

Higher Education and Developmental Leadership: The Case of Ghana

Amir Jones, Charlotte Jones and Susy Ndaruhutse, CfBT

This study highlights the important role that quality education, at both secondary and higher level, has played in the formation of developmental leadership in Ghana. Its findings include the way in which quality education (largely residential in Ghana) has promoted social integration and shared values, and can help form networks and coalitions that have a greater chance of initiating and sustaining reform.

Introduction

This paper reports on the third phase of a research programme that explores the links between higher education and developmental leadership and coalitions. This third phase looked specifically at how higher education has equipped developmental leaders and coalitions in Ghana with the necessary skills, values and networks for leadership and national reform.

Leaders involved in the following three key areas of reform in Ghana were identified:

- restoration of democracy (1987-2000);
- Economic Recovery Program and related public sector reforms (1983-1997);
- liberalisation of the media (1989-2003).

The educational background of a longlist of 115 leaders was analysed and semi-structured interviews with 27 key leaders conducted, covering the quality, content and culture of their education, as well as the key reforms that they had been involved in. They were asked about the relative importance of education in the development of their skills, ideology, attitude and networks, and were asked to compare this to the influence of pre-existing networks such as their political, religious and other social connections.

Where time permitted, a 'relationship survey' asked interviewees to assess the strength of their connections to other members on the 27-strong shortlist of key leaders and to describe the origin of these relationships. This gathered infor-

mation about the relative importance of higher education for networking and coalition-building.

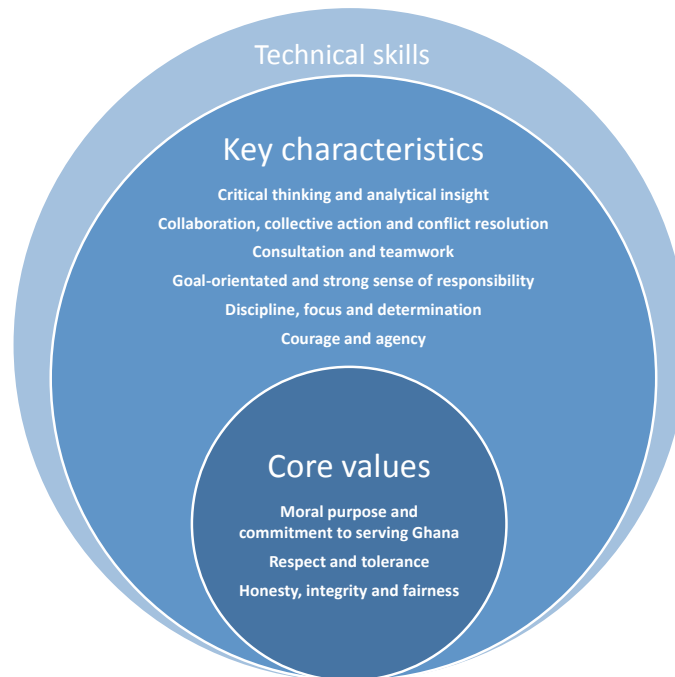
A model for developmental leadership

The answers of our interviewees identified a set of leadership qualities that cross political divides. We found evidence of a direct link between these qualities and the education of key leaders in the 1960s and 1970s.

Of course, not all interviewees mentioned all of these qualities, but all mentioned at least two, and the majority mentioned six or more. Moreover, grouping individuals in their reform coalitions, we find that both coalitions report possessing all of these qualities. These qualities are:

- **Core values** – moral purpose and commitment to serving Ghana; respect and tolerance; honesty, integrity and fairness. Our analysis shows that these values largely, but not exclusively, originated in secondary school and provided the initial motivation to pursue a developmental career; they are also central to the everyday activities of a developmental leader.
- **Key characteristics of successful reforming leaders** – critical thinking and analytical insight; collaboration and conflict resolution; consultation and teamwork; goal-orientation and a strong sense of responsibility; discipline, focus and determination; courage and agency. These are the essential characteristics or qualities demonstrated by leaders in Ghana who were successful in pursuing reform; some were developed at secondary school, some at university and others at work.
- **Technical skills** – these are the 'hard' skills, expertise and knowledge which leaders need if they are to drive change. They are largely acquired at university and further developed while being applied at work.

A model of developmental leadership qualities in Ghana



Leadership qualities and links to education

Leadership quality	Link to education
Honesty, integrity and fairness	School culture and values; on-campus debate; legal studies
Respect and tolerance	School culture and values; boarding; diversity of student population; overseas study
Moral purpose and commitment to serving Ghana	School culture and values; exposure to poverty through student diversity; sense of privilege created and of debt to society; political debate on-campus; student activism; subject studied (law, politics, journalism, economics)
Courage and agency	Sense of being groomed for leadership; school culture; leadership opportunities; student activism; study of history; belief that role of intellectuals is to provide leadership for change
Discipline, focus and determination	School culture and values; extracurricular activities (e.g. Cadet Corps); subject (e.g. law)
Goal-orientated and strong sense of responsibility	Leadership opportunities; sense of being groomed for leadership
Consultation and teamwork	Extracurricular activities such as sports and debating clubs; boarding school interaction
Collaboration, collective action and conflict resolution	Diversity of student body; extracurricular activities; student activism course content (e.g. African studies course)
Critical thinking and analytical insight	Teaching quality and methodology; debating clubs and on-campus debate; broad curriculum; close interaction with lecturers; subject choice (e.g. law, economics, politics, philosophy)
Technical competency and knowledge	Teaching quality and methodology; on-campus debate; broad curriculum; close interaction with lecturers; extracurricular activities; subject choice (e.g. law, economics, politics, journalism)

Key findings

1. A quality education – at both secondary and higher level – has been an important factor in the formation of developmental leadership in Ghana

All but one of the interviewed leaders on our shortlist attended an elite Ghanaian or UK secondary boarding school or had an elite university education (defined as attending the University of Ghana at Legon or studying overseas); all but three had both. An analysis of the backgrounds of

the 115 leaders on our longlist showed similar results: 96% had attended either an elite secondary school or higher education establishment and 74% had attended both.

Quality is important. Analysis of leaders' backgrounds and interview responses suggests that an elite education does more than just screen for existing elites. In Ghana, there was relatively meritocratic access to education, and its quality was the transformative factor in producing developmental leaders. Secondary education was important in the formation of core developmental skills and values. Higher

education gave further opportunity to develop those skills and values, and also provided an opportunity to develop technical skills and explore political beliefs and activism.

2. During their education, the leaders gained developmental leadership qualities (including core values, key characteristics and technical skills)

The most common subjects studied (and the technical skills developed) among Ghana's developmental leaders were law, economics, politics and journalism. The foundation of their values was laid in secondary school and further embedded during university. Key characteristics such as critical thinking, teamwork and courage were developed in both secondary and higher education. Technical skills were largely developed during university and then applied in work.

Our model of developmental leadership qualities has strong parallels with the 'capabilities-based professionalism' model developed by Walker and McLean (2013) as their ideal for training professionals willing to work for the 'public good'. The key characteristics of developmental leadership found in Ghana largely overlap with Walker and McLean's eight professional capabilities: vision; affiliation; resilience; struggle; emotions; knowledge, imagination and skills; integrity; confidence.

3. Education has helped create shared values among the leaders, facilitate social integration and increase social mobility

High quality education in Ghana was based on the British model, but also had a strong moral purpose grounded in its Christian missionary roots and fostered social mobility. Our interviewees came from all kinds of family backgrounds and seemingly had only their educational experiences in common. Inclusive access to quality education was a key priority of Kwame Nkrumah's post-colonial government, and most of the leaders studied were directly affected by educational policies that made access to Ghana's elite more meritocratic.

The education of the era also provided a shared residential experience through which key values such as public service and national unity were intentionally formed, leading to greater integration of elites and consensual unification. This ultimately led to sufficient agreement on the 'rules of the game' to allow the emergence and development of democracy.

4. Higher education was critical to both the emergence of reform coalitions in Ghana and to their success in bringing about economic, political and media reforms.

Higher education influenced coalitions in two main ways. Firstly, many of the key reform coalitions in the 1980s and 1990s could trace their roots back to networks first formed on and around campus. Secondly, higher education played a central role in

developing the skills and values of these coalitions which would both bring them together and support their success.

Many of the key reform coalitions in this study can trace their roots back to university-based networks and coalitions formed at Legon. Networks formed at and around Legon in the 1970s and early 1980s formed the blueprint for both Rawlings' Economic Recovery Program team and opposition coalitions such as the Movement for Freedom and Justice and the Alliance for Change. More indirectly, most reform coalitions had university alumni, academics and highly qualified professionals at their core.

It is also clear that certain kinds of human and social capital developed during higher education (such as skills, values, ideas, ways of working and, sometimes, the status of networks and alumni) helped bring the leaders who shared them together in new coalitions. These qualities were also critical for the leaders' success in bringing about reform. Many of these qualities were developed at university through joint action within study groups, or in collective student action and political campaigning. During later coalition-building, these already established norms were integral to the 'culture' of coalitions and their success.

For example, Rawlings selected an Economic Recovery Program team whose members were highly qualified in law and economics, but he had also already seen at Legon their ability to debate these issues as a group, apply critical thinking and make evidence-based decisions. The pro-democracy movement had a shared sense of agency and a joint history of 'underground' collective action that had begun in groups at Legon such as the New Democratic Movement. Academic status was a key motivator for bringing respected academics such as Adu Boahen into the Movement for Freedom and Justice, providing some protection for the cause.

Conclusions

This research demonstrates the important role that both secondary and higher education in Ghana have played in the formation of developmental leaders and coalitions.

It adds to the evidence base on the importance of structure (the key reforms and the political and economic institutions that they created) and agency (the individuals that were central in making and sustaining those reforms).

The skills and values that these agents acquired during their education, coupled with the networks formed, particularly at university, have led to the emergence of coalitions able to instigate and sustain change in Ghana's political and economic structure.

The inclusive nature of Ghanaian secondary boarding schools and the University of Ghana both increased social mobility and helped to foster the integration of elites. We can therefore say that education, and in particular quality secondary and higher education, has played a key role in improving governance in Ghana.

Policy considerations

The Education for All agenda and the education Millennium Development Goals, intended to help reduce poverty, have diverted investment away from higher education over the last twenty years. Since the early 1990s, Ghana has been on a positive trajectory of change from poor governance to improving governance, and this can be partly attributed to the role of an educated group of leaders and developmental coalitions with the necessary skills, values and networks to effect sustained change.

We outline some policy considerations raised by the findings of this research below, but further research is needed in other countries in order to build more specific recommendations.

A wider view of education

Our research from Ghana suggests that education policy needs to incorporate not only important issues such as equity, human rights and poverty reduction, but also more strategic issues such as the development of good governance and developmental leadership.

Residential experience

In Ghana, both boarding schools at secondary level and the shared experience of halls at university helped to bring together students from diverse geographical, ethnic, political and socio-economic backgrounds. They also helped foster common values and mutual respect, building a more integrated elite. Although generally seen as costly and elitist, the evidence from Ghana is that some form of residential education with meritocratic access could work well in countries where trust, integration and shared values are lacking.

Humanities and social sciences versus STEM subjects

Law, economics, politics and journalism were the subjects studied at university by the majority of developmental leaders interviewed in Ghana. Science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) are vital to train the technicians required for development, but they tend not to create transformative leaders. This suggests that investment in STEM should not be at the expense of the humanities and social sciences.

A broad curriculum

Interviewees also stressed the importance of a broad education, both at secondary and higher levels, in developing their intellect holistically and shaping their values and world-view. While Ashesi University in Ghana is bringing the liberal arts model to Africa, the general trend seems to be towards increased specialisation and segmentation.

School autonomy

Policy makers could consider where the current focus on metrics and accountability might lead. The developmental leadership qualities this research identifies are not easily measurable. Quality education establishments need some flexibility and autonomy to decide what is best for the development of their students.

Scholarships to create networks

At least nine of the developmental leaders we interviewed had studied overseas with the help of scholarships and international fellowships. Their experience offered something different than what was available domestically and can be said to have enhanced developmental leadership in Ghana. Although they gained wider experience, most were isolated from their Ghanaian peers and so missed out on the networking possible for those who studied only at home. Scholarship providers might consider whether scholars could be concentrated at particular overseas universities to maintain some of the advantages of domestic education.

Massive online open courses (MOOCs)

Our findings emphasise the importance of a high-contact, campus education (and all the positive network effects that this brings) in the formation of developmental leaders. However, we also see in Ghana that funding constraints mean that massification is diluting the quality of campus education. One point to consider then is not whether MOOCs will replace campus education, but whether they can be exploited to relieve pressure on publicly funded higher education establishments, thus allowing them to provide the quality, high-contact education they were in the 1960s and 1970s. Ashesi University is also demonstrating how higher education establishments can use MOOCs to increase their course offerings without substantially increasing their costs.

Reference:

Walker, M. and McLean, M. (2013) *Professional Education, Capabilities and the Public Good: the role of universities in promoting human development*. Oxford: Routledge.

This research was conducted by CfBT Education Trust in partnership with the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) Ghana.

Download the full paper at: www.dlprog.org/ftp/

The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international research initiative that aims to increase understanding of the political processes that drive or constrain development. DLP's work focuses on the crucial role of home-grown leaderships and coalitions in forging legitimate institutions that promote developmental outcomes. DLP's independent program of research is supported by the Australian Government.

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The Developmental Leadership Program

E: info@dlprog.org