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How do we grow Africa? Where will our resources have the greatest impact? **Frik Landman**, CEO of USB Executive Development Ltd (USB-ED), explores the role of management training in Africa.

# MANAGEMENT muscle

**T**he challenges facing Africa are enormous, and incontestable. Much has been said and written about the economic, social and environmental inequalities confronting us on this continent.

Yet, this very same landscape is endowed with more than 60% of the world's arable land and more than its fair share of natural resources, and we receive significant foreign direct investment. The potential of our growing consumer market

is massive, our population is young and the labour force is expanding. There are positive indicators of growth acceleration, and opportunities and challenges present themselves to unlock potential in agriculture, retail, resources and infrastructure.

The begging question is: If we have these resources and opportunities, why the challenges that manifest in the Millennium Development Goals and why the sluggish progress? If you are not a cynic there is no easy or glib answer for these systemic problems and neither is the solution singular or 'panaceaic' in nature.

One way of looking at this *problématique* is to identify a high-leverage variable in the system that, if pulled, could have a significant influence on positioning the described landscape to be more conducive to sustainable growth for all its peoples.

## MAKING BETTER MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

A part of the answer hides in the fact that we have millions of managers on the continent, daily making decisions from operational to strategic level. Each decision made by a manager has consequences,

which in turn amasses into the quality of life we experience on this continent. These managers are operating, influencing and directing resources in the public and business sectors. It is therefore rather obvious that they have the opportunity to shape a better Africa. They are the ones tasked to lead the turning of these resources into results for Africa's people and to achieve the primary goals of an economic policy, which are sustainable economic growth and social development.

It is therefore vitally important to build management capacity to get the envisaged results, namely to reduce poverty and to improve healthcare, education, infrastructure, service delivery and economic growth. Entities that focus on the development of managers could offer powerful and influential platforms to convene these managers and equip them to lead their organisations in becoming a force for good in Africa.

I would like to reflect on this landscape from different perspectives.

### STUDYING AT A RECOGNISED INSTITUTION

There are too few quality institutions on the continent that can serve the number of managers needed for the future. It is estimated that Africa has 90 institutions providing some form of MBA of variable quality. Only about six business management institutions on the continent comply with international standards like the AACSB, EQUIS and AMBA. If one considers the fact that India, with a similar population to Africa, has over 1 000 business schools offering an MBA over and above other institutions focusing on general management, the challenge facing Africa is obvious.

Creating voluntary partnerships and collaborative relationships among stakeholders in the public sector, business

sector and civil society could be a starting point from where to achieve the shared ideals for the continent.

## 'High-quality management development is ... a powerful force to capacitate managers.'

### UNPACKING THE ROLE OF MANAGEMENT SCHOOLS

Serious efforts are required to improve the quality of Africa's institutions. Management development schools, in accordance with the mission of the United Nations' Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), need to 'champion responsible management education, research, and thought leadership'. These are expressed in six principles which I take the liberty to reframe in the following sentences. Hence, the drive of a school of management, as a partner for sustainable progress, is to:

- **Develop** the capabilities of managers so that they can be future generators of sustainable value for business, government and society
- **Consider** society at large and the connectedness we have, and work actively towards an inclusive and sustainable global economy
- **Integrate** into its academic activities and courses the values of global social responsibility
- **Create** a rich learning space that allows

for effective learning experiences to become responsible leaders


- **Participate** in sound theoretical and rigorous pragmatic research that advances understanding of organisations (public, business, civil society) in the quest for a sustainable future.

To action the above, sufficient and well-educated faculty is needed. This is a base resource but also a declining resource in many instances.

### COLLABORATING WITH OTHER SCHOOLS

Africa's current management development entities cannot master it alone; we are too few in number, our resources are limited and it is challenging to be everything to everyone. Furthermore, the task is complex and it requires a number of participating stakeholders for different reasons. Part of this is for business schools to collaborate with managers of organisations (business, government, civil society) to deepen their understanding of the challenges in meeting economic, social and environmental responsibilities and to jointly explore effective approaches to meet these challenges. These schools need to facilitate and support discourse and debate among business, government and civil society entities on critical issues relating to responsible leadership and economic, social and environmental sustainability.

### MANAGING AFRICA

High-quality management development is by no means a panacea, but it is a powerful force to capacitate managers to execute their organisations' missions effectively and to underpin this with a sustainable value system. 

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