

The Human Factor Approach to Development in Africa



ed by

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Contents

About the Contributors	vii
Foreword	ix
Acknowledgements	xi
Preface	xii
Introduction: Human Factor Development: Agenda for the Future <i>Vimbai G. Chivaura</i>	1
PART ONE: THE HUMAN FACTOR CONCEPT AND EDUCATION	
Chapter One: The Human Factor: Foundation for Development and Democracy <i>Senyo Adjibolosoo</i>	11
Chapter Two: The Human Factor Perspective and Development Education <i>Benjamin Ofori-Amoah</i>	34
Chapter Three: The Human Factor and Education Content <i>Ignatius Chombo</i>	44
Chapter Four: The Human Factor and Tertiary Education <i>Imahe O. John</i>	58
Chapter Five: The Human Factor and Economic Development <i>Sarah Anyanwu</i>	66
Chapter Six: The Human Factor and the African Intellectual <i>Munashe Furusa</i>	76
PART TWO: HUMAN FACTOR DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURE	
Chapter Seven: African Philosophy and Human Factor Development <i>Claude G. Mararike</i>	87
Chapter Eight: European Culture and Human Factor Underdevelopment <i>Vimbai G. Chivaura</i>	96
Chapter Nine: Language, Culture and Human Factor Development <i>Wacira Gethaiga</i>	111
Chapter Ten: Socio-Linguistic Issues and Human Factor Development <i>Samukele Hadebe</i>	121
PART THREE: HUMAN FACTOR DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS	
Chapter Eleven: The Human Factor and Industrial Entrepreneurship: Succession Problems in Nigeria <i>Heidi Willer</i>	134
Chapter Twelve: The Human Factor and Corporate Responsibility: Zimbabwean Business Organizations <i>France Maphosa</i>	148

The Human Factor and the African Intellectual

Munashe Furusa

Introduction

This chapter addresses the role of the African intellectual in Human Factor (HF) development in independent Africa. It specifically focuses on the African intellectual because HF development involves the exercise of the mind in independent thinking, self-definition and self-determination. It involves mobilizing Africa's material and mental resources for her own cultural and economic development. Africa herself, should bear the task of determining matters that belong to her destiny. This is where the intellectual as researcher, thinker and philosopher comes in. He boosts the creative potential of Africa's HF. The challenge for Africa's intellectuals, therefore, is to help Africa to look into her own potential and develop it. Africa is guided in this regard by the principles and ideals sourced from her own heritage and history. The challenge should be understood against the background of Africa's conquest by Europe, a fact well known and extensively documented. The impact of colonial history on Africa's material resources and HF content has been severe and disastrous. Africa experienced ruthless exploitation of her wealth, her people and the repression of her peoples' talents for a century. This historical enslavement gave birth to Africa's desire to liberate herself.

The task for Africa's post independence intellectuals is to help Africa stand on her own feet again and start working for her own development. The first step is to develop a HF which can bear the responsibility of developing and guiding the creative potential of Africa's different nation-states towards the attainment of their envisioned goals using their own resources, principles, values and ideals fully, rather than merely opting for decadent European ideas and models through cheap imitation. The principles, ideals and values which Africans themselves have evolved throughout history constitute the HF content they need to guide them in their endeavours. These include their own cultures, religions and philosophies. These are the characteristics which give Africa her distinct identity, integrity, vision and creative urge. Identity, here, becomes a people's way of doing things together and realising their aspirations and destiny collectively. HF development for Africa therefore, becomes the collaboration and collective use of talent, resources and potential for the enhancement of her humanity and guarantee of continuity and survival.

HF development in this sense and more importantly then, refers to the moral character development of the individual and the whole society. Moral character and dignity, indeed, do constitute the identity and humanity of a people. Mimicry of factors which constitute cultures of other people has no place where there is true exercise of

the intellect. Inveniveness and engagement of talents of Africa's own people are the true premises of her HF development.

The African intellectual is one such talent Africa must develop. The crucial challenge for HF development on the African intellectual is to help release the talents and original thinking of Africa's own people. It does not include excellence in aping theories and models of former masters even those long discarded in their own countries. The need to inculcate patriotism, commitment and purposefulness in Africa's future generations is the central HF project for Africa. A nation with intellectuals who have principled minds and talents is a nation with a healthy HF ready to effect development.

Problems facing the African intellectual

The major problem is that independent African states have not succeeded in breaking cultural and economic tendons tying them to Europe. Development theories, models and approaches which today's African intellectuals use for building African institutions are imported from the West. (See Mararike, Chapter Seven of this Volume). This practice and attitude of the African intellectuals falls squarely into the Western agenda to unite the world into a global village on European terms to serve European interests. Such global villagization has absolutely nothing to do with Africa's needs.

African intellectuals trained in schools of western thought are, unfortunately, in the forefront of championing and marketing these Eurocentric ideas for Africa. They regard them as infallible, objective, unquestionably acceptable and applicable to Africa's past, present and future. Ayi Kwei Armah is correct to say that:

the majority of [African] intellectuals educated in colonial and neo-colonial institutions are trained to be ignorant of their own philosophical antecedents while struggling to assimilate data, theories and father figures from western arsenals (1981:58).

The truth about European models and theories of development is that they mortgage Africa to Europe and make Africans continue to suffer the weight and density of the burdens of debt, high inflation rates and many other social and economic ills Europe concocts. Africa's challenge, here, is to source development initiatives from its own African experience, institutions, traditions, heritage and intellectual HF.

African intellectuals should be torch-bearers who look into Africa's own history and people for models of wisdom in order to formulate theories and programmes for developing the welfare of their nations. An immediate challenge to the realization of this role which the African intellectual must address is the task of removing obstacles of repression still existing in the colonial structures our societies have inherited from colonialism after independence, rather than opt for the difficult alternative of trying to force these institutions to work even where they have already failed. Obstacles must be carefully researched on and understood. Strategies to remove them must also be carefully thought out. The removal of obstacles would lead to the liberation of the African people's creative potential and urge.

The role of the African intellectual today seems caught up between two opposing camps. These are those striving to transform the colonial structures in order to release

Africa's own HF potential; and others seduced by colonial structures to copy and parrot moribund European fads.

The first is the kind needed for Africa's HF development. To improve our people's quality of life requires breaking political, economic and cultural links tying us to Europe as dependants. Describing the African intellectual as revolutionary, Fanon writes:

In underdeveloped countries, there are certain members of the elite, intellectuals and civil servants, who are sincere, who feel the necessity for a planned economy and the strict prohibition of attempts at mystification. Such men [and women] fight for participation in the ordering of public affairs (1963:120).

Africa needs these intellectuals who have faith in the capacity of their people to change their own lives, who see people as subjects, not passive objects to be developed by outsiders. Such relevant African intellectuals fight for the release of the creative power in African men, women and children in order to improve their lives. HF development in Africa should depend on the creative power of her own people not some messengers from foreign lands. It depends primarily on African people's ability to think, plan, and act according to guidelines, ideals and values they themselves establish in line with their vision of the future.

What is important to emphasize, here, is that the African intellectuals can have wonderful visions of tomorrow, such as Zimbabwe's 'Vision 2020', and theories of future societies, yet without utilizing the sweat, minds and efforts of their people, the visions will not materialize. Africa will develop when her men and women pick up hoes and shovels, mix mortar and mould bricks and plan and organize their resources and erect bridges which lead to their vision of the future. That is why we emphasize the removal of economic, political and cultural obstacles hindering Africa's intellectual and creative efforts.

Intellectuals who mimic European thought from books and journals are not relevant to Africa's development. Such intellectuals belong to Europe whose programmes and theories they fiercely champion. In Africa, they should feature as comic characters in the works of our brilliant satirists. Soyinka's Lankunle in *The Lion and the Jewel* (1974) is an example of the intellectual caricatures who import European models into Africa. We should laugh at them and insist on Africa's right to determine her own destiny.

Chinweizu describes intellectual bafoons like Lankunle as the fundamental problems hindering Africa's development. He maintains that:

the greatest problems today, the single most formidable obstacle to [Africa's] final liberation is the character of the elite' (1975:351). Ngugi describes the aping of European thought by African intellectuals as 'infantile imitative mentality and crass world-outlook which like borrowed robes sits uneasily on [them]' (1983:20).

Total lack of originality, Ngugi argues, is the major obstacle to Africa's progress. African intellectuals' Eurocentric vision of society and progress, prosperity, authority

and management — be it economic, political or cultural — is derived from their colonial education. Eurocentric intellectuals have no policy directions of their own. In industry and commerce, they function as appendages of the west or middlemen whose role is to work as transmission lines between Africa and Europe. Ngugi writes:

They are happy [and] content to be... agents for international tractors, motor vehicles, pharmaceuticals, textiles, boots, canned foods and fruits, videos, television sets, bottled water [and] every little thing manufactured abroad. Their... genius glows momentarily... when devising ways of crushing any competing national initiative in all areas for which they have been paid a commission to administer (Ibid.).

To understand their own African cultures and the arts, languages and literature, media and communication, religions and oral traditions, they seek the guidance of Jacobson, Freud, Levi Strauss, Umberto Eco, Lacan, Noam Chomsky, Derrida, Karl Marx, Walter Ong, Bertold Brecht, Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin. The list of European thinkers that African intellectuals imitate is endless.

Calling themselves the 'middle-class' as they do, is admission of their commitment to Europe and alienation from Africa. They despise Africans below them and aspire to be like the whites above them. Europe calls them 'enlightened,' 'converted' and the 'talented tenth.' The only contact they have with Africa and her people and culture is when they make incursions into communities with tapes and clipboards to capture information for their own leisure and laughter and for European amusement and amazement. The ideas they store in their heads and present at seminars and conferences do not correspond to the reality in which African people live.

Culture as human factor development

Africa's development can only take place in a cultural context. Culture here means the ideas, principles and values which Africans themselves have developed as a means to guide the way they live their lives and develop their own societies and institutions. The African intellectual who imitates European culture and builds European types of social institutions in Africa is confused and misinformed about Africa's survival and HF development needs. No true HF development comes out of apemanship. To try and build institutions in Africa on European terms, beliefs, historical experiences and culture is to throw Africa's potential and future into European creative reserve banks for the benefit of Europe's progeny, not Africa's.

Blyden warned Africa of such danger a century ago, saying:

even if Negroes do successfully imitate the whites, nothing new has thereby been accomplished. You simply have a larger number of persons doing what others have been doing. The usual gifts of race have not thereby been developed and an unwilling world, therefore, continues to wonder what the educated negro is good for (1971: 228).

It would be foolhardy to pretend that African intellectuals who propose Eurocentric ideas for Africa have African needs in mind. Individual gain, promotion

and prizes which their European masters pay them for doing work for them, selling their own brothers and sisters and Africa's HF and wealth are their primary and only concerns. One has only to read the researches that such intellectuals publish, to realize that they are meant to please and impress Europeans. This 'rat race' for status and recognition has resulted in frustration and cynicism in the African intellectuals who have not done their job properly for Europe to impress and obtain the coveted promotions and rewards. The long period African intellectuals spend imbibing with European ideas and cultivating attitudes of civilized arrogance, increases the depth of their alienation and rootlessness. As Sembene Ousmane rightly says, they 'live like pebbles in a creek, tossed from one bank to the other fleeing reality' (1984:134).

Lucifer in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* wishes he were born somewhere else, not in Africa. He says:

'I am Lucifer Mandengu. I was born here against my will. I should have been born elsewhere ... of some other parents. I have never liked it here, and never shall ... and if ever I leave this place I am not going to come back ... I have been born here but ... that is... only a biological and geographical error ... (1975: 162).

European thoughts and ideas in Lucifer undermine his belief in himself, his people and country. The irony is that Africa has been taught to look up to such confused intellectuals as Lucifer for visions of development. To entrust such intellectuals with leadership in developing Africa's HF is to employ people who will demean and crush African minds, culture and institutions.

Education with European culture and content is one of the tools that the west uses to destroy Africa's enterprising spirit. Paulo Freire advises to choose education models which accord with our needs. According to him:

there is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the 'practice of freedom', the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world (1973:15).

The education which independent Africa inherited from the colonizer does not prepare Africans to deal with their reality or participate in Africa's development process. It underdevelops the HF and personality characteristics of African intellectuals and incapacitates their ability to function creatively in society. It turns them into dreamers who, like N'Deye Touti in *God's Bits of Wood*:

lived in a kind of separate world, [and] ... part of the universe in which her own people had no place and ... she in theirs. She went through normal acts of everyday living as if she were dreaming... a dream that was constantly filled with the image of some prince charming from her books (Ousmane, 1984: 131).

The dreams of such intellectuals are not about Africa and her development. They are fairy tales about Europe. Mongo Beti sums the tragedy of African intellectuals brought up on a heavy dosage of Eurocentric diet. He says:

the tragedy which our nation is suffering today is that of a man left to his own devices in a world which does not belong to him, which he has not made and does not understand. It is a tragedy of a man bereft of any intellectual compass, a man walking blindly through the dark (1958:181).

Ayi Kwei Armah also laments the Eurocentric paralysis of African intellectuals. According to him:

the air around us is poisoned with truncated tales of ... the wreckage of our people. The haze of this fouled world exists to wipe out knowledge of our way... These mists are here to keep us lost [and turn us into] the destroyer's easy prey (1973:2).

James Baldwin once said that African history was 'deeply buried in mischief' and prejudice by Europeans and that the culture we were made to consume was 'intended that we should perish, never allowed to spell our own proper name' (Achebe, 1989:10).

What is to be done?

Marimba Ani suggests that:

We ... separate our thought from European thought so as to visualise a future that is not dominated by Europe. This is demanded by an Africa-centred view because the future towards which Europe leads us is genocidal (1994:xvii).

Amílcar Cabral calls on the African intellectual to 'return to the source' and immerse himself or herself in the life of the people. For Cheik Anta Diop:

Collective historical consciousness is one of the chief means of survival and source of creation. Destroy or stifle it and the chances for development become questionable. [Developing Africa's own HF] is inseparable from the restoration of Africa's collective historical consciousness (1987:115).

Chinweizu's conclusion is that the only path that reconnects the African intellectuals with their collective historical consciousness is the path linking them to their ancestors. To that end, he writes, African intellectuals 'would do well to exhume and study Africa's classical traditions, clarify and disseminate them, so they can be useful to us today' (1984:14). Chinweizu further suggests that:

African intellectuals] who wish to contribute to Africa's development... should remember that one of the cardinal purposes of any worthwhile intellectual activity is to assist people achieve the kind of self-awareness that would help them carry out their historical projects [1984:14].

Arguing for the importance of historical knowledge in Africa's HF development, Chukunyer Kamalu says that,

'there lie undiscovered, thousands of years of culturally rich historical past we are largely unaware we possess. Such an immense heritage must surely provide for the future endeavours of our minds' (1990:22).

He warns that 'the redemption of African people from the humiliation of the past four hundred years need not consist in mimicking European civilization' (Ibid:22).

To answer the urgent question 'What is to be done?' Baldwin in Achebe's 'Spelling our Proper Name' says, 'If we know [our history] there is really no limit to where we can go' (Achebe, 1989:10).

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon argues for the re-Africanization of African intellectuals and the liberation of our social institutions. His message to the African intellectual is:

Come, then, comrades; it is [imperative] that we decide at once to change our ways. We must shake off the heavy darkness in which we were plunged and leave it behind. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent and resolute.... Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry.... We have better things to do than to follow Europe.... We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe (1963: 251-2).

As we search for values and principles relevant for HF development in Africa, Fanon further suggests that:

We need a model ... [W]e want blue prints and examples. For many among us the European model is the most inspiring... [But we] have seen what mortifying set-backs such an imitation has led us. European achievements, European techniques and the European style ought no longer to tempt us and ... throw us off balance (Ibid: 252).

Fanon's argument suggests a farewell to Eurocentrism and points towards innovation and inventiveness based on Africa's own material and mental resources.

Michael Thelwell identifies Eurocentrism as the major problem which the process of HF development in Africa should address. He suggests that we reclaim our identity from Europe's cultural terrorisms (1987:109). To do this, he suggests, we have to struggle for the right to create our own terms by which to define ourselves. We must also strive to have these terms recognised. This is the first necessity of a free people and the first right oppressors must not be allowed to continue to withhold (Ibid: 109).

Sekou Toure in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, explains the importance of practical involvement in Africa's development for the intellectual and says:

You must yourselves be a living part of Africa and her thought, you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for ... the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and [her] suffering humanity (1963: 206).

According to Bitek:

Progress ... means making life more meaningful [and]... ensuring the maximum participation of every individual in the productive activities of the society here and now, in politics, economics, artistic and all other fields of human endeavour (1986:49).

Bitek further suggests that we heed the wisdom of our forefathers. He emphasizes the obligations and responsibilities that the present generation owes both the ancestors and the unborn, as the historical bill they must pay. According to Bitek, no African is born free from social and historical responsibilities. One carries them to the grave. From birth to death, one is either 'son' or 'daughter,' 'father,' or 'mother,' 'husband' or 'wife,' 'uncle' or 'aunt,' 'father-in-law' or 'mother-in-law.' These are 'responsibilities' and 'designations,' not 'mere words or labels.' As Bitek suggests, we must teach the younger generations that the only freedom that exists is for each individual member of society to play his or her numerous roles fully, according to his or her talents and capabilities in the development of Africa and her people.

Conclusion

The challenges of HF development in Africa demand that the intellectuals descend from their ivory tower and actively become involved in the everyday tasks of society. It is through this involvement in the process of developing their own people that they themselves also become developed socially, culturally, intellectually and morally. Through active, practical participation, the African intellectuals discover the meaningfulness of life which European education meant to paralyse in them.

Historical circumstances facing Africa today demand that intellectuals 'draw clear and practical conclusions from studying Africa's problems' and be able to 'sum them up in formulas that are equally clear and easy to understand and apply' (Diop, 1973:13). Such a task is only possible if carried out in conjunction with the knowledge of our history and revival of our languages, traditions, culture and social institutions. These enable African people to function together as a united entity in the development process.

Blue prints for Africa's future must come from Africa's own social and cultural foundations. To emerge with a vision and trajectory for Africa's future, it is imperative that the present reconnects with the relevant and promising trends from the past.

The African intellectual must join his people in their daily struggles. He must help them in the process of isolating the specific problems of our social reconstruction and examining models and precedents from our past to unravel the future. If the African intellectual fails in this, he will appear in the history of Africa as having failed his own race. There is absolutely no place in Africa's HF development for the intellectual who looks to Europe for guidance and tutelage. Shona ancestors have advised us wisely that we must 'handle strange things only after we have protected ourselves. [*Bata chabva kumwe watanga wazora mushonga.*] They have also taught us 'not to rely on borrowed tools to sustain our families.' *Chinwango cheumwe hachina ndima.*

Let's rely on our own intellectual talent, creativity, potential and sweat, for Africa's HF development.

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