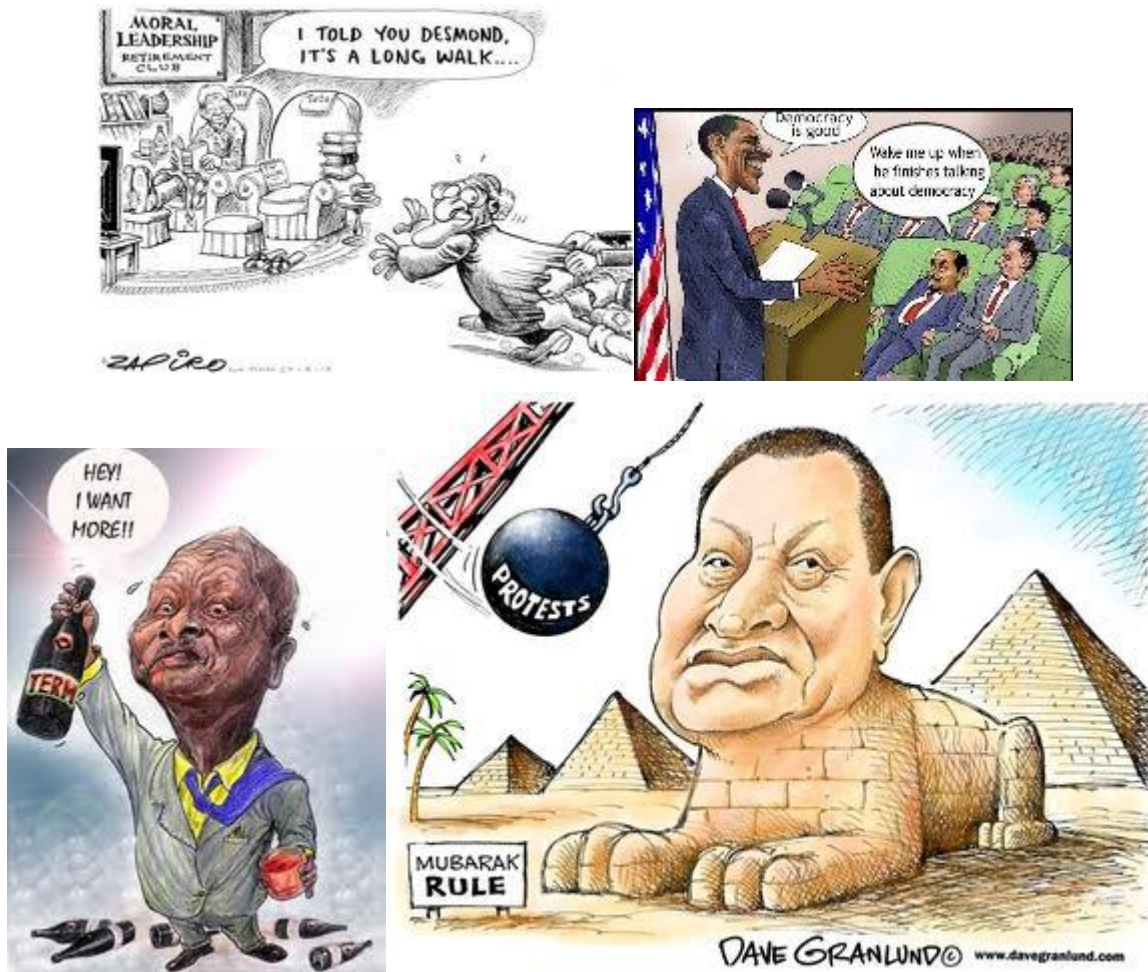# Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?
Obama and the Recipe for Leadership in Africa

Tutu Associate: Samah Salman
Submission Date: Monday, August 17th, 2015
For Presentation to: Mr. Peter Wilson, AFLI (African Leadership Institute) and Mr. Richard Briant, University of Oxford, Said Business School
Session: The Archbishop Tutu Leadership Program, Part Two

Introduction

_____

Auma Obama, President Barack Obama's half-sister, reintroduced him to the world as he started his 2015 East Africa visit in Nairobi. She affectionately harkened back to his first visit nearly thirty years before, reminiscing about how he slept on a cot in her cramped apartment. Of everything, she spoke of their dinner: 'we were drinking tea and eating ugali and sukumawiki' as recalled by Mr. Obama in his speech *The President Speaks to the Kenyan People* (2015). Hospitality, being pivotal to the traditional African experience, is certainly one of the best ways to become acquainted with African culture. However, Mr. Obama was quick to note in his speeches in both Nairobi and Addis Ababa, that unlike its food, leadership in Africa has fallen short on 'sugar and spice and everything nice'. Throughout his Africa trip, Obama has created many 'teaching moments' on leadership in Africa.

The first part of this paper traces Mr. Obama's Africa trip, through his admiration for, and sometimes biting critique of African traditions. Ultimately, it will provoke a discussion on African customs – that while some are worth retaining, others are still holding back leadership in Africa. Borrowing two selected dimensions from Hofstede's national culture framework (see Appendices A and B), this paper will argue that bad leadership in Africa is no longer a political, but rather, a cultural challenge. The good news, of course, is the inverse, which is that good leadership in Africa is a ***cultural opportunity***.

In the second part of this paper, I argue that education is the most powerful method of seizing the cultural opportunity to effectively transform leadership in Africa. I refer to leadership, not based on the stereotypical 'big man' leader, but the collective leadership of citizens in political, business or social domains, who make decisions every day that will leave the continent either better or worse off. New and innovative forms of education are required to nurture leadership, beginning at the grass-roots level, to ensure that young Africans are imbued with a strong moral compass, taught a relevant skill set and educated and informed via a vibrant media ecosystem, starting from a very young age.

Where do we want to go?

_____

As he gazed intensely at his audience at the African Union (AU) headquarters in Addis Ababa last week, President Obama finally confronted the gargantuan elephant in the room: 'The old thinking..and ways can be a stubborn thing… but I believe the human heart is strong. I believe hearts can change. I believe that minds can open. That's how change happens. That's how societies move forward' (*President Obama Speaks to the African Union,* 2015). Finally, what could only be said by a son of Africa, and would have been taken as brash and insolent by any other, had been said.

In the next 15 years, the most critical issue that Africa faces is its population explosion. If managed through the lens of pro-active socio-cultural transformation, this growth in our most valuable resource, our people, will be a valuable demographic dividend. If ignored, it will be a ticking time bomb.

By 2030, nearly one out of every five persons will be African and by 2050, the ratio will be one out of four. At no other juncture does our generation face so many global challenges; cultures which will survive will be those that adapt and innovate effectively while those whose cultures are too entrenched will be unsustainable (O'Connell, 2015). Thus it becomes even more important to inculcate cultural values that will produce leaders with the attitudes, orientations and behaviors that will embolden them to make the right decisions, at both the macro and micro levels of African society.

As a strategist, I know that the first and most fundamental step of any entity's strategy formulation exercise is the identification of its basic beliefs and values, or organizational culture (see Figure 1). In the corporate world, a merger or acquisition has an extremely slim chance of success when there is a mismatch of values between the merging entities. That is why 70% - 90% of all corporate mergers fail to deliver intended results (Christensen et al, 2011).

Figure 1: Strategy formulation roadmap

Basic Beliefs and Values → PESTLE[1] Assessments → Competitive Advantage → Products and Services → Key Metrics → Project Portfolio & Capabilities → Governance & Organization → Strategy

Why then, do we assign so little attention to the crucial importance of building and aligning culture and values within newly formed nation-states? Africa experienced a huge transformation or 'change program' between 1880 and 1913. Large swaths of previously uninhabited land, totaling more than two-thirds of its land mass, were merged with grand empires, tribal nations and small feudal states (en.wikipedia.org, 2015). 'The Heritage Problem' referred to by Moyo (2015), is that these newly created countries were assigned systems of governance, almost overnight, that until today 'are institutions [which] are completely alien to most of our people'. Africa's diverse heritage of over 7,400 tribes, more than 1,000 languages, over 200 ethnic groups and hundreds of religions (Levinson, 1998) is a colorful tapestry woven of delicate and easily frayed threads. Nation-states, like corporate entities, can be doomed to ethnocentric fragmentation and failure without the right cultural elements, ones that will elicit the behaviors deemed essential to successful leadership.

Leadership in Africa will only change to effect successful transformation of the continent, when a leadership talent pool is created to groom leaders at every level. Good companies have good succession planning programs. Good nations should be cultivating good citizens, who can then be called upon to lead across all strata of society – political, business and civil. Too often we think of the innovators in organizations as the CEO and executives, when in fact, it is overwhelmingly middle management that implements effective transformation. Similarly, in nation-states, we cannot see past the formidable commander-in-chief while it is often the local municipality leader who influences the quality of our lives on a day-to-day basis.

---

[1] PESTLE (Figure 1): Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental

Africa's national culture paradigm: As it is

_____

Power distance: Disenfranchisement and low self-esteem

We, as Africans, give up too much of our own power. This certainly was not lost on Obama when he argued that 'my strong belief [is] that the future of Africa is up to Africans' (_The President Speaks to the Kenyan People_, 2015). He may have been taking a cue from de Tocqueville (1835), who noted that America's democracy is successful not because of elections and politics, but because it is a society with a culture of joiners, activists and organizers, with a fierce sense of agency and ownership of their destiny. As Africans, part of our sense of powerlessness stems from structural external shocks. No other region of the world, for example, was so extensively and systematically ravaged by slavery. Despite Africa's dark history, though, it is of utmost importance, as Sean Lance (2015) asserts, to classify this as a 'wicked problem' which requires 'remain[ing] analytical about our past and emotional about our future – that is, to take the monkey off your shoulder and put it on your adversary'.

Given how historically disenfranchised Africa has been, the first visits to Nairobi and Addis, by a sitting US president, have given us, as Africans, a sense of new-found confidence at a time when we are asserting our place in the world.

DJ Black Coffee, a prominent West African musician, takes Obama's premise on agency one step further: 'People who didn't see much in themselves were raised by people who didn't see much in themselves... music can change that' (CNN, 2015). In 1984, Bob Geldof and Midge Ure launched Band Aid but despite their good intentions, the song 'Do they know it's Christmas?' has had unintended consequences by invoking images of African babies with kwashiorkor that are still deeply entrenched in the global consciousness. The power of the media as a form of socio-cultural education has taken the Ethiopian brand from Geldof's desperate Ethiopia, to Obama speaking to the AU in a vibrant Ethiopia. The significance lies not only in rebranding Ethiopians to the world, but also restoring their dignity and self-esteem.

Individualism vs collectivism: Tribalism and war culture

When I was very young, I would gaze curiously at my grandmother's strange cheek scars. Her deep tribal markings, of our Sudanese Ga'aliyyah tribe, became indelibly etched in my own mind as if she were born that way. So it is for other Africans whose tribal affiliation is not just a clan name, but scarification. Whether it is about self-preservation, pride or neopatrimonialism, tribal scarring is the very essence of identity. The objective is divisive: to identify who belongs, and who does not. Sudan, which has gone through a recent bitter and protracted divorce between north and south, is now veering dangerously close to its second divorce with

Darfur if it does not learn to manage its rich cultural diversity. Mr. Obama is also of the view that 'a politics that is based solely on tribe and ethnicity is a politics that is doomed to tear a country apart … it is a failure of imagination' (*The President Speaks to the Kenyan People,* 2015).

It is not just the public sector in Africa which is tribal in orientation. Family businesses frequently topple after the founder's generation because of interpersonal conflicts, demands for unquestioning loyalty and lack of succession planning. The diversity and inclusivity needed to induce growth and innovation are often suppressed in favour of groupthink (Sanchez, 2015).
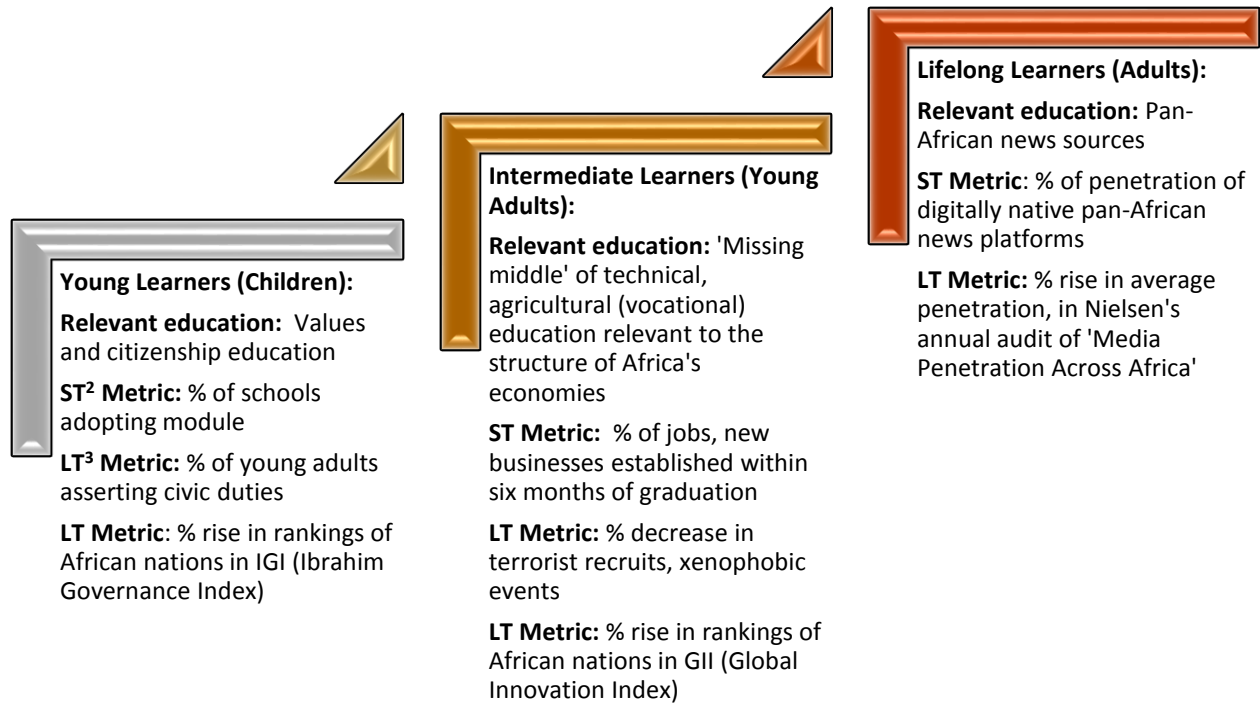
Shifting our national culture paradigm: As it could be
_____
Relevant and appropriate education

I believe the single driver most vital to shifting Africa's cultural paradigm in the right direction is innovation in education (see Figure 2). Educational intervention should awaken the consciousness of the African child through good values and citizenship education. For young adults, it will be the 'missing middle' of education relevant to their participation in the economy. For adults, social education via the media will create transparency and inform the public, whereby educated, empowered African citizens, guided by their moral compass, can hold their leader-servants accountable and discern 'when the emperor has no clothes'.

Young Learners (Children):

Relevant education: Values and citizenship education

ST[2] Metric: % of schools adopting module

LT[3] Metric: % of young adults asserting civic duties

LT Metric: % rise in rankings of African nations in IGI (Ibrahim Governance Index)

Intermediate Learners (Young Adults):

Relevant education: 'Missing middle' of technical, agricultural (vocational) education relevant to the structure of Africa's economies

ST Metric: % of jobs, new businesses established within six months of graduation

LT Metric: % decrease in terrorist recruits, xenophobic events

LT Metric: % rise in rankings of African nations in GII (Global Innovation Index)

Lifelong Learners (Adults):

Relevant education: Pan-African news sources

ST Metric: % of penetration of digitally native pan-African news platforms

LT Metric: % rise in average penetration, in Nielsen's annual audit of 'Media Penetration Across Africa'

Steve Biko explained it most eloquently: 'The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed' (Steve Biko Foundation, 2015).

I subscribe to Hofstede's view (see Figure 3) that cultural identity is a learned attribute that can be developed over time (McGuire, 2011). He also claims that it is 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group of people from another' (Hofstede, 2010, p.6). I also believe that it is the ability of a group to deliberately transform its state of mind that unleashes the success of future generations.
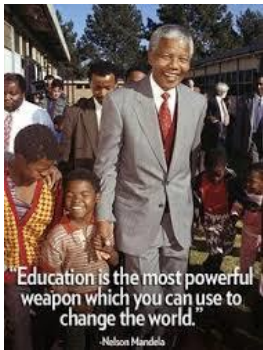
---

[2] ST (Figure 2): Short-term
[3] LT (Figure 2): Long-term

Hofstede (1994) Three Levels of Uniqueness on human mental programming (p.6)
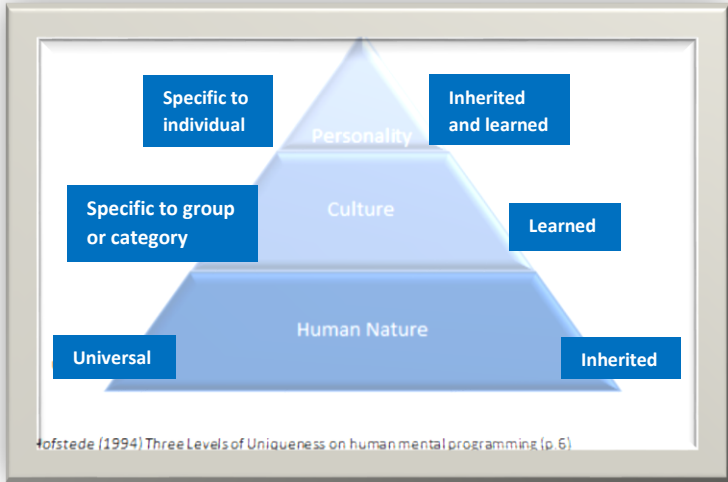
Early childhood intervention

In a groundbreaking experiment in the US in 1964, Rosenthal tested what would happen if teachers were told that certain children in their class, selected at random, were destined to succeed. The result was that if teachers had been led to expect greater gains in IQ for certain children, they invested more in them and increasingly, those children learned more (Spiegel, 2012). Non-stop positive reinforcement creates a virtuous cycle of higher self-confidence, higher performance and stronger character. It is by planting the seeds of a moral compass in our children's earliest years, that they will gain the strength of moral conviction to speak truth to power in their adult years.

Early childhood education interventions should be in the form of an educational module on values and citizenship taught in primary schools that instils national and pan-African pride, civic duties, work ethic and innovation to cultivate a sense of agency in the continent's trajectory. It is also important that

values are inculcated in early childhood in order to remedy the separation of the 'work person' from the 'home person' (Theimann, April and Blass, 2006) so that a more well-adjusted sense of self can emerge. It would create a generation of servant-leaders in the spirit of Mandela, who are 'masters of their fate and captains of their soul', and would, if put in various leaders' shoes and asked to run for a third term, thank the electorate for the compliment, before stepping down.

The *'missing middle'* of education: Technical and agricultural vocational education

Our continent's baby boom will take our population from 1.2 billion today to 2.4 billion in 2050. Africa's current formal education system is broken and needs to be overhauled. It educates students for a service sector that comprises six per cent of Africa's economies overall. Each year, 11 million students graduate from universities but only 1 million are afforded jobs (Oxford Africa Conference, 2015). This means we educate our students for unemployment. In order for the 'Africa rising' story to bring about inclusivity, and avoid the tight grip of social despair that fosters increased terrorism and xenophobia, young adults need the *right kind of education*. The structure of Africa's economy is based on growth in infrastructure and agriculture. 65-70% of Africans depend on subsistence agriculture, while less than 10% of uncultivated land is utilized (World Bank, 2015). Furthermore, the consequences of current innovations such as 3D printing are such that the promise of huge growth in jobs for our youth in manufacturing will not materialize (Adesida, 2015). The future of African education is in addressing the 'missing middle' between secondary school and research universities. Rather than outsource technical and agricultural jobs, we sorely need to create vocational training programs that will produce technicians, electricians and welders to build and maintain our roads and dams, and farm managers to fulfill Africa's promise to become a breadbasket to the world.

Remarkably, the late prime minister Lee Kuan Yew recalled being impressed with one of the late president Kwame Nkrumah's key advisors, who had taken a first in Classics at Oxford, but was puzzled as to why '…a country so dependent on agriculture should have its brightest and best do…Latin and Greek' (Kuan Yew, 2011, p.355).

Media education in the information age

One of the strategies of the South African anti-apartheid movement was to demonstrate under the gaze of a global media presence, alongside Archbishop Tutu's rallying of the international community's support for sanctions (Allen, 2006). He knew the power that the fourth estate had in naming and shaming in the public eye and helping to bring his adversaries to their knees.

Possibly the most sophisticated media education comes in the form of political satire. As a subtle form of whistleblowing, it follows Oscar Wilde's adage that, 'If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they'll kill you'. The cadre of Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, John Oliver, Young Turks Network (YTN), Bassem Youssef and Trevor Noah are surprisingly effective. Stewart's advocacy resulted in the passage of a US healthcare bill for 9/11 responders.
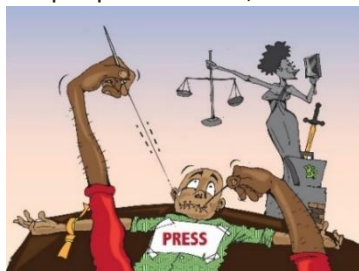
It is essential for us to develop a pan-African media platform to serve as a bridge for Africans across the continent and more crucially, offer an African voice and face to the world. As Naidoo (2015) argues, when

organized and disciplined we have the power to confront one of the fundamental challenges we face, which is to manage our diversity. By doing so, we bolster our demographic dividend.

The role of young emerging leaders: The secret sauce
_____

Our young emerging leaders have central roles to play in effecting successful transformation of the continent. One example we can learn from is the YTN (Young Turks Network). According to a traditional Turkish chant, 'Turkey's the biggest country. There is no other big country'. The self-confident culture imbued within Turkish youth is exemplified by innovation in the media. YTN, is the first daily streaming online show started in 2006. 'Young Turk' means a reformist member of a movement. YTN is aimed at the '98 per cent not in power' and is run by a group of young progressive reporters, investigative journalists and outspoken satirical commentators (The Young Turks, 2015).
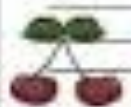
The recipe for success: Leadership in Africa
_____

From The Kitchen of
BARACK & MICHELLE OBAMA

Recipe for Good Leadership in Africa

2/3 cup values and citizenship education
3/4 cup agency and ownership of Africa's destiny
1 1/2 cup first class treatment of women
Mix in bowl and remove any traces of victim mentality
Grease tray with tolerance for diversity
Bake for 45 minutes in oven with servant-leadership
When center of cake's moral compass rises, take tray out
Place tray out to cool xenophobia and tribalism
Cut into equal-sized power-sharing slices
Serve with fresh youth leaders
Enjoy

But…can we really do this? The proof is in the pudding!

One may counter-argue that it is notoriously hard to overhaul educational systems and to overcome cultural traditions. However, Melinda Gates has reported her experience to be quite the contrary. In rural Africa, she has had intimate discussions with women and was shocked to discover how much they were asking about education that had been introduced to their villages. Once educated on healthcare and reproductive methods, they saw the benefits to their families and embraced them. Gates calls them 'agents of change' because these '…individuals were lifting up their communities, which would lift up a society, then lift up an economy and that is how the demographic dividend is created' (Chatham House Prize, 2014).

Food for thought: What the world can learn from Africa

In Africa's 'we' culture, the destitute and elderly rarely need fear abandonment. Homelessness is a foreign concept and the nursing home is a shameful one. Every African has a family. *Ubuntu* and *harambee* are integral strands of the African DNA's double helix. Auma Obama, referred to in the Western media as Barack Obama's half-sister, is in African media, simply his sister.

That raw humanity – despite high poverty levels, or in spite of them, is in stark contrast to the prevalent loneliness, isolation and higher rates of suicide in the US, despite its relative wealth.

While the US transitions into the 'new economy' with more informal economic activities such as freelance work, the African entrepreneurial mentality has long existed, because African economic activity is largely informal. This means that reliance on social networks and a sharing economy with innovations like Uber and Airbnb, comes as second nature to Africans. The West would do well to draw lessons from African culture.

In conclusion

Mr. Obama, when you next come for dinner with Auma, we hope you will stay a bit longer. Why not teach us a thing or two about leadership in Africa. We hear that you have some very good recipes.

Appendices
_____

Appendix A: Hofstede's National Culture Dimensions Framework

Hofstede's National Culture Dimensions (#1 – 3)

1. Power Distance Index (PDI)	The degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The fundamental issue here is how a society handles inequalities among people. People in societies exhibiting a large degree of Power Distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. In societies with low Power Distance, people strive to equalise the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power.
2. Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV)	Individualism, can be defined as a preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families. Its opposite, collectivism, represents a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we."
3. Masculinity vs. Femininity (MAS)	The Masculinity side of this dimension represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success. Society at large is more competitive. Its opposite, femininity, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented. In the business context Masculinity versus Femininity is sometimes also related to as "tough versus gender" cultures.

Hofstede's National Culture Dimensions (#4 - 6)

4. Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)	This is the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. The fundamental issue here is how a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Countries exhibiting strong UAI maintain rigid codes of belief and behaviour and are intolerant of unorthodox behaviour and ideas. Weak UAI societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles.
5. Long term Orientation vs. Short term Normative Orientation (LTO)	Every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and the future. Societies prioritize these two existential goals differently. Societies who score low on this dimension, for example, prefer to maintain time-honoured traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. Those with a culture which scores high, on the other hand, take a more pragmatic approach: they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future.
6. Indulgence vs. Restraint (IND)	Indulgence stands for a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. Restraint stands for a society that suppresses gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms.

Hofstede, G. (2015) *National Culture* [Online] Available from: http://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html. [Accessed: 21 July 2015].

Changrikim1980@GMAIL.COM. (2011). Hofestede's Five Cultural Dimensions. [Online] 13 June 2011. Available from: http://theoort.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/cultural-dimensions.html. [Accessed: 12 August 2015].

References

_____

ADESIDA, O. (2015) The Innovation Challenge. [Lecture notes] *The Innovation Challenge – Notes*. Tutu Fellowship Leadership Program. African Leadership Institute, Mont Fleur, 30 April 2015.

ALLEN, J., (2006) *The Authorised Biography of Desmond Tutu Rabble-Rouser for Peace.* Reading: Ebury.

Chatham House Prize (2014) *In Conversation with Melinda Gates*. Chatham House (Royal Institute of International Affairs), London, United Kingdom, 21 November 2014. London: Chatham House.

CHRISTENSEN, C. M., ALTON, R., RISING, C. and WALDECK, A. (2011). The Big Idea: The New M&A Playbook. *Harvard Business Review.* [Online] (March 2011). Available from: https://hbr.org/2011/03/the-big-idea-the-new-ma-playbook. [Accessed: 2 August 2015].

CNN (2015) Need Energizing? Check Out DJ Black Coffee. [Online video]. 31 July 2015. Available from: http://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2015/07/31/dj-black-coffee-african-voices-spc-a.cnn. [Accessed: 31 July 2015].

DE TOCQUEVILLE, A. (1835) *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America.* London: Penguin.

EN.WIKIPEDIA.ORG [2015] Scramble for Africa. [Online]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scramble_for_Africa. [Accessed: 10 July 2015]

HOFSTEDE, G., HOFSTEDE, G.J., MINKOV, M. (2010) *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind.* 3rd ed. New York: McGraw-Hill.

KWAN YEW, L. (2011) *From Third World to First: Singapore and the Asian Economic Boom.* New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

LANCE, S. (2015) Leadership. [Lecture notes] *Leadership – Notes*. Tutu Fellowship Leadership Program. African Leadership Institute, Mont Fleur, 26 April.

LEVINSON, D. (1998) *Ethnic Groups Worldwide: A Ready Reference Handbook.* Phoenix: Oryx Press.

MCGUIRE, M. (2011) *Examining Culture #2 - Is Hofstede's view of culture relevant?* [Online] 19 December 2011. Available from: http://agents2change.typepad.com/blog4/2011/12/examing-culture-2-is-hofstedes-view-of-culure-relevant.html. [Accessed: 12 August 2015].

MOYO, N. (2015) The Leadership Challenge. [Lecture notes] *The Leadership Challenge – Notes*. Tutu Fellowship Leadership Program. African Leadership Institute, Mont Fleur, 30th April.

NAIDOO, J. (2015) The Challenge to Young African Leaders. [Lecture notes] *The Challenge to Young African Leaders – Notes*. Tutu Fellowship Leadership Program. African Leadership Institute, Mont Fleur, 28 April.

O'CONNELL, B. (2015) Education. [Lecture notes] *Education – Notes*. Tutu Fellowship Leadership Program. African Leadership Institute, Mont Fleur, 2 May 2015.

Oxford Africa Conference (2015) *Education Systems in Africa: Trends in (Post-) Secondary Education Delivery*. University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom, 22–23 May 2015. Oxford: University of Oxford.

SANCHEZ, D. (2015) Family business leaders in Africa Who Are Beating the Odds. *AFK Insider*. [Online] 13 August. Available from: http://afkinsider.com/101741/13-family-business-leaders-in-africa-who-are-beating-the-odds/. [Accessed: 13 August 2015].

Spiegel, A. (2012) Teachers' Expectations Can Influence How Students Perform. *NPR (National Public Radio).* [Online] 17 September. Available from: http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2012/09/18/161159263/teachers-expectations-can-influence-how-students-perform. [Accessed: 21 July 2008].

STEVE BIKO FOUNDATION (2015) *Steve Biko Quotes.* [Online] Available from: http://sbf.org.za/steve-biko-quotes.php [Accessed: 1 August 2015].

THE WORLD BANK. (2015) *Data.* [Online] Available from: http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.ARBL.ZS. [Accessed: 27 July 2015].

THE YOUNG TURKS. (2015) *About.* [Online] Available from: https://www.tytnetwork.com/. [Accessed: 6 August 2015].

THEIMANN, N., APRIL, K., BLASS, E. (2006) Context Tension: Cultural Influences on Leadership and Management Practice. *Emerging Knowledge Form*. 7 (4). p. 38–51.

The White House (2015) President Obama Speaks to the African Union. [Online video]. July 28, 2015. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_Kw9YnNXJk. [Accessed: 28 July 2015].

The White House (2015) The President Speaks to the Kenyan People. [Online video]. July 26, 2015. Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNife3N3X0Q. [Accessed: 27 July 2015].