

Tools and methods of the

Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa

Introduction

The Alliance was created on the basis of a firm conviction: Africa cannot content itself with patched up, imported models that have only worsened the governance crisis. It is up to Africans, with feet firmly planted in African soil and eyes wide open on the world, to speak out and collectively determine Africa's future. Rebuilding governance in Africa is indeed a collective and inclusive task, not just a job for government leaders and intellectuals taught in Western schools.

While poor governance is certainly a concern for leaders and intellectuals, it is

also a major concern for other types of actors who suffer its effects on a daily basis. Yet these actors are often forgotten when important issues of governance are addressed. The Alliance concept is part of a wider reflection on the crisis in collective action and what can be done about it. It takes into account cultural changes and technical developments, in particular internet. The Alliance is also based on shared responsibilities--one way to combine the autonomy of initiatives with the coherence of the whole.

In keeping with its convictions, the Alliance has developed a vision, ways of working, methods and tools that are shared by all its allies. To meet the challenges it faces, the Alliance has constructed a methodology based on four building blocks:

The building blocks of our methodology

- **Use concrete experience of actors**, not dogma, as a foundation;
- **Set up a continuous ‘back-and-forth’ movement between experience and reflection**, to establish diagnoses and make proposals;
- **Link--rather than isolate**—governance levels (from the local to the global), problems, milieus, local innovation and global policies, Africa and the rest of the world;
- **Articulate unity and diversity**, showing the diversity of situations, viewpoints and experiences in different social milieus (colleges) and territories (countries).

1 - Use the concrete experience of actors, not dogma, as a starting point

Collecting experiences and statements

The Alliance has been built on the experience and innovations of all types of social actors at all levels. It has not used as a starting point any pre-established dogma or theses produced by colloquiums or in the sterile, locked offices of Dakar or Manhattan. The Alliance thinks collecting and comparing experience and changing it into principles of governance is of the greatest importance. So it has adopted methods and tools that allow it to collect and compare experiences with the greatest rigour, in an open approach that allows the public to see even the process it uses to construct its ideas. Actors previously excluded from the debate, such as farmers, fishermen, traditional leaders, women, young people, etc., have been reached through the Alliance’s efforts to collect experiences and statements. The Alliance has gone into the heart of Africa to collect statements (interviews, videos, notes, etc.) and truly comprehend actors’ personal visions of governance, including the underlying images and symbols. As they go about their daily lives, these actors produce true-life

experiences that can be transformed into knowledge--and conclusions--to apply to the major challenges facing Africa today.

If we want to rebuild governance in Africa and the world, despite great contextual differences, we must start with concrete action on the ground in order to establish comparisons and common issues at a later time. Basic problems are often identical; only the modes of expression are different. This does not, however, mean the same solutions can be used everywhere. So, although many centres produce knowledge and experience, no one category has a monopoly on meaning. The Alliance's approach has been absolutely inclusive.

Making use of experience through capitalisation

How can we help experience lead to knowledge? How can experience be designed and formulated so that it becomes capital that everyone can use? What do we need to do so that experience can be shared, so it can enrich both theory and practice? It is this step from experience to shareable knowledge that we call capitalisation. Capitalisation serves many goals: create knowledge that is useful for action; redirect action; strengthen commitment; encourage communication; make use of experience, etc. Capitalisation of experience can also serve to transfer knowledge and understanding from the individual to the group. In sharing its methodology, as well as organising the collection of experience, the Alliance for Rebuilding Governance in Africa helps consolidate links between the allied organisations and actors with which it is in contact.

2 - Set up a continuous 'back-and-forth' movement between experience and reflection

Transversal analysis and experimentation

The systematic organisation of knowledge acquired from actors by collecting and analysing experience leads the Alliance to produce diagnoses and proposals periodically. These are submitted to the actors concerned for discussion, so they can be assessed for pertinence, enriched, experimented with and shared. There is a continuous 'action-reflection-action' process in which knowledge gained from experience is put to the test in a practical context and a verdict is made on its usefulness.

This systematic organisation is based on a transversal analysis that consists in progressively discovering recurring themes, analogies and/or complementariness amongst the experiences and reflections in a group of documents and experiences, and extracting the common elements. The Alliance sets up a dialogue between points of view that have their origins in different but equally important milieus (government leaders, farmers, traditional leaders, intellectuals educated in Western schools, women, young people, etc.). Articulating 'unity and diversity' is not, however, the only role of transversal analysis: it can also be used to link issues.

3 – Link

Instead of 'boxing off' the different elements, the Alliance concentrates on relationships between different scales of governance, problems and milieus, between local innovation and global policies, reflection and action, Africa and the world. The shared concerns identified by transversal analysis are expressed in the form of files, prospective analyses, proposals for actions and charters (Let Us Change Africa, 15 Ways to Start, Proposals booklets, etc.).

4 - Combine unity and diversity

In the various countries, with the help of national moderators, the Alliance strives to reflect the diversity of situations, experiences and viewpoints in the various social milieus (the 'colleges'), not just the 'Westernised elite'. As a result, reflection is grounded in the diversity of territories (countries) and social groups (colleges) and organised around federating themes (initiative groups) so that it can produce common objectives. With such an approach, statements specific to a socio-professional group (college) can be constructed at one level, and common local-global concerns at another.

To implement these methods, the Alliance has adopted tools that support its vision:

'Gouvafrique' database

The Alliance has a database (BaseDeFiches) that allies can access on the internet. It can be used as a working platform and to share information. Various documents produced by the Alliance (proposals booklets, charter, sheets, etc.), as well as the Alliance's memory, are stored in BaseDeFiches. The subjects treated by the various documents are indexed by keyword. This is why the structure of the keywords (theme-based, actor, geographic, etc.) is so important. The choice of words, their definition and relationships between them are decisive elements in structuring our representations of reality.

Resources website

Obtaining information is no longer a problem. Given the profusion of information, however, the main challenge now lies in structuring data to provide access to what is useful. To better view and share what it produces, the Alliance has set up a resource site that is interconnected with the 'Gouvafrique' database. The site, which makes available a great amount of information, is organised around themes on which the Alliance focuses.

Desmodo conceptual mapping tool

This is the tool the Alliance uses for the transversal analysis of its production (documents) in the database, or to lead national or international meetings such as the African Union / Alliance Conference on governance held in 2005. To summarise a meeting, one needs to link analogous statements. To find one's way in a large quantity of information, one needs a tool for finding one's way between concepts. Desmodo organises concepts and the links between them using cartography (mapping), an approach that combines database searches, processes for learning and sharing key concepts, and their visualisation. All the elements used to produce a transversal analysis are recorded in memory and can be recovered in case of dispute (see meeting with the AU).

Decentralised funds management

The 'alliance' concept has led us to dissociate the way in which funds are managed and the operation of the Alliance itself. Funds management is decentralised so that each initiative taken in the framework of the alliance can assume responsibility for the management of its own resources. First the network and now the Alliance use the techniques of the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation for Human Progress (FPH) as a basis for fund management. For more than a decade the FPH has used a tried and proven analytical accounting technique that consolidates the analytical accounting of each of the initiative centres. In particular, this analytical accounting technique makes it possible to establish detailed lists of types of expenditures, which can then be regrouped according to the specific requirements of each donor. Each initiative centre keeps analytical accounting records with a coding system shared by all so that the general secretary can consolidate the budget each month. The corresponding receipts and paperwork are collected at meetings. Lastly, the consolidated budget is transmitted to the beneficiary designated by the donor; the beneficiary is responsible for providing the technical and financial report. Tools have been developed to allow authorised users (with internet ID and password) to enter the expenses of each Alliance initiative leader into a joint database. Each entry is then checked twice: once with respect to accounting codes (analytical accounting) and commitments and once with receipts collected at meetings. This verification can be performed from any workstation anywhere (Bamako, Dakar, Paris, etc.) All data is automatically entered in several charts for monitoring funds; these charts can also be accessed over the internet (with ID and password). Consequently, expenses can be monitored by budget line and by donor, with automatic calculation of balances. A summary for each donor is also available.