

Responsible Management in Africa, Volume 2

This is one of the broadest collection of essays on *Responsible Management in Africa* that I have come across. Reading this book will open your eyes to African-grounded knowledge that has been suppressed. As we say in West Africa – it will ‘shine your eyes’. The book should be compulsory reading for all students of sustainability and responsible business around the globe.

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November 30, 2021

A few years ago, we witnessed the consolidation of many African Business schools and the creation of some new ones. On that occasion, there was a raging discussion: Should African business schools follow the paths set by further advanced Western business Schools? Should they rather strive to creatively develop some new, original, peculiarly African concepts and points of view? Could ‘ubuntu’ and other traditional concepts be considered important elements contributing to the growth of African and non-African businesses? Maybe! The contribution of Dr Kemi Ogunyemi and her co-editors in their new book is a powerful claim and statement that the second and third options are not only viable but very much alive and productive. The contributions give a deep insight to the treasures of indigenous wisdom and how they contribute to growth and development.

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Responsible Management in Africa, Volume 2

Ethical Work and Sustainability

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

to Toyé and Sola Ogunyemi and to Iheanyi and Ngozi Anozie

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Foreword

Across the world, the covid-19 crisis, and what comes thereafter, demand a rethink about the present and future of business management and sustainable development. This provides an opportunity to better sensitise Africa's businesses towards endogenous conditions, norms and processes.

Africa is a region where the multidimensional nature of sustainability challenges is painfully exposed. Almost half of the continent's population of 1.3 billion live below a poverty line of US\$1.9 per day. As a continent that has been historically exploited, and still suffers from conflict, corruption and economic disparities, there is a growing interest to motivate researchers to investigate how Africa could play a critical role in transitioning to responsible management and embracing the UN sustainable development goals (SDGs).

This volume of 'Responsible Management in Africa', looks into the philosophies that indigenously support ethical work and sustainability in Africa and captures deep insights about the principled entrepreneurship traditions of several African countries and ethnicities.

The editors premise that the conservation of African traditional values and the identification of virtuous principled entrepreneurs are one way to address the continents' problems, and call for a discourse to study the indigenous ways of working ethically and promoting sustainability in Africa.

The book volume explores the cultural foundations for responsible management in different places including Algeria, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia with the aim of capturing the available wisdom in the quest for solidarity and contextualized sustainability.

Capturing the Wisdom

Associated with Bourdieu's (1997) concept of *habitus*, is to *give meaning to relationships*. This contains a strong, normative component in terms of self-understanding: who I am, who do I belong with, and who can I trust? (Ibrahim, Fowler, and Kiggundu 2021). In Africa, communal living and associational life typically revolve around the proximity of mutual belonging, captured in the east and southern Africa concept of *Ubuntu*, and its equivalents in other regions (Mbiti, 1970).

Intergenerational affinities and relations shape personal and group identity. Care and respect for older ones is part of the culture. Older people have a sense of responsibility towards younger generations which can be seen as promoting sustainability thinking and concern for future generations.

The book focuses on discovering how African philosophy – which is often lived rather than systematically written out – can relay indigenous wisdom that could heal the selfishness in the way businesspeople tend to act, and shows solutions where wisdom that guided many interactions including those relating to trade, entrepreneurship and other activities that drive the dynamics of economies.

From Mauritius in chapter 4 attitudes and behaviors of people engaged in business transactions were found to be guided by traditions, culture and values stemming from Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism beliefs and served to establish sound principles of trade and business decorum in the country. In Eastern Nigeria, chapter 7 takes us through the economic rise of the Igbos through the provision of capital and mentoring in the Igbo apprenticeship.

Cultural Diversity and Solidarity

Africa is a multi-cultural mosaic like no other region in the world. Because of this heterogeneity, it is imperative to promote unity and common goals (Robinson, 2020). Solidarity emphasizes the need for some level of shared appreciation across cultures, and refers to the expectation that others will generally act in a way that enhances mutual benefit and coordinated action toward collective goals (Macneil, 1980). Solidarity is intrinsically relational and reciprocal (Archer, 2013).

There are often similar common concepts that are part of the African cultural heritage many of which promote solidarity and inclusion. Historically in Africa, no individual would prosper at the expense of society, and society would not ignore the situation of any of its members (Oruka 1990).

The book notes this cultural diversity and richness in varying traditions within each African country, and promotes a varieties of concepts which foster solidarity in different traditions and incorporate them into discussions.

The editors in chapter 1 highlight the concept of solidarity and concern for the welfare of others, and call for re-incorporating cultural values which foster responsibility into management education curricula as means to improve the way business is done globally. They identify that when solidarity is practiced, and not just written as theories, social equity will be enhanced and poverty levels will be reduced. Chapter 2 identifies Africa as the least xenophobic of all continents and a model of welcoming the foreigner and explains that nationalism can be civic and liberal without extremism. It calls for the unity of all African peoples and that it should not stop at the level of territorial States. In chapter 8, we see trust-based notions of solidarity among entrepreneurial circles in the informal sector of Tanzania, and examples of financial traditions that sustain the micro-retail sub-sector and livelihoods in urban as well as rural areas. Chapter 10 presents the subsequent post-independence complex society of Zambia and how Africans could responsibly manage their affairs.

Contextualized Relevance

Management theories develop within a culture. We need to learn more about how non-western political-economic-cultural systems intersect with Africa businesses in real spaces. There is an increased awareness of the need to contextualize

knowledge and to changing thematic priorities related to sustainability. Inclusion of African businesses in an equitable way requires re-missioning and rethinking of how African stakeholders—individuals, communities, native enterprises, social groups, and civil society— can partner to play a role in ethical work and responsible management (Vazquez-Brust and Sarkis, 2022).

The social structure to support sustainable development cannot be rushed (Hofstede, 1993). A more social and less technocratic approach is appropriate for Africa, contextualized relevance requires attention to the *habitus* of African citizens, considerations for indigenous economies and majority livelihoods, and sensitivity to operational conditions.

The book brings up the question of how cultural influences in African countries can contribute to eradicating poverty and indicates that there is no truly African CSR, and that what is currently practiced is a copy of western strategies.

Chapter 5 studies the managerial discretion surrounding corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in Algeria, and the influence of local values and ethics to preserve the value of one's actions, referred to as the "*neya*". Chapter 7 investigates corporate social responsibility prudence in Kenya and reports that most CSR initiatives seem to be imported from the west and are imposed on Africa regardless of the truth that the contexts are not the same. The author calls for CSR actions to be grounded in communalism, traditional philanthropy, and African humanism (*Ubuntu*). In the final Chapter 11, authors call for respecting the diversity and inclusion of alternative narratives in the CSR modules, and a need to develop more strategic business models that inculcate traditional values and Africa ethos into formal organizations.

In my view, there needs to be a balancing act between honoring ethnicities and promoting acceptance and solidarity in Africa, especially when the traditional philosophies embedded in African cultural systems diverge widely from the philosophical underpinnings of western theories. The book exemplifies many African wisdoms, philosophies, and perspectives needed for this very diverse continent and offers something for a broad spectrum of readers to contemplate.

No individual book or volume can cover the scope and depth to address the centuries of sustainability concerns of this economically and marginalized continent. I am pleased that the authors took on the challenges of completing this project and provided a high quality of chapter series covering many viewpoints of Africa work ethics and sustainability.

Much research and scholarship about the continent is still needed, especially connected to responsible management education and the training of a home-based younger generation of African change agents. The more we share about who we are, the more explicit and creative we can become about ways to unite for the better good.

Finally, I know it is a major achievement to have successfully completed this project in this tiring environment. My sincerest appreciation and congratulations to the editors, Kemi Ogunyemi, Amaka Anozie, Omowumi Ogunyemi, and all the contributors.

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