a development mindset.

The benefit of this mindset change approach, when properly applied, can reap enormous results, as demonstrated by the South Korean case. The advantage of this mindset change approach is that while the first 'basic-human-needs-and-rights (BHNR)' approach and the second physical infrastructure building approach both breed strong dependency on the part of the recipients, this, on the contrary, promotes the attributes of self-reliance, independence and self-ownership. Not only can, and should, this approach be employed to complement the first and the second approaches, but when successfully pursued, it will make these two approaches redundant. For example, in the case of South Korea,

the amount of aid it received for BHNR and physical infrastructure was minimal, and the duration of such assistance was far shorter compared to other countries.

Figure 12.2 below represents a proposed new formula of development assistance to Africa, the tripod of development assistance: the existing BHNR approach and physical infrastructure building projects, and the addition of the new mindset-change approach. The BHNR approach is what the traditional donors have mostly been engaged in, while physical infrastructure projects are what China and, to a lesser extent, other emerging donors have been mostly focusing on.¹¹

The mindset-change approach is not unique to Korea, but is applied routinely in the everyday lives of all the people. Whether in films, dramas or novels, we almost always see someone taking the lead in uplifting others to fight on or rise to the occasion and not give up in despair. This does not happen only in dramatic scenes; even small words that touch our hearts and encourage us can unleash powerful forces in individuals. In schools, companies, factories, sports teams, hotels, hospitals, the military, government agencies, etc., people are repeatedly and persistently reminded of their 'code of conduct' and are urged to exert themselves in order to fulfil their duties.

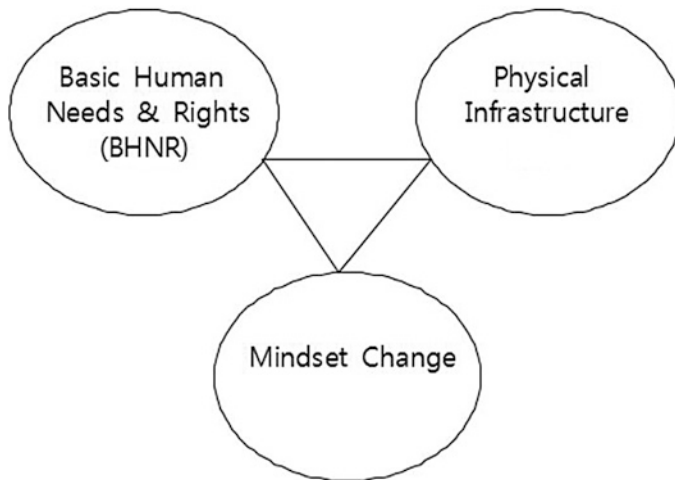


Fig. 12.2 The tripod of development assistance

In every society, there is a constant need to ‘energize’ people to act positively, and this is a vital part of the management process for any institution or organization. And the mechanism for motivating or energizing people is, of course, ‘rewards (remuneration) and sanctions (punishments)’, as mentioned earlier. The problem is that we have forgotten to do all this when it comes to Africa’s development.

Going back to the term ‘development-mindedness’ or KPOP, all this seems to underscore the importance of the last ‘P’, which stands for ‘passion’. I have pointed out that Korea’s uniqueness of its mindset change approach can be found in the ‘reverse engineering’: the act of instilling passion in people first and letting the power unleash itself, which will take care of the rest.

The achievement or success of a nation is not assessed in terms of how the powerful and the privileged have amassed wealth and lead prosperous lives; instead, it is the overall level of living of the whole population that counts and matters. That is why when we are talking about national development, it is crucial to have a set of initiatives that connect with the people and are relevant at the national level. This is the area in which most Sub-Saharan Africa countries find themselves at the weakest point.

What Africa lacks most, and hence needs to assign the highest priority to, is none other than the software compartment of mindset change. Without an attitudinal change in the people and the leaders, and understanding what constitutes or enables development, all the assistance provided by the international community, and all the investments and other business opportunities that foreigners may offer will be to no avail, since Africans will not be the true drivers and owners of development.

The first thing to do is to be aware of the necessity of mindset change. The next challenge is how to focus on and implement this task. The mindset change campaign itself should come from Africans themselves. For donors, their role should be assisting such efforts in a supplementary and facilitating fashion.

Critics have pointed out the ills of continuous flows of aid to Africa. If a wise thing to do is not cut these drastically—and I do not see this happening anytime soon—then both donors and African countries

should at least work closely together to foster a new environment of development partnership. It should start with the premise that people's attitudes are 'changeable'. And the practical way to launch this endeavour is to bring the locals, the leaders and the masses to the point where they comprehend the inevitability of change in their mindset and behaviour if they want to lead better lives. A strong community drive in which committed leaders from different backgrounds come together can be instrumental in this regard. People should be made to realize that relying on handouts from their government or aid organizations will get them nowhere and will only disempower and impoverish them further.

Such initiatives should not just target the 'development-mindedness' of the people in general, but should also involve concrete measures to curtail specific obstacles that undermine development. For example, a typical hindrance commonly experienced by donors are delaying and 'sabotaging' efforts by the officials in charge. Such acts are committed due to a lack of supervision and enforcement of disciplinary rules, as well as the overall weakness in the governance of the state. If African governments can put in place a more stringent administrative oversight and accountability enforcing mechanism in their system, it would considerably enhance the performance of development projects.

The continued gaps and discrepancies between what the development community is pursuing and what will actually take place are more attributable to 'attitudinal' factors than 'capacity gaps' and local conditions that the people on the receiving end often cite as the reason for such shortcomings.¹² By suggesting that a lack of capacity is the primary reason for failures, they are in fact asking for open-ended support from donors. They try to conveniently avoid responsibility by invoking their 'lack of capacity', when the real reason is their intent. Attitudes and capacity are two very different things, and attitudinal problems should not be masked by such terms as 'lack of capacity'.

The word 'capacity' implies the ability of someone to carry out certain assignments or demonstrate their skills, and is based on accumulated knowledge and training. So, when people say that the problem is due to a lack of capacity, they are insinuating that its nature is technical and what is needed is more investment for building capacity. But the reality is that the most egregious transgressions are often committed

by those who know all too well the field of their expertise and hence should know better. The issue is far more profound than simply accumulating knowledge and capacity.

There is no denying that in the region, many people do lack the necessary education and technical skills training, and the illiteracy rate in Africa in general as a continent is probably the highest in the world. Of the top ten countries with the highest illiteracy rate in the world, nine are from Africa, with only one country coming from outside the continent (Afghanistan).¹³ Fighting illiteracy and providing greater education opportunities to the population should be the rudimentary responsibility of the state. But what is necessary is moving beyond people's ability to read and write, as this is only the first step in the long process of human development.

The question is not only how we can fight widespread irregularities and corruption, but also how the people can be uplifted and empowered. The reason why Sub-Saharan African countries are not faring well compared to many other developing nations in Asia and other parts of the world is that the 'double drawbacks of underdevelopment'—corruption and poor work ethics—are markedly more serious here than elsewhere. And these will not take care of themselves in a social, economic and political environment that seeks to maintain the status quo. A 'shock-therapy' type of approach and an all-out campaign at a national level might be needed.

A Westerner once asked me why I thought when there is so much corruption in China, just like Africa, China still manages to reap economic success. I replied that it must be due to differences in the level of work ethics. Africans themselves know better than anyone else how much corruption there is in Africa, so they are curious to hear from foreigners how their countries were able to deal with corruption. A Dutch colleague of mine once told me that when he was asked by a Ugandan businessman whether there was corruption in the Netherlands just like in Uganda; he responded that corruption exists everywhere, but the difference is that in the Netherlands those who commit irregularities are likely to be held accountable for it while in Uganda they are not.

I have discussed the preponderance of the 'commission culture' and the 'allowance culture' in Sub-Saharan Africa that is eating away at the

competitiveness and public interest of the nations in the region. The former is an unwritten practice, while the latter is institutionalized in the governmental sector. In any case, they reflect unwholesome opportunism, laxity or loopholes in supervision and disciplinary mechanisms, and the temptation to seek windfall gains whenever possible. Another widespread practice in governmental circles in Africa that I still do not understand is the failure on the part of the government to pay its employees' monthly salaries on time. The payment of regular salaries should be a predictable task and it is purely due to administrative laxity that this is not the case, so there cannot be any excuse for that.

Why governments and their public sectors seem to always fall short in terms of delivering public service and spurring economic dynamism in Africa is due not so much to bureaucratic bottlenecks and inefficiencies, but rather a lack of supervision and managerial negligence, in addition to the prevalence of irregularities and corruption. In most countries, the function of government falters not necessarily because of 'bureaucratization', but rather because the organization is deficient in 'life' and a sense of purpose. Generally, the merit of public service is the honour to serve one's nation, as well as job security. Since government officials' salaries and budgets come from taxpayers, they have the obligation to serve the public interest. If an employee wants to amass wealth, they should be in the private sector doing business. The same holds true for elected officials and parliamentarians in particular. Carrots and sticks are always necessary in the management of personnel and the operation of any organization. And, of course, the important thing is to enforce them vigorously. Most of all, 'sticks' or 'sanctioning mechanisms' are required to prevent civil servants from committing detrimental acts.

Frederick Herzberg, who studied employees' attitudes and motivations in order to come up with the 'motivation-hygiene theory', claims that there are satisfying and dissatisfying factors in employees' work environments. Satisfying factors, which he called 'motivators', include recognition, achievement and the challenge of work itself. Meanwhile, dissatisfying factors, which he termed 'hygiene factors' that do not give positive satisfaction or lead to higher levels of motivation (though dissatisfaction results from their absence), include status, job security, salary, fringe benefits, work conditions, good pay, paid insurance and

holidays. The word ‘hygiene’ is used in the sense that these are maintenance factors.¹⁴ The conclusions drawn from the case in the US, where the study was conducted, cannot be applicable to all other regions. But the most striking feature that is typical of Sub-Saharan Africa may be that the management system to effectively apply incentives and disincentives for employees is difficult to find.

If the employers or leaders of organizations were truly dedicated to enforcing carrots and sticks, exercising their powers in a constructive way, we would probably see a far different situation from the one we see today. The gross failure in management comes not from a lack of ‘knowledge’ or ‘capacity’, but from an unwillingness to take the trouble to see to it that things are working properly. It is basically an attitudinal rather than a technical problem. But then the same holds true for employees. Workers need to have an ‘earning-one’s-way-to-success’ mentality and their catchphrases should be ‘work ethics’, ‘devotion’, ‘consistency’ etc.

Regarding methodology, it would be worthwhile if comprehensive and in-depth research on the mindset of the people could be conducted. A study of the mindset can become a field where many ‘mysteries’ or paradoxes can be unlocked, and hence solutions can be discovered. Confronting the matter of the mindset of people can be both a daunting and an onerous task, and there can be a disinclination to address the topic at all. But this is an opportunity to think creatively and enlarge our boundaries of engagement with respect to development. I hope this book spurs new interest in this field.

A famous phrase—‘truth will set you free’—comes to my mind at this point. There are many issues around the world, and some seem to be simply too daunting to rein in. Fighting natural disasters and the effects of climate change, dealing with conflicts that are based on political, ethnical, and religious divides and that reflect direct conflict of interests or a stalemate in power dynamics are some examples. However, the truth is that lifting Africa out of poverty should by no means be an insurmountable task because there is no inherent conflict of interests or strategic stalemate involved here; that is, no intrinsic or intentional obstacle exists to discourage Africa’s development. Thus, there is no point in shying away or refraining from ‘searching’ for the truth

because the truth and the facts will only lead to ultimate solutions. As far as the development of Sub-Saharan Africa is concerned, there are no risks involved in assuming a bold, proactive posture in order to move forward.

As was the case in South Korea, the kind of mind transformational initiatives must come from within. This requires the courage to confront 'inconvenient truths' rather than hiding behind the cloak of political and academic correctness. Ethical and civic society can only be attained from the self-reflection of individuals through the embodiment of ethics, and this cannot be provided externally. People might be tempted to seek explanations and solutions to the problems outside of themselves, but this will do no good even in the short term. Being truthful to oneself or, to put it differently, 'internalizing' one's responsibilities is the entry point of *social correctness*. When individuals only blame others, they are choosing to become a mere 'dependent variable' of others.

Especially in development, the question of attitudes is a core issue and it should be recognized as such by all the stakeholders involved. For instance, being optimistic and having confidence is always a good trait. But having an empty sense of pride or being overly naive that somehow everything will turn out for the best or that someone else will take care of the problems will not help.

'Mindset' is a term encompassing 'attitudes' and 'work ethics'. There is no given definition of 'work ethics' and it could be defined simply as 'an ethical principle that places greatest value on hard work and diligence'.¹⁵ Business etiquette expert Jacqueline Whitmore talks about seven elements of strong ethics: professionalism, respectfulness, dependability, dedication, determination, accountability and humility.¹⁶ We can see how far in depth we can go with the term 'work ethics' and how much it is relevant in today's business and our livelihood in general. Hence, unless the work ethics of the people of developing nations are successfully targeted and changed, business, foreign aid or development projects will continue to have only a very limited output. What is in everybody's interests is to avoid turning material or financial support or resources into de facto handouts that have no visible impact on Africa's development.

People's work ethics make all the difference in the performance of a nation. I do not wish to be seen as biased, but there is such a thing as a typical work pattern of the local workers. To cite an example, this becomes evident when you are moving in and out of countries. I know that moving household goods out of your home and loading them into a 40-foot container truck takes half a day's work in Seoul. In Rome, it took a full day plus some extra hours the next day. In Abidjan (the capital of Cote d'Ivoire), it took two full days. In Uganda, three days were needed to get everything out.

Increasing economic efficiency and competitiveness does not happen easily over time and the most practical way of enhancing it is through strengthening the work ethics of workers. Whether it is simple manual work or a technical assignment, what must be done must be done, and cutting corners always has consequences.

In sociology, there are theories of social movements or revolutions explained in terms of 'relative deprivation', such as James C. Davis' J-curve theory (1962). According to this theory, revolution occurs when the gap between people's 'expected need satisfaction' and 'actual need satisfaction' widens to an intolerable level. But from the perspective of development, the correlation between people's level of 'desires' and level of 'work ethics' could be more meaningful.

In the economic sense, 'work ethics' has bearing on 'supply' aspect of market mechanism as work ethics affects productivity, output, competitiveness, quality of work, service delivery, etc.. The work ethic of a nation is deemed to be a fundamental determinant of its economic performance. And logically, people's demand (desires) should be matched by supply (work ethics) to ensure the stability, satisfaction and prosperity of society or nation. Needless to say, as in the case of J-curve theory, the growing discrepancy between people's expectations and reality can have a negative impact on society.

We should pay attention to what different combinations of desire and work ethics imply. A society showing both desire and work ethics on a steady rise is an ideal state for developing nations that need to escape poverty and attain sustainable development. When countries have achieved economic transformation and enter the phase of mature industrialization or post-industrialization, the overall level of the work

ethic in the people measured in conventional terms (hours of work, labour intensity, etc.) will drop. When countries become wealthier, they can afford to provide better working environments for people, but the rich nations' desires, which are already high, may continue to rise. In such a case, the gap should be filled by innovative measures enhancing the efficiency and competitiveness of the workforce, institutions and policies.

When the levels of both desires and work ethics remain unchanged at low levels, this represents a stagnant society with an economy stuck in a state of underdevelopment. Meanwhile, when the work ethic stays sluggish, but desires continue to ride high, this means that a society cannot satisfy its own demands, possibly resulting in the public's dissatisfaction and distrust in the government and the system, increased dependency on outside assistance and investments, a deterioration in public services, corruption and irregularities, etc.

Notes

1. Thomas P.Z. Mporu, 'Urbanization and Urban Environmental Challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Research Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Management* 2, no. 6 (June 2013), pp. 127–134.
2. See the book *Don't Eat the Marshmallow Yet: The Secret to Sweet Success in Work and Life* written by Joachim de Posada, Berkeley, 2005.
3. The remarks made by President Museveni's during the ceremony of the 50th anniversary of Uganda's independence in 9 October 2013 and other occasions.
4. 'Africa: Museveni Paper Adopted as Africa's Dev't Blueprint Guide', *The Observer* (Uganda), 27 August 2016. Uganda's President Museveni elaborated on this earlier on 9 October 2013 during Uganda's Independence Day celebrations: (1) ideological disorientation, which manifested itself in the sectarianism of religion and tribes (failing to see that all groups in Uganda benefit from each other by buying products of the respective groups apart from the other historical, linguistic and cultural similarities or links); (2) the need to radically reform the state structure, especially the army, which was not only being sectarian but was also led and manned by people of little or no education; (3) attack

on the miniscule private sector based on the ideology of inadequately analysed nationalism (because all investments made in Uganda, being part of its GDP, strengthen Uganda's independence rather than weakening it); (4) human resources that was not educated or well catered for in terms of health; (5) inadequately developed infrastructure—especially electricity, roads, railways and piped water—all undermining the profitability of investments in the country on account of the high costs of doing business in this economy; (6) a small internal (regional) market on account of colonialism fragmenting the ancient pre-colonial market that used to stretch from the River Congo to Zanzibar on the Indian Ocean and to the swamps of South Sudan, the inconveniences caused by the greedy tribal chiefs; (7) a lack of industrialization, exporting only raw materials, thereby donating money and jobs to foreign economies; (8) an underdeveloped services sector (hotels, banks, insurance, transport, etc.); (9) an under developed agriculture with only a small portion of the economy being engaged in commercial agriculture, while the majority of the farmers were only engaged in subsistence farming using inferior seeds and breeding stock, not using fertilizers, no irrigation and not using improved agro-practices; and (10) a culture and history that lacked democracy.

5. Kajuju Murori, '7 Top Reasons Why Africa Is Still Poor, 2017', *The Africa Exponent* (Tanzania), <https://www.africanexponent.com/post/billions-lost-in-profits-by-foreign-companies-tax-evasion-1953>.
6. Greg Mills, *Why Africa Is Poor: And What Africans Can Do About It* (Johannesburg: Penguin, 2010).
7. Otoaye Godfrey Martins, '7 Reasons Why Africans Are Poor and How to Be Rich in Africa', *The Spirited Hub*, <http://thespiritedhub.com/7-reasons-africans-poor-rich-africa>.
8. Africa Development Bank, *Africa's Competitiveness Report 2015* in Mark Jones, '8 Ways Africa Can Raise Farm Productivity and Boost Growth', World Economic Forum Global Agenda, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/06/8-ways-africa-can-raise-farm-productivity-and-boost-growth>.
9. Piet van Asten made the remarks during his presentation at the 'Seminar on Uganda's Agricultural Development' at the Sheraton Hotel, Kampala on 5 December 2016. This seminar was organized by the Korean Embassy. The attitudes were broken down into four categories: 'pessimist', 'optimist', 'pragmatist' and 'trapped'. The International

Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) is a member of the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) consortium.

10. *The Free Dictionary*, <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/attitude>.
11. It has been a general tendency for traditional bilateral donors, namely Western donors, not to focus on major physical infrastructure projects, while regional bodies and international organizations like the EU, the World Bank and the African Development Bank have been considerably more active in this field. China is the most conspicuous collaborator in infrastructure-building projects for Africa.
12. I have realized that often the locals, when talking to foreigners, purposefully avoid using words with negative connotations like 'corrupt', 'deceitful or 'unethical', but instead use more neutral terms like 'lacking capacity' to explain their problems.
13. *Which Country*, <http://www.whichcountry.co>. The information is said to be verified by authentic sources and collected from the CIA World Factbook (2011).
14. 'Summary of Herzberg's Motivation and Hygiene Factors. Abstract', *Value Based Management*. Retrieved on 6 January 2016, http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net/methods_herzberg_two_factor_theory.html.
15. *The Free Dictionary*, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/work+ethic>.
16. Jacqueline Whitmore, '7 Elements of a Strong Work Ethic', *Entrepreneur*, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/250114>.

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