

# Global Mindset and Sustainable Development in Africa- A Synergy

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**Doi:10.5901/mjss.2012.v3n13p29**

## **Abstract**

*Global managers and leaders have exceptionally open minds. They most often respect how different countries do things and they have the imagination to appreciate why they do them that way. But, they are also incisive. They sort through the debris of cultural excuses and find opportunities to innovate. There is need to develop the global mindset of leaders/managers, teams, individuals, and the entire African populace to enhance global sustainability. The existing scenario in Africa indicates that it does not have enough leaders within global competencies. It is essential to identify African leadership potentials that help to sustain competitive advantage in a dynamic global/ local environment. This advantage of course is achievable through global mindset development. The concept and idea of sustainable development is widely accepted, and good progress has been made on sustainable development metrics; yet its implementation has been largely unsuccessful especially in Africa. The position of this paper is that global mindset remains a sine qua non for sustainable development anywhere in the world. A synergy between global mindset and sustainable development has therefore been established. It was recommended among others, that African leaders should be more proactive and also see the development of global mindset as a priority.*

**Keywords:** *Global, Mindset, Sustainability, Development, Synergy*

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## **Introduction**

The most important attribute required for effective global leadership and sustainability is not just a new set of skills or experience, but rather a new perspective called global mindset. This requires simultaneously recognizing situations in which demands from both global and local elements are compelling, while combining an openness to and awareness of diversity across cultures and nations with a willingness and ability to synthesize across this diversity.

Global mindset means we can scan the world. The achievement of global sustainability objectives is best propelled by a country-wide alignment of global mindset, when each and every employee, leader and entire citizenry knows their part in fulfilling the national and international vision and is prepared to work effectively in the global complex environment. Ensuring compliance with and implementing the principles surrounding sustainable development is better enhanced when leaders of nations, non-governmental organizations and all stakeholders develop in them a global mindset. The business of sustainable development is not something that should be limited to

domestic strategies only. The notion of global mindset holds that leaders of various countries should be at liberty to consult and partner with other countries freely, especially if those other countries possess what can better facilitate efforts toward the achievement of sustainability.

In short, leaders of various countries in the world are the arrow heads in the success and failure of sustainable development. Global leadership mindset is therefore the ability to take a global rather than country specific view of the environment and people, and be able to apply this perspective to a country, taking into account its culture, resources, ideology etc.

Leadership matters and cannot be ignored. Leaders work in un-chartered territories, beyond traditional boundaries with state, non-state, business, and auxiliary (universities, trade unions, charities, third sector). They seek to make sense of new situations, personnel, processes, and dynamic policy shifts. Although social agency constrained by the structural, institutional and historical context, leadership capacity is a quality which can alleviate the negative consequences of economic regional development and to reinforce the positive ones.

When we use the term global mindset leadership we don't refer to the typically strong, charismatic leader with a formal position & power, but all those who, following their inner consciousness and inner values, take responsibility and actions for sustainable development in their own communities, localities and regions and the world. Passion and commitment and the capability to mobilise others are essential in this process. However, we know a great deal about what leaders do, but very little about the inner place, the source from which they operate. Change today requires a shift of the mind, a shift of will and a shift of the heart.

Global mindset development can be viewed as a process of reframing a cognitive reference point, shifting a worldview, or developing a new paradigm of meaning or perspective taking (Bartunek, 1988). From a practical perspective, the next generation of leaders and followers must develop meaning making strategies that allow them to transcend cultural boundaries where differences may exist. Such strategies will enable leaders and followers to recognize the nuanced nature of entering new and different cultures, to integrate the information and knowledge into a personal system of meaning, and to use that meaning to guide the development of behavioral repertoires that are consistent with both their self-concept and with the cultural context of interaction.

The concept and idea of sustainable development is widely accepted, and good progress has been made on sustainable development metrics; yet the implementation of sustainable development has been largely unsuccessful. The world has made little progress in implementing programs and policies to improve the lives of the poor (Moyo, 2009), and the integration of the three pillars of economic development, social development, and environmental improvements remains a challenge. Sustainable development is not easy and will take considerable time and effort. It emphasizes a holistic, equitable and far-sighted approach to decision making at all levels. It emphasizes not just strong economic performance but intragenerational and intergenerational equity. It rests on integration and a balanced consideration of social, economic and environmental goals and objectives in both public and private decision-making. The concept of sustainable development emerged from anxieties that accompanied the triumphant rise in living standards enjoyed in developed countries during the second half of the 20th century.

Encapsulated in the Club of Rome's 1972 publication of *The Limits to Growth*, this unease sprang from two painful realities. It had become clear that the life-sustaining role of the biosphere was at risk from open-ended consumption of natural resources.

In this paper, effort is devoted in the understanding of relevance of global mindset development in the enhancement of sustainable development in Africa. Leaders in various

capacities in Africa should strive to build a global mindset that would give them the opportunity to explore all avenues across the world to help realize their goals.

### **Conceptual Underpinning Global Mindset**

Global mindset means we can scan the world .it combines an openness to and awareness of diversity across cultures and markets with ability to synthesize across the diversity. With this ,countries in African would be able to understand what is obtainable elsewhere in the world and the scope of thinking is enlarged.

The achievement of global sustainability objectives is best propelled by a country-wide alignment of global mindset, when each and every employee, leader and entire citizenry knows their part in fulfilling the national and international 's vision and is prepared to work effectively in the global complex environment.

Global mindset Helps managers, and leaders see possibilities when opportunities arise and share best practices with the surroundings, Speeds up cross-country sharing of information, Enhances the capability of risk-taking, gets innovations and better ways of doing things on the globe in a shorter time and facilitates the convergence of local adjustments with global standardization

With this increasing flattening of the world, is the fact that to effectively engender change in this new world will require a more different kind of leader than ever before. A leader who will not only have to be generally effective in the traditional skills expected but also with additional knowledge, skills and above all mindset to navigate through the complexities brought on by moving beyond one's traditional borders.

But, what then exactly is a global mindset and how does it impact the way nations lead? It is the ability to influence individuals, groups, organizations, and systems that have different intellectual, social, and psychological knowledge or intelligence from your own. But, more than the old adage, "think globally and act locally," it's now "think and act both globally and locally" at the same time. This means not only recognize when it is beneficial to create a consistent global standard, but also deepen the understanding of local and cultural differences, crossing cultures and changing contexts. It requires simultaneously recognizing situations in which demands from both global and local elements are compelling, while combining an openness to and awareness of diversity across cultures and markets with a willingness and ability to synthesize across this diversity.(Cohen, 2010).

The concept of global mindset has been suggested by scholars as a way to achieve a better understanding of ways to engage in appropriate levels of cross-cultural functioning, (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1998). Global mindset has been defined as "the cognitive ability that helps individuals figure out how to best understand and influence individuals, groups, and organizations from diverse socio/cultural systems" (Beechler & Javidan, 2007). In today's complex and changing environment with its concomitant effects, nations are increasingly looking for ways to develop global mindset among their leaders. To be successful in the global economy, leaders must have the ability to navigate the needs and norms of multiple cultural groups simultaneously. Global mindset provides leaders with the capacity to not only understand the nuances of culture, but to also have a broader understanding of the impact of global trends on local strategies.

The mindset is the repository of meaning and global mindset develops as individuals transform into more complex meaning makers (Kegan, 1983), who incorporate multiple cultural

frameworks into their meaning systems. The construction of meaning is a personal experience, in which we develop constructs to understand what is happening around us. Thus, meaning making is simply the activity of being and we experience our reality as the meaning we make of it, said Kegan. In this era of climate change, nations need to start thinking deeply on how to make meaning in the direction of sustainability.

Global mindset development is a process that can occur throughout the life span. The constructivist/developmental model provided by Kegan allows us to understand how global mindset is not a factor of traits and skills, but rather a process of knowing one's capacities to make meaning of events and to use this capacity to display appropriate behaviours, in this case, developing behavioural patterns and attitudes that are not at variance with the principles of sustainable development.

Additionally, Gupta and Govindarajan (2004) described the development of global mindset as a series of S-curves, in which individuals become aware of their current mindsets, find a means to articulate these and become more inquisitive and open to learning about new cultures, which again exposes their current mindset, and thus the process continues.

Individuals differ in how they sense and interpret the world around them. So do organizations and nations, and these differences matter. They matter because it is how we perceive our environment as well as ourselves that determines which of the multitude of opportunities and problems we go after and how we do so. We would define a global mindset as one that combines an openness to and awareness of diversity across cultures and markets with a propensity and ability to synthesize across this diversity.

Global mindset leadership in African countries would be proactive in benchmarking and learning from product and process innovations outside their domestic borders. Global mindset should make the countries much more alert to the entry of non-traditional (that is, foreign) competitors in its local environment especially if it has to do with new ways of engendering sustainability.

## **Sustainable Development**

The term, sustainable development, was popularized in *Our Common Future*, a report published by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. Also known as the Brundtland report, *Our Common Future* included the "classic" definition of sustainable development: "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Acceptance of the report by the United Nations General Assembly gave the term political salience; and in 1992 leaders set out the principles of sustainable development at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It is generally accepted that sustainable development calls for a convergence between the three pillars of economic development, social equity, and environmental protection. Sustainable development is a visionary development paradigm; and over the past 20 years governments, businesses, and civil society have accepted sustainable development as a guiding principle, made progress on sustainable development metrics, and improved business and NGO participation in the sustainable development process. Yet the concept remains elusive and implementation has proven difficult. Unsustainable trends continue and sustainable development has not found the political entry points to make real progress. As a result, climate change has become the de facto proxy for implementation of the sustainable development agenda; but the framework of the climate change negotiations are not always the appropriate forum for broader strategic discussions of sustainable

development. While sustainable development is intended to encompass three pillars, over the past 20 years it has often been compartmentalized as an environmental issue (Drexhage, and Murphy, 2010)

Added to the above, and potentially more limiting for the sustainable development agenda, is the reigning orientation of development as purely economic growth. This has been the framework used by developed countries in attaining their unprecedented levels of wealth, and major and rapidly developing countries are following the same course. The problem with such an approach is that natural resources are in imminent peril of being exhausted or their quality being compromised to an extent that threatens current biodiversity and natural environments. Addressing this challenge calls for changes at the consumer level in developed countries. Developed countries have the wealth and technical capacity to implement more sustainable policies and measures, yet the required level of political leadership and citizen engagement is still a long way off. The lack of action in developed countries is compounded by economic growth in developing countries that follows the resource-intensive model of developed countries. Without change and real action to address levels of consumerism and resource use in developed countries, one can hardly expect a receptive audience among developing countries when attempts are made to direct attention to their economic development practices. More sustainable development pathways are needed in both developed and developing countries; which require a level of dialogue, cooperation and, most importantly, trust that simply is not reflected in today's multilateral institutions or regimes.

There is a huge gap between the multilateral processes, with their broad goals and policies; and national action, which reflects domestic political and economic realities. A huge constituency around the world cares deeply and talks about sustainable development, but has not taken serious on-the-ground action. Deep structural changes are needed in the ways that societies manage their economic, social, and environmental affairs; and hard choices are needed to move from talk to action. While some would argue that we have failed on sustainable development, 20 years is a relatively short time frame to implement the required changes in such a daunting area. The needed systemic changes will require a revolution in the way the world does business. This will have an impact on lifestyles and consumption patterns— especially so in developed countries, but also for the growing middle class in developing countries. The recent financial crisis and the beginning of the decline of trust in the liberalization and globalization model could mean some renewed receptivity for a new sustainable development paradigm. A new model could chart a development path that truly is concerned with equity, poverty alleviation, reducing resource use, and integrating economic, environmental, and social issues in decision making. The opportunity is ripe to move beyond incrementalism to real systemic change.

Since the Brundtland report and the Rio Summit, sustainable development has transitioned from being an interesting yet at times contested ideal, to a concept that enjoys widespread endorsement by international institutions, governments, businesses, and civil society. The nearly universal adoption of sustainable development as a guiding principle is, in part, due to its flexibility. It allows various stakeholders to adapt the concept to their own purposes. This strength, however, is also a liability because various interpretations have led to confusion and compromised implementation. Nonetheless, sustainable development has been integrated into the operations and governing mandate of many prominent international organizations. These include the World Bank, which has affirmed a commitment to "sustainable globalization" that "enhances growth with care for the environment"; the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2010), with a commitment to "sustainable economic growth"; as well as the World Trade Organization which endeavours to contribute to sustainable development through the pursuit of open borders and the removals of

barriers to trade. Sustainable development is also a prominent component of the MDGs, which have been widely endorsed by national governments and the world's foremost development organizations since they were adopted at the Millennium Summit in 2000.

Sustainable development has also gained currency in the private sector—often in the form of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda. Several voluntary initiatives have been formed over the past 20 years, including the World Business Council on Sustainable Development (WBCSD), Global Compact, Equator Principles, Global Reporting Initiative, and Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. In addition, various major international NGOs, such as Friends of the Earth, have increased the scale and sophistication of their involvement in sustainability principles. Local NGOs around the world have taken up the cause of sustainable development.

Others view sustainable development as a balancing act between the economy and the environment—meaning that the economy is an entity that is separate from the environment, where the latter inevitably loses out (Caccia, 2001). Some critics accuse the business community of using sustainable development as a way to paint environmentally destructive practices green—a rationalization for economic growth without due concern for environmental or social imperatives.

Others question if sustainable development should continue to support economic growth at all, given the physical limits of the global ecosystem; while others have suggested that the concept does not give enough attention to the poor and their acute vulnerability to environmental degradation (Adams, 2008).

The concept has also become synonymous for some with particular political agendas: in that those most vocal in support of sustainable development often come with political agendas that, at least in North America, are often associated with the left wing of the political spectrum. On the other hand, many developing countries see sustainable development as an ideology developed by developed countries for the purpose of imposing stricter conditions and rules on development aid and international trade.

Despite all these detractors, one could argue that sustainable development might be the only paradigm of development left standing. With the recent fiscal and financial crises, and the loss of faith in the pure economic growth model of the Washington Consensus, there is renewed interest in the potential of sustainable development as an effective framework and tool to address these core structural challenges.

## **The Synergy**

There is a synergy between global mindset and sustainability. Sustainable development in Africa and across the world is often directed and driven by leaders and heads of governments, institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations, the organized private sector, etc as the case may be. To a large extent, subordinates and citizens in general act in consonance with the direction of their leaders. Any leader with a global mindset of sustainability is capable of influencing subjects/citizens and would motivate them towards the enhancement of sustainable development and therefore would mobilize efforts towards the achievement of the predetermined objective.

Global mindset leaders are sensitive. Sustainable development issues are so sensitive to comprehend and implement. The more damaging the economic activity, the more perverse are the results. For example, the construction of a new airport has a positive effect on GDP. Climate change, noise pollution, loss of habitat and the increase in inequality (airports benefit richer rather than poorer families) are all excluded from the calculations. Yet GDP is universally regarded as the most important of all economic indicators.

Without global mindset leadership approach, Sustainable development will remain the El Dorado of modern times, a vaguely charted dream of everlasting prosperity which inspires discourse rather than deeds. With the cultivation of global mindset, world leaders would be reminded always that their domestic difficulties have no lasting remedy unless they are aligned with stewardship of our planetary home and provision for all members of the human family. This becomes more urgent when we realize that sustainable development is the imperative of the twenty-first century.

Nations driven by leaders with global mindset have the abilities to understand sustainable development issues of their local environments and then compare and contrast such with what is obtainable in other regions of the world. They have the ability for knowledge and innovation transfer. In this era of technology, it is important for nations to get into partnership that can better their situations.

A nation's vision and values must show global consistency. However, its workplace practices, which translate policy guidelines into day-to-day procedures, should be locally determined. A need for global consistency would favour policies that accentuate formalization, standardization and global dictates, whereas a need for local responsiveness would favor flexibility, customization and delegation.

Global mindset in the context of sustainable development pursues the achievement of an atmosphere of trust especially between developed and developing countries (Africa in particular). Presently, what is seen is the reverse. Developed countries have not met commitments to developing countries, generating an atmosphere of distrust. The international discussions on sustainable development are permeated by a lack of trust between developed and developing countries. This is underpinned by developed countries not meeting their financial and technology transfer commitments to developing countries. An implicit deal of the Rio Summit was that developing countries would pay attention to the sustainable development agenda if developed countries increase development assistance significantly. Developed countries have failed to live up to this bargain. Most developed countries (with the exception of Sweden, Norway, Luxembourg, Denmark, and the Netherlands) have not reached the goal of allocating 0.7 percent of GDP to aid for developing countries.

In another wise, Developing countries also question developed countries' commitment to undertake the required changes to relieve the pressure their societies place on the global environment; and are suspicious of their demands for change in developing countries. An example is a request by some developed countries that the World Bank not fund coal-fired power plants in developing countries, while the construction of such plants continues in some of these developed countries. Developed countries have taken no significant action to change production and consumption patterns; and developing countries are likely to resist significant radical action without developed countries leading the way. All these discrepancies and lack of commitment to agreement would be better resolved when leaders in developed and developing countries build global mindset, because the world would be considered as truly a global village and that whatever anybody does would affect everybody not minding the geographical location. The notion of global mindset and sustainability frowns at issues that magnify Bias, sentiment, favouritism and ethnicity.

Sustainable development is part of the international lexicon, but the concept remains too amorphous to be clearly defined, and hence implemented. The effective implementation of sustainable development would be easily achievable through the use of global mindset. Since the Brundtland report and the Rio Summit sustainable development has largely remained an idea and a conceptual framework. There are many acceptable views of sustainable development, and it has

been taken up as a starting point or perhaps an end goal—but the implementation of sustainable development has lagged.

One means that Sustainable Developers have to ensure continuing support of their anti-human programs is through moulding the minds of the next generation. Chapter 25 of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 21 calls for the need to “enlist and empower children and youth in reaching for sustainability. Again, what this attempts to tackle is the development of global mindset of the youths because they are the leaders of tomorrow and sustainable development is focused on how to enable future generation to meet up their own needs

A global mindset can be the new competitive advantage in the arena of sustainability, so a global strategy needs a high stock of global mindset! Countries across the world must take much more responsibility for their own development. It is critical to remember the quest for a global mindset may never end. The complex and dynamic world in which we live provides unlimited opportunities for exploring the many linkages across our wide world of diversity.

## Conclusion

As nations across the world grapple through efforts toward sustainable development, the acquisition of a true global mindset that will enable leadership effectiveness in a global capacity remains worthwhile. Without acquiring such a mindset, all the global leader experience in the world is not likely to improve one's effectiveness on the global stage. As social, cultural, economic, political, and business complexity increase so does the demand for a global mindset, almost exponentially given the intersect of this complex environment. There is therefore the need for leaders and all stakeholders in the business of sustainability to incorporate the essence of global mindset development into their faculties and systems and frameworks.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations remain worthwhile.

- There should be continuous awareness creation and capacity building towards global mindset development. This could be achieved through training programs for citizens, to develop mindset and skills to work effectively across cultures. Training programs for Africa's current and future leaders and stakeholders, to develop competencies to lead in a global context is also advocated.
- Nations across Africa and the world should understand the synergy between global mindset and sustainable development and therefore ensure that priority attention is placed on achieving global mindset development
- Since sustainable development is a life-long process, leaders in Africa and the world should develop more proactive measures in tackling and addressing challenges staring on them.

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