

The 21st Century - Africa's century

Eric Mafuna: (EO African Leadership Group)

"It is time now to revive the spirit of African Leadership ... " said South African President Thabo Mbeki at the official launch of The African Leadership Group in Johannesburg, South Africa on July 13,2006. The African Leadership Group represents the culmination of years of work by business pioneer Eric Mafuna, who is seen by many as the next leader of South Africa.

By Pooia Padhve

Having graduated in Marketing from Tufts University Boston, Eric Mafuna started his career in advertising, serving as an account director for Reebok SA and Johnson & Johnson. In 1975 he founded an organization called the Black Management Forum (BMF) "to give young African managers an organizational home and promote the idea that black people can also become managers". When the BMF was founded apartheid was still extremely prevalent and the concept of black people as managers did not even exist. In contrast, today there are hundreds of black people in managerial positions.

((Democracy can disappear quickly so you have to nurture it like it's a flame and build it up until it's a bigfire,")

In 1982, after spending fifteen years in advertising, Eric Mafuna started his own research and management consulting company called Africa Now. He and his research team at Africa Now sought to identify strategies and actions that Africans should adopt in order to develop effective leadership. This research marked the first step that eventually led to the establishment of the African Leadership Group.

THE AFRICAN LEADERSHIP GROUP

Since childhood, Mafuna has always been fascinated by development issues largely due to his own background. "I came from a poor background. Looking back I am very grateful for that since it helped me learning to fight

for myself, to recognize opportunities and to embrace opportunities that I could turn into something that could make a difference." The difference he wanted to make was realized when he founded The African Leadership Group, which he characterizes as "informed, effective and productive citizenship where citizens must take charge."

According to Eric Mafuna, "to make the 21st century Africa's century, African leaders have to ensure that there is enough development on the African continent so that the African continent joins the world community of nations as a developed partner and as a partner that is going to actively participate."

Moreover, concerning the development of Africa through effective, authentic African Leadership he expresses his concept of constellational leadership - where each member of a team is a star in their own way. "In South Africa, we want to make sure that all the groups of society are represented; to make sure that we embrace the diversity of our country." Furthermore he added, "In South Africa today, nobody knows who is going to be the next leader after Thabo Mbeki. When one looks at looks at other countries, for example the USA, John Edwards has already announced his candidature in the next presidential elections." He stressed that

"Africa cannot wait for leaders to emerge. We have to develop our own leaders."

POINT OF DIFFERENCE

The unique differentiating factor of the African Leadership Group is that *citizens have to take action themselves rather than wait for the government to take action.* Throughout

Africa the majority of the citizens wait for the government to take action. "If the roof of a school is blown off by a storm the people in the community are not going to 'do anything, because they wait for the government to come and fix the roof." Since the era of colonialism, the government has always been very separate from the people. The people are of the opinion that the government is there to do things for the community and the community does not need to augment government efforts. "Development cannot be achieved by government alone, ordinary people have to take charge. When ordinary people take charge you can start solving a lot of the problems facing Africa today such as HIV Aids and Malaria."

He explained, "We were able to win against apartheid because people organized themselves to resist a racist regime. They organized themselves to fight for freedom. There was a climate of resistance but driven by a form of activism. People were actively fighting for a cause."

{Today} young people are not driven by any visible brand of activism."

CITIZENS MUST TAKE CHARGE

According to Eric Mafuna, "If one looks at the world today, young people are not driven by any visible brand of activism. In Africa and many other parts of the world, young people today are just happy to watch TV. I am not sure that young people around the world are

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angry enough today because if they were, they would be taking up the challenge against environmental issues, the Middle East, poverty etc. We need young people to generate and stimulate activism and channel it towards development. We need them to be angry, angry enough to care about development issues, angry enough to want to do things that are going to improve their life."

((Promoting democracy also means supervising and encouraging leaders to serve their term and no more.))

"Today I don't see the same anger in young people that is channeled towards positive issues. In South Africa we need to make sure we stoke up that anger, paradoxically, in a positive way. We need to stoke up the anger so that it is directed towards development so that if the roof of a school is blown away the community does not wait for the government to act."

ZIMBABWE'S LEADERSHIP CRISIS

When asked to comment on the recent leader-

ship crisis in Zimbabwe Mafuna tells us that "the issue of Zimbabwe could have been dealt with a long time ago. We must remember that Robert Mugabe was voted into power by his own people. This means that there must be a community of interests there that realizes that if Mugabe goes they would lose out. The ruling party and the community of interests that Mugabe represents is the one that is keeping him there.

There is no point for the world to come in now and say that the elections are false. The institutions worldwide that are interested in the promotion of democracy should have taken steps eighteen years ago and said to Mugabe: You have done your two terms, that's enough, you have to step down. Promoting democracy also means supervising and encouraging leaders to serve their term and no more."

AFRICAN LEADERS OF TOMORROW

When Mr. Eric Mafuna was confronted with his views on the future of African leadership, specifically whether he was concerned that the bright young African leaders of tomorrow would seek a better future outside the African continent he jovially said, "No I am not worried about this issue, because if you do not make the conditions attractive for young Africans to

come back you are not going to get them back, you can't."

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS

Students interested in actively participating in this project can do so by posting opinions or comments on the website:

www.africanleadershipgroup.com .

The 5 Key Objectives

The five key objectives of The African Leadership Group are:

- To make the 21st century Africa's century
- To entrench democracy on the continent
- To develop Africa through effective, authentic African leadership
- To support reconstruction and reconciliation
- To encourage dialogue that enables South Africans and Africans to confront issues that impact on leadership effectiveness.

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