

## **The Discipline for Passion: A Passion for the Possible in Transforming Leadership**

*All I have to say is that this is hard work. ... What it's about is not giving up. ... There is a discipline for passion. ... It's about how many times you stand and are brave, and you keep on going.*

Lady Gaga<sup>1</sup>

All told, development practice is not for the faint of heart. Opponents and proponents alike concede the hard work and difficulties entailed. For some practitioners, passion fuels their commitment in staying the course. An abiding challenge for these individuals tends to be figuring out how best to discipline and substantiate such passion. I reference the remarks above by Lady Gaga to engage the proposition that this individual dilemma finds parallel expression at both the levels of institutionalization and systemization. The popular artist aptly alludes to the role of resilience in the struggle to attain set goals. Yet, there is often a missing link to capitalize effectively on the returns of hard work, tenacity, courage and commitment. For our immediate purposes, I suggest that learning is a key ingredient that helps catalyze hard work and related inputs into measurable, augmentable, and impactful outcomes for individuals, institutions, and systems.

Building on insights from my prior interventions in the two preceding Hirschman Legacy conferences, the central claim of my proposed contribution remains that Africa can learn its way out of the daunting challenges besetting its development in the contemporary epoch. Various critiques of the crises of development in Africa stress the relationship between development and democracy to argue the importance of fixing the apparatus of governance as a way to improve the returns on investments in development. Increasingly, objective evidence suggest that the average African favors democracy, warts and all, as a lesser evil of competing forms of governments experienced since colonialism. The evolving passion for the logic of democracy lends credence to Lady Gaga's epigraph above about the discipline for passion. What behooves better understanding which I will address in my paper are the fundamentals for augmenting the gains of such discipline. As a preliminary proposition, it is safe to reason that the perseverance integral to the trial and error that denotes a passion is the front-end of such discipline for which the core is learning.

The purpose of my proposed contribution is to explore a strategy to facilitate a learning community to help transform leadership in ways that deepen conditions for Africa's self-determination and development. It is hardly controversial to assert that Africans have had more than their fair share of bad governments. Indeed, many political leaders of African nations deserve indictment as the paramount architects of Africa's post-independence predicament. So what? How, e.g., can one reconcile the fact that that the culprits persist in office by any means necessary or continue to exact adverse influence post-office? How can Africans attenuate the risks and burdens of such pattern?

Drawing on the proverb that "it takes a thief to catch a thief" which captures a popular tenet in traditional worldviews, I am keen to examine the possibility of ascertaining a pathway to invigorate and harness creatively the knowledge base of a cohort of political elites as a resource to socialize and prepare a new generation of leaders. This is with a view to demonstrate the case for mainstreaming the discipline for planned succession as a non-negotiable public good. Historicizing Africa's current leadership deficit, the paper will analyze and evaluate a paradigm shift to think about popular sovereignty as a mechanism to democratize the exercise of state power consistent with indigenous orientation in concrete African settings. This will posit the potentials of leadership opportunities for the citizenry as disruptive of

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<sup>1</sup> Lady Gaga, Oscar Acceptance Speech for Best Original Song, February 24, 2019. <https://youtu.be/fFcZDFx13CE>

entrenched practices that seek to consolidate power as the exclusive preserve of officeholders. Thus, a key proposition promotes an ethos of leadership as an art of self-transcendence to inculcate the elite and the electorate with an ideal of civic virtue.