Book review

Ratemo Waya Michieka (2016). *Trails in Academic and Administrative Leadership in Kenya: A Memoir.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Reviewed by Claudia Frittelli*

Trails in Academic and Administrative Leadership in Kenya: A Memoir (2016) by Ratemo Waya Michieka provides a historical footprint for African university leaders tasked with transforming constituent colleges into full-fledged public universities. Kenya's higher education enrollment reached 470,000 in 2015 from 184,000 in 2010, and the sector has expanded from five to twenty-three public universities since the 2000s (*ICEF Monitor 2016*, Commission for University Education, 2015). During this expansion, leadership at Kenyan public universities has fluctuated between politicised recruitment and decision-making, and autonomy of management to the detriment of university governance structures (Oanda & Jowi, 2012). According to his memoir, Prof. Michieka, although a political appointee, succeeds at strengthening the institutional governance structures he leads.

The book documents the author's founding of and/or contribution to pivotal higher education constituent organisations between 1994 and 2003 which have led to broader platforms for higher education decision-making. This includes his role in the origins of Kenya Education Network, The African Institute for Capacity Development, Inter-University Council of East Africa, Kenyan Commission for Higher Education, and re-initiation of Jomo Kenyatta University Students Organization at a time when Kenyan student unions were banned due to riotous behavior (Chapter 12).

In 1989, President Moi seconds Michieka from his position as associate professor and chairman, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Nairobi, to become deputy principal of academic affairs and subsequently vice-chancellor of Jomo Kenyatta College of Agriculture and Technology (JKCAT). Michieka's mission is to transform JKCAT into a science and technology-based public university which involves lobbying the agenda; staff recruitment and release; development of academic programmes and staff; improving gender equity; increasing research funding, infrastructure and publications; maintaining quality; and managing outreach services and public relations (Chapter 10). While the book lacks data indicators of what was achieved, the vice-chancellor's decision-making procedures are well documented.

Thirteen years later, following a political transition, President Kibaki abruptly appoints Michieka as director-general of the National Environment Management Authority

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(NEMA). On arrival at NEMA (Chapter 17), the appointee receives a list of environmental, pollution and degradation issues and no budget. Neither appointments were Michieka's choices, but his ability to transform a university college into Kenya's fifth public university, and subsequently modernise a heavily controlled government parastatal while maintaining integrity and independence from political machinations is exemplary. The memoir demonstrates his leadership adjustments and approaches among multiple constituencies – gaining the confidence of and retaining academic staff; building long-term relationships with external funders like the Japan International Cooperation Agency; representing rural community voices to protect national parks; and influencing nation-wide public attitudes through pioneering anti-litter campaigns.

This leads to his conclusion in Chapter 19 that good leadership "includes the following aspects:

- Vision – framing the organisational character and pursuing it;
- Planning and generating potential solutions to the issues at hand;
- Deciding and making a commitment to a course of action;
- Explaining the rationale that led to this commitment and presenting the legitimate expectations;
- Executing the objectives to realisation;
- Continuous evaluation of the progress with modifications as necessary;
- Integrity and accountability;
- Responsive public relations;
- Good sense of time management."

In both establishing Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) and transitioning to NEMA, Michieka starts with a clean slate, charts a course, consults with governance bodies, and rallies staff and external stakeholders. The memoir's chronological account of his merit-based decision-making in a context of ethnic cleavages, nepotism and sycophancy provides practical examples for decision-makers in similar contexts. The author self-admittedly reports on rather than critiques the political regime which some may find lacking. However, the personal anxieties he describes, like facing discrimination on an apartheid-era South African Airways flight, validate his integrity and character. In 2006, he returns to his tenure at the Faculty of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences, University of Nairobi where he had never stopped conducting research and supervising postgraduate students, demonstrating his commitment to scholarship and the Kenyan academy.

The book was supported by the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) Higher Education Leadership Program which documents challenges and trends of university leadership over the past several decades. The Program aims to better understand the various changes taking place with regard to governance and leadership of higher education institutions in Africa, the nature and forces at play in constituting leadership and governance, and the extent to which changes in governance and leadership of African higher education have contributed or not to changing the general perceptions of the mission and roles of institutions (CODESRIA, 2012). Kenya is expected to have one of the world's fastest-growing populations of 18- to 22-year-olds through 2024,

along with a steady decline in the percentages of undergraduates studying abroad (*ICEF Monitor*, 2016). The Kenyan Commission for University Education has recently been given a mandate to collect, disseminate and maintain data on the country's sixty-eight higher education institutions (The Universities (Amendment) Bill, 2014). Concerns about quality due to massification are attributable to the sector's leadership and governance, particularly the effectiveness of university senates and councils. By documenting historical governance practices, *Trails in Academic and Administrative Leadership in Kenya* contributes to equipping the next generation of higher education leaders.

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