OPERATIVE PORTION OF LKY'S ADVICE TO AFRICA (1993)

Source: https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/lky19931108.pdf

I offer these few principles which have been important in Singapore's transformation.

Goal 1: Clean government, effective civil service

Our first goal in Singapore was to shape the government into an effective instrument of policy. This require strong, fair and just leaders, who would have the moral strength to command the respect of the people. Unity in the core group of leaders helped to send clear signals to the people thus avoiding confusion that would have arisen if the team had bickered and split. Leaders must have the sense of trusteeship, that they are only temporarily in charge of the destinies of their people and that their duty is not only to discharge this trust but also to pass it on to equally trustworthy and competent hands. Responsibility for the people under their care required that luxurious living whilst our people were mired in poverty and backwardness was out. We ensured complete accountability and open separateness between personal assets and public funds. Corruption which we regarded as a cancer must be eradicated as soon as detected.

A strong, political leadership needs a neutral, efficient, honest civil service. Officers must be recruited and promoted completely on merit. They have to share the same nation-building philosophy and development goals of the political leaders. They must be adequately paid so that temptations would not be difficult to resist. An impartial, capable Public Service Commission had to be shrewd at assessing character. Appointments, awards of scholarships must be made to the best candidates.

I need to emphasise this because of paragraph 42 of the InterAction Council report:

> "It is not only in Africa that corruption exists. But in Africa it is dangerous because corruption is becoming ingrained culturally at all levels of society, both in government and in the private sector. As Africa glimpses the consumer society, a cleavage has arisen between desires and the ability to satisfy them locally. This provided fertile ground for corruption. Corruption must be curbed and weeded out as it is a real and serious obstacle to development and modernisation."

Economist Survey on Nigeria, August 21, 1993, page 6:

> "The cost of corruption to credibility reaches most of civil society. 'The military government has distorted people's values" says Beko Ransome Kuti, a currently jailed civil rights leader and, like his younger brother, Fela (Nigeria's wildly popular Afro-beat musician, who sings about thieving African politicians), a thorn in the flesh of the Babangida regime.
>
> 'Politics is seen as a way of gaining access to fantastic wealth, and this government has carried it to an extreme.' Nigeria has many fine lawyers, but the judiciary is tainted by trials settled with bribes. It has fine academics, but universities are tarnished by the trade in diplomas. It has respected chiefs, but the nobility has been mocked by the sale of chieftaincy titles. In many ways, the institution that has suffered the most under this military government is the military itself. 'Military men are not soldiers any more', is a common Nigerian observation."

In a report by Keith B Richburg, an Afro-American in the international Herald Tribune, 14 July 1992, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) official, Mamadon Bah, said:

> "What we need in Africa these days is mainly discipline, but discipline from the top." "Still many other Africans agree with Mr Musevani, President of Uganda, and OAU official that cultural factors do play a role in development. They argue that lack of discipline among African leaders is a particular problem. For even the hardest-working African has difficulty building a solid life if his country's political leadership is corrupt."

The question is how to put things right in Africa when both the political leaders and the civil service have become inefficient and corrupt. This is a most difficult problem to which few countries have found solutions. Once a political system has been corrupted right from the very top leaders to the lowest rungs of the bureaucracy, the problem is very complicated. The cleansing and disinfecting has to start from top and go downwards in a thorough and systematic way. It is a long and labourious process that can be carried out only by a very strong group of leaders with the strength and moral authority derived from

unquestioned integrity. We just managed it and stopped it before it got out of control. The South Korean President Kim Yong Sam is in the midst of such a process.[1]

Goal 2: National solidarity

The next basic goal is to maintain national solidarity and social cohesion despite many races or tribes. All successor governments of colonial regimes inherit this problem of multitribal, multilingual, multireligious, multicultural solidarity. If national solidarity is broken, problems become intractable. Without a united people, development is almost impossible. The InterAction Council report, para 6:

> "For many African countries the concept of the state is very recent, not older than 30-40 years. Ethnicity, regionalism, religion, race and class interests are the causes of sharp divisions and conflicts in many countries. Countries which currently seem to be more successful economically, whether among the wealthy industrialised world or in Asia and Latin America among the developing countries, usually have a much longer history of integrity, often stretching back from hundreds of years."

The Singapore solution to the problems arising from its young nationhood has been a policy of deliberate gradualism in all issues which involve race, language, culture and religion. We are 76 per cent Chinese, but of different clans speaking different dialects from different parts of China. We are 15 per cent Malay-Muslims from different parts of Malaysia and Indonesia. We are seven per cent Indians from different parts of India. The rest came from Europe and other parts of Asia. We need a common language. We solved this by making everybody learn not one but two languages, English and the mother tongue. English is not any group's mother tongue, so no advantage is gained or lost by any one group. We have neither forced nor pressure-cooked a national identity. We have refrained from suppressing ethnic culture, languages, religions or sense of identity.

Goal 3: Family Planning

The third goal, to slow down population growth. By comprehensive methods of family planning, we brought down Singapore's total fertility rate from six children per woman in 1960 to 1.9 in 1990 and 1.8 in 1992 i.e. below the replacement rate of 2.1. The enormous difference between the population growth of Asia and Africa is fearful.

InterAction Council report, para 1:

> "Population doubles every 23 years, food production doubles only every 30 years. There are more uneducated people now than there were 30 years ago. In 1960, Africa produced 107 per cent of its food requirements as compared to 78 per cent today."

InterAction Council report, para 70:

> "In 1990, the population of sub-Saharan Africa totalled 526 million; projections - taking account of the impact of AIDS - envisage two billion by the year 2050 and a stabilisation at 2.9 billion."

InterAction Council report, para 71:

> "The population had grown at an explosive rate of 3.1 per cent, caused by a steep fall in the mortality rate and a continuously high fertility rate, approximately 6.5 children to every woman - much the same as 30 years ago and twice as high as in South Asia at present. This population surge has been a major factor in impeding the rate of social and economic advance, characterised by such indicators as 59 per cent illiteracy and infant mortality of 100 per 1,000 births."

No economic growth can cope when each African woman produces 6.5 children. Unless you aim to bring it down to 2.5 or at the most three children per woman, your economic progress will be swallowed up by the new mouths to feed and educate and find jobs for. With contraceptives, like Norplant, which can be implanted in the woman once every five years, it should not be too difficult to bring population growth rates down. UNFPA (United Nations Fund for Population Activities) programmes can help finance this. There should also be universal education not only on family planning but also on the dangers of Aids. Condoms should be freely available. Again, the international health organisations can

[1] The speech in Singapore archives leaves out the words, "We just managed it and stopped it before it got out of control.". However, these words are found in videos circulating on the internet, and these words are both important and meaningful, given Singapore's extreme corruption before LKY began his reforms.

help. Otherwise, Africa faces a bleak health problem which will weaken its societies as strong and young people die of Aids leaving their children as orphans.

Goal 4: Pragmatism not dogma in economics

Fourth, economic policy must be pragmatic not dogmatic. Singapore consciously set out to maintain continuity with past policies. We accept our colonial heritage. Continuity with the past helps the evolution into new growth sectors. This is one of our secrets to growth. We encouraged all British, European, American, Japanese and Asian businesses to stay and expand their investments. We encouraged our own businessmen to enter trade and manufacturing and services not by displacing these foreign enterprises but by working as their suppliers or competitors.

In the 60s and 70s, we had considerable animal husbandry like the rearing of pigs, chickens and ducks, and vegetable gardening. We did not consciously set out to phase them out, but allowed economic developments to increase the value of rental of land until it became uneconomic to use land for rearing of pigs and the growing of vegetables. They were phased out by economic forces. We still have for domestic consumption, battery chickens, ducks without ponds, and for export we grow orchids and rear tropical fish, not for eating but for aquariums.

If I were an African in charge of a rural economy like Tanzania, I would concentrate on improving productivity in agriculture, by bringing in expertise to improve yields and to encourage investments in large scale plantations for palm oil, coffee, cocoa, etc diversifying into as many products as possible. I would also encourage high savings. You will see from the Financial Times table the high savings in Asia, which means high investments without foreign debt.

I would encourage cottage industries so that people will stay in their villages. I would do nothing to accelerate the drift into the large cities. This will happen in any case, the slower the better. I would spend the minimum on prestige projects, whether monuments, buildings, airlines or shipping lines. Grandeur in monuments and squares will not help economic growth or feed the people.

Goal 5: Let foreigners and local entrepreneurs get on with their business

The seductive trap to be avoided is the equalisation of wealth through nationalisation of commerce, industry, land or any other property. On the contrary, I would attract more foreign investment of multinational corporations (MNCs) whether American, European, or Japanese. I would protect and encourage more Indians and Lebanese small traders and shopkeepers. For they know when to lend to which farmer who will pay back at harvest time better than any branch of any agricultural bank that the state may set up.

International Herald Tribune, 14 July 1992:

> "Tanzania in many ways is the saddest, since it has enjoyed 30 years of peace and considerable foreign assistance, but its economy has been ravaged by years of socialist mismanagement. Dar-es-Salaam, its capital, is in worse disrepair than Hanoi. The road system has collapsed, telephones do not work, electricity is sporadic and the store shelves are bare. Tanzania is [and] remains, by many estimates, the third-poorest place on earth."

Financial Times Supplement on Africa, 1 Sep 1992, page II:

> "At present growth rates - five per cent for gross domestic product (GDP), and three per cent for population - it would take 20 years for Ghana to join the ranks of lower middle income countries. The less successful have longer to wait: 'With today's poor policies it will be 40 years before the region returns to its per capita income of the mid-70s, says a World Bank official."
>
> "In the meantime, Africa is being left far behind by the countries which have made better use of their resources and compete more vigorously for capital. In 1965, Indonesia's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was lower then Nigeria's. Today, it is three times higher. Thailand's income per head in 1965 was lower than Ghana's; now it is one of the fastest growing economies in the world."
>
> "Former 'success' stories and 'role models' in the 1970s have since become cautionary tales. Kenya struggles to implement economic reforms which erode the patronage on which the ruling Kanu party has been so dependent. Cote d'lvoire moves deeper into difficulties that cannot be

addressed until the CFA franc is devalued, an obstacle that holds up effective economic reform in the 13-member CFA bloc."

"Most disturbing of all, perhaps, is the concern that Africa no longer has the adequate institutional capacity to help itself. The technological gap between Africa and the world has widened, and the continent's management is weak. Many schools and universities are without teaching materials. Civil services have been neglected or politicised. The integrity of the judiciary has been eroded."

Goal 6: Educate everyone

Education is the key to the long term future of any people. Modern agriculture, modern industry and today's information technology, require the whole population, including women, to be literate and knowledgeable in order to receive knowledge and to participate and to add value. In an African context this means universal literacy and basic knowledge of personal health, hygiene, of agriculture and basic mathematics and science.

InterAction Council report, para 77 said:

"They (women) are not recognised as having their own rights as human beings and citizens. Despite all declarations by Governments, in reality, women are marginalised essentially because of culture."

InterAction Council report, para 78:

"Governments need to change their attitudes in the way they view women's rights, incorporate them as a key element in the development of a society's full potential, and offer real opportunities to all members of society. Affirmative actions must be undertaken in all fields: political, economic, social and cultural. Special programmes enhancing women's productivity, especially in agriculture and environment, are recommended. Enhanced acesss to formal education, health and nutritional education, and credit is equally critical."

I believe this will solve not only the waste in not using half the population's resources but [also] solve the dangerous population growth. Singapore's experience has been that once women are educated equally with men and given the same job opportunities, they do not see any point in having large families which drag down the standards of living of the family and of society and make their lives a drudgery.

Goal 7: Go for results not political correctness

Singapore rejected conventional wisdom when it did not accord with rational analysis and its own experience. For example, in the 60s and 70s, it was politically correct to be anti-American and anti-MNC. The theology expounded by Latin Americans like Raul Prebisch was that MNC would reduce them to "dependancia". We did not accept this. Instead we assiduously courted MNCs. They had the technology, know-how, techniques, expertise and the markets. We decided it was a fast way of learning on the job working for them and with them. Indeed they have been a powerful factor in Singapore's growth.

It will be equally mistaken to follow mindlessly the present politically correct and stridently advocated view that democracy is the precondition for economic development. Without democracy, Western ideologies argued, Russia could not develop a free market. This was not borne out by the experience of Taiwan and South Korea and post open-door China. What is necessary for growth and progress is good government, one that is honest and effective and works for the benefit of the people. What Africans should work for is good government. Fortunately, this is recognised in the report of the InterAction Council. First, they stated the general principle in paragraph 10:

"Democracy, representative government and the ability to change it by elections are the best safeguards for human liberty. Such a setting would engender stability and facilitate development as a self-sustaining process. Security, stability, development and cooperation are interlinked and Governments must take a wide range of measures to develop to a democratically constituted system."

Then in the next section under culture-attitudes-values, they went on to say, paragraph 15:

"If democracy is going to be sustained in Africa, it has to be home-grown and owned by the people and the countries. It cannot be imposed from outside. Governments should take bold

> measures to accomplish a higher degree of popular participation in the economic and political transition process."

And in paragraph 16:

> "Democracy is a culture. It is not given nor is it attained overnight. Democracy grows at a speed which differs from country to country. The form of a country's democracy must evolve out of the culture of the people it serves. There is no standard pattern of blueprint for societies which differs fundamentally from the West.

This was also recognised in the Financial Times survey, 1 September 1993, page two:

> "Hopes that the emergence of multi-party politics would prove a simple stepping stone to good governance have proved premature. Opposition parties have turned out to be weak, fractious and susceptible to patronage, owing more to ethnicity than policy for their support."

Good governance includes the pursuit of national interest regardless of theories or ideologies. Good government is pragmatic government. When Singapore was up against the wall in 1965, cut off from its hinterland in Peninsular Malaya and the Borneo territories, and confronted with economic boycott by Indonesia, we concluded that we had to make ourselves useful to the rest of the world if we wanted to survive. We could not change the world. We could adapt to it. So even though China was the largest exporter of revolution in the 60s and 70s, giving arms and succour to the Communist Party of Malaya to subvert and create revolution in Singapore and Malaysia in 1950 to 1970, we never broke off our economic links with China. Nor did we close down the Bank of China even at the height of China's madness during the Cultural Revolution. We reaped the benefits in trade and investments when China stabilised after Mao. The existing links were in place to facilitate a blossoming of new trade and new investments, not only by China in Singapore but by Singaporeans in China.

Finally, let me add this caveat. You have to draw your own lessons from your own experiences and from observing that of other countries. As the Financial Times Supplement on Africa, 1 Sep 93, page II, said:

> "From Africa must come a new generation of leaders, committed to reform, and tapping the same spirit that brought freedom 30 years ago. Angered by the failures of corrupt and autocratic leaders, frustrated by economic policies that did not deliver, impatient to recover their loss of civil rights, and worn out by wars, Africa's people are striving for a fresh start."

I have only guessed at what would interest you. It is better that I stop to allow you to raise your interests at question time.