

VISIONARY VISTAS

Reflections on a brighter future for Ghana

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Baafoo Ahenkora is the pen name of a Ghanaian writer.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the people of Ghana. As we celebrate the birth of the nation this month, let us remember the ideals upon which our country was founded. It was for us to assert ourselves as a free people and to prove to the world, against all odds, that the black man is capable of managing his own affairs.

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Preface

Ghana won independence on 6th March, 1957 amidst immense hope for Gold Coasters¹ and other black peoples the world over. The pioneers of the political struggle for independence had noble ambitions for the burgeoning independent nation—called the lodestar of Africa—in an otherwise bleak continent of imperialist oppression and decreasing opportunities for self-determination for natives. Ghana’s independence was historic for a number of reasons.

Firstly, being the first country south of the Sahara to attain independence, it was regarded as a beacon of hope for other African countries that were still under colonial rule. Kwame Nkrumah’s compelling passion for the immediate emancipation and unification of the African continent led him to adopt our current flag, which has one black star in the middle—a symbol of the emancipation of the African continent. As the legend goes, other stars were supposed to join later so we could form a United States of Africa, just like the United States of America.²

The achievement was also seen as a signification of opportunity for other struggles for freedom by oppressed peoples the world over. Prominent advocates for black emancipation trouped to Ghana to witness what was a historic landmark in the small African country. American civil rights leader

¹Before independence, Ghana was called the Gold Coast, and its citizens, Gold Coasters. Kwame Nkrumah named it Ghana at independence after the ancient West African empire, Ghana, that existed from the 9th to the 13th century.

²Nkrumah’s vision of a united Africa is well-documented (eg. see [Acquah \(1992, Chap. 13\)](#)), but whether he adopted the first black star in the middle of the Ghanaian flag in anticipation of other African countries joining is not clear from the literature. We know, however, that when Ghana formed a confederacy with Guinea, they adopted a flag that looked like Ghana’s except it had two stars in the middle, lending credence to the belief that that intention motivated the initial adoption of the black star.

Martin Luther King Jr., one of the invited guests at the ceremony, drew inspiration from the event for the activism he was spearheading in his home country. He remarked: “This event, the birth of this new nation, will give impetus to oppressed peoples all over the world. I think it will have worldwide implications and repercussions—not only for Asia and Africa, but also for America. . . It renews my conviction in the ultimate triumph of justice. And it seems to me that this is fit testimony to the fact that eventually the forces of justice triumph in the universe, and somehow the universe itself is on the side of freedom and justice. So that this gives new hope to me in the struggle for freedom.”³

Nkrumah stated in his speech on the eve of independence: “I’m relying on your support. . . so we can prove to the world that when the African is given a chance, he can show to the world that he is somebody. . . there is a new African in the world; that new African is ready to fight his own battles and show that, after all, the black man is capable of managing his own affairs. . .”⁴ Fifty-four years of independence have passed. Yet, there is not much to show for the euphoria with which we welcomed our freedom. The youth of today wonder whether the decision taken by their forebears was prudent because they have seen the example of countries like South Africa that spent a longer time under colonialism but are, probably as a result, doing better than Ghana. Most of the countries with which we were on similar economic footing at independence have left us behind in the development process.

Nkrumah also stated that “Our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent. . .”⁵ Has our independence been meaningful? Today, all African countries are independent, at least, in the formal sense. But Nkrumah probably meant more than independence when he spoke of liberation. It goes without saying that he had taken for granted the fact that the black man was capable of managing his own affairs. But I am sad to admit that this has not materialised into reality—the black man has woefully failed to manage his life, his country, and his continent. Until some drastic changes are made across the political-economic landscape on which most African countries find themselves, it will be a long time before we earn ourselves a respectable place in the world.

³The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project, 4:146

⁴Nkrumah (1957)

⁵Nkrumah (1957)

Why the title *Visionary Vistas*? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a vista is “a view or prospect, especially one seen through an avenue of trees or other long and narrow opening.”⁶ It could also be “a mental view or vision of a far-reaching nature.”⁷ The *vistas* referred to in the title incorporates both meanings. For whereas it could be tautological to apply the adjective *visionary* to the word *vista* as connoted by the second definition, it makes perfect sense to apply it to the meaning alluded to in the first definition.

The current state of Ghana is the sort one would see if she were looking at it through a blurry vista—even though the country is capable of great progress and development, these have not been realised yet for lack of a clear vision. *Visionary Vistas* is a book of eight reflections on how Ghana could look if one were to view it from an uncluttered vista. It may speak of wading through dark forests in search of dreamy glades, but, at least, it is realistic. It is about things that most keen observers of Ghanaian society would ponder—basic things that politicians with the interest of the nation at heart would tackle—making it all the more amazing that not much has been done about them in a long while.

By publishing these reflections, I hope to draw attention to the issues that are raised, and to get the youth informed and sensitized about the potential power they wield—politically, as a voting block, and economically as the bulk of the labour force—in forcing changes that would inure to the benefit of the country.

The essays roughly split into five categories: those that deal with education (Chapters 1 and 2), those that deal with the economy (Chapters 3 and 4), those that deal with our infrastructure (Chapters 6 and 7), those that deal with good governance (Chapter 5), and those that deal with cultural issues by taking a broader perspective on Africa (Chapters 5 and 8).

Many Ghanaian youth are apathetic to political developments in the country because they think they can adequately insulate themselves from the consequences of the poor decisions taken by those in power. But as Ako Adjei, one of the members of the Big Six,⁸ once said “Ghana is our country. We

⁶OED (2011, vista, Definition 1)

⁷OED (2011, vista, Definition 3a)

⁸The Big Six were six prominent leaders of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) that led the struggle for independence. They rose to fame after they were falsely accused of, arrested, and imprisoned for starting the 1948 riots. On 28th February, 1948, World War

have nowhere to go. This is where God has placed us and the earlier we realized this the better for all of us.”⁹ The notion that it is sufficient for one to do well for himself and his small family has left the youth disengaged from political discussion and other critical domains conducive to nation building. This is a gross mistake that I hope to correct by illustrating to the youth that this is the time when we are needed the most.

I would like to thank Stephen Abrokwah, Agana Agana-Nsiire, Kwabena Akuamoah-Boateng, Kwabena Antwi-Boasiako, Paapa Yaw Berkye Antwi-Boasiako, and Terry Kipkorir for commenting on earlier drafts of the book. Portions of the essays have been published on my blog, <http://ghanabiased.com>, and also at <http://freeafricanmedia.com>.

II veterans from the Gold Coast marched to the governor’s house to demand their promised pensions and other compensation. As they approached the residence, the governor’s guard fired into the crowd and killed three of the veterans, sparking the riots.

⁹Ellison (2002)

Chapter 1

Rethinking our system of education

The civilisations that have influenced the human race with their culture and philosophy have done so through education. Over the course of history, through interaction, mainly by way of conquest, trade, and tourism, humans have absorbed from one another the positive and productive aspects of our existence. Hence, an emerging economy that wants to abandon its present state of deprivation for the more desirable one of development and progress should take education more seriously than we presently do.

It is undeniable that our educational system is fraught with serious problems. We still have children schooling under trees¹ and teachers who are not sufficiently motivated. This has led most Ghanaians who can afford it to move their children from the public school system to the private school system at the elementary level. They do this because they realise that the prospects, for a respectable livelihood with ample opportunities, of a child educated in the public school system are severely curtailed.

Because most of these problems have been with us for a long time, they seem normal, if not intractable. The bold steps that are required to solve the problems do not seem politically expedient, so politicians have shied away from them. The average politician would rather spend time on the so-called bread and butter issues—those issues whose resolution result in immediately recognisable results. Unfortunately, such short-sightedness will not eradicate the problems with our educational system as reform in this sector tends to

¹[Ghana News Agency \(2010\)](#)

take longer to yield significant results.

The problems with our current system are multifaceted. Fundamentally, there are issues with what we teach as well as with how we teach it. In addition to that, the infrastructure needed to support education is either non-existent or horribly dilapidated.

The shift towards a novel view of education should be immediate as we have failed to capitalise on the blessing of our vast natural resources. Ghana was not named the Gold Coast for nothing. The European explorers (exploiters?) named it for its prolific gold reserves. Today, we have discovered other types of gold than they found—black gold (crude oil) and white gold (salt). We also have manganese, bauxite, and diamond. Both literally and metaphorically, Ghana is a Coast of Gold. Yet, even though we have exploited these natural resources for years, we have not gained enough from them. Our trading partners have realised most of the benefits to be derived from our natural resources much to our own detriment.

It is time we focused on building our human resource base. We should add another type of gold to this list: brown gold—our untapped arsenal of 24 million brilliant minds. The last time we made significant strides in education was the era of Kwame Nkrumah. His vision for Ghana and Africa led him to invest in educating the masses for free. The gains of his effort are felt today as many of those running the country were educated under his comprehensive education plan. I fear we may be running out of that crop of Ghanaians he educated.

Today, only 6%² of Ghanaians attend a tertiary institution after secondary school, and out of this number, a significant proportion are from the urban areas—effectively excluding people from the rural areas. This implies that, of necessity, every university graduate is bound to assume an influential position of one form or the other in the future. In spite of this, we do not educate our university students with this knowledge in mind. I once recounted this story to a friend who was shocked to hear it because in his mind, he was not up to the task. On recalling his time in university and the calibre of students he met there, he was not convinced that they were ready to assume the herculean task ahead of them. We need a large contingent of highly-skilled labour to manage our affairs, yet, there are too few of them—the statistics are appalling.

²UNESCO (2010, p. 170)

We need more schools to address the problem of access. We also need those we have to become much better than they presently are. We are currently employing a very uninnovative method to determine who fill the few available spots—absurd cut-off grades and exorbitant fees. Instead of turning away capable students, we should build more schools and expand the existing ones too.

Apart from the sheer inaccessibility of educational opportunities, there is a problem with what we teach. Because almost all of our education is in English, we assume that we know the language well after we complete basic education, but this is not the case. Apart from the lack of materials and practice to enable students get acquainted with the language to an appreciable level, there is not enough emphasis on speaking proficiently. The typical Ghanaian student will have excellent grammar, but substandard speaking and articulatory skills.

With regard to mathematics, the problems are even more severe. Mathematics has become synonymous with the rote memorisation and regurgitation of meaningless formulae. There is also the false dichotomy between the hard sciences and other analytical fields on one hand, and the humanities on the other. It is this mindset that makes it impossible for a secondary school student to take any courses outside their narrow field. This problem is accentuated in the university where it is impossible to transfer between two programmes as similar as computer engineering and electrical engineering.

The problems call for many concrete changes on the ground one of which I will elucidate. I think we should take a more humanistic approach to education in order to make the subjects we teach more relevant to the students and their everyday experience. This approach would stress the acquisition of general transferable skills at the early stages, with specialisation postponed to the stages where students are more mature. It would also encourage a deliberate integration of the arts and crafts into primary education. It is on this premise that I support Prof. Agyeman Badu Akosa's proposal to teach highlife music in our classrooms.

This proposal will not go down well with many Ghanaians. We tend to prefer more traditional, orthodox, or "westernized" curricula that are often far-removed from any cultural significance.

The golden age of highlife music, the musical genre to which Ghana can lay claim as its heritage, died with the overthrow of Nkrumah. As one of

the prominent proponents of Pan-Africanism, Nkrumah saw the promotion of the arts as cardinal to building a national identity, so he promoted music with our national resources. It was in those days that musicians like E. T. Mensah, and bands like Ramblers International were hailed as ambassadors of an authentic genre that entertained Ghanaians at home and advertised their culture abroad. Ghana was seen as a beacon of light in the push for freedom and self-determination by black peoples, and our music reinforced those themes.

Those days are gone, but not just those. The days when Ghanaians actively appreciated the home-grown arts like concert parties, live bands, poetry (anwensem) recitals, and so on have died as well. This has led to the fading from the general memory of our history, and a profound lack of appreciation for the beauty and richness of our languages. For instance, I wish I could write this piece in Twi, or Ga, or Dagbani, but I cannot with any respectable decency, and neither can the vast majority of Ghanaians.

Why not study our music and our arts if we study Shakespeare or Achebe? Our musicians are not appreciated for their creativity and innovation, much like our writers. Most of them are thought of as failures who try to make ends meet by bombarding us with hollow tunes. This feeling has roots in the early days of highlife when palm-wine bars were choked with these musicians, most of them recently immigrated city-dwellers whining about the vagaries of city life. Their brand of highlife, palm-wine, was highly patronised then and it still resonates with some older Ghanaians today. We forget that even though they created an aura of listlessness and delinquency, they addressed real issues in the society, and helped define what has become modern-day highlife, and its new child—hiplife.

Music, especially the kind that the seasoned highlife composers produce, keeps aspects of the culture in the general memory. If they are invoking proverbs, and rattling rhymes, and provoking with *kasakoa*,³ they are educating, comforting, and reminding. Hence, their effect is not antithetical to the cause of education at all. Embracing them and teaching the intricacies of their art in classrooms will add some cultural significance to our education

³*Kasakoa* translates roughly to a merging of *euphemisms* and *idioms* even though they are employed for a slightly different purpose in the Twi language. The pricing of sophisticated speech and indirection implies that users of *kasakoa* are deliberate in its usage in order to obscure the meaning of the concepts they are communicating. Akans believe that this demonstrates one's appreciation of the language and reverence for the ancestral customs.

and make it meaningful to the many disillusioned children trudging along in our schools for the sake of formality.

The proposal to rethink our educational system is even more imperative in the face of the numerous interventions that have been made with the intent of assisting Africa escape its predicament. It is reasonable to assume that an in-depth appreciation for the historical and cultural underpinnings of the causes of a problem is prerequisite to formulating an effective solution. Yet, all too often, we see one-size-fits-all solutions that are to be oblivious to local nuances. We have far-reaching problems ranging from corruption and how it is fueled by our extended family system, to city planning and how it is affected by our traditional methods of organising settlements, to the role of chieftaincy in the modern-day legal-rational systems of government we have chosen to adopt. It is only by studying the cultural underpinnings of these problems that we can make any significant progress at solving them.

Some authors have criticised a certain narrow view of the history of the world in which Western scholars, in particular, have attempted to superimpose their own cultural experiences on the African motif. In other words, if history is seen as a continuum progressing from primitiveness to a particular Western understanding of sophistication, then it is reasonable to think that Africa must, of necessity, follow the same path that the advanced Western countries of today followed to get where they are. But, *a priori*, there is no reason to privilege that mode of existence. In order to solve our problems, we need to build institutions that understand and take into account our indigenous conceptions of society, government and politics. We need home-grown solutions to our problems. And in this regard, our chiefs may have to form a necessary component as they have been the most viable custodians of our culture and traditions.

This issue is quite touchy for some modern day republicans who would rather rid our society of any semblance of traditional authority; but I think modern day democratic administrations acknowledge the effectiveness of chiefs when they empower them to settle minor disputes among their subjects, and do not hesitate to solicit their approval for significant undertakings. Regardless of the fact that the chieftaincy institution is inherently undemocratic and, hence, is perhaps incompatible with the current democratic system we want to uphold, the fact remains that there are a lot of lessons to be learnt from the institution. To the extent that most Africans hold their chiefs in higher

esteem than their democratically elected heads of state and government officials, there is something to be said for the integrity with which the older institution of chieftaincy has helped maintain a balance of sorts in our countries. Our palaces hold the treasures of our past in terms of our history and cherished customs. Inviting our chiefs into the arena of education will lead to the teaching of our history which will open a window into our past and how our ancestors practised self-governance. This will in turn strengthen the democratic dispensation we are trying to foster and lead to a more stable society.

Chapter 2

Why they do not teach history

Marcus Garvey, a prominent pan-Africanist and Jamaican intellectual, once said “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” I, and I believe many other Ghanaians, agree with this profound sentiment. The vintage African tradition of gathering children by the fireside to hear stories from elders is a reflection of the depth to which this sentiment is ingrained in our consciousness. During these story-telling sessions, we learn of the heroic acts of our ancestors—some of the stories are true, while others are at best, half-true—so we can know what we are capable of, and what is expected of us.

It is upsetting that this culture of oral tradition is fading away; but even more troubling is the fact that we are actively desisting from teaching our history in school. It is embarrassing that a student could graduate from our universities without any appreciable knowledge of our history. Unless the student is reading a course that requires government or civics, there is no way, as per our rigid system, for her to delve into unrelated territory, even if she is interested. The cumulative effect of this ignorance is our profound lack of appreciation of current events, both at home and abroad. It is crucial for us to know our past so we can understand how we got here and perhaps, if we want to move forward, how to do so in a sensible manner, without repeating the mistakes of the past.

When I was in junior secondary school,¹ I was told about a bit of our

¹Junior Secondary School (JSS) spans the 7th to 9th grades of elementary school. Students in these grades range, on average from ages 12 to 14. At the end of JSS, students take a nationwide examination, the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), organised

history. I heard about how the Portuguese, the first Europeans to arrive on our shores, discovered what later became known as the Gold Coast. They first arrived at our shores to trade and built a fort, Fort Sao Jorge da Mina, from which the modern day township, Elmina, derives its name. I heard of how missionaries came over to preach the gospel and to promote literacy by building schools and sending natives abroad to be educated as priests. I heard of educated natives like John Mensah Sarbah organising to demand more rights from the colonial masters through the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society. I heard the stories of Yaa Asantewaa and the Asante and how they resisted the British, even though they were eventually conquered. I heard of how the British ruled us as a colony with a representative appointed by the Queen, under a system of government known as indirect rule.² And then suddenly, I heard of a group of more vocal natives demanding independence from the British—a group led by Joseph Boakye Danquah and his United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). Immediately, an inconsistency stood out to me: why were these men demanding independence? What was wrong with the system they had then?

It is worth noting that prior to this point of my studies, I had not had much interpretation of the events that were going on. Of course, I had heard of the riots of 1948 which were triggered by a failure of the British colonial government to keep its promise of adequate compensation for Gold Coasters who had fought as British allies in World War II. The riots were triggered by the killing of three of the war veterans who were among those who marched to the governor's house to present their petitions. But that was a fluke, I thought. Any government would occasionally have protests if the people are dissatisfied with something, which is not uncommon. I had read of the 1995 Ku Me Preko demonstrations in which four people were killed, but that did not warrant an overthrow of the government.

There was no reason to think that the British were bad or that they were

by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). Students are then admitted to Senior Secondary School (SSS) based on their results. The JSS system has been replaced by the Junior High School (JHS) system.

²This system of indirect rule was proposed by Lord Lugard as a method of governing those British colonies in which the British could not settle because the climate was not conducive. Under this system, indigenous systems of government were strengthened and made accountable to the British colonial government, instead of to the people. Indirect rule was applied in Ghana and Nigeria.

doing something bad, or that there was something amiss with the current system in place. If I should have known better, then I blame this ignorance on the educational system which had taken pains to ensure that we were just presented with facts—facts stripped of their philosophical, cultural, and historical context. The question has been raised as to whether 12–14 year-olds can appreciate a philosophical discussion of what it means to rule oneself. I contend they absolutely can. In most of these schools, pupils elect their own class and school prefects. They understand what it means to have a secret ballot and appreciate the fact that the elected officials are their own and not one that their teachers have thrust on them.

When we learnt about Governor Gordon Guggisberg, we learnt about his ten-year development plan and how he built the Korle-Bu teaching hospital, the Takoradi harbour and the Achimota school. Up till today, Korle-Bu is the biggest and most sophisticated hospital in Ghana, and one of the best in Africa. Achimota School remains one of the most prestigious schools in the country, having trained pioneers and luminaries like Ghana's first president, Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's second president, Edward Akufo-Addo, president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, Gambia's first president, Dawda Jawara, Ghana's fourth president, Jeremiah John Rawlings, and Ghana's sixth and current president John Evans Atta-Mills. The Takoradi harbour is one of two in the country and plays a major role in exporting our raw materials like timber, manganese, bauxite, and very soon, crude oil.

So, as a little boy, I reasoned that if we had, at least, continued at the pace of Guggisberg, the country would have been a very different place. Even though he could not complete his ten-year development plan, we made significant progress during his time. So why would you want to get rid of such a person? Why would you want to get rid of the British?

If my education had included a more comprehensive civic component, I would have been taught the importance of governing oneself. I would have learnt why it is demeaning to have somebody invade your country, condemn you to servitude and then have you not even recognise it—this is dangerous. I would have learnt that Kwame Nkrumah once said “We prefer self-government with danger to servitude in tranquility.” Unfortunately, many children are graduating from our junior secondary schools with this ignorance. Since this is the only point in our educational system where some history is taught, until they take the initiative to re-educate themselves later in life,

they will never acquire any real appreciation of what independence meant—to wit, the struggles of the pioneers have been reduced to nought. The philosophy that necessitated the wresting of independence from the hands of the oppressor has been lost on us. Upon observing countries like South Korea and Singapore, countries with which we were on similar economic footing at independence, it is worth questioning whether it was worth the fight.

I have always wondered why we shy away from history in our schools. Could it be because too many of the players in the history are still alive? Could it be that our academics have been too lazy to document it? Could it be because our books were printed by our colonial masters?³ Could it be that we are so ashamed of our rush for self-government, realising we do not have much to show for it? What is the reason?

All the reasons listed above have a part to play, but I think the biggest impediment to teaching our history is the complicated legacy of Kwame Nkrumah. Ordinarily, the life and work of the founding fathers of a nation are cemented into the common consciousness of the people. The founding fathers are hailed as heroes of the nation and myths are created around them that are passed on to future generations. Even though there is a palpable nostalgia among Ghanaians of an older generation for Nkrumah, they have not been able to transfer this enthusiasm for Nkrumah and his work to the younger generations.

Nkrumah, even though he worked assiduously to establish Ghana on a strong infrastructural framework, did not stick to the principles of good governance while doing so. His suppression of dissent, which led to the passage of the Preventive Detention Act (PDA) in 1958 under which any Ghanaian could be detained in prison for up to five years without trial or the right to appeal to the courts, resulted in the imprisonment of many politicians who were seen as his opponents.⁴ The detainees suffered severe human rights abuses and most of them died in prison.⁵

Prominent among those who died in detention were J. B. Danquah and E. Obetsebi-Lampsey, both of whom died in jail due to ill-health.⁶ Both of these men were members of the Big Six and would otherwise have been

³More of our textbooks are now being printed in Ghana.

⁴[The National Reconciliation Commission Report](#), p. 61

⁵[The National Reconciliation Commission Report](#), p. 62

⁶[The National Reconciliation Commission Report](#), p. 62

celebrated as heroes of our struggle for independence. All public celebrations of Danquah's life and work were proscribed, leading to the fading of his story from the general memory.

Ebenezer Ako-Adjei, the man who introduced Nkrumah to the leadership of the UGCC⁷ and recommended him for the post of general secretary, forswore politics on the day he was released from jail, acquiescing into a private life that was quite uncharacteristic of him given his earlier involvement and vibrancy in national politics.⁸

After Nkrumah was overthrown, he lived in exile in Guinea and never returned to Ghana. He died of skin cancer in Bucharest, Romania in 1972.

The period after Nkrumah's overthrow saw the young nation plagued by a series of coups d'état and attempted coups d'état plunging it into sustained periods of instability interspersed with short-lived periods of uneasy calm. In the 1979 uprising, there was the gruesome murder of three former heads of state—Acheampong, in secret, Afrifa, and Akuffo, in the public glare—all of these by firing squad and arguably with popular support. The pain and intrigue surrounding these bloody episodes is yet to be forgotten. Even though the NPP government⁹ initiated a formal process of reconciliation in May 2002,¹⁰ more time is needed to heal the deep wounds of the past.

It is against this backdrop that we have shied away from our history—it is too controversial, too bloody, and too many of the actors are still alive. This shunning of our bleak post-independence history has been totalising, leading to a complete forbiddance of all other histories, be they of the world, of Africa, or even of pre-colonial Ghana. We quickly brush over the major points never to return to them again. There may be those who will argue for the maintenance of the status quo since it does not appear to have any dire consequences.

However, if we are to stop moving around in circles in our political debates, if we are to bring more depth to the discussion on current issues, if we are to move forward while avoiding past mistakes, we must confront our history

⁷The United Gold Coast Convention was a movement founded to fight for independence from the British using all means possible. Their slogan was "Self-government in the shortest possible time."

⁸Ellison (2002)

⁹The New Patriotic Party was in power from 7th January, 2001 to 6th January, 2009 with John Agyekum Kufuor as president and Alhaji Aliu Mahama as his vice.

¹⁰Attafuah (2004)

head on. Every society with a history like ours will have kinks and disasters in it, but that should not deter us from studying our history. If we discuss these issues candidly and avoid cheap and unwarranted rhetoric, a natural healing process will take place until we are at peace with ourselves as a nation. This is a crucial step we must take, for a nation that is going to pursue economic and social development, freedom, and justice cannot thrive in ignorance.

The constitution stipulates the formation of a National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) which should see to the education of the citizenry on their civic responsibilities as well as other matters of national interest such as these.¹¹ However, the NCCE is consistently under-funded leaving it handicapped in the performance of its duties.¹²

If we are to better understand the trajectory of the nation with respect to the rest of the world, we cannot ignore the study of history—the history of the world, the history of Africa, and most importantly, that of Ghana. The study of history will help us understand our place in the world. It will illuminate for us the reasons why the world is the way it is and patterns of thought that got us here. With this knowledge, we can better map out a way to a more productive and edifying social discourse as well as to a better future. The earlier we woke up to this reality, the better.

¹¹[The 1992 Constitution](#), Chap. 19

¹²[Daily Graphic \(2009\)](#)

Chapter 3

Generating more revenue in the economy

It is an undeniable fact that the government needs revenue to run the country smoothly. The nagging question is how to obtain these funds without stifling creativity, disincentivizing industry, or instigating revolt. It is disappointing that, so far, no sustainable and efficient solutions have been pursued by our leaders in this regard.

In a country where more than half of those who are eligible to pay taxes do not pay because the government does not have the capacity to track down defaulters, it would make sense for an unenterprising administration to raise taxes on the already overburdened compliers rather than ruffle feathers by claiming that to which it is legitimately due.

Many of those who make a decent living, and as a result should be eligible to pay income tax, easily evade tax because they belong to the so-called informal sector, which to this day remains elusive—they resist definition and accountability. In general, people realise that these are serious problems bedevilling our society. I would even contend that the solutions are well-known; yet, nothing is done about them. Whenever I raise the issue, the questions that keep arising are “What should we do?” “What would you do?” These questions annoy me because they underscore the bankruptcy of ideas that the administration, or the questioner, feigns. They are rhetorical questions that are supposed to point out the all-knowing arrogance of those who dare to differ, and, hopefully, to shut them up.

Ghana’s problems are too pressing to trifle with, so I will propose two

solutions: The government should vigorously pursue a street-naming and house-numbering programme. The installation of such infrastructure will ease the process of tracking down workers in the informal sector. We should also add value to our raw materials before exporting them. After fifty-four years of independence, this should be common knowledge, but it does not appear to be.

The answer to the question Where do you live? is fodder for unadulterated hilarity. “I live in the pink house with a tall mango tree in front of it that is close to the blue kiosk that is next to the barbering shop with a TV pole on top of it that is in the area called...” as opposed to “I live at 355 Black Stars Avenue.” Many workers ply their trade without certificates (an issue for another day’s discussion) and, worse still, they do not have a permanent address with which correspondence like audit and asset declaration requests can be sent. This makes it trivial for them to evade tax.

To enforce the laws regarding proper street-planning and tax collection will require enormous political will that is yet to be found in any of our democratically elected heads of state. For politicians who care about leaving a veritable legacy—significant development attributable to their tenure—this should be worthy of consideration. The president who will be bold enough to brave this path will be hailed by posterity for being a true visionary.

As the second largest producer of cocoa in the world one would expect that the many products derived from cocoa should be pervasive and accessible on the Ghanaian market. Sadly, that is not the case. There are cocoa farmers who have no clue what their beans are used for. In short, they have never seen chocolate!¹

Variants of this narrative are familiar to most of the third world who possess resources that serve as raw material for more refined end products. Our benefactors are cunning: they like our cocoa, but not our chocolate. They like our gold and diamond, but not our jewellery. They like our timber, but not our furniture. Rich countries deliberately erect barriers to entry into their markets even though they expect us to freely open our markets to their goods.² For this reason, the extractive processes that were set in motion in the colonial days have continued much to the detriment of our economic growth.

¹The Mirror (2002)

²Lean (2003)

Having started drilling for oil in commercial quantities, most Ghanaians are optimistic that it will result in a magical boost in the economy. But how exactly is this going to materialise? Lest I douse the hopes of many, I will not discuss the objective benefits to be derived from this oil find. Suffice it to say, it is not as much as most of us hope it is. Further, Ghana will not process any of it at home—all of it will be shipped abroad as we do not have the capacity to refine it (or so we are told). If any benefits are to inure to our credit, it is going to be through derivative businesses that are based on the primary resource—oil. But that is what we have consistently failed to do with our other natural resources, making me all the more sceptical if any meaningful advantages will be gained from this oil find. We should not get too excited unless we are willing to do things differently.

To end, I will paraphrase the speech Obama gave to Ghana's parliament on July 11, 2009. He said "Old habits must also be broken. Dependence on commodities, or a single export, has the tendency to concentrate wealth in the hands of the few, and leaves people too vulnerable to downturns. So, Ghana, for instance, oil brings great opportunities. You have been very responsible in preparing for new revenue but as so many Ghanaians know, oil cannot simply become the new cocoa. From South Korea to Singapore, history shows that countries thrive when they invest in people and in their infrastructure, when they promote multiple exports services, develop a skilled workforce, and make space for medium scale businesses that create jobs." This advice is still relevant and should be heeded.

Chapter 4

How property rights affect the economy

The political economies of societies are inextricably tied with their other aspects—their values, customs, and beliefs. To determine the important aspects of the political economy of a society, one has to take into account all these interrelated factors. To assume that with just a few parameters fixed one could accurately predict the nature of a society's economy would be an oversimplification of human behavior, and the complexity of societies.

Acemoglu et al reject the geography hypothesis of economic development, or stagnation, in favor of an institutions hypothesis.¹ While the supporters of the geography hypothesis propose that ecological, climactic and geographic factors such as proximity to the equator affect economic growth, Acemoglu et al propose that the calibre of institutions that are built by societies either encourage or stifle investment and that is what, they argue, determines economic growth.

Even though Acemoglu et al do not explicitly state that the form of institutions that are created in a society, usually by those with economic and political advantage, is related to the way in which the powerful in society benefit from property, it is clear from their argument that that is precisely what obtains. If powerful people control which laws govern property rights in a society, it is in their interest to enact those laws that are beneficial to them. As Onoma argues, governments that profit directly from the sale of land are more likely to prefer weaker property rights institutions, or none at

¹Acemoglu et al. (2002)

all, whereas those that profit from indirect uses of land are more likely to prefer stronger property rights institutions.² Here, indirect uses of land would include leasing it to companies which use it for business from which the leaser collects rent, as opposed to direct use which would imply selling the land.

It is typical for Western scholars to fall into the trap of assuming that secure³ property rights regimes would result in economic growth, while insecure property rights regimes would stymie investment with its accompanying growth. It might be true that in the Western countries where capitalism⁴ has thrived for a long time, the observed economic growth has been paralleled by the institution of secure property rights regimes in the society. The simultaneous occurrence of these two events, however, should not cause one to assume that they must, of necessity, always happen together; for there are counterexamples.

Berry describes a system of property rights in Asante in modern day Ghana that involves story-telling in the adjudication of land ownership disputes.⁵ The land tenure system is deeply ingrained in the history and culture of the people. It is remarkable that, for instance, from someone's name alone, one can deduce a lot of information about his genealogy, the circumstances of his birth, the time of his birth, and possibly, his achievements in life. This system of story-telling seems frivolous because of its susceptibility to manufactured tales. Hence, the prospect is unfathomable in a modern Western nation in which property rights are governed by a legal system with rigid codes accessible to all, even those who might not be educated in the traditions of the society. Yet, Kumasi, the capital of Asante, is a modern day commercial centre with financial markets that mirror those of the West in many regards. The administrative region of which it forms a part is also one of the cardinal regions in Ghana's cocoa production enterprise even though they possess the same property rights systems.

²Onoma (2010)

³Secure property rights regimes usually constitute Western understandings of the rule of law concerning property and the surrounding transactions between economic players in the society. Where the structures that guarantee this form of property rights are absent, property rights regimes are deemed insecure, or fluid. Firmin-Sellers, for example, suggests such a view in her discussion of property rights in the Gold Coast.

⁴I should say a specific form of capitalism as capitalism is not alien to the societies I talk about later, eg. the citizens of the ancient great West African empires.

⁵Berry (2001)

During the time of the great West African empires—Ghana, Mali, Songhai—there were vibrant market economies with extensive multilateral trade in places like Timbuktu and Salaga, an indication that there was an appreciation of trade and capitalism, even though these societies lacked what one may construe as a secure property rights regime. Vibrant market economies thrive on mutual respect for contracts, whether written or unwritten, and a realization that once no single party has monopoly over the capacity for violence or wrongdoing, it is in the interest of all parties not to deviate from acceptable behavior.

I am sceptical of the notion of secure property rights because I think the definition is too narrow. Definitions that centre around a system of laws with the backing of a strong legal-rational government or judiciary seem to be tailored to the Western understandings of the concept. Individuals owning property, the uses from which they can exclude others by force of law alone, does not appear to capture all the meanings of property, and the limits on its uses that are inherent in most societies. For example, in most societies, people are discouraged from committing certain crimes because of the strong stigma associated with doing so. Hence, even though one might want to commit suicide, there is a strong incentive not to do so because of the consequences it might have for one's family, or legacy. Hence, even though there might be a law prohibiting suicide, that is not the real reason why someone would not commit suicide. Similar reasoning applies in societies that I would describe as methodological collectivists, in the classical sense. In these societies, the individual is not the basic unit. It is the family or the clan. Property like land or precious minerals is held in common, usually by an elder or a chief on behalf of his people. In such societies, citizens feel bound to act in certain ways because family ties are strong and meaningful. The actions of one member affects the reputation of the rest. If one studies such a society, it is not difficult to understand why they might be able to sustain a sophisticated market economy based on commonly held conventions, with special cases being forwarded to a higher authority for adjudication.

As transactions between members of the society become increasingly complex, it becomes necessary to formalize the laws governing those transactions so as to enable others who want to venture into it to fully understand all the nuances. This mechanism checks fraud and lets all parties involved know what is at stake and what is expected of them. This process of formalization,

however, does not have to be uniform across societies because, as evidenced by the example from Asante recounted above, the understandings of what property is and how disputes surrounding it should be resolved vary widely across societies that thrive economically. It is not always the case that an economy thrives because of secure property rights systems. In fact, there are instances in which a society might want to breach the rights of individuals in favour of the common good. The issues with eminent domain in societies that otherwise have secure property rights institutions illustrate this. If the rights of individuals are held sacrosanct regardless of the consequences it might have for the society, the society risks a retardation in its development.

We need more than a knowledge of the property rights system in a society to make definitive statements about the important parts of its political economy. If this knowledge were sufficient, then the world would be a fundamentally different place: It would mean, for example, that simply adopting a set of rules that have been shown to be successful somewhere would be enough to change the fortunes of a dying nation. In places where this has been tried, there has not been the resounding success that has been hoped for. However, that is not to dismiss the role that a property rights regime can play in the political economy. It gives a rough snapshot which combined with other aspects of the economy will give a fuller picture, but it cannot be the sole factor that suffices.

One of the major impediments to business in Ghana is the difficulty in raising capital. Even though most people own property in some form, the systems that must be put in place to make these assets more fluid are weak. It appears we must do away with some of the traditional ways of viewing property in order to make these assets more liquid and transferable between different domains of the economy. As things stand now, there does not seem to be any urgency in reforming the current system. It is, however, imperative that we do so if we intend to transition to a more sophisticated market economy.

Chapter 5

Checking corruption

Corruption is a systemic, endemic problem in our society. Its gravity is so severe that even otherwise honest and law-abiding citizens have to engage in it in order to get by—for example, if you do not want your time wasted at the ports, it is in your interest to employ the corruption machine by complying with it. There is a realisation that, somehow, we are all complicit in its propagation. Yet, the stigma associated with it is so strong that the discourse surrounding its eradication is shunned. This has led to a tacit pact between citizens to the effect that, perhaps, because the problem is too old and too grandiose for one person to tackle, we should throw our hands up in despair.

Some have suggested that the problem might be more pervasive in our society than in others, and that its preponderance may be linked to some inherent traits that Africans, or Ghanaians, possess—as former president Kufuor once said, it is as old as Adam. I will grant assertion that the phenomenon has strong cultural underpinnings because the clientelism which fuels corruption mirrors the internal workings of the extended family system. In this system, once somebody in the family has an asset, the family considers her only a custodian of the wealth who holds it in trust for the rest. I should note, however, that there are strong social norms governing appropriate use of property, even when it is personal. Hence, even if one owns a lot of money, society frowns on uses that do not take the effects of one's wealth on others into account.

The Akan understandings of *nnuado* and *abusua*, or the South African conception of *ubuntu* are all offshoots of the universal human tendency to-

wards friendship and community. If these concepts are primarily universal, then it takes a uniqueness in the ways in which they are exhibited in Africa for them to lead to these problems. To an extent, there is corruption of this form in all societies: I am more likely to favour somebody I know over another I do not know, moreso when that person I know is my sister. To wit, “blood is thicker than water.”

If our corruption were limited to this benign form, we would not have as much cause to worry as we do now. However, the worst looters of our resources deviate distinctly from these forms of the canker. As these men grow richer their families shrink—in other words, they are not practising *nnuado* or *ubuntu* when they do what they do. They reduce their circle of beneficiaries to only a tiny proportion of the population whose loyalty they seek to win. It is blatant greed of the kind that only the most depraved are capable. Hence, the natural or cultural predisposition to corruption does not fully explain its pervasiveness in our society.

I think that corruption persists in our society because our society is highly corruptible. The deliberate mechanisms that have to be instituted to stem the seemingly incessant tide have been ignored.

As evidenced by the quick mob responses to petty theft, we know that Ghanaians would be quite concerned if they knew someone was misappropriating their resources. So, why have they been silent about corruption? Why have they not driven corrupt officials out of office? Could it be because they do not see the direct consequences of their actions on our economy? Could it be because it is not our own money going down the drain?

Sometimes, this corruption is in direct spiting of the state. The state applies ridiculous tax laws and we protest by circumventing the system. Who benefits? We do, we think. For, after all, there is something to be gained by the briber who pays fewer levies, as well as the bribed, who makes a fortune. It is a *quid pro quo* on the pesewa of mother Ghana—that faceless maternal entity with infinite love and resources for her children.

What if it is not our money? Economist George Ayittey has lamented, at length, the unsustainability of our current model of money-begging-cum-unbridled corruption. Over the past fifty years, the amount of money that has been lost through stealing is greater than that which we have received through foreign aid. If the money is not ours (most Ghanaians do not pay taxes) and the foreign owner will not ask for it, why bother?

Ordinarily, I would expect the government to invent innovative ways of generating revenue in the economy in order to run it smoothly. When the government fails at this, the economy crashes and the government is voted out for its mismanagement of resources, but not in Ghana, and Africa, for that matter. Governments rarely pay for lousy economic decisions because foreign agencies always intervene with the intention of helping. This is one of the biggest problems with the current aid model we run. Instead of lazy governments being left to face the consequences of their poor decisions, there is always somebody out there to bail them out, to the detriment of the country.

The solutions are straightforward. We should cut extraneous sources of funding which are liabilities in the long term; demand accountability from leaders—assets declaration should be a non-negotiable prerequisite to assuming public office; have transparent audit of political party accounts; enforce tax laws and mete out stiffer punishments to defaulters; pass the right to information bill over which parliament is dragging its feet.

All these proposals will deal a powerful blow to the powers that be who benefit from the status quo, but there is an even more important institutional change that will be necessary: decentralisation.

Who do you blame when the gutter behind your house is clogged? Who is to answer for the poorly-managed taxi rank? Who do you hold responsible when there aren't enough dustbins in town? In a country where you elect your local administrative heads, your District Chief Executive is most likely the one responsible for such affairs, but not in Ghana. In a country where the president appoints mayors and District Chief Executives, you blame the president for the clogged gutter behind your house. You also blame the president when 91% of houses in Accra do not have toilets.¹

The major political parties have paid lip service to the concept of decentralisation but we are yet to see any serious efforts at reform. Many Ghanaians are apathetic towards local politics because the positions into which they can elect their own officials are virtually inconsequential. The officials who call the shots are not appointed by them and so they do not answer to them either.

In order to cultivate a culture of accountability on the national stage, we must begin at the local level. When citizens have the power to depose poorly performing elected officials at the local level, the officials at the national level will be put on alert to get their houses in order. This is one of the

¹Daily Graphic (2011)

arguments for the devolution of power from Accra. Apart from the fact that the current system is highly inefficient and a drain on our resources, it fosters corruption—a problem every politician seems determined to fix. A deliberate limitation of their power as evidenced by systematic decentralisation will be the proof of their seriousness in this regard.

Chapter 6

Improving energy supply and mass transportation

Our acute dependence on the Akosombo Dam as the main supplier of hydro-electric power is quite remarkable given that it was built for a different purpose. This dependence is even more remarkable considering the stiff opposition Nkrumah faced in the process of constructing the dam. Questions were raised by his opponents as to whether it was necessary and timely. His international partners who promised funding also faltered, posing major challenges to the implementation of the plan.

What was then known as the Volta River Project was one that Nkrumah saw as the engine of the modern industrialised nation he sought to build. In his mind, the project was a *sine qua non*—the essential thing without which all his dreams for Ghana would not materialise. Ghana had been mining bauxite for a while but, as Nkrumah thought, we were not reaping enough revenue from the mineral due to the fact that we were shipping it outside the country for processing. This seemed highly illogical to him, and so he set out to construct this hydro-electric power plant that would power an ultra-modern smelter for the local refinement of bauxite. The residual power that would be generated from this activity would be used to power emerging industries. At the time, Ghana had a population of six million and so the residual power was sufficient for our paltry needs.

Today, our population is four times what it was when the dam was initially constructed. Apart from the reduction in efficiency of the power generation systems at Akosombo, the dam is clearly stretched beyond its limits. Frequent

power outages resulting in the destruction of property have become a normal experience in Ghanaian homes and industries. The consequences in terms of our healthcare and our productivity cannot be overstated. If surgeons have to resort to torch lights to perform critical operations, then it is, perhaps, too much to ask for consistent flow of power for entertainment in the home.

If we do not want our development to be retarded, we should take all necessary action to resolve the problem. New dams should be built and other means of obtaining power should be explored. In this regard, the nuclear option should not be brushed aside for there is enormous potential in it for emerging economies like ours to be pioneers in alternative energy technology.

The Tema Oil Refinery (TOR) is also stretched beyond its limits and by now, we should have laid down plans to expand it. It is worth noting that this plant was also built to refine crude oil on a small scale so we could reduce costs inherent in importing processed oil. However, over the years, we have failed to expand it even though we continue expecting more from it.

The prices of petroleum products is one of the factors on which our economy is tightly hinged. Hence, any efforts that can be made at reducing this almost inelastic dependency should be pursued. This is why mass transportation should be made more efficient. The railway system has not been renovated in decades, leading to its deterioration. Also, the system of privately operated taxis and minibuses (trɔtrɔ) is not as efficient as could be. It would be better to have bigger buses moving people en masse from point to point across our cities. This would cushion the effects of volatile crude prices on our economy as a great deal of its effect is through the costs incurred by ordinary citizens, especially traders, in moving across the country for business.

Chapter 7

Harnessing the power of high-end technology

The technology revolution that has enthralled the world has taken Africa by storm. Many significant successes have already been chalked even though the technology industry is least developed on this continent than any other. This points to great potential for development now, and for leverage in the future. However, these immense benefits will not be reaped by accident; African countries must take many deliberate steps in order to realise all to potential benefits from these emerging technologies.

In the recent upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt, the Internet accelerated tangible political and social change. That is not to understate the resolve and determination of the Tunisian and Egyptian people. In the face of bleak stagnancy, they continued pressing their demands. In the face of brutal resistance, they kept hope alive. But if the Egyptians had wanted to start a revolution ten, or even five, years ago, they would have had to employ other, less efficient, means of communication. In today's world, however, social media like Twitter and Facebook served as natural communication platforms for gathering people and mobilising them to action. These platforms also afforded the rest of the world the opportunity to weigh in, lending credence to the people's demands, and giving the Tunisian and Egyptian governments a lot more for which to be accountable. I hope the many other benefits to be gleaned from the advent of high-end technology will not end with cataclysmic events like these, their positiveness granted, but that we will also take steps to ensure that there is a systematic transformation of our societies from their

current states into highly mobile and dynamic information and communication based societies.

The rapidity with which Africa has embraced the new Internet technology is not incidental. Apart from the charm of these inventions to woo even the reluctant, the underlying framework that supports the Internet and other communication networks was already in place. Hence, it was not too difficult to tack on the new framework that supports the Internet.

If you had asked the average communications minister ten years ago why she would not work towards sending phone lines to a village, the typical answer would have been that the villagers were illiterate and would not find use for the telephone. We now know how wrong she would have been. The barriers that inhibited rapid and efficient communication between people were dismantled by the communications revolution, ushered in by the influx of SMS technology, that preceded the more pervasive Internet revolution we see today. Today, the so-called illiterate villagers are using mobile phones not just for keeping in touch with distant loved ones, but also to conduct more sophisticated transactions such as exchanging electronic money and tracking climactic and economic forecasts for agricultural production.

The ease of use of modern technology coupled with the forthright enterprising of the marketing companies has eliminated the question of whether un-schooled adults can catch on with emerging technologies—they have proved they can. It is now up to African governments to wake up, feel the pulse of their citizens, and systematically introduce the necessary infrastructure to capitalise on the gains already realised.

Limiting my scope to Ghana, two avenues through which we can make an impact readily come to mind. The first is the media—an avenue through which we can educate our citizens and keep an eye on elected officials in order to make them accountable to us. The second is the technology start-up community—an avenue through which we can build more efficient systems and create employment for the masses.

The media in Ghana is still very conventional. The main modes of news transmission have remained quite static even though media houses have incorporated new technology here and there. On first reading, it seems contradictory to claim that the media is static in one breath and then claim it has incorporated new technologies in another, so let me explain.

First of all, many major newspapers do not have a website.¹ For most of those who have websites, they are not regularly updated. It appears the newspapers are content with their newsstand sales, and are not keen on reaching a wider audience. Admittedly, these news outlets would probably not be appealing to people who are likely to buy hard copies of their publications, so it may make sense not to serve them as such a venture may constitute a liability. I would argue, though, that by refusing to publish on-line, they are ignoring their duty to disseminate information to the public, whoever they might be.

The largest TV stations, even though they have an on-line presence, have not capitalised on their already existing extensive archives and brand names to deliver new content to the public. Apart from GTV, the government-sponsored television station, which makes video clips of some of its stories available, the rest of the TV stations just report on the stories with prose, and some of them do not regularly update their websites. Hence, the most reliable sources of on-line information are ghanaweb.com and the websites of the three radio stations, Joy FM, Citi FM, and Peace FM.

There is also a preponderance of blogs written by Ghanaians, some at home, others in the diaspora. These blogs address topics ranging from everyday observations in town, to poetry and literary works, to politics and social commentary, to entertainment and technology. Even though the bloggers are popular amongst themselves and the initiated few, they are yet to break into the mainstream. This might be due to the fact that not many Ghanaians have Internet access at home—most people who use the Internet do so at the office, or at an Internet cafe, or on their mobile phones. Maybe if more people could browse the web from home, they would patronise these blogs to the extent that they would pose a competition to the mainstream media houses. Citizen journalism could be more effective if there were more Internet users in Ghana, but for now, that seems like it is only a dream.

It is crucial for the media to make itself more accessible as it is one of our most potent tools for fighting corruption and other social ills. By making information readily available to Ghanaians, they would be ensuring that they are equipped with the information to hold their leaders to account. Hopefully, the mainstream media outlets are going to take this aspect of their role more seriously.

¹I will desist from mentioning names here, but I hope the editors and managers of these newspapers will consider this issue urgently.

30 CHAPTER 7. HARNESSING THE POWER OF HIGH-END TECHNOLOGY

The potential for technology to provide job opportunities for the youth is immense. To create wealth using the Internet would require us creating a critical mass of technically competent people. It is when this critical mass of technically savvy people cluster in one location, the Silicon Valley of Ghana, that we will see the birth of riveting ideas capable of providing employment for millions. Our society has many needs that can be easily satisfied with the application of technology, but there is the lack of enough skilled people with the requisite motivation to take up these issues. What is the guarantee that their ideas, after hours of hard work will not be snubbed? What is the guarantee that the department or sector of the economy that needs it will not refuse to try it because of some pointless political power play? Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter are all products of the mindset of wanting to meet a need. The driven and innovative people who started these companies were assured, somehow, that their ideas would not be shunned. There was a guarantee that in spite of the political atmosphere in the country, their ideas would be welcomed if they were found to be valuable.

It is good that our politicians enjoy hyperbolic banter; but too often, they have let it stray into the realm of absurdity so that fruitful and legitimate ideas are ignored because they may have originated from people affiliated with the other team. If the economic atmosphere continues to remain this sensitive to political machinations, innovation will be stifled. The genius that creates these sublime ideas can be fragile. It might retreat and fail to materialise if we do not provide a comfortable enough environment for it to flourish.

In this regard, I submit to the powers that be that it is time they paid attention to their students in the technical fields that have a direct relationship with the building and exploitation of these technologies. If we actively court these young minds, they will serve us well in the future, employing themselves and their friends. The initial investment may seem huge but the return is nothing to be compared with it. Providing the requisite facilities may seem like costing a fortune initially, but once a brilliant idea is sparked from the toying with these facilities, the investment begins to yield returns without much prodding.

The institutional framework—mainly legislation—that is required for Ghana to take advantage of the global market that is ready to patronise our goods and services has not yet been constituted. Hence, an artist whose work is cherished abroad cannot sell to his foreign fans because we do not have the

infrastructure.

Even though the banks have incorporated cell phone technology in their services, we are yet to see any serious attempt at the incorporation of web technology for on-line banking.² We still carry paper in large quantities even to supermarkets—you just cannot use your debit card or anything of that sort.

We must take a decidedly principled stance on the course of our nation with regard to new technology. We cannot expect people to just pick it up like they did for cellular phone technology. In order for these new technologies to form the substrate on which the rest of the economy grows, there must be a deliberate, concerted effort by the government to invest in its success.

²Some banks allow customers to view their balance on-line, but the infrastructure to enable, say, the transfer of a balance from one account to another is not available. Neither is it possible to open a bank account on-line without physically walking into one.

Chapter 8

Why Africa is the Dark Continent

They have called Africa the Dark Continent not because of the complexion of its inhabitants—in many regards, it is unknown, unheard, unlit, and backward. Cartographers of antiquity coined the term *dark continent* because they did not know enough about the continent's geography to pen it on a map.

Even though this stereotype was conceived long ago, the situation remains unchanged. In today's socio-economic landscape, even though Africa forms a fifth of the world's land mass, and a sixth of its population, and holds a significant amount of its natural resources, it is unheeded at the trade negotiations that matter.

That Africa is unlit is obvious, both in the literal as well as the figurative senses. An aerial view of Africa at night shows that it is hopelessly dark. There is little electricity, triggering all the negative consequences that follow from it—stymied industrial and economic growth, stifled Internet access, and the squandering of potentially productive man-hours.

Rarely do African leaders think of themselves as servants of the people. It is customary for them to consider themselves as saviours who should not be questioned or opposed. They are full of themselves and are unresponsive, if cognizant, of the plight of their citizens.

Even though the leaders are crass in their statecraft and inebriated with power, I am reluctant to lay the blame for Africa's predicament solely at their doorsteps. Africa's leadership deficit is just a testament to the poverty of its people's minds. The people have failed to take possession of their own destinies, leaving room for the grisly kleptocrats to rapaciously plunder their countries' resources.

Given that our political systems have pampered mediocre leadership and encouraged do-littles to take the fort for so long, who will stem this tide of backwardness and unproductivity?

Usually, it is the people who are most affected by the negative consequences of government who are expected to react. In Africa's case, that would be the youth. But, it appears that the youth are too fearful or disengaged for this activism to take place. Will this ever change? What would it take for these lethargic youth to arise from their stupor?

Most of the African youth who are in a position to effect change are apathetic because they think they can insulate themselves from the consequences of an inept administration. In their minds, it is sufficient to make a decent living for oneself independent of the system which is at work in their respective countries. If it were in fact the case that they could adequately insulate themselves from the consequences of an inept leadership, it might be reasonable for them to take the passive stance they have taken. But, the truth of the matter is that, as most of them consider their options for a better life, they do not see a future for themselves at home. Their outlook is outward—"How do I flee this ditch for greener pastures abroad?"

Sometimes the countries they migrate to for greener pastures are not much better than their home countries; and even if they are better, they are not treated with the dignity they deserve. To wit, they become servants abroad whereas they could be kings at home. Africa will remain where it is for a long time if this trend continues. If everybody leaves Africa while young only to return after they have made a comfortable living abroad, we are headed for worse trouble. The majority so disengage from the system at home that they never return to settle until they have made certain they can return whenever they want. This usually means marrying a citizen of the foreign country, naturalizing, getting a residency permit, or whatever other document, by any means necessary. This is an assault on their dignity for whereas they are very much needed at home, these ones would rather work abroad where they are, very often, neither needed nor appreciated.

I understand the arguments for wanting to stay abroad. There are many old hawks who are so engrained in the systems at home that opposition to new ideas is their primary preoccupation. Because they have refused to improve themselves over the years, they have become irrelevant and, yet, will not leave or allow better qualified people to assist them. These ones seek to frustrate

anyone with new ideas who wants to help; moreso when that person has the annoying British or American twang.

There is also the rationalization that it is just by coincidence that one was born in country A or B so it does not matter where one settles in the end. To wit, "all nations were created by God" and one should be able to choose where one wants to live irrespective of where one was born. That might also be true, but a greater truth is that while many of these youth toil abroad, they wish they could come home and make a decent living. They know that even though they are working hard with little fulfilment, their work would be much better appreciated if it were done at home. They know that their services would have more of an impact on the course of humanity if they were rendered at home. Yet, the vicissitudes of life make it "impossible" for them to return.

The brain drain is a problem that has been lamented by a number of economists. It comes in many forms. Professionals are trained with state resources in poor countries only for them to be poached by richer countries. Brilliant citizens of poor countries go abroad for studies never to return. Are these people a loss to their nations?

There are a number of ways to understand this problem. One of them is the differential in utility to which these people would be put if they stayed at home versus if they moved abroad. It turns out that for most of these brilliant young minds, they would be idle if they stayed at home, so there is personal fulfillment to migrating to places where their talents would not be wasted. Economically, however, it is clear that the governments of the poor countries where these professionals flee in droves have wasted their money.

I have already addressed the issues relating to education (Chapter 1) and how it can be used to solve this problem so I will not belabour the point here. I will conclude by noting that a hint of patriotism and education on what it means for one to be so disempowered that she cannot confidently make a decent living in her own country should motivate these young ones to come home and make efforts at effecting change.

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