

# Building Leadership out of Conflict

BY MATT ANDREWS

NOTHING SHOWCASES LEADERSHIP—or its absence—like a crisis. This is perhaps why leaders are so well known in countries that have emerged from conflict with some success. Many identify Nelson Mandela as the reason South Africa avoided bloodshed after apartheid and Paul Kagame as having made the difference in Rwanda after the genocidal killings of 1994. Defining moments of Middle-East peace are represented in vivid pictures of Israeli and Palestinian leaders embracing or shaking hands. But do these individual “leaders” provide the source of leadership? Do these handshake moments define it? What opportunities exist to promote leadership in fragile and post-conflict situations?

## ◆ From leaders to leadership

SOCIAL, LEGAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC institutions are important buffers of crisis. Strong institutions help get things done in ways that are sanctioned by society. They enable a dynamic equilibrium vital to growth and development and ensure this equilibrium is maintained or restored in the face of crisis. But countries face major problems where institutions are absent, deficient, hotly contested, or themselves a source of inequality and oppression. Crises can brew for long periods of time under such conditions. When the crises mature, stability slips away and conflict erupts.

◆ Conflict is itself an ongoing deepening of crisis. It amplifies the effects of calamitous problems such as chronic unem-



Adults in the village of Gashaki, Rwanda, are leveling the ground for the construction of a local school building. This community has achieved impressive results under the Vision 2020 Umurenge Program launched by the Government of Rwanda.

ployment, disease, lawlessness and corruption. Leaders often emerge from such situations, resolving conflict and apparently re-establishing stability. But stability may be short-lived when leaders are really just victors in a high-stakes “winner takes all” scenario that fuels continued conflict. The experiences of many of Africa’s “Big Men” tell this story. Thankfully, this stands in contrast to other accounts, in countries such as Mozambique and Rwanda, where leaders have emerged as brokers of peace, guarantors of stability and even catalysts for post-conflict growth.

These leaders fill the institutional voids that created vulnerability in the first place. They find opportunities for leadership in the deepened crisis of conflict, much as the management and political science literature suggests they should, and emerge as champions of change for their people. But not only (or even) because they are victors, authoritarians or charismatic stand-outs. More than any of these characteristics, which usually come to mind when hearing the word “leader,” stories of successful leadership in these contexts and others center on the how individuals helped *build coalitions around common desires to overcome conflict and crisis*.

Often these coalitions were built by many parties, from within and outside the country, stretching beyond the media-acclaimed leaders we may ultimately see shaking hands in the lasting images. The importance of broad and engaged networks of players is universal, where different parties bring different elements of a final leadership solution to a larger constituency and together they achieve their purpose. Prominent players like Mandela or Kagame helped to establish the common vision and set the tone for the climate of trust and dialogue that proved so vital to building coalitions. But others built the bridges and persuaded recalcitrant parties to cross them. They helped find the resources, conduct the necessary meetings, and otherwise connect nodes in the complex social and political webs that characterize countries emerging from conflict. Together, individuals connected in networks thus provide leadership: they intentionally mobilize people, ideas, meaning and resources toward achieving a purpose—in the best instance choosing the path towards peace and stability after a conflict.

## The challenge beyond conflict resolution

IN MANY RESPECTS, the real work begins once the conflict is resolved. However, governments may then face devastating weaknesses in their social, economic and political institutions, including destabilizing problems like unemployment and an inability to deliver basic services. With scant capacity, these governments must take steps to produce peace dividends in the short term, while at the same time building sustainable institutional structures that can provide a buffer against crises in the future.

The problems post-conflict governments face are often seen as technical, in contrast to the adaptive challenge of dealing with the conflict itself. International development organizations

play a big role in defining steps at this juncture, and provide crucial support for social and financial stability, often with both money and military presence. The donor community’s agendas often place a high priority on building the long-term institutional fabric that is seen as deficient and contributing to the conflict. Most conflict-affected countries thus allocate lots of capacity to writing procurement and civil service laws needed to secure funding from external partners.

While these steps are no doubt valuable in the long-term, and earn the countries’ legitimacy in the eyes of their international supporters, this may do little to ensure continued domestic support and legitimacy in the short term. It is quite common for a President in these circumstances to receive international accolades as a great leader, only to face increasing opposition at home, and ultimately lose office. Why?

One explanation is simply that the re-building process is largely internally-focused. The goal is to make the country better for its citizens, but the resources and support for the process must come from the outside. This splits the attention, time and capacities of leaders, often leading them to devote insufficient attention to the home-front. A second explanation is that, while post conflict reconstruction is treated as a technical challenge requiring specific technical capacities and inputs, it is actually an adaptive leadership challenge, requiring the kinds of networked leadership solutions used to deal with the earlier conflict resolution challenge. When these solutions fail to emerge, and local issues and players feel under-served in the new governments, old crises may begin to accumulate and the potential for conflict resurfaces.



President Paul Kagame (L) stands with wife Jeanette as they preside over a ceremony commemorating the 15th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide at a mass-burial site in Nyanza, near Kigali.



## Promoting leadership in post conflict development

SOME COUNTRIES have dealt with these problems better than others, and offer lessons about continued leadership that ensures adequate fertile space for engagement and results, allowing short-term dividends to emerge while simultaneously building an institutional framework for better development outcomes in the future. Rwanda is an example of this, as are Sierra Leone, Burundi and the Central African Republic. Specific interventions in these countries focused on developing leadership to solve urgent problems ranging from poor service delivery to an inadequate justice system to environmental degradation and even disputes around land reforms.

The Global Leadership Initiative (GLI), a multi-donor working group led by the World Bank Institute, has been following these and other leadership support activities in Afghanistan, Kenya, Kosovo, Rwanda, Timor Leste and Uganda. Observations to date suggest that leadership can be broadly developed in fragile and post conflict states—and others—as fostering development more generally. Lessons are emerging from the GLI about exactly how leadership works, what it looks like, and why it matters.

The first lesson is that leadership is facilitated by a sense of shared purpose, especially in response to a crisis. The tendency in many post-conflict situations is to focus on moving beyond the crisis, taking a sigh of relief that the fighting is over, when in fact the underlying factors of the crises may still fester below the surface. However, leadership can be developed around these crises, making them opportunities for social reconstruction.

This is especially the case where crises have been de-constructed into smaller chunks, and tackled in ways that produce clearly demonstrable and achievable goals and solutions. For example, officials in Burundi proved their ability to gradually

deal with a legacy of crises in service delivery by ensuring the safe delivery of school text books with the help of a rapid results project. Rwandan authorities dealt with the judicial and representation crises that helped destabilize the country prior to 1994 by creating local courts and *Imhigos* (indigenous performance contracts), clearly demonstrating a new approach to governance, and achieving development results.


The second lesson centers on the importance of building coalitions to deal with manageable crises. Coalitions emerge when players concerned about achieving a similar purpose know that they cannot do it alone, and seek support from others. Often these relationships are brokered in broad social networks by bridging parties not even in the formal coalition, including, for example, the clergy, or even donors. The various parties to the coalition have different roles, which the coalition arrangements clarify, and these relate across formal boundaries in a horizontal manner, creating organizational structures that are quite different to the usual hierarchies found in developing-country governments.

A third lesson is that parties involved in these interventions tend to identify multiple rather than individual leaders, emphasizing the idea that it is the process of “leadership” that matters more than the “leaders” themselves. It follows that leaders are identified more often for what they do to achieve the common purpose, than who they are. Three main roles center on (i) creating acceptance for the purpose at hand, (ii) building authority to achieve this purpose, and (iii) enhancing the coalition’s ability to achieve the purpose, by mobilizing funds, people and even information. The connections among multiple players thus manifests itself in leadership. This creates the space to achieve a purpose, even in post-conflict countries where the capacity to achieve results is scant on the ground.

A final and concluding lesson coming out of the Global Leadership Initiative is: Outside interventions can help to

facilitate, motivate and stimulate leadership in conflict affected states—especially in the period following the initial euphoria over conflict resolution. In this endeavor, a manageable crisis may prove invaluable, along with a commitment to working broadly across networks and in unconventional structures, and a desire to really get things done. 🐾

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