



Praxis Paper 6

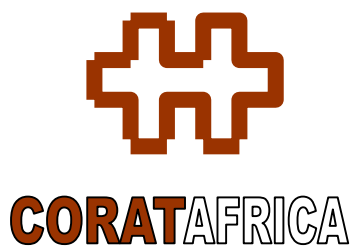
Realities of Change

*Understanding How African
NGO Leaders Develop*

By Rick James
with Julius Oladipo, Moses Isooba,
Betsy Mboizi and Ida Kusiima

Illustrations by Charles Onen

July 2005



Acknowledgement

This paper is the product of an ongoing collaboration between INTRAC (Malawi), CDRN (Uganda) and CORAT (Kenya). Details of these institutions can be found in Appendix 2.

The research was funded primarily by CORDAID and also by INTRAC Praxis.

The authors would particularly like to thank Charles Onen for the cartoons.

A number of INTRAC staff contributed to the editing of this paper: considerable thanks are due to Rebecca Wrigley, Lucy Earle and Jackie Smith especially.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgement	iii
Executive Summary	vi
1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Theories of Leadership: Evolutions and Limitations	1
1.2 The Research: Rationale and Approach	3
1.3 The Contexts in Uganda, Kenya and Malawi.....	4
1.4 This Publication.....	5
2. Constraints on Leadership Behaviour and Change	6
2.1 Diverse Perceptions of Leadership	7
2.2 Conflicting Concepts of Leadership	8
2.2.1 Traditional cultural perspectives on leadership.....	8
2.2.2 Neo-patrimonial political leadership.....	10
2.2.3 Western management theory	11
2.3 Congested Lives of Leaders	12
2.3.1 Organisational demands.....	13
2.3.2 Donor demands on leaders.....	14
2.3.3 Domestic demands	15
2.4 Challenges Facing Women Leaders	16
2.5 The Impact of HIV/AIDS.....	18
3. Leaders in Change	19
3.1 Who Says Leaders Need to Change and Why?	19
3.2 The Process of Change	21
3.3 The Catalysts and Triggers of Change	22
3.3.1 New leadership role	22
3.3.2 Organisational crisis or challenge	22
3.3.3 Personal discomfort and pain.....	23
3.3.4 New learning from capacity building processes	25
3.3.5 Example and inspiration from others.....	26
3.3.6 Inspiration from their faith in God.....	27
3.4 The Person in Change	29
3.4.1 Beliefs and values	29
3.4.2 Sense of self and inner security	29
3.4.3 Openness and willingness to change.....	30
3.4.4 Aspirations and determination	30
3.5 Factors Reinforcing Change	31
3.5.1 Support from staff	31
3.5.2 Support from board	31
3.5.3 Support from family	32
3.5.4 Support from friends, peers and mentors	32
3.5.5 Supporting changes in organisational structures and systems.....	32
4. Conclusions	33
4.1 In What Ways did Leaders Change?	33
4.2 Summary Using Force Field Analysis.....	33
5. Implications for Leadership Development	37

5.1	Content of Leadership Development	38
5.2	Methods of Leadership Development	39
5.3	Principles of Leadership Development Practice	40
5.4	Personal Approach to Leadership Development	41
5.5	Approach Used by Capacity Building Providers	42
5.6	Influencing Donor Policies	43
	References	45
	Appendix 1: Research Methodology	48
	Appendix 2: Participating Organisations	50
	Appendix 3: National Civil Society Contexts	51

Realities of Change

Understanding How African NGO Leaders Develop

By Rick James

Key Words: leadership, Africa, management, NGOs, civil society sector, personal development, HIV/AIDS, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda

Executive Summary

The context in which most civil society organisations (CSOs) work is constantly evolving, often rapidly. In response, leaders of CSOs must therefore be leaders of *change* in their own organisations. In order for organisations to develop and change, practical capacity building experiences are revealing that leaders themselves have to develop and change. Leadership development is therefore being prioritised as a crucial capacity building intervention, both by leaders of African CSOs themselves as well as by donors and other stakeholders.

Libraries overflow with material about leadership in a Western commercial context, but there is very little published information about the particular realities that civil society leaders face in Africa, and even less about the factors which influence those individuals to change their leadership behaviour. To address this knowledge gap, three capacity building organisations in Africa undertook a joint research programme. CORAT Africa in Kenya, INTRAC in Malawi and the Community Development Resource Network (CDRN) in Uganda interviewed 45 non-governmental organisation (NGO) leaders to find out their perspectives on leadership; the nature of the leadership change processes they had experienced; and the factors that had promoted and constrained change in their leadership behaviour in the past.

The main findings are that:

- Leaders do not have a coherent and consistent underlying understanding of leadership. Their perspectives on leadership are hybrids, influenced by traditional cultural expectations of (male) leadership, a political 'neo-patrimonial' role model and Western management theory. Leadership behaviour tended to oscillate between these models depending on convenience and circumstance rather than conscious choice.
- NGO leaders have very congested lives as they simultaneously inhabit three different worlds – the international aid system with its accountability and information demands; the urban organisational world of staff/board expectations; and the rural context of extended families. Keeping such diverse demands satisfied leaves leaders with little time to reflect and learn.
- Women leaders face tougher realities, confronting cultural expectations of women being followers, not leaders, and facing even greater demands from their families.

HIV/AIDS is exacerbating this situation through its destructive impact on organisations and families – though the extent of the impact is not fully appreciated.

In terms of the process of leadership change, research respondents identified moving towards a more empowering style of leadership as one of the most common changes. The process seemed to be a gradual evolutionary one rather than a great revolutionary leap forward. It was not a linear or planned, but rather it was a cascade of events. While the process of change that individuals went through was complex and unique to each person, a number of elements in leaders' change processes were common:

- Leaders were stuck in congested lives with conflicting models of leadership
- External events 'catalysed' a process of change
- Leaders internalised these events and gave them meaning
- Leaders implemented changed behaviour and followers and others responded, reinforcing or undermining the change

The research studies identified a number of external events that played a role in encouraging leaders to behave differently: a change in leadership role; an organisational crisis; negative feedback from staff, board, peers or mentors; positive role models; or new knowledge (e.g. from training). However, while these events acted as catalysts of change, what seemed to make the difference was how they were interpreted by the leaders themselves, based on their: beliefs and values; sense of self; openness to change; aspirations and determination. Because leadership is fundamentally a relationship, the extent to which a leader's decision to change was supported or resisted by staff, the board, family, friends and peers also had a considerable impact on the degree of change.

These research findings indicate that leadership development could be more effective if it:

- is personalised, allowing leaders to internalise the need for change;
- assists leaders to develop their own coherent guiding theory of leadership;
- recognises the congestion in leaders' lives and helps them think through their different roles in life, and in particular look at gender implications.
- actively reinforces the identified catalysts for change;
- ensures that workshops and training create space for reflection and peer feedback, take an experiential learning approach, provide new knowledge and use role models;
- uses mentoring and peer learning as follow-through and as stand-alone leadership development inputs in their own right;
- is rooted within the organisation, so that 'followers' and board members can be supportive of change processes.

For capacity building providers this would mean:

- adjusting both the content and process of their leadership development programmes to reflect the factors that inhibit and promote change;
- developing the skills to deliver these different services, such as being able to provide counselling and coaching support to leaders;
- challenging donors on the type of leadership development programmes they support and effective roles and boundaries in stimulating and reinforcing leadership change;
- practising what they preach by having constructive feedback, time for reflection, and placing values at the heart of their own capacity building practice.

1. Introduction

Good leadership is increasingly viewed as one of the critical components in the development of civil society in many parts of Africa. Several studies by African non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have highlighted the need to focus capacity building efforts on leadership development (IFCB 1998 and 2001; CIVICUS 2002). The recent report by the Commission for Africa reiterates this priority (2005). Certainly the problems of poverty, inequality, conflict and ill health are considerable and among other things will need strong leadership at local level, if they are to be addressed. The reasons for the failure of strong leadership to emerge at local level (within NGOs, churches, government or the private sector) are complex, inter-related and include historical, cultural, economic and social dimensions.

Practitioners involved in capacity building provision in Africa are finding that in order for organisations to change and build their capacity, leaders themselves may need to change – to the extent that 'leadership commitment to organisational change is synonymous with their commitment to their own personal change' (James 2002, Quinn 2000, Daft 2002). Where leaders do not change their attitudes or behaviour on a personal level, the organisations often fail to change.

Where leaders do not change their attitudes or behaviour on a personal level, the organisations often fail to change.

Yet, despite the plethora of activity in leadership development today, the underlying conceptual basis for these programmes is often not clear and is poorly adapted to the characteristics of the civil society/NGO sector. These concepts often fail to locate 'leadership' in

the context of the particular social relations and dynamics in Africa or the personal dynamics of how leaders change and develop. Without an understanding of these factors leadership development programmes may risk failure in supporting NGO leaders in Africa to rise to the considerable challenges they are facing.

1.1 Theories of Leadership: Evolutions and Limitations

In the last 25 years, leadership has become one of the most talked about elements of organisations. As an illustration of this, today there are more than 16,000 publications referenced to leadership on the Amazon.com web-site, up by almost 50% in the last two years alone. Yet amidst this accelerating activity, there is still no widely accepted definition of leadership and no common consensus on how best to develop leaders (Bolden 2004). Leadership is a contested arena with a multitude of different theories.

Some of the early leadership theorists focused on identifying and isolating a finite number of 'traits' that were exhibited by 'great men' based on psycho-dynamic perspectives. Some of the limitations of trait theories prompted others like McGregor (1960) and Blake and Mouton (1964) to highlight the importance of what leaders actually do, rather than their personal characteristics. They focussed on leadership

behaviour and styles, often advocating for a 'team management' approach. The next wave of theorists (such as Fielder 1967 and Hersey and Blanchard 1977) emphasised the 'situational' aspect of leadership – in other words they believed that the effectiveness of different leadership styles depended largely on the particular situation. Within this framework John Adair highlighted the importance of a leader being able to balance the needs of the task, the team and the individual (1973).

From the late 1970s onwards the concept of 'transformational leadership' gained currency with writers like Burns (1978) and later Covey (1992) who advocated for leadership being about transforming people and organisations by engaging their hearts and minds. In the last 20 years other leadership theories have emphasised the importance of the 'charismatic leader' or the 'servant leader' (Greenleaf 1998). Others have highlighted the spiritual dimension of leadership (Owen 1999; Kakabadse and Kakabadse 1999). These ideas have been complemented by recent work on 'distributed leadership', based on the notion of leadership being first and foremost a relationship of mutual influence between leaders and followers. The 'followership' of an organisation, and how freely they attribute leadership authority, is also increasingly recognised as having an important role to play in the behaviour and success of a leader (Howell and Shamir 2005).

Almost all leadership theory is based on Western private sector management – much of which is not relevant to different political and cultural contexts in which NGO leaders work .

Almost all this leadership theory is based on a very specific context – Western (particularly US) management of private sector companies. As a result much of the current leadership research is not relevant to the different political and cultural contexts in which NGO leaders work (Smillie and Hailey 2001; Fowler, Ng'ethe and Owiti 2002; Hailey and James 2004). Social identity theory argues that leadership behaviour is bound up with leaders' definitions of themselves in relation to the group (Haslam 2001). Thus, NGO leadership needs to be seen in the wider social context. For example, Fowler, Ng'ethe and Owiti's (2002) analysis of the determinants of civic leadership in Kenya emphasised the importance of the wider institutional framework in determining the performance of NGO leaders.

While these studies have increased our understanding of the static characteristics of effective NGO leadership, few have tried to explore the dynamics of how leaders change and develop. Yet as social identity theory suggests, for leadership development approaches to be effective, they must be designed with an understanding of the historical and social forces affecting leaders in African civil society, the pressures and realities they face and the factors which influence them to change behaviour.

In this paper civic leadership is located in the context of the workings of organisations and not in relation to wider social change or the dynamics of inequality and power that act as a precursor to change at the societal level. Thus this paper and the review of literature, as well as its implications for leadership development practice, has to be seen only from the perspective of civic organisational entities.

1.2 The Research: Rationale and Approach

In order to explore these issues three capacity building organisations CORAT, CDRN and INTRAC¹ in Eastern and Southern Africa sought to find out: *'What makes leaders within African civil society change their leadership behaviour?'*² by identifying:

- who says leaders need to change and why?
- the incentives and forces for change
- the sanctions and constraints on leaders changing
- the process of leaders changing their behaviour
- the implications for leadership development
- the implications for capacity building providers

The research did not start out from a particular theoretical stance, but through purposive sampling of more than 45 'well-respected, experienced and diverse' NGO leaders in Kenya, Uganda and Malawi the research had respondents identify the 'most significant change' in their leadership behaviour over the years. The NGOs chosen included a diversity of urban/rural, faith-based/secular and those focusing on service delivery/advocacy. Through semi-structured interviews respondents identified the different factors and events that prompted these changes. The personal experiences of change from three different African countries were analysed to draw conclusions about what makes leaders change. The contextual and cultural differences and commonalities were assessed, paying particular attention to the cultural challenges facing women leaders as well as the contextual challenges of leading in places of high HIV/AIDS prevalence.

The research did not intend to enter the highly contested academic debate, but to focus on the changes that leaders themselves perceived in order to reflect on how leadership development programmes can be designed and implemented more effectively. There were a number of limitations to the research methodology used:

- Due to limited resources as well as ethical considerations, the research focused exclusively on top leaders in organisations, although the researchers believe that 'leadership' pervades all parts of the organisation. This also meant that leaders' perceptions of their change could not be verified or moderated by others.
- The different researchers were not leadership theorists themselves, but researchers working within capacity building organisations in Africa. The organisational interests therefore tended towards the pragmatic, that is focusing on 'how does it make a difference to our capacity building practice?'
- Getting a good diversity in the samples was a priority, but the size of the samples was still very small compared to the size of the NGO sector as a whole in the different countries.
- The research relates specifically to countries in East and Southern Africa with influence of Bantu languages. The necessary generalisations made about countries and regions therefore must be highly qualified. It is recognised that the *'continent is too large to describe. It is a veritable ocean, a separate planet, a*

¹ See Appendix 2 for more information on the participating organisations.

² A description of the research methodology and research limitations can be found in Appendix 1.

varied, immensely rich cosmos. Only with the greatest simplification, for the sake of convenience, can we say "Africa".' (Kapuscinski 1998). Furthermore in the efforts to synthesise learnings from the different countries it is easy to become too deterministic.

1.3 The Contexts in Uganda, Kenya and Malawi

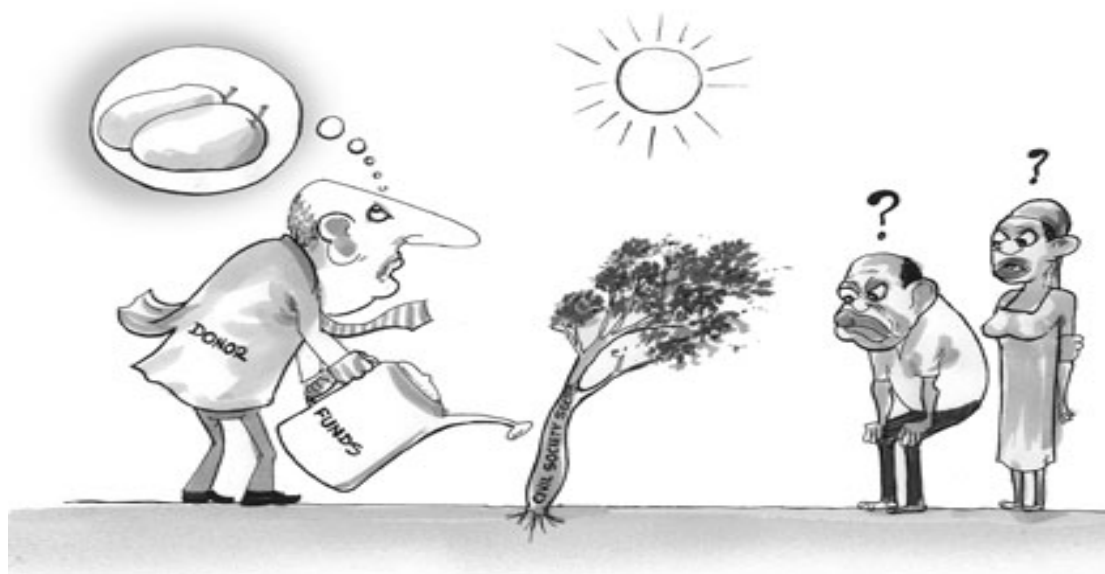
The different studies revealed that the contexts in which civil society leaders lived and worked had a very pervasive and profound impact on both the leaders' behaviour and on the pressures for change. Leaders cannot exist in abstraction and their behaviour is influenced by many historical and social forces. At the outset it is therefore important to identify the salient characteristics of these different, but at the same time similar, contexts.

The contexts in which civil society leaders lived and worked had a very pervasive and profound impact on both the leaders' behaviour and on the pressures for change.

Civil society has seen a massive growth in numbers and financial support over the last 15 years, but to a degree this is now under threat. In all three countries civil society operates in a context of severe poverty, with HIV exacerbating existing economic and social problems at organisational and individual level. This makes change very threatening.

Most CSOs are operating hand to mouth at a subsistence level, making them highly risk averse. They are facing problems of credibility: that they are neither living up to their own values, nor delivering the development they promised in proposals. Leadership of these organisations is largely male. Where women are in leadership, this is often because they founded the organisation. Second-line leadership in CSOs is lacking due to resource constraints within CSOs and high turnover of senior staff recruited by international NGOs and donors. The civil society sectors in Uganda and Malawi in particular are very young and dependent on outside donors who therefore have a considerable influence over their activities. In Uganda, civil society is more enmeshed with the state than in Malawi or Kenya, where CSOs have more a history of opposition³. But in all three countries, politics is in a state of flux with recent elections in Malawi and Kenya and important political changes in the offing in Uganda.

³ A more detailed description of the contextual specificities of civil society in Uganda, Kenya and Malawi can be found in Appendix 3.



1.4 This Publication

This Praxis Paper provides a synthesis of the main findings of the leadership research and explores the implications these have for leadership development practice. CSO leaders, leadership development practitioners and donors are expected to benefit from these findings by understanding and being able to respond to the pressures being faced by NGO leaders in Africa and the potential catalysts and constraints for them to change. The research organisations involved (CORAT, CDRN, and INTRAC) have already benefited by applying the findings to their organisational and leadership development work to improve the quality of their own capacity building services.

In the Paper, section 2 examines the prevailing conditions affecting leadership behaviour common to each of the research studies, identifying the conflicting influences on leaders' perspectives and the congested lives they lead. The section also highlights the particular constraints facing women leaders and the impact that HIV/AIDS is having on leaders and their organisations. Section 3 analyses the change processes that leaders went through, identifying the catalysts and reinforcers of change. The section highlights the primary importance of the individual person in the change process: their beliefs, values, sense of self, openness to change and aspirations. Section 4 summarises these findings using force-field analysis. Section 5 examines the implications of these findings for both leadership development programmes and capacity building providers. This section includes the views of CSO leaders from Kenya, and those involved in leadership development from around Africa⁴, who came together at the end of the research process to discuss the research findings and input their views and experiences.

⁴ Those attending included representatives of CDRN (Uganda), CORAT (Kenya), INTRAC, TRACE (Tanzania), CADECO (Malawi), SNV, Impact Alliance, CORDAID, World Vision, PACT International, Aga Khan Foundation, YWCA and 5 other Kenyan organizations.

2. Constraints on Leadership Behaviour and Change

The research revealed that in all three countries leaders' behaviour is significantly influenced by, and to a strong degree constrained by, five major factors which are explored in more detail in this section:

- there are many diverse perceptions of leadership and the role it plays.
- concepts of leadership are influenced by sometimes conflicting models of how a leader is supposed to behave, including: traditional cultural perspectives; political role models; and Western management theory.
- leaders lead very congested lives, striving to juggle the different organisational and personal demands.
- women face distinct and often additional leadership challenges which are greatly affected by gender roles and expectations.
- the impacts of HIV/AIDS are exacerbating the pressures faced by leaders in all three countries, although the constraints faced are rarely discussed openly.



2.1 Diverse Perceptions of Leadership

The way leadership is conceptualised and understood has a major bearing on leaders' ability to change. During the studies from Uganda and Kenya, time was spent examining the local leaders' own perspectives on what constitutes successful leadership. These included perceptions of leadership as:

visionary	Most respondents understood leadership to be about providing guidance and strategic direction. They commented: <i>'Vision distinguishes the leader,'</i> and another articulated it as having, <i>'a balcony perspective to issues.'</i>
the head	The leader was frequently understood to be the chief of the organisation. This often carries with it the idea of being more powerful than their followers. As one respondent said: <i>'If we ask people what they think, they will start to wonder whether we are really leaders because they believe that a leader should know all the answers.'</i>
problem solver	The leader is a problem solver for the organisation. In one organisation, the staff referred to their Director as their <i>'mother'</i> . Leaders are meant to fix any problems that arise in the organisation as well as in the personal lives of staff.
privilege	Positions of leadership had a way of improving one's stature and importance in society, displaying one's ability and achievement. One leader mentioned that for many in the CSO sector, what keeps them going is <i>'...a personal ambition, one needs to be recognised.'</i>
proxy	Some leaders, whose organisations were either heavily donor-driven or part of a church structure, felt they existed merely to meet the agenda of others. They felt they were <i>'proxy leaders'</i> to champion other people's interests.
calling	Many leaders of church-based organisations perceived their leadership as a divine calling. One said: <i>'I feel a sense of calling, called to this position for this season, to serve a specific purpose. I have to seek to understand God's purpose for me.'</i>
relationship	Some respondents defined leadership as a relationship with a group of followers. As one said: <i>'Leadership is a relationship with the led.'</i> Another commented: <i>'Leadership is people-orientated: keeping people's spirits up, maintenance of relationships, making sure people feel part of the group.'</i>
influence	Influence was commonly mentioned as a notable characteristic of leadership. One respondent said: <i>'Leadership is ability to influence and inspire people towards realisation of set goals to the extent that they are willing and ready to go ahead and do it whatever the situation.'</i>
servanthood	Faith-based leaders often referred to leadership as service. As one respondent said: <i>'Leadership is ability to serve others, to make them realise their potentials.'</i> Another stressed: <i>'For me, leadership is servanthood.'</i>
stewardship	Funds, material resources, even the office itself are assets entrusted to the NGO for a designated cause. Responsible stewardship and a high sense of accountability are expected from leaders.
empowerment	As one respondent emphasised: <i>'I believe in participation and empowerment, not only out there in the community but also here in the organisation.'</i>
management	While most respondents pointed out that there is a distinction between leadership and management, they emphasised that successful leadership requires considerable managerial skills.

2.2 Conflicting Concepts of Leadership

The diverse perspectives on leadership seem to have been heavily influenced by three main sources: traditional cultural perspectives on leadership; neo-patrimonial political leadership; and Western management theory. To an extent this has created an uncomfortable hybrid of imported and local concepts of leadership that do not always sit comfortably together, which can constrain authentic change in leadership behaviour. As one Ugandan commented: *'There are many actors who contribute to it, but not all in a clear way.'* We now examine each of these influences in turn.

2.2.1 Traditional cultural perspectives on leadership

All respondents identified a clear 'traditional' cultural approach to leadership that very much fits the stereotypical 'big man' model. Respondents had a clear conception of 'traditional leadership', although some researchers question the validity of such conceptions and highlight the dangers of such stereotypes. It may also be important to understand the significance of 'followers' in the 'big man' model – i.e. those who contribute to the legitimacy of leaders.



The Kenyan respondents highlighted eight features describing how the leader is perceived in the traditional setting, that are broadly echoed by the Uganda and Malawi studies. The research showed that this traditional model of leadership continued to exert a very powerful and pervasive influence on how civil society leaders are expected to behave (both by themselves and also by their staff and boards). Indeed, in Malawi and Uganda this model of leadership has an even more

pronounced influence as most civil society leaders in these countries were brought up in a village setting (whereas in Kenya more NGO leaders are products of an urban upbringing). In such rural and traditional settings leaders are seen as:

all-powerful	Respondents described the traditional leader as <i>'a human being but he's sitting in the seat of the divine'</i> . He is perceived as <i>'powerful – 'a total man', 'someone who can do and undo as he wills'</i> . He is <i>'an extremely strong dictatorial person, who relates to the people with 'stick-and-carrot' approach'</i> .
fearsome	In traditional African society, the leader has a forbidding character: <i>'He is seen as an awe-inspiring fearsome person, someone to be feared.'</i> ... <i>'He is someone to be obeyed, with fear and trembling.'</i>
all-knowing	Respondents mentioned that the African society ascribed unbounded wisdom to the leader. Someone said: <i>'All elders are wise; the leader among them is all-wise.'</i> The leader is <i>'all-knowing'</i> . He is <i>'a small god; he has all the answers.'</i> It was invariably noted that <i>'a leader must be at least one or two steps ahead'</i> .
all-owning	As some of our respondents put it: <i>'He is the "owner of all things"...</i> and ... <i>'It is assumed he has the resources to do all that needs to be done.'</i> In the traditional setting, the main resource is land and its ownership resides with the 'chief' who holds it in trust for the community, but carves it out to individuals at his own discretion.
all-pervasive	Traditional leaders are highly visible and all-pervasive. One respondent noted: <i>'The leader was visible.'</i> Another said, <i>'The leader's presence was supposed to be felt everywhere.'</i>
all-faceted problem solver	In the traditional context, the village head is consulted on a wide range of issues and problems way outside their primary functions. One respondent observed: <i>'The leader is presented with myriads of problems. He would give them hope. That's the role of the leader.'</i>
infallible	As one respondent related: <i>'In our traditional setting, it is a taboo to question the leader. S/he cannot be wrong – is a demigod.'</i> Another observed: <i>'The leader is perceived as beyond reproach. You don't oppose him even if you disagree.'</i>
aloof	The general consensus was that an elevated position of power is a prominent feature of the African traditional context. As one respondent said: <i>'In traditional perception, the leader is aloof, an entity apart from the rest of the people.'</i>
leader for life	Several of the respondents observed that, in the traditional setting: <i>'the leader stays on till death'</i> . In that context, leadership is lifelong tenure.

These elements are in line with academic studies into cultural traits shaping and influencing leaders and organisational culture, such as Hofstede's⁵ work analysing 'power distance' (whereby leaders are found to be autocratic or paternalistic and employees are dependent on and afraid to disagree with them) and 'collectivist', in which the extended family is a determining aspect. The extended family notion is often transferred to the workplace⁶, the feeling of mutual obligations of protection in exchange for loyalty is prevalent and poor performers are seldom discarded⁷. Followers are usually highly dependent on their leader for representation of their

⁵ Hofstede 1994.

⁶ James and Mullins 2004; Blunt and Jones 1992; Kenya NGO Council 2001.

⁷ Hofstede 1994.

views to the outsider and to take care of their interests⁸. Furthermore, social identity theory indicates that leadership behaviour is bound up with leaders' definitions of themselves in relation to the group – their social identity⁹. Leadership is not a person so much as a relationship. It is a dynamic process of mutual influence between leaders and followers. This carries even more weight in much of Africa where the concept of Ubuntu – a person is a person because of other people – *'I am because we are'* – prevails. Interestingly respondents concentrated on the more 'negative' aspects of traditional leadership rather than identifying more positive aspects such as leaders often not speaking until the end of a discussion, emphasising the importance of relationship, and having a council of elders to whom they are accountable.

While such a stereotyped traditional perception of leadership still clearly wields considerable influence over leadership behaviour and follower expectations, the experience of African countries since independence offers another model of leadership, though perhaps not as significantly different from the traditional view as one might expect.

2.2.2 Neo-patrimonial political leadership

In the 40 or so years since independence, political models of leadership have been provided by a few key individuals in each country – Kenyatta and Moi in Kenya, Obote, Amin and Museveni in Uganda and Banda and Muluzi in Malawi. Commentators¹⁰ identify a common system of political leadership that has characterised much of this era – that of neo-patrimonial leadership. Research respondents in all three countries supported the validity of this generalisation. Although dependent upon the context, neo-patrimonial leadership can be characterised by three main features:

- The personalisation of power, whereby all positions of political power are held by virtue of the ruler's patronage, and based on ties of personal, nepotistic, ethnic or regional loyalty. This is closely aligned to the centralisation of power within the executive, or 'presidentialism'.
- The treatment of public office, and access to the resources that public office gives access to, as a means to personal and communal gain, rather than as a means of pursuing a broader public good.
- The geographical extension of power via networks of 'clients', at every level. Inclusion within this patronage system becomes the main source of accumulation and security.

NGO leaders are still influenced by political leaders (albeit inadvertently) as models of effective leadership behaviour, despite often being opposed to the Presidential example and despite the inherent problems that this form of leadership has promoted. As Bennis and Thomas state, 'the era in which we grew into maturity remains an important force throughout our lives' (2002:10). This form of politics has been linked to Africa's general economic 'stagnation' and failure to 'develop' since independence, 'in part because the arbitrary nature of personalised decision-making

⁸ Tosh 1978.

⁹ Haslam 2001.

¹⁰ Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Cammack 2001.

within a presidentialist system creates instability and is also, along with clientelism, highly susceptible to corruption¹¹.



2.2.3 Western management theory

Respondents' perspectives on leadership were also clearly influenced significantly by Western management theory¹². Their emphasis on aspects such as the leader providing vision and strategic direction echo much of management theory as taught in business schools in Europe and North America. Some respondents spoke of the traits of leaders and others mentioned the need for situational leadership. The tension or synergy between leadership and management is an issue often explored in management theory. Servant leadership¹³ is a common concept amongst Christian organisations promoting good leadership and has more recently been embraced by the Western management theorists (Greenleaf 1998).

NGO leaders were clearly influenced by Western management theory for a number of reasons. This may be partly because:

- leaders are responding to the indirect resource power that donors have. Leaders know that donors have been sponsoring the propagation of such ideas through their support for past leadership training;
- the empowering forms of leadership advocated by books and training courses are consistent with the development theory of bottom-up empowerment espoused by their organisations;

¹¹ Hickey 2003:30.

¹² The literature is reviewed in each country study, rather than in this synthesis report.

¹³ A servant-leader is seen as a servant first, that is someone whose natural inclination is to want to serve, but who makes a conscious choice to aspire to lead.

- many NGOs, particularly those involved in advocacy work, are far from happy with the prevailing political neo-patrimonial leadership;
- traditional forms of more autocratic leadership may be appropriate in a stable village setting, but in a turbulent NGO environment, where leaders have to interact with a multiplicity of stakeholders across the globe, such forms of leadership are clearly less effective.

When a leader is faced with the pressure or opportunity to change their behaviour, they may opt instead simply to oscillate between different leadership paradigms. In this way the confused leadership perspectives block authentic change in leadership behaviour. A leader who attempts to distance him/herself from a traditional approach to embrace other leadership styles, may find him/herself torn between two value bases, fail to be strongly anchored in either one of them, and eventually settle for 'the devil that he/she knows'.

The continuing power of the traditional approach to leadership (determined by culture and instilled as a value), which is then often reinforced by political role models, means that when leaders are under pressure they often revert to the traditional approach as their default mode. As one Ugandan leader explained: *'(Personal growth) is one of my weakest points. We all come from different backgrounds and we carry this with us, unconsciously. I was brought up in a certain way and got an idea of the ideal worker...we carry our value systems with us in work situations. At some point I felt I was being pushed in all directions and decided to back out.'*

2.3 Congested Lives of Leaders

Another significant determinant of leadership behaviour and constraint on leaders changing is the congested lives that many civil society leaders live. Many of the development NGO leaders interviewed seemed to operate simultaneously in three

CSO leaders in Africa often have to operate simultaneously in three different worlds – the global aid world, the urban context in which they live and work and the rural village setting where many of their extended families still live.

different worlds – the global aid world, the urban context in which they live and work and the rural village setting where many of their extended families still live. Each world places very different expectations and demands on the leader. It has been said that the art of leadership is to keep all the different stakeholders satisfied. As leadership is primarily a relationship between the leader and the followers, clearly the staff and board of an organisation have powerful expectations of how a leader should behave.

The organisation's donors bring different but powerful demands for accountability and expectations of performance that NGO leaders also need to respond to if they are going to keep the organisation afloat. Those African NGO leaders involved in the research are also keenly aware of personal demands on them particularly from their extended family as well as their direct family. Keeping such diverse demands from different worlds satisfied is no easy matter and is a key determinant in their

behaviour. Having such congested lives leaves leaders with very little time to reflect on their leadership, inhibiting their potential for change.



2.3.1 Organisational demands

If leadership is a relationship between leader and followers, then clearly the expectations and demands of followers have an important influence on leadership behaviour. When Kenyan respondents were asked, 'What do those you lead expect of you as a leader?' they prioritised:

- Ensuring job security: The dominant concern of the NGO staff, as perceived by the CEOs, relates to the prevailing uncertainties about job security. One CEO put it this way: *'Here, I think the topmost concern is about their job security. They expect the leader to ensure they are able to keep their jobs.'* Another said, *'My staff expect me to strive for regular and fair salaries for them.'*
- Providing direction for the work: Staff look up to their leader for direction. The CEOs severally said, *'The staff expect direction and they expect support. The leader is in the forefront but pulling them to come forward.'* ... *'They expect me to provide guidelines for the work.'* ... and ... *'My staff expects that I know where the organisation should be going and I should tell them what to do to get us there.'*
- Personal advancement: The other expectation of the staff is progression on the job, as expressed in the following: *'They expect me to appraise them objectively for advancement.'*
- Inspiration to achieve themselves: Some of the responses indicate that the staff are not around only for pay. The workplace seems to have some other roles. For example, one interviewee said: *'I am aware that at the workplace people expect inspiration, some inspiration to go on in life.'* This indicates that people do like to achieve and would appreciate being facilitated to achieve.

Leaders rarely receive much support from their boards in responding to these different demands. In most NGOs the board tends to be more compliant than supportive. Boards rarely operate well enough to share some of the leadership burden with the leader. One leader lamented: *'Sometimes board members speak to me 'sympathising', as if it is not more of their burden than mine.'*

The Ugandan report highlighted the particular demands that came from working within wider systems, especially the framework of a church structure. Churches were seen as hierarchical with rigid policies and reluctant to embrace new ideas and initiatives. Respondents mentioned that the conservative culture of the church is rooted in obedience and submission and respect for tradition (often perceived as God-ordained). Leaders of faith-based organisations often find themselves constrained or even controlled by the church leaders such as Bishops to whom they refer. One respondent noted that: *'We are a church organisation, we do community development and we struggle with the dual entity. Struggling with oneself and what the priests want. Pressure from the priests and their unnecessary demands...'*

2.3.2 Donor demands on leaders

One of the major external influential factors relating to NGO leadership is donors. Most NGOs in the region depend heavily on external donor funding, which can easily force the NGOs to fit in with donor priorities rather than pursuing their own agendas. Managing donor relations and economic resources is therefore considered one of the keys to successful NGOs¹⁴. Kaplan (2002) notes that NGO leaders are faced with demands for over-hasty timeframes, short-term projects and quick results. In this way funders tacitly shape leaders to become implementers of projects, with short-term horizons, who can provide a 'quick-fix' for a 'quick-win'. This clearly does not allow time for reflection and development of visions, which are crucial parts of individual and organisational learning processes.

Leaders' lives are congested by donor demands – one Malawian NGO leader estimated he spent 50% of his time dealing with donor visits.

Leaders' lives are congested by donor demands for participation in that workshop, presence in this meeting, writing of that proposal or report – one Malawian NGO leader estimated he spent 50% of his time dealing with donor visits alone. This congestion is being exacerbated

by current donor insistence on partners working in consortia – ostensibly for greater impact but also for donor funding simplicity – creating even more meetings for leaders. NGO dependence on donor funding and follower concerns about job security make leadership behaviour very sensitive to donor demands, especially in an increasingly competitive aid environment. In some cases leaders are merely being asked for their NGO to be a vehicle for implementing a donor's project.

Preoccupations with donor-driven agendas can contribute to blocking leaders from changing. One informant, commenting on the factors that had stopped him from changing, mentioned: *'The major one is donor-driven agenda; donor projects, donor*

¹⁴ Kenya NGO Council 2001.

goals. A leader is driven by what he/she must have achieved at the end of a project and only concentrates on that.'

2.3.3 Domestic demands

NGO leaders are also subject to considerable domestic demands particularly from the extended family, as well as the direct family. The boundary between the professional life of an organisational leader and the personal life of a leader in the family is often not clear cut. The leader is part of an intricate web of family and work relationships, making a clear distinction between family and organisation sometimes illusory.

The boundary between the professional and personal lives of a leader is not clear cut. In Africa a leader is expected to provide for extended family and kin through patronage and other forms of largesse.

NGO leaders in many parts of Africa are viewed by their families as 'the fortunate ones', the ones who by dint of opportunity or qualifications have managed to lift themselves out of the extreme poverty that affects most of the continent, including much of the rest of the family. A leader is expected to provide for extended family and kin through patronage and other forms of largesse. The leader is expected to have access to vital information about jobs and scholarship opportunities. Leaders are often directly obligated to a sizeable number of dependants on an ongoing basis, an inevitable situation in the context of mass poverty. *'School fees, diseases, deaths, cultural pressures – this all weighs you down'*. As one leader lamented: *'You have a hundred people depending on you. And there are those dependants who have given up in life and are now just suckers.'* Many of those family members who have not made it, are highly dependent and often abdicate responsibility for solving their problems onto their more successful relatives. One Kenyan leader said: *'I think the reality is that, once you are a leader, your life is no longer your own.'*

The respondents all invariably expressed deep frustration over this issue. One explained: *'This post gives a false picture of how much I am earning. Even my children expect to live like other children whose parents carry big titles like I do. Many CEOs create trips for per diem so as to be able to live up to societal expectations.'* A leader is expected to use the privileges of office to benefit one's own community or clan – 'to be a true son or daughter of the soil requires delivering something back home.' (Kenya NGO Council 2001:9) There are expectations that, once you are a leader, you can and will provide jobs or contracts or donor projects and such other benefits.' This is echoed by one respondent who said: *'People expect you to get their sons and daughters jobs. One keeps being taunted, "How can you be CEO leading a place and not employ your own people?"'*

As well as the demands from the extended family there are also demands closer to home. NGO leaders are often times also expected to extend the use of office facilities to their spouses and family members. Use of an office vehicle to take children to school, do weekend shopping or go to the rural areas to attend funerals and other functions is the expected norm. The lack of pension provision and career development opportunities makes leaders acutely aware of the need to provide for their close family in the future.

NGO leaders are also often leaders in wider society, frequently involved in associations and community service. For example many NGO leaders also have leadership roles (elders) in their churches and others are involved with wider networks. One respondent commented: *'As CEO of this organisation, one is officially on the boards or committees of nine federations, networks and collaborative bodies. And on top of those are the professional association, religious committees and community service organs!'*

Leaders feel they have no time to stop and reflect and then change. As one Ugandan responded, when asked what is hindering him from preparing for change: *'We are too busy with the day-to-day running of the organisation for daily survival, e.g. report writing'*. This proved to be a major constraint on their ability to change. This echoes Dotlich and Noel's findings that: 'One reason people in business do not change is that they do not take time to reflect' (1998:47). Leaders' very busyness and congested lives preclude serious questioning of their leadership behaviour.

2.4 Challenges Facing Women Leaders

Civil society leadership in Africa is highly affected by gender roles and expectations. While all leaders face challenges, some proved particular to the female leaders interviewed. Women leaders find themselves in a cultural context dominated by men. In terms of gender roles in East African societies, men are supposed to be more concerned with achievements outside the home and to be assertive, competitive and tough. Women are supposed to be more concerned with taking care of the home, of the children, and of people in general – taking the gentle roles (Hofstede 1994). Traditionally, African women are socialised to look to men for decision-making authority in almost all spheres and therefore rarely fit within the cultural expectation of being a leader. Women fall under the category of the led. The upbringing of girls emphasises submission to male authority, first to fathers, uncles and brothers and later to their husbands. Kakabadse and Kakabadse (1999) note that consequently the expected gender roles affect female leaders in various ways, including prejudice, promotion opportunities, harassment, lower salary, and family pressure. The research provided many examples of how this is still being played out today.

Two Malawian respondents described how as girls they were actively discouraged by their parents from finishing school. One Kenyan (not included in the research) narrated a similar story, which later affected her ability to perform as a leader. Having been admitted to university to do law, her father asked: *'which man will ever accept your judgment?'* Although she achieved her later ambitions as an NGO leader, this statement still rings in her ears. Later, in marriage, her husband became a major de-motivator by reminding her that she was 'a mere woman' and relating any failure to the fact that women were incapable of doing any better. Most women respondents thus began their leadership careers with a need for constant assurance regarding their performance and professional ability, to help counteract negative cultural 're-enforcements' and help build their confidence. As one related: *'I desperately need approval, negative feedback destroys me...When an opportunity for*

a big post came, I could not apply yet I desired it. My supervisor and colleague had to push me into applying and indeed I emerged the best candidate.'



When accepted, however, they are expected to be motherly leaders and not just leaders. *'There is a lot of social pressure and social expectations vis-à-vis work'*, said one female respondent. When a woman does well and is assertive, she is labelled a 'man'. In the view of some, in an effort to prove their ability, women managers can overreact. Some respondents expressed with unease that staff expect them to be motherly in the office. Women leaders felt burdened by this expectation and found this 'exploitative'. According to one: *'I have an urge to excel in what I do and being effective and efficient has nothing to do with being a man or a woman but about doing a job – but maybe I have lost a bit of my femininity. Society expects this treatment and when it falls short then such a woman is labelled "manly"'*.

Our respondents also mentioned that women are expected to be morally upright, not expected to visit 'social places' – a condition which men are not so rigorously subjected to. Sexual harassment is still seen in the research as a plague in the

Kenyan workplace. Cases of harassment of female staff by male bosses and supervisors and seduction of female staff by male board members were expressed as a concern.

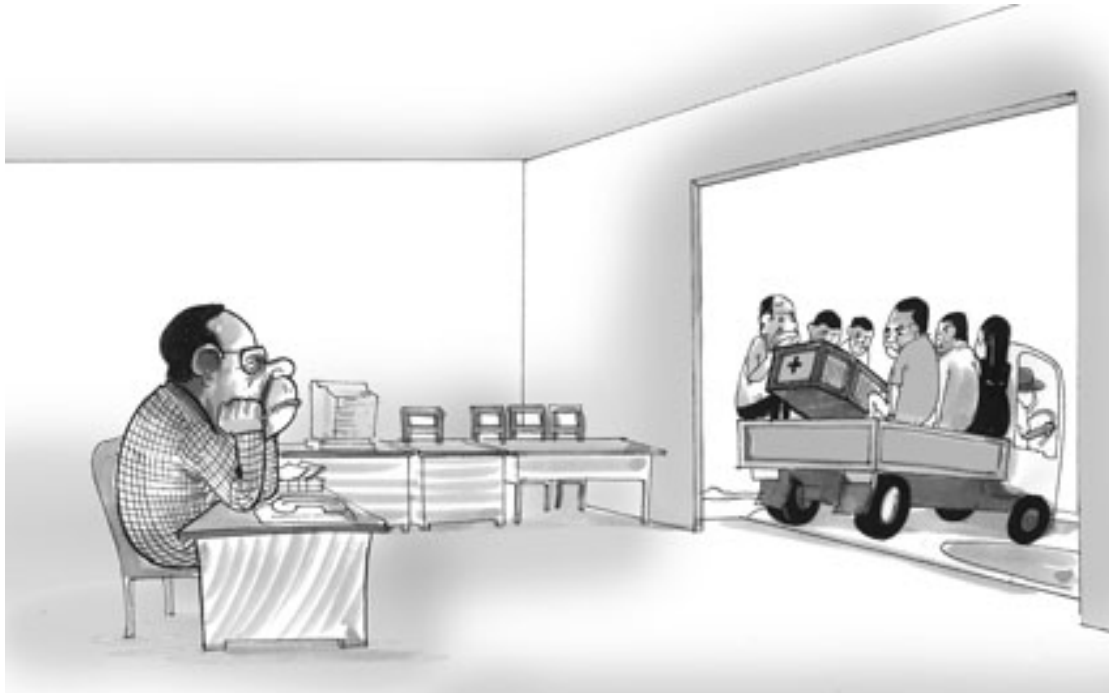
Sexual harassment is still seen in the research as a plague in the Kenyan workplace. Cases of harassment of female staff by male bosses and supervisors and seduction of female staff by male board members were expressed as a concern.

It would appear, however, that this situation is gradually changing, particularly in Kenya, though also in certain cases in Malawi or Uganda. The Kenyan research noted a gradually rising percentage of women forming part of the social composition of

the new and younger African elites taking over from the post-independence generation of leaders. Women are prominent in the NGO leadership in Kenya. Many of them are founder-leaders, not only of NGOs and CBOs specialising in women's concerns but also of others on general social development. The female CEOs interviewed in Kenya seemed generally not to be encountering notable gender-related challenges in the course of their leadership. Three of them said, almost in identical words: '*Board, donors and others respect my leadership.*'

2.5 The Impact of HIV/AIDS

At first glance it appears that the impact of HIV/AIDS has yet to really impact upon civil society leaders. Although HIV/AIDS permeates all aspects of the society, our interviewees did not seem to immediately relate it to their functioning as leaders, until specifically asked about it. Once asked directly about HIV/AIDS, however, respondents were very forthcoming about how their organisations and they themselves had been affected by the disease.



Part of the reason for this is that even in NGOs the issue of HIV/AIDS is still shrouded with fear. There was a feeling that dealing directly with HIV in the workplace might be opening a 'Pandora's box' and leaders would find themselves without the resources to 'effectively' deal with the situation. As a result many leaders found it easier to ignore until it directly affected the organisation. HIV/AIDS was beginning to affect the CSOs in different ways:

- absences for funerals are increasing. '*Requests for permission to attend funerals are increasing. But at these funerals you will not hear that the deceased was an AIDS victim.*'

- the loss of key staff and consequent high staff turnover. HIV therefore is causing major challenges for NGO leaders due to loss of key skills through sickness and death. As one respondent noted: *'We've lost 4–5 people, both staff and beneficiaries. Resources that have been invested are lost. We lose capable people.'*
- problems of motivation and morale in the organisation. 'Also employees are sick and it makes you sad back in office'. Another described how their loss of staff and increasing demands at community level have *'also created such need that we're not able to respond – that somehow renders the organisation irrelevant'*. Some leaders felt HIV had made them over-exposed to human suffering. As one described: *'When we started our HIV/AIDS component, I was crying everyday. If this is the reality of HIV/AIDS, only God could stomach it!'*

Leaders mentioned how HIV/AIDS was challenging the organisation's mission and strategy – a key part of a leader's responsibility. For example, one organisation focuses on mitigating the suffering of children and by policy steered clear of asking how the suffering came about. The leader said: *'HIV/AIDS challenged us: "Do we have the capacity to respond to the ever increasing number?" HIV/AIDS brought us into having to deal with the infected and affected parents and not just with children alone.'*

3. Leaders in Change

It is striking (as evidenced in the previous section) that the external realities that leaders face in all three countries are broadly similar. The distinct features from each country add different colours to a common picture, rather than fundamentally changing the picture itself. In all countries, CSO leaders took their implicit theories of leadership from the same variety of sources and leaders' lives were congested by considerable expectations from staff, donors and their extended families. This was particularly difficult for women leaders and was being exacerbated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

This section explores the processes that different leaders went through to overcome these constraints and change their behaviour. Before analysing the change processes it is instructive to ask 'who says leaders need to change and why?'

3.1 Who Says Leaders Need to Change and Why?

The pressure for leaders to change comes from a variety of different stakeholders. Those involved in promoting organisational change and capacity building, such as the organisations involved in this research, and also management academics, argue that for organisational change to be effective, the leader also has to change. INTRAC's experience of NGO capacity building in Malawi shows that leadership change is central to organisational change (James 2002). Other change consultants in Africa have found that for CSOs to change, 'Leaders often have to go through the most major changes...If leadership can't shift then no organisational process can succeed.'

(Interview with Allan Kaplan in Crockett 1996) Leadership commitment to organisational change was in practice synonymous with those leaders' commitment to their own personal change. As Robert Quinn also points out: 'When I discuss the leadership of organisational change with executives I usually go to the place they least expect. The bottom line is that they cannot change the organisation unless they first change themselves' (2000:106).

'Leaders often have to go through the most major changes...If leadership can't shift then no organisational process can succeed.'

This emphasis on the role of the leader in change may be particularly significant for many NGOs in Africa which, being young, still tend to be led by a charismatic founder-leader. It may be even more critical for NGO leaders because much of their work is focused on planned social change, i.e. to facilitate some form of change in society. More than ever before, the NGO faces great turbulence in the social and political environment, and increasing complexity in constituency demands and ever-changing donor policies and priorities¹⁵. The leader has the role of steering the organisation through these challenges of change. This implies that the NGO leader is an external change agent in reference to work in the community and also an internal change agent with respect to the organisation s/he is leading.

Donors also highlight the need for leaders to change. While emphasising that this will lead to more effective organisations, they sometimes define 'effective' in very narrow terms, equating it as 'becoming a better manager of *our* project'. They threaten to turn off the tap if leaders do not change. The power of donors in this regard differed between countries in the research, with the Ugandan CSOs subject to the most outside influence.

CSO staff also call for change in the behaviour of their leaders, though rarely in public. They have an ambiguous attitude towards leadership. On the one hand they want a strong leader to provide for them (particularly in high power-distance, risk averse settings), but on the other would like to have more influence on decisions taken that affect them. Some staff however resist or ignore the added responsibility that goes along with this increased responsibility.

Leaders also had a mixed attitude towards their own change. The Ugandan study in particular found that when asked to describe effective and successful leadership only a small minority of respondents explicitly mentioned 'change' as part of leadership qualities. Leaders may not consciously reflect on the need for change or may not consider change a necessary part of leadership because they:

- are not conscious of the link between organisational and personal change;
- emerge from a government background where long-term planning is prominent and dynamic change may not be valued;
- are influenced by cultural notions of leadership that underline static power structures;

¹⁵ See forthcoming INTRAC Praxis Papers on analytical and adaptive capacity and NGO leaders and leadership.

- see change as threatening, and do not recognise the need to undergo processes of renewal;
- feel they have successfully survived so far without having to go through any significant personal or organisational change.

In Malawi and Kenya the leaders interviewed were more positive about their change, perhaps because of the different contexts or the particular individuals interviewed.

3.2 The Process of Change

The processes of change that leaders went through were complicated and messy processes that do not lend themselves to easy simplification. As leadership is a relationship between people, a change in leadership behaviour is a complex interaction between many different human beings. Leadership change is therefore more than just the change in one individual, but also how others respond. Not

Leadership change is more than simply being a chameleon and changing external colour to blend with the environment (such as donor pressure).

surprisingly therefore, respondents found that their experiences of their own change processes were very difficult to analyse themselves. We must beware of becoming too deterministic.

Change is a complex process; it not only involves certain catalysts, but also requires the leader to react to these incentives. A leader may experience an incentive (key) to change but not actually initiate any change. External catalysts in themselves do not bring about change. Rather, it is how leaders interpret those events that makes a difference. Leadership change is more than simply being a chameleon and changing external colour to blend with the environment (such as donor pressure). This is cosmetic change. What the research was looking for was more authentic change in leadership behaviour.

Yet amidst the complexity, a number of elements in leaders' change processes were common:

1. Leaders have *congested lives with conflicting models* of leadership (which we explored in the previous section)
2. External events occur (*incentives and catalysts* – see section 3.3)
3. Leaders internalise these events (much then depends on *the person in change* – see section 3.4)
4. Leaders implemented changed behaviour and followers and others responded (*reinforcers of change* – see section 3.5)

One of the clear findings from the studies was that leadership change was a gradual evolutionary process rather than a great revolutionary leap forward. As one respondent said: *'You can only see change in the rear view mirror'*. It was not a linear, planned process, but more a cascade of events. The Kenyan study noted that few respondents could recall having momentous behavioural changes. Many had to rack their brains before remembering any. The researcher took this to be indicative of the fact that leaders generally don't focus on their own change and improvement.

Similarly the Ugandan study concluded that although some leaders may experience a particular incident and are able to link this incident with their change, most respondents found it difficult to identify one crucible that immediately led to a dramatic change in their leadership behaviour. This indicates that for most leaders, change is gradual process that is not linked to any specific event but a series of discussions, events, trainings, exposures and sharing of experiences.

3.3 The Catalysts and Triggers of Change

Those NGO leaders interviewed during the research identified a number of external factors and events that played a significant role in 'catalysing' a change in their behaviour as leaders. Their perception was that these catalysts included:

- a change in leadership role
- organisational crisis
- personal pain and discontent
- new knowledge from training, reading and organisational development (OD) interventions
- example and inspiration from others
- inspiration from faith in God

3.3.1 New leadership role

At the simplest level a change in leadership role often caused leaders to change behaviour. Several of the respondents recalled how new types or levels of responsibility had caused them to behave differently. One who moved from the position of Financial Manager into the post of CEO said: *'My style used to be that of a brutal push for results. My background is in finance and in that field, 'deadline is deadline'. But I have changed from that. I have moved from 'management deadlines' to 'relational'.* Another noted: *'I was a very reserved person before, but I have changed. I suppose the position of responsibility and the need to engage actively with people horizontally and vertically has changed me.'*

This echoes Lebow and Simon's belief in the primacy of roles in moulding behaviour. They assert that 'individual behaviour is powerfully shaped by the organizational roles that people play' (1997: 47) and feel that 'the most effective way to change behaviour is therefore to put people in a new organizational context, which imposes new roles, responsibilities and relationships on them.'

3.3.2 Organisational crisis or challenge

The most common triggers for change fall into the category of organisational challenge or even crisis. This pain is frequently financial, with the organisation struggling to raise funding to cover salaries. At times it was due to poor organisational performance and a failure to meet goals. One respondent commented: *'I kept asking myself, 'Why aren't we meeting our self-set goals?'* Organisational malaise was also often felt by leaders when their board and their staff were not really taking responsibility for and ownership of the organisation. The Malawi study noted a number of cases where staff were taking a very instrumental approach to

their work (just a way to earn money), abdicating responsibility and pushing their work up to the director to do. Their potential was being severely under-used.

Leaders also often felt organisational malaise when their board and their staff were not really taking responsibility for and ownership of the organisation.

Sometimes the pain was more about relationships, with leaders having to respond to internal conflict or a closed organisational culture. According to one respondent: *'I came in when the organisation had just gone through an evaluation followed by re-structuring. I discovered that the staff and the board were in separate camps, in an 'us versus them' situation. It was evident both sides needed to change, and I'm aware I may have to change personally also. I had to pause and I decided I needed*

a totally different approach. I prayed hard...'

When leaders take personal responsibility for an organisational crisis they become more open to personal change. Founder-leaders in particular are very sensitive to the success or otherwise of their organisations.

3.3.3 Personal discomfort and pain

A basic ingredient of change is to feel deeply uncomfortable with the existing state of affairs. Leaders' change was therefore catalysed when they experienced personal discomfort from:

- overwork
- negative feedback from staff and/or board
- negative feedback from peers or mentors
- personal calamities
- their survival in the post being threatened

Some of the NGO leaders took a more empowering approach to leadership when they found they were overworked trying to do everything themselves. As one Ugandan leader put it: *'If your management style is to do it yourself, then it is burdensome'*. Many of the Malawi respondents commented in the same way – one described his organisation as *'one small head with a very fat body. All my subordinates were reporting to me personally even on small petty issues, such as what coffin to buy'*. Unable to increase the time they could give to the organisation, the leaders felt increasingly uncomfortable and realised that something had to change. As another explained: *'I was failing to do what I was paid for. I was paid to do networking, vision, mission, but I was bogged down with everyday routine things that could be done at another level'*.

Another very common catalyst for change was when leaders received negative feedback from staff. Constructive criticism was a powerful motivator for change, even if initially met with denial or anger as was usually the case. In Malawi one respondent related how staff responded to his request for open feedback: *'Since you have asked, you have this problem, that problem, you make these statements'*. He was initially annoyed. Another described a challenging comment from her staff: *'yes we can do it ourselves'*, that proved pivotal in catalysing her change.



For some this negative feedback came from the board. One Malawian leader changed when her board threatened to resign because they said: *'we do not know what you are doing. We are not interested in continuing to work with you'*, and although she left the meeting angry and upset, she later realised the truth in what was said. Another Kenyan described how he was greatly influenced by the rigorous critique he always received from a particular board member when the CEO's report was reviewed at board meeting.

Peers provided the feedback for other respondents. For one respondent, challenging feedback came from fellow participants on a leadership development programme. For another this role was played by a trusted friend outside the organisation: *'We would sit here and discuss for hours and learn from one another and advise one another'*. For others the feedback came from mentors – one leader testified that it was consistent, open feedback from her mentor that resulted in her becoming so frustrated with herself that she began to change. Another also mentioned the important role played by the *'mind of a mentor, who does not condemn your faults, but asks "what if?", and "have you seen an adjacent path?"'*

Calamities in the personal life of the leader prompted leaders to change their behaviour within the organisation. One leader related how he changed his approach to HIV/AIDS when his family was affected: *'When I lost two sisters and realised how badly they had been treated at their former workplaces, immediately I saw the need to change the policies of my NGO.'*

Ultimately the most powerful incentive to change came when leaders found their very survival in the organisation under threat. A few respondents noted that the consequences of not changing would most likely have been losing their job: *'If I hadn't changed I think I would have been transferred or in the worst case lost my job.'*

3.3.4 New learning from capacity building processes

As well as these more 'negative' catalysts for change, leaders in the research changed in response to positive incentives.

In Uganda and Malawi, many of the respondents found participation in various organisational development (OD) and other training events an impetus for change. One Ugandan leader related: *'What really set off the change was attending an OD training, especially leadership training'*. This, she continued, changed her

After attending an OD training one respondent said *'I realised I was too fast – I needed to be a good listener – trying to understand the person behind, being tolerant and understanding people better, making everybody feel valued'*.

perspective: *'I realised I was too fast – I needed to be a good listener – trying to understand the person behind, being tolerant and understanding people better, making everybody feel valued'*. Another leader described attending a 'self-determination' workshop as being an eye-opener to her management style. It came at a time when staff thought that she was too controlling, too fast and running the NGO like a school. Yet another said: *'I went for a PRA training last year and now I use it in all my work, even at organisational level'*.

Similarly in Malawi training events such as a distance learning NGO Management course had a significant impact on some leaders' behaviours. One said this course really opened her up and clearly revealed to her the areas of leadership in which she was failing. One leader narrated: *'the major shift in my life was when I attended an OD workshop. I learnt that leadership was about sharing responsibilities'*. Another respondent *'realised from books, training and advice that team work is important in getting results. I began to understand power and authority in a new way'*. For others, management training boosted their confidence and knowledge. In Kenya, however, there is a different story. None of the 15 CEOs interviewed mentioned learning from workshops, training courses or conferences as an initiator of personal change, despite the plethora of such events they attend. Perhaps many years attendance has inoculated them against the impact and given them immunisation?

Books and resource materials from training often provided leaders with a catalyst for change. One respondent highlighted the value of reading: *'I took time to read a lot on the issue.'* Another said: *'I read resource materials. I felt I needed to read some related contemporary books.'* One woman leader perceived that her hunger for knowledge had made her a successful leader.

OD processes did have a catalytic effect on some leaders. One Kenyan related: *'We have been having a process of change in our organisational culture here. I have benefited tremendously from the process. I have become more relational. I am able to listen to what people are saying in their heart'*. Another said: *'Basically, I like stability. But, the change process we have been having was inevitable. I have learnt a lot from it. Now, I am more positively disposed to change.'*

The impact of capacity building was enhanced when it was a personalised process where self-searching and reflection was emphasised. Capacity building inputs had

much more of an impact if they created the time and space for leaders to reflect on their leadership. Having the opportunity to stop and reflect on their leadership proved a catalytic moment for many leaders in the research. As one Malawian leader described a training course: *'I had time to reflect upon my leadership background, development, and the way we were running our affairs'*. Another found that it was a 'sabbatical' space, spending one month away that gave him the opportunity to reflect and fundamentally change his way of leading.

3.3.5 Example and inspiration from others

Many of the respondents noted the impact that role models had had on their leadership change. Some mentioned that as they admired particular traits in other leaders they sought to imitate them. As one Kenyan leader stated: *'Much of what I have learnt in life has been what I have watched in leaders and older people. I have been influenced by some qualities I have observed in some among board members and management. Some have a way of saying what's on your mind with remarkable clarity. Some have great foresight.'*

One Malawian mentioned that she gained confidence from seeing the example of other Malawian women standing up and talking in meetings and leading NGOs. She said: *'I feel if they can do it why can't I do it? I know I have to do more. I have learnt that women can stand up just like men do.'*



Others were also influenced by their predecessors in the leadership role. As one Malawian related: *'my predecessor was a kind and humble person who would sit on the ground with villagers and attend staff funerals'*. Another described her previous

programme manager modelling for her a different way of leading. She said: *'If leaders are exposed to other leaders in action, it plays a role in them shifting because they have seen another human doing it. If I am impressed with people, I will easily copy what they do'*. In Kenya the involvement of leaders in different networks and consortiums in the NGO sector gave them an insight into different leadership styles.

Exposure to other organisations proved catalytic to some. One Kenyan respondent recalled: *'I was given a consultancy assignment by an international NGO, which involved a different working culture: proactive planning; operating by team-agreed procedures; rigorous drive for results; intense documentation; commitment to monitoring and evaluation ...The main impact on my leadership behaviour is that I have developed the attitude of mentoring and the approach of team work.'* Similarly, from the Ugandan study one leader noted the value of exposure visits: *'Whenever I travel, I see how things are done and when I come back I want to put in practice this new learning'*.

3.3.6 Inspiration from their faith in God

As well as receiving human inspiration, many of the respondents (of which almost half were from faith-based organisations in predominantly Christian contexts) mentioned the importance of the spiritual dimension to their change process. One Kenyan mentioned having been directly challenged by a sermon and recounted the incident as follows: *'A notable change in my leadership behaviour is about my management style. When I started, I was rather pushy. Personally, I like timeliness and meeting deadlines. I expected everyone to see how important it is to be timely and to work to deadlines. But I got frustrated. "Why can't they be timely? Why delay?" It took one sermon in church, a New Year sermon, to open me up. The preacher said, "We are all different, with different traits. As you start this New Year, give people a second chance." I became very prayerful and I asked the Lord to help me.'*

One CEO, describing the strength received in facing the process said: *'It was tough going. But I got inspiration from the Book of Nehemiah in the Bible – perseverance amidst diverse intense opposition; assigning duties; participatory approach.'*

Others mentioned that the change process was encouraged by inspirations drawn from specific biblical examples and teachings. One CEO, describing the strength received in facing the process said: *'It was tough going. But I got inspiration from the Book of Nehemiah in the Bible – perseverance amidst diverse intense opposition; assigning duties; participatory approach.'* Another said: *'I prayed hard. I asked for strength and courage to do what needs to be done.'*



Similarly in Malawi the research on leadership change found that 90% of respondents explained their change in leadership behaviour with reference to a spiritual force. As one put it: *'from my point of view the way I changed was purely spiritual.'* They felt that their faith had had a profound effect on their values by awakening their consciences. This awakening took place through both biblical examples and teachings, as well as through direct revelations from God. Respondents in the interviews felt that the example and teaching of Jesus in the Bible had proved a major influence in helping them to change. As well as knowledge through biblical teaching, respondents felt that God had communicated with them in revealing to them the areas they needed to change. Many respondents in Malawi felt that their belief that they were a part of God's purpose was a key influence in their change process. One related: *'I believe there is a limit to what a person can do, and beyond that the divine supernatural nature works. We should use ourselves to the best we can and ask for divine intervention beyond that'*. Even in Uganda, where the spiritual dimension was less powerful, the research noted that: *'For all the respondents, faith or what some called "an inner voice" or "conscience", played an important role in facilitating the change'* (2005). A spiritual dimension was recognised as very important in supporting the change process by giving the leader the inner strength to carry out work according to his/her beliefs.

3.4 The Person in Change

These external catalysts, in themselves, did not lead to the change. It was how people interpreted those events within themselves that seemed to make a difference. For example, criticism or new information may change one person's life, but leave another's totally unaffected. Change therefore depends on how people internalise and respond to external information. Therefore, what creates a process of change in leaders can depend as much on the person, i.e. their beliefs and values, sense of self, openness to change and attitude, as the external catalysts, thus making leadership development such an individual and complex subject.

3.4.1 Beliefs and values

As the previous section showed, a person's faith and religious beliefs has an impact on how outside events are internalised. The leader's values also had a major influence on how outside events were internalised. The Malawi study concluded that an internal battle at the level of values was at the heart of the change processes. Values were the most important lever for change. The realisation (from outside catalysts) that there was a considerable difference between the people they wanted to be (their core values) and the people they were (their leadership behaviour) was what drove the change process. Change was motivated by a desire to maintain their integrity to be the people they wanted to be. In this connection, one CEO said: *'This organisation takes its values seriously and strives to live by it. Occasionally, it happens that a situation arises where action conflicts with values, and we promptly take corrective action.'*

3.4.2 Sense of self and inner security

Inextricably linked with a person's values is their sense of self – how secure they are in themselves or how fearful they are about what other people think of them. People are much more open to internalising these external catalysts if they are self-aware and self-assured. Like values, people's sense of identity is heavily influenced by their upbringing in their family and wider social culture (with associated gender role perspectives). In Uganda one leader had on a number of occasions gone against church policies to implement changes such as hiring female Protestant staff, which required considerable inner security. Another leader identified *'being open and having confidence in herself'* as a critical factor for her to change.

Fear is the main block to change. For some leaders, the fear of change is linked to the apprehension of losing a position or a job. In poor countries employment access and security are often paramount as many leaders are faced with the challenge of supporting an ever-increasing extended family. One respondent thus mentioned that she at one point wanted to implement changes, but that because she feared losing her job, she stalled.

If people are too controlled by their fears, they may be unable to hear constructive criticism and immediately become defensive. Many of the respondents were inhibited from change by their insecurities.

If people are too controlled by their fears, they may be unable to hear constructive criticism and immediately become defensive. Many of the respondents were inhibited from change by their

insecurities. One mentioned that he feared that by involving staff more, *'I would look under-rated and my juniors would think they know more than me'*. Another leader described her *'fear within – that if these people know what I am doing and maybe can do it better, what is my position?'* In the Ugandan research fear of failing inhibited people from internalising catalysts to change. There was also a fear of public opinion and even the fear of political retribution. Women especially were fearful of not conforming to traditional societal norms for women's roles.

3.4.3 Openness and willingness to change

The way that external catalysts are interpreted by leaders to a large extent depends on their 'adaptive capacity' – how open they are to change. As one Kenyan put it, *'Personally, I like facing challenges. So as I weighed the pros and cons and as both expected and unanticipated obstacles and constraints showed up, I felt more committed to pressing on.'* The extent to which leaders embraced change or conversely felt they were a 'fixed type' unable or unwilling to change, had a significant impact on whether they changed.

Leaders with a passion for learning can be humble, if their learning helps them to recognise that they are not perfect and there are plenty of areas in which they can improve.

Leaders with a passion for learning can be humble, if their learning helps them to recognise that they are not perfect and there are plenty of areas in which they can improve. The opposite characteristic that prevents people from internalising feedback or learning new things is pride. One Malawian respondent described the chief protagonist in her internal fight to delegate more as *'my public image. I was feeling like people will be saying 'she is not as*

she was'. This held me back'. Pride is damaging because it leads to impatience, an unwillingness to build consensus, inability to receive criticism and unwillingness to endure periods of trial and uncertainty (Delbecq 1999:348).

The research projects interpreted the impact of age on 'openness to change' differently. While the Malawi study highlighted that leaders' most significant changes occurred very early in their leadership careers, the Ugandan survey concluded that age gives confidence through a lifetime of experiences. With such confidence, change appears less threatening. Two respondents explained how age had changed their perception of leadership: *'I have become softer with age. For me work is no longer about making a career. It's more about sharing my experiences and empowering young people and my staff.'*

3.4.4 Aspirations and determination

How leaders respond to external catalysts for change depends partly on their aspirations and determination. In all the different country studies leaders mentioned this desire for excellence and success as critical for change. In the words of one respondent: *'I like to do well and to do things right. You get personal satisfaction and, the reward for good is always there.'* Interestingly this was linked to a positive aspect to a fear of failure or perhaps put better 'a dislike of failure'. One said: *'I don't like to be associated with failure. If you failed, people would not go into why you failed. So, I had to throw in all that is in me in order to ensure it comes out right.'*

For a number of Ugandan respondents, gaining respect and recognition for the work they do was another important motivational factor for change.

These aspirations for success need to be linked with a strong determination to succeed and not be put off by the inherent obstacles along the way. Leaders who change are found to be determined to learn and to create an environment for organisational learning through sharing experiences and reflections.

3.5 Factors Reinforcing Change

Once the leader has internalised the need for change and even implemented the different behaviour, the process is far from over. There can be strong temptations to return to the comfort of the old ways. One Ugandan respondent likened herself to a tortoise, which often quickly withdraws its head when threatened in the new situation. The fears and pride may have been overcome for a time but can return, particularly in times of stress. For those respondents who had become more empowering of staff, there were external pressures to revert to old ways as some staff did not want the extra responsibility. In other situations staff accepted

As leadership is a relationship, the extent to which a leader's decision to change is supported or resisted by staff, the board, family, friends and peers has a considerable impact on the degree of change.

increased responsibilities but used these in an irresponsible manner. Some respondents said that their boards seemed to prefer the previous style of more autocratic leadership. As leadership is a relationship, the extent to which a leader's decision to change is supported or resisted by staff, the board, family, friends and peers can have a considerable impact on the degree of change and on whether it has a positive impact on the organisation.

These groups can either reinforce or undermine change. As one Ugandan respondent commented: *'There are so many people that contribute to a leader succeeding. I am where I am today because I got support from my employer but also from the staff, the local communities and our donors.'*

3.5.1 Support from staff

The extent to which staff supported the leader's change process was very significant. Some respondents noted that they actively sought support from staff for the change. When asked how he implemented change, one leader answered: *'Every training or workshop I've attended I've made sure to pass on the skills and knowledge to the staff. In this way individual learning is turned into organisational learning and it's not difficult to implement the change.'* In contrast others experienced resistance from staff. Staff can interpret change in a leader's behaviour as a threat and force the leaders to abandon the idea. They are frequently ambivalent until they have seen what it means. As one respondent put it: *'The initial attitude of most of the managers was 'wait and see', but now they have taken it well.'*

3.5.2 Support from board

The board also has an influence on whether or not a leader is given the encouragement to implement a change. A number of respondents mentioned the

support given to them by individual board members, particularly the chairperson. One Kenyan mentioned: *'My board was a supportive factor because they appreciated what I was doing'*. In Malawi too, one respondent related it was the board chair's insistence that the organisation was his show and that he had been hired to lead, not follow her that proved influential. Another leader felt consistently given positive reinforcement: *'Somehow, the board believed I would find an answer. I overheard talks like, 'She's able; she's going to turn things around.'*

Yet in most NGOs in these countries, boards usually play a limited role in supporting the leader. It is not uncommon to find NGO boards that are weak and unable to discharge even basic responsibilities. Even when they are engaged, they are often more conservative than progressive about change. They can feel threatened by leaders modelling behaviour that is different to their own. For example, in the Malawi research some of the leaders' board members put strong pressure on them to maintain an autocratic style. One respondent said that when he started delegating more, *'the board looked at me as a weak manager because they were used to a centralised and dictatorship kind of management'*.

3.5.3 Support from family

Some respondents also highlighted the importance of support from their family (especially spouses) in believing in them and giving courage to carry through change. One mentioned the considerable support from her husband instilling the message, not just in words, but in actions by providing the childcare support while her duties took her away from home. In the words of one respondent: *'If you don't get enough support from your family, you have a problem. Thus this affects the change.'*

3.5.4 Support from friends, peers and mentors

Support received from friends was also highly valued: *'I had a confidant on whose shoulders I wept and wept. And we prayed together a lot.'* Some were able to find other CEOs with whom they could share their struggles: *'I also consulted with fellow-leaders within the sub-sector on a personal level – therapeutic sharing.'* The Malawi study also found that ongoing support from coaches, mentors, and peers helped a number of respondents maintain their change.

3.5.5 Supporting changes in organisational structures and systems

Leaders were able to reinforce their decisions to change by making changes in organisational structures and systems. For example, decisions to empower and delegate more were often strengthened by the establishment of senior management teams to take decisions that were previously the preserve of the leader. Similarly a desire to continue to receive feedback from staff and donors about their leadership performance led to the strengthening of appraisal feedback systems in some organisations.

4. Conclusions

4.1 In What Ways did Leaders Change?

All three studies yielded surprisingly similar results in terms of what kind of behaviour leaders changed. The two main ways in which leaders described their own change processes were to do with their use of power, either empowering staff more or gaining the confidence to use their own power more. As Carr et al. point out: 'Leadership often boils down to one basic question, namely, what degree of worker participation is appropriate?' (1998: 67).

A feature of the Uganda study was a change towards a more participatory leadership style, involving shared leadership with some degree of participation and inclusion of staff in decision-making as well as recognising and nurturing staff's potential. As one leader related: *'Now I encourage people to initiate things themselves. I'm more open with a participatory leadership style.'* Such shifts are echoed by the Malawi research where 70% of the respondents identified the most considerable shift they had made as leaders was to a more empowering style of leadership. Similarly in Kenya most cases of change in leadership behaviour related in the study reflect a shift to a more empowering leadership style. One respondent recalled: *'I started to give allowance for failure in other people. I see the occasion of noticing mistake as an opportunity to help people to grow.'* Another mentioned: *'We should let them drive their own process, even where we think we know better. In leadership, we need to draw ideas from the people and count on peer enabling; they know how to influence one another.'* The Kenyan respondents emphasised the importance of leaders growing the next generation of leaders in the light of succession planning. Consequently they shared more information with staff, involved them more in decision-making and donor meetings.

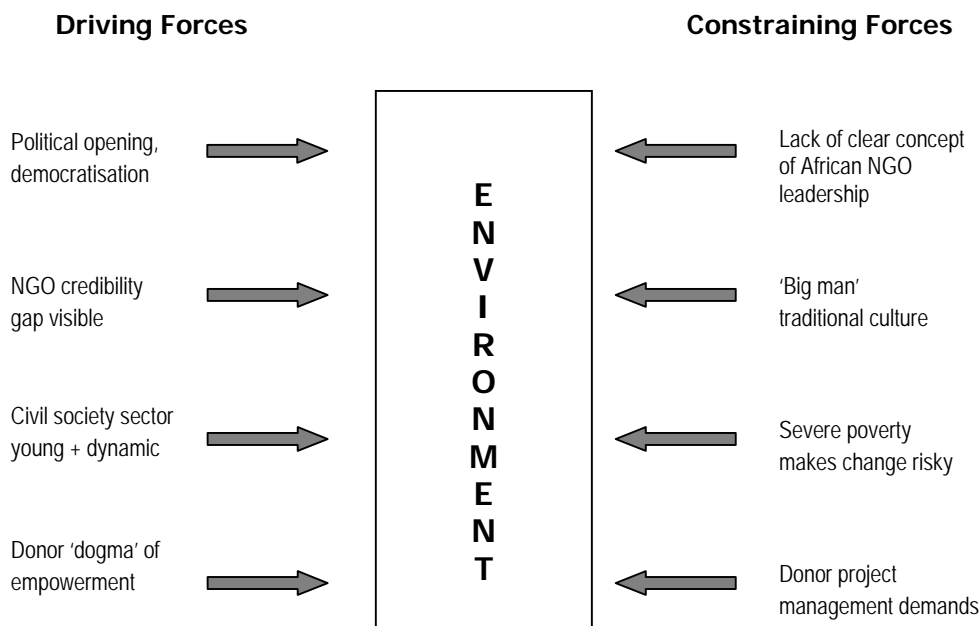
The other main ways in which leaders, particularly women leaders, felt they had changed was to gain greater confidence in themselves, be more able to confront when appropriate, and accept that they were ultimately responsible for the success or otherwise of the organisation. The Uganda study described this as embracing their leadership position. This change was more prominent for female leaders because women had to fight off traditional gender roles. This feeling of being confined by societal perceptions led some women to a need for constant approval and assurance at work.

4.2 Summary Using Force Field Analysis

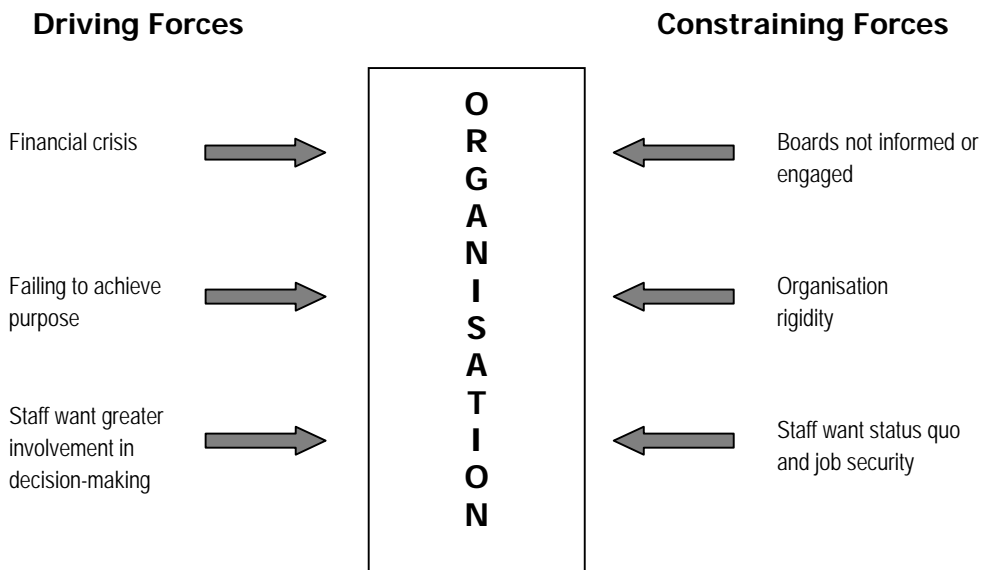
This section has revealed that leadership change is more frequently a gradual evolutionary process, rather than a great revolutionary leap forward; a cascade of events more than a linear, planned process; an ongoing journey more than a place where people arrive. Change was seen to be a slow incremental process, not the sudden transformational change often hoped for. Change can be seen in terms of

force field analysis, whereby leadership behaviour is the produce of the tension between driving and constraining.

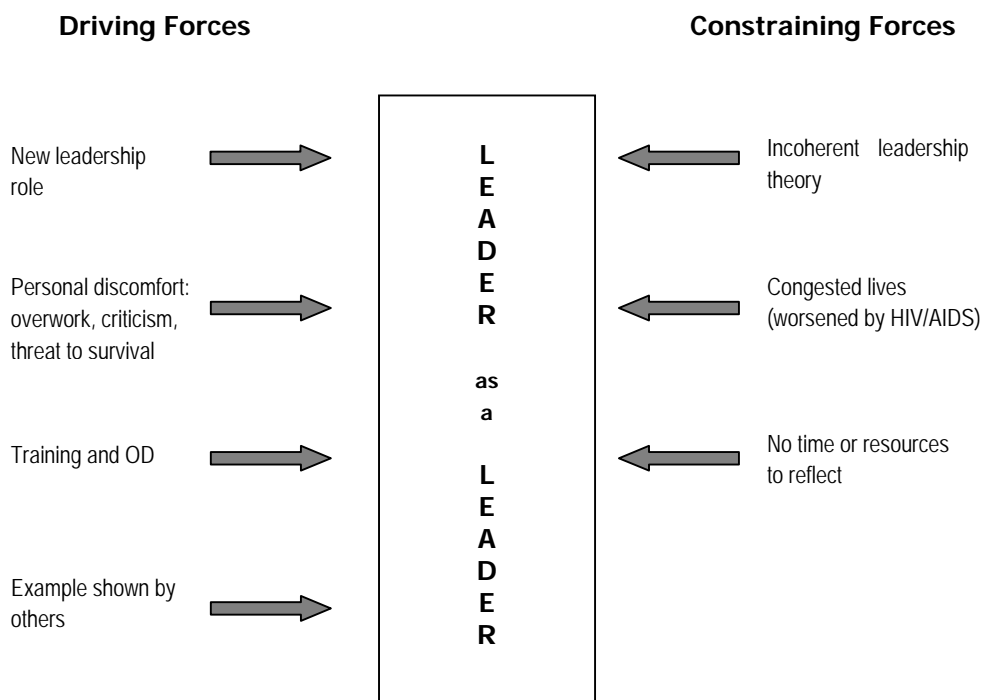
In the wider environment leadership change is constrained by the lack of a clear concept of what good NGO leadership means in Uganda, Kenya and Malawi. Instead leaders referred to differing, and sometimes conflicting, models of leadership influenced by the 'big man' traditional culture of leadership, neo-patrimonial political example and Western management theories. Women leaders faced particular challenges due to cultural perceptions of gender roles in leadership. In each of the studies the context of severe poverty made organisational and individual survival paramount and leaders therefore more risk averse. The environment also meant that NGO leaders were continually having to respond to donor demands. On the other side, the environment also drove leaders to change due to the political opening in all three countries; the civil society sector being young and dynamic and therefore changing itself; the credibility gap between NGOs' espoused values and their actual practices becoming increasingly visible; and donor pressure for leaders to become more empowering in line with their programme strategies. This is illustrated below:



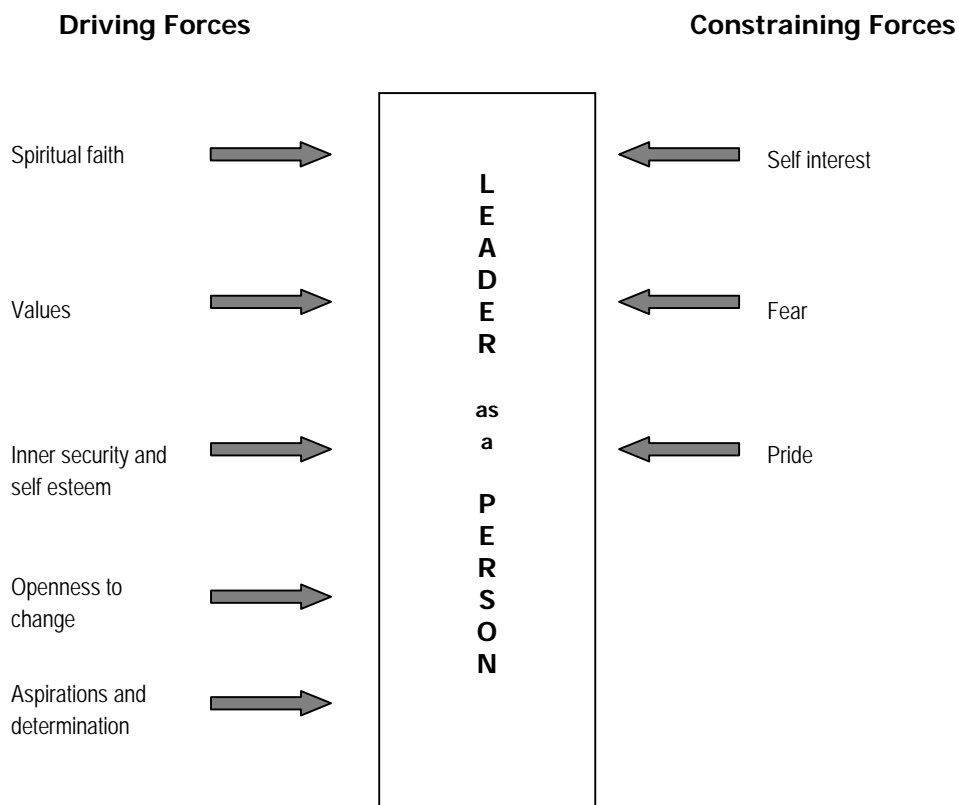
The organisations themselves also prompted both constraints and pressures to change for leaders. We saw how in many NGOs, the boards were not informed or engaged and when they were, tended to act as a conservative force for maintaining the status quo. In Uganda in particular the rigid structures of the church were also seen to constrain change. In terms of driving forces, however, it was often financial crisis in the organisation or a realisation that the mission of the organisation was not being achieved that initially prompted leaders to question their own leadership. This questioning was often encouraged also by staff wanting more involvement in decision-making in the organisation, but conversely staff also constrained leadership change by their concern for job security and the status quo.



For the leaders in their leadership role, they were inhibited from changing by incoherent and inconsistent theories of leadership and congested lives which left them very little time to reflect and change. But some of the incentives which drove change were when they were given a new role of leadership; when they were feeling discomfort from overwork and criticism to the extent of their job being threatened; when they learned something new about leadership from training or OD events; and when they learned from the example of others.



Ultimately change was influenced by how leaders responded to these external stimuli and again there were internal forces for and against change. The main constraints were self-interest, fears and pride, while the internal drivers of change were spiritual faith; core values; sense of self/inner security; their openness to learning; and their aspirations and determination. There was a difference between authentic, internalised change and the more cosmetic, outside change, where leaders (like chameleons) were able to appear to change in the face of external pressures. Authentic change has to touch the heart of a leader. Yet even once leaders had decided to change and started to behave differently, the extent to which others (staff, board, family and peers) supported them or resisted them in this change proved influential in determining the extent of their change.



5. Implications for Leadership Development

This research has highlighted a number of constraining and driving forces for leadership change. So what are the implications for leadership development programmes in African civil society? On completing the research the participating organisations reflected on the findings and held a workshop in Kenya to discuss

To be effective leadership development in Africa needs to specifically respond to the local catalysts and constraints.

implications with a wide range of local and regional organisations involved in leadership development. The discussion highlighted that, to be effective, NGO leadership development in Africa needs to specifically respond to the local catalysts and constraints. That is, to reinforce the variety of triggers that catalyse change whilst reducing the power of the constraining forces.

Clearly, at the heart of whether or not leaders changed was whether they internalised the need for change. Much therefore depends on the person in change and the need for leadership development to be personalised. The development process should also be rooted in the organisation, so that when the leader returns, followers and board members can be supportive rather than resistant to change processes. In this way leadership development may benefit from being part of wider organisational development interventions (including governance) so that organisational and leadership change can work together.

It is also clear that with leadership development, one size does not fit all, and programmes have to be tailored to fit the needs and availability of the target group. The research highlighted, for example, the considerable constraints that many women leaders have to overcome in order to attain leadership positions in NGOs and perform effectively. There is therefore a strong argument for designing programmes that cater specifically for the needs of women. There is also a case for developing programmes that focus on emerging NGO leaders, such as the Young Professionals schemes run by organisations like CDRN in Uganda or Aga Khan Foundation in Kenya. In turn, donors have the potential to significantly influence (positively and negatively) the context in which NGO leadership development takes place. This section explores these implications in more detail by looking at how the findings of the research apply to the:

1. content of leadership development
2. methods for leadership development
3. principles of leadership development practice
4. personal approach to leadership development
5. approach used by capacity building providers
6. policies of donors

5.1 Content of Leadership Development

Leadership development programmes need to address the major constraining forces on leadership behaviour. The research highlighted the pervasive impact of conflicting models of leadership as well as leaders' congested lives. Leadership development programmes therefore need to:

- **assist leaders to work out their own coherent concept of leadership.** This can be done by spending time examining the cultural expectations of leaders in their countries, including how women are perceived. It is very important to explicitly explore the positive elements of African leadership, rather than simply accept negative stereotypes. After all, we are seeking to develop 'African' leaders, not Western clones. It may also be valuable to analyse political leadership in the country as one of the prime role models for leadership behaviour. Different theories of leadership may be critiqued so that leaders can work out for themselves what they believe.
- **deal with leaders as whole people leading congested lives.** This can be done by getting leaders to identify the different roles they play in life and the demands these place on them in their particular cultural context. It may highlight that they are over-stretched and need to change. Western literature does not say much about pressures from the extended family in relation to leadership, as it assumes a greater separation of work and family demands. Again it is important to explore the particular challenges facing women leaders in juggling different roles. Effective leadership development in Africa looks at the social and family pressures especially in the context of growing HIV-infection rates.
- **explore an empowering style of leadership.** This responds to the fact that the most significant change that leaders felt they had made was shifting towards greater empowerment of staff/followers. The relevance of an 'empowering' style of leadership is obviously not confined to Europe or America, but touches on core human principles of behaviour that transcend geography and culture and are already expressed in the African notion of 'Ubuntu'. Exploring what is meant by empowering leadership, and its application to local contexts, is therefore legitimate and important to include in any leadership development programme.
- **address issues of leadership succession**¹⁶. Respondents felt that leaders should begin to analyse and take action on such issues from the outset of their tenure, rather than waiting until it was too late at the end. Leaders need to be helped to think through where the organisation would go without them and where they would go without the organisation. The perceived lack of career opportunities beyond NGO leadership is seen as a major factor in blocking individual, organisational and even sectoral change. There is value, therefore, in leadership development programmes helping leaders to articulate their vision for their own lives and to explore ways in which this might be achieved beyond the current organisation.

¹⁶ Highlighted by different groups in East Africa at the workshop where the research findings were fed back.

5.2 Methods of Leadership Development

The research demonstrated that leaders changed in response to a wide variety of different stimuli, not one single input. Change was a cascade of events. The different catalysts that respondents identified included capacity building inputs, such as leadership training, OD interventions, peer networks, exposure visits, exchanges, coaching and mentoring support. Effective leadership development therefore will make use of a variety of methods to catalyse change. In the past there has been a tendency to use single inputs such as training – as we saw in the Kenyan research, leaders can become immunised against the impact of such events.

On an individual level we saw that leaders were changed through:

- **Leadership training:** this still has an important role to play in leadership development. The research showed that such workshops in Uganda and Malawi had proved to be significant in the learning of many leaders, but that they need to be well-designed – following the approaches and principles outlined in the next section and also integrating other methods explained below.
- **Mentoring and coaching:** these are increasingly perceived to be effective in promoting behaviour change. Such support can take the form of leadership counselling where issues such as values, aspirations, exit plans, extended family pressures, staff motivation and power are explored. There may also be a need to train the mentors as experience of using such methods in the African CSO sector is still limited. Former NGO leaders may be developed so they can provide on-going counselling and mentoring support to younger leaders. There is a need to analyse and document the experience that does exist, to assess how mentoring and coaching is practiced in other sectors and to understand how mentoring and coaching already takes place in an African cultural context.
- **Peer support networks:** these are another important element in leaders' change. Many of the Kenyans interviewed alluded to the positive peer influence that fellow leaders in NGO networks are having on them. Leadership development initiatives should see how they can encourage the formation of such formal or informal groups.
- **Exchanges, exposure visits and sabbaticals:** these were seen to be important factors in triggering change for some leaders. Support programmes can be developed to target managers from a given thematic area across organisations, then get them to visit each others' organisations.

In designing a leadership development programme the type and combination of methods used need to be tailored to the target group. For example, while leaders in an emerging civil society sector may benefit more from a systematic programme involving a series of modules and placements, this would not be appropriate for leaders from more developed sectors. More on-the-job inputs such as mentoring and coaching or peer networks may prove more effective for this group.

But the research also showed that leadership development should not just take place at an individual level. Although the research methodology concentrated on top leaders, leadership is actually practised throughout the organisation and there is great value in taking a more comprehensive and organisation-wide approach to leadership development. Leadership development should therefore also encompass the 'followers' who are leading others, which could be achieved by:

- **In-house leadership development** programmes can be very useful in ensuring that the training is grounded and applied directly to a very specific organisational context. In addition, they show that leadership is not something vested in one individual, but all staff are leaders in different task areas. If learning has been widely spread, staff may put pressure on the leader to implement change. In addition, institutionalised learning may increase ownership of change among staff because they want to see their efforts put to good use.
- **Organisation Development (OD)** interventions can also serve to empower followers to push for changes in leadership behaviour and take more responsibility for the organisation. If followers do not take more responsibility this may lead to a leader's efforts to be more empowering being resisted or blocked by staff. Leadership is a two-way relationship.
- **Governance training and orientation** was seen as an important aspect of leadership development. Leadership should not be left to one person, but is a responsibility shared amongst the board and senior management. Governance training can therefore help boards to engage effectively with their executives, providing direction, accountability and support.

5.3 Principles of Leadership Development Practice

Whichever methods of leadership development are used, the research highlights the value of:

- **Creating space for reflection**, rather than cramming participants with inputs. This enables an experiential learning approach whereby leaders reflect in their hearts about their own practice, rather than simply transfer a body of knowledge to their heads.
- Using questions to get people to **challenge and discover answers themselves**.
- Ensuring that there are opportunities for **peer/facilitator feedback** to participants. Such constructive criticism was a key part of leaders' change processes.
- Providing good **resource materials** for leaders to review later. We tend to see busy leaders not having the time or inclination to read, but there were a

significant number of research respondents who found themselves challenged to change by what they read.

- Using **role models** where possible. People learn from others they admire and many training events would benefit from inclusion of appropriate role models.
- Ensuring that learning is **applied to organisation change**. As well as leaders developing their own action plans in training workshops, they also need to think through followers' reaction plans, so that change processes move beyond simply good intentions. They also need to think through the implementation process back in their organisation.
- **Following through** – because change is not a one-off event, but a process that needs reinforcing. Alumni groups can be one way of following through as can individual mentoring processes.

5.4 Personal Approach to Leadership Development

The research showed that ultimately what mattered in change was how people internalised the external catalysts. An effective leadership development programme recognises this personal dimension to any change. It focuses on the particular individual – what ultimately motivates them and how they learn. Most fundamental change of behaviour occurs from the heart, but most leadership programmes only touch the intellect. The emotions and even the spiritual faiths of people need to be harnessed to effect authentic change. As one respondent pleaded: *'We should be given space to reflect on what we have learnt throughout the years, how we have changed and what has made us stay as leaders. Please help me discover myself.'*

Taking a personal approach to leadership development involves addressing:

- **Self-awareness:** This is a critical attribute of an effective leader, who is able to change. 'Leaders with self-awareness are more likely to move quickly and confidently and in different directions, without needing to be consistently right and in control'¹⁷. Leadership development programmes should therefore include elements of self-development, though self-knowledge. This may involve exploring people's inner values, their vision and meaning for their life, their restraining fears and pride.
- **Personal values:** Leadership development programmes need to help participants explore their values and how this affects their leadership. As one Ugandan said: *'We should have a value-laden capacity building process where emphasis can be on values (cultural or spiritual values).'*
- **Use of power:** One key value that needs to be explored is about power and its use by leaders. The research highlighted that the most significant leadership change took place in leaders' use of power. Leadership development therefore

¹⁷ Dotlich and Noel 1998:138 & 187.

should not simply be about learning new management skills and techniques, rather it should address the sensitive, but crucial issues of how leaders use their power.

- **Self-identity:** Leadership development programmes need to touch leaders' self-identity and may even need to surface the fears and emotional scars that may be driving their behaviour. Effective leadership development assists people to identify the causes of their resistance to change and address them. Women leaders may need to overcome specific types of fears, derived from society's perceptions of their roles. One female respondent advised: *'Find out what makes this person fear. Especially for women. Identify the source of that fear, and attack it'*.
- **Personal style and vision:** Leadership development programmes need also to explore how people learn and how adaptive they are by nature. They may also benefit by exploring the ways that pride and ego can impact on change. Leadership development programmes need to focus on leaders' forward-looking vision and aspirations – what they want to be remembered for or what they perceive as their calling. It is important to cultivate an innovative spirit in leaders.

Obviously not all these personal issues can be explicitly addressed in a leadership development programme. The prime element is to explore what leaders as people bring to the process. This is why for effective leadership development, participant selection is crucial. Leadership development efforts should focus on those already open to their own learning. The Malawi research found that the major changes that leaders made in their leadership behaviour occurred within a few years of them moving into a leadership role, whereas the Ugandan research revealed that some leaders mellowed with age to become more flexible.

5.5 Approach Used by Capacity Building Providers

Capacity building providers clearly need to adjust their leadership development approach to reflect the factors that inhibit and promote change. This means:

- **Adjusting both the content and process of leadership development programmes** in line with the previous section. The target group for such processes needs to be clear (e.g. emerging or existing leaders; women, youth) and the methods used need to be tailored to their needs, for example shortening courses for those with congested lives. This demands creativity in the planning of leadership development processes. Where leadership training is used the facilitator needs to reduce the time spent standing in front of participants so that they can learn from each other and from their own experiences. More effort needs to be made to include mentoring and coaching as part of the leadership development package. Opportunities for leaders to safely share and learn from each other through peer support groups need to be promoted. Capacity building providers should strategise more creatively to explore: How often do we use exchange visits, facilitate documentation processes, organise thematic groups to

discuss issues of special interest to them, reward best performers or organise retreats? Do we have the capacity and courage to do this?

- **Developing a diversity of leadership development skills.** Capacity building providers clearly need to develop the skills to deliver a diverse range of services. One of our respondents noted that to develop relevant NGO training for leaders it would be good to move away from textbooks and ask the sort of questions that were asked during the research interviews. As well as skills in up-front training and presentation, they therefore also need to be able to:
 - provide counselling support to leaders on a one-to-one or even a group support basis,
 - provide good quality mentoring and coaching support to leaders, and
 - be prepared to organise opportunities for leaders to learn from each other, rather than simply from the capacity building provider.
- **Putting into practice what they preach.** While it is important for capacity building providers to implement the findings of this research to adapt their external programmes, the findings about leadership development also need to be applied inside the capacity building organisation itself. The importance of constructive feedback, the value of time for reflection, the power of values in change need to be at the heart of a capacity building provider's internal processes. Increasingly some capacity building providers are imitating CDRA's concept of home-weeks (alternatively called no-fly weeks, holy weeks, 'to the nest' weeks). This may include providing internal leadership mentoring and coaching, planning for leadership succession and understanding of the gender implications of leadership development.

5.6 Influencing Donor Policies

While the research highlights that donor policies and practices can have significant impact on the ability of leaders to develop and change, both positively and negatively, few CSOs in Africa have the confidence to be able to challenge donors directly. Capacity building providers, both local and international, can play a role in challenging donors on their support to leadership development in collaboration with local CSOs. For leadership development initiatives to be effective, donor policies need to recognise and respond to:

- **the extra pressures they put on NGO leaders** through their often onerous requirements that constrain change. One CSO leader in Malawi estimated that 50% of his time last year was dedicated to organising and accompanying donor visits! Leaders need to be given space to lead their own autonomous organisations, not merely be treated as donor project managers requested firmly to attend this meeting and that meeting.
- **the inherent power imbalance between donor and partner.** The Malawi research found no evidence of donors playing a significant direct role in the change process. In fact, if donors did try and direct a leader to change, it often

proved counter-productive. As one respondent commented: *'No, it is not possible for any foreign entity to influence that. It can't happen. In fact if that foreign element says to you, you are doing it wrong, this is how you should do it, the instinct is to go the opposite direction'*. Donors are usually in too powerful a position to be able to give feedback on leadership behaviour that will be internalised by the leader, however well meant it is. The power that donors have over their partners through control of resources necessarily undermines CSO leaders' freedom to choose and at best will only lead to cosmetic compliance.

- **the positive role donors can play through questioning leaders behaviour** in a way that allows them realise their inconsistencies for themselves, rather than issuing ultimatums. This should include providing positive feedback and encouragement when change makes a positive difference.
- **the importance of making resources available** to directly support all sorts of leadership development interventions at all levels within an organisation. The interventions mentioned are resource intensive and need generous support from donors if they are to occur. Fostering formation of networks, support groups, leadership counselling services, exposure and exchange visits are important contributions to this end. Many NGO leaders claim their reluctance to delegate arises from having under-trained staff. Therefore, providing more generous support for the hiring and development of second and third-line leadership will enable leaders to be more empowering and reduce the problems caused by over-dependence on one person.

References

- Adair, J. (1973) *Action-Centred Leadership*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Adair, J. (2002) *Effective Strategic Leadership*, London: Macmillan.
- Barr, A., Fafchamps, M. and Owens, T. (2003) 'Non-governmental organisations in Uganda', a report to the Government of Uganda.
- Bennis, W. and Thomas, R. (2002) *Geeks and Geezers: How Era, Values, and Defining Moments Shape Leaders*, Boston MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.
- Blake, R. and Mouton, J. (1964) *The Managerial Grid*, Houston TX: Gulf.
- Blunt, P. and Jones, M. L. (1992) *Managing Organisations in Africa*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Bolden, R. (2004) 'What is leadership?', Leadership South West Research Report, Exeter UK: University of Exeter.
- Bratton, M. and van de Walle, N. (1997) 'Neopatrimonial rule in Africa', in Bratton, M. and van de Walle, N., *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burns, J. M. (1978) *Leadership*, New York: Harper Row.
- Cammack, D. (2001) *Malawi at the Threshold: Conflict: Environmental Scarcity and Ingenuity in a Newly Democratic State*, Committee on Security Studies, American Academy of Arts and Science, MA.
- Carr, S., McAuliffe, E. and MacLachlan, M. (1998) *Psychology of Aid*, London: Routledge.
- CIVICUS (2002) *Connecting Civil Society Worldwide*, Newsletter No. 175, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Commission for Africa (2005) 'Our Common Interest: Report of the Commission for Africa'.
- Covey, S. (1992) *Principle-Centred Leadership*, New York: Summit Books.
- Crockett, P. (1996) 'OD Useful in Changing Times: Interview with Allan Kaplan', *Mott Exchange* 11 (3), Flint Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.
- Daft, R. and Lengel, R. (1998) *Fusion Leadership: Unlocking the Subtle Forces that Change People and Organisations*, San Francisco: Berrett Koehler.

De Coninck, J. (2004) 'Politics is (best) left to the politicians – civil society in a period of political transition in Uganda: challenges and prospects', CDRN Civil Society Reviews, Comments and Reports Paper No. 5.

Delbecq, A. (1999) 'Christian spirituality and contemporary business leadership', *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 12 (4): 345–49.

Dotlich, D., and Noel, J. (1998) *Action Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Fielder, F. (1967) *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Fowler, A. Ng'ethe, and Owiti, J. (2002) 'In Search of Appropriate Theory: Determinants of Civic Leadership in Africa: An Exploratory Study of NGOs in Kenya', Draft Working Paper IDS, Nairobi.

Greenleaf, R. K. (1998) *The Power of Servant Leadership*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

Hailey, J. and James, R. (2004) 'Trees Die from the Top: International Perspectives on Leadership Development', *Voluntas* 15 (4).

Haslam, A. (2001) *Psychology in Organisations: The Social Identity Approach*, London: Sage.

Hersey, P. and Blanchard, K. (1977) *Management of Organisational Behaviour*, Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall.

Hickey, S. (2003) 'The Politics of Staying Poor in Uganda', paper prepared for the International Conference on 'Staying Poor: Chronic Poverty and Development Policy', IDPM, University of Manchester.

Hofstede, G. (1994) *Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind – Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival*, The Association for Management Education and Development.

Howell J. and Shamir, B. (2005) 'The Role of Followers in the Charismatic Leadership Process: Relationships and their Consequences', *Academy of Management Review* 30 (1): 96–112.

IFCB (1998) and (2001): 'Southern NGO Capacity building: Issues and Priorities', New Delhi: PRIA.

Isooba, M., Mboizi, B. and Kusiima, I. (2005) 'Realities of Change: Civil Society Leadership in Uganda', CDRN.

James, R. (2003) 'Leaders Changing Inside-Out: What Causes Leaders to Change Behaviour? Cases from Malawian Civil Society', Occasional Papers Series No: 43, Oxford: The International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC).

James, R. (2002) *People and Change: Exploring Capacity-Building in NGOs*, NGO Management and Policy Series No.15, Oxford: The International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC).

James, R. and Mullins, D. (2004) 'Supporting NGO Partners affected by HIV/AIDS', *Development in Practice* 14 (4).

Kakabadse, A. and Kakabadse, N. (1999) *Essence of Leadership*, International Thomson Business Press.

Kaplan, A. (2002) *Development Practitioners and Social Process: Artists of the Invisible*, London: Pluto Press.

Kapuscinski, R. (1998) *Under the Shadow of the Sun*, London: Penguin.

Kenya NGO Council/Fowler (2001) *A Guide to Being a Successful NGO Leader*, NGO Leadership Development Series No.3.

Kenya NGO Council/Fowler (2001) *A Guide to Good Governance Of NGOs*, NGO Leadership Development Series No.1.

Lebow, R. and Simon, W. (1997) *Lasting Change*, New York: Wiley.

McGregor, D. (1960) *The Human Side of Enterprise*, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Oladipo, J. (2005) 'Realities of Change: Experiences of Kenyan NGO Chief Executives', CORAT.

Owen, H. (1999) *The Spirit of Leadership*, San Francisco: Berrett Koehler.

Quinn, R. (2000) *Change the World: How Ordinary People can Accomplish Extraordinary Results*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Smillie, I. and Hailey, J. (2001) *Managing for Change: Leadership, Strategy and Management in Asian NGOs*, London: Earthscan.

Tosh, J. (1978) *Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs in Lango: The Political History of an East African Stateless Society c.1800-1939*, Oxford Studies in African Affairs, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Wallace, T. (2004) 'The impact and implications of rational management tools on NGO partnership and practice', Kampala.

Appendix 1: Research Methodology

The research was done in two stages:

Stage 1 Malawi Study: In 2002–2003, INTRAC Malawi (Rick James) carried out pilot research into civil society leadership behaviour change published under the title 'Leaders Changing Inside-Out' (INTRAC OPS 43). A 50-day research project involved:

- literature review
- semi-structured interviews with key informants
- in-depth interviews with ten 'respected' CSO leaders transcribed from audio tape
- analysis and drafting
- input from leadership specialists in Africa and Europe
- presentation of research report to CORDAID Africa Department
- feedback workshop with CSO leaders in Malawi
- publication as an Occasional Paper

Stage 2 Studies in Kenya and Uganda: After securing financial support from CORDAID and INTRAC Praxis, CORAT (Julius Oladipo) and CDRN (Moses Isooba, Betsy Mboizi, Ida Kusiima) undertook the second phase of the leadership research in Kenya and Uganda respectively in 2004–2005. This involved:

- analysis of the leadership research study from Malawi
- literature review
- identification of sampling criteria, potential respondents and methodology to guide the research
- background research was undertaken on each of the organisations whose leader was to be interviewed to understand its profile
- semi-structured interviews with 3–5 key informants in each country
- in-depth interviews with 15–20 key CSO leaders in each country
- drafting of country papers
- joint analysis workshop in February 2005 to synthesise learnings
- national feedback workshops with CSO leaders
- publication of regional research synthesis paper
- regional research workshop in June 2005 in Kenya

The criteria used for selecting respondents differed slightly between countries. In Malawi well-respected leaders with more than three years leadership experience were approached. These were predominantly, but not exclusively, organisations with whom INTRAC had built trust and rapport. Five women and five men were interviewed from a balance of NGO and faith-based organisations. Similarly in Uganda diversity was the essence of the selection – there was a balance of: former and current CDRN partners and 'non-partners'; 'successful' leaders and not so successful ones; founder-leaders and second generation leaders; men (65%) and women (35%); from faith-based and secular organisations; from rural and urban areas; with activities covering service delivery and policy advocacy. In Kenya, 30 NGOs based in Nairobi were purposively selected from the directory of NGOs. The selection was guided by the need to include a broad range of NGOs: international and local, faith-based and secular, development support NGOs as well as

implementing community-based organisations (CBOs), and with emphases on women development, youth concerns, and children's services. Of the 30 invited for participation only 15 self-selected themselves for inclusion after hearing of the time commitment involved. Over half of the respondents were women.

The research focused exclusively on top leaders in organisations, although the researchers believe that 'leadership' pervades all parts of the organisation. This decision was taken largely for pragmatic reasons: firstly resources did not allow time to interview staff and board members from each organisation; secondly it would have made the interview protocols more ethically sensitive (as the methodology may have opened up organisational issues that the researchers were not in a position to deal with); thirdly most CSOs in the research are still highly dependent on the director or CEO to provide the leadership function (boards are generally weak).

The different researchers inherently brought their own organisational and personal interests and priorities to the project, although attempts were made in the planning stage, at the mid-project review stage and in the final analysis meeting to ensure the methodologies were as synchronised as possible. Because each organisation made the research more relevant and applicable to their own specific questions and contexts, this enhanced ownership of the project, but undermined the ease of comparison between countries.

The researchers found that leaders interpreted their questions in different ways (although constant attempts were made to clarify). For example when leaders were asked about their own personal change processes, they often preferred to talk about a particular problem they had solved in the organisation.

Appendix 2: Participating Organisations

CORAT:

CORAT Africa was the lead NGO in this collaborative project. CORAT Africa (Church Organisations Research and Advisory Trust) is a Nairobi-based Pan-African management and consultancy organisation, founded in 1975, for capacity building of churches and Christian organisations for greater effectiveness in their services to society. Leadership and management are the main areas of CORAT focus and it is involved in providing ongoing training and accompaniment support to leaders.

CDRN:

The Community Development Resource Network (CDRN) was founded in 1994 by a small group of Uganda-based professionals involved in community development work. CDRN's mission is to promote civil society's efforts to reduce poverty among women, men and children in Uganda through organisational and institutional strengthening. CDRN was founded in order to support community development work through participatory techniques and to assist those organisations involved in such work generally to become more effective.

INTRAC:

INTRAC (The International NGO Training and Research Centre) is committed to improving the organisational effectiveness and programme performance of Northern and Southern NGOs involved in relief and development work. INTRAC provided support to this initiative from its civil society capacity building programme in Malawi as well as from its capacity building Praxis programme from the UK. INTRAC Malawi (Rick James) assisted this research project by inputting the findings from the pilot research in Malawi (published as *'Leaders Changing Inside-Out'* INTRAC OPS 43); conducting a mid-project review and bringing together the different national research reports into a regional paper. INTRAC UK provided some financial assistance to the research.

Appendix 3: National Civil Society Contexts

The Ugandan Civil Society Context

Uganda is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 158th/174 in the UN Human Development Index. 85% of the population is engaged in small-scale subsistence farming and have been heavily afflicted since the 1980s by the AIDS pandemic (this has in great part been responsible for a reduction in average life expectancy to 42 years). There have, however, been recent improvements in absolute poverty reduction with a decrease from 56% of the population living below the poverty line in 1992 to an estimated 35% in 2000.

In Uganda, the civil society sector can be characterised as:

- very young – therefore still dominated by founder-leaders;
- growing fast – numbers of registered NGOs increased from 160 in 1986, 600 in 1990, 3500 in 2000 and 4700 by 2003 (Barr et al. 2003) – but with much infant mortality and with thin roots to communities, creating questions of legitimacy and a growing credibility gap;
- highly dependent on donors – meaning that fundraising is a major activity for many CSOs. According to De Coninck: ‘Many CSOs thus appear to be preoccupied with accountability to their donors and their own self-perpetuation, rather than with accountability to their would-be constituencies’ (2004: 6). Donor influence is therefore very pervasive.
- fragmented and competitive – competition for various donors’ funds, contracts and recognition *among* NGOs fosters self-interest, disunity, distrust (Wallace 2004), and a greater distance from the common social agenda.
- having blurred and permeable boundaries and to a degree ‘enmeshed’ with the state due to the lack of a strong tradition of independent and critical thought from civil society, membership of the government-inspired ‘Movement System’ as well as sub-contracting by local government decentralisation having become the norm;
- overwhelmingly involved in service delivery, but currently being pressured by donors to take on the task of holding government to account through advocacy;
- having relatively experienced, educated and usually male leadership. They are described as quite shrewd and calculating, but beginning to face issues of succession;
- having limited second-line leadership – staff turnover means that many of the best potential future CSO leaders are moving from local organisations, to international NGOs and then to official donor agencies instead;
- increasingly affected by HIV/AIDS;
- having quite rigid church structures and a history of denominational conflict.

The Malawian Civil Society Context

Malawi suffers deep and entrenched inequity within a context of pervasive poverty. It ranked 168th in the UN Human Development Index – the poorest country not suffering from the effects of civil war. Life expectancy has reduced to between 37 and 39 years (due to HIV/AIDS). Since independence in 1964, Malawi was largely a

closed society with considerable state control in the economic, social and political spheres and little or no organised civil society participation. The churches were, however, instrumental in exposing the ills of Dr Banda's regime through pastoral letters and this began a more inclusive political dispensation with multi-party elections in 1994.

The NGO sector in Malawi is:

- young – it really started to grow from 1992 onwards, in response to the arrival of Mozambican refugees as well as drought. When the international relief organisations left, many local NGOs sprung up to take their place;
- increasingly active in human rights, political and economic governance issues, and HIV/AIDS among other areas;
- beginning to mobilise and come together around sectoral thematic groups forming CSO networks, coalitions, and alliances;
- overall, however, it is fragmented, isolated and still concentrates largely on the welfare-type work of providing services to the dependent poor;
- highly influenced by donors;
- often bypassed by international NGOs who are implementing their own operational projects vulnerable to having their best staff 'poached' by better resourced international organisations;
- still credible (perhaps more so than Uganda and Kenya);
- motivated by positive values and a desire to make a difference;
- populated by a significant number of influential faith-based organisations and churches;
- largely under male NGO leadership with CSO coalition leaders young and often just out of university. Women leaders tend to have founded their own organisations rather than be recruited into the post.

The Kenyan Civil Society Context

In Kenya the civil society sector is more developed than in Uganda or Malawi. It has a longer history and a broader scope. In Kenya, the concept of civil society is used in an inclusive manner to mean the realm of voluntary and autonomous associations that are independent of the state and the market. Of such organisations, there were about 90,000 registered in 1995 and by the end of 2002, the number has risen to about 220,000. Women's groups account for about half the number of registered CSOs in Kenya; they were about 32,000 in 1995, increased to about 110,00 in 2000 and were about 122,000 by the end of 2002. Amongst formalised CSOs, NGOs have the longest presence in the Kenyan development space. Some are offshoots from missionary activities while others are branches of international NGOs that came to Africa early in the colonial era. They entered the development space chiefly as relief and welfare organisations but shifted and diversified into community development activities as from the 1970s. In the 1980s they again shifted or diversified into institutional building activities for sustainable impact. As from the early 1990s, many began to incorporate advocacy programmes. The number of registered development NGOs in Kenya was just about 120 in 1978 and about 290 in 1988. In 1992 they numbered about 400, but increased to 1,000 in 1995, and were about 2,300 in early 2003.

The pro-democracy struggle accounts for the rise in the number of NGOs from 290 in 1988, to 1,000 in 1995 and still more today. Activism pervades the civil society sector in Kenya and there is a strong sense of separate identity. It also fostered formation of formal and informal networks, in collective response to particular advocacy issues. Networks and consortiums are a notable feature of the Kenyan NGO sector. There are various sub-sectoral federations such as Kenya Land Alliance, Kenya Alliance for Advancement of Children and Kenya Water Alliance. These mean that some peer pressure accountability and networking exist amongst leaders.

In Kenyan civil society there is 'a serious credibility deficit' (Kenya NGO Council 2001:10). The general perception is that NGO leaders are in it to make money or as a stepping stone to politics. The high-profile, elitist lifestyle fits many an NGO leader into the class of the so-called 'Lords of Poverty'. Increasingly, however, CSOs have to apply their demands for government accountability and transparency back to themselves. They are being pushed to implement their stated values and put their own houses in order.

Activities of development NGOs depend largely or entirely on donor funding. The current concern with financial sustainability is leading many local NGOs to incorporate a commercial activity, with the hope of generating funds to keep the organisation afloat. Nairobi hosts the Africa Regional headquarters of most of the international NGOs and of the multi-lateral development agencies, making it a major gateway for the international development agenda – the first port of call in Africa for any newly arriving theme. Nairobi also hosts the main offices of the numerous NGOs serving in the conflict-ridden neighbouring countries, particularly in Sudan and Somalia and in the 1980s in Uganda and Ethiopia. Nairobi is also the base of most of the local NGOs as well.

The leadership of NGOs in Kenya is largely centralised on one individual, who comes from an urban educated background. A considerable proportion of Kenyan NGOs have been founded by women, which has contributed to female leadership being accepted and respected in Kenya (though gender sensitivity in the workplace is still considered low). The NGO labour market in Kenya is more developed than in Uganda or Malawi with staff mobility very high.

Praxis Paper No. 6

Realities of Change: Understanding How African NGO Leaders Develop

By Rick James with Julius Oladipo, Moses Isooba, Betsy Mboizi and Ida Kusiima

This paper summarises the main findings of a programme of research into leadership undertaken by CORAT Africa in Kenya, INTRAC in Malawi and the Community Development Resource Network (CDRN) in Uganda.

These organisations interviewed 45 non-governmental organisation leaders to find out their perspectives on leadership; the nature of the leadership change processes they had experienced; and the factors that had promoted and constrained change in their leadership behaviour in the past.

Leadership development is currently being prioritised as a crucial capacity building intervention, both by leaders of African CSOs themselves as well as by donors and other stakeholders. This paper highlights the kind of contextual issues that practitioners need to consider when undertaking such interventions.

ISBN 1-897748-95-7

INTRAC

Postal address: PO Box 563, Oxford, OX2 6RZ

Registered and visiting address: 65 George Street, Oxford, OX1 2BE

Tel: +44 (0)1865 210851 Fax: +44 (0)1865 210852

Email: info@intrac.org Website: <http://www.intrac.org>

INTRAC is a company limited by guarantee No. 2663769

Registered in England A Registered Charity Charity No. 101667