



# Executive Transitions and Succession Planning

Using Case Studies to Explore Models of  
Transition and Succession Planning for  
NGOs in Uganda

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This work would not have been possible without Akijul (Enabling Change) Ltd. We are grateful to you for taking the lead in this investigation and for your unwavering support in compiling the findings.

Akijul (Enabling Change), P.O.Box 22622,  
Kampala.

Email: [ashokille@akijul.org](mailto:ashokille@akijul.org)

Website: [www.akijul.org](http://www.akijul.org)

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# The Acronyms

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<b>CBO</b>	Community Based Organisation
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>DED</b>	Deputy Executive Director
<b>ED</b>	Executive Director
<b>FBO</b>	Faith Based Organizations
<b>FIDA</b>	Association of Women Lawyers
<b>HR</b>	Human Resource
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>OD</b>	Organisation Development
<b>SMP</b>	Succession Management Plan

# Executive Summary

Executive leadership transitions are key turning points in almost all organizations, often with mixed results. Since transitions are inevitable, it is important to learn how organizations can best proactively plan for them, and where necessary, absorb the shocks arising from unexpected leadership transitions. This study analyses various case studies on executive leadership transition and succession planning in selected NGOs in Uganda. It also provides an opportunity for reflection and learning for NGOs that have undergone leadership transition and succession processes in Uganda and those that have not. In addition, it also outlines some models and lessons —drawn from the respondents' experiences for executive leadership transition and succession planning for NGOs.

The study was commissioned by CivSource Africa, an independent advisory firm that is committed to nurturing a more sustainable, effective, and connected civil society that advances the dignity and voices of all people. CivSource Africa does this through promoting reflective, responsive, and accountable philanthropic practice on the one hand and an accountable civil society on the other. As part of promoting an accountable civil society, CivSource Africa promotes learning, amongst CSOs, on how they can be more effective and sustainable.

The **overall objective of the study** was to identify, document, analyse, and glean lessons from the current approaches in organisational executive leadership transition and succession management in Uganda. From this, models on executive leadership transitions and succession management would be developed for possible piloting as part of CivSource Africa's leadership-support programme.

Overall, the study found that many executive directors have had to navigate the transition and succession management planning terrain on their own, in some cases drawing on the advice from and support of a few trusted friends and colleagues. Furthermore, there is no mechanism and/or institution to support executive directors and CEOs of NGOs in Uganda to facilitate learning to improve leadership transition planning and management. The Executive transition management and succession planning have the potential to strengthen and transform the NGO sector in Uganda by ensuring that organizations have functional systems and structures for building and creating space for renewed leadership, perspectives, and ideas to guide the sector.

**On Executive Transitions:** Executive transition is a process and not an event. It, therefore, requires sufficient planning and resourcing. Analysis of the findings of this study indicates that key moments of executive leadership transitions in NGOs, in Uganda, can be broadly categorized under the following: (i) transition at the end of the ED's contract/tenure (ii) transition from pioneer/founder ED (iii) enforced executive leadership transition (iv) executive leadership transition as part of an organisational reset/restructure and (v) emergency executive leadership transition. However, even where it is an emergency transition, having a policy that provides guidelines on how to manage such transitions will contribute to more effective transitions. However, where systems and structures exist for an executive leadership transition but are not followed in practice, it can have a detrimental effect on the transition. Furthermore, policies and plans on how to manage executive transitions are useful if they are supported by plans and resources. The study found that the board/governing body plays a critical role in effective transitions; boards with experienced members seem better able to navigate transitions even in the absence of clear organisation policies to guide the same.

Planning for executive transition should include preparing the team (internal), working with external stakeholders and/or partners, and the process of recruitment and handover.

Effective transition does not end immediately upon the handover but requires additional support for the incoming ED, either from the outgoing ED, Board, or a coach. It was also found that transitioning from a founder/pioneer EDs requires more investment to build confidence/trust in the incoming leadership. It also appears that organisations that have invested in building strong systems and structures for efficiency and accountability tend to have more effective executive transitions. The

study found the key factors that determine the effectiveness of executive transition in NGOs in Uganda are the following:

- Existence and Implementation of an executive leadership Transition Policy and/or Plan
- Role of the Board
- Adequate structures, systems, and a culture of transition
- Purpose for which the organisation was founded
- Level of preparedness by the outgoing Executive Leader
- Level of dependence of the organisation on the personality of the Executive Director
- Managing the transition beyond the immediate handover to an incoming ED
- Staff retention
- Availability of funding/resources to support transition planning and management

**On Succession Planning:** Succession planning is about having a plan in place to help an organisation effectively manage staff transitions, which in many cases are inevitable.<sup>1</sup> A well-planned succession plan provides an organisation with the opportunity to best position itself for the future. For succession planning to be successful, it must include: the board being aware/familiar with best practices in leadership succession; a management team with time to support the process; a strategic plan and the requisite resources for the implementation of the plan, including human resource policies and plans.<sup>2</sup> The study found that 60% of the organisations interviewed did not have policies and/or deliberate processes to plan for succession. In addition, succession planning tended to be equated with capacity building.

Succession planning is also hampered by a lack of resources. In most of the organisations assessed, progress in staff capacity development and/or preparation for succession depended on the interest and/or initiative of the Executive Director. The absence of a policy and/or plan means that any efforts at succession planning are at the discretion of the ED, and further means that there is no framework for a structured process that can be tracked and nor measured.

It was also found that the Policy should be accompanied by a detailed plan that can guide and/or ease implementation. Challenges to effective succession planning and management include limited resources, low staff retention, and in organisations that represent marginalised communities, a limited pool of skilled and experienced talent to draw from.

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1      Erin Gloeckner. Succession Planning [NOT] for CEO Available at: <https://nonprofitrisk.org/resources/e-news/succession-planning-not-ceo/>

2      Erin Gloeckner. Succession Planning [NOT] for CEO. Available at: <https://nonprofitrisk.org/resources/e-news/succession-planning-not-ceo/>



## Core elements for effective executive transition

The study derived eight (8) core elements essential to effective executive transition in any type of organisation and/or circumstances of executive transition. These eight core elements are described below:

Core Tenet	Description
<b>Succession Policy and Plan</b>	<p>The organisation should provide for succession in its policies e.g., human resources policy and explain the purpose of succession planning i.e., capacity building and/or support to enable staff take on new responsibilities/leadership within the organisation. Link succession planning to existing capacity building initiatives.</p> <p>The board should then develop a succession plan that provides a step-by step plan for the organisation to ensure that there is resident capacity, amongst the team, to handle all the core functions at any time. The succession plan should identify the core functions of the organisation, provide for at least two staff members to receive training and/or exposure on how to manage the core functions, and have a strategy to support leadership development, update knowledge and the capacity to analyse key programmatic issues and team work on a regular basis.</p> <p>The board and executive should also discuss the process of succession planning with staff and explain the strategies and/or initiatives. Possible strategies and/or initiatives that can be included in the implementation plans are;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity building aligned with staff appraisals and/or performance management,</li> <li>• Develop individual staff development plans with key targets,</li> <li>• Exposure of staff to various aspects of leadership/management,</li> <li>• Exposure of staff to various organisation processes e.g., strategy development, possible participation in board meetings, proposal writing,</li> <li>• Exposure and engagement of staff in external engagements including with funding and other partners,</li> <li>• Delegation of additional responsibilities to staff,</li> <li>• Specific leadership development training and/or support that can include coaching.</li> </ul> <p>There should be regular monitoring, reflection, and review of the staff development plans and setting new targets for growth.</p>

Core Tenet	Description
<b>Executive transition management policy and plan</b>	<p>The policy should provide the overall guiding framework for executive transition and include why transition management is important to the organisation, the values that will guide the process, responsibilities, and specific actions. Specifically, the policy should among others, provide for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of executive transition and why it is important</li> <li>• Documentation of key organisation processes, decisions, and systems, and how these aid effective transition.</li> <li>• Term limits for EDs (if applicable).</li> <li>• How the oversight of the transition process will be handled and by whom?</li> <li>• Specific implementation steps and/or structure for a detailed transition plan including allocation of specific roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>• ED's exit plan, which can include the development of a personal development plan. The Policy may provide for a coach to support the ED develop this.</li> <li>• A specific plan for staff retention, in order to ensure that whenever executive transition happens, a good team is available to continue managing the organisation and will be the team that the new ED works with.</li> <li>• Resourcing for the policy/plan implementation, including a list of resources required, a budget, and options to obtain these resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Duration of the Process</b>	Indicate the duration of the transition. This can be determined by the history of transition in the organisation, the nature of the organisation, and resources available.
<b>Leadership/Oversight</b>	This is usually carried out by the board. The oversight might be delegated to a board sub-committee, the board chair or overseen by the whole board.
<b>Implementation</b>	Detailed implementation plan and allocation of responsibilities including whether there are aspects that should be externally contracted
<b>Preparing the organisation for transition</b>	What specific interventions will be carried out to prepare staff for the transition? This may include meetings between the board and staff, staff retreats, leadership training to prepare for new roles, etc.
<b>ED recruitment strategy</b>	The process of recruitment of the new ED. It could be in-house recruitment from existing staff, or external recruitment.
<b>Role of former ED</b>	Clarify the role and/or support function of the former ED in the organisation during the transition and afterwards. This includes preparing a comprehensive handover report that provides information on programmes, finances, and key stakeholder engagement. It could also include reflections on key issues that the new ED should pay specific attention to.

This study makes the **following recommendations** for CivSource Africa:

Based on the findings of this study, CivSource could consider the following interventions to address some of the challenges and gaps identified in this study:

- (i) Offer **institutional strengthening support** for transition and succession planning as a matter of course to grantees/partners so that strategic approaches to transition and succession are important components in institutional strengthening.
- (ii) Provide **targeted support services** to grantees/partners that have long-term/long-serving EDs/CEOs and those that request support for executive succession and transition.
- (iii) Establish a **transition grant** for executive search services by competent firms for strategic planning, coaching, and transition and succession consultancy services. The transition grant could also cover the acquisition of information and other in-kind resources to grantees/partners for their boards and EDs/ CEOs, for example, publications, readers' guides, and communication strategies on transition and succession planning.
- (iv) Create a **succession and transition planning assistance programme for NGOs** to meet the real and expressed needs of organizations using the findings from this study. Programme areas could include:
  - Support local leadership capacity building for the provision of succession and transition services to address the individual leadership development needs of NGOs using the findings from this study.
  - Support coaching for executives on transition and succession.
  - Support for skills and knowledge generation and sharing on executive transition and succession for South-to-South learning. For example, roundtables, annual retreats, and knowledge hubs for information on organizations that have had successful transitions, etc.
  - Support board capacity strengthening including transition and succession planning.
- (v) **Explore the possibility of designing a Board training and support programme:** As highlighted in this study, NGO Boards play a critical role in ensuring effective transitions, as well as providing strategic guidance and oversight. CivSource Africa should carry out a more in-depth assessment of the nature of boards of NGOs, their performance, existing skills/capacities, and identify ways to strengthen them.

# 1.0 Introduction



## 1.1 Background

Strengthening the sustainability of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Uganda is largely dependent on the ability of an organization to renew itself through new leadership, ideas and energies, as well as through building a strong institution that can stand the test of time. Effective leadership transition and succession planning are central to this. The Executive leadership transition requires a pre-determined and structured way of preparing for and managing the transition from one executive director (ED) to another. On the other hand, succession planning is a strategic and deliberate process of developing the capacity of the staff within the organization to prepare them to take on more senior positions/roles when required.

CivSource Africa is an independent advisory firm committed to nurturing a more sustainable, effective, and connected civil society that advances the dignity and voices of all people. CivSource Africa does this through promoting reflective, responsive, and accountable philanthropic practice on the one hand and an accountable civil society on the other. As part of promoting accountable civil society, CivSource Africa promotes learning amongst CSOs on how they can be more effective and sustainable.

Executive leadership transitions are key turning points in almost all organizations, often with mixed results. Since transitions are inevitable, it is important to learn how best organizations can proactively plan for them and where necessary absorb the shocks arising from unexpected leadership transitions. This study analyses various case studies on executive leadership transition and succession planning in selected NGOs in Uganda, and provides an opportunity for reflection and learning for NGOs that have undergone leadership transition and succession processes in Uganda as well as those that have not. It also outlines some models and lessons, drawn from the respondents' experiences for executive leadership transition and succession planning for NGOs.

## 1.2 Study objectives

The overall objective of the study was to identify, document, analyse, and glean lessons from current approaches in organisational executive leadership transition and succession management in Uganda. From these findings, models on executive leadership transitions and succession management would be developed for possible piloting as part of CivSource Africa's leadership-support programme.

The specific objectives were:

- (i) To define key forms and cases of organisational executive leadership transition and to document case studies on the key types and instances of leadership transition across NGOs.
- (ii) Name and extract current promising approaches (models) being used by organizations to support effective transitions.
- (iii) Explore the merits and implications of planned and organized transitions over abrupt and unexpected transitions.
- (iv) Identify safeguards that organizations can install to enable them deal with unexpected transitions.
- (v) Propose the most promising transition models and provide clear steps on implementing them.

## 1.3 Methodology

Qualitative research methods were used for collecting data. Primary data was collected through one-on-one interviews —on-line and in-person— with purposively-selected stakeholders. Interviews were also conducted with key informants in the NGO sector including long-standing leaders. (*Annex 1: Organisations that participated in the study*).

Facilitative techniques were used to enable open and meaningful interviews and discussions. A discussion guide in the form of an open-ended questionnaire was administered in the interviews as well as a checklist with structured questions.

Secondary data was collected from various reports and documents on executive leadership transition, succession planning, and NGO's operations in Uganda. In addition, a textual analysis of organisation policy documents addressing leadership transition and succession planning was carried out (*Annex 2: Organisation policy documents*). Other secondary data sources on executive leadership transition and succession planning in the NGO sector, on the continent and globally, were reviewed on-line. (*Annexe 3: References and Endnotes*).

The diverse range of sixteen (16) organisations that were purposively selected included some that had experienced an executive leadership and others that had not. The group included both longer-standing organisations (8-15 years) and newer ones). These organisations were identified in close consultation with CivSource Africa.

#### **1.4 Study challenges**

In line with the Government of Uganda Covid-19 prevention measures, most of the interviews were conducted virtually. The respondents were generally open to sharing their experiences though

interviews were sometimes disrupted by poor internet connections. Not all respondents who had been selected to participate in this study were available for interview. This was partly because of their busy schedules, while for others, due to the sensitivity of the issues involved. Some declined. In addition, whilst the study generally had positive responses, it is possible that the sensitivity of the issues discussed combined with the virtual nature of the interviews lowered the trust to be established between interviewers and interviewees.

Civil society in Uganda is comprised of various types of organisations that include professional associations, trade unions, NGOs, NGO networks, coalitions/alliances, community-based organisations (CBOs), faith-based organisations (FBOs), and savings and credit cooperative organizations. The NGO sector in Uganda has been growing and currently there are 13,000 NGOs legally registered with the National NGO Bureau. The Civil Society Organisation Sustainability Index for Sub-Saharan Africa established that CSOs' internal governance capacities ranged between fair and poor in 2019.

## 2.0 Understanding the Context of NGO Transitions in Uganda

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This study reveals different perspectives on leadership transition. On the one hand, some of the respondents argued that NGO leadership transition should be viewed as unique because of the character of NGOs and the need for strong leaders to continue to engage on key issues.

Oftentimes, power, influence, and effectiveness are driven by and centralised with the leaders. Their long tenures are aimed at extending this as much as possible. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents (90%) argued that setting up an NGO as a ‘public’ institution requires founders/leaders to manage the organisation according to the best governance practices including the periodic changes in leadership.

In some instances, organisations are often very closely associated with their leaders, which is reflective of the nature of public institutions in Uganda today —they tend to be personalised. In some interviews, the study was informed often NGOs are started by individuals who are passionate about key social issues and are pioneers who want to do important development work. However, because funding is mainly available to NGOs —not individuals some establish NGOs as channels to raise resources for their passions and work, not necessarily institutions they want to grow.

The study also notes that whilst Uganda’s civil society has accumulated a pool of relatively well-qualified human resources, with donor funding being highly competitive and the majority of organizations receiving only project funding, CSOs often lack the stable income needed to attract and retain highly skilled staff. The attrition rate of CSO staff was high in 2019. At least four reputable organizations, including two international CSOs, struggled to replace director-level staff members who had departed.

This study does not delve into the nature of NGOs in Uganda but recognises that this context has an impact on the likelihood and nature of leadership transitions. The study focuses on the transitions within organisations set up as NGOs, and where there is an expectation of their continuity and leadership transitions.

# 3.0 Executive Leadership Transition

### 3.1 Executive leadership transition: The theory

From a review of literature, the study noted that a transition is defined as consisting of movement from a current state to a future state as illustrated in Figure 1 below. When pre-planned, the future state is a desired state.

**Figure 1: Transition**



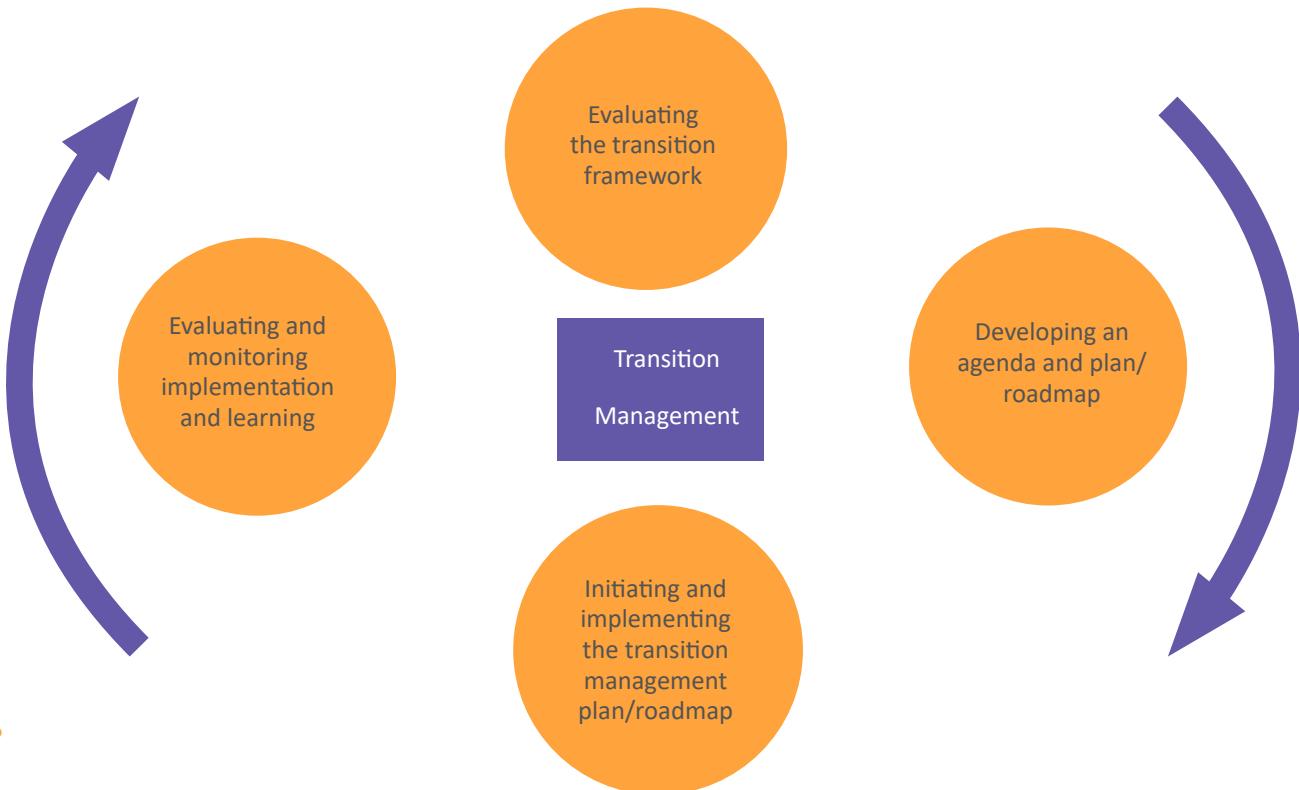
Any transition involves change, hence having a good understanding of managing change in organisations is imperative. The literature review revealed that in order to have smooth transitions, it is important for NGOs to be deliberate and have a transition plan that caters for such situations whenever they arise, whether expected or abrupt.

Essentially, there are four key components in transition management;

- (i) Establish the transition framework,
- (ii) Develop an agenda/roadmap,
- (iii) Initiate and implement the transition plan/roadmap, and
- (iv) Evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of the plan.

Figure 2 below illustrates these core components in a transition management cycle.

**Figure 2: Transition management cycle**



### 3.2 How does executive leadership transition in Uganda's NGO sector happen in practice?

Analysis of the findings of this study indicate that key moments of executive leadership transitions in NGOs in Uganda can broadly be categorized under the following:

- Transition at the end of the ED's contract/tenure
- Transition from the pioneer/founder ED
- Enforced executive leadership transition
- Executive leadership transition as part of an organisational reset/re-structure
- Emergency executive leadership transition

#### (i) Transition at the end of ED's contract/tenure

The study found that 8% of the organisations interviewed for this study had policies that provided for processes, systems, and structures to guide effective executive leadership transitions. These organisations have all been in existence between 10 to 15 years and have invested in building and strengthening their organisational structures and team capacity for longer-term sustainability.

One of these organisations is a membership organisation that has been in place for over thirty (30) years. During this time, the organisation experienced challenging transitions that have since informed the current policy and practice for executive leadership transition, which includes term limits and a structured process for replacement and hand-over at the end of the ED's tenure/contract.

*"Our organisation used to have challenges with managing transitions. It was particularly challenging because we are a membership*

*organisation and individuals have diverse interests. However, over the years, we have learned key lessons and now have a clear process for executive transition. When the ED resigns, we have process of recruitment that is headed by the Board. Then the former ED prepares a detailed transition report that is also submitted to the board. The former ED is expected to be available to support the orientation process of the new ED. I was fortunate because I had worked with the organisation for a while before being appointed ED. We have term limits here, so I know that I will soon have to prepare for my transition as well." NGO Executive*

The other organisation is the national affiliate of an international organisation that has been in Uganda for close to 30 years and has had several executive leadership transitions.

*"Our organisation is part of a global organisation and therefore we have the policies and systems in place for transition management. When I joined the organisation, I received a briefing from the board, was introduced to the staff, and also received a hand over report from the team that had been leading the organisation whilst the search for a country director was on-going. The former country director resigned his position to take on another job. The main challenge with the transition process for me was that the board took about a year to find a suitable replacement. So, when I joined the organisation, the former country director had already started another job. He was however able to make some time to support my orientation and was also available on call when I needed his advice." NGO Executive*

A third, in which a transition was triggered by the end of the ED's contract, invested in having strong systems and processes from its establishment partly because the founders had previously worked with other NGOs before setting up their organisation. This organisation had a policy on executive leadership transition that provides for a one-year transition process. This process includes appointing a deputy executive director, developing a new strategic plan to guide the new leadership, regular engagement with staff to provide reassurance and confidence about the planned transition, providing opportunities for training and exposure for the new executive leadership team in various issues including engagement with the board, as well as shadowing by the outgoing ED for a three-to-six-month period.

Conversely, the study also found that where systems and structures exist for the executive leadership transition but are not followed in practice, there is likely to be a detrimental effect on the transition. In this organisation, on the expiry of the outgoing ED's contract, the board recruited a new ED but did not invest in a thorough handover. The incoming ED was not given a proper orientation and they did not have a full team to work with. As a result, there were some gaps in programmatic implementation, as well as strategic leadership. Although the board chair filled this gap and got involved in some of the management of the organisation, in the end, the incoming ED was overwhelmed, did not have the time to build confidence in the team from the onset, and had a tense relationship with the board chair thereon. This example demonstrates that even in instances where the expiry of an ED's contract triggers new recruitment, a poorly managed transition is detrimental to the operations of the organisation.

Below is **one example** of steps taken to plan and manage effective executive transition at the end of the ED's contract/tenure in another organisation.

In this long-established membership-based organisation, the transition process was evolutionary. After going through a few challenging transitions, members of the board took the time to reflect on lessons learned and used these to develop a transition policy. The

following are the key steps applied for their executive transition process:

**Step 1: Institutionalised transition:** Transition planning evolving over a period of time and formalised in policy.

**Step 2: Board supervision oversight:** The board provides guidance during transition, including establishing rapport with management.

**Step 3: Handover process:** A comprehensive report from the outgoing executive director is stipulated as a requirement to expedite the 'settling in' of the incoming executive director.

**Step 4: Coaching and mentoring:** Coaching and mentoring by the outgoing executive director for the interim executive director.

**Step 5: Building confidence of partners, including funding partners, in the transition and new leadership:** Ensuring the transparency and accountability of the transition process by communicating with partners to build confidence and mitigate reputational risk.

**Step 6: Documentation:** Documenting of the process, by the board, with lessons learned and good practices that can inform organisation policy review.

## (ii) Transition from pioneer/founder ED

Organisations transitioning from a pioneer/founder ED face unique circumstances and apply varied approaches to oversee these processes, including head hunting by the outgoing founder ED. Typically, in these circumstances, the organisation is very sensitive to hiring the right person to steer the organisation into its next phase and who can instil confidence in the team and partners. Effective transitions were observed in organisations where the process of headhunting was done collectively with the board and a structured process was applied to orientate and onboard the new executive director.

However, where the successor is handpicked by the retiring ED or another individual, without enough effort to onboard the new ED, the transition can be problematic. As in the example below, where a hand-picked successor found it difficult to adapt to the organisation and lead. In the end they left abruptly hence requiring the organisation to manage an emergency executive transition. One of the respondents echoed this view as below,

*“...the founder of the organisation was leaving to pursue other interests and decided to select a person that she thought would best succeed her. Since she was the founder, the board did not have any objection. However, it seems like the person she selected to succeed her was not ready for the position and struggled to adjust to the leadership required. A few months after taking on the position, she went into exile and for a few months operated from there until she resigned. I was then asked to initially act as the ED, and was eventually appointed by the Board as the substantive ED.” NGO Executive*

Below are two examples of processes used during the transition from a pioneer and/or founding ED:

#### **Example 2: A three-year executive transition process from a pioneer/founding ED**

In this organisation the founder was also its first executive director, and held this position for 11 years, until 2017 when a decision to transition the executive leadership was made by the ED and board. The nearly three-year-long executive leadership transition process was proactive and spearheaded by the founder-cum-executive director and the board, with support, by way of funding, from external partners. The process took the following steps:

**Step 1: ED initiated transition with board involvement:** The ED-initiated and board-led process included an externally facilitated internal organisation analysis that identified three activities for catalysing the executive leadership transition. These included: capacity building for board members, coaching and mentoring support for the

outgoing executive director and the interim ED, and a facilitated transition strategic meeting for the board to define and set benchmarks for the succession/transition period.

*(Key questions addressed by the board included: What will a successful transition look like and what would the organisation look like after the transition? How long should the transitional period be? What roles would the founder play after the transitional period? What would be the roles of the mentee and ED i.e., mentoring roles and organisational leadership roles during the transition period? What roles could the board play during the transition? What are the organisation’s situational and operational issues including fundraising?*

**Step 2: Internal reflection sessions:** A series of internal reflection sessions for board and staff members to address the fears and anxieties around the ED’s exit and include coping mechanisms.

**Step 3: Peer learning:** Engagements with other NGOs to share information and knowledge on leadership transition.

**Step 4: Transition management planning:** A two-year transition management plan with milestones, actions, timelines, and roles was developed.

**Step 5: Dual sourcing:** Competitive sourcing for a replacement opened to internal and external individuals, following laid-down procedures. (An external candidate emerged as the best fit but was on board for a brief period resulting in the founder returning as an interim ED as a stop-gap measure. Another recruitment round was undertaken, and a new externally sourced ED was recruited).

**Step 6: Mentorship:** Bi-monthly mentoring and orientation sessions for the new ED with the founder cum-interim ED for two months.

**Step 7: Partner engagement:** Maintained communication with partners/stakeholders on the transition and continued fundraising for the organisation in collaboration with the incoming ED.

**Step 8: Handover process:** Handover notes to the new ED, the board, and staff members.

### Example 3: A deliberate and multi-faceted executive transition process from a pioneer ED

In this organisation, the transition process was pre-meditated following the executive director's decision to move on after more than a decade at the helm —they were also a co-founder. The approach was deliberate, multi-faceted, and outside of the established policy —human resource or other governance policy document. The following steps were taken:

**Step 1: Board/ED scenario-building:** The board and ED looked at the different ways in which the leadership transition could be handled.

**Step 2: Transition management planning:** Developing an executive transition plan with the board approval and with steps conceptualised by the ED to guide the transition implementation process.

*"It is quite probable that they will use the same process and probably the board will advise that this should be the policy on how to manage transition." NGO Executive*

**Step 3: Internal sourcing:** Executive leadership deliberately sourced for and developed an ED from within the organisation because of the 'unique' focus of the organisation that required specific specialised competencies.

*"It is nice to have someone from outside come with a new perspective and all that, but then, you sort of lose momentum and you might also lose a bit of the organizational culture." NGO Executive*

### (iii) Executive leadership transition in line with organisation reset/restructuring

The study also met with two organisations where new EDs were recruited with a specific mandate to 'reset' the organisation because the organisations had either been through challenging times under the previous ED, like poor financial management or had a mission drift. In these organisations, the former EDs had served their full terms and the board needed a new ED to get the organisation back on track. In these circumstances, the new EDs were recruited through independent processes and should have been given the support required to address the challenges the organisations faced. However, this was not always the case. In one instance, the ED sought to build confidence with funding partners, renew relationships with key stakeholders, and also boost staff morale with minimal support from the board.

*".... when I took on this position, I knew that the organisation had challenges. My clear mandate was therefore to 'right the ship.' However, it has been very difficult to get this done, especially with funding partners. Despite finding the funds to re-fund some money that was allegedly mismanaged, a review and re-structuring of our accountability systems, and all our attempts to demonstrate a new work culture, including increased strategic clarity and a focus on activities that are yielding change in communities, some of the funding partners continue to blacklist us... I am largely doing most of this work on my own, with limited staff and board support because the majority of my board are based upcountry...." Former NGO Executive*

The steps taken in the transition above are presented in Example 4 below of a **basic executive leadership transition process that was inadequate for organisation reset**

**Step 1: Provision for executive transition in organisation's constitution:** Transition was provided for in the organisation's constitution highlighting the importance of the executive transition and the process of recruitment and the handover of a report and organisation property by the outgoing ED to the incoming ED.

### **Step 2: Board supervision oversight:**

The board provided guidance during transition, including overseeing the recruitment. However, they did not provide much support after the incoming ED took over the organisation. There was also no attention paid to having a communication plan/messaging for key partners and stakeholders about the impending transition. The incoming ED therefore had to introduce themselves to partners and key stakeholders.

**Step 3: Handover process:** A report from the outgoing executive director was provided as a requirement to expedite the ‘settling in’ of the incoming executive director. However, the report did not capture all the key issues that the organisation was facing.

In the above example, the incoming ED was aware of the task ahead and although able to make some progress, could have benefitted much from additional support during the transition. For instance, a more comprehensive handover report from the outgoing ED could have been provided. Furthermore, the board could have had prior discussion with the development partner to address the accountability challenges and seek their commitment/support to review and re-structure systems and develop a re-branding and/or communications plan and a resource-mobilisation strategy. A coach for the ED for at least 3-6 months would have also been helpful.

#### **(iv) Enforced transitions**

Enforced transitions happen when either external or internal factors force a transition from one ED to another. In the scenario observed by the study, often the organisations had policies on transitions, but the outgoing executives tried to circumvent the procedures. In one example, pressure from funders and other development partners ensured that one such ED complied and handed over. In another situation, the ED tried to delay the transition, however, the board was firm and insisted on adhering to a prior commitment made by the ED to step aside for new leadership.

Hostile takeovers were also noted by the study. In one enforced transition for example, the ED was requested to meet very high finance targets and when he was unable to deliver within a few months, he was asked to resign. In his words,

*“I had been asked to raise 500,000USD in one year, which is very challenging. At the next board meeting I was told to do so in six months, when I failed, I was asked by the board not to request for a renewal of my contract...” NGO Executive*

#### **Example 5: Enforced transition due to external and internal pressure**

The following were the key steps in their executive transition process:

##### **Step 1: Provision for executive transition in organisation’s constitution:**

Transition was provided for in the organisation’s constitution, highlighting the importance of transition, the process of recruitment, and the handover of a report and organisation property by the outgoing ED to the incoming ED. The Constitution also provides for term limits.

##### **Step 2: Board supervision oversight:**

The board provided guidance during the transition, including overseeing the recruitment. However, a board meeting was convened with a section of the members absent (though with quorum) and a decision to set aside the term limits for the outgoing ED was made.

##### **Step 3: Engagement by members and key stakeholders:**

Some members of the organisation, including from the board, objected to the setting aside of term limits for the outgoing ED. In addition, the organisation’s partners, including funding partners urged the organisation to respect its constitution and enforce the term limits.

**Step 4: Recruitment process:** The pressure on the board of the organisation to abide by the constitution worked. The outgoing ED agreed to resign the position and a process of recruitment of a new ED was undertaken, under the supervision of the board. A new ED was recruited.

**Step 5: Handover process:** A handover report from the outgoing ED was compiled and handed over to the incoming ED. A meeting between the outgoing ED and incoming ED was held. The outgoing ED also remained available virtually to advise the incoming ED when required.

#### (v) Emergency transitions:

The study also revealed that some organisations had experienced emergency transitions. An emergency transition is when the ED relinquishes leadership without providing due notice to the board or any other part of the organisation. In one of the organisations, the ED decided to resign her position to contest for political office. According to one respondent,

*“...we were put in a very difficult situation because the Executive had been handling most of the organisation’s work. Fortunately, we were an experienced Board and so were able to quickly develop an emergency transition plan and implement it.” Board Chair, NGO*

#### Example 6: Emergency transition due to ED resignation with short notice

**Step 1: Provision for executive transition in organisation’s constitution:** Transition was provided for in the organisation’s constitution, highlighting the importance of transition, the process of recruitment, and the handover of a report and organisation property by the outgoing ED to the incoming ED.

**Step 2: ED’s resignation:** The ED submitted a resignation letter halfway through their term in order to contest for political office. The Board was given 2 weeks’ notice.

**Step 3: Emergency Board meeting:** The Board Chair called for an emergency meeting of the board to discuss the developments and agree on a way forward.

**Step 4: Appointment of Acting ED:** The Board identified an existing member of staff to take on the position of acting ED as they developed a more comprehensive process for the recruitment of a new ED.

**Step 5: Communication with staff, partners, and key stakeholders:** The Board communicated with staff, partners, and key stakeholders about the change in leadership at the organisation and reassured them of a smooth transition to a new ED.

### 3.3 Factors that determine the effectiveness of executive transition in Uganda

#### 3.3.1 Existence and Implementation of an executive leadership Transition Policy and/or Plan

This study found that only 20% of the organisations had a policy on executive leadership transition and/or mentioned the need to develop a transition plan in other organisation documents. Even among the 20%, the implementation of these policies varied across organisations.

In some, the transition followed the planned process, as articulated in their policies. For instance, in one organisation, there was a detailed and very deliberate transition plan that involved the board and staff:

*“It was planned over two years, and it was very deliberate because I made the decision to leave. It was very deliberate to make sure that the leadership of the organization would be sustained.” NGO Executive*

However, in others, even where the policy provided for executive transition, transition happened without a plan even when it was imminent. This was either because the Policy did not provide for a plan, or the organisation did not adhere to the need to develop a detailed transition plan. According to a former ED in one such an organisation,

*“The organisation policy provides for executive transition, however, when I was asked to leave the organisation, there was no plan; there was even no proper handover process, so even the person who took over was shy to approach me for any help. The only time they did was when a donor insisted that they wanted to hear from me.” Former NGO Executive*

In some NGOs, there were no clear handover processes because guidelines did not exist. Whereas some NGO leaders, who had since left the organisations, had some support from the board during the transition, most did not because transition plans and strategies were non-existent, and there was no guidance on engagement with staff and partners among other stakeholders.

*"I would have appreciated a proper handover and a proper orientation such that I would be able to transition into the role. A lot of things I had to learn on the go...I did not have the depth of where the organization was in terms of finances, in terms of human resource, in terms of donors, which report was needed by which donor - all that." NGO Executive*

### 3.3.2 Role of the Board

The board is critical in managing effective transitions, and yet on the flip side, some boards have been complicit in poorly managed executive transitions. The following are examples of the different levels and nature of involvement of boards in executive transitions.

- **The board managing an emergency transition:** In one of the organisations, the executive director resigned her position without adequate notice in order to contest for a political position. The Board and other members of the organisation were taken by surprise by the resignation. Fortunately, the Board chair was very experienced and had managed transition processes before. She was able to convene a board meeting and the board charted a plan to manage the transition. The plan included appointing an acting ED from amongst the existing staff, the establishment of a board committee to develop a detailed transition management plan, including the process of recruitment, and communication with staff as well as with external stakeholders. This quick action by the board was able to calm staff and also engender confidence amongst stakeholders of the institution's stability.
- **The board ensuring an enforced transition:** There were a few examples of boards ensuring effectiveness despite an enforced transition. In all instances studied, the former EDs had served their terms and were due to handover to new directors. In one instance, the former ED was insistent that he should continue to hold the position, however, the board insisted that the ED

should handover since he had been the ED for twelve (12) years. In this instance, the Constitution provided for transition, but the process had not been clearly articulated. The board chairperson then convened a meeting to develop a plan for the transition. Part of the plan included establishing a specific board sub-committee that had a lawyer and an experienced human resource management professional to lead the process. This sub-committee developed a detailed action plan including; a process of recruitment, identification of an acting ED, a timeline for developing a handover report, as well as a process for orientation. The plan also made provision for the outgoing ED to work alongside the incoming ED and the organisation compensated the former ED's time during this period. And a plan that addressed their personal development, including next career steps after leaving the organisation. This was in line with the organisation policy but also as a result of earlier discussions between the board and the ED during which it was agreed the current ED had done a really good job but needed to hand the organisation over to new leadership.

- **The board managing an effective transition:** There were also some examples of the board managing effective transitions in line with laid down policies and procedures. In these instances, the boards received the notices of resignation from the outgoing EDs and then put in place the processes to ensure the transition. These included; commencing processes of recruitment, meeting with staff to keep them updated on the process, where necessary establishing an acting ED, and then providing for a detailed orientation of the incoming ED, including an introduction to key stakeholders (where possible by the outgoing ED). One of the respondents summarised the role of the board as follows,

*"... the board oversaw the implementation of the Executive transition plan... they provided inputs for the drafting of the plan, reviewed and approved it. They then regularly checked on staff progress on each of the commitments in that plan. They also went through their own session of accepting that change is needed and this is how they were going to do it. This enabled them manage the rest of the process with confidence..." NGO Executive*

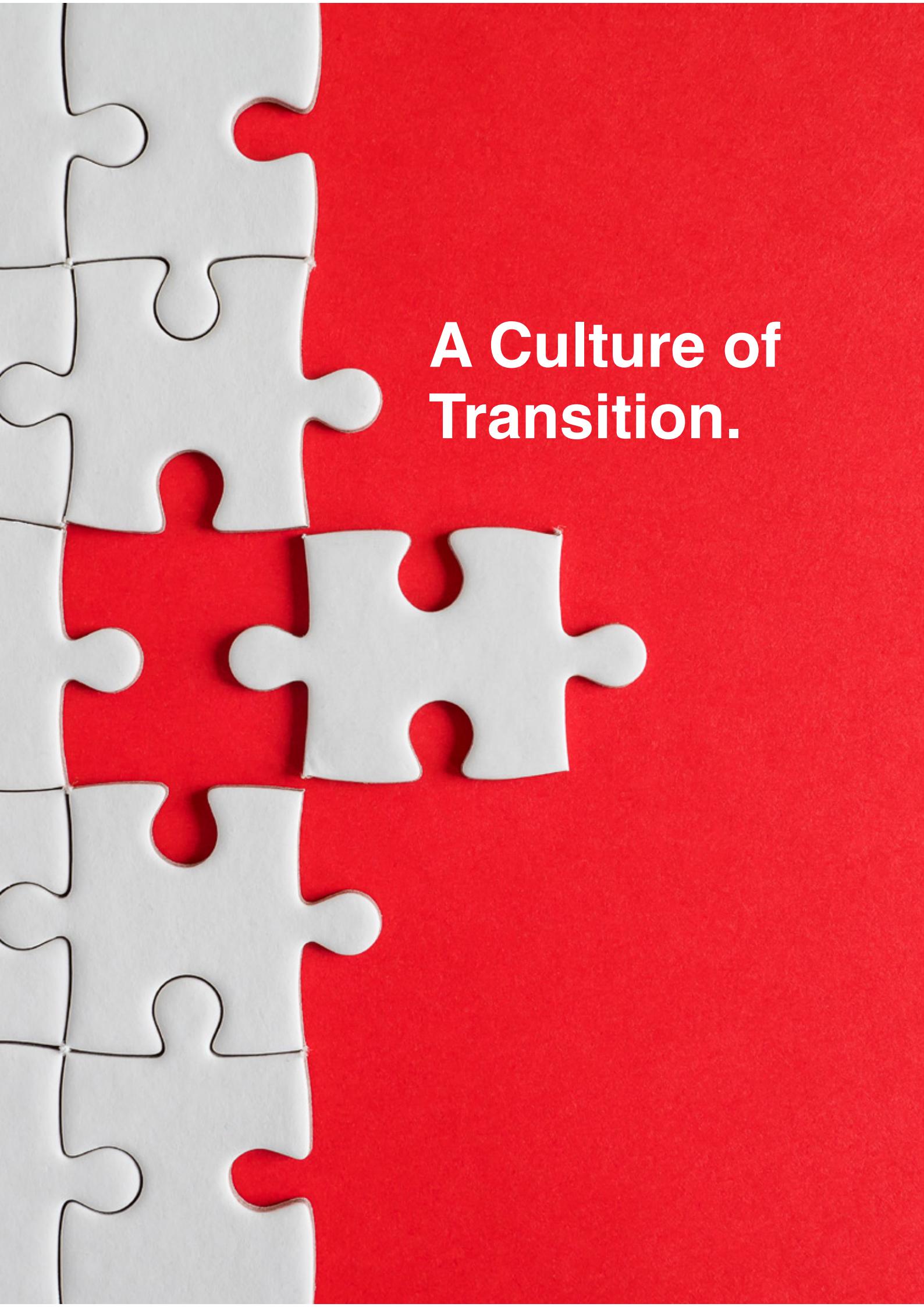
In another example, the board had to steer the organisation through an emergency transition when the ED resigned without giving adequate notice. This situation was particularly challenging because the organisation had just been through an audit that had raised several queries regarding financial management. The new ED, therefore, had to address financial accountability loopholes and also seek to restore confidence in the organisation. Fortunately for this ED, the Board was available to provide counsel and guide the review and strengthening of accountability structures and systems. The board also participated in some meetings with key stakeholders to try and build confidence in the new checks and balances, as well as the new leadership in the organisation. The process of restoring confidence in the organisation took over a year, however, with consistent and persistent actions, the organisation has been able to regain trust both within the wider civil society and with some development partners. They have received some funding too.

- The board being complicit in an ineffective transition:** In two organisations, board members were complicit in the ineffective transitions. In one example, the board did not follow the proper procedures for transition. In this organisation, the former ED was asked to leave the organisation with one week's notice and did not have sufficient time to draft a thorough handover report. The former ED's departure was abrupt and caused some consternation among the existing staff and some of the organisation's development partners. The former ED was not even allowed to provide any support and/or orientation to the incoming ED. However, he was requested to attend one meeting when one of the organisation's development partners requested for him to be directly engaged in the implementation of a project that they fund.

This study finds that the board plays a critical role in managing effective transitions. For instance, this study found that in two of the organisations, the policies did not provide for a detailed executive transition, however, both organisations had experienced board members who were able to navigate the situation and lead processes where the transition was well managed. Boards that are effective are those that (i) have some members that are experienced in management and/or overseeing organisation transitions, (ii) are able to work collectively, (iii) are open to learning and/or receiving technical support, and (iv) able to communicate and engage effectively with staff and key stakeholders. Though not a core part of this study, it was found that there seemed to be a challenge with getting experienced and well-qualified board members in the NGO sector in Uganda.<sup>3</sup> It was pointed out that in some instances board members were not selected for their qualification but for the nature of their relationships with the ED or founder members. One organisation addressed this by issuing a public call for board members and having this recruitment process independently handled by a recruitment firm or a law firm. Board recruitment was particularly a challenge for membership organisations where there were only a few members with the skills and experience required for an effective board. This challenge has been circumvented by some membership organisations by providing extra positions on the board for non-board members that bring specific technical competencies. Respondents to the study recommended the need for Board training and/or certification for the NGO sector —possibly done in collaboration with the Institute for Corporate Governance or a similar organisation that has the experience and/or expertise in training and supporting Boards. It was also suggested that a list of potential/experienced board members be maintained and made accessible for NGOs seeking to constitute and/or recruit new board members.

3

Some reasons given for this were, NGOs tend to look at a limited pool for their selection because they do not have information and/or contacts, or because the organisations are small and do not have the funds to pay/'facilitate' board members for their organisations. In some instances, recruitment of board members who will not challenge the organisation is deliberate in order to vest power and control in the hands of the ED. This study notes that the issue of governance boards of NGOs is an important one and has an effect on effective transitions, and so should be further interrogated to find ways of strengthen NGO/CSO board governance in Uganda.



**A Culture of  
Transition.**

### 3.3.3 Adequate structures, systems, and a culture of transition

The study found that smooth and effective transitions happen in organisations where there has been a culture of transition at various levels in the organisation including the board, ED, and other staff. Such organisations have developed the policies, culture, and practice of smooth and orderly transitions in the organisation. The study also found that this culture of smooth and effective transitions is aided in organisations that have strong and stable structures, resourcing, and a track record of programme implementation and are thus reasonably well-established. A firm foundation for the organisation seems to be a prerequisite for smooth and effective executive transitions. This is reflected in a statement by one of the respondents,

*“...the quality of a transition is reflective of the type and character of an organization... the more prepared and robust an organization is the better it will be at preparing for transition and succession.” NGO Executive*

Two other systems that were identified as important to effective transition are: (i) having ED exit plans and (ii) good documentation of organisation processes, activities, lessons learned, and good practices.

*“...I think there needs to be a clear exit plan, whenever somebody is at the top...because I think many, many times we've seen a gap created when someone very good leaves. And that's because, you know, they were taking on all these roles, and they were not working with other people...so you find someone leaves, maybe sometimes very suddenly, ...then you find that within the organization, there's nobody who can step in adequately, because they were not exposed to how things were being done...” NGO Executive*

It was emphasised that these systems worked when an organisation had a culture of accountability and compliance with systems.

*“...And, and I think also, part of the challenge also comes in with the systems that we have in our organizations, a lot of the systems exist on paper... but in practise, most things are done informally. And so, when somebody comes in, there is no reference point...No, there is no handover report, and that makes transition really hard. But I think that if we could strengthen systems in the organization, you know, such*

*that things are documented, and people can come in, and people can read and see this is what's been happening... also have a tenure limit for people at the head... and also proactive leadership development, a deliberate leadership development program for other members of staff in the organization...” NGO Executive*

Preparing staff for transition and having discussions about succession within the organisation contributes to building a culture of transition and shared leadership. Many respondents interviewed for this study echoed this view,

*“... that was part of the of the transition plan, preparing staff for that transition. We had those intense and difficult discussions and supporting staff to get to a level of acceptance... we had many of those sessions, those who had to cry, cried during those difficult sessions which were also rewarding. So, by the time the actual transition happened, I think everybody was appreciative. We eventually accepted that ...we need to step up our game if we are to see the organisation grow... So, it's an organisation transition, not about the executive director, but all of us as staff, accepting it and being ready to keep the organisation growing...” NGO Executive*

*“... there was a lot of anxiety. And so, it took us quite a number of internal discussions, both between the director herself and her staff, as well as us and the staff and the staff on their own. And that took quite a long time to get people to that point of acceptance.... we would have discussions where people voice their fears, their anxieties, their worries, and then you know, slowly, slowly from that, go to a point where people are like accepting like, Okay, this is going to happen, and if it happens, what do we need to do? ... So, it was a whole process...” NGO Board Chair*

*“...I think that the kind of support organizations need is, first and foremost, to really understand the importance of having succession plans to understand and appreciate and practice succession, because I think what I see around in many, many, many organizations, particularly the women's organizations, is that we have people who start organizations, especially founder directors, and you know, there's that famous founder syndrome, it's their baby, they never quite leave, you know, and so they remain at the helm of the organization. NGO Board Chair*

In some of the interviews, EDs who had stayed in their organisations for 8 or more years stated that one of the reasons they were not ready to move on was because they did not want to hand over a ‘shaky’ organisation. They felt a responsibility to leave behind a strong organisation. This was particularly the case for EDs who took over organisations at times of crisis and had been able to turn things around to rebuild the institutions. This further emphasises the importance of strong structures and systems as a prerequisite for effective transitions. In each case, the board should clearly determine what they consider to be an appropriate level/performance of systems and structures that should be in place before an executive transition can happen.

### **3.3.4 Purpose for which the organisation was founded**

During the study, respondents shared that the motivation behind the establishment of an organisation also has an impact on the occurrence and the nature of executive leadership transition. Where NGOs were set up with the intention of building organisations that would outlive the founders, deliberate efforts to ensure transition have been established. There are instances where NGOs are established as a channel for the founder’s personal work and/or interests. In such instances, the executive transition could be postponed indefinitely or until the founder determines they are ready to leave. Even then, the process of transition would most likely be determined by the founder who could hand-pick a successor or employ a more independent process.

### **3.3.5 Level of preparedness by the outgoing Executive Leader**

It was also pointed out that executive transitions tended to be smooth and effective when the outgoing executive had had the time to prepare for their exit. In some examples where the transitions had been smooth and effective, the former EDs had planned for the next steps in their career or taken on new jobs in other organisations.

The study notes that 90% of the organisations interviewed did not have any plans or interventions to support the outgoing EDs as they prepared for their future after the organisation. None of the respondents, who were in leadership at the time of the study, had a comprehensive individual transition plan describing key actions they needed to accomplish at a personal and professional level

to achieve a seamless transition.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding, most agreed that it was important to develop and maintain individual transition plans.

Overall, providing support to executive directors in transition planning was considered to be a good practice that could aid effective transition,

*“It should be a process that I should go through the moment I enter so that I start preparing for my retirement, pension and so on.” NGO Executive*

An ED disclosed her personal discomfort with staying in a role for too long and noted that she thought about the need for transition,

*“I don’t believe in staying in a job for so long. I become a liability after five years if I’m not getting a challenge or I’m not seeing myself growing. I believe in moving on and letting others take over the job. So, I always enter knowing that I need to give the people I work with the skill set that they need in case I move on so that there is no crisis when I finally leave.” NGO Executive*

Some EDs said that they intended to commence developing their transition plans citing the need for support in this regard:

*“There were some things that I had never really thought about. I don’t have an individual plan... I need to work on my individual transition plan.” NGO Executive*

However, the study found that only one of the EDs had a transition plan which was shared with management and monitored to establish progress and with feedback to staff members who were made aware of the pending departure and the onboarding of an in-coming ED.

*“...the work plan is so that they are aware that I am moving backwards, and the new director is taking on more responsibilities as we went edging towards my final departure.” NGO Executive*

Another good practice that was identified was having term limits for executive leadership in an organisation because it provides room for new thinking, new ways of working, change and growth:

*“So, it doesn’t matter how well somebody has performed, they exit; you plan your agenda in the five years [or] four.” NGO Executive*

Phased transitioning-out by an outgoing ED was another good practice because it allowed the incoming ED to onboard more practically through increased delegation from the outgoing ED. The phased transitioning also fosters team building by providing opportunities for the incoming ED to interact with staff.

### 3.3.6 Level of dependence of the organisation on the personality of the Executive Director

In some instances, where executive transitions had been long-drawn or problematic, the image and work of the organisation had become synonymous with the personality of the outgoing ED. Partly due to their unique style of work and/or strong personality, some organisations' brand identity was fused with the personality of the ED. In such circumstances, the ED had established relationships with target groups and stakeholders, including funding partners. It was feared their departure would possibly lead to the collapse of the organisation:

*"Many times, you then end up having somebody at the top, very experienced, but then they also end up very overloaded with work because they keep losing experienced staff, and they keep recruiting new people without sufficient experience. That is part of what creates the fear and anxiety that if this person leaves, what happens to the organization? Because I think they haven't created that space for other people to step into their shoes with ease." NGO Executive*

In one organisation, an ED mentioned to the board she would like to retire, however, the board insisted she stay on as she was doing a very good job for the organisation and had become a strong advocate for the organisation's brand. Organisations that have a stronger institutional base with greater participation and representation of other staff and board in their activities and operations found it easier to transition and build confidence with key stakeholders as the organisation was associated with more than one individual.

### 3.3.7 Managing the transition beyond the immediate handover to an incoming ED

The study found that the success and/or effectiveness of executive transition was dependant on how the incoming executive

adapted to the organisation and addressed any challenges beyond the handover. Often, the transition was considered to end at the handover of the office and possibly during the orientation of the new ED. This study found that even in organisations where the handover had gone smoothly, an effective transition was affected by either internal organisation dynamics or external factors. For instance, in one organisation, due to a long-drawn-out transition process, a number of staff members were requested to take on acting positions and a few even applied for the ED position. However, when the board decided to recruit an 'outsider' some of the staff members were frustrated and decided to leave the organisation. In addition, the lack of consistent leadership during the transition/search for a new ED affected team morale and led to jostling for power and influence within the organisation. The incoming ED, therefore, had to spend considerable time trying to address these team dynamics, including some staff exits.

In a few other organisations, the new EDs joined organisations accused of financial mismanagement, which had stained the organisations' reputations with funding agencies and other stakeholders. The incoming EDs, therefore, did not only have to adjust to the new organisation but also had to spend considerable time atoning for the mistakes of the previous leaders and renewing confidence and trust among development partners. In some instances, this process of atonement had taken years. This study, therefore, finds that support to transitions should look beyond the installation of a new ED and to resolving any negative impacts from the process on the operations of the organisation among other areas. Maintaining contact with the outgoing ED was considered one way of easing executive leadership transitions.

*"For the first six months after I took over, I had the previous country director available to me as and when I needed him at a fee. It was very helpful, because I always referred to him. And he would support me with all the information I needed. That was, I think, very wise of the board." NGO Executive*

Another respondent shared as follows,

*“... I am able to regularly consult with the previous Executive Director (also the founder) because she is on the board, and a signatory to the organisation accounts. ...that means that we even see each other every other week. So even if the handover report was not very detailed, I didn’t feel like there was that gap, because actually, we kept on talking and anything that comes up, she’s just a call away. Even WhatsApp, we communicate.” NGO Executive*

In addition to maintaining a connection with the previous ED, it was also suggested coaching and/or peer support for the incoming ED would be very helpful. The respondents further suggested the establishment of a platform and/or initiatives to support new and existing EDs of NGOs in Uganda as a critical and much-needed intervention.

### 3.3.8 Staff retention

The study also found the ability of the organisation to retain good staff had a bearing on transition. In many instances, organisations had tried to groom successors from existing staff members by providing training and various forms of exposure. However, in one organisation, the members of staff that were being groomed left the organisation for better jobs.

*“We’ve had EDs who come in, and they are star performers, and they’re really doing well. But they also stay very long at the top of the organization. What typically happens is that then there is this gap, there’s a ceiling because you have this person who’s up there and they’re not leaving. So, all the people who are at the bottom, anyone who has career ambitions, if they’re a star performer, they will be looking for a job outside, because there seems to be no career progression within the organization.” NGO Executive*

### 3.3.9 Availability of funding/resources to support transition planning and management

The availability of funding/resources to support various aspects of transition planning and management can influence the effectiveness of a transition. One organisation had the funding to convene a transition retreat that included scenario planning and risk assessment.

*“...the transition retreat was for two days with staff and board to discuss the upcoming changes, scenario building, looking at disadvantages, advantages, opportunities and threats, and determining the best option for the organisation. We also discussed what the process would look like, any fears, and how both the board and staff would work together to support this, hence developing a supportive system for the transition where everyone takes leadership...” NGO Executive*

*“...A risk assessment is an important part of the transition management process, and we did this as part of the transition retreat... Some of the risks include maintaining relationships with key partners and stakeholders, as well as building confidence that the quality of work of the institution would not be affected by the departure of the Executive...” Former NGO Executive*

The discussions from the retreat also informed the organisation’s transition plan,

*“... we developed a detailed succession plan that is a plan of action that outlined in detail what is needed to be done for the two years of transition, who was responsible, or how the new director would take over responsibilities, how to communicate to funders and partners, issues of finances, public relations, etc... the plan was reviewed six times in two years i.e. during Board meetings that happened three times a year, and the plans were also reviewed by management and staff..” Former NGO Executive*

Respondents to this study were asked to describe what they considered constituted effective leadership transition.

Their responses are provided in Box 1 below:

- Having and being able to articulate a clear vision for the future positioning of the organization.
- Having a transition plan for executive transition that provides for situations where there might be emergency transitions.
- Having and implementing the necessary organisation policies, systems, and plans to facilitate leadership transition.
- Executive leaders having the space and support to develop their personal transition plans.
- Having a clear handover process for the incoming ED. This handover process should allow for the time needed for the incoming and outgoing executive directors to work together and for the new executive director to be formally introduced to key stakeholders.
- Provide coaching and any other external support that may be required by the new director and the outgoing director to ensure an effective transition.
- The board having the capacity and requisite support to guide the transition, including facilitating engagements with staff, partners, and key stakeholders in the transition.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Executive transition is a process, not an event. It, therefore, requires sufficient planning and resourcing. Even when it is an emergency transition, having a Policy that provides guidance on how to manage such transitions will contribute to more effective transitions. The study found that the board/governing body plays a critical role in effective transitions; boards with experienced members seem better able to navigate transitions even in the absence of clear organisation policies to guide the same. Planning for executive transition should include preparing the team (internal), working with external stakeholders and/or partners, and the process of recruitment and handover. Effective transition does not immediately end upon handover but requires additional support for the incoming ED, either from the outgoing ED, Board, or a coach. It was also found that transitioning from a founder/pioneer ED requires more investment in building the confidence/trust in the process and the incoming leadership. It also appears that organisations that have invested in building strong systems and structures for efficiency and accountability tend to have more effective executive transitions.

## 4.0. Succession planning as a core part of effective executive leadership transition



## 4.1 Defining succession planning

Succession planning is about having a plan in place to help an organisation effectively manage staff transitions, which in many cases are inevitable.<sup>5</sup>

A well-planned succession plan provides an organisation with the opportunity to best position itself for the future. For succession planning to be successful, it must include: the board being aware/familiar with best practices in leadership succession; a management team with time to support the process; a strategic plan and the requisite resources for the implementation of the plan, including human resource policies and plans.<sup>6</sup>

Succession planning is important because it increases the availability of capable individuals for management positions; the risk of losing experienced leaders is minimized; fewer financial resources will be spent on external recruitment and development of candidates; and human resource (HR) departments can establish formal procedures to support the talent development process.<sup>7</sup>

At the core of succession planning are: planning how an organization's leadership needs will evolve in the future, identifying future leaders, and identifying activities to strengthen leadership capacity. While the future may be uncertain, creating a plan enables the organization to develop leaders more intentionally and effectively. The processes could differ from one organisation to another.

## 4.2 Succession planning practices in Uganda

This section provides the study findings on the perspectives and practice of succession planning amongst NGOs in Uganda. The study found that a number of organisations did not have policies and/or deliberate processes to plan for succession. In addition,

succession planning tended to be equated with capacity building. Succession planning is also hampered by the lack of resources. More detailed findings are presented below:

### 4.2.1 Equating succession planning with staff capacity building

The majority of respondent equated succession planning with capacity building/staff capacity development. Partly as a consequence of this, 60% of the NGOs that participated in this study did not have specifically defined succession plans, while in some organisations succession was reflected in the policy documents but in a cursory manner. One of the 16 organisations that had a 'stand-alone' succession planning policy document also had succession planning reflected in its human resource policy describing the procedures for an individual to act in an established position. In another organisation, succession was reflected in the board governance manual as well as in the human resource policy of the organization.

### 4.2.2 Organisations considered performance management systems as a tool for succession planning

All the organisations interviewed had performance management systems that included standard annual appraisals conducted by line managers or supervisors. These systems provided a framework to assess staff growth and/or development, and to identify training needs. The systems were not necessarily established for succession. Capacity and competencies were developed but were not necessarily for succession. According to one respondent,

*"...competencies of management have been developed although not intentionally for succession"* NGO Executive

5 Erin Gloeckner. Succession Planning [NOT] for CEO. Available at: <https://nonprofitrisk.org/resources/e-news/succession-planning-not-ceo/>

6 Erin Gloeckner. Succession Planning [NOT] for CEO. Available at: <https://nonprofitrisk.org/resources/e-news/succession-planning-not-ceo/>

32 7 IMD. Succession Planning Model: Ensuring Leadership Continuity with Effective Succession Planning Models. Available at: <https://www.imd.org/lfb/focused-reflections/succession-planning-models/>

In one of the organisations, the human resource policy had provisions that could foster succession planning, but it has not been considered a priority, as articulated below:

*“...what we had was a provision [in the human resource manual] to the effect that we would build the capacity of staff members to be able to be elevated in case of a vacancy other than bringing somebody from outside... we were supposed to come up with a strategy on how to build that capacity and the meeting to do that just kept being pushed forward - it never ever happened.” NGO Executive*

#### 4.2.3 Inadequate funding for succession planning

During the study, it was found that most of the organisations (90%), did not have a specific plan or budget for succession planning.

In the couple of organisations that had a budget, the respondents highlighted the importance of having a budget and/or resources to support succession planning. According to one respondent,

*“...we do not we do not have written succession policy, but when people have the desire to do for example, a course and it fits within our budgets, and the course directly contributes to our institutional goals then we support this... sometimes the course cannot directly fit within our organisation goals, in such situations we can give staff the time to do the course, but not pay for it...” NGO Executive*

In another organisation where a succession plan was found, it was not periodically reviewed or resourced. So, whereas the succession plan reflected the long-term leadership needs of the organization, the capacity building needs were not budgeted for nor funded and so did not happen.

The EDs that have invested in building the capacity of their teams also pointed out that such training and mentoring for succession requires a lot of effort and recommended that organisations invest in providing resources for succession planning that would among others cover costs for mentoring and coaching of staff for specific positions.

#### 4.2.4 Succession planning structures not usually provided for in organisation policies

Since most of the organisations did not have policies or plans for succession it follows that they did not have structures to facilitate succession planning. One respondent specifically pointed to the absence of positions in the organisation for career growth as a potential challenge to effective succession because staff will leave and/or even if they stay, will not have the opportunity to experience leadership at a more strategic/oversight levels in the organisation.

*“Sometimes in some organizations, you find a huge gap between the management/strategy team and the implementation team for instance there can be ED, and program officers and no programme director with a broader view of things. So maybe even the organizational structure would be a place to look at so that we create those career opportunities where people move from one step to the other... And then the other thing that goes with this is compensation... this is one of the issues that results in people leaving...” NGO Executive*

It was also suggested that succession plans should be jointly developed with the team,

*“...The succession plan should address staff at various levels and be developed collectively with other staff. The Succession plan should also be grounded in the Constitution, Human Resource policy and Strategic plan... and should be monitored regularly...” NGO Executive*

#### 4.2.5 The ED’s role in succession planning

In all the organisations assessed, progress in staff capacity development and/or preparation for succession depended on the interest and/or initiative of the Executive Director. In one of the organisations, the ED mentioned she had initiated a number of activities meant to enhance the staff capacity for greater effectiveness as well as prepare for succession within the organisation. Activities included training, delegating various responsibilities, including acting ED as well as exposure to meetings and other engagements with various stakeholders. However, none of these initiatives was provided for in any of the organisation's policy documents and/or strategy. This means that if the current ED leaves the deliberate efforts to enhance staff capacity will be determined by the level of interest of the incoming ED. In addition, the lack of a Policy and/or plans means that this aspect of organisation development is not monitored and/or measured.

The study found that whilst the majority (60%) of the organisations did not have succession policies and/or plans, during the discussion, they recognised this as a gap and noted its importance,

*“.... It is important that we do have our succession plan, which is known by everybody. And it's not only for the executive director, but everybody in the institution. If we are to try to get to another level in the institution, it should be clear, who is moving, why and when... so that people are deliberately working and working towards it. And, of course handling emergencies and risks in case somebody leaves..., all that will be stipulated in that succession plan... having all staff involved in the processes and understanding what goes into it helps for the emotional well-being of both the leaders and the whole team, but also enables the team to become supportive of the processes ... and yes, it can help with smooth transitions...” NGO Executive*

*“.... succession planning is important...you find that in a lot in our NGOs, you can stay program officer for 10 years and you don't move up. So, how do we also ensure upward mobility at all levels of the organization so that people get to experience leadership...to grow their leadership skills at whatever level that they are at... And that enables us to really get a pool of leaders at all levels... so that yes, if the ED leaves tomorrow, you can pick from whichever department is there...” NGO Executive*

One of the organisations with a succession policy recommended that the succession policy should be translated into a detailed plan, as captured below,

*“Succession planning should include opportunities for staff to learn from experience, adapting as they go along...it should foster horizontal leadership i.e., shared leadership to enable opportunities for leadership to move around... that everyone is seen as a potential leader... those are the principles. So now, the practicalities I think is where we need to strengthen more, how do we continue making it more practical so that the next group of leaders have it easier? Yes, we have it (succession planning) in the Constitution, but how do we have it written down in terms of policies and plans? ... What are the steps we should take? You know, what are the practical steps for mentoring? What do you mentor? What really what do you do in those six months to a year? But even before*

*then, how do you identify the next leaders? Because the Constitution limits the Executive to five years...So in those five years, we should actually have a group of people that we are sure can run the organization, but how do you identify them? How do you develop the plan? What are the skills that are required for them? What's the criteria?... there is need for continuous coaching, continuous leadership training, and management training and guidelines, practical written guidelines for that process... These guidelines can be used to monitor the process by management and the board... the board can regularly check and ask, how is the process going, you know, to keep checking? Who are the people we've identified in the transition? ...when the board is able to monitor and supervise then they will not be caught by surprise if something happens...” NGO Board Chair*

#### 4.3 Challenges to Succession Planning

##### 4.3.1 Lack of policy and/or plan for succession, including leadership development

As highlighted in the section above, the study found that a number of NGOs boards did not prioritize/plan for succession.

##### 4.3.2 Lack of resourcing for implementation of succession planning

Donors/development partners do not provide financial support for succession planning under institutional strengthening in NGO strategic plans and funding proposals. However, in only one of the long-standing NGOs, the board played a critical role in insisting that succession planning and succession management were institutionalised with strategies that provided opportunities for management staff to hone their competencies, for instance through having a structured process to enable staff to act in executive leadership/senior management positions.

##### 4.3.3 Low staff retention after building their capacities:

A key challenge for one of the organisations had been retaining management staff whose competencies had been enhanced through effective succession management implementation:

*“You can have some staff that you are counting on and suddenly leave the organization... But yet, it's not what you anticipated. And your eyes were on that person. But then suddenly, they leave.” NGO Executive*

#### 4.3.4 Succession planning challenges in organisations constituted by marginalised communities

The study also found that sometimes the capacity needs for the effective succession and transition in organisations constituted by marginalised communities is more challenging because the communities they represent may not have the skills required to run NGOs effectively. One of the respondents shared the following;

*“... in organisations like ours, sometimes it is argued that it would be easier if we had professional people, you know, from outside to come as, as a finance or program manager, or even on the board... that is a temptation for organisations like ours i.e., to bring in those outsiders, because then the assumption is that they are more educated and have more connections. But I applaud our organisation because it has stuck to the value of representation of our constituents at all levels of leadership... But it also means that we have to be flexible and aware of the challenges that come with that, and seek to build a leadership model that works for that particular constituency... we have had donors who have been able to support some of constituents to go back to school going for diplomas... every organisation should be aware that those are the challenges that come with building leadership in this kind of movement, and the importance of having partners who will work together to build the different leaders at different levels...” NGO Executive*

#### 4.4 Example of succession planning and management model

Only one organisation had a systematic succession planning and management framework. The key aspects of this plan were as follows:

**Step 1:** A detailed plan outlining what needed to be done over a two-year period in terms of who was responsible for what, how the new director was going to start taking on responsibilities, and communication —how the succession process was going to communicate to the funders and partners.

**Step 2:** A management committee was established to oversee the implementation of the succession plan.

**Step 3:** Monthly reviews of the succession plan activities were conducted within the organization and at every board meeting held three times a year, over a 2-year period. The transition plan was reflected in the board meeting agenda.

**Step 4:** Identification of staff training needs through appraisals. (For example, the identified capacity gap for the deputy executive director (DED) was organisational development, and so the DED was supported to attend organisation development training at a regional management institute.)

**Step 5:** Externally facilitated staff training on managing transition.

**Step 6:** Staff taking lead on specific projects for purposes of building their leadership and project management skills.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

60% of organisations interviewed for this study did not have Succession policies and/or plans in their organisations. Succession planning is often equated to capacity building, with staff being exposed to various forms of training, and in some instances, the delegation of duties. The absence of a policy and/or plan means any efforts at succession planning are at the discretion of the ED and further means there is no framework for a structured process that can be tracked and measured. It was also found that the Policy should be accompanied by a detailed plan that can guide and/or ease implementation. Challenges to the effective succession planning and management include limited resources, low staff retention, and in organisations that represent marginalised communities, a limited pool of skilled and experienced talent to draw from.

# **5.0 Core Tenets for Effective Executive Leadership Transition**



## 5.1 The eight (8) core elements/tenets for effective executive transition

The study derived eight (8) core elements essential for effective executive transition in any type of organisation and/or circumstances of executive transition. The eight core elements are described in the table below.

Core Tenet	Description
<b>Succession and Plan</b>	<p><b>Policy</b></p> <p>The organisation should provide for succession in policy e.g., human resources policy and explain the purpose of succession planning i.e., capacity building and/or support to enable staff take on new responsibilities/leadership within the organisation. Link the succession planning to existing capacity initiatives.</p> <p>The board should then develop a succession plan that provides a step-by-step plan for the organisation to ensure that there is resident capacity amongst the team to handle all the core functions at any time. The succession plan should identify the core functions of the organisation, provide for at least two staff members to receive training and/or exposure to how to manage core functions, and have a strategy to support leadership development, update knowledge and capacity to analyse key programmatic issues and teamwork, on a regular basis.</p> <p>The board and executive should also discuss the process of succession planning with staff and explain the strategies and/or initiatives. Possible strategies and/or initiatives that can be included in the implementation plans;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capacity building aligned with staff appraisals and/or performance management,</li> <li>• Develop individual staff development plans with key targets,</li> <li>• Exposure of staff to various aspects of leadership/management,</li> <li>• Exposure of staff to various organisation processes e.g., strategy development, possible participation in board meetings, and proposal writing,</li> <li>• Exposure and engagement of staff in external engagements including funding and with other partners,</li> <li>• Delegation of additional responsibilities to staff,</li> <li>• Specific leadership development training and/or support that can include coaching.</li> </ul> <p>There should be regular monitoring, reflection, and review of the staff development plans and setting new targets for growth.</p>

Core Tenet	Description
<b>Executive transition management policy and plan</b>	<p>The policy should provide the overall guiding framework for executive transition and include why transition management is important to the organisation, the values that will guide the process, responsibilities, and specific actions. Specifically, the policy should among others, provide for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of executive transition and why it is important.</li> <li>• Documentation of key organisation processes, decisions, and systems and how these aid effective transition.</li> <li>• Term limits for EDs (if applicable).</li> <li>• How the oversight of the transition process will be handled and by whom?</li> <li>• Specific implementation steps and/or structure for a detailed transition plan including allocation of specific roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>• ED's exit plan, which can include the development of a personal development plan. The Policy may provide for a coach to support the ED develop this.</li> <li>• A specific plan for staff retention, in order to ensure whenever executive transition happens, a good team is available to continue managing the organisation and will be the team that the new ED works with.</li> <li>• Resourcing for the policy/plan implementation, including a list of resources required, a budget and options to obtain these resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Duration of the Process</b>	<p>Indicate the duration of the transition. This can be determined by the history of transition in the organisation, the nature of the organisation, and resources available.</p>
<b>Leadership/ Oversight</b>	<p>This is usually carried out by the board. The oversight might be delegated to a board sub-committee, the board chair or overseen by the whole board.</p>
<b>Implementation</b>	<p>Detailed implementation plan and allocation of responsibilities including whether there are aspects that should be externally contracted</p>
<b>Preparing the organisation for transition</b>	<p>What specific interventions will be carried out to prepare staff for the transition? This may include meetings between the board and staff, staff retreats, leadership training to prepare for new roles, etc.</p>
<b>ED recruitment strategy</b>	<p>The process of recruitment of the new ED. It could be in-house recruitment from existing staff, or external recruitment.</p>
<b>Role of former ED</b>	<p>Clarify the role and/or support function of the former ED in the organisation during the transition and afterwards. This includes preparing a comprehensive handover report that provides information on programmes, finances, and key stakeholder engagement. It could also include reflections on key issues that new ED should pay specific attention to.</p>

## 5.2 Application of the 8 core tenets to different types of executive transition

Below are the eight core elements/tenets applicable to the five common types of executive transition identified by this study, i.e. (i) Transition at the end of ED's contract/tenure (with independent recruitment) (ii) Transition from pioneer/founder ED (with head hunting) (iii) Enforced transition (iv) Transition for organisation reset (v) Emergency transition.

### 5.2.1 Application of the 8 core tenets during executive leadership transition at the end of ED's contract/tenure

Core Element	Description
<b>Succession Policy and Plan</b>	A succession plan with all the key aspects as outlined in the description of the core tenets in 4.1 above
<b>Executive transition management policy and plan</b>	<p>The policy should provide the overall guiding framework for executive transition and include why transition management is important to the organisation, the values that will guide the process, responsibilities and specific actions. Specifically, the policy should among others, provide for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of executive transition and why it is important.</li> <li>• Importance of documentation of key organisation processes, decisions and systems, and how these aide effective transition.</li> <li>• Term limits for EDs (if applicable).</li> <li>• How the oversight of the transition process will be handled and by whom?</li> <li>• Specific implementation steps and/or structure for a detailed transition plan including allocation of specific roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>• ED's exit plan, which can include the development of a personal development plan. The Policy may provide for a coach to support the ED develop this.</li> <li>• A specific plan for staff retention, in order to ensure that whenever executive transition happens, a good team is available to continue managing the organisation and will be the team that the new ED works with.</li> <li>• Resourcing for the policy/plan implementation including a list of resources required, a budget, and options to obtain these resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Duration of the Process</b>	This can be determined by the history of transition in the organisation, the nature of the organisation, and resources available. In well-established organisations, it can take between 3 – 6 months.
<b>Leadership/ Oversight</b>	This should be carried out by the board. The oversight might be delegated to a board sub-committee, the board chair, or overseen by the whole board.
<b>Implementation</b>	Detailed implementation plan and allocation of responsibilities including whether there are aspects that should be externally contracted.
<b>Preparing the organisation for transition</b>	This may include meetings between the board and staff, staff retreats, and leadership training to prepare for new roles, etc
<b>ED recruitment strategy</b>	The process of recruitment of the new ED. It could be in-house recruitment from existing staff or external recruitment.
<b>Role of former ED</b>	The former ED should prepare a comprehensive handover report that provides information on programmes, finances, and key stakeholder engagement. It could also include reflections on key issues that the new ED should pay specific attention to.

## 5.2.2 Application of the 8 core tenets during executive leadership transition from a pioneer and/or founder ED

Core Element	Description
<b>Succession Policy and Plan</b>	A succession plan with all the key aspects as outlined in the description of the core tenets in 4.1 above.
<b>Executive transition management policy and plan</b>	<p>The policy should provide the overall guiding framework for executive transition and include why transition management is important to the organisation, the values that will guide the process, responsibilities, and specific actions. Specifically, the policy should among others, provide for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of executive transition and why it is important.</li> <li>• Importance of documentation of key organisation processes, decisions, and systems and how these aid effective transition.</li> <li>• How the oversight of the transition process will be handled and by whom? Specifically, emphasis on the need to be strategic in recruitment, including head hunting in order to ensure that the transition inspires confidence in the team, partners, and key stakeholders.</li> <li>• Identification of the key structures and systems that should be in place to allow for an effective transition from the pioneer and/or founder ED.</li> <li>• Specific implementation steps and/or structure for a detailed transition plan including allocation of specific roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>• ED's exit plan, which can include the development of a personal development plan. The Policy may provide for a coach to support the ED develop this.</li> <li>• A specific plan for staff retention in order to ensure that whenever executive transition happens, a good team is available to continue managing the organisation and will be the team that the new ED works with.</li> <li>• Resourcing for the policy/plan implementation including a list of resources required, a budget and options to obtain these resources. It should be noted that the resources required for a transition for this type of organisation may be higher because there will be need to build confidence amongst staff and key stakeholders and the overall transition may take a long time.</li> </ul>
<b>Duration of the Process</b>	The process of transition from a pioneer and/or ED who was a founder member may take between 6 months to 2 years. This depends on how closely associated the ED has been with the organisation. A longer process can allow for the former ED to provide mentoring and direct support to the new ED, invest in introducing the new ED to key stakeholders and if possible participate in a process of strategy review that includes the incoming ED.
<b>Leadership/Oversight</b>	The initial decision on an interim ED will most likely be taken by the whole board during an emergency meeting. The rest of the transition may then be delegated to an existing board sub-committee, a specially constituted committee to oversee the transition, or by the board chair.
<b>Implementation</b>	The board (or delegated committee) should develop a detailed implementation plan and allocation of responsibilities including whether there are aspects that should be externally contracted.

Core Element	Description
Preparing the organisation for transition	Specific interventions to prepare staff for the transition include an emergency meeting between board representatives and the staff to inform the latter of the pending transition and the immediate steps to handle the transition. If possible, the board should provide staff information about the short and longer-term plans to manage the transition.
ED recruitment strategy	The board will determine the process of recruitment for instance in-house recruitment from existing staff or external recruitment.
Role of former ED	The outgoing ED should be required to provide a handover report and if that is not possible, to at least have a briefing with the Board and interim ED on key issues the interim ED should be cognisant of. If the ED is not dismissed, they can also be asked to hold some meetings with the interim ED to provide further insights on the organisation and the role of the ED.

### 5.2.3 Application of the 8 core tenets during executive leadership transition in line with organisational reset

Core Element	Description
Succession Policy and Plan	A succession policy and plan with all the key aspects as outlined in the description of the core tenets in 4.1 above
Executive transition management policy and/or plan	An executive transition policy and plan with all the key aspects as outlined in the description of the core tenets in 4.1 above
Duration of the Process	This can be determined by the circumstances of transition. Often, in situations of reset, the organisation will want a quick transition process of 2-3 months.
Leadership/Oversight	This should be carried out by the board. The oversight might be delegated to a board sub-committee, the board chair or overseen by the whole board. The board has to be very clear about the type of leader they need to handle the reset, their level of experience, skills, as well as reputation.
Implementation	Detailed implementation plan and allocation of responsibilities including whether there are aspects that should be externally contracted. Specific attention should be paid to the need to address any challenges that led to enforced transition, and any reputational damage that will need to be addressed.
Preparing the organisation for transition	This may include meetings between the board and staff, staff retreats, and leadership training to prepare for new roles, etc. The team should also discuss the implications of the transition and build consensus on public messaging and/or interface with the external stakeholders as the organisation seeks to rebuild trust and confidence in its work.
ED recruitment strategy	The process of recruitment of the new ED can involve interviews but will most likely also include head hunting because the organisation is looking for specific qualities in the incoming executive.

Core Element	Description
<b>Role of former ED</b>	The former ED should prepare a comprehensive handover report that provides information on programmes, finances, and key stakeholder engagement. It could also include reflections on key issues that the new ED should pay specific attention to.

#### 5.2.4 Application of the 8 core tenets during enforced executive leadership transition

Core Element	Description
<b>Succession Policy and/or Plan</b>	A succession plan with all the key aspects outlined in the description of the core tenets in 4.1 above
<b>Executive transition management policy and/or plan</b>	<p>The policy should provide the overall guiding framework for the executive transition and include why transition management is important to the organisation, the values that will guide the process, responsibilities, and specific actions. Specifically, the policy should among others, provide for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of the executive transition and why it is important,</li> <li>• Importance of documentation of key organisation processes, decisions, and systems, and how these aid effective transition</li> <li>• How the oversight of the transition process will be handled and by whom?</li> <li>• Specific implementation steps and/or structure for a detailed transition plan including allocation of specific roles and responsibilities,</li> <li>• ED's exit plan, which can include the development of a personal development plan. The Policy may provide for a coach to support the ED develop this,</li> <li>• A specific plan for staff retention in order to ensure that whenever an executive transition happens a good team is available to continue managing the organisation and will be the team that the new ED works with,</li> <li>• Resourcing for the policy/plan implementation, including a list of resources required, a budget, and options to obtain these resources.</li> </ul>
<b>Duration of the Process</b>	This can be determined by the history of transition in the organisation, the nature of the organisation, and the resources available. In well-established organisations it can take between 3–6 months.
<b>Leadership/ Oversight</b>	This should be done by the board. The oversight might be delegated to a board sub-committee, the board chair or overseen by the whole board.
<b>Implementation</b>	A detailed implementation plan and allocation of responsibilities, including whether there are aspects that should be externally contracted. Specific attention should be paid to the need to address any challenges that led to enforced transition and any reputational damage that will need to be addressed.

Core Element	Description
<b>Preparing the organisation for transition</b>	This may include meetings between the board and staff, staff retreats, and leadership training to prepare for new roles, etc, as well as to build consensus on public messaging and/or interface with external stakeholders as the organisation seeks to rebuild trust and confidence in its work.
<b>ED recruitment strategy</b>	The process of recruitment of the new ED. It could be in-house recruitment from existing staff or external recruitment. Where the enforced transition happens before time for the implementation of a recruitment strategy, an acting ED may be appointed from amongst the staff as the full recruitment is undertaken.
<b>Role of former ED</b>	The former ED should prepare a comprehensive handover report that provides information on programmes, finances, and key stakeholder engagement. It could also include reflections on key issues that the new ED should pay specific attention to.

### 5.2.5 Application of the 8 core tenets during emergency executive leadership transition

Core Element	Description
<b>Succession Policy and/or Plan</b>	A succession plan with all the key aspects outlined in the description of the core tenets in 4.1 above
<b>Executive transition management policy and/or plan</b>	In addition to the core aspects described in 4.1 above, the policy should have specific provisions for emergency executive transitions and the conditions in which they can occur for instance, if the ED gets another job and gives short notice; if the ED's contract is terminated without notice; if the ED decides to relinquish the job without notice; or if the ED is physically incapable of carrying out their role. The policy should also provide for the process to be taken in such an emergency, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convening an emergency board (or board executive) meeting upon notification that the ED is leaving,</li> <li>• Identification and appointment of an acting ED to take position with immediate effect. This should be communicated to the incoming ED both verbally and in writing,</li> <li>• Where possible, the board chair and/or representatives to hold a meeting with the outgoing ED to obtain a handover report (preferably in writing or verbally) and the handover of any organisation property,</li> <li>• Board chair and/or other representatives to convene a meeting with the staff to inform them about the circumstances of the emergency transition and to address and questions/concerns they may have,</li> <li>• Board chair to communicate to key partners and/or stakeholders about the transition.</li> </ul>

Core Element	Description
<b>Duration of the Process</b>	Emergencies are immediate situations. The transition process, therefore, needs to commence immediately. The board may decide to appoint an interim ED from amongst the existing staff in the immediate and then plan a longer process to recruit a substantive ED. The board may also decide to appoint one of its members as the interim ED.
<b>Leadership/ Oversight</b>	The initial decision for an interim ED will most likely be taken by the whole board during an emergency meeting. The rest of the transition may then be delegated to an existing board sub-committee, a specially constituted committee to oversee the transition or by the board chair.
<b>Implementation</b>	The board (or delegated committee) should develop a detailed implementation plan and allocation of responsibilities, including whether there are aspects that should be externally contracted.
<b>Preparing the organisation for transition</b>	Specific interventions to prepare staff for the transition include an emergency meeting between board representatives and the staff to inform the latter of the pending transition and the immediate steps to handle the transition. If possible, the board should provide staff information about the short and longer-term plans to manage the transition.
<b>ED recruitment strategy</b>	Once an emergency transition is managed and an acting ED is in place, the board will then determine the process of recruitment of a substantive ED for instance in-house recruitment from existing staff or external recruitment.
<b>Role of former ED</b>	The outgoing ED should be required to provide a handover report and if that is not possible, to at least have a briefing with the Board and interim ED on key issues that the interim ED should be cognisant of. If the ED is not dismissed, they can also be asked to hold some meetings with the interim ED to provide further insights on the organisation and the role of the ED.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

Minimal emphasis is placed on building a sustainable organization through continuous leadership development and talent management in Uganda's NGO sector. Limited effort is put into strategizing, planning, and funding for both executive leadership transitions and succession planning.

Many executive directors have had to navigate the transition and succession management planning terrain on their own, in some cases drawing on advice from and support of a few trusted friends and colleagues. Furthermore, there is no mechanism and/or institution to support executive directors and CEOs of NGOs in Uganda to facilitate learning to improve leadership transition planning and management.

Executive transition management and succession planning have the potential to strengthen and transform the NGO sector in Uganda by ensuring that organizations have functional systems and structures, building and creating space for renewed leadership, perspectives, and ideas to guide the sector.

### This study makes the following recommendations for CivSource Africa:

Based on the findings of this study, CivSource could consider the following interventions in order to address some of the problems and gaps identified in this study:

- i. Offer **institutional strengthening support** for transition and succession planning as a matter of course to grantees/partners so that strategic approaches to transition and succession are important components in institutional strengthening.
- ii. Provide **targeted support services** to grantees/partners that have long-term/long-serving EDs/CEOs and those that request for support for executive succession and transition.
- iii. Establish a **transition grant** for executive search services by competent firms, for strategic planning, for coaching, and transition and succession consultancy services.

iv. The transition grant could also cover the acquisition of information and other in-kind resources to grantees/partners for their boards and EDs/CEOs, for example, publications, readers' guides, and communication strategies on transition and succession planning.

v. Create a **succession and transition planning assistance programme for NGOs** that meets the real and expressed needs of organizations using the findings from this study. Programme areas could include:

- Support to local leadership building capacity for the provision of succession and transition services that address the individual leadership development needs of NGOs using the findings from this study.
- Support to coaching for executives on transition and succession.
- Support for skills and knowledge generation and sharing on executive transition and succession for South to South learning. For example, roundtables, annual retreats, and knowledge hubs for information on organizations that have had successful transitions, etc.
- Support to board capacity strengthening including transition and succession planning.

vi. **Explore the possibility of designing a Board training and support programme:** As highlighted in this study, NGO Boards play a critical role in ensuring effective transitions as well as providing strategic guidance and oversight. CivSource Africa should carry out a more in-depth assessment on the nature of boards of NGOs, their performance, existing skills/capacities and identify ways in which to strengthen these.

## Annex 1: Organisations that participated in the study

No.	Name of NGO
1	Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA)
2	Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO Uganda)
3	Uganda National NGO Forum
4	National Association of Women with Disability Uganda (NUWODU)
5	Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA)
6	Women's International Peace Centre (WIPC)
7	Wizards Media
8	Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE)
9	ActionAid Uganda
10	Association of Women Lawyers Uganda (FIDA-U)
11	Freedom and Roam Uganda (FARUG)
12	The Taala Foundation
13	Cross-Cultural Foundation
14	Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE)
15	Women's Organization Network for Human Rights Advocacy (WONETHA)
16	Monitoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women (MEMPROW)

## Annex 2: Organisation documents reviewed

FIDA-Uganda: [CEO and Board Transition Policy Brief](#)

FIDA-Uganda: [Election Guidelines, 2017](#)

FIDA-Uganda: [Election Regulations, 2014](#)

FIDA-Uganda: [Call for nominations for election to FIDA-Uganda Board of Directors in the Annual General Meeting of 2020.](#)

Uganda Women's Network: [Constitution, 2014.](#)

Uganda Women's Network: [Human Resource Management Policy, 2020.](#)

Monitoring and Empowerment Programme for Young Women (MEMPROW): ["Transition" A power point presentation for the Board.](#)

MEMPROW Board Transitional Strategic Meeting: [Facilitators Report, August 2017.](#)

MEMPROW Concept Note: [Board engagement in MEMPROW's leadership Transition Processes.](#)

### Annex 3: References

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# **CivSource Africa**

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**Plot 18, Balikuddembe Road,  
Naguru Kampala, Uganda  
P.O Box 4310 Tel: +256 393 224 056  
[civsourceafrica.com](http://civsourceafrica.com) | [info@civsourcea.com](mailto:info@civsourcea.com)**