

## Book Review

**Robert J. Priest and Kirimi Barine, eds., *African Christian Leadership: Realities, Opportunities and Impact***

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Between 2011 and 2015, a team of researchers funded by the Tyndale House Foundation carried out the *Africa Leadership Survey*. Guided by Robert J. Priest, a team of scholars from eleven African countries surveyed over 8300 African Christians. The survey worked with a knowledgeable sample of mostly college-level educated respondents who could understand the 93-item questionnaire and were also connected to grassroots organizations. The respondents were from three countries representing linguistic regions of Africa, namely Kenya (Anglophone), Angola (Lusophone) and Central Africa Republic-CAR (Francophone). The respondents were asked to identify, then later to talk in detail about, individual lay leaders, pastors, and organizations demonstrating a high level of positive impact, including the key characteristics that marked their impactful leadership. The survey was carried out in order to inform curriculum development, training materials, mentoring practices, networking and gaps so as to develop best practices in engagement between African Christians and their partners around the world.

The project was conducted in several iterative stages, which included research instrument designs, multiple in-country coaching consultations for field researchers and team writing workshops. It also included networking researchers from the three regions. All of the details of these multi-year processes are narrated in the book, and research instruments and responses are presented as appendixes in the book as well as a web-based *Resources Seedbed*, accessible at <http://www.africaleadershipstudy.org/>.

The final book, entitled *Africa Christian Leadership: Realities, Opportunities and Impact*, is structured in 12 richly detailed chapters that are carefully curated out of the data. The chapters are organized in thematic headings by authors who were also the research team leaders. Issues discussed include the genesis and growth of the project, characteristics of influential leaders, patterns of formation of leaders, the role of social capital, leadership during armed conflict, realities of women's leadership, socioeconomic development, reading patterns among African leaders, curricula implications and future conversations about engaging Africa.

Broadly, there were several core findings. First, pastors were identified as the most influential Christian leaders in Africa's growing Christian community. Second, pastors are considered as very important for the roles they play in their communities. Third, churches play many more than spiritual roles in the lives of ordinary African believers, although spirituality remains core. Fourth, non-clergy leaders, women and emerging parachurch organizations are other key groups found to be essential to life in Africa, filling various niches depending on circumstances, which are detailed in the essays. Fifth, all of these named above play key roles in

mentoring young and upcoming youth into leaders in a wide variety of ways. Mentors were found to be versatile in working inter-ethnically, accessing and navigating technology and using it creatively. Sixth, relational networks creating innovative forms of social capital at local, national, regional and global levels remain hugely relevant.

In addition, the research found three key areas needing major emphasis: empowering the youth in both spiritual and non-spiritual work, forging integration between faith and civic or political spheres, and creative bridging of relationships with Muslims. Other findings include that the Bible is strongly affirmed among all the leaders and their communities, and that African Christians are very committed readers of printed books as well as online resources. However, African Christians are reading books written by non-Africans, as there are fewer African Christian authors equipped to write in the context of their faith issues. Finally, the research found that far more resources are directed at Anglophone countries, and fewer in Francophone and Lusophone Africa.

In my estimation, this research is hugely important for a number of reasons. Many western scholars decry the absence of culturally nuanced yet globally available research from Africa. In an era of world Christianity, part of turning the tide on the dearth of data is empowering an emergent generation of local and regional scholars (who are already fine scholars but usually non-recognized beyond their local institutions) to bridge the rural vs. urban, local vs. regional-global, grassroots vs. educated, popular practice vs. social science spectrums and continuums of research, producing high quality writing and circulation of data results. *Africa Leadership Survey* shows how the processes of funding, creativity of research design, collaborative networking and production of world-class knowledge are possible.

This research comes at a critical juncture when several convergences point towards a new historical moment across Africa, frequently referred to as “Africa Rising.” One, Africa has experienced steady restructuring towards tangible expansion in democratic space and the rise of a younger corp of leaders in all social spheres. Churches and related organizations have often assisted in transitional processes. Second, the cumulative contribution of development and humanitarian agencies from the West has uplifted the previously marginalized, especially women and children. Material support has enabled funding of numerous initiatives as detailed in many of the essays of the research. Third, Africa is experiencing exponential expansion in education, raising a technologically savvy youth and a gradually stabilizing middle-class. Altogether, the significant transformation of the continent owes a lot to Christian leadership.

As churches continue to network through partnerships of church planting, education and reciprocal exchanges, further questions about leadership, mobilization, creation and distribution of resources, and the agency of Africans will continue to be asked. Gaps also remain. This book provides objective, context-specific research to inform processes of future engagement with Africa, and there is a whole chapter in the book by Mary Kleine Yehling, executive director of the Tyndale House. [Yehling provided a book preview in the January issue of *Global Missiology English*, Vol 2, No 15 (2018). – ed] Missionaries, past, present and prospective, theological educators, pastors and youth leaders who send young people on short-term trips, development and humanitarian agents and their supporters, plus all who want to ask critical questions on Africa ought to listen to the data in *African Christian Leadership: Realities, Opportunities and Impact*.