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Diversity management discourse: An African perspective

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This paper reviews the concept of diversity across selected sub-Saharan Africa countries. It focuses on the impact of social relations that depict cultural and social identities of individuals within these African countries. This is with the aim to help corporations develop diversity management strategies for their workforce. Consequently, this narrative paper adopts a qualitative approach, a literature survey that assesses views on diversity in Africa by critically exploring discussions on the formation of social identities, dominant diversity dimensions and approaches to managing diversity in the region. The paper reveals challenges in managing the existing socio-cultural formations in African states and further reveals the role of state institutions in managing these diversity concerns from a national perspective which ultimately feeds into corporations. The paper highlights the impact of the lack of diversity management strategies on national development planning and how this results in limited access to social services and lack of opportunities in the workplace, especially in relations to gender equality; thereby, slowing the progress towards achieving equality and capacity development. This paper significantly contributes to understanding and developing diversity management approaches relevant to sub-Saharan African States and acts as a catalyst for more in-depth research in managing diversity within African States.

Key words: Diversity management, Africa, development, management.

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to review diversity management from an African perspective to contribute to management discourse as well as act as a catalyst to foster more in-depth research on African management approaches. It addresses the key question: how is diversity viewed and what are the likely challenges to managing diversity from

an African perspective. This is because, Africa as a continent has multiple diversity dimensions, hence, the need to understand and manage these differences to promote effectiveness and efficiency in the workplace cannot be ignored. For instance, literature (Atta-Asamoah, 2012; Mengisteab, 2011; UNECA, 2014)

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reiterates that diversity in Africa focuses on social identities¹. This is because social identity forms the base for diversity discourse in the African context; thereby, increasing the need to understand the multiplicity of social identities (Bereketeab, 2011). The multiple social identities represented in any society determine the extent to which a society is perceived as diverse (Atta-Asamoah, 2012). Atta-Asamoah (2012) groups social identities in Africa into two: ascribed social identity and attained social identity. Ascribed social identities are inherent or deeply rooted in an individual. They include gender, ethnicity, race and religion, and form the culture of specific groups. The second social identity group, which are attained social identities, include shared values, beliefs and experiences, and factors such as the environment and changing interests influence this group. In spite of these efforts to categorise social identities, Atta-Asamoah (2012) and Mengisteab (2011) argued that this does not successfully elucidate the plurality of diversity in Africa and its influence in the reformation and governing of African states. Kamoche (2002) highlights that the multicultural nature of African states creates a high tendency for individuals to relate with people of the same cultural background rather than on the assumption of belonging to a common nation-state. This is likely to influence both the national and organisational levels. He further recognises the significance of family in most African states as a key socialising unit (Kamoche, 2002). This unit stretches to the extended family and then the ethnic group. Hence, strong evidence of favouritism exists 'along kinship and ethnic lines', as culture requires people to show support and care for those from the same tribe. This echoes the presence of multiple social identities in the African context.

Another characteristic highlighted by Atta-Asamoah (2012) is the homogenous approach to understanding social identities at the macro- (national and organisational) level, while remaining diverse at the micro- (individual) level. This automatically creates conflicting understanding and management of social identities at various levels. Furthermore, Atta-Asamoah (2012) ascribed the failure of a nation's state building process as the reason for a weak 'African experience'. Hence, understanding social dynamics as a starting point elucidates the need to not only manage social identities towards development at the national level, but also to manage diversity and promote equality at organisational levels, to drive productivity in the workplace.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

As mentioned, this paper is a narrative review that explores literature survey approach to understand social

identities and its impact on management approaches and national development in selected sub-Saharan African countries. It draws facts from previous studies and critically analyses them to make meaning towards how diversity is viewed in Africa. Hence, no new empirical data has been collected and included as it compares and summarizes facts on mainly existing findings and theories. Following, research (Atta-Asamoah, 2012) shows that African countries seek to address diversity concerns through policies aimed at creating an inclusive state. Hence, the paper, critically examines selected African nations to explore the concept of diversity and how these countries address diversity concerns. Though it noticeably examines the concept of diversity from a national perspective, this is with the intention to aid development and implementation of a more relevant diversity management practice by organisations, perhaps in partnership with national policies and agencies.

A REVIEW ON THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL IDENTITIES IN AFRICA

As previously mentioned, diversity management from an African perspective unveils the concept of diversity in Africa around social identities. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the formation of identities and social identities especially in relation to individual and societal social constructivism. Social identity, as initially established by Henry Tajfel in the 1970s, was in relation to social perception, categorisation comparison, prejudice, discrimination and intergroup conflicts (Burke, 2006). This idea helps develop conceptual views around motivation, norms, behaviour, social influence, multiple categorisations and diversity (Brown, 2000; Burke, 2006). This theory looks at intergroup relations and the social self (Hogg et al., 1995). Linking intergroup relation to identity, this postulates that self reflects the wider social structure (Hogg et al., 1995). This also captures the argument that an individual's understanding of her/his self-influences his/her social behaviour. This therefore positions social behaviour as the link between individual and society (Hogg et al., 1995).

However, differentiating individual constructs from social identities, Burke (2006) highlights that individual constructs are attributes not shared with other people, while individuals in a social group exhibit social identities shared with more than two other persons. In the African context, individuals are not completely separate from their social realities in relation to socio-cultural formations. Individuals categorised in social groups are stereotyped as likely to exhibit the same or similar character traits (Kamoche, 2002; Ezra and Mateveke, 2012). In addition, this supports the argument that individuals are likely to exhibit multiple social identities (Atta-Asamoah, 2012).

Alongside social identities, culture plays a key role as an identity signifier in most African countries (Mengisteab,

¹In this thesis, a social identity looks at how an individual can be labelled or identified socially. Other terminologies used interchangeably include diversity dimensions, social categories, social groups and social construct.

2011), thereby classifying African states as extremely diverse (UNECA, 2014). This links to Hofstede's argument (Hofstede and McCrae, 2004) that individuals' character and their cultural environment affects beliefs. From Hofstede's (2001) definition of culture, he argues that culture does not focus on individuals, but represents a group of people. Furthermore, Hofstede (2001) states that culture is for a group of people as personality is for an individual. Similarly, the uniqueness of most African states links directly to culture, beliefs and practices that possibly influence the state institutions. Following this debate, Atta-Asamoah (2012) evaluates Africa as institutionally diverse. In his argument, he states that many African countries, like Uganda, Nigeria and Ghana, merge their formal institutions and systems of the modern state with traditional institutions. This again supports the notion that the concept of diversity in Africa places emphasis on social identities, culture and state formations (UNECA, 2014) and will practicably position prevailing socio-cultural formations as the dominant social dimensions in this scale.

Diversity dimensions in Africa

The previous arguments have shown the significance of social formations in Africa and the probability of certain diversity dimensions taking precedence over others in Africa, although this varies from country to country. The dimensions include gender, disability, age, ethnicity, education, beliefs, values, HIV status, politics and religion (Romie and Nkomo, 2005; Neff, 2007; Mo barak, 2011; Atta-Asamoah, 2012). The identifiable socio-cultural formation in Africa does not leave out racial diversity, as globalisation has also made Africa home to immigrants. Countries like South Africa have a high presence of racial identity because of their social structure (Romie and Nkomo, 2005). In contrast, specific diversity dimensions are in some cases perceived as not conventional (The Economist, 2014) in some countries. For instance, there is awareness and acceptance of specific sexual orientations in some countries that are nonetheless addressed as criminal offences in others such as Zimbabwe and Nigeria, where unacceptable sexual orientations are punishable under the law of the land (Mkono, 2010). On the subject of gender, Atta-Asamoah (2012) describes an almost even distribution of the men and women (of varying ages) population in Africa. However, this has not corrected or reduced the gender issues experienced in most African countries, which relate to the uneven balance of position and resources for equality and development. Christianity and Islam are the main religions in Africa; though traditional African ideas and other forms of religious identities have a significant presence (Atta-Asamoah, 2012).

For instance, South Africa addresses the oppression of and discrimination against certain social groups (Neff,

2007). According to Klarsfeld (2010), apartheid focused on legislated racial categorisation and separation that divided the population into various, mainly racial sectors. This division affected every sphere of social life, from education to employment. Hence, discriminatory practices were inevitable (Romie and Nkomo, 2005). For many years, a large number of minorities in South Africa did not have rights to education, jobs and opportunities because of discrimination (Romie and Nkomo, 2005). This lack of rights positioned racism as a major diversity dimension generating inequality. Similarly, Romie and Nkomo (2005) stressed that democracy in South Africa was responsible for the rise in racial and gender diversity in the workplace; however, Neff (2007) argued that ethnicity allows a more insightful analysis of the social structure of the South African nation than race.

In addition, scholars (Thomas and Bendixen, 2000) performed an exploratory study on the impact of ethnicity on management culture in South African organisations. They interviewed 586 managers and the results showed similarity in cultural values amongst the various ethnic groups represented (Hofstede, 1991). Another finding was that the management cultures are independent of 'dimensions of culture and race' hence, management practices can improve through study and experience (Cox, 1994). Again, this emphasises the peculiarity of each country in relation to understanding and managing diversity. Furthermore, it raises the question of how best an organisation can adapt to managing these diversity differences. The above review has provided evidence of race, ethnicity and gender as the three major identifiable diversity dimensions in South Africa. However, HIV status has also been identified as a dominating social difference (Mo Barak, 2011) because of the rise of discrimination against individuals identified with HIV.

Similarly, in Zimbabwe, HIV status is a key diversity dimension. While there are other dominating diversity dimensions in Zimbabwe, Mkono (2010) highlights the fact that there is a limited consciousness of the significance of diversity management in an organisational context. Furthermore, Ezra and Mateveke (2012) stressed that the African patriarchal culture is evidently rooted in the subconscious state of both African employees and employers, and this shows in the stereotyping and segregation acts carried out in the workplace in Zimbabwe. Stereotyping is evident at the national level, especially in relation to gender balance in the institutionalisation of state affairs (Ezra and Mateveke, 2012).

In Ghana, Abdulai (2000) highlights that discrimination exists subtly in the public sector, with gender, ethnicity and regionalisation dominant amongst other social identities. Consequently, policies act as an instruction to promote integration of the Ghanaian people and 'prohibit discrimination and prejudice' on the grounds of diversity differences (Abdulai 2000: 451). For instance, gender dialogue ensures that women take roles that are

significant in socio-economic activities, including decision making at the top management level. Abdulai (2000) summarises that there are lapses in both the public and private sectors regarding recognising the social needs of the workforce; hence, he cites this as the motivation for the introduction of a human relations institute in Ghana.

Additionally, the socio-cultural paradigms in Ghana influence strongly the structural and management plan of organisations (Sackey et al., 2011). This paradigm views women as supporters to their male partners. Hence, a large number of women in Ghana exhibit specific behavioural patterns, including prioritising domestic chores above other responsibilities outside the home (Sackey et al., 2011). Although increasing numbers of women are becoming professional, they face the challenge of carrying out both domestic roles and organisational demands as two full-time jobs (Sackey et al., 2011). This prevents them from progressing within the organisation; hence, the top positions remain reserved for men (Sackey et al., 2011). In Eritrea, political position and parties (Tessema and Soeters, 2006) influence state gender and class. This affects employee performance within an organisation; for example, gender, class, age or political views, rather than merit or experience, influence promotion in the workplace.

Consequently, as reviewed by Akobo (2016), Nigeria as a nation has for many years, endured conflicts due to the poor supervision of gender related issues and other socio-cultural factors like, ethnicity and religion. These social frustrations have challenged the structure of the Nigerian state set by the colonial government pre-independence. In spite of these debates pointing back to the impact of the colonial governance before independence (Akobo, 2016), the Nigerian structure has significantly remained the same and has led to continuous dialogue on 'what should be'

Political involvement as identified in the case of Eritrea (Tessema and Soeters, 2006), highlights the impact of politics on human resource management or development processes, whether in an organisational or national context. This further highlights the involvement of political leaders and parties in the development process in developing African countries, where position and authority are used to exploit the lapse in managing differences and resources within the state (Asiedu, 2006). This exploitation further enhances political instability in the nation (Fosu, 2002, 2003). Moreover, the unstable political environment in Eritrea affects the planning and management of human resource practices, including managing diversity and the development of human capacity (Tessema and Soeters, 2006). Therefore, this establishes the fact that beyond considering internal factors in human resource strategies, it is similarly important to consider external factors that can influence diversity management either at an organisational or national level.

Similarly, the presence of ethnic, religious and other

social differences in Nigeria influences the pursuit of political gains (Treisman, 2000; Frynas, 2005). This exploitative strategy of obtaining competitive advantage over others includes promoting rivalry amongst various ethnic and/or religious counterparts (Frynas, 1998, Asiedu, 2006). Likewise, Kenya's heterogeneous characteristic has led to the emergence of ethnic challenges in the workplace (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). This has manifested in the form of 'favouritism' for recruitment and training opportunities (Adekanye, 1995). Similarly, as a result of unemployment and political conflicts (Adekanye, 1995), people tend to rely on their tribes to take advantage of 'ethnically-sanctioned obligations' (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). The socio-cultural system in Kenya is influenced by what Nzelibe (1986) describes as an 'African thought system' (p. 214). This system stresses ethnocentrism, traditionalism, communalism and social teamwork (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). The critical discussion so far highlights how diversity dimensions are myriad and varied in some African countries. Hence, it brings to light the fact that companies operating in Africa need to understand the social identity dynamics in the national and organisational context in order to implement appropriate diversity management approaches.

APPROACHES TO MANAGING DIVERSITY CONCERNS IN AFRICA

The foregoing discussions on the nature of diversity in Africa highlight the need to manage diversity both at the national and organisational levels. This growing need emerged during the early stage of the post-independence era (UNECA, 2014) because of the struggle experienced by African leaders in relation to decolonisation and political control (Atta-Asamoah, 2012). This struggle still exists within the geo-political context in most African countries as social differences connect with the unrest occurring in this region (Mengisteab, 2011). For instance, the inability to establish a sense of national culture (in some African states) and encourage tolerance between various social identities promotes socio-cultural related conflicts (Mengisteab, 2011; Ekanade, 2012). Consequently, Tanzania pursued a common national identity policy, with the first president following independence adopting a universal language across the country. Following this, the government established a one party education system that eradicated diversity processes at the nation's local and political levels. In Ghana, the government made policy choices that involved banning ethnic and religious political parties.

Similarly, Kenya introduced legislation against discrimination and initiatives to promote peace and co-existence, while South Africa, amongst several efforts, introduced initiatives targeted at reducing discrimination among the people. This was in relation to their

establishment of strong democratic institutions to empower minority groups economically and to create a single identity for the country (Atta-Asamoah, 2012). In the Nigerian context, diversity discussions intersect with institution building and governance system (Akoba, 2016). In spite of these efforts to create a single state and reduce diversity conflicts, the debate remains as to whether these countries can be completely homogenous, as diverse social identities will persist (Atta-Asamoah, 2012).

In relation to transferred policies, the Kenyan industrial environment focused on trade unions (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001) established during the independence movement (Chege, 2008). This focus also led to the early formation of human resource practices and policies in Kenya (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001); however, despite this, Budhwar and Yaw (2001) argued that the human resource practices need to be clearly personalised in order to adapt to organisational realities. This they argued should take into consideration, the influence of the socio-cultural, political, economic and industrial environment of the organisation. This suggests personalisation of human resource practices but does not however limit the understanding and management of various social identities represented in a workforce. Therefore, Gilbert et al. (1999) highlights that the workforce is a reflection of the society in which the organisation is located.

From a Ghanaian perspective, there was an integration of Western labour management practices with traditional personnel management activities after independence (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). The British colonial administration, European missionaries and commercial enterprises introduced these Western management practices. These Western practices were formal and structured, and contradicted the traditional informal practice (Akinnusi, 1991; Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). Furthermore, as a result of independence, the new government focused on empowering indigenes (nationals). This led to the replacement of foreign staff with Ghanaians in the public and private sectors (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). Additionally, as a step towards development, Ghana introduced constitutional rule, which provided frameworks and laws with which to govern its people. This constitution also included policies for effective human resource policies within the public and private sectors (Abdulai, 2000).

In South Africa, according to Grobler et al. (2006), organisational diversity management programmes have only existed for a few years. Nonetheless, the most common diversity concerns include sexual harassment issues, employees with disabilities and the recruitment and selection of individuals classified as minority groups, including women. Thomas and Bendixen (2000) and Binedell (1993) state that management practices in South Africa have been shaped by British and American systems, which has provoked some criticism from African scholars, for example Anakwe (2002), who argues that

African management styles should replace the Western systems. One of the main reasons that established this argument was that there was no integration of African cultural values exhibited by national stakeholders into their organisational cultures (Thomas and Bendixen, 2000). The analyses above on the approaches to managing diversity in African states reveal that there are limited management processes that intersect with cultural and national structures, and these structures create a challenge in managing diversity in the African context. Therefore, arguably, the existence of policies towards an inclusive state in the African context introduces a likely structural challenge to transferred Western policies (Nishii and Ozbilgin, 2007). This paper also discusses the challenge of transferred diversity management processes that exist in the African context.

DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT CHALLENGE IN AFRICA

The previous critical analysis on diversity approaches in some African countries reveal that these approaches were developed in response to the lack of a perceived national consciousness in these nations. Likewise, the author further reiterate that the establishment of policies as an approach to address probable social related conflicts highlight the challenge of engaging suitable management strategies. This focuses on the effects of transferred management practices in the African context. Again, this analysis explores countries in Africa.

A recent study (Sartorius et al., 2011) argues that diversity management in most organisations' workforce has been a challenge, specifically for MNCs. The complex nature of integrating cultural differences within the workplace remains a universal human resource issue, even in an African context like Mozambique (Hofstede, 1994; Sartorius et al., 2011). It is further argued that this is a result of Western-based MNCs implementing home-based human resource systems in Africa. Conversely, Africans have accepted these systems in order to attract foreign investors (Horwitz, 2007). This approach to economic growth, however, creates a challenge for social development and the development of African management styles especially in the light of understanding and managing social identities in the workplace (Horwitz, 2007). The challenges and resistance recognised in diversity practice because of these social differences led to a rise in research expenditure on how to manage the situation efficiently (Sartorius et al., 2011). The economic circumstance in Mozambique demonstrates that the adoption of neo-liberal policies in the early 1990s was a radical step towards rebuilding their economy following the extended civil war (Sartorius et al., 2011). This also led to the establishment of MNCs and the practice of transferred management policies at this scale.

Similarly, in Zimbabwe, because of privatisation (which also increased the presence of MNCs) and deregulation

introduced by the Zimbabwean government, the employment rate increased slowly. However, particular globalisation challenges came into play, including the ability to implement global policies in a local context (HDR, 1999; Thompson, 2000; Fischer, 2003). Correspondingly, Horwitz et al. (1996) argued that managers in organisations were overpowered by the challenge of globalisation because they were not able to integrate all levels of the organisation (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). On the other hand, the 'Africanised' system in Kenya (Lutta-Mukhebi, 2004) was characterised by ethnicity, thus creating an autocratic system in both the public and private sectors. Ultimately, this led to the closure and privatization of state-owned enterprises (Nyambegera, 2002). In addition, the private sector grew because of the significant presence of MNCs. This dominance had a huge impact on the economy. Furthermore, there was perception that the human resource systems practised by these MNCs was an improvement of the existing system (Nyambegera, 2002). They attracted and retained a qualified workforce, regarded as more efficient (Akinnusi, 1999; Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). In spite of these advantages, Budhwar and Yaw (2001) and Akinnusi (1999) emphasised that MNCs found it difficult to operate domestically. These affected areas include staffing, general work life, motivation and productivity.

The challenge of how diversity should be managed in Africa elucidates a form of globalisation where policies transferred between countries seem viable (Komache, 1997). However, once again, this is debatable (Nishii and Ozbilgin, 2007) if not contextualised to ensure effective practices that enhance development (Thompson, 2000). As a developing continent, there is a strong focus on the need to promote national development planning in both the national and organisational contexts. With support from international agencies (United Nations, 2010), initiatives like the millennium development goals (MDGs) seek an inclusive social development process. This process aims to ensure equality and social development for all people in the African context. However, without the engagement of state institutions, these initiatives would seem futile. This understanding introduces the role of state institutions in managing diversity.

The role of state institutions in diversity management

The awareness of the significant role of state institutions positions them as major stakeholders in the formation and implementation of diversity management policies in Africa (Kamoche et al., 2012; Akobo, 2016). These state institutions include governments, government related policy makers and regulatory agencies. In Africa, state institutions view MNCs as key players in state's economies (Sethi, 2002). This is in relation to their large employment capacity and service delivery packages. Similarly, due to the continent's large human workforce

and relevant resources (BBC, 2014), African states demonstrate a potential investment environment for various MNCs (Kamoche et al., 2012). However, there is the argument that factors like conflicts, unstable governance, laws and regulations pose a major threat and challenge to these corporations (Kamoche, 2002). In their argument, Kamoche et al. (2012) highlight that, while these institutional factors could act as a resistance for attracting foreign and local investors to a state, there is still significant evidence of thriving local corporations and MNCs in these African states. This, then, elucidates the fact that these challenges may not necessarily restrict economic enhancement, competitive advantage and globalisation (Kamoche, 2002; Atta-Asamoah, 2012).

In agreement with the foregoing argument, diversity issues in Africa share a number of characteristics, including the influence of globalisation, technology, and economic and political development (Atta-Asamoah, 2012). This further increases the opportunity of being significant contributors to the advancement of diversity management and African development planning. However, despite the possibility of these characteristics allowing for better living conditions and accessibility, their connection to diversity management, which includes identifying and defining social identities in various African countries, embraces this struggle through the adoption of fluid neo-liberal paradigms in specific states (Adekanye, 1995).

This argument leads to awareness of how national culture influences diversity (Hofstede, 1991; Romie and Nkomo, 2005) and can create stereotypes, and this, in turn, influences the way of life within the society (Kamoche, 2002; Ezra and Mateveke, 2012). For instance, Rudman and Kilianski (2000) explain the impact of culture on behaviour through gender-role stereotypes that authorise men to be masculine and women to be feminine. This led to the existence of male dominance in management in South Africa (Romie and Nkomo, 2005). Moreover, as the medium for promoting gender equality throughout society, the South African government established after apartheid created legislative rights and responsibilities to this effect. Romie and Nkomo (2005) argued that while there are some positive changes, there remains high evidence of white male dominance in top leadership positions. Through Affirmative Action programmes, South African organisations have made efforts to include individuals from other ethnic minorities in their management structures (Romie and Nkomo, 2005). These programmes involve managing the country's diversity.

From a national perspective, the South African populace believe it is the government's duty to ensure effective management of diversity and the redistribution of power, wealth and opportunity (Human, 1996). This is crucial for the future prosperity and stability of the country (Human, 1996). Similarly, at an organisational level, employees, especially line managers (Human, 1996)

handle the organisation's affirmative strategy. In spite of this understanding and the passing of government legislation on organisations, Human (1993, 1996) argued that most organisations have this policy in place but do not practice effective management of diversity. He further states that many organisations, when faced with diversity challenges, implement hastily identified solutions that do not incorporate the company's strategy.

In addition, the South African government established a Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) in 1994 to meet the basic needs of all its citizens. The policy for this project was to be 'people driven' (Spiereburg and Wels 2006). The RDP preceded the 1996 policy of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), which hoped to build economic prosperity based on neo-liberal assumptions (Spiereburg and Wels, 2006). However, these projects did not succeed because of the strong presence of racism and class in the development structure (Klarsfeld, 2010) along with other overpowering economic factors like the global instability at the time (Hanival and Maia, 2008).

In Ghana, the role of state institutions towards a more inclusive society led the country to design its constitution to be inclusive and compatible with international treaties (GHRDR, 2007). The Ghana Human Development Report (GHDR, 2007) highlights the significant progress made by the government, from a social exclusive state to a more inclusive one. Areas affected include gender-related issues, cultural norms of discrimination, minimal access to public goods and services, geographical disparities, and age-related and disability exclusions. The policies developed by the Ghanaian government, because of various social exclusions (Garvin et al., 2009), depict the recognition of adequate management approaches (Cox, 1991) as a strong instrument to achieve a socially inclusive society (GHRDR, 2007).

In the Kenyan context, factors that influence the formation of human resource policies and practices include the political-economic environment, socio-cultural environment and the natural environment (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). The political-economic environment incorporates the negligence of the government in the utilisation of funds, as the state has been unable to provide quality education, health and infrastructure development to a required standard (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). This led to the introduction of a structural adjustment programme (SAP) by the United Nations, a neo-liberalism paradigm for a free market and privatisation (Adekanye, 1995) of services. Additionally, political unrest and ethnic conflicts have fuelled insecurity in Kenya, which has affected the political and economic growth of the country (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). As previously discussed, it is the role of the state institutions to initiate national development in the country. However, due to lapses in the government systems in most African countries, nationals as well as the state institutions tend to rely on MNCs to promote national development

planning (Akobo, 2016). This expectation allows for the possibility of positioning diversity management towards achieving national development.

CONCLUSION

National development is a key phenomenon amongst African countries. This relates to methods by which countries can achieve a high level of development for majority of their populace (McLean, 2004). This includes several development policies and initiatives planned locally, or at state or national level (Lutta-Mukhebi, 2004). In many African countries, the need for increased skilled labour for national development is rising (Sydhagen and Cunningham, 2007). The United Nations argues that the Human Development Index (HDI), which measures life expectancy, education and access to resources for development, will assist policy makers and institutions in focusing on the lives of people in general, rather than only in relation to the economy (Klugman, 2011). This is due to the understanding that social issues like inequality, socio-cultural related conflicts and environmental issues weaken institutions if they are not handled appropriately (Sydhagen and Cunningham, 2007; Akobo, 2016).

In view of these HDI groupings, most sub-Saharan African countries are rated low as, in most African countries, access to essential resources, including education, and improving the standard of living in rural areas need development (McLean, 2004; Klugman, 2011). This drive for development has led to embracing Western concepts of diversity management and other human resource strategies at organisational level (Mkono, 2010; Akobo, 2017). Following this, Anakwe (2002) argues that Africa needs to develop relevant management approaches that can increase productivity within the region. It is also necessary to highlight that these approaches must consider the need for state intervention and progress in developing skills for economic growth (Horwitz et al., 1996). Consequently, during the eighth African Governance Forum (AGF-VIII) on democracy, elections and the management of diversity in Africa, Tegegnetwork Gettu, United Nations assistant secretary general and director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa (RBA), argued that both democracy and development in Africa are key concepts for human development, and are both related through mechanisms, processes and institutions (UNDP, 2011). This reinforces that development progress can function efficiently when one recognises that countries and societies have varied social, economic and political conditions, which may not be suitable for the neo-liberal ideology or transfer of Western practices (Sydhagen and Cunningham, 2007). This could be within either a state or an organisation (Hofstede, 1991). Hence, identifying and managing various social identities that reflect the social institution of a country or an organisation impacts on the diversity management practice of any corporation operating within

the African region (Hofstede 1991, 2001).

As a step towards reformation, human resource management and development, strategies are being established in African countries. For instance, in management and state institutes, human resource development (HRD) projects and salary scaling ensure the development of organisations' workforces and particularly nationals across various states and sectors. Similarly, in most African (Asiedu, 2006) and even Western States (Shen et al., 2009), specific diversity dimensions are more evident, and this tends to be reflected in the change processes (Akobo, 2017) of national and organisational strategies. This further creates the perception that the concept of diversity in the African and Western contexts is likely to have similarities as well as differences. Regardless of these evidences of similarities and differences between the global North and South, this paper clearly emphasises the need to understand how diversity is contextualised in African States to promote effective management processes.

This paper reiterates areas by which the nature and concept of diversity in Africa has been contextualised in selected African States. From the foregoing discussions, it has well been emphasised that diversity dimensions in Africa focus on dominant socio-cultural formations. As a result of these formations, expansive approaches (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001; Atta-Asamoah, 2012) have been applied to manage identified diversity concerns. These approaches consider both national and organisational levels at a particular scale and recognise the role of state institutions in promoting the validity and effectiveness of this concept. However, in spite of these procedures, diversity management in Africa has not been without challenges. These challenges again are created from national and organisational paradigms, as identified in the paper.

Similarly, in spite of the growing presence of diversity in Africa, explicit diversity management processes within organisations in the African context remain largely unknown, and there have been extensive discussions on the need for effective management practices in Africa (Komache et al., 2012). Consequently, some scholars (Anakwe, 2002; Nyambegare, 2002) argue that the adoption of Western practices (Nishii and Ozbilgin, 2007) in the African region in relation to management and development of human resources may be unsolidified, as Africa has distinctive characteristics (Anakwe 2002). This includes its heterogeneous complexity (Hofstede, 1991; Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). This diverse nature of most African countries affects the political, economic and social development of the people (Budhwar and Yaw, 2001). In addition, the vast significance of culture in politics and economics strengthens the link between diversity and globalisation, which also recalls the rhetoric of neo-liberalism (Spierenburg and Wels, 2006) in the African context (Akobo, 2017).

It can be seen that equality is used recurrently in

diversity management discourse. Although Kandola and Fullerton (1998) highlight the difference between managing diversity and equal opportunity, these two concepts usually intersect within the development and management discussions as a result of diversity management evolving from equal opportunity rights (Klarsfeld, 2010). Hence, managing diversity and equal opportunities discourse depicts the rationale for valuing and managing diversity dimensions across various countries. For instance, gender equality is addressed in most African constitutions, and this has led to national changes supported by government and non-governmental organisations (NGO). These initiatives encourage women to be active participants and decision makers (Spierenburg and Wels, 2006). However, it remains clear that male dominance predominates in Africa because of the patriarchal nature of societies (Morrell, 1998; Booyesen, 2007). Similarly, racial inequality has some significance in Africa. For instance, Thomas and Bendixen (2000) stated that whites still control the public and private South African economic sectors as an effect of the apartheid regime, while the labour force is predominantly black. In addition, Spierenburg and Wels (2006) argue that racial inequality still affects socio-cultural dynamics in some African organisations. They further stress that racial stereotypes and divisions outside organisations affect people's behaviour and attitudes in the workplace. Therefore, there is need to examine the connection between national cultural values and managing diversity in the workplace (Hofstede, 1991).

The critical analysis in this paper undoubtedly demonstrates that Africa as a continent exhibits multiple diversity dimensions hence, we cannot ignore the need to manage these differences in order to promote effectiveness and efficiency in the workplace, as well as positively influence development (Sydhagen and Cunnigham, 2007). Although, arguments have arisen as to what type of management system should be incorporated to bring about this in Africa, this narrative paper examines critically the concerns around diversity management discourse in Africa. In summary, the push towards the adoption of African management practices (Anakwe, 2002) should not instigate the total dismissal of management practices and ideologies from the global North especially due to the effect of globalisation (Akobo, 2017). Akobo (2016) reemphasises the argument that the rejection of Western theories would be an impractical counter move to global processes for industrialisation and globalisation because of the establishment of the third sector across various countries, the operations of private sector businesses in home and host countries and the fostering of public sector partnerships with both the private and third sector organisations across the globe.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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