



Results-based leadership as a vital consideration in the evaluation of SDGs

This article centres on the apparent lack of leadership focus in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an unfortunate mistake which is likely to reduce the chance, especially in Africa, to achieve them by the 2030 deadline. The argument advanced is that evaluation of SDGs should deliberately include the assessment of leadership practice with a focus on good governance leadership, skills set management and results-based monitoring & evaluation among other pro-development leadership elements. The conclusion is that leadership assessment should be mainstreamed in the SDG evaluation framework.

Pindai M. Sithole, Social Research and Evaluation Consultant in Development, Centre for Development in Research and Evaluation International Africa (CeDRE Africa)

Introduction

WHILE leadership is a well-researched phenomenon, its practical application to transform people's lives still remains problematic. One of the most unfortunate assumptions made in the development and endorsement of the Sustainable Development Goals and their predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals, is to think that countries and organizations alike have results-based leadership for development. Judging from the conflicts, human-made environmental disasters and rising poverty levels in many parts of the world, there is no doubt that this assumption is fallacious. Results-based leadership has been defined in many ways but everyone agrees that it is leadership practice of a special type which focuses on positive change/transformation of people's lives. In other words, the underlining motivation for a leader's actions should be to respond to the needs of the people from a short-term to a long-term range in a sustainable manner (Burton 1990 and Staten Island Foundation 2015). There are many faucets of results-based leadership but this paper will focus on three, namely governance, team competency and monitoring & evaluation in the context of the global desire to achieve the SDGs.

Good governance leadership

Normally what tends to come to mind when the term 'good governance' is mentioned are concepts like accountability, transparency and freedom of expression. Admittedly, these are key principles of the notion of good governance but it should be pointed out that the African continent is still far from achieving true good governance (Enwereonye 2015 and OECD 2001 and 2002). On this aspect, Enwereonye (2015) points out that unless countries and organizations in Africa have ethical leaders, it will continue to be a challenge to transform people's lives. Unethical leadership is self-serving, induces violence, reduces the scope for citizens to exploit their potential, is paranoid to advice and has a know-it-all attitude.

The suffering of people in a community or country despite abundance of resources literally 'under their feet' has become to be known as the resource curse theory (Auty 1993, Bannon and Collier 2003). The theory refers to a situation where resources which should or expected to bring blessings to people's lives turn out to cause untold suffering instead and this is no doubt indicative of unethical leadership. Generally, most African countries south of the Sahara have, regrettably, confirmed the relevance of this theory. This is judged from their poor development, despite the endowment of natural resources that characterize the continent (Bhattacharya et al. 2016 and Sebudubudu & Botlhomilwe 2011). Therefore, in the evaluation of ►►

► **SDGs, ethical leadership assessment will be key** to ensure that countries and organizations alike have pro-development leaders to deliver on the agreed goals by 2030.

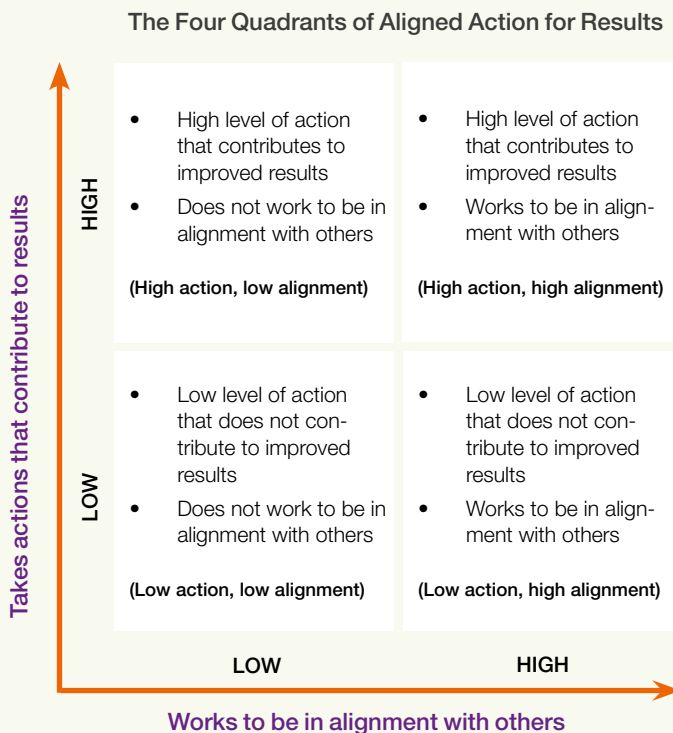
Skills set management

The ability to manage human resources is one of the tenets of effective leadership but, just like the leadership practice, it is without challenges of its own (Whetten and Cameron 2011). Common management skills include the aptitude for one to manage team dynamics, discipline and deal with conflict, delegate effectively, motivate personnel, communicate effectively, plan, solve problems, make decisions and develop the right people to achieve the goals of the country or organizations. The greatest challenge in the human resources management

phenomenon lies in the skills set management. Put simply, skills management is the practice of understanding, developing and deploying people and their skills in a collaborative way in order to achieve high level of development results. Pillsbury (2009) extensively researched and documented this notion of skills set management and developed what is now known as the Aligned Contributions Theory, firmly located in effective leadership practice. The theory is diagrammatically presented in Figure 1 below.

The author (Pillsbury) puts forward that effective leaders are those who are able to work in alignment with others and take actions that contribute to acceleration and magnitude of results or growth in organizations and countries. As Figure 1 illustrates, a well-implemented skills set management practice is when a leader competently identifies the skills ►

Figure 1: Illustration of Aligned Contributions Theory



Source: Adopted from Pillsbury (2009)



► that job roles require, the skills of individual employees and any capacity gaps during the course of carrying out given work. In the context of evaluation of SDGs, it will be a vital consideration to include assessment of leadership competences in skills management as advocated by Pillsbury.

Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are integral components of every development initiative because they allow one to systematically establish the worthiness or significance (Scriven 1991, OECD 2002 and Royse, Thyer & Padgett 2006). Viewed from a different angle, monitoring and evaluation are checks-and-balance designed to ensure that actions of an individual or groups of individuals should always be steered to bring quality of life to people. This means that results-based monitoring and evaluation (RBME) should be a way of life for every pro-development or ethical leader in a country, community or organization. The fact that relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, outcome, impact,

sustainability and lessons learnt are key evaluation standards, it is therefore imperative for leaders at any level in society to have RBME knowledge, skills and the right attitude. **Results-based monitoring and evaluation are central descriptors in defining leadership phenomenon as well as in selecting pro-development leaders.** In line with this proposition, there should be a deliberate effort to include leadership assessment as an important component in the frameworks of evaluating SDGs.

Conclusion

The discussion presented here was an attempt to locate leadership at the centre of the global discourse to achieve the set SDGs by 2030. The paper argues that at minimum, leaders should uphold ethics, be knowledgeable and skilled in results-based monitoring & evaluation and be competent in the management of skills. The overall recommendation is that these three elements be included in the evaluation frameworks of SDGs to increase the chance in their attainment across all UN member countries.

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Author's profile

Dr. Pindai Sithole is a founding director of the Centre for Development in Research and Evaluation (CeDRE) International Africa based in Harare, Zimbabwe (www.cedreafrica.org) and co-founder and current President of the Zimbabwe Evaluation Society (www.zes.org). He is a development consultant and practitioner with 21 years of international experience in Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation, Social Research, Results-Based Strategic Planning. His experience is drawn from public, civil society and private sectors in Africa, Asia and the USA. Pindai is also a part-time lecturer of graduate studies at Africa University in Zimbabwe, in the Institute of Peace, Leadership and Governance (IPLG). Dr. Pindai holds an Associate Degree in Accounting (Richland Community College, USA, 1993), BSc. in Finance with specialization in Management Information Systems (Millikin University, USA, 1995), MA. in Leadership & Management (Africa Leadership and Management Academy, Zimbabwe, 2007) and a PhD in Sustainable Development Studies with a special focus on Sustainable Community-Based Development (Witwatersrand University, South Africa, 2014).

