


Commitment: A Prerequisite for Social Transformation

 <p>AHMHCB O AFRO HERITAGE MENTAL HEALTH COMMUNITY BASED ORGANISATION</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kiingati J.B. (2021) Commitment: A Prerequisite for Social Transformation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">https://afroheritageconsult.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Commitment-.pdf</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Visit our website for more articles afroheritageconsult.org</p>
--	---

Introduction

Commitment is defined by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary as “a promise to do something or to behave in a particular way”. While the definition uses the words 'promise' and 'behaviour', it leaves individuals to determine the value they put on the two words. That makes the definition light and mild in a world so marred by individualism. Much more than that though, this text desires to look at commitment as an undivided and undistracted attention towards something, somebody, a goal, a value, or a vision. Before going on to give other parameters to commitment, the first task is to explain each of the words given in this new definition:

Explanation of the Adopted Definition

Undivided and undistracted attention is best understood by watching a hunter seeking a game. One cannot think of a better hunter than the cat. Taking time to observe a cat focussing on a prey, one notices the strategy it takes to choose a position. It ensures that this chosen position is calm, and permitting it to pounce, once the prey is noted. The position is one that attracts the unexpected prey. This position is supported by the posture that the hunter adopts. On the one part the cat remains low, so as not to overly distract its prey, and at the same time setting the limb muscles to facilitate a long, yet fast pounce. The cat also remains quiet; very quiet that unless you had noticed it before, you may not realise its presence. Her eyes, ears, and nose are all set to perceive any presence and position of the prey.

This *attention is towards something, somebody*, a goal, a value or a vision. Something or somebody is physical. This means that one can perceive and interact with this other. The interactions use any of the five senses: eyes, ears, smell, touch, and feel. The degree to which the interaction is done, is highly dependent on the intentions of the interactions. These intentions also determine the level of attention granted. The level of mildness and temporality, that is granted to the interaction, determines the level of the attention, hence the commitment. The attention given by a nature swimmer to a slug in water, is not the same attention given to an approaching crocodile or hippo. The attention given to a pedestrian, by a driver, cannot be compared to that given to a spouse.

Attention is also given to a goal. Goals are linked to aims and to objectives. Aims, objectives and goals, in that order, of intensity and severity, are futuristic. An individual or a group of persons, acknowledge their present position, with its challenges and gains. They then appreciate growth towards another, presumably better position. Aware of the efforts needed, they lay down strategies towards realizing the new position. These strategies need to be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound. The strategies also need to be clear on what action is to be carried out, who is to carry out the action, and who is to benefit. Also, it is important to be clear on where the activity shall be carried out, when it shall be done, and how (material, method) needed to execute the strategies. The planners and executors also need to be very clear on why (reasons) this strategy is being carried out. The severity of the goal, the effect that it is meant to have, the resources needed to realise the goal, the time

frame within which the goal is to be realised, and the length of the effect that the goal is going to have, all contribute to the degree of attention required in the process. In this way, the level of commitment varies.

Attention can be towards the attainment or the realization of a value. A value is that which one desires. The desire of the value could also be by a community. Both goals and values, are in the human cognition. This means that they are not in the docket of animals. In addition, goals and values also have identifiable indicators (perceivable actions/behaviour) linked to the attainment of the goal/value. However, values tend to have a moral judgment, an aspect not necessarily present in goals. On that note, goals are easily linked to the Id (individual pleasure) and the Ego (human relational level) while values are in the realm of the superego (Going beyond human relation to that of the Divine; what is good in itself). Values seek to attain more universal good. Based on this therefore, values call for greater attention and greater commitment. In Eisenhower's quadrant, values tend to be at the level of not necessary but important. If not well considered, persons whose focus is on materialism and consumerism, fail to ever seek value. It is possible to appear quite successful in the human eyes, yet remain very unhappy, due to a lack of value proposition.

Attention is also geared towards a vision. The following story helps explain the understanding of a vision that this writeup adopts. There was once an elderly man whose business was to take grocery and cereals to a nearby market. To ease his operations, he had a donkey drawn cart. One morning, he woke up as was his habit and headed for the market. He carried on with his business of distributing his goods as the donkey and the cart waited at the yard. Due to the day's heat and perhaps the fatigue, the donkey decided to lie down awaiting his master. In the late afternoon as the sun was beginning to set, he came to his donkey and wanted it to start on its way home. He executed the usual gesture commanding the animal to stand up and start the journey, but this animal did not respond. He turned to beating it so that it could obey, but to no avail. The tussle went on for a few minutes and was becoming a little frustrating for the old man.

Soon, a young lad appeared and offered to help. The old man, having been so frustrated desired to see what the young man would do, that would challenge his many years of experience. The young boy asked the old man to provide a juicy carrot. This he easily did, from the multitude of sellers that was beginning to get attracted to the spectacle. The young boy, got hold of the gift, tied it to a long stick that he had with him. He jumped onto the stationary cart and stretched the stick so that the carrot dangled right in front of the tired eyes of the donkey. To this, the donkey realised that a meal had been offered. It attempted to reach the carrot still from a laying position but this was not possible. Oblivious of the trick, it jumped on to its feet still in the attempt. The more forward it moved, the more the carrot maintained its attractive distance of dangling just above its eyes. It was on its feet and on its way. The old man had to be helped to quickly jump onto the moving wagon. Amazement never ceased to grasp the old man and the spectators who had learnt some new trick from just a lad.

A vision is a carrot dangling right above our eyes. It grants us the needed impetus to keep moving. It is never too far as to get us giving up. Rather it is just at the right distance. It is also quite juicy and attractive, and often is needed when we are too exhausted to think of taking any step. A vision remains a vision in that we never actually get it. If we do, it immediately turns into a goal. We then need to re-set the vision. A well-set vision however, is never fully attainable in our human existence. The Holy Bible's "Love your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your body, and love your neighbour as you love yourself", is one such a vision. For the Christian, it is never fully attainable in human life. It is also not too far to convince us that we are moving in the right direction. It governs our thoughts, emotions and actions. Well-done it forms our Christian behaviour and subsequent character.

Proper attention geared towards a life vision generates commitment. Due to the worth that the vision holds within us, and in giving us lifelong purpose, the attention needed needs to be equally intense.

Additional Qualifications of Commitment

Commitment supersedes a worldly reward: How short-sighted is one that sets a commitment on worldly/perishable goods! The shorter the achievability of a realistic goal, the easier it is and, in many ways, the faint the severity of the commitment. To a large extent, also the higher or lower the degree of maturity. For the believer, eternal life calls for commitment. The precepts laid down by one's faith, are often quite hard to realise. Adequate realisation of the same, often leads one to be looked at as a little insane. It is therefore not strange that those qualifying to be referred to as saints, at the Church and also at the level of individual interactions, appear to have a miss in their lives. Mother Teresa's commitment towards the very poor, and her continued risky engagements with the neediest, left many questioning her sacrifice.

For the non-religious, commitments seen in nationalist leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Mandela to the wellness of their nations, shall remain historical and to many unfathomable. The humility of Nyerere, his unselfish act of having to walk and mingle with his citizens, is crazy for many leaders today; they all dream of having too many enemies and dread being eliminated at any available opportunity. These nationalists were certainly committed to their countries to levels that one can hardly believe. The effect that these commitments had on their citizens have left marks that generations enjoyed, enjoy and shall continue to enjoy for long. Certainly indeed very few leaders shall ever attain such degrees of commitment.

Social transformation calls for commitment. Certainly, salaries and worldly remunerations are far from such commitments. Titles of office bearers become such an illusionary path for social transformers to undertake. With this, very little, if any at all, is affected by their work. Social transformation, is inevitable if one and future generations are to enjoy the fruits of man-effected positive change. At times, or even many times, the social transformer does not live to enjoy the fruits of the work. The inner satisfaction however, is much more than what any human can offer. On that note therefore commitment supersedes worldly rewards, and so is the case to the social transformative commitment.

Commitment goes beyond instinct: Commitment goes beyond instinct. Animals are very committed to seeing their offsprings live. Mother hen will lay on her eggs, with such a commitment that she shall be attacked and killed by safari ants; she will not abdicate her commitment. I once witnessed an accident where a mother and her two-day infant were casualties. The vehicle that was ferrying them rolled three times. When a passing military truck saw what had happened, the occupants soon took up the task of rescuing the occupants. Out was removed a mother who was unconscious. In her arms however, was a two-day infant dead asleep and safe. The rescuing army men, could not disengage the infant from the unconscious mother. This spectacle has remained in my mind 30 years down the line; such a commitment to the offspring's life, as executed by the mother.

Commitment however, goes beyond instinct. It is a conscious decision to pursue an end. We noted about the vision; it is an undivided and undistracted attention towards.... It is value adding in that one can choose not to. I am not sure that it is motherly and instinctively so for mothers to choose not to protect their offsprings. In the present world though, the continued infanticide is leaving this statement questioned. The focus of this write-up nevertheless is that the cognition and volition is entirely at work. On that note therefore, there is nothing like forced commitment. That does not water down, contradict or even eradicate that commitment calls upon consequences. Even when individuals challenge consequences, though that may affect the futurity of the commitment, it does not replace it. Caution is therefore given that prior to an undertaking of commitment, a clear thought process, involving the consequences needs to be considered. Social transformative commitment therefore has also to go beyond mere instinct.

Commitment could be ignited by a crisis or an experience: A crisis is that which offers a threat. This threat can be to one's comfort, to one's support system, or to one's life. When it is to one's comfort,

one can as well ignore it. At this level one may move from affording cars often driven by the elected honourable to cars often afforded by business starters or middle level civil servants. It may also get one moving from having treatment in expensive private hospitals to crowded public hospitals. While this may lead to some people going into depressed conditions, with some maturity, one may easily overcome the stress. All in all, the positive angle to this is that loss of comfort can ignite commitment.

Threat that is on one's support system can be a little more devastating than that on one's comfort. An example of one's support system is friends, relatives and even work. When one loses friends and even relatives through death, or through reduced income, or even through advancement in age and lessened morbidity, devastations can settle. This means that one may start feeling unwanted or even rejected. One key loss to one's support system comes with old age. Retirement and inability to occupy the large office that one initially had, loss of guaranteed income and loss of the power to have many subjected to your docket are all sensitive matters. They need to be addressed with the seriousness they deserve. This may ignite commitment to something different.

Threat to one's life can never be ignored. Do not be tempted to think that I am referring to commitment by the dead. Far from it, threats do not always actualise what they purport to do; thanks to that. Threat to life, again as mentioned earlier can be brought about by age. Gradually smooth ageing tends to cushion the threat. When however, one has a terminal illness. This is a blatant reminder of one's mortality and the pronouncement of it by a medic can be a death sentence to many. I guess a life imprisonment has almost the same devastating effect, though this second one carries with it self-blame, if the crime was indeed committed willingly. Threat to life, can also be brought about by a serious accident. This may be where one's friends or even relatives are lost. Of course, the guilt that one comes with it is dependent on the driver's state at the time. If one was under the influence of alcohol, or worse still if one was over speeding, the impact is heavier.

While it is hard to fathom, such threats do come in life. The way it is handled by the individual, by those wound the person, and increasingly so, by the therapist who may need to journey with the individual, is so crucial. This handling may easily break or re-construct the individual. Lest I forget, loss of a spouse can also be in such a level. Of course, this is also dependent on the relationship that existed between the two.

Threat hence is key in undertaking commitment. However as noted in the process of the write up, not all commitments are ignited by perceivable or even realizable threats. There are numerous situations that may lead to commitments, and one of them is experience.

Experiences are deeper than perceptions. While perceptions remain at the level of the five common senses, when such become unignorable, then it starts moving towards an experience. In that way therefore, experiences call for some length in the perception. Experiences, in many ways are life changing. When one undergoes an experience, life is never the same again. Together with the time aspect, an experience may also be cumulative in nature. This means that a perception may be followed by another and another, and eventually an experience is realised. The effect of the discussed realizations of experiences, lead to an experience leading to value acquisition or loss, behaviour change or acquisition, and hence character change or formation. An experience cannot not leave one the way they were before its realization.

Experience therefore leads to commitment. Those that are recruited into the military, undergo continued and repeated perceptions in the form of training. On passing out, it is rare that they shall not have been changed by the training experience. Those that undergo religious formation or seminary training, on taking on of their perpetual vows, and/or on being ordained, they are different persons. With this therefore, they are able to commit themselves. In this lifelong commitment, their characters are changed, the way they relate to other people and in turn the way others relate to them. From threats or experiences, commitment is ignited.

Commitment is however, not sustained by the igniting crisis or experience: While threats and experiences ignite commitment, they do not sustain the commitment. Threats and experiences are

temporal. They have a beginning and an end. At times, the threat or the experience may be instant and very short lived. One such example is an accident. This could be life changing despite it happening within seconds. One that was walking, may have to spend the rest of their life in a wheel chair. It could even lead to death, leaving the spouse and the children with a changed life.

It is therefore, quite immature for one to wait for a threat or an experience for them to change and have a long-life commitment. I guess this may have been the frustration in Jesus when crowds desired a miracle for them to change. Even after two or three having the same or similar threats or experiences, the subsequent commitment is not necessarily the same. Among alcoholics, the rock bottom is different for each. Some may only require the disappearance of the spouse for them to commit to something different. Others, may never commit to something different even when the threat to life keeps coming. Personalities influence the effect leading to a commitment and also its sustainability. For those in religious life and in Christianity, prayer is noted as significant. For those that suffered immense poverty, fear of retrogression may remain a factor in the sustainability. In all cases, sustainability to commitment depends on what the individual chooses and, on the commitment, to remain on that truck.

Commitment is only for adults: Infants, children and adolescents have enough problems of growing up. In their physical, mental, and even societal ability, they do not have the ability to make commitments. Complete maturity is a concept which many struggle not only to identify, but to realise. A proper look at oneself, and especially in times of crisis, leaves one wondering whether they truly are mature. Neither the individual nor the society can fully put a finger to the exact meaning of maturity. I guess, one needs clear identifiable indicators to be able to understand the term maturity. I think you will also agree with me that different communities and even cultures have different meanings to maturity.

Based on that therefore, it is important that each individual is clear in what is the meaning of maturity. As far as possible if this meaning is in line with societal expectations, then there may be harmony. However, the increased individualisation of one's cognition, emotional intelligence, and actions, in the name of human rights, has continued to challenge orthodox ways of determining what is socially right. Due to this, it is increasingly hard for ethics, which has been hard to address, since the start. Even crime related issues that appeared clear a few years ago, are increasingly dependent on the lawyer one has. Religious based values, have been interpreted by different altar bearers to a level that one can hardly put a finger to what is right. All these make it even harder to indicate with precision, what maturity is, and who an adult is.

By now there is hardly no doubt that adulthood has never been challenged to these levels before. It is fluidly linked to the umbrella constitutional dispensation of who an adult is. However, to many, the question calls for increased thought. The harder the definition of adulthood and maturity is, the harder is the understanding of commitment. With that note, the harder it becomes to understand why citizens of the developing world cherish remaining in their abject conditions despite generations and generations of sufferers, and the immense education-related resources that are spent. Remember, the more solid one's commitment is, the more the adulthood is realisable!

Relevance of Commitment to our Developing Nations

Leaders and citizens in a developing nation are equally responsible for our position. Individually and communally, every adult is responsible for their own destiny. Unfair it may sound, to varied degrees, I agree, but each has a significant role to play in the person they are and what they are going to be. Dreams are for all, but actualization of the dreams are for those whose commitment is real. As we undertake to understand this statements better, additional realities emerge:

- (i) *Leaders get into power with no vision and worse still having the wrong motives:* Increasingly, those with notable wealth, sadly become the *de facto* leaders, ignoring how the wealth was acquired and who acquired it. Increasingly too, the eloquent get the best opportunities of convincing the electorate (in democratic systems) and find their way into leadership. The

perfection of human folly is when criminals (including those from corruption) are speedily laundered and presented to represent, work for, and take charge of the hard-earned resources of the citizenry. Leadership has nothing and is largely divorced from the above parameters. A servant leader is one that takes charge of the self and is committed towards the development of the society. The individual that is ready to go into the ditch with the masses, and together learn the way to get out of the ditch, is a leader. A leader, does not know, but rather encourages the people as each discovers their Divine granted strength to know. A leader lays down one's life for the masses. A leader is not self-seeking and not self-centred. A leader desists from self-worth, rather solicits societal and communal worth. In line with this write-up, a leader is visionary and is committed to self and to communal vision. A leader knows when to say enough, and hand over the mantle for others to lead. A leader shapes the future by nurturing the giftedness of future leaders. In that way, the leader is aware of their limitations and of the subsequent need to be a steward in ensuring the sustainability of the organ when s/he is gone.

(ii) *Leaders live a facade that they are doing themselves well by enriching themselves at the expense of the citizenry:* While keeping in mind that each of us is a leader in their own small way, with the imminent lives of abject poverty when attending primary and secondary school, coupled with the hard work that was put, leaders often feel obliged to reward themselves, at the closest opportunity. In fact, many feel that it is their right to spend their times in leadership rewarding themselves for the sacrifices they made. Quotes from scriptures and from writings, are memorised and constantly repeated to the masses as a justification for their actions. In all these, the “commitment” is towards self-improvement and self-enriching. This acts to sanitise their consumerism and materialism. To a large extent, their lavish life-styles are justified. A society and a community however, is as wealthy as its poorest citizen. This is the basic mathematics that is done in the calculation of a nation's GDP. Household economies, security, the future of a country and imminent happiness, often linked to countries with the best of institutions, cumulatively inform the wellness of the individuals in that nation. The individual enriching of leaders, with the resources from tax payers, and the subsequent justification of such, is hence easily questioned when the wealth struggles to go past a generation. Social transformation speaks to the leaders, more so in the developed world. Care calls for commitment to the who we are, for it is only so, that I sustainably am.

(iii) *Citizens have decided to continue behaving in the same way but expect different results:* Unfortunate to the saying, only fools expect different results after engaging in the same activity. The citizenry has fallen back into their tribal cocoons even when the leader has evidently engaged in corrupt dealings that have only enriched him/her and if lucky, the immediate family. Leaders have promised milk from taps even when water taps run dry. When persons who have proven effective in other docket, including international ones, local citizenry has adamantly heckled them down. Gender has been a dominant determiner of leaders, a factor that has continued to deny developing nations, leadership. Lessons from the developed world and even from some unprecedented, but out of the normal trends, that have led to success, have failed to be repeated by the neighbours. The citizenry has opted to waste valuable production time, pursuing leaders who already are on the payroll. As long as these trends continue, the results shall continue as they are. Gradual change is expected from the progressive wave of nature. True to the changing reality and to the evolution theories, this process is very slow. The hope of it progressing towards the right direction is if the leadership does not negatively influence the change towards their favour. With these, only generations to come may be factored in its fruition. This can only be altered by social transformation where individuals catalyse the process to generate speedy results.

(iv) *Citizens expect change without being committed to effecting the change:* Voting is the starting

point of the citizenry effecting change. This voting has got to be with the head and not guided by bribery, corruption, gender or negative ethnicity. This voting entails numbers. In that case, every vote counts. With the continued Free Primary Education, subsidised secondary and the subsequent support for tertiary education, the citizenry is expected to continue developing a critical mind. This means that the populace can read for itself, and critic what the leaders are engaging in. Promises that can never be realised, have to be squashed. Those whose role is empowerment, through Civil Society and FBOs have a Divine duty to continue educating the citizenry. After voting, the work of the citizenry is even more. All are called to follow up on their leaders demanding accountability. Numbers are key in such follow-ups. While having the colonial hangovers, leaders may find this as negative intrusion and even attempt to threaten the individual citizens, numbers matter. An approach to a public office in numbers makes a mark. With the current mainstream and social media, the public have an additional arm that can act as the ombudsman. Speedily, any information, any injustice, easily goes into the air. This is not often a welcome situation for those in leadership. Additionally, continued unending struggles to seek for services is needed. Giving up only gets leaders enriching themselves at the expense of the citizenry.

- (v) *We all (individually and collectively) fall short of commitment to effect change in our nations, and hope that those from outside will effect the change:* Those that occupy offices in institutions, unchecked, easily desire to behave like small gods, or even as though the remunerations they get are their right and are as a result of very great favour to the public. Easily, when persons are in office, forget that once an appointment letter is issued, the back of it, with little changes, is the termination letter. In whatever docket, each individual has a duty to do their best. Many if not all the developing nations have a challenge with identity in relation to commitment to.... Those who have had the opportunity to work with the British, can almost predict their specific and accurate way of management and administration. The hardworking nature of the Germans and their commitment is outstanding in almost everything that they engage in. Among the Asian Tigers, the diligence of the South Koreans, the focus of the Indians and the technological focus of Japanese, are all notable. In the recent past, the Chinese's focus on reaching out to the African market is shocking. What is our identity as persons from the developing world? It is easy to point fingers at the leaders, but even at home and in the immediate locality, what is my identity? It is easy to talk of male, and then mention the ethnic community. At a slightly added level, I could also mention the job that I do. Integrity-wise however, and character-wise, the definition of the person's identity collapses. For those that cherish the eulogy reading at funerals, the predictions are evident as we write almost similar stories: birth, school, church, marriage, work, sickness, death. While each of us is uniquely created, that uniqueness fails to come out. This could easily be a life not lived, or rather not lived in a worthwhile manner. A life of non-commitment to anything special except, the pursuance of that which everyone else pursues. What a sad uniformity founded on non-commitment! Social transformation challenges that I look into my inner self. Through mindfulness guided by character strengths, one can be aware and engage in the small things, yet bring immense changes to the self and to the significant other. Through social transformative commitment, let us seek to be deliberate in our thoughts, and deeds.

Conclusion

Social change is inevitable. If there is one thing that we are sure of, is change. It shall come whether we want it or not, whether we effect it or not. Social change is a natural process that reflects and responds to the movement of the universe. Social change is not harmful to creation. It is sustainable and in many ways is necessary for the continuations of creation.

However, with the human beings continued influence on the natural process, vices have continued to be realised. The human being brought (and continues to proliferate) slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, dictatorship, nepotism, negative ethnicity, poverty, corruption, amidst the new normal of consumerism, materialism, environmental degradation and pollution as well as unwarranted environmental exploitation of non-renewable resources. Even the exploitation of the renewable resources is done as if we desire to finish them then jump on to another planet. These are not in tandem with social change. It would be unfair and unrealistic for any human being to expect social change to put right, vices that it did not effect. It is therefore, important that the human being, more so the one suffering the loss most, to act. This acting is what is called social transformation. It calls for clear planning at the individual level and later at the family level, before thinking of the community level. It calls for attention to things, to people, to goals, to values and to visions. The longer one postpones the commitment, the longer one pushes away happiness and wellness, at the individual and societal level in the present and in the time of, and for the future generations.