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## Kenya gives mother Africa its best

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By Dennis Onyango

Sometimes in September 2008, a small school with big dreams will open its doors to the children of Africa hoping to change things once and for all. Saying its vision is "To Develop the Next Generation of African Leaders," and its mission to "Educate and Develop Outstanding Students into Principled, Ethical Leaders for Africa, the African Leadership Academy, located in Johannesburg, South Africa, will open its doors to some 250 of "the most promising 15-18 years old gifted high school children from Africa and the rest of the world and pump in to them a great mission.

The students, at least two from each of the 54 African States, will undergo a different kind of education.

By April 2008, the school will have assembled its first class of about 100 students selected from across the continent on a "need-blind basis" with expectation that at least half will be on full scholarship.

Those exceptionally gifted children of Africa will most likely open their school and learn under a respected Kenyan high school principal.

The burden of whether this idea flies or flops, will rest on the four and another Kenyan of undoubted potential.

### Training people to become leaders

After shopping and conducting interviews across the world looking for the person to head ALA, the Academy has settled for Kenya's Mr Christopher Khaemba, the Principal of Alliance Boys High School, as its founding Dean.

If he accepts the offer, Khaemba will be at Alliance till the end of the year to see off the current Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE) candidates, then move to South Africa next year to champion the idea.

ALA is the story of those great innovations that begin as a



**-The entrance to the main block at the African Leadership Academy in South Africa**

hobby, like Yahoo or Africa online and the World Wide Web, then evolve into global phenomenon that change the way people view life or do business.

The Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the school is Mr Fred Swaniker, a 30-year old Ghanaian who calls himself a citizen of Africa. He teamed up with Acha Leke, a Cameroonian product of Stanford's Engineering school, Chris Bradford, a US citizen and graduate of Yale and Stanford and Peter Mobaur, a German with extensive consultancy and business experiences in Africa, to come up with the school.

The school's founders believe they can use education to create the leadership and unity that politics has failed to provide. It will have strong emphasis on teaching leadership.

"We coach athletes so that they can perform. We train people to become doctors. Why are we not training people to become leaders?" Mr Swaniker asked in an interview in Nairobi this week.

### **Leaders have education devoid of ethics**

The idea of thinking education could change things in Africa may sound strange. After all, some of the Continent's leaders went to some of the best universities abroad and studied alongside other world leaders, who went on to make great impact on their nations while the Africans returned from the Harvard, Yale, London School of Economics and Oxford to mess up theirs.

They came from Yale, Oxford, Harvard and the rest, returned to Africa and fell comfortably into the welcoming arms of tribalism, nepotism, corruption and plain robbery of their citizens. Does education really count?

"I agree a lot of our leaders went to good schools abroad and here. But what type of education did they get? It was academic. They never learnt values. It was education devoid of ethics. They went to school to pursue knowledge and they did not even know they would be leaders." That was Mr Swaniker's answer.

"We will inculcate in young people a deep passion for Africa. We hope to create people who will do what is in the best interest of Africa. We want people who will learn from the tender ages that leadership does not mean you serve yourself, that leadership must be driven by a desire to serve others," he says.

By the end of this year, the Academy will have identified 30 students each from the East African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania to be admitted to the school.

The number would then be cut to eight and finally to six who will proceed to Johannesburg and take their

seats in classrooms, which will have about 15 students at ALA.

## **Africa in dire need of more effective leaders**

According to Ms Ivy Mwai, the Associate Director in charge of admissions for East Africa, ALA will offer A-level syllabus and the students joining will do only their final two years there.

The graduates will then be placed in some of the best universities in the world for further education. The promise is; every student who goes through ALA will have to return and use his or her skills for the Continent.

"We are looking at academic performance but that is not all," Mwai says.

"We are looking for young people with potential for leadership, passion for Africa and a genuine desire for community service. We are looking for people who understand that the good things they get in life are not for themselves alone but should also benefit the community," she adds.

The Academy's projection is that in 50 years, it will have produced some 6,000 Africans with potential to lead the Continent.

"Those are a lot of potential leaders," Mwai says. "Remember, it takes one person to change the world," she adds.

The academy's business plan opens with what sounds like a cliché; "Africa is in dire need of more effective leaders." Change and leadership are the by-words in the school's plan and on the lips of its founders.

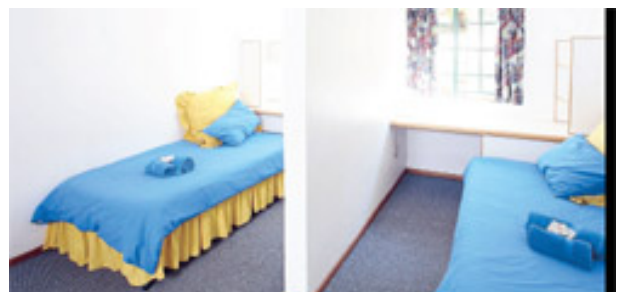
"Over the past 40 years, during a period of unprecedented wealth creation and poverty alleviation across the world, the African continent has actually grown poorer. Africa has been mired in violent conflict, stifled by corruption, and constrained by undemocratic governments and unenlightened policies," the founders say in their business plan.

"Most of the local and international intervention in Africa has addressed the symptoms of these problems, such as famine, uneducated masses, and unclean drinking water. These interventions are certainly necessary, but lasting change will not occur until the root causes of Africa's problems are addressed."

## **Few good men and women**

One cause of Africa's problems, the founders say, is under people's direct control. They identify it as "an undersupply of principled, ethical, and effective leaders across all spheres of African society."

There have been a few good men and women, the founders say. In recent years, leaders in Botswana and Mauritius have blazed unlikely paths toward prosperity, while individuals like Mr Nelson Mandela and Prof Wangari Maathai inspired millions to reverse gross social injustices, ALA's founders admit.



**-The accommodation facilities.**

"But too few of these leaders exist in Africa's political, economic, and social spheres, leaving disastrous consequences. Most current leadership development initiatives in Africa are focused on middle-aged managers, with limited rigour and depth of exploration.

While these programmes have an important purpose, we believe the next generation of great leaders must be cultivated at a younger age. African youth can be inspired to "dream big" and envision their impact on the continent."

When ALA talks of leaders and leadership, it does not confine itself to politics. According to Mr Swaniker, the Continent has an undersupply of leaders across all fields, and the Academy will be trying to create them.

"Africa needs strong leaders across its society. Strong leaders create positive change and generate growth and prosperity," he says.

In the Business Plan, ALA laments that Africa particularly lacks entrepreneurial leadership.

The continent's education, Swaniker says, has taught the youth to be job-seekers and not job creators.

"Most entrepreneurs in Africa today are subsistence entrepreneurs with small businesses and meagre incomes that allow them to support only their families. If Africa is to break the cycle of poverty, large scale mega entrepreneurs are needed," the institution says.

### **Talent going to waste**

In the midst of poverty sweeping the continent, Mr Swaniker says he has been amazed at how hard Africans work to take their children to some of the best learning institutions abroad. In one moment of deep thought, he found himself asking; "Why can't we have a school on this continent that competes with the best in the world?"

Across, the Continent, Swaniker says, a lot of talent and potential is going to waste. In Malawi, he met a 16-year old boy who never got much formal education but has built a windmill that is serving as a source of power for his village.

In Zimbabwe, he met a young boy who was orphaned before teenage when all his parents died of Aids. The boy took over parental responsibility, taking care of his siblings and struggling with schools at the same time. When he sat the 'O' levels, he had straight A's and a few B's.

Which is why academic promise will not be sole qualification for joining ALA and fees will not be a barrier.

ALA promises that approximately 50 per cent of its student body will qualify for full scholarships to learn Leadership, Entrepreneurship, and African Studies.

The Academy will then help its students gain admission to the world's premiere universities, and its careers office will facilitate career opportunities for graduates on the continent.

Currently, the Academy's recruitment team is visiting countries, schools and parents and sharing with them what is coming up. The academy is working with a number of "outstanding schools in every country, which will serve as feeders advising on those who qualify.

"Ultimately, ALA will create a pan-African network of leaders who can collaborate to drive positive change across the continent," Swaniker said.

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