# TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN AN INSECURE AND DISRUPTIVE ERA: BUILDING ETHICAL, RESILIENT AND IMPACTFUL LEADERS FOR AFRICA

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## 1. Introduction

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, partners, and students, it is a great honour to deliver this keynote address at this landmark International Conference on Leadership and Governance for Sustainable Change and Wealth Creation. I commend Afe Babalola University, Trinity Western University, and the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD) for their vision in convening this gathering at a time when our world—and particularly Africa—is undergoing rapid, complex, and often disruptive transformations.

The theme of this conference, *"Shaping Transformational Leaders for a Changing World: Tackling Insecurity, Governance and Development,"* is not only timely but imperative. Across the globe, societies are grappling with multiple intersecting crises—climate change, insecurity, economic inequality, technological disruption, and democratic backsliding. The quality of leadership has become the single most critical determinant of whether nations will thrive or falter in the face of these challenges (Igbuzor, 2025; Igbuzor, 2018).

Leadership has long been recognized as one of the most decisive variables that determine the trajectory of nations and organizations. As Chinua Achebe (1983) famously noted, *"The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership."* This observation remains profoundly relevant today.

Recent studies show that the world is experiencing a leadership crisis, with 86% of global experts identifying inadequate leadership as a major challenge to solving contemporary problems (Igbuzor, 2018). In Nigeria and many parts of Africa, this crisis manifests in poor governance, insecurity, elite capture, weak institutions, exclusionary politics, and underdevelopment despite vast human and material resources.

The persistence of insecurity—from terrorism and banditry to communal conflicts and organized crime—exposes deep governance gaps. Inadequate leadership has contributed to the inability to craft inclusive, evidence-based strategies for nation-building and security sector transformation. Economic and development challenges are compounded by corruption, lack of long-term planning, weak public institutions, and exclusion of large segments of the population, including youth, women, and marginalized communities, from governance and development processes.

In order to change the trajectory of development across the world especially in Africa, there is the urgent need to build transformational leaders. This is why the theme of this keynote address *Transformational Leadership in an Insecure and Disruptive Era:*

*Building Ethical, Resilient and Impactful Leaders for Africa* is very relevant and urgent. We live in a world defined by insecurity, volatility, and disruption. From violent conflicts and terrorism to climate crises, artificial intelligence, and economic uncertainty, Africa finds itself at a crossroads between promise and peril. The continent's trajectory in the next decade will depend not merely on resources or technology—but on the **quality of leadership** that emerges to navigate this complex era. Leadership is the most important variable that affects the performance and development of any organization or nation. Indeed, as John Maxwell reminds us, *"everything rises and falls on leadership."*

## 2. Understanding Transformational Leadership

Leadership has been defined in various ways. John Maxwell (1998) describes it simply as *influence*, while Myles Munroe (2008) sees it as the ability to inspire others to pursue a common purpose. Transformational leadership goes beyond influencing people or maintaining systems—it is about changing people and societies for the better. It is characterized by vision, integrity, empathy, and a strong moral compass.

According to Burns (1978) and Bass & Avolio (1994), transformational leaders motivate followers to exceed expectations by appealing to higher ideals and values. They act as change agents who challenge the status quo, stimulate innovation, and prioritize long-term goals without compromising ethical principles.

Africa faces multifaceted challenges: governance deficits, economic inequality, insecurity, and erosion of values. Transformational leadership is thus not a luxury; it is a necessity for national rebirth. It emphasizes character, vision, and the ability to mobilize people for positive change. Transformational leaders differ from transactional ones. While the latter focus on compliance, performance, and rewards, transformational leaders seek to *transform* mindsets, institutions, and values. They inspire followers to think beyond personal gain, creating self-perpetuating systems of integrity and innovation (Bass, 1999; Bolden et al., 2003). Transformational leadership is about change—not cosmetic change, but deep transformation in values, vision, and systems. It transcends daily management concerns to focus on long-term goals, meaning, and moral purpose.

Transformational leaders are *change agents*—courageous, value-driven, visionary, and capable of mobilizing people to achieve shared purpose. They do not merely manage structures; they inspire transformation in the hearts and minds of people. Transformational leadership entails:
- Enlarging vision and deepening understanding;
- Clarifying values and aligning behaviour with ethical principles;

- Creating self-perpetuating systems that promote accountability, service, and learning;
- Building organizations and nations that are resilient and people-centred.

In contrast, transactional leaders merely maintain the status quo, focusing on rules, short-term targets, and efficiency. Transformational leaders focus on **purpose, principles, and people**.

## 3. The Context: Insecurity, Disruption and the Transformational Leadership Imperative

The 21st century has unleashed multiple disruptions—technological, social, political, and environmental. In Africa, these are compounded by endemic insecurity and governance crises.

We face *terrorism, banditry, farmer-herder clashes, coups, political instability, and economic exclusion.* These insecurities are symptoms of deeper structural issues: weak institutions, leadership failures, and erosion of public trust.

Technological disruption adds another layer. Artificial intelligence, automation, and the digital revolution are transforming labour markets and governance. Yet Africa lags behind in adapting to this new order. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed both our fragility and our potential.

This is the reality of the *disruptive era*—where change is constant, and uncertainty is the new normal. The question is not how to avoid disruption but how to lead through it.
In a world characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity, disruption and diversity (VUCADD), what is required is not transactional leadership focused on short-term gains, but transformational leadership — leadership that envisions and drives fundamental change.
Transformational leaders:
- Live their ideals and embody ethical values;
- Articulate a compelling vision of the future;
- Stimulate innovative thinking;
- Coach and develop others; and
- Build trust and collective commitment

As Myles Munroe rightly stated, "The world is filled with followers, supervisors and managers but very few leaders." Building a new generation of transformational leaders is therefore a strategic imperative for Africa's development.

## 4. Building Transformational Leaders: Framework and Practice

Leadership, contrary to popular belief, can be learned. As Myles Munroe (2008) stated, *"True leaders are not born; they are made."* He put it aptly:

> There is leadership potential in every person. Despite this universal latent ability, very few individuals realise this power, and fewer still have responded effectively to the call. As a result, our nations, societies and communities are suffering from an astounding leadership void. (Munroe, 1993)

At the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD), we have, over the past one and a half decade, demonstrated that leadership skills can be cultivated through structured education, mentorship, and practice. Our Leadership School trains leaders who embody vision, discipline, and service, and who go on to transform their workplaces, communities, and nations (Igbuzor, 2018). We have graduated three thousand and twenty students over the past sixteen years with outstanding testimonies.

Developing transformational leaders involves nurturing key traits: integrity, focus, empathy, courage, and a commitment to developing others. It also requires institutional mechanisms—leadership schools, mentorship networks, and intergenerational dialogues—to ensure leadership continuity.

Research and experience demonstrate that leaders are made, not born. Drawing from over sixteen years of leadership development through the Centre LSD Leadership School, we have identified key pillars for shaping transformational leaders (Igbuzor, 2018):

1. **Vision and Strategic Thinking** – Leaders must be equipped to understand complex contexts and design long-term strategies.
2. **Values and Integrity** – Leadership requires ethical foundations and character.
3. **Problem-Solving and Innovation** – Leaders must anticipate, define, and address challenges creatively.
4. **Influence and People Development** – Leadership is influence and building others is central to sustaining leadership impact.
5. **Adaptive Capacity** – Navigating uncertainty requires emotional intelligence and flexibility.

Transformational leadership development must be intentional and institutionalized through leadership academies, universities, civil service reforms, political party recruitment processes, and civil society platforms. This is why the partnership between Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti (ABUAD), Nigeria, Trinity Western University (TWU), Vancouver, Canada, and the African Centre for Leadership, Strategy & Development (Centre LSD), Abuja, Nigeria is timely, strategic and

potentially revolutionary in changing the leadership trajectory across the world.

Trinity Western University is arguably the global leader in leadership education emphasizing values-based leadership, servant leadership, ethical formation and character development. Its offerings include Master of Arts in Leadership (MA in Leadership); graduate Certificate in Leadership and Education Leadership Certificate; BA in Leadership; MA in Educational Leadership and other specialised streams and Sectoral Leadership.

ABUAD was founded by Aare Afe Babalola in 2009 with mission oriented toward excellence, human capital development and nation building. The University has contributed to addressing the "leadership deficit" in Nigeria through education, character formation and opportunities for governance and service through international leadership and governance conferences; thought leadership/public lectures; value, character and ethical emphasis; partnership and institutional messaging. The founder Aare Afe Babalola is a role model in leadership, philanthropy and educational efforts. He received the Obafemi Awolowo Leadership award in 2018 for "exuding excellence in leadership qualities" and for his contribution to human capital development through education. Today ABUAD is arguably the fastest growing private University in Africa.

## 5. The Ethical Imperative of Leadership in Africa

Across Africa, the crisis of governance, underdevelopment, and corruption points not to a lack of resources or talent but to a profound deficit in ethical leadership (Igbuzor, 2021). The moral compass of leaders shape institutions, influences public trust, and determines whether power serves the people or enslaves them. Ethical leadership entails leading with integrity, transparency, fairness, and accountability. It goes beyond technical competence or charisma to the moral disposition of leaders who act in the public interest. As Aristotle taught, ethical virtue is not an abstract ideal, but a habit formed through consistent right action. Ethical leaders embody honesty, justice, and service—they lead not merely by authority but by moral example.

Robert Klitgaard's famous formula—**Corruption = (Monopoly + Discretion) – (Accountability + Integrity + Transparency)**—demonstrates how leadership ethics can make or break governance systems (Klitgaard, 1988). When integrity and accountability are low, corruption thrives; when leaders institutionalize ethical conduct, nations flourish.

Africa's developmental setbacks are deeply rooted in a moral and ethical crisis. Corruption diverts resources from health, education, and infrastructure into private pockets. It distorts meritocracy, undermines the rule of law, and perpetuates poverty.

Nigeria's experience, for instance, reveals that despite multiple anti-corruption laws and agencies, unethical practices persist due to weak enforcement and moral decay (Igbuzor, 2021).

Africa's renaissance therefore demands leaders who are ethical visionaries—men and women who see public office as stewardship, not ownership. Ethical leadership requires setting the *tone at the top*: living out the values of honesty, humility, and accountability. Leaders must build systems that prevent corruption through transparency, open governance, and citizen engagement. Ethical codes of conduct should be enforced in public institutions, complemented by civic education that nurtures moral consciousness among citizens.

Furthermore, the ethical imperative extends beyond individual virtue to institutional ethics. Integrity systems—such as corruption risk assessments, whistleblower protections, and independent oversight bodies—are crucial in cultivating ethical environments (Igbuzor, 2021). Ethical leadership must be both *personal* and *systemic.*

In an insecure world, ethics is not optional—it is foundational. Leaders must model integrity, transparency, and inclusivity, creating a culture where honesty is rewarded, and corruption is punished.

Luckily, there are African Philosophical thoughts upon which ethical and collective leadership can be built. African leadership traditions are deeply rooted in indigenous philosophies that emphasize communalism, accountability, and human dignity. Among these traditions is **Ubuntu**, a South African philosophy summarized as *"I am because we are."* Ubuntu underscores interconnectedness, mutual respect, and the prioritization of community well-being over individual ambition (Mbigi, 2005; Tutu, 1999). Similarly, the Yoruba philosophy of **Omoluabi** celebrates the leader as a person of virtue and integrity—honest, respectful, courageous, and just—whose character is moulded by and accountable to the community (Akinyemi, 2014).

From Ghana, the Akan concept of **Sankofa**, symbolized by a bird looking backward while moving forward, teaches that leaders must retrieve wisdom from the past to guide future actions (Agyeman, 2006). In Tanzania, Julius Nyerere's concept of **Ujamaa** emphasized cooperative self-reliance, equality, and grassroots participation as essential for human development and social cohesion (Nyerere, 1968). Similarly, **Harambee**, a Swahili term popularized by Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya meaning "let us pull together," promotes collective effort and solidarity in nation-building (Mutiso, 1975). This has been adopted by many communities in Africa. The Urhobos of Nigeria

call it *Oshobe.* Among the Igbo of Nigeria, the principle of Oha na Eze emphasizes that people (oha) with the King (eze) frames leadership as stewarding communal will through councils of elders, age grades, and assemblies (oha) (Oguejiofor, 2019). These African philosophies share a moral foundation emphasizing dignity, virtue, consensus, and community. They contrast with the individualistic paradigms of Western leadership models by centering humanity, interdependence, and service. Hence, effective African leadership must reconcile these indigenous principles with contemporary governance and development challenges to produce leaders who are ethical, inclusive, and transformative (Igbuzor, 2025).

Given the continent's persistent challenges—bad governance, corruption, unemployment, gender inequality, and environmental degradation—Africa requires a new generation of leaders who can challenge conventional approaches, inspire shared visions, and promote innovation. The type of leadership Africa needs is **dynamic, strategic, visionary, and transformative**—leaders who empower others, think systemically, and are anchored in ethical and inclusive principles (Igbuzor, 2025). Transformative African leaders must possess the courage to reimagine systems and structures to achieve equity, justice, and sustainable development. They must move beyond personal and organizational interests to embrace public value and community flourishing. Such leaders embody ethical leadership, grounded in integrity, transparency, and accountability; and inclusive leadership, characterized by the recognition and engagement of diverse voices, including women, youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities (Bolden & Kirk, 2009).

## 6. Building Resilient and Impactful Leaders for Africa
Resilience in leadership refers to the ability to remain steadfast, adaptive, and forward-looking in the face of adversity. Impactful leadership, on the other hand, speaks to the capacity to produce measurable transformation—leaders whose vision, integrity, and service bring lasting positive change. Resilient and impactful leaders are not defined by their titles but by their tenacity, adaptability, and capacity to inspire and mobilize others toward a shared purpose.

Africa faces complex challenges—governance deficits, insecurity, unemployment, inequality, and technological disruption. Yet, these challenges also present opportunities for innovative and courageous leadership. In an era of insecurity and volatility, the need for leaders who can navigate uncertainty, remain ethical, and build institutions that endure has never been greater (Igbuzor, 2025).

Resilient leaders learn from failure; they adapt rather than collapse under pressure. Impactful leaders move beyond rhetoric to measurable action—they design systems that serve people, build accountability into governance, and ensure that progress is

inclusive. As Bass and Avolio (1994) noted, transformational leaders are change agents who mobilize followers around values and vision rather than fear or coercion.

To build resilient and impactful leaders, four dimensions are essential:
1. **Vision and Purpose:** Leaders must have clarity of direction and the courage to pursue long-term goals despite adversity.
2. **Values and Integrity:** Resilience without ethics is manipulation; impact without morality is exploitation.
3. **Adaptability and Innovation:** Resilient leaders anticipate change and convert crises into opportunities.
4. **Mentorship and Multiplication:** Great leaders do not only achieve success; they raise others who will sustain it.

As Myles Munroe (2008) observed, *"True leaders are ordinary people who accept or are placed under extraordinary circumstances that bring forth their latent potential."*
Resilient and impactful leaders build strong institutions rather than personal empires. They prioritize systems over self and continuity over charisma. Transformational leadership, as I have always argued is inseparable from institution-building—it requires leaders who can design frameworks, enforce accountability, and foster cultures of integrity and performance (Igbuzor, 2019). Such leaders ensure that governance is not dependent on personalities but anchored on principles and structures.

Resilience is the hallmark of transformative leadership. Africa's leaders must be adaptive, emotionally intelligent, and visionary. To build such leaders, we must invest in **leadership development ecosystems**—formal institutions, leadership schools, mentorship networks, and civic education systems.

## 7. Leadership, Governance, and Institutional Strengthening
Across Africa, the progress or stagnation of nations is largely determined by the quality of leadership, the effectiveness of governance, and the strength of institutions. Leadership defines vision, governance translates that vision into policy and practice, and institutions ensure that such policies are sustained and delivered effectively. Where any of these three is weak, development suffers (Igbuzor, 2018; Ake, 1996). In the African context, these elements are often undermined by corruption, weak accountability mechanisms, and personalisation of power. However, the failure of leadership inevitably translates into weak governance and dysfunctional institutions—a vicious cycle that must be broken if Africa is to achieve inclusive and sustainable development.

Leadership and governance are inseparable twins in national development. Leadership provides direction, while governance provides the framework for accountability and participation. Good governance ensures that power is exercised transparently, laws are enforced fairly, and citizens' voices are heard. Yet, many African nations face a crisis of governance rooted in poor leadership—leaders who prioritize personal interests over national good and who weaken institutions for political survival (Igbuzor, 2025).

Transformational leadership offers a way forward. It calls for ethical, visionary, and servant leaders who inspire citizens and strengthen governance systems rather than exploit them. Leadership is not about domination; it is about stewardship.

Institutions are the backbone of governance. When institutions are strong, they enforce accountability, protect citizens, and ensure policy continuity beyond individual leaders. Nigeria and much of Africa have witnessed repeated waves of public sector reforms that often fail to achieve lasting results due to weak political will, poor implementation, and lack of ownership. Effective institutions embody three core attributes: **effectiveness**, **accountability**, and **inclusiveness**. These principles align with Sustainable Development Goal 16, which emphasizes building strong institutions for peace, justice, and sustainable development. Strong institutions are those that operate on rule of law, deliver services efficiently, and provide checks on executive power.

Institutional strengthening therefore requires:
- Transparent and merit-based civil service systems;
- Independent judiciary and legislative oversight;
- Participatory governance where citizens hold leaders accountable; and
- Continuous reform processes that adapt to emerging realities.

As the Commonwealth principles on public sector reform highlight, institutional effectiveness depends on professionalism, innovation, ethics, and goal-oriented competency (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2015).

Leadership is central to institutional transformation. Effective leaders do not only establish rules; they model them. They understand that institutions outlive individuals. Transformational leaders strengthen institutions by building systems of accountability, meritocracy, and civic participation.

As Claude Ake (1996) argued, Africa's development crisis is not primarily economic but political rooted in governance failures and institutional weaknesses. Therefore, the strengthening of democratic governance, institutional independence, and civic

engagement remains imperative.

## 8. The African Imperative: Towards an Ethical and Innovative Future

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Africa stands today at a defining moment in its history—facing unprecedented challenges but also unparalleled opportunities. The 21st century presents us with a dual reality: on one hand, the disruptive forces of technology, insecurity, and global inequality; and on the other, the promise of demographic advantage, innovation, and moral awakening.

The African imperative is clear: we must build a future anchored on ethics, innovation, and inclusive governance. The prosperity and dignity of our continent will not emerge from the abundance of resources alone, but from the quality of our leadership, the integrity of our systems, and the creativity of our people (Igbuzor, 2025; Igbuzor, 2018). Across Africa, the crisis of development is rooted not merely in economic deprivation but in a deficit of ethical leadership (Igbuzor, 2021). Therefore, the African imperative begins with rebuilding ethical consciousness—leaders who see public office as stewardship, not ownership; citizens who demand accountability; and institutions that reward honesty over patronage. Ethics must become the currency of African leadership. Without moral reform, no technological or economic innovation can endure.

The second pillar of the African imperative is innovation. The future of Africa depends on our ability to harness creativity and technology for inclusive growth. As the Fourth Industrial Revolution unfolds, Africa cannot remain a consumer of foreign technology—it must become a producer of ideas and solutions. Innovation, however, is not limited to technology. It includes innovative governance, education, and social organization. We must invest in science, research, and entrepreneurship ecosystems that empower young Africans to design solutions for local problems—from renewable energy and fintech to sustainable agriculture and digital governance. Transformational leadership, as I have argued elsewhere, thrives on innovation—it challenges the status quo, stimulates new thinking, and creates self-perpetuating systems of excellence (Igbuzor, 2018; Bass & Avolio, 1994). For Africa to thrive, we must connect innovation with ethics—creativity with conscience. The African imperative demands leaders who are ethical, visionary, and innovative. Strong institutions are built by ethical leaders who design systems, not empires; who build accountability, not adulation.  To achieve the Africa of our dreams, we must institutionalize leadership training, strengthen governance, and create enabling environments for young innovators.

The Africa we envision must be guided by five imperatives:
1. Ethical Leadership: Leaders guided by conscience, humility, and public interest.
2. Innovative Education: Curricula that promote creativity, technology, and civic responsibility.
3. Institutional Integrity: Systems that reward merit, transparency, and service.
4. Inclusive Governance: Spaces for youth, women, and marginalized communities in decision-making.
5. Continental Collaboration: Harnessing African solidarity through platforms like the African Union and ECOWAS.

This is the pathway to the *Africa We Want*—ethical, innovative, and globally competitive. Africa's renaissance will not be imported; it will be imagined, built, and led by Africans who believe that transformation begins with integrity and innovation. As Nelson Mandela once said, *"It always seems impossible until it is done."*

## 9. Conclusion
Distinguished participants, the time to act is now. Africa cannot afford to wait for another generation to do what ours has failed to do. The mantle of transformation rests upon us—leaders in government, academia, civil society, business, and the faith community. We must rise above complacency and cynicism to reimagine the future we desire and deserve.

Let us institutionalize leadership training across our schools and universities, ensuring that leadership formation becomes as essential as literacy. Let us reform governance to reward merit, integrity, and innovation rather than mediocrity and patronage. Let us deliberately cultivate a continental network of ethical, value-driven, and impact-oriented leaders—men and women who are not prisoners of the past but architects of the future.

We must mainstream youth and gender inclusion—not as a token of progress, but as a strategic imperative for sustainability. And we must strengthen collaboration across the continent through platforms such as the African Union, ECOWAS, and civil society networks that connect vision to action and ideals to impact.

The time has come for Africa to lead with conscience, to govern with courage, and to innovate with compassion. This is the moment to transform our values into vision, our knowledge into impact, and our collective dreams into enduring legacies.

Leadership remains both Africa's greatest challenge and its greatest opportunity. The

insecurity and disruptions of our time are not signs of defeat but invitations to courage. Every generation is called to shape history; ours is called to redeem it.

Let us therefore build leaders who are ethical in conduct, resilient in adversity, and impactful in service—leaders who do not just occupy office but transform society; who do not merely react to disruption but harness it to create progress; who do not live for applause but for purpose.

As we leave this conference, let us commit to being those leaders—leaders of vision, virtue, and value. For the future of Africa will not be determined by chance but by choice—the choice to lead with integrity, to act with courage, and to serve with humility.

May this conference ignite a continental movement of transformational leadership that rebuilds trust, renews hope, and reclaims Africa's destiny. And may history remember that we stood at the crossroads and chose to lead Africa into an ethical, innovative, and prosperous future.
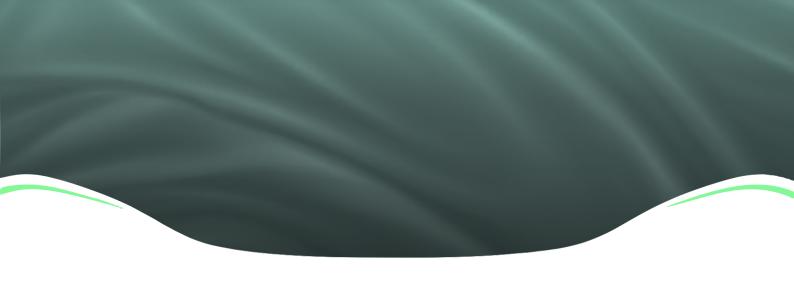Thank you and may God bless Africa.

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