CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

STORIES OF CHANGE

2015 COHORT
“It was a pleasure sharing experiences and acquiring skills and knowledge. My take away is that to whom much is given, much more is expected. Thank you WACSI and Ford Foundation West Africa for the brilliant organisation and coordination. You have definitely made an impact.”

Fatoumatta Ndure, CSLI 2015 Alumni, The Gambia

ABOUT CSLI

The Civil Society Leadership Institute (CSLI) is designed to groom the next generation of leaders in civil society. It equips participating fellows with the skills and tools they need to create sustainability in their fields and places of work and amplify the effectiveness of their actions. It also designed to bring the present and future young leaders in civil society together to share ideas, build each other up, to construct a vibrant, resilient and effective civil society in West Africa. The programme is run in two phases, the training phase and mentorship/coaching phase. These together, provide the fellows with strong theoretical principles and experiential guidance to put these into practice.

ABOUT STORIES OF CHANGE

This publication showcases leadership stories from various communities within West Africa. The stories highlight the growth and influence of young West Africans leaders who continue to shape the development of their various organisations and communities. The publication reveals their abilities to lead themselves, lead others, transform organisations and influence society.

The publication is a product of CSLI organised by the West Africa Civil Society Institute with support from Ford Foundation West Africa.

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Acquiring the Attributes of an Effective Leader

Benetta Davies, Programmes Officer at NAYMOTE was among the twenty activists who were selected to be part of the first cohort who took part in the Civil Society Leadership Institute “This programme has planted a seed within me that will continue to flourish” remarked Benetta.

Benetta contributed to and influenced change in two key aspects of NAYMOTE’s work; (i) enhancing the organisation’s reporting system and (ii) policy implementation.

At CSLI, Benetta learned that a leader does things right and a clearly defined leadership structure is important for the growth of an organisation. In the past, all reports were sent directly to the Executive Director (ED) without first channeling them to department heads. As a result, the productivity of staff members was reducing and caused repeated exhaustion for the ED as his responsibilities became overwhelming.

After CSLI, Benetta realised that such a system weakens the leadership in the departments, reduces productivity and impedes growth in the organisation. During a meeting, Benetta proposed the use of performance monitoring scheme as a means of evaluating staff
As per the human resource (HR) policy, department heads evaluate their staff members. As a result, every staff began to report to their department heads and became more productive.

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Currently, decision-making at NAYMOTE is decentralized. The ED now has the time and energy to focus on securing partners and donors for NAYMOTE and creating strategies for sustainability and influence. Staff productivity has increased and the organisation is functional even when the ED is absent for a period.

On policy implementation, as part of her action plan, Benetta worked along with the HR Manager and a consultant to revise the HR Policy. But prior to the revision, the administrative and finance officer also played the role of an HR manager. After the revision, NAYMOTE saw the need to have a staff focused only on implementing the HR policy.

“An HR manager was recruited from amongst my organisation’s pool of volunteers. Being a colleague from the Bus project, I shared with her lessons from Human Resource Development session I took at CSLI and how with a clear plan, the programmes department can raise funds to support staff capacity building that matches the institution’s need” stated Benetta.

Since then, the HR manager has not just been promoting a positive work culture, ensuring safe travels for staff to rural Liberia, acquiring insurance and providing other support, but has also been ensuring that staff are trained and capacitated.

“With a clear plan, the programmes department can raise funds to support staff capacity building that matches the institution’s need”
Since May 2015, 15 NAYMOTE staff, both national and regional staff members, has been trained in different courses both internationally and locally. As a result of such capacity building, NAYMOTE, though run by young people, is regarded by its peers and even donors as one of the most vibrant organisations with committed and competent staff.

Since CSLI, Benetta has been making use of learning opportunities that enabled her understand and improve her appreciation of leadership and good governance. “The lessons on leadership, personal productivity, strategic thinking, performance thinking and people management were helpful in shaping my ability to influence change within NAYMOTE,” reiterated Benetta.
Leading a New Way

“There were no blue prints to direct or inform the mission of the organisation in the form of a strategy.” These were the words of David Sidikie Yambasu, a 2015 Fellow of WACSI’s Civil Society Leadership Institute (CSLI), as he reflected on what his organisation was like just a few years ago.

“institutional learning was met with stiff resistance from all levels of management; I think it stemmed from insecurities in the team and conflicts in priority,” he continued. As it is in many organisations, where there is a lack of clear, strong leadership, there is disarray. As a Manager at Caritas Bo, David was not immune to the problems of the organisation. “I was always inclined to reflect as an organisation rather than as a member of a team. As a Manager my focus was on deliverables instead of performance,” he confessed.

But David did have one thing going for him, he was eager to learn and when he heard about WACSI’s CSLI, he pounced on the opportunity and applied. He got into the programme and travelled to Accra for the two-week, first phase of training. He came hungry to improve his performance as an individual, he left hungry to transform his organisation.

“The two weeks structured training stimulated my latent leadership skills especially the special skills of
managing my boss and that of being able to bring my team along with me so that together we could perform as a team,” David said. He was no longer focused on him, but on his organisation. Over the next two years, David would help initiatives in his organisation that would change the way they worked and their very culture.

“He came hungry to improve his performance as an individual, he left hungry to transform his organisation.”

“I have been able with my new creative leadership skills shift my organisation into becoming a learning organisation while strategically maintaining the organisational memory,” he said proudly.

Caritas Bo went from a task-based organisation, guided by log frames to a results focused organisation guided by a theory of change.

“Upon my return from the CSLI, I pushed for the development of an organisational strategy and for staff members to receive regular internal and external trainings to improve themselves,” David declared, “We now integrate learning into strategy and policy.”

“One of the most important things I took away from the CSLI on a personal level was keeping a daily journal. It serves as a dashboard for my personal learning and team planning. It helps me stay on top of my action plan I developed as part of the programme.” Further, David also employed principles he learned during the CSLI to institute team self-review sessions which have been a catalyst for learning and morale boosting for the entire team.

Through these and many other advents, David has been able to transform and expand Caritas Bo. “We are now in all four southern districts in Sierra Leone. We have sub offices in Bo, Bonthe, Moyamba and Pujehun Districts, providing humanitarian services to approximately 35,000 men, women and children in the Catholic Diocese of Bo. We have 42 social workers and research assistants who live and work in the various communities facilitating access to education, justice, portable and safe drinking water, healthcare services. We also provide hot meals for 5,000 children as well as protection for the vulnerable rural poor.”

Describing the work David has been doing since his renewed verve, the Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Bo, Most Rev Charles
“His leadership ability, has made a tremendous contribution towards the growth of the Catholic Diocese of Bo.”

A.M. Campbell simply put it, “his leadership ability, has made a tremendous contribution towards the growth of the Catholic Diocese of Bo.” Through their remarkable performance over the past few years, Caritas Bo has been able to attract new partnerships and rekindle old one, working with USAID, UNICEF, TUFTS University, Kindermissionswerk, BMZ, Action Medeor. This has also helped them boost their resource base.

“For me the CSLI was a period of stimulation and reflection. Interacting with the experienced faculty was a joy. It is as if it were in a factory where “new leadership” skills were produced, and latent techniques sharpened. The coaching, mentorship and follow up techniques employed by CSLI continues to keep me charged with the renewed zeal of wanting to stay on top of my planned actions.”
Vandalark R. Patricks has stood firm against acts of intimidation against free speech and corruption in Liberia for close to a decade. Vandalark is the founder and Executive Director of Campaigners for Change International (CFCI), formerly SURE-Liberia. As a member of Concerned Liberians against Corruption and Impunity (CLACI), a coalition of Liberian human rights defenders aimed at addressing issues of corruption and ensuring accountability for human rights violations, he has fiercely spoken against injustices and increased citizens’ awareness particularly in natural resource governance.

Vandalark, an alumnus of WACSI’s Civil Society Leadership Institute (CSLI), was groomed to strengthen his leadership capacity. “Before I participated in CSLI, I felt rough around the edges but this experience has made me more focused and aware of my own leadership abilities” stated Vandalark. The CSLI is designed to facilitate transformational leadership through an approach that focuses on individual, organisational development and community impact.

In 2015, Vandalark’s work became critical as a disquieting and growing trend of government restrictions against civic mobilisation and engagement around extractive industry issues became prominent in Liberia. Even though Liberia became the 14th African country to join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in
2007 and have exercised reasonable compliance, corruption remains endemic within the sector and permeates most sectors of the society. Low public-sector salaries, lack of training and capacity, inefficient regulations create both incentives and opportunities for corruption across the public sector. Vandalark championed the movement to increase citizens’ awareness and oversight in natural resource governance in Liberia.

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However, things took a turn for the worst in the first week of February 2016. The Liberian Government charged Vandalark with Sedition and Criminal Libel Against the Liberian President, Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf for highlighting various human rights abuses and rampant corruption within the extractive sector. Specifically, Vandalark had criticised the Government over the handling of the death of Harry Greaves, Jr., the former Managing Director of the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company, whose body was found at a beach in January 2016.

A week later, a team from WACSI, as a part of the coaching phase of the CSLI programme, visited Vandalark. During our interaction, the team expressed their concern about the news regarding his potential arrest and detention. In his usual defiant manner, Vandalark remarked, “a key takeaway from the CSLI was the importance of remaining resilient in times of uncertainty as one pursues the public good.”

At that moment, it became obvious to us that Vandalark was determined to face the storm.

A week after this interaction, Vandalark Patricks was arrested on 23 February 2016 after participating in a meeting where he urged members of civil society to take part in a peaceful protest on 11 March 2016. He was detained until 1 March 2016, during which he suffered medical complications.

The human rights defender was denied permission to seek essential
medical treatment abroad, until 28 March 2016 when he was allowed to travel to Ghana for treatment.

Vandalark’s campaign and subsequent arrest attracted international attention. His plight was referenced in a letter dated 15 April 2016 from the UN panel of Experts on Liberia, addressed to the President of the United Nations Security Council. The report expressed concern about tensions that were building in spite of assurances from the Government of Liberia in maintaining peace and stability in the wake of the drawdown of United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

Unexpectedly, Vandalark participated in the 2016 International Society for Third Sector Research Africa Network (ISTRAN) Conference, which took place from 19-20 April in Accra. WACSI had the opportunity to interview Vandalark where he reiterated the significant contribution CSLI made to his leadership skills.

With a smile on his face, he said, “I am passionate about the pursuit of justice, I was born a fighter but the leadership training I received at WACSI made me understand that in order to make a difference you must lead from the front, pursue the public good and when you make strides always make sure your feet are still grounded. I remain resolute, focused and a firm believer in a prosperous and free Liberia.”

It is our pleasure to celebrate an inspirational change maker, Vandalark Patricks, a 2015 CSLI fellow. As an institute, we are always inspired and encouraged by the exploits of our CSLI fellows. We believe we are on the right side of history and remain committed to working with like-minded partners to groom the next generation of Africa’s civic leaders.

“**In order to make a difference you must lead from the front, pursue the public good and when you make strides always make sure your feet are still grounded.**”
Henry O. J. Tucker never quite got on the same wavelength with his boss. They had different approaches to work and leadership and could never seem to see eye to eye. “I always had challenges managing my boss. Some situations prompted my boss to assume my roles and responsibilities directly due to overlapping functions as outlined in the various job descriptions,” lamented Henry.

This game of cat and mouse started to wear him down. He bided his time while looking for a means of escaping his predicament. During this period Henry also applied for West Africa Civil Society Institute’s (WACSI) Civil Society Leadership Institute and was successful. Henry didn’t know quite what to expect but was open to learn and take advantage of the opportunity presented to him. Henry had been occupying the role of Advocacy and Communications Officer at the time of the programme and was determined to incorporate the leadership skills he learned to maximise his work in the field. Upon completing the training phase of the programme Henry returned to his organisation, Defense for Children International, Sierra Leone.

What Henry picked up proved to be very valuable. Alliance building and networking, becoming goal oriented; these weren’t the skills Henry
initially sought but were the ones he needed. “Prior to my participation in the CSLI Programme in 2015, I had some challenges about alliance building, especially with my boss. After the course however, I have been able to demonstrate resilience by using the people management skills I learned, to effectively manage personality conflicts between my boss and I.”

Not only was Henry able to reengineer his relationship with his boss, he got promoted.

“After realising my leadership abilities and potential appointed me as the Project Officer to manage a five years girl’s empowerment programme funded by the Dutch Government. The responsibility required me to lead a team of 4 full time employees, 3 volunteers and 7 interns from various tertiary institutions within and outside Sierra Leone,” he said proudly. His horizons had been expanded and Henry saw opportunities to effect change all around him. “One key change I realised after CSLI was that I became task, action and result oriented,” he said, referring to his venture into social entrepreneurship.

“Considering my extensive role in advocating for social, legal and economic justice, I realised I was limited, especially in alleviating the suffering of children, youth and women.” He launched into social entrepreneurship, a move that saw him gain recognition in the civic space and also rise to become the National Director of the Indo-OIC-Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IICCI).

“I am currently in transition from being a civil society practitioner to a social entrepreneur.” An area in which he believes he can make a significant dent on the lives of so many that are economically destitute.

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“Before the CSLI, strategic and effective planning was a skills gap on my part but immediately after the course I started fully utilising skills acquired and began to slowly become a strategic thinker and this has helped me greatly in all my leadership endeavours,” confessed Henry. The two things that stood out to him about the project? Follow up mentoring and coaching and peer learning among CSLI Fellows. For him, this was the gas that kept the flame burning after the initial training they received in Accra in 2015.
Transforming an Organisation

No formalised operating structure, loopholes in management and accountability, lack of prioritisation on donor and partner relationships and weak board involvement. These are not the recipes of a successful organisation yet that is how Joseph Senyo Kwashie described his organisation before 2014. Joseph is a 2015 alumnus of the Civil Society Leadership Institute (CSLI) and is now the National Director of Community and Family Aid Foundation (CAFAF), a fledgling organisation promoting the empowerment of women, communities, young people to manage issues concerning their development.

In 2015, Joseph applied to be a part of the CSLI fellowship and successfully enrolled in the same year. Coming on board, he hoped to learn the skill he needed to improve his work in his role, little did he know he was going to be the catalyst for transforming his organisation.

“We didn’t have strong relationships, not with those we served or those we worked with. They weren’t involved in our planning process. Our
organisation had no structure and things were done haphazardly,” he remarked, “we just weren’t working properly.” Through the exhaustive training phase of his fellowship however, Joseph acquired the skilled to make him the leader to transform him civil society organisation (CSO) into a real changemaker.

“Change management, organisational restructuring, knowledge management, team work and a theory of change in the 21st century were the tools that helped me turn CFAF around,” declares Joseph.

“What truly made CSLI unique and effective was the pairing of fellows with accomplished and dedicated mentors and the coaching and support they and WACSI provided during the second phase of our training.” Joseph was mentored by George Osei-Bimpeh, Country Director of SEND Ghana, who helped him make practical use of all he had learned.

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“This and the network of other great fellows from all over the region is what makes the CSLI so useful. It is practical.”

Today, CAFAF is stronger than ever and growing in mandate and size. Under his leadership, the organisation underwent sweeping changes, instituting policies, bye-laws, working documents for departments and regulations that properly govern the organisation.

He got the board more involved and invested in the organisation and committed to building up his staff, just as he had been through the CSLI. Most importantly, the communities they served are now partners in their own development. “all our activities and projects offered on the ground are founded on effective community and stakeholder input and validation before their implementation,” Joseph proudly states.

“I can confidently say there was transformation, both personally and professionally, because of my time in the CSLI. The overall impact of the program on my organisation’s daily operations and interventions is phenomenal. This journey has truly been transformative.”
A Radical Change

Weak operational structures and systems, poor capacity enhancement programmes and uncertainty in the organisation’s results and sustainability was the practice in Balm in Gilead Foundation for Sustainable Development (BIGIF), an organisation that works to facilitate social change and development through the pursuit of its objectives, resource mobilisation, capacity building and advocacy for the rights of the vulnerable in the society in Ado Ekiti in Nigeria.

BIGIF is a youth-led NGO that focuses on enhancing healthy living and promotion of rights of Women, Girls, Youths and Children. BIGIF is registered with the Ministry of Women Affairs, Cooperate Affairs Commission (CAC) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission-(EFCC-SCUML). Its major thematic areas include health promotion, youth and women empowerment, gender equality, human rights promotion include rights education, civic education, Advocacy, comprehensive research and capacity building.

Nelson Akerele, the Programme Manager was faced with these organisational challenges which demanded that he partakes in a leadership programme that will not only position him to surmount them, but also enhance his leadership skills.
Nelson applied for the Civil Society Leadership Initiative programme in 2015, with the aim of improving his way of tackling organisational issues, his ability to influence change in his society, his people management and communication skills.

“Before the training, I usually did my work without my team, not thinking outside the box, or planning before the task. I was limited by my immediate environment and often resulted to a monotonous approach which was obviously not producing results.” Nelson shared

After the programme, Nelson contributed significantly to BIGIF’s turnaround in its organisational development. In June 2016, Nelson led the development of a grant proposal on behalf of BIGIF for the first time in its 3 years of existence for a four-year project. In November 2016, BIGIF was awarded a $300,000 grant for the “Protect Women’s Rights and Promote Gender Equality through strengthened Advocacy and Lobby Capacity of Local NGOs and Relevant Stakeholders in Ekiti State, Nigeria” project by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

“This was possible through my participation in the programme which moulded me to become an effective people manager, an excellent team player, a creative thinker and a better communicator in both my writing and speech” declares Nelson.

Today, BIGIF continues to enhance its institutional capacity through staff capacity building, development of structure and systems for sustainability and a stronger coherence between strategy and programme delivery. Nelson has become an integral part of BIGIF’s current success and its future promise.

“Nelson led the development of a grant proposal on behalf of BIGIF for the first time in its 3 years of existence for a four-year project.”
Redefining Leadership

Leaders should influence others in such a way that it builds people up, encourages and edifies them so they can duplicate this attitude in others—Bob Goshen

“This is the impact the Civil Society Leadership Institute made in enhancing my leadership ability and my capacity to work within my circle of influence” James Mulbah exclaimed

Prior to the training, James struggled with how to assign tasks to others in his team. James was challenged with the problem of assigning these tasks on the basis of their capacities and willingness to work in order to achieve targets and goals.

“Before the training, my team and I at Golden Veroleum Liberia Inc. (GVL) struggled with performing our tasks; we lacked a consistent synergy within our diverse team to facilitate our work and generally had a poor attitude to work. I was constantly frustrated as I expected them to have the same work drive and mindset as I did.” James reiterated.

GVL is a strategic social enterprise; whose founders hold the deep belief that Oil Palm development can and should be carried out
responsibly and sensitively to enable environmental conservation and prosperity for communities, while working collaboratively with key stakeholders.

In response to his frustration, James felt the urgent need to participate in a leadership programme that will boost his capacity, sharpen his leadership skills and enable him to refine his way of tackling issues with his team. This led James to apply for the CSLI programme of which he was successfully selected.

“After the training I experienced a complete turnaround in the way that I work. I saw the real effect of CSLI on my life and work particularly in the area of leadership and my personal productivity skills. Now, the performance rate of my team has drastically improved, and we now have an undivided team. This can be attributed to the personal productivity skills that were imbibed in me during the programme. This gave me a holistic view on how to develop my personal and organisational effectiveness.” James confessed.

Through this, James has given back to his organisation by building his team to effectively work towards attaining the organisation’s mission, objectives and sustainability. Two years after the programme, GVL is fully equipped to work with twenty local communities in Sinoe and Grand Kru in Liberia to provide roads, schools and water pumps construction, scholarships and other infrastructure that facilitates change in these communities.

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Discovering the Leader Within

In 2015, Theodora Anti the then Programmes Officer at the Foundation for Security and Development in Africa (FOSDA), an organisation that works to promote peace and human security by working to realise the lasting potential of communities and individuals through the systematic and effective sharing of information, knowledge and skills applied to be a part of the Civil Society Leadership Institute.

This decision was necessitated due to the need for her to boost her confidence to enable her to deliver her work more effectively, strengthen her self-belief and be more assertive.

Two years after the CSLI, the evidence of the programme is still bearing fruits in the life of Theodora who is now a Programmes Manager at FOSDA.

“Before the CSLI, even though I had a lot of working experience, I wasn’t bold in executing my leadership roles. I wasn’t fully aware of the demands and responsibilities of a leader. I also had a challenge with my colleagues, who were not forthcoming and prompt with their tasks. The programme taught me to understand my leadership role better, understand the motivations of my colleagues and how to work with them as a team to produce more results” Theodora confessed

The programme that included modules that focus on performance thinking, personal productivity
skills, and people management shaped her leadership thinking and practice and made a colossal contribution to Theodora’s career trajectory.

“The CSLI has enhanced my performance thinking which placed emphasis on confidence through the session we had. This has moulded and taught me the difference between effectiveness and efficiency. I have now learnt to be effective and give my subordinates the platform to be efficient. This was possible through the people management session during the programme. Now I am working better with my colleagues, as we have adopted a better team spirit. This can particularly be attributed to the feedback session I learnt during the programme which I now have with colleagues from time to time, which has made a significant impact on our productivity as a team and organisation” she confessed

Currently, FOSDA’s presence is more felt in policy spaces concerning the youth in Ghana and beyond, an achievement that can particularly be attributed to the networking and collaboration session that was accentuated during the CSLI. Theodora systematically transferred the knowledge from this session to her colleagues and organisation to add impetus to their advocacy and partnership building efforts.

“FOSDA contributed to the drafting of the National Youth Authority Act and we are currently working on its implementation. We’ve built a coalition of youth development organisations to ensure that youth development initiatives and resources in Ghana are organised without corruption and are made accessible to the youth especially those in the rural area. This success can be attributed to the networking and alliance building session we had during the CSLI” Theodora emphasised.