

## Greetings

### YMCA family and friends

As we move towards our next Ordinary General Meeting (OGM) of African YMCAs where new volunteer leaders will be elected to take up office, it is important to reflect on why, as YMCAs, we focus on leadership and leadership development.

Our recent experience at the Africa YMCA Youth Summit highlighted that leaders are only as good as their followers. We used this story to illustrate this point:

*A scientist put a herd of sheep in line. He then placed a stick in front of them, two feet from the ground. The first sheep came and jumped over the stick. The second did the same. After the third sheep, he removed the stick.*

*To his surprise, when the fourth sheep came, it jumped over an imaginary stick. Every sheep thereafter jumped over this imaginary stick. Their minds were fixed on a stick; they never realised it had been removed.*

In Africa, we have been jumping over imaginary sticks for many years. Since colonial times, our fathers were trained to jump, and we are following them. External powers have set targets for our leaders to jump over and they are happy jumping. Because we are following them, we are also jumping. We are like the fourth or the fifth sheep. At least our leaders can see the stick and they know why they are jumping. But we are busy jumping blindly, using their standard.

Through our Subject to Citizen (S2C) project, we are creating the space for youth to develop a credible voice, and to use this voice to influence those in authority.

The Subject to Citizen (S2C) project tackles the crisis of leadership by empowering the followers. For the leadership to be accountable, the followers must be competent. This African YMCA project involves building the civic consciousness and competence of young people, which will then be used to practice advocacy. We are raising competent and courageous youth followers as S2C Ambassadors and trained change catalysts. And as they grow in confidence, competence and skills, they will take their place as accountable youth and then adult leaders.

If enough youth in Africa become good followers – courageous followers – this will have incredible impact on our leaders in terms of accountability, participation and transparent decision-making geared towards positive change for all citizens, especially the youth.

This issue of *Siyahamba* contains a book review of *The Courageous Follower*, and excerpts from the book, which focuses on the importance of the follower, providing the rationale and tips for good followership. The issue also contains articles on mentorship and membership which are essential elements of leadership and followership.

For us in the YMCA, good leadership and courageous followership starts in our local branches and spreads out into our national movements, to Africa Alliance level and globally.

We march together as leaders and followers!

**Clifford Sileya**  
President, Africa Alliance of YMCAs

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We are all leaders; we are all followers

# Book review The Courageous Follower: finding courage to evolve our followership

Christine Davis, Africa Alliance of YMCAs' volunteer

It is not often that we are presented with a way of looking at our roles within advocacy work through a new lens. Typically, leaders become the names and faces that represent the courage, sacrifice, dedication and loyalty behind our initiatives and too often, the role of the follower is forgotten. Ira Chaleff's book, *The Courageous Follower* (2003), serves as a reminder that not only is followership a powerful tool to achieve a common purpose, but also that constructive followership itself takes great courage and dedication to achieve.

Chaleff undoes the passive connotations of the follower role and demands a reawakening to the importance of a strong, constructive followership. This generates an improved support for leaders but also, importantly, reduces feelings of cynicism, helplessness and insubordination within the followership itself.

Earlier understandings of the leader-follower relationship tend to indicate a top-down approach of thought, direction and activity. Traditionally, the leader creates the vision and necessary direction to achieve that vision, with little mention or credit for the achievement being shared by the followers. History has been recorded with the leaders in mind as it is easier to create role models out of a few notable people than it is to account for thoughts, intentions and activities of a larger more complex and diverse group. In many ways, this failure to showcase the work of followers has created a culture of leadership prioritisation. Few initiatives attempt to stimulate growth in follower power as few understand where that power is enshrined and how that power can best serve the organisation.

It seems then that our current global climate of environmental decline, extensive urban and rural poverty and decay, ongoing violent crime and political instability has called out for change but has limited these changes to the leadership structures. With the result that many initiatives focus only on the development of solutions through the development of the leadership itself. Although this is notable and necessary, a problematic paradox is created in that the follower has become subordinated to the leader, heeding only their demands and providing little accountability and direction to the purpose of the intended change. The intention then to improve leadership in an effort to generate much needed social change has often served to prioritise the importance of leadership and undermine the necessity for followership development.

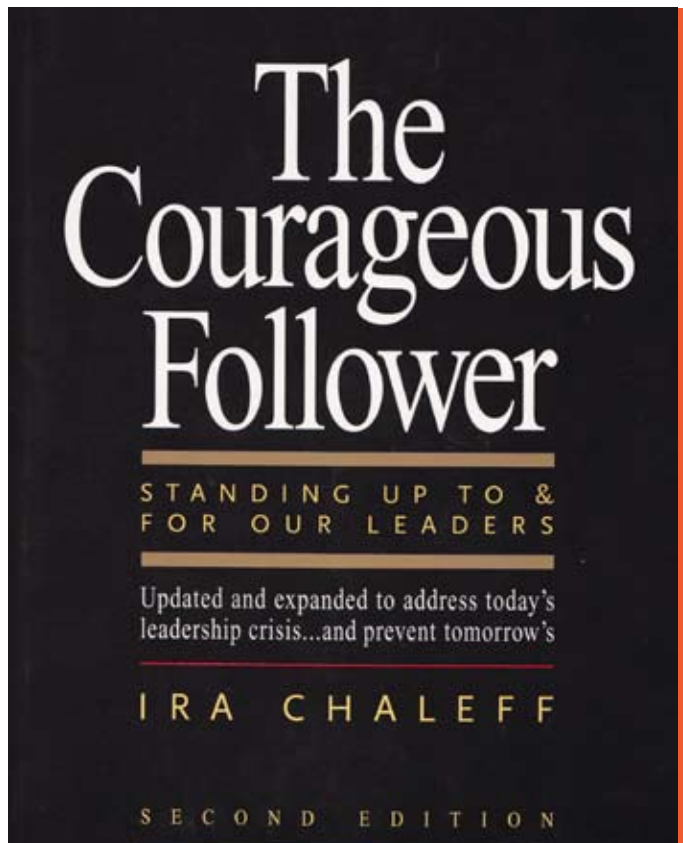
For Chaleff, this is highly problematic as, "there seems to be a deep discomfort with the term 'follower'. It conjures up images of docility, conformity, weakness, and a failure to excel." But as Chaleff points out, "You can't... have a world just of leaders!", just as you can't have a world where a large portion of the work is carried out by people who feel disenfranchised, dissatisfied and insecure about their own role in the intended change.

Chaleff believes that the power and responsibility of the follower resides in the force of accountability they hold for our leadership structures. To understand the full scope of their power though, followers must firstly understand the source of their power; secondly, appreciate the value of the leadership and the "critical contributions they make to our endeavours",

and thirdly, significantly, they must "understand the seductiveness and pitfalls of the power of leadership" and prevent these pitfalls from distracting the organisation from its ultimate purpose.

It is only once this has been achieved that we will see a work culture of increased support for our leaders, a reduction in feelings of helplessness, and fewer instances of an organisation's failure to act in line with the path needed to achieve its overall purpose. This latter point is vital in the human rights arena, specifically within the context of youth development activities and initiatives. If too many initiatives develop and foster a sense of leadership entitlement amongst the youth, then not only is the role not earned through experience, but also there is a weakening constructive support-base for the leadership that could be fostered from within this same group. In the end then, instead of a balanced movement of energy between leaders of followers, we develop a system where the leadership is inexperienced and working to dominate, or where it unintentionally isolates or distances the followership. At the same time, the followership, through their distance from the leader, feels un-invested and exhausted by their role or strives to undermine the leadership so that they can enter that domain themselves.

The ultimate solution to the conflict within the leader-follower relationship rests with the focus of the roles. If leadership training initiatives then tend to foster an idea that the leadership is the ultimate ambition and the position members should aspire to, the focus of activities within an organisation will shift from the purpose of the organisation's work, to an individual quest for



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status or power over others. This problem, Chaleff believes, is easily rectified by a re-evaluation and improved understanding of the role participants play towards the purpose. "Often the purpose exists and we come together around it. Sometimes the leader envisions it and draws us to it. At other times we formulate or redefine the purpose together. If the purpose is not clear and motivating, leaders and followers can only pursue their perceived self-interest, not their common interest. The process of clarifying purpose can mobilize a group, heal painful rifts, and help the group steer through treacherous passages" (Pg. 13).

Ultimately then, the purpose not only guides the direction of the organisation, it also provides clarity and intent for the core understanding of the leader-follower roles and should define the ways in which they react to one another. As Chaleff states, "Followers and leaders both orbit around the purpose; followers do not orbit around the leader" (Pg. 13).

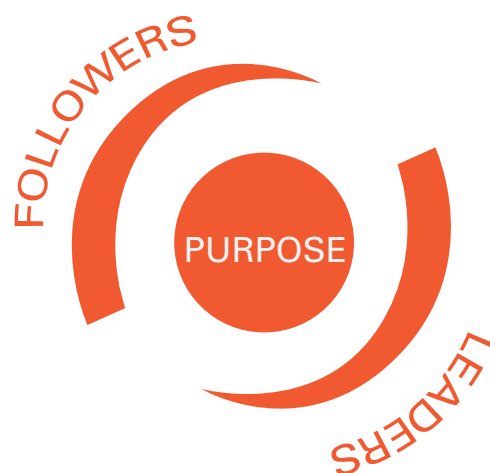
Just as good leaders must have specific characteristics nurtured and developed to ensure their effectiveness, followers require the same training and development. For Chaleff, the value of a follower is found within the development of an interdependent relationship between the leader and follower in which balance is created through egalitarian characteristics that support and motivate the leader/partner. A good follower is able to help the leader and organisation attain the common goal or purpose by displaying the following characteristics: (Pg. 19)

- Effective followers are cooperative and collaborative, qualities essential to all human progress;
- Trusted followers integrate their ego needs sufficiently into their communal responsibilities to serve rather than compete with the leader;
- Well-balanced followers are less prone to the pitfalls that await leaders with strong egos and can serve as guides around these pitfalls; and
- Caring followers perceive the needs of both the leader and other group members and try to form a bridge between them.

Chaleff's rediscovery of followership and the importance this role provides in the attainment of an ultimate goal will prove to be a seminal work in the overall development of organisational strength and capacity. It provides a solid framework from which leaders and followers can best react to the specific situations they may encounter and goes a long way to making the importance of our followership a self-motivating tool for its development and growth and should be read by both leaders and followers alike.

*In November 2009, Carlos Sanvee, General Secretary of the Africa Alliance of YMCAs, challenged youth and guests about understandings of African leadership at the opening ceremony of the Africa YMCA Youth Summit. Speaking at the Africa Hall of the Economic Commission for Africa, United Nations building, he said that Africa suffers from bad followership. Coverage of this view on media sites and online news platforms caught the attention of Ira Chaleff, who offered to enable the YMCA to pursue this line of thinking further. His generous donation of 100 copies of his book The Courageous Follower will enable youth in African YMCA movements to begin to interrogate this thinking. We appreciate this Ira!*

*Ira Chaleff is a thought leader in the field of Followership and the founder and president of Executive Coaching & Consulting Associates. He has published and has been quoted in numerous articles on Followership and its emergence as a newly recognised field of study and practice, and The Courageous Follower is now in third edition. He coaches and consults for international organisations focused on democracy, business and legislature.*



Ira Chaleff

## The paradox of followership

We are responsible. Whether we lead or follow, we are responsible for our own actions, and we share responsibility for the actions of those whom we can influence.

All important social accomplishments require complex group effort and, therefore, leadership and followership. Both are necessary in the pursuit of a common purpose. Some believe that influence in the leader-follower relationship is largely one-way. This is far from true. Followers have great capacity to influence the relationship.

Just as a leader is accountable for the actions and performance of followers, so followers are accountable for their leaders. We must support leaders and, when necessary, help them correct their actions, just as they must support us and help us correct our actions. This is partnership. Both sides must be proactive. If we have followers who are partners with leaders, we will not have leaders who are tyrants.

Leadership may be informal and distributed throughout an organization. But formal leadership, which has final accountability and authority, is usually vested in an elected or appointed or self-proclaimed leader or small group. At the extremes, the formal leaders of a group may be wise or arrogant, servants or parasites, visionaries or demagogues. More commonly, leaders are a rich blend of strengths and weaknesses, of qualities that add and subtract value, and there is the potential for either side of their personalities to grow while in office. The quality and courage of followers influence which of the leader's characteristics will grow.

If we amplify our leaders' strengths and modulate their weaknesses, we are the gem cutters of leadership, coaxing out its full brilliance. If we amplify our leaders' weaknesses, we may stress existing fracture lines in their characters, and these fracture lines may become fatal flaws. Followers who are closest to a leader carry pivotal responsibility; they markedly shape the tone and outcomes of a leader's tenure.

### **Courageous followership is full of paradox:**

- A courageous follower has a clear internal vision of service while being attracted to a leader who articulates and embodies its external manifestation.
- Courageous followers remain fully accountable for their actions while relinquishing some autonomy and conceding certain authority to a leader.
- A central dichotomy of courageous followership is the need to energetically perform two opposite roles: implementer and challenger of the leader's ideas.
- There is inherent tension between the identity a follower derives from group membership and the individuation required to question and creatively challenge the group and its leadership.
- Followers often benefit from the leader as mentor, learning crucial things, yet at the same time must be willing to teach the leader.
- At times, courageous followers need to lead from behind, breathing life into their leader's vision or even vision into the leader's life.
- Senior followers often are important leaders in their own right and must integrate within themselves the perspectives of both leadership and followership.

*Ira Chaleff. (2003). The Courageous Follower: Standing up to and for our leaders. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publisher. Page 13-15*

## The five dimensions of courageous followership

### **The courage to assume responsibility**

Courageous followers assume responsibility for themselves and the organization. They do not hold a paternalistic image of the leader or organization; they do not expect the leader or organization to provide for their security and growth, or to give them permission to act. Courageous followers discover or create opportunities to fulfill their potential and maximize their value to the organization. They initiate values-based action to improve the organization's external activities and its internal processes. The "authority" to initiate comes from the courageous follower's understanding and ownership of the common purpose, and from the needs of those the organization serves.

### **The courage to serve**

Courageous followers are not afraid of the hard work required to serve a leader. They assume new or additional responsibilities to unburden the leader and serve the organization. They stay alert for areas in which their strengths complement the leader's and assert themselves in these areas. Courageous followers stand up for their leader and the tough decisions a leader must make if the organization is to achieve its purpose. They are as passionate as the leader in pursuing the common purpose.

### **The courage to challenge**

Courageous followers give voice to the discomfort they feel when the behaviors or policies of the leader or group conflict with their sense of what is right. They are willing to stand up, to stand out, to risk rejection, to initiate conflict in order to examine the actions of the leader and group when appropriate. They are willing to deal with the emotions their challenge evokes in the leader and group. Courageous followers value organizational harmony and their relationship with the leader, but not at the expense of the common purpose and their integrity.

### **The courage to participate in transformation**

When behavior that jeopardizes the common purpose remains unchanged, courageous followers recognize the need for transformation. They champion the need for change and stay with the leader and group while they mutually struggle with the difficulty of real change. They examine their own need for transformation and become full participants in the change process as appropriate.

### **The courage to listen to followers**

After exploring the model and applications of courageous followership, I will conclude with an exploration of the leader's responsibility to support the conditions of courageous followership and to respond productively to acts of courageous followership. This is harder to do than it appears to be on the surface. When done well, it offers powerful paybacks for the leader and the organization. When done poorly, both leaders' careers and their organizations suffer.

*Ira Chaleff. (2003). The Courageous Follower: Standing up to and for our leaders. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publisher. Page 6-8*

# The Liberia YMCA:

## How to nurture our mentorship

Reginald Ffoulkes Crabbe, Regional Secretary, Greater Accra YMCAs, Ghana

Globalisation, political transition and technical innovation have created new opportunities to improve the living standards of millions of people. There are widespread concerns, however, that people in Africa still face high levels of inequality, environmental decline, lack security and live in times of uncertainty and conflict. These are the social challenges the African YMCAs address by empowering youth to be civically responsible and active in creating necessary social change.

As the YMCA is a membership-based organisation, it is the volunteer members who complement the work of the core staffing teams. Members are drawn from our communities themselves and thus represent the needs and aspirations of the communities and ultimately the progress and the success of the communities through impactful programmes which add value and improve the lives of individuals and groups within those communities

It is the members' efforts that ensure that everyone is able to identify with the YMCA activities and that people become invested in the membership, thereby taking ownership and ensuring commitment on their part which enhances their level of responsibility. Thus membership in the YMCA is an investment in community.

According to Edward Gboe, National General Secretary of the Liberia YMCA, this is the foundation on which their membership has been built over the past several years. The Liberia YMCA is a good example of a YMCA that continues to strengthen because they focus on delivering relevant programmes and increasing member involvement. In a country of about 4 million people, the YMCA serves about 500,000 people, through 7,000 members and 263 staff.

The Liberia YMCA draws its strength from the important role of its members. In fact, amongst other factors, a minimum of 500 committed members is required for a local YMCA to obtain branch status. This focus on membership as the key sustaining element of their YMCA has led to the commitment of people and communities as owners of the association. With such high value on membership, they do not easily part from the YMCA. This has guaranteed continuous support of local citizens and leaders both within and outside of the YMCA. Communities have made generous contributions of resources, including land and labour, to enable the YMCA to achieve more in Liberia.

Edward Gboe shares this story of Kenneth Best, a local YMCA hero and an example of extraordinary commitment. "I encountered Kenneth 21 years back when I was 17," begins Gboe. "At the time he was serving as President of the National Council, the highest governance body of the Liberia Y, was a managing editor in private life and publisher of the Independent Daily Observer, Liberia's oldest independent daily newspaper (a management role he still holds today). As Guest Speaker at a ceremony to present me with an award as an Astute Student leader at my high school, Kenneth

spotted me and asked that I pick up the award from his office at the YMCA. My visit to the Y led me to learning and experiencing more youth leadership and programming skills for 8 years." Over 21, Edward Gboe now serves as National General Secretary of the Liberia YMCA and still believes Kenneth Best to be "a super volunteer".

The Liberia YMCA's five membership categories (Student, Ordinary, Honourary, Institutional and Corporate) reflect the needs and social dynamics of the people in the country. The Student Membership Category caters for the interest of students in Junior School (Gra-Y) and Senior School (University Y) through the establishment of leadership training, youth empowerment, leadership development skills, life skills and livelihood training programmes. Ordinary Membership activities are targeted at addressing the needs of both the youth who may not be in school and the citizens of the community in general. Programmes in areas of fellowship and fun, recreation and sports, conference facilities and physical fitness are designed to serve the interests of the other categories of membership which focus on the people and institutions that provide support to the YMCA. This membership-based approach changes lives and mobilises resources and technical support for the YMCA's success.

Today, the Liberia YMCA can boast that it is the leading youth development institution in the country, with activities that impact almost every aspect of society. With a good membership campaign strategy based on successful programme initiatives that speak to the needs of the different socio-economic groups, Gboe believes that the sky possibilities and potential for the YMCA activities in Liberia are limitless.

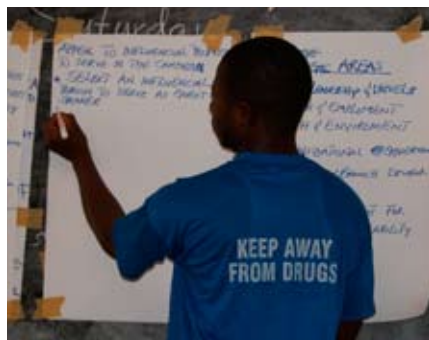
As YMCAs initiate and run relevant programmes and deepened engagement, members are then positioned and groomed to become leaders and volunteers that strengthen the YMCA in its efforts to meet the individual and community needs.

Hierarchical structures have given way to successful YMCA team structures with more than one leader. More importantly, in any one leadership relationship, followers become leaders and leaders become followers, depending on the situation.

### Some key issues to consider when developing a membership strategy:

- **Recruiting new members to the YMCA:** How do we build a list of prospects? How do we inspire youth to join our YMCA? How do we follow through with prospective members?
- **Retaining our members and building their loyalty:** More members leave the YMCA within the first year of joining, than at any other time. What is our current member engagement strategy?
- **Renewing our members:** Membership renewal is a challenge for any organisation. What do we offer our members to keep them renewing year after year? How do we re-engage lost members?
- **Revenue earning from our members:** How do we maximise revenue from fundraising, events, functions, merchandise, memorabilia, education, professional development and membership upgrades?
- **How do we continue to build our membership:** How do we creatively do this when budget doesn't allow for spending on outreach strategies?

Reginald is currently on a 6 month internship with the International Group of YMCA of the USA as part of the Africa Alliance of YMCAs' youth leadership development strategy.





Ricky Johnson with one of his mentees.

## Reflection on youth mentorship

By Ricardo Johnson, Youth Coordinator, Athlone YMCA, South Africa

Research and analysis suggests that the youth today are, through the growing rate of poverty, greatly susceptible to socio-economic concerns such as substance abuse, joblessness, unhealthy lifestyles, crime and a low sense of self-worth (South African Department of Social Services and Poverty alleviation). It seems that many of South Africa's youth have lost faith and have been led to believe that they have few options and are doomed to repeat the cycle of poverty.

As a result of this, the youth now tend to exclude themselves from the process of change and feel a sense of entitlement about their futures. As Professor Brian O'Connell, Rector and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the Western Cape explains, *"we seem to believe that we all have the right to have our future secured by the State without our [needing to make] a strong contribution. We seem, as a nation or an organisation (young men and women), to have removed ourselves as agents from the process of our nation building"*.

This presents one of the biggest problems for youth leaders today. If we are to be effective in empowering youth, the South African YMCA needs to play a vital role in advocacy development and become key strategic actors in our communities. The role of mentorship is crucial to achieve this, especially in the areas in which I work, which are typified by gangs, drugs, crime and lack of respect for others and the self. But what does mentoring involve and how should mentoring of youth be approached?

Mentorship is generally about coaching or assisting people in tasks where young people can see or interpret the reality of life or society through the eyes of someone more experienced and trained to deal with the situation.

Stephan Mayers, Christian author and leadership, mentorship trainer, suggests as a definition for mentorship: *"Mentoring is someone imparting an aspect of their life to another that encourages growth. It means that mentoring involves an intentional relationship in which a mentor imparts knowledge, skills or values from their experience to a person or group of people they believe in, who are teachable and responsible and desire to develop their potential."*

To quote an *isiZulu* saying *"umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu"*, which means *"a person is a person through a person"*. This African maxim helps us to understand the essential role each

person can play to empower another. If we want to build the civic competence of young people in our organisation in terms of leadership development, they need the input of the mentors to guide, coach and empower them.

For some people I work with, mentorship comes with a deep emotional connection. Daniel Daniels, a volunteer in the Athlone YMCA's youth department and mentee, believes that mentorship represents a deep trust between people. *"From my experience, a mentor goes the extra mile, walks alongside you, listens, and gives advice to assist you to make positive decisions that will affect your life"*. Speaking of the benefits of mentorship in his life, he said, *"To be mentored or at least to reap the benefits of it, is to decide how things will benefit me. What will I be able to see and gain at the end of the day and how will it affect those around me positively? So how have I benefitted? I have gained self-confidence; I seek advice before making decisions; I am flexible, adjustable, and clear thinking"*.

But mentorship is not only about the transfer of knowledge or skills from the mentor. It is important that mentors listen, adapt and learn from those they work with and this is so often missing from a mentoring relationship. As Gil Harper, Executive Secretary for the Africa Alliance of YMCA's states, *"It is important to engage in reverse-mentoring where our mentee's life and work experience enriches our own. I place great value on what I learn from my mentees – their thoughts, views, ideas. I draw a lot of my insight on youth issues from my mentees, which improves my own work. This, in itself, is incredibly empowering for mentees as they see their ideas valued by a mentor and integrated into the mentor's work."*

Well conducted reverse-mentoring leads to the development of a good understanding of leadership and, indeed, enhances the leadership skills of the mentor as well as develops the leadership potential of the mentee.

The mentoring relationship needs to be approached with respect and caution. When developing a mentoring relationship it is tempting to sometimes do or give too much which does not help the mentee to develop and become self-reliant. For me, it is important to have clear boundaries of what you can and cannot do for the mentee and that they accept these boundaries and understand why they exist.

# African YMCA Leadership Academy – *realising the dream*

The establishment of an African YMCA Leadership Academy in Togo, West Africa, is a bold step forward for the movement, as the Academy is the first of its kind in the African YMCA history.

“There is huge need to provide continual concentrated and relevant certified training for staff and volunteers in the movement to ensure that our strategy and programming meets the changing needs of youth development work,” said Simon Lazarre Badiane, Executive Secretary: Leadership & Organisational Development, Africa Alliance of YMCAs.

“By providing this training we are not only ensuring staff and volunteers are personally and professionally equipped to meet our shared vision, but we are also contributing to the creation of African knowledge systems.”

The Academy itself is a result of a contractual agreement between the Africa Alliance of YMCAs and the Togo YMCA. Seed money for renovations for the dormitories of the Togo YMCA buildings, where the Academy will be housed, was provided by YMCAs of New York and Charlotte.

Certificated courses, which will be offered to civil society organisations and individuals as well as the YMCA staff and volunteers, will include various key focus issues relevant to youth development work. The following are being considered: Advocacy and civic engagement, Conflict transformation & peace building, Gender, Human rights, Reproductive health & HIV/AIDS, and Environment & climate change. Diploma courses will include youth and social work, leadership and programming and fundraising.

The ultimate goal is to offer relevant degree courses at and through the Academy.

“While the Academy’s primary focus will be on training, it will also be open to use by civil society and church groups for meetings, camps and workshops. In this way, the Academy will not only meet a market need, but will also ensure sustainability.”

As part of a leadership strategy, it is envisaged that there will be YMCA Leadership Academies serving Southern and East African countries to complete the West African Academy.

Renovation work will begin soon and we will keep you updated on progress.

## *Y-reflect*

### We are all leaders; we are all followers

Vezi Mncwango, Africa Alliance of YMCAs’ executive committee member

“If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as he pleased” – 1 Corinth 12v16-17

A lot is said and written about leadership, but very little about followership. It was Adam Smith (1723 -1790) in his work ‘Wealth of Nations’, who eloquently made a case for a comparative advantage, arguing the importance of nations to focus on producing goods and services where they have a cost and effectiveness comparative advantage; and import such goods and services from other nations where they have a comparative advantage over local production.

God has given each of us a talent that gives us a comparative advantage over others. Paul in his letter to the Church in Corinth confirms this as stated in the opening quote. Because God has given each of us unique talent and abilities, the body of Christ has individuals who, through focusing on their talents, create the wealth that would not otherwise have been created had we depended on ourselves for everything.

In every area that God has given us talent, we are called to be a leader in that area. For every other area, we are called to be followers. Leaders influence others, using their talent, in an area that God calls them to lead into. Followers, on the other hand, provide the mechanism for the multiplication of the leaders’ influence.

Allow me to illustrate. When a house is built, an architect provides a blueprint in the form of a plan. The plan is then given to a builder, an electrician, a plumber etc, for execution. In turn, these parties procure the building material from various building supply specialists. Can you see how, in this example, the various members to the building process are leaders and followers in their own right? The key is each member focuses on their area of specialisation.

Followers have an important task of holding leaders accountable in their area of influence. Without this accountability leaders might abuse their influence through selfishness, egotism and the like. A leader needs followers who understand their responsibility of holding them accountable to be a true leader.

Here is a powerful thought: the kind of leaders we end up with are a reflection on the kind of followers we are. What kind of a follower are you?

