



DEVELOPMENT
ALTERNATIVE

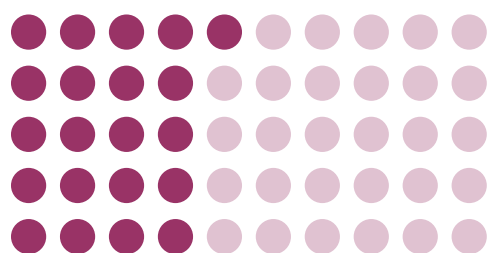


SHIFTING THE POWER:

Joseph from Uganda,
Ziyad from Iraq and
Mohammad from Lebanon

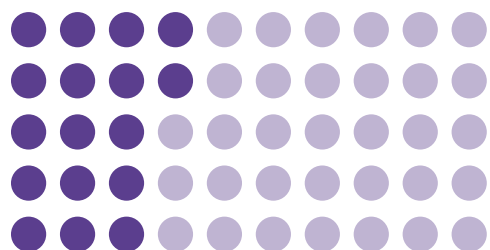
What will it take to lead youth CSO differently?

We investigated the root causes behind youth CSOs just surviving, not thriving, and we learned that while leadership journeys are complex and varied within CSOs, this **diversity can be harnessed towards more inclusive and dynamic types of leadership within the sector**. This brief explores how to support leadership structures that multiply leaders within youth CSOs.



41.7%

of youth CSOs don't provide
leadership development
opportunities on a regular basis



34.7%

of youth CSOs have not figured out
their succession planning

The graphs above show how, despite not representing the majority of youth CSOs, a large number of organisations can be supported to develop their succession planning, and to build the leadership of junior team members.

We found that...

Well rounded leadership is seen as key, as the best leaders are not necessarily experts but have a mix of soft (ie. communications, interpersonal) and technical (ie. financial, project management) skills - though the former matters more than the latter.

To become a leader you must first know the 'right people'. While some leaders make their way up, most either found organisations or have the right relationships - both with organisations and other leaders in the sector - to help them grow. For those without relationships this may present a specific barrier to grow into leadership roles in the sector.

There is a **distinction between 'leadership' as an activity and 'leader' as an identity**. We found that while most leaders see "leadership" as something anyone could do, other members of their teams saw 'leadership' as something restricted to a small group of people - to those who hold leadership as an identity.

Whose 'expertise' count is a matter of where they come from. We found a shared sense that those with experience and credentials developed through external (and international) opportunities, are perceived as having greater "expertise" than those who built their experience through internal opportunities for growth. This finding again speaks to power imbalances within the sector and how heavily entrenched are notions of "international as 'expert'" and "national as 'implementer'".

How can we do it differently?

If development actors want others in the sector to share the view that 'everyone can be a leader' at their own right in youth organisations, we must **address prevalent, one-dimensional notions of "who gets to be a leader?" and "what does it mean to be a leader?"**; or face perpetuating a culture of elitism and inaccessibility in current models of youth leadership.

Civil society needs to continue to speak truth to power in our sector, and power holders within it need to address how **working through external spaces and top-down capacity development negatively impacts leadership** - restricting opportunities for relationship building and growth.

While capacity strengthening in leadership should combine soft and technical skills, the focus should be on **building leadership journeys within organisations**, ensuring trickle down effects, succession planning and inclusion.

“ **PEOPLE AT THE TOP SAY EVERYONE IS A LEADER BUT THAT PERSPECTIVE IS NOT SHARED BY THOSE THAT ARE AT OTHER LEVELS.** ”
JOSEPH, YOUNG RESEARCHER FROM UGANDA.



This research series is coordinated by The Development Alternative, a group of organisations committed to testing and developing new ways of doing development that are truly led by young people and their communities. This project is funded with UK aid from the UK government.