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# TOWARDS NEW NARRATIVES OF HOPE FOR FOSTERING TRANSFORMATIVE AFRICAN FUTURES

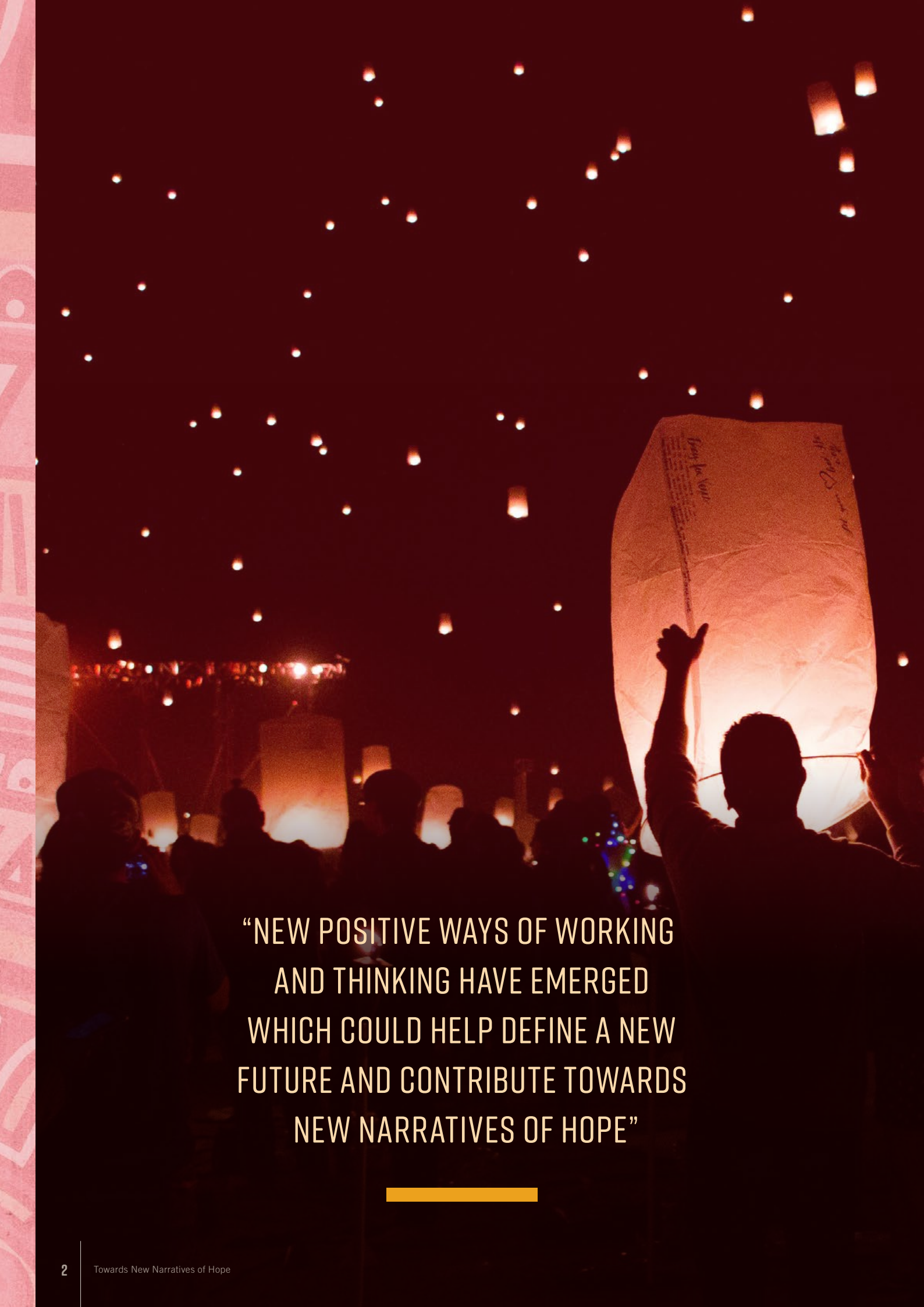
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**African Chapter of the Club of Rome**

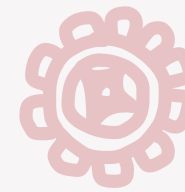
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**September 2020**





“NEW POSITIVE WAYS OF WORKING  
AND THINKING HAVE EMERGED  
WHICH COULD HELP DEFINE A NEW  
FUTURE AND CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS  
NEW NARRATIVES OF HOPE”



## TOWARDS NEW NARRATIVES OF HOPE FOR FOSTERING TRANSFORMATIVE AFRICAN FUTURES

In a recent [Open letter to Global Leaders](#), the Club of Rome with 250 partners and other global institutions launched the [Planetary Emergency Partnership](#). This document re-affirmed the reality that the world is facing a Planetary Emergency and that now more than ever, new ways of thinking, governing and acting are called for to respond to the devastating effects that the COVID-19 global pandemic are unleashing on the global economy, financial markets and the everyday realities of people's ability to create livelihoods and hopeful futures. As argued by many analysts, this pandemic has exposed our vulnerabilities. In particular the social, environmental and economic injustices that plague our societies have been revealed.

We now recognise the inherent fragility of our highly technological and globalized societies in ways that would have been unthinkable in a pre-Covid-19 world. And yet in the midst of these challenges, new positive ways of working and thinking have emerged which could help define a new future and contribute towards new narratives of hope. This is where we would like to weigh in, with cumulative and new African voices—old and young—to consciously co-create an emerging present that places values such as entrepreneurship, sustainability, community, empathy, compassion, circularity and resilience, inter alia, at the centre of our focus.

Gripped by the magnitude of the global state of emergency, the African Chapter of the Club of Rome convened regularly in 2020 to document insights from African philosophy and cosmology in this time of radical uncertainty and transition. In our reflections we tried to bring into focus the unique contributions Africa and Africans bring to the Planetary Emergency Partnership is offering for the complex, interconnected challenges of our world. Seen through the epistemic lens of 'Western culture', the challenges facing post-colonial Africa have always seemed insurmountable – even to those charged with governing the post-colonial African nations. These challenges are not our focus here, especially as they are well documented and studied and seem more complex and interlinked now than ever before. Rather, our point of departure, is to take an Africa-centric world view, seeing these challenges through 'decolonial' lenses and striving, alongside other global communities, to make sense of this rapidly changing world.



During the online interactions with colleagues, we realised that in this time of uncertainty, we could offer to curate a new narrative for framing what it means to be African at this historic moment, and how this may be relevant to others around the world. The demonstration of solidarity by people moved to participate in mass protests in support of the Black Lives Matter movement across the world reflected a much deeper search for a new humanism. From an African perspective, where being black is mostly *sine qua non*, we were obliged to reflect on why it is that this movement at this very time, could make a difference. Consequently, what is our own collective responsibility to contribute to this question of building a more just and equitable world? More specifically, what would our experience of being African bring to the discussion about transcending the collective global state of fear, anxiety, discrimination and disorientation as humans face the breakdown of economic and social institutions alongside the already rupturing ecological web of life? Faced with the cracks that have been exposed in the social, economic, ecological and political fibre of nations, are we not all obliged to re-examine our world and re-imagine a more just and inclusive future for peoples of all colour, culture, religion, gender, class and nationality?

## GOALS FOR AFRICA

For us Africans, using our ‘decolonial’ lens, re-imagining new narratives to inform alternative futures, invariably leads us to Agenda 2063 of the African Union, tagged ‘the Africa we want’, with the following well-articulated goals:

- **A prosperous Africa** based on inclusive growth and sustainable development
- **An Africa of good governance**, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law
- **An Africa with a strong cultural identity**, common heritage, shared values and ethics
- **An Africa whose development is people-driven**, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.

Similarly, the AUD-NEPAD agenda focuses on pragmatic action points such as:

- **Collaboration and intra-Africa trade** and exchange of goods and services
- **Strengthening of health systems** to provide universal access to quality care;
- **Production of goods and services to meet urgent needs** for equipment and personnel for health and other systems within our countries;
- **Shifts to technology based online teaching, learning and virtual engagements** are an opportunity to leverage our 1,3bn market in framing our economic negotiations;
- **Young people’s employment and livelihoods** are an opportunity to tap into their creativity and energy as the most important asset on our continent to effect the transformation of our economic systems into bottom up SMEs driven approaches.





While Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global consensus on what futures we all might want, questions arise about the kind of sustainable well-being we want and the timelines in which these can realistically be achieved. Pragmatically seen, these need to be addressed within each geographical context, aligning with the mantra: Think Global, Act Local. Or in more local lingua, the interplay of the individual and communal spheres so common to African communal consciousness, enable us to make a distinction between planning in solidarity (globally) and execution at a subsidiary level (locally). Mediated by geography, history, culture, economy and ecology, the sustainable future we want and can achieve will have a very specific meaning in the African context.

Our post-colonial history has forced us to learn the hard way that too often, initiatives that promise change actually reinforce current inequities and unsustainable trajectories that are based on borrowed narratives that have been inherited from colonial, imperial and neoclassical discourses developed for very different contexts. In what follows, we are offering some ingredients that could inform the beginnings of a new narrative for crafting more just and transformative African Futures and in so doing offer the world a way of seeing that helps transcend the current failure to identify and address the problems faced by the global community.

What is most important is that we seek to reframe the way our minds ‘see’ the problem. In this context we hope to contribute a ‘decolonial’ lens that offers a new view on problem-solving. For instance, we propose to frame ‘time’ as a circular continuum wherein, rather than as a succession of moments in a lineal dimension<sup>i</sup>, we find ‘no contradiction between the interests of past, present and future’ and acknowledge these three time dimensions as key stakeholders wherein the mutual resolution of stakeholder interests eventually serves the good of all<sup>ii</sup>. That means we must prioritize our education systems.

In April 2018, the Government of Kenya convened a Pan-African High-Level Conference on Education (PACE 2018), where key stakeholders including Ministers of Education from all AU member nations committed to building ‘skilled African citizenry as agents of change’—an agenda made public by the Nairobi Declaration and Call to Action on Education<sup>iii</sup>, calling on each nation to look towards the future. This we can only achieve by acknowledging the critical role of learning, unlearning and relearning at this time, across cultures, professions, borders and above all generations, to incorporate the best of our past and present in building our future. Our objective with this paper is to apply transgenerational insights and wisdom to approach the most pressing global problems in an integrated and sustainable way, extending beyond our local context to be applied globally. Our proposition to take up a ‘decolonial’ lens is to unfurl African Thought as a resource for all.

Writing way back on the morrow of a colonial age, Aimé Césaire predicted the future when he wrote:

“A CIVILIZATION THAT PROVES INCAPABLE OF SOLVING THE PROBLEMS IT CREATES  
IS A DECADENT CIVILIZATION. A CIVILIZATION THAT CHOOSES TO CLOSE ITS EYES TO  
ITS MOST CRUCIAL PROBLEMS IS A STRICKEN CIVILIZATION.”  
(Quoted in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

**The Planetary Emergency Plan: Securing a New Deal for People, Nature and Climate** may well be the most clear-sighted and urgent call for this ‘stricken civilization’ to open its eyes. But like so many documents of this nature, the epistemic centre remains Euro-American. When we Africans write from where we are and not through the eyes of those who look at us, our epistemic centre changes. This is what Ndlovu-Gatsheni refers to as the ‘decolonial turn’. By starting from the assumption that ‘coloniality’ is the core challenge in the world today, the decolonial perspective swaps the Euro-American definition of ‘universality’ with a diverse ‘pluriversality’ where the Euro-American epistemic centre is no longer assumed to be the norm. In the words of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013):

“What the epistemological struggle should seek to attain is cognitive justice, which would enable everyone to benefit from ecologies of knowledge while enriching humanity. The horizon that is sought is pluriversality rather than universality because the latter is predicated on the Euro-American hegemonic drive that results in inequality rather than equality. The epistemological struggle lies at the base of re-imagination of another world not founded on racism. What continues to inhibit African creativity, innovation and imagination is epistemological colonization that dates back to the time of colonial encounters. A new struggle pitched at the epistemological level, and underpinned by a decolonial epistemic perspective, not only reveals the truth about the continuation of colonialism but also entails the decolonization of the minds of the African people. Without mental decolonization, it is impossible to imagine another world.”

The decolonial perspective may well reveal more clearly what is ‘planetary’ about the **Planetary Emergency Plan**. In practice, as argued by Ndlovu-Gatsheni, this will entail three epistemic breaks.

**THE FIRST** is to break from what Fanon called ‘nauseating mimicry’, namely the tendency within Africa to assume that solutions developed elsewhere are superior to those developed by Africans.

**THE SECOND** is the break from the assumption that nineteenth century social and economic sciences are adequate for addressing twenty-first century challenges. This means unthinking long-held paradigmatic assumptions (such as, for example, the neo-classical economic assumption that ‘economies naturally tend towards equilibrium’) and then ‘thinking-in-context’ about appropriate solutions in ways that are decoupled from outdated paradigms.

**THE THIRD** break is about ending the love affair with a particular conception of ‘modernity’ which has resulted in a search for liberation and development from within epistemic parameters established at the start of the colonial era. All three are closely related: mimicry stems from deep attachments to colonial conceptions of modernity, and an education system that reproduces a particular pattern of thinking. The ‘decolonial turn’ is about accepting that the former colony—in this case Africa as both a place and an epistemic challenge—not only has a voice, but constitutes a context conducive for generating solutions that might be difficult to see from the Euro-American epistemic centre. To this extent, decoloniality may be a precondition for true planetary solutions.





By drawing inspiration from the work of African-American philosopher Cornel West (2017), a new narrative of hope could be built by harnessing a more ‘moral and spiritual way of war’ against imperialist ideals and institutions that operate on strategies of ‘defeat, destroy, devastate’. He suggests that by fostering narratives that draw on the power of ‘remembrance, reverence, and resurrection’ we are afforded the means to re-imagine hope through ‘radical love and revolutionary praxis’. By elaborating our thinking using this framing of remembrance, reverence, and resurrection, we hope to fan the flames of hope in ways that inspire a new generation of African leaders to rise up to seize the future with the necessary vision and passion.

## I.REMEMBRANCE: RE-MEMBERING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN IN THIS WORLD

Exploring new visions of the world through an epistemology of being-in place, implies a leaving behind of old orders as suggested by Ndlovu-Gatsheni. A certain world-ending happens whilst we are re-orientating ourselves and often such shifts produce fugitives—people who are no longer at home, or on their way to the place they remember as being home. West-African philosopher and poet, Bayo Akomolafe (2020) reminds us that:

***“(t)he thing to do when this happens is not to try to kick-start a fresh new order of being, try to quickly imagine the next, or rush into new manifestos. The thing to do is to consult the corrosive agency of greater intelligences, seek to be defeated and shape-shifted by these “others” we must meet at crossroads, and stir up an alchemy of descent which might allow us build new coalitions of becoming in response to the world around us.”***

In the process of transitioning from old world orders, Africa offers not a new world order, but a place from where we all can engage in the process of remembering what it means to be human that is grounded in a relational ethical imperative of becoming-with-others.

Drawing from the well of generosity and solidarity within us, we are invited to forge ‘new coalitions of becoming’ by remembering the African conception of what it means to be human through which a new ‘African human-ess’ (as opposed to an African humanism) can be evoked. This form of remembrance does not draw on a superficial nostalgia for the pre-colonial traditions but calls forth an even deeper view of what it means to be human in essence. Kofi Opoku, an African scholar descendant of the Akan people of Ghana and elder, expresses this more eloquently in his talk at UNISA entitled ‘Skimpy and imperishable truth: African religious heritage’:

***“The concept of human beingness, or the essence of being human, termed Ubuntu in the Bantu languages of Africa, is central to African cultures and religious traditions. It is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community.”***



Mutombo Nkulu-N'Sengha, another African scholar of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, quoted by Opoku in the same talk, elaborates further to show how this relational concept finds resonance in the wisdom of other cultures across the globe:

***“Bumuntu is the African vision of a refined gentle person, a holy person, a saint, a shuntzu, a person of ado, a person of Buddha-nature, an embodiment of Brahman, a genuine human being. The man or woman of Bumuntu is characterized by self-respect and respect for other human beings. Moreover, he/she respects all life in the universe. He/she sees his/her dignity as inscribed in a triple relationship, with the transcendent beings (God, ancestors, spirits) with all other human beings, and with the natural world (flora and fauna). Bumuntu is the embodiment of all virtues, especially the virtues of hospitality and solidarity.”***

These concepts of what it means to be human are not confined to African cultural and religious traditions. They are shared across the globe. Indigenous peoples in India, East Asian region, Pacific Islands, and the Americas have an understanding of much of the same core essence in their worldviews. This should not be surprising given the common origins of humanity and the shared heritage of the mother continent of Africa. At the same time, African religious wisdom does not claim to be the only and ultimate truth but remains open to other impulses. As the Shona proverb goes: ‘Truth is like a baobab tree, one person’s arms cannot embrace it.’ This openness is a sign of humility that encourages conversations across the world we inhabit as a human community.

## THESE CONCEPTS OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN ARE NOT CONFINED TO AFRICAN CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS. THEY ARE SHARED ACROSS THE GLOBE.

The power of the concept of Ubuntu/Bumuntu or Iwa (Yoruba), Omenala (Igbo) and Suban (Akan) is the way it is seamlessly integrated into a way of life. Conversations and social engagements across generations are opportunities to shape the personal characters of children and adults; they reflect the values of Ubuntu as a way of life. This ‘Ubuntu’ thinking permeates many African cultures. For example, the Igbo concept of ‘Omenala’ recognizes the interconnectedness of the ecosystem, human and time dimensions. Precisely because of globalization, we have rediscovered that human development is intricately bound with the integrity of our entire ecosystem. One event is linked to another in such a manner that a destabilization, whether it is a natural, political, social, economic or cultural phenomenon, affects all others. Society—being the entire embodiment of human beings and their environment—therefore needs more integral criteria to assure the social dimension of its sustainability:

The five key principles of Omenala, which assist the social dimensions of sustainability and promote an integral criteria and approach to life, include:<sup>iv</sup>

- **preservation:** which safeguards what was inherited from the past by preserving it for future generations;
- **guidance:** which draws upon the existing link between the ancestors and the current generation;
- **direction:** which assists people to seek for wisdom and meaning in solving current problems;
- **continuity:** which enables society to retain essential elements in language, ritual, values, practices that unite the people and guarantee sustainable livelihoods based on lessons learnt;
- **equity:** which balances the social order and minimizes conflict.

These traditional principles—local in their foundation but global in their application—were built around the medium of oral narration as the vehicle for both transmission and innovation. This is a situation that has continued, though in varied application, to influence many traditional societies till date. The implied opportunity herein is that we might universalize core principles drawn from traditional African Thought by documenting and investing in this collective knowledge and formalizing our traditional African wisdom found across various cultures. In other words, to reframe our thinking and understanding and more importantly to underline the ethical fabric and core values that have proved so essential to Africa’s robust and resilient change management strategy:

Specifically on the Omenala ‘Principle of Direction’, Edozien (2006) writes:

***“Taking into cognisance that a people and human society cannot survive without orientation and meaning, the principle of Direction in the Omenala refers to the means whereby present living generations including youth and persons in need of advice sought for direction from a variety of highly regarded stakeholders. Such stakeholders included the deities, the priests, the elders, the ancestors, wise women and men. These were considered to be closely connected with the generations of the past and future, and thus commanded authority. The consultation of these stakeholders, particularly the elders, helped the present-living and ensured a tradition that regarded the interests of past, present and future generations in decision-making. Such processes thus tended to be consultative, future-oriented, with reverence for the past and respect for the future. Matters for which direction was requested ranged from the economy, politics, social life, the environment, religion, family, community...”<sup>v</sup>***

The core of the African concepts like Omenala and Ubuntu is that one cannot be a complete human being without the reciprocal affirmation of other human beings—umntu ngumtu ngabantu. The Akan of Ghana would say: onipa na oma onipa ye onipa: it is a human being who makes another person a human being. This relational view is extended also to non-living or transcendent beings, as explained here:

***“We have an ecological commitment to conserve and enrich. Our capacity to empathize is the core of our being and essential for the sustenance of life itself. The intimate totemic relationships with plants and animals reinforce our reverence for nature of which we are a part. For many Sub-Saharan African writers, this relatedness to everything (people, nature and ancestors) is captured by the Shona word Ukama” (Murove, 2009).***

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PERHAPS ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES WE  
FACE TODAY IS THE RETHINKING OF CAPITALISM AND CAPITAL  
IN THE CONTEXT OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HUMAN.

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African cosmology has an intuitive response to this, which is deeply rooted in the intertwined cultural, social and economic understanding of property in traditional African societies. For example, among the Igbo, where property is seen as a natural right and therewith a human right, for the satisfaction and protection of the needs of the individual, the family and the clan as a whole. As such, though the individual owns property, it is the family and the entire community which ultimately owns the individual. As such, whatever the individual acquired as private property (land, skills, technology, clothing) was based on the right of ‘access’ and ‘use’ in a proximate but not ultimate sense. The human being was placed at the centre in traditional society, but always as a holistic and integral part of the natural, social, economic, cultural and spiritual ecosystem.

***“The ancestors were thought to have obtained the ‘traditions and customs of the land’ (referred to as Omenala) from ‘Ala’ [the earth deity]. A modern interpretation of this may be the acknowledgement of nature and natural resources, including [land] air and water, as a gift to be used, managed and held in trust. This is an important element often lacking in modern business management where the pursuit of private interests inadequately recognizes responsibilities towards the use of natural resources. There is an urgent need for businesses [and the individuals that constitute them] to manage with greater responsibility the natural resources which actually belong to the entire human community.”***<sup>v</sup> One of the great ethical questions that generations of thinkers across all world systems of thought have posed over the ages is this: what does it mean to be human? Today, the question becomes: now that we are a geo-physical force of nature with extra-ordinary informational powers, what does it mean to be human in the Anthropocene? To answer this question, we need to bring African philosophy into conversation with the ‘post-humanist turn’ in Western social science.

The underlying science that substantiated the nature-culture binary is questioned across many disciplines. An alternative is offered by the notion of ‘complex adaptive systems’ (CAS) (Preiser, Biggs, De Vos and Folke, 2018). Following Murove, seeing reality as a CAS is remarkably similar to the relational worldview found in Sub-Saharan African philosophy (Murove, 2009; Coetzee, 2017). The interconnected relational nature of all reality sits at the very centre of the worldview expressed in both these systems of thought. This, in turn, has major implications for our understanding of what it means to be human in the Anthropocene. In the words of Rosi Braidotti (2013), one of the chief exponents of the Western post-human turn that is infusing many natural and social sciences:

***“The human of [classical] Humanism is neither an ideal nor an objective statistical average or middle ground. It rather spells out a systematized standard of recognizability – of Sameness – by which all others can be assessed, regulated and allotted to a designated social location. The human is a***

***normative convention, which does not make it inherently negative, just highly regulatory and hence instrumental to practices of exclusion and discrimination. The human norm stands for normality, normalcy and normativity. It functions by transposing a specific mode of being human into a generalized standard, which acquires transcendent values as the human: from male to masculine and onto human as the universalized format of humanity. This standard is posited as categorically and qualitatively distinct from the sexualized, racialized, naturalized others and also in opposition to the technological artefact. The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about ‘human nature’.***

***My anti-humanism leads me to object to the unitary subject of Humanism, including its socialist variables, and to replace it with a more complex and relational subject framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities.”*** (Braidotti, 2013: 26).

Together with the science that subverted the foundational nature-culture dualism (Capra, 1996; Merchant 2018) and the rise of ‘complex adaptive systems’ thinking (Preiser et al. 2018), the combined impact over the past three decades of feminism (that challenged sexualisation), post-colonial studies (that challenged racialisation), political ecology (that challenged naturalisation) and actor-network theory (that challenged technicism) has resulted in the collapse of ‘Vitruvian Man’. In its place is the relational self, where connectedness rather than separateness is valued in a way that reconstitutes what it means to be, know, learn, love and act. This includes the connectedness between all sexual and racial identities, as well as between humans and nature, and humans and technological artefacts. In this way, radical ‘multi-species’ relationality subverts classical Humanism (Haraway, 2008).

The conception of the relational self we see emerging out of Western post-humanism is remarkably similar to notions at the very centre of a long-established and substantial body of Sub-Saharan African philosophy with deep roots in pre-colonial cosmologies and cultural practices (Murove, 2009; Coetzee, 2017). For Murove, the two most important concepts in this body of knowledge are Ubuntu and Ukama: Ubuntu is about a relational humanness, but Ukama means relatedness of everything (Murove, 2009).

Significantly, Ukama is not merely about relatedness between people, but also between people and nature (including inanimate objects), and between people and ancestors (who are, in turn, experienced in very real ways in the everyday lives of many rural and urban Africans) (Murove, 2009). Indeed, extending relatedness to include ancestors and inanimate objects is African philosophy’s distinctive contribution to environmental ethics (Behrens, 2014). Based on an extensive review of African philosophical traditions and Western scientific thought, Murove concludes that western conceptions of science have “been applied in a way that has severed the Ukama between environmental well-being and humanity” (Murove, 2009:327). By contrast, trends like the ‘new systems science’ and western post-humanism are regarded by Murove as a “vindication of African values of interconnectedness” (Murove, 2009:326). He concludes by arguing that:



*“...African ethics, as espoused in the concepts of Ukama and Ubuntu, offers a plausible paradigm that can help the present generation, and humanity at large, to harmonise its behaviour with the natural environment. ... [T]hrough Ukama, ... an authentic understanding of human existence should embrace human togetherness in all spheres of existence – social, spiritual, economic and ecological. In Ukama with all these dimensions of human existence, the individual derives personality and character.”* (Murove, 2009:329)


As Western social science has caught up with African philosophy, Braidotti captures what is specific about the present context: *“We need a vision of the subject that is ‘worthy of the present’.”* (Braidotti, 2013:51) In the spirit of Ukama, are we prepared for a decolonial future with an appropriate sense of what it means to be human in this complex age of sustainability?

The status quo—the persistence of the ‘unitary subject of Humanism’—will ensure that the knowledge, ingenuity, creativity and inspiration required to make a deep and just transition happen will remain suppressed and constrained. The sexualization, racialization and naturalization associated with this version of being Human excludes women, people of colour and the web of life we are embedded within from being active partners in the production of the transformative knowledge we need to address the polycrisis we face. This systemic exclusion

*“result[s] in the active production of half-truths, or forms of partial knowledge about these others. ...[O]therness induces structural ignorance about those who, by being others, are posited as the outside ....The reduction to sub-human status of non-Western others is a constitutive source of ignorance, falsity and bad consciousness for the dominant subject who is responsible for their epistemic as well as social de-humanization.”* (Braidotti, 2013: 28 - emphasis added)

This epistemic convergence of the Sub-Saharan African philosophy of relatedness and Western post-humanism makes it possible to identify and challenge the dominant values of masculinism, racism, the dogma of the superiority of scientific reason, the devaluation of indigenous knowledge and the worship of the ever-rational individual homo economicus. If these values remain dominant, they will prohibit the emergence of the ‘transformed world’ envisaged in the Preamble to the SDGs and in the Planetary Emergency Plan. Where they are expressed most beautifully is via the notion of Ukama – a multi-species relationality that is allowed to flower within an ecocultural commons.

For Braidotti, the “complex and relational subject [is] framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities” (Braidotti, 2013:26 - emphasis added); similarly, for the South African philosopher Coetzee, the “the main ordering principles of sub-Saharan African thought and world senses are relationality, multiplicity, fluidity and difference, rather than sameness, exclusion and stability.” (Coetzee, 2017, emphasis added) The overlap from very different vintage points is striking.



THE STATUS QUO—THE PERSISTENCE OF THE ‘UNITARY  
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## 2. REVERENCE: RE-CLAIMING OWNERSHIP OF OUR 'AFRICAN WAY' AS EXPRESSED THROUGH VALUES, RESOURCES, IDENTITIES AND SOLUTIONS

Reverence means to deeply respect who we are to the extent that we can re-claim our context. Once the epistemic centre of the universe has been decolonized, a pluriverse of multiple centres of decolonial knowledge opens up. In this section we celebrate a wide range of initiatives, actions, processes, reforms and innovations that best express what Africa can bring to the world. Just because slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism and structural adjustment did so much damage, this does not mean greatness is impossible. As Ben Okri (1996) put it so eloquently:

*“Do you realise that you know more than you think you know? Do you realise that if you use all you know, and all the possibilities within you, that there is almost nothing that you can’t do? More serious than that is this fact: if you use more than you know that you know, the world will be as paradise. What we know compared to what we don’t know is like a grain of sand compared to a mountain. But what we don’t know, our unsuspected possibilities, is immense in us. That is our true power and kingdom. When nations do amazing things, that is because they create from what they know. And that is a lot. When they do extraordinary things, that is because they create from places in themselves, they didn’t suspect were there. But when a nation or an individual creates things so sublime—in a sort of permanent genius of inventiveness and delight—when they create things so miraculous that they are not seen or noticed or remarked upon by even the best minds*

*around, then that is because they create always from the vast unknown places within them. They create always from beyond. They make the undiscovered places and infinities in them their friend. They live on the invisible fields of their hidden genius.”*

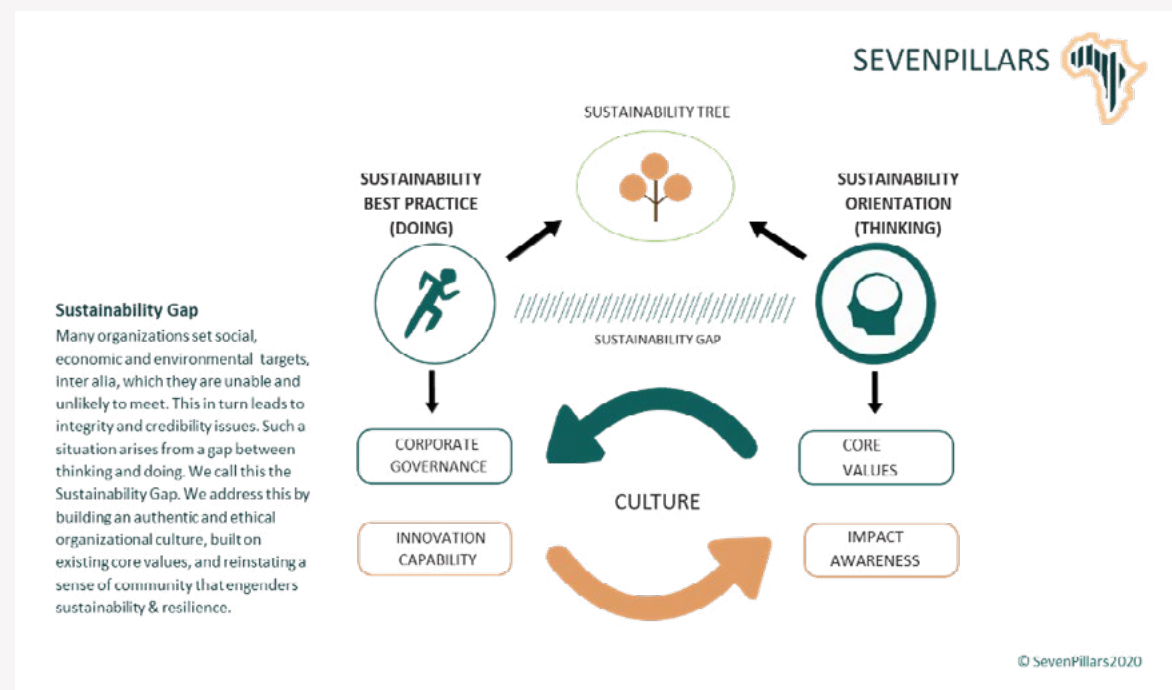
We offer a few stories of this ‘invisible fields of our hidden genius’. For example, Africa has the most innovative use of Fintec in the world (MPESA), and home-grown unicorns like Interswitch, yet we do not claim that excellence and lead with it to Rethink Finance and Finance Change on our continent and beyond, so that we can lead the change needed in the 21st century finance systems. This is in spite of the fact that our mobile banking is often much further advanced than that of many western countries. Another example is our vast wildlife and wildlands that are neither reflected in our balance sheets as African countries, nor treated as unique investment treasures for enhancing our prosperity and wellbeing wherefrom we harvest nature’s lessons and gifts (healing remedies yet to be decoded and documented and patented) to us in these uncertain times, and for the future of our biosphere.

By drawing on our deep cultural African traditions, and forging ethical values and societal norms that honour and respect our existential entanglement, we can more radically re-imagine social and economic policies of inclusion, more responsible forms of production and resource extraction, just distribution of resources, social equality and protection, responsible leadership and governance to emerge. This could be done by some practical interventions and applications by creating value systems that openly confront self-destructive and inhumane actions and policies or ideologies that:

- **acknowledge the reality of our woundedness** i.e. by embracing the concerns of stakeholders through a stakeholder mapping and assessment of materiality issues
- **transform neoliberal value systems** by redefining the corporate culture along the lines of the Seven Pillars (see below) and key stakeholders taking into cognizance all interests and aligning these with existing performance indicators of the company (understanding clearly that negative externalities can also be understood as risks, and thereby appealing also to the self-interest of the company as well as the communal interests i.e. the common good)
- **pay more interest to the core values** of our employees and our local environment and host communities and traditional culture because these warehouse the core value and ethical roots of the people, for example, respect for the environment is much more strongly embedded among the Igbo when we understand the culture of burying an umbilical cord next to a tree, which in turn makes the tree itself sacred and worthy of reverence because it is personified by its association with a specific human life.

Yet another example is in the field of integrated reporting and corporate governance where the ideals, principles and standards originated from the African continent have been by many counts ahead of global peers, though not necessarily applied in practice. Closing the gap between thinking and doing may be achieved by rooting our understanding of finance and economy, business and sustainability much more firmly in our traditional African principles, ethics and values and therefore establishing also the connection between past, present and future in a holistic way. This is significant, as it would yield a result whereby sustainability thinking—as captured in the evolving integrated reporting guidelines—may result in our vast wealth intangible natural and human resources being valued, respected and protected.





The modern application of traditional African jurisprudence and legal reasoning centres around creating peace and balance, rather than assigning victor and vanquished. Likewise, with the notion of circularity in traditional economies, where customs, history, and time-honoured beliefs guide economic decisions such as production and distribution. There are many instances of this:

- **The traditional economy centres around the family**, and the basis of resource allocation is usually according to need, not greed. In Igbo culture for instance, the rationale for economic decision-making draws from the 3 tiers of existence (the living, the yet unborn and the ancestors) and this forms a cornerstone in the Omenani Sustainability definition that goes beyond the present and the future to also incorporate the past. The same understanding of past, present and future is built into the recursive and infinitesimal orientation of societal organization and even communal architecture among the Igbo, wherein the villagers homes might encircle the leaders compound who in turn encircles within his compound the sacred grove of the ancestors inciting a recursive pattern that has no end since the ancestors trace back to beyond what the mind can remember—as such symbolizing also the eternity of life that considers the ancestors and the yet unborn in one infinite continuum;
- **Similarly, the notion of preserving certain parts of the forest as sacred** ensured the continuity and sustainability of the environment as no human was to interfere with the space wherein nature was allowed to reign supreme, ensuring balance and mutual respect between nature and humankind;
- **In pragmatic modern economies like Lagos** some of the traditional practices have prevailed. For instance, the preparation of food using organic packaging e.g. moin-moin and ofada rice are again being served creatively and beautifully in banana leaves. Similarly, the use of natural soil or even plastic waste as building materials is increasing and receiving high acclaim, and the art made of local waste and debris is being valued and called ‘art’.

- **The Igbos also valued highly certain foods that were grown locally**, like the yams which were considered a symbol of wealth. Likewise there were traditions built around the sanctity of foods that grew naturally and locally—with specific rules on the percentages of crop harvested that was to be replanted—all of which ensured a certain economic circularity embedded in the traditions, norms and culture of the people and the agronomy, sustained by the earth and the human beings that inhabited the area.
- **In terms of social equity, traditional practices prevailed** that ensured equitable access to resources e.g. land and seed yams, which meant that inequality in society was curbed and every human person had rights, no matter their status at birth, and could evolve based on entrepreneurial endeavour. Through traditional governance structures like the ‘umunne’ and ‘umunna’, all persons were also guaranteed rights to a fair hearing, ensuring that society continued to balance private interest, enterprise and the communal good.
- **Land, a primary asset in traditional society**—also symbolic of the value ascribed to nature – was held in trust, not ever owned absolutely. Thus, implying an ownership style which rewarded individual enterprise but also respected and upheld the long-term interest of the community. This tradition encouraged corporate social responsibility by ensuring the most enterprising in society provided enough for all to survive, including the lazy who had a right to harvest the leftovers from farmland after the rightful ‘owner’ had taken all they wanted. This meant that even the lazy and the poor had to work with dignity for their daily bread.

## MAKING EXPLICIT THE RELEVANCE OF LOCAL CULTURES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PAST FOR NAVIGATING THE FUTURE IS CRITICAL

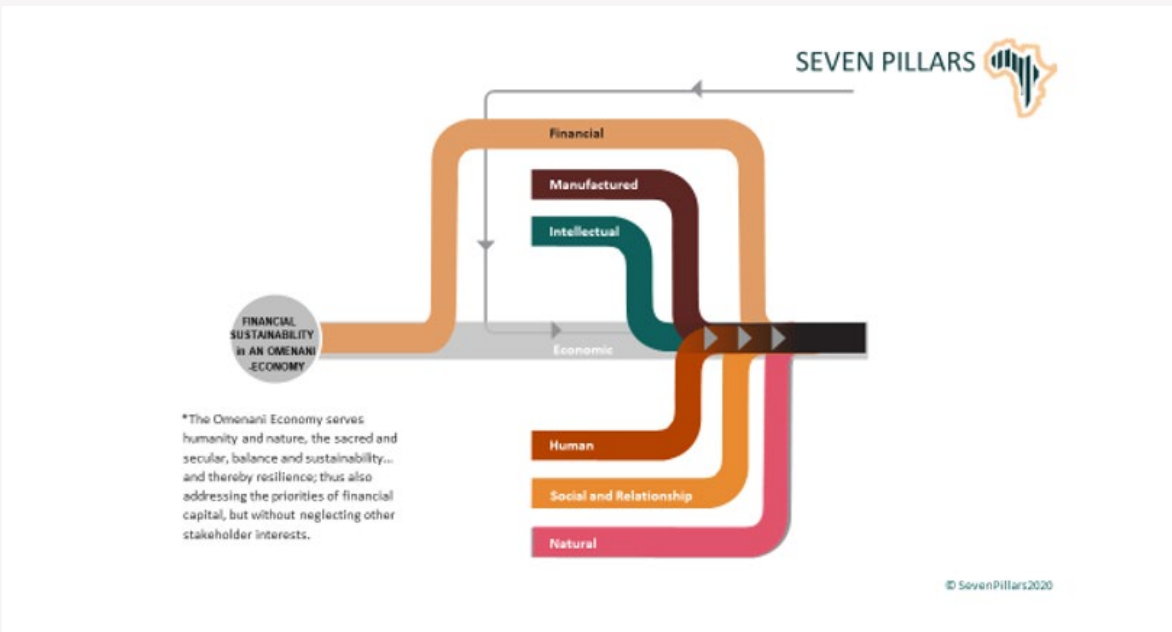
### 3. RESURRECTION: BUILDING COLLECTIVE MODES OF AFRICAN LEADERSHIP, CIVIL SOCIETY AND PUBLICNESS

To rebuild Africa within the pluriverse inspired by the Planetary Emergency Plan in a way that addresses the seeming intractability of the African challenges. For this we will need ‘visionary knowledge’ (Wilenius 2017) which combines knowledge of the past and present with the cultural, normative and ecological place-based practices to inform relational modes of governance that will bring the change we are hoping for. In Africa, where futures are often predicated upon western ideals of development, making explicit the relevance of local cultures and the importance of the past for navigating the future is critical (Pereira et al. 2018). Imagining hopeful and novel futures together in a world defined by complexity, diversity, and uncertainty calls for creative, collaborative, and experimental approaches and transformative modes of action. Shifting from a problem-centric approach to appreciative or strengths-based approaches may help unlock the deeper systemic and relational potential to create transformative pathways to change. To bring forth the resurrection of our African heritage, the following three interrelated challenges need to be addressed:



### 3.1 RETHINKING ECONOMICS, AND IN PARTICULAR WHAT THIS MEANS FOR FUTURE TRAJECTORIES OF DEVELOPMENT

In successfully applying the Omenani SevenPillars to develop the Sustainability Thinking, Culture and Reporting of Africa's largest business, between 2017 and 2020, it was possible to show the potential in aligning corporate governance and sustainability with the core values and impact orientation of a business, its employees, owners and key stakeholders. Additionally, achieving compliance with government regulations on sustainability reporting ahead of time, as the first premium board listed company in Nigeria to achieve this, was possible precisely because of the adoption of a community based, stakeholder centric and core values rooted approach to sustainability. Working from the inside out, and not just to fulfil laws that were being imposed externally, the development of a corporate culture of sustainability—which included economic impact—meant that the priorities and interests and values of the business owners were redefined in the context of key stakeholders including employees, neighbouring communities and the host economies. The SevenPillars Methodology evolved out of research conducted, and values distilled at the Bottom of the Pyramid working with hundreds of business to ascertain the traditional values and systems that made communities sustainable and resilient, such that these could be applied globally.<sup>vii</sup>

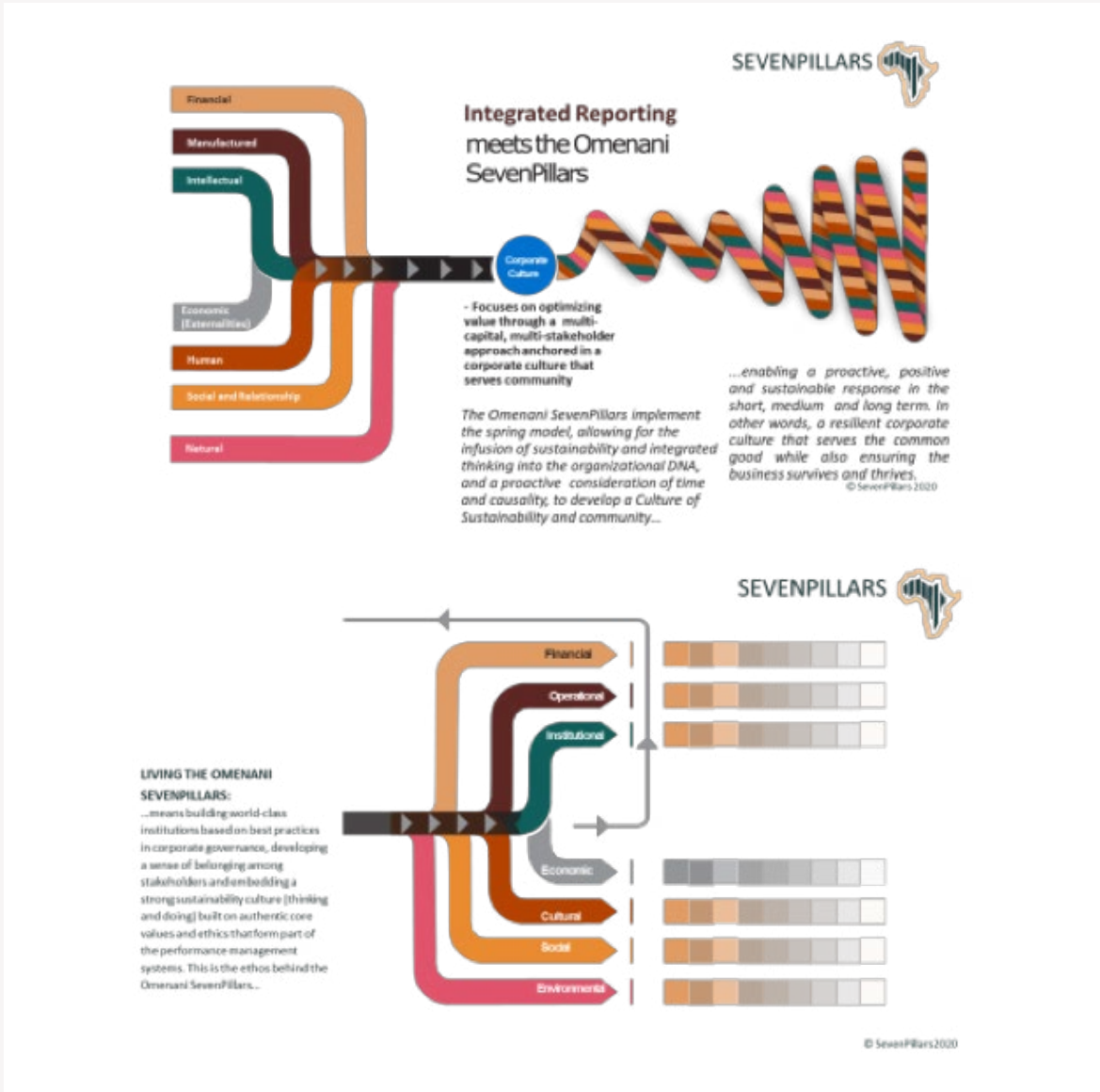


### 3.2 REINVENTING GOVERNANCE, AND IN PARTICULAR THE DESIGN OF STATE AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS, INCLUDING THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE PUBLIC SECTOR, THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE COMMONS;

The Growing Businesses Foundation (GBF) is a 21year old case study comprising projects with leading multinationals like MTN, ExxonMobil and Unilever in Nigeria. The outcome has been to demonstrate that to achieve synergy and win-win partnerships between diverse stakeholders spanning the public sector, private sector and civil society is a holistic, integral and progressive means of truly achieving development that is sustainable and enduring. Working with Unilever, GBF saw 4000 women

entrepreneurs empowered achieve a positive incremental contribution to Unilever annual revenues in excess of 20% during a year when the year on year overall revenues of the multinational dropped by 11%. In other words, the same principles that applied in traditional Igbo society worked – allowing the micro-retailers enough margins to live on at the Bottom of the Pyramid resulting in their businesses thriving in spite of a national recession. GBF invented the term 'Corporate Response-ability and Sustainability' in 2007 to emphasize that community-centered sustainable thinking in action should be core to business strategic thinking. This approach re-emphasizes that the holistic nature of 'African Cosmology' successfully applied to capitalism can produce positive outcomes for all, including businesses, without sacrificing the society, environment or the commons.

The figure below depicts the Omenani SevenPillars framework applied, whereby sustainability becomes the outcome of applying the Six Capitals of Integrated Reporting, with the intention to achieve sustainability by accounting for economic externalities (positive and negative) in order to achieve a more circular economy and responsible capitalism.





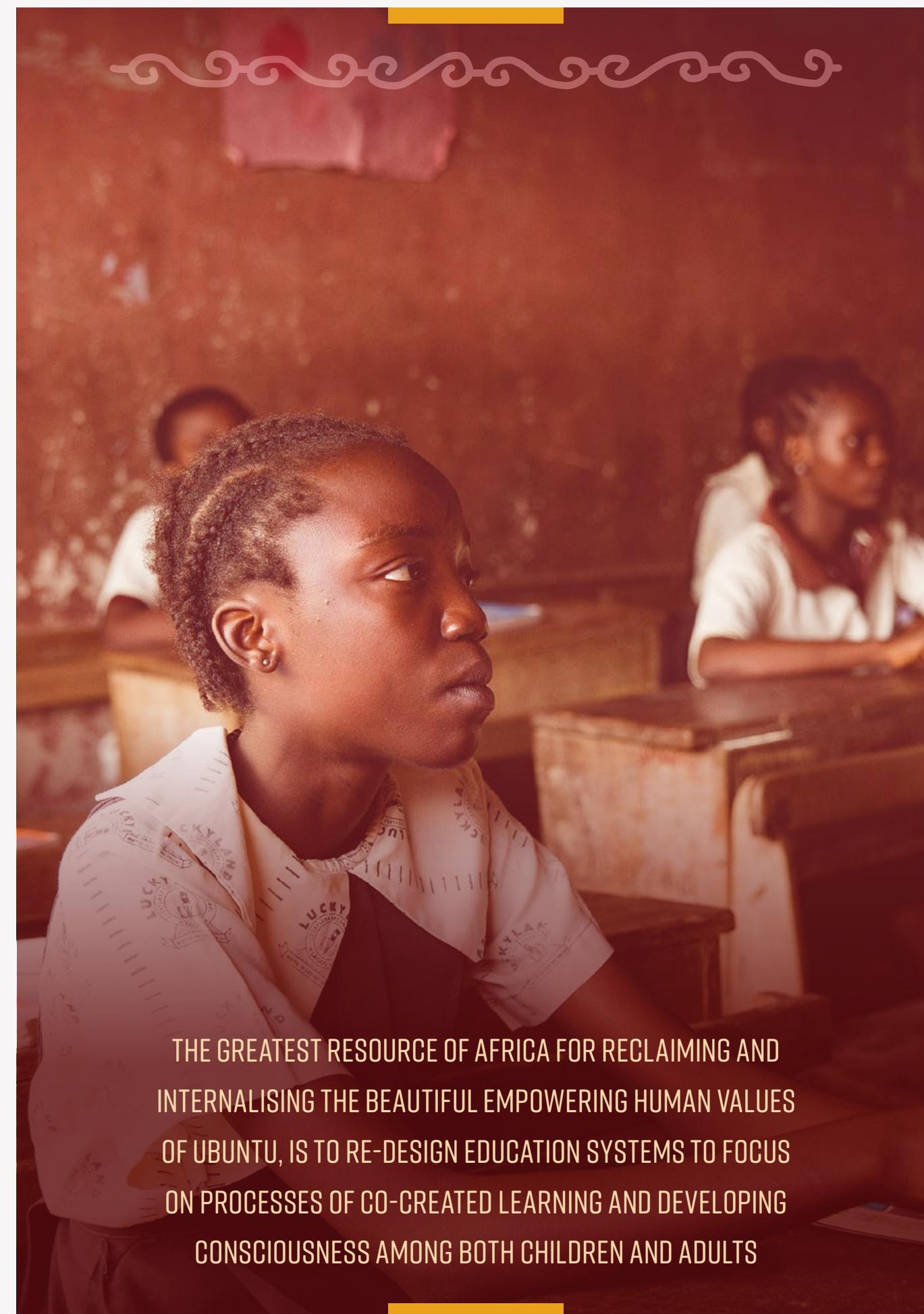
### 3.3 REDESIGNING EDUCATION, FROM THE EARLIEST AGE THROUGH TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF TERTIARY EDUCATION

Referencing the importance of Ubuntu in any educational system, Paulo Freire once said: ***“Authentic humanism consists in permitting the emergence of the awareness of our full humanity, as a condition and as an obligation, as a situation and as a project”***. This is a homegrown gift we must hold and nurture in Africa for the sake of the whole world as we transform education to take us into the dynamic, unpredictable, and challenging present and future of the 21st century. In order to establish a reimagined and empowered Africa, committed to embracing and enabling young people, the greatest resource of Africa for reclaiming and internalising the beautiful empowering human values of Ubuntu, is to re-design education systems to focus on processes of co-created learning and developing consciousness among both children and adults. We commit to this in order to reclaim and reconstruct our history, cultural heritage, identity, and shared humanity and we commit to work together to ensure a sustainable and dynamic future for the continent and all of its living beings.

A successful working model of African Consciousness education is the LEAP Science and Maths Schools of South Africa ([www.leapschool.org.za](http://www.leapschool.org.za)). For the past seventeen years the LEAP Schools have developed into a group of six small schools across four regions in South Africa serving children from the lowest economic quintile in the townships and rural communities. During this time more than 2300 students have graduated from LEAP Schools with over 75% of the graduates able to apply for access to university. Until now the average rate of university applications from the communities served by LEAP has been 5%. LEAP Schools prioritise the emotional development of LEAP students to develop in each student a strong and clear sense of self with heightened consciousness and metacognitive capacity enabling academic success and intrinsic values-driven self-regulation. In Africa the education of **‘Ubuntu’** must function as a unifying factor, bringing people together regardless of their background or access to wealth. In the reimagined education systems of Africa, the humanity of an individual will not be separated from the humanity of those around him. African citizens will recognise that we become fully human to the extent that we are included in relationships with others. In so doing we will create and develop solutions for a sustainable and thriving future for all in Africa and we will share these solutions creatively and generously in the global village.

Knowing that sustainable development depends on harnessing the energy of all of us—meaning that reimagined schools must function as outward looking community hubs in which all school community members actively develop as agents of care and change in their own communities—we must replace the fixed internalised colonial mindset of low expectations and compliance with a vibrant and unrestricted growth mindset that will ensure that our children will become caring, problem-solving, ethical, digitally literate, and creative global citizens willing to lead and speak truth to power in any context. The same model needs to be appropriately extended to higher education.

Every African child is a genius according to the original meanings of the word **‘genius’**, which are: ***‘to give birth’*** and ***‘to be zestful or joyous’***. The real meaning of genius is thus to ***“give birth to the joy”*** that is within each child. Every child is born with that capacity—we must fulfil our responsibility to unlocking this unique innate capacity in every African child. The solution lies in our own history, culture, and struggle against colonial oppression—activating consciousness and metacognitive capacity through mindful processes of active and engaged shared learning.



THE GREATEST RESOURCE OF AFRICA FOR RECLAIMING AND  
INTERNALISING THE BEAUTIFUL EMPOWERING HUMAN VALUES  
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CONSCIOUSNESS AMONG BOTH CHILDREN AND ADULTS



## 4. CONCLUSION

In addressing these challenges, the dream of **'Africa rising'** is not to be built on some imaginary cultural origin that sets it apart from any other cultural orientation. The moment of resurrection does not happen in rejecting a form of 'simple' Western ideology, but by Africa encountering itself (Houtondji 1996). This kind of homecoming invites Africa to embrace its internal pluralism, its historical depth and its essential openness to the world.

From an African perspective, surely it's time to build on the rich philosophical tradition of relational subjectivities cited above and then invoke the fighting spirit of Fanon when contemplating what it will take to translate decolonized conceptions of self into new real modes of collective action and social organisation within society (Fanon, 1963). As a founding contributor to post-colonial studies, he was obsessed with what it meant to contest, resist and transcend the 'othering' of the colonised subject, and therefore by extension, for this discussion, all who have been 'othered'. Fanon—and others in his tradition such as South Africa's Steve Biko (Mamdani, 2012)—were interested in the dismantling of the psycho-social apparatuses that the colonizer uses to control the minds of the colonized.

A key goal of the colonizer was to diminish via culture/religion and—where necessary—forcibly kill off (via torture, imprisonment, concentration camps, genocide, mass rape, forcible removal of children, slavery) the rage felt by the colonized. The goal was always docility. As far as the colonizer was concerned, the colonized become human when they become docile. It is as simple as that. Docility is the condition that allows the colonized to accept the dominant colonial discourse as normal or even 'natural' or, as the missionaries insisted, as 'God-given'. Writ large, the claim that docility defines what it means to be human is true for all who are 'othered' to this day. The granularity of everyday micro-power dynamics that reproduce the dominant patriarchal definition of what it means to be human by insisting on docility is today all-pervasive.

The question we face now is: having glimpsed the greatness of our inner capability to return to the source of our being, are we ready to reimagine our relationships as humans with all life on Mother Earth? Could we dare to dream ourselves into a Planetary Community that can live in harmony as interconnected and interdependent beings? We must begin by confronting the glaring contradiction presented by an African continent that does not model the beauty of **Ukama** in its political, social, economic and ecological relationships. Given the richness of its heritage, why is there a rupture between Ubuntu/Iwa/Suban/Ukama values and the current state in many Africa societies?

Africa's story is an evolution of traumatic ruptures: slavery, colonial conquest, and post-colonial exploitative governance and socio-economic systems. Each one of these manifold ruptures used dehumanization to break the will of its victims. Current neuroscience tells us that of all the forms of intergenerational traumas, humiliation has the most devastating impact. Africa's humiliation by racist conquerors and their missionary handmaidens devalued its culture and heritage. These efforts obscured our inheritance of God given black beauty. Racism persists to date and justifies colour-coded inequity across the globe only adding salt to these festering wounds.

Since colonization, humiliation has been encoded into development and governance narratives to reproduce coloniality. Following Ndlovu-Gatsheni, development after colonialism was justified in terms of **"catalogues of deficits and series of lacks, lacking history, lacking writing, lacking souls, lacking civilization, lacking responsibility, lacking development, lacking human rights and lacking democracy."** Development came to mean programmes to address these 'lacks'. It is a conception of development that has **"been accepted by Africans and their governments as key to their realization of freedom and fulfilment of the absent centre of ontology, without much success."** (loc.208-218)

Martha Cabrera is a psychologist who worked in her native Nicaragua in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch in the 1990s. She confronted the inability of the Nicaraguan people to rebuild their lives after the protracted war of independence against the US backed brutal regime. After intensive conversations with people on the ground she came to the following conclusion:

**"Trauma and pain afflict not only individuals. When they become widespread and ongoing, they affect entire communities and even the country as a whole... the implications are serious for people's health, the resilience of the country's social fabric, the success of development schemes, and the hope of future generations"** (Transcribed Talk by Martha Cabrera <https://www.medico.de>).

As a human community, we have seriously underestimated the impact of multiple intergenerational traumas on people. Especially those whose worldview rests so heavily on the assumption that our humanity is authenticated in its affirmation by other people. The systemic denial of African humanity, that was structured into the process of colonial conquest combined with slavery across the continent, has devastated the very foundations of African traditional belief systems. It severed the links Africans believe are inextricable between people, simply because they are part of our shared humanity.

To add insult to injury colonial conquerors denied the validity of the African religious belief systems that affirm the presence of the divine in all living beings. The replacement of these values and this way of life with a god that demanded change in our culture, rejection of our languages including assuming foreign names that are characterised as Christian names, was the ultimate cultural genocide. Africans underwent a radical change of culture and language; they not only lost their land and their dignity, but also the anchors of their belief systems. Opuku reminds us of the wisdom of our ancestors that: **"A person who is dressed in other people's clothes is naked, and a person who is fed on other people's food is always hungry."**

Africa, like many regions in the world where Christianity holds sway has allowed itself to be dressed in other people's clothes, embraced others' languages as the official mediums of communication, and even changed indigenous names to accommodate those acceptable to the gods of conquerors. Africans eat foreign foods that will never satisfy their hunger. Africa has yet to express itself fully as a contributing member of the community of nations. It has yet to bring its rich heritage of Ubuntu/Suban/Ukama into the circle of ideas of the world community and give shape to global culture.



# WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

The first step in any healing process is the acknowledgement of the woundedness that is plaguing us. This was demonstrated in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s as the masses rose up in protest. Over the past decade and a half, there have been mass uprisings in 40 African countries. As many have argued, outrage holds the key to psychological liberation of the self from the prison of inferiority complexes imposed by other people, who consider themselves superior.

The second step requires sustaining self-liberation and transforming the value system of the entire society toward healing. Transforming value systems of societies is hard work. It requires investments in intergenerational conversations and narratives that enable people to externalize their fears and anxieties and to rekindle the life spark essential to living a full life. The logic driving the existing socio-economic and socio-ecological system needs to be identified and changed to align with what matters within the value system of Ubuntu/Ukama/Omenala. In this worldview, human life and healthy environments that sustain life take centre stage. For Ubuntu and Ukama, the wellbeing of people and the biosphere are the measures of success in all social endeavours. Our education and healthcare systems, our human settlements and energy systems, our livelihoods and resource systems, should also reflect Ubuntu/Ukama/Omenala values. The COVID moment has heightened the urgency of this second step not just for South Africa, not just for the whole African continent, but for the entire world.

The third step is a case for Africa to pay more attention to its ancient history as part of the healing of its wounds. John Henrik Clarke, an African-American historian, wrote:

**“History is not everything, but it is a starting point. History is a clock that people use to tell their political and cultural time of day. It is a compass they use to find themselves on the map of human geography. It tells them where they are, but more importantly, what they must be. (...) A people’s relationship to their heritage is the same as that of a mother to a child”** (John Hendrik Clarke <https://www.goodreads.com>).

The teaching of history, not only in Africa but globally, can rob our children of the opportunity of finding themselves on the map of human and ecological geography as proud global citizens. African leaders need to invest in transforming the teaching of history to enable African children to take pride in their ancient origins and rich heritage.

By re-imagining new and hopeful narratives for generative African futures, that include the elements of remembrance, reverence and resurrection, we can offer the world a demonstration of “hope in motion”. As Cornel West (2017) suggests: **“Being a hope is being in motion, on the move with body on the line, mind set on freedom, soul full of courage, and heart shot through with love”**.

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iii <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000263829>

iv Ibid.

v Ibid. p 401

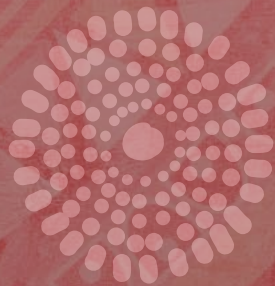
vi Ibid, p 10; cf Ike, O & Edozien, N.N. Understanding Africa Traditional Legal Reasoning, Jurisprudence & Justice in Igboland; 2001, p 18, 20 ff;

vii Edozien, NN, The Ownership and Management Structures in the Economy: African Traditional Values Applied to Modern Issues of Sustainability and the Corporate Governance Function, 2006



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