

Thoughts on
LEADERSHIP
from
young emerging African leaders
at 2017 workshop in Nairobi
on youth participation in inclusive governance and accountability,

Workshop organized by the University of Cape Town Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance building bridges project, funded in part by IDRC grant no. [108471](#), to promote inclusive governance in Africa through public leadership development.

Reflections gathered in person in November 2017 in Nairobi by Kathryn Toure, Regional Director, Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

Before, Susan thought leadership meant running for office. Now she believes it has to do with the capacity to **move a group from one place to another**. Anger at the status quo drove her to become involved and engaged.

According to William, leaders **show the way** not only through talk but also actions. To be leaders, people must **gain experience and expose themselves to opportunities to learn**. Leadership does not necessarily have to do with age: a younger member can “lead” a family. Leadership is **doing the right thing** and not just doing things right. William, schooled on two continents and is very connected with people on the ground, is showing the way for peace studies at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

Rama dit qu'un leader **voit plus que soi-même**, plus que l'individu, **se met au service** d'un groupement de personnes et d'une vision partagée, et peut mener de devant ou de derrière. Tout le monde peut être leader ; un groupe peut avoir un leader aujourd'hui et un autre demain. Un leader doit avoir un **niveau de conscience élevé** et viser à amener du changement positif. Quelquefois le leadership est une réponse à un appel – on ne peut pas faire autrement que d'être leader dans une situation donnée. Le leader reconnaît qu'il/elle n'est **pas seul(e)**.

Tout en soutenant le leader, **la communauté doit être critique** et **rappeler au leader ses responsabilités**, en disant : « Ce, ce n'est pas normal ». On peut devenir leader quand on répond à son environnement, en étant alerte et quelquefois en s'indignant.

Carolyn explains that a leader must be able to **envision things different from how they are** and share that vision. A leader must be bold and **take action to bring a change in a specific space**. According to her, anyone can manifest leadership – the moment, through self-awareness, they understand that they have roles and responsibilities in their community. **Leadership can be cultivated through coaching, mentoring, training and space** to learn and experiment. She **used to think that leadership was for older people** and meant being a member of Parliament.

“I used to be shy and did not know how to engage. I appreciate myself more after leadership training. **I now know that I do not have to be politician to be a leader**. I have to affect change.”

Believing in the need for young people to have **spaces to experiment**, Carolyn co-founded an open co-working and teambuilding space called Ubuntu Hub in Arusha, Tanzania, to facilitate learning among young small- and micro-entrepreneurs – for example persons selling phone cards et al. from kiosks.

“We learned what was important to us and have stayed true to the cause. We are committed to and see the value in what we are doing.” She said that **with a collective spirit, entrepreneurs can strengthen each other and the community**. “What I do not have, another has. If we can grow together, we can go further. **I thrive if you thrive**. I eat if you eat. Being **inspired by African history and culture** allows us to be a richer community.”

A woman from Zimbabwe said that leadership is a **process** by which individuals **engage** with and approach issues and challenges, by which people **bring people together** to find some common ground and **achieve something**, by which you **bring out the best in people** while remaining focused, by which you encourage other leadership moments to flourish. Leadership is **reflective**. It is about **learning**, learning about what enables and inhibits.

On becoming a leader, she said that **circumstances can create leaders who respond to the need for a change or a shift**. Exposure can create leaders. Leaders may be born out of what is put into them, i.e. those people whose social circumstances shape them to take responsibility. People have the **choice** to respond (or not) to the call to leadership. Some people are intentional about choosing leadership, and some people just find themselves in a leadership role.

The community should **engage with and provide feedback to leaders**. This is very important. Members of the community should also contribute where there's work to be done.

A leader needs **acknowledgement** of her leadership role. A leader also needs confidence in a skill set and support. “I need to know that I have the potential to build a team and that **success or failure is shared**. Everything is not entirely on my shoulders.” Leadership is **not a one-man or a one-way show**.

Sometimes, when seeking peace and security in society, we overlook the leadership role of **non-formal wielders of power**. For example, women in a family in South Sudan may be encouraging men in the family to go to war to demonstrate their manhood. Regarding xenophobia in South Africa, we overlook the junior power brokers in communities who have links to politicians and, at first, we would not think of inviting them to the table to help resolve the situation. Women in church groups may be agitating for peace through prayer vigils and marches and by asking, “How do we respond to the needs of the community?” Often these people are not on our leadership radar or lists of influential people.

While at university in South Africa, this young emerging leader thought it was just white males who could contribute. But a **leadership forum in which she participated was transformative**. “**I had the opportunity to be in a space where my ideas mattered** and where I could learn to articulate and express them in effective ways. It was motivating and formative to be around other African women at similar points in life and who aspired to great things. They were leaders in their fields and mentored me. **Sharing a space with these women made me understand myself better and my role in community, in Africa**. I gained in confidence more than I imagined possible.”