

## Attitude Change: New West African Crusade

By Kofi Akosah-Sarpong

Starting from Sierra Leone, since this year, there have been campaigns West Africa-wide for attitude change as a progress measure. Anybody who knows West Africa well, as Kwasi Gyan-Apenteng, a former editor of the once prestigious London, UK-based defunct **West Africa Magazine** and currently member of Ghana's National Commission of Culture, will tell you, "we are poor because we lack the right attitude."

Actually, our poverty troubles are multi-dimensional but attitude as a development issue is one of them, if not the key factor, as Gyan-Apenteng and his West African brothers argue. The attitude change crusades are more prominent in Sierra Leone and Liberia, two West African states that undermined their corporate attitude mind-set so much so that they overwhelmingly blew themselves into pieces in the face of their rich histories and traditions of civilizations – Sierra Leone as the "Athens of West Africa," with the ancient Fourah Bay College flashing in West Africa, and Liberia, as the first independent country in sub-Saharan Africa, as the bulwark of West African emotional stability.

But if anything, at deeper level, Gyan-Apenteng and his other West African folks' on-going attitude change crusades are in reaction to a West Africa for long mired in moral crisis. The ongoing attitude change campaigns in Nigeria by its Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to "curb the menace of the corruption that constitutes the cog in the wheel of progress" is one of them. As the dark spot of Africa, with most of the trans-Atlantic taking place there, most of Africa's mindless military coup d'état took place in West Africa. At a time most of the 16 countries in West Africa were the playground of confused military juntas, with marijuana-smoking officers as young as 23 years-old and rebel leaders as old as 63 declaring themselves as Heads of State and roaming the regional scene and sending the region into tatters.

There are strong perceptions among other Africans that crime is heavier in West Africa than other parts of Africa - after all West Africa is the home of the global scam '419.' As relic of too much military juntas (within which were great deal of indiscipline as the Jerry Rawlings June 4, 1979 junta in Ghana seek to correct) and civil quarrel, at a point West Africa led Africa in civil conflicts, from Senegal's Cassamance to Liberia to Sierra Leone to Guinea-Bissau. As Sierra Leone's on-going government-backed attitude change campaigns demonstrate, most of these crises, developmentally, is due to indiscipline.

The Sierra Leone attitude challenge, in the face of its immense wealth and small size, fit into Gyan-Apenteng's argument that you may have all the first-class natural wealth but you need discipline to harness them for progress. "... Switzerland, which does not plant cocoa but has the world's best chocolate. In its little territory people raise and plant the soil in only four months of the year. They also produce the best quality dairy products. It is a small country that transmits an image of security, order and labour which has made it the world's strongest safe," thundered

Gyan-Apenteng, also columnist for the Accra-based *The Mirror*, among countries like Japan that had succeeded more from discipline and order than endowment with great natural resources.

But while Gyan-Apenteng and his other West African siblings have done well in critically discussing and raising the implications of attitude in West Africa's progress, they haven't gone deeper enough, as the West African reality calls for. The issue isn't the intellect, as Gyan-Apenteng recognizes: "Executives from rich countries who communicate with their counterparts in poor countries show that there is no significant intellectual difference. Race or skin colour is also not important. Immigrants labelled lazy in their countries of origin are the productive power in rich European countries."

The burning issue is how Gyan-Apenteng and his West African associates have not factored in sufficiently enough the implications of the West African culture in the attitude-progress campaign 50 years after freedom from colonial rule. Much of the attitude debates have been seen more from neo-liberal Western values than from African traditional ones. There is nothing wrong in appropriating neo-liberal values for progress. The challenge is how you fit it into the West African attitude challenges, especially from within its cultural milieu.

While Gyan-Apenteng acknowledges that the difference why the developed countries' progress is grounded in good attitude more than Ghana and other West Africa states, he makes the case that "the attitude of the people" (developed countries) is "framed along the years by education and culture." The lesson here is that Ghana and West Africa have not invested heavily enough in their culture as a development issue, more so as a discipline issue. A range of Ghana and other West African traditional values can easily be appropriated for the on-going attitude promotion.

The defining word here is certain aspects of the "culture" as part of the reasons why Ghana and other West Africa states have for long being troubled by the attitude challenges. West Africans have not worked hard in the cultural context not only as a modernization factor but also as a progress issue. The trouble, however, is that the circumstances have changed. West Africans can no longer lean on the neo-liberal values to take on the attitude-progress issues that have seen them wheeling in mid air in their development process. Worse still, their lack of grasp of their culture as a serious progress issue has turned them against themselves.

Whether Gyan-Apenteng talks of "ethics as a basic principle" or "responsibility" or "respect for rules and laws" or "respect for the rights of other people" or "punctuality" that spurred the developed countries' progress, this has to be seen in the context of their culture, and should be the case with West Africa. It is still shocking why in the face of this moral crisis, Gyan-Apenteng and his West African associates have not tapped into the various national houses of traditional rulers to reclaim West Africa's morality by seeking their advice and direction.

Gyan-Apenteng and his West African associates can borrow some advice from the Southeast Asians. Recently, as some Southeast Asian countries such as Japan and China face attitude challenge, they drank deep into their core traditional values such Confucianism to regenerate themselves in order to spur their progress.

Gyan-Apenteng and his West African associates are yet to do this in the face of armed robbers appropriating juju-marabou mediums for crime; parents who do not discipline their children well and blame their crimes on witchcraft; drivers who are drunk, get involve in fatal accidents and blame witchcraft and evil spirits; a President Samuel Doe who rejects all rational thinking and use juju-marabou mediums and plunge Liberian into long-running bloodbath and suffering in the face of massive human sacrifice; and civil servants who use juju-marabou mediums to bring down their co-workers down.

All these attitude problems emanate from the West African culture and people like Gyan-Apenteng have to consider them in the attitude change-and-progress crusades, all things being equal – for all things are not equal.

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