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Transformative leadership in Africa: Thabo Mbeki and Africa's development agenda

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Abstract

The debate on the causes of Africa's underdevelopment has offered different explanations for the deplorable state of the continent's development. While some argue that Africa's socio-economic malaise finds its roots in the structural adjustment policies and programmes (SAPs) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank[1], other scholars believe that the real impediment to sustained economic growth and development in Africa has more to do with political leadership and the absence of good governance than with economic plans or reforms. These scholars have established a causal relationship between political leadership and economic development, arguing that the two are intimately interrelated, each being a cause and effect of the other[2]. What is more, these scholars have argued that if the continent is to recover from its economic malaise, "it needs leaders who are strong and self-confident, creators of great ideas and who are totally committed to Africa's economic recovery"[3]. It is against this background that this research report will contribute to these discussions, by establishing a framework within which leadership, and more specifically transformative leadership can be measured and understood to be effective in moving the African continent forward from its current state of crisis, in a spirited and collective effort. In this regard, the report will evaluate former President Thabo Mbeki's leadership style and the extent to which it can be considered as transformative. It will be argued that his leadership, was not only in response to the burgeoning crisis in Africa, but also sought to conceptualise and provide a visionary framework which aimed to harness the developmental potential Africa.

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[1] Kennedy, P. "Political Barriers to African Capitalism." The Journal of Modern African States. Vol 32, No 2, 1994, pp 200.
[2] Richardson, P. "Good Governance: The Challenge of Leadership in Africa." 2008 http://www.africagoodnews.com/leadership/african-leadership-and-good-governance.html, p 2. Accessed 15 May 2009.
[3] Obasanjo, O, Orville, d' H& African Leadership Forum. "Challenges of Economic Development." Challenges of leadership in African Development. New York, Taylor& Francis, 1990, pp 2.