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RESEARCH REPORT

AN ANALYSIS OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS AND GOVERNANCE WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN GHANA

By
Solomon Kofi Amoah
Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Cape Coast
2017 Research Fellow
West Africa Civil society Institute (WACSI)

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West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI)

No. 9 Bingo Street, East Legon P.O.

Box AT 1956, Achimota

Accra, Ghana

Email: research@wacsi.org

Tel: +233 (0) 302 550 224

NB: The views expressed in this research are entirely those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of WACSI or its partners.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

ED: Executive Director

ISTR: International Society for Third Sector Research

NGO: Nongovernmental Organisation

WACSI: West Africa Civil Society Institute

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERMS

Organised Civil Society: Civil society organisations that are formally established with a
coherent governing document and bound by the company's code.
Such an organisation is required to have some degree of
operational formality.

Board: The term board is used in this study to generally refer to the
governing body which serves as the trustee of the public in a
nonprofit organisation. It connotes the council or board of directors
depending on the creation of the particular nonprofit.

Sustainability: There are several definitions of sustainability some of which are
very technical. The concept of sustainability is used in this study to
refer to the ability of an organisation to cope or adapt to changes
and ensure the effective use of resources to maintain its mission
and relevance now and in the future to come.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many civil society organisations (CSOs) lack governance structures and systems to support effective leadership transitions. Evidence indicates that a few organisations have plans in place to help manage leadership transition processes. This has led to a situation where organisations have been left in turmoil when founding executive directors leave. This report is an analysis of the governance structures and leadership transitions in select CSOs in Ghana. It is based on evidence from fieldwork carried out in Ghana involving fifteen research participants; ten of whom have been leaders of civil society organisations or currently serve as executive directors. The study explored governance structures, systems and processes within CSOs in Ghana and how leadership transitions and successions are managed in these organisations. The research also analysed the implications of succession planning for CSOs' sustainability and proffers measures for strengthening governance and healthy leadership transitions.

This study was conducted mainly through interviews, focus group discussions and field observations. The following are the key findings of the study:

1. Sixty percent of executive directors and founders expressed a limited understanding of governance. Many of these participants tend to confuse governance roles in their organisations with management functions. Whilst all the organisations had governing bodies, many of them were not effective as a result of their initial constitution. Many of the governing bodies were constituted based on relations rather than professional interest thus, the systems that facilitate effective governance were in many cases underdeveloped.

2. A majority of CSO leaders emphasise the importance of the governance structures of their organisations for effective control and accountability. However, in discussing these systems, they tend to emphasise their overriding importance for meeting the expectations of donors, with little regard for other stakeholders. Other stakeholders, including academics and public sector officials, reiterated the need for broader accountability practices that involve all stakeholders including beneficiaries and staff of CSOs.

3. Leadership transitions are an important concern to CSO leaders, yet the study found that most CSOs and their boards are not proactive about dealing with the challenges of transitions. This is evident in organisations with long serving founding leaders.

4. All, except for one of the CSOs studied, did not have formal succession plans in place at the time of the study. In a few instances, succession plans were being developed after the organisations had gone through the experience of a leadership transition, primarily influenced by the threats and challenges the change presented.

5. The study also uncovered two divergent experiences of leadership transitions, one being smooth and the other, more challenging. Neither of the two cases followed a formal succession planning process. Some of the developments were largely unplanned and spontaneous; and the internal responses were largely at the discretion of the executive leadership.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, there has been an evolving debate on CSOs' governance and accountability around the world (Carothers, 1999, p.19; Schmitz, Raggo & Vijfeijken, 2012; WACSI, 2015). This has mainly been due to the growing relationship between CSOs and development aid programmes, international institutions as well as the accusations of corruption and inefficiency levelled against select CSOs (Bendell, 2006; Trivunovic, Johnsøn & Mathisen, 2011). CSOs, particularly Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), have often been at the forefront of development project implementation, which often involves large funds in the form of aid. While this risk is an important concern, both CSOs and international donors have not been able to effectively manage these risks (Trivunovic et al., 2011). However, in many of the discourses on accountability, the focus has been on external accountability with very little emphasis on internal accountability, which often derives from effective governance structures and systems. It is this internal accountability which, when ensured in the governance and structural mechanisms of the organisation, eventually yields accountability to the people affected by the work of the CSOs, funders, governments and the international institutions. Researchers have underscored the need for CSOs to be "inwardly accountable to themselves for their organisational mission, values, and staff" (WACSI, 2015, p.82) even as they strive to be accountable upward to their funders, downward to their beneficiaries and horizontally to their peers.

Most CSOs are still accused of not being very transparent and accountable, especially regarding financial resources **(**Schmitz et al., 2012) and internal structure due to their informal structures and ad hoc mode of functioning (Linnell, 2010). They often lack functional policies, structures and systems, which are essential to control and accountability (Linnell, 2004, p.10; WACSI, 2015, p.60).

Another problem identified in CSOs is that of institutional growth. It is often difficult for these organisations to create independent governance systems with expert roles to help them thrive. Hence, many civil society groups and organisations have not been able to remain relevant and influential in society. While this problem is not peculiar to organisations in the non-profit sector, it is crucial because of their public nature.

It is important to recognize that the policy and strategic directions of organisations, including policy formulation, decision making and oversight, are the responsibility of governing boards. The appointment of the executive director is an essential role of the governing board, which includes the determination of compensation and conditions of service as well as the definition of accountability mechanisms and performance appraisal (McKee & Driscoll, 2008). In addition, boards play a critical role in managing transitions from one executive director to another.

Even though leadership transitions present great challenges to all forms of organisations, there are equally good opportunities in transitions. Indeed, Allison (2002) has argued that organisations with an effective governing structure of a properly constituted board and following well designed governance processes can become stronger through leadership transitions. Many have described leadership transitions as challenging and complex because of the uncertain outcomes of the event.

Executives in non–profit organisations are described as central to organisational operations and therefore overreliance on them makes organisations more susceptible to disruptions brought about by executive turnover (Stewart, 2016). While many reports exist of the demise of organisations due to executive transitions, there is also documented evidence of organisational qualities that buffer against turnover disruptions often found in the existence of appropriate governance structures, systems and processes (Stewart, 2016, p.45). In Ghana, while many organised civil society have significantly worked to develop long-term strategic plans; administrative and financial policies, with clearly defined governance roles, governance and leadership continues to be an important discussion of civil society sustainability.

The discussions on CSO sustainability have been overly focused on financial sustainability. Some aspects of operational sustainability have been given attention (Lewis, Boateng & Hayman, 2015; Darkwa, Amponsah & Gyampoh, 2006), however, the critical role of governance and leadership has been largely absent.

A study by the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) found that civil society sustainability has 4 components including financial, operational, identity and intervention sustainability (2015, p.13-14). Nonetheless, WACSI's research did not emphasise leadership transition as a core aspect of CSO sustainability. In a related study, Kreutzer (2009) explored non-profit governance during organisational transitions in select Swiss voluntary associations. This study however was focused on organisational transitions other than leadership transitions.

There have been a few studies in which the problem of boards and executive transitions have been given attention (see eg: Allison, 2002; Chapman & Vogelsang, 2005; Mckee & Driscoll, 2008; Froelich, Mckee & Rathge, 2011; Stewart, 2016). Many of these have however been carried out in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and other European nations, all of which have different legislative and geopolitical contexts compared to Ghana. Some of these existing studies have also been approached in ways conceptually different from this paper. While Stewart's (2016) study particularly gives some insight into executive turnover in the non-profit sector, methodologically, Stewart's focus on current executives who have experienced recent turnover limits the perspectives of other informants who may likely hold useful "outsider" perspectives.

While the subject of CSO internal structuring, leadership and executive transitions has gained great attention among practitioners around the world, not much exists in terms of research on the subject in West Africa and Ghana in particular. There is therefore a dearth of data on CSOs' governance and leadership, especially with respect to successions in these organisations in Ghana. There are several reasons why the context of Ghana is important in this study. In the developed world, where much of the earlier studies were conducted as has been noted, there are initiatives of self- appointed watchdogs within the nonprofit sector (Gordon, Knock & Neely, 2009; Sloan, 2009) which exert some level of influence on the functioning of CSOs. These aside, there are external and independent efforts to hold all registered nonprofit organisations accountable in those jurisdictions (Schmitz et al., 2012) which is a rare commodity in Ghana. Even though many of these external independent control mechanisms have been criticized as ensuring upward accountability at the expense of internal and lateral accountability (Ebrahim, 2005, p. 18), their existence have yielded some effective governance systems and structures over the years.[1]

Also, the discussion of civil society sustainability in developing countries like Ghana is taking centre stage in the face of dwindling international donor funding. One unquestionable fact is that most CSOs in the developing world have largely depended on grants from the international donor community. This has been the dominant model especially in Africa. However, there is evidence to the effect that this funding option is fast changing. In line with this change, there is a renewed interest in how to get beneficiary communities involved in keeping civic activity alive in these countries. This was at least clear in the presentations of the key note address and of many panelists at the 4th ISTR Africa Network conference held in Accra in June 2017. In countries like Ghana, the graduation from lower income to middle income status has resulted in some curtailment of previous international aid programmes to the country. Indeed, as Pratt (2016, p. 527) notes, "some donors have a legal obligation not to provide funds in middle-income countries".

The above situation pushes discourse on civil society sustainability to the table and raises concerns about internal, lateral and downward accountability for a thriving third sector. These are governance roles and responsibilities and therefore having a baseline data on the state of CSO governance and leadership as factors of sustainability in Ghana serves to illuminate our understanding of governance and especially leadership transitions. The present study was therefore an attempt to explore the governance structures of organised civil society in Ghana and their effectiveness in managing leadership transitions. It evaluates the governance systems of selected organisations and how executive transitions are managed in them. The study's focus on

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[1] See Schmitz et al. (2012) for details on some of the dividends of external controls on NGOs in other countries.

sustainability also draws attention to governance and leadership as key components of CSO sustainability, thereby satisfying some conceptual and theoretical gaps in the existing literature.

1.1.2   The Concept of Governance

The term governance has a Latin origin which means to steer or give direction (Cornforth, 2012, p.8). Gill (2001) defines governance as "the processes, structures, and organisational traditions that *determine* how power is exercised, how stakeholders have their say, how decisions are taken and how decision makers are held accountable" (2001, p.1 emphasis added). Similarly, Cornforth (2004) defines organisational governance as "the systems and processes concerned with ensuring the overall direction, control and accountability of an organisation" (Cornforth, 2012, p.8).

The process is also described by Hughes (2010) to mean making collective decisions about important issues, including the purpose of collective action, strategies for achieving purpose, and oversight and accountability mechanisms" (2010). While acknowledging that governance could take place at several levels, the present focus is on governance at the organisational level.

Governance structure is taken from the perspective of Gill to mean a distinctive set or cluster of 'systems', responsibilities (functions) and processes (practices) that are logically consistent with one another (Gill, 2001, p.10). From this perspective, structures and systems are applied interchangeably in the present study based on their logical consistency and not to argue that the two are [always] one and the same.

The body with the main responsibility to carry out the governance functions of an organisation is the board or whatever the governing body of the organisation may be. That said, the governance system goes beyond just the board to include the general framework of responsibilities within which an organisation operates. This is defined to include the regulatory, audit and reporting requirements and relations with stakeholders of the organisation. It also includes other actors within the organisation who contribute in various capacities towards carrying out the governance functions (Cornforth, 2012, p.9). These actors may include managers, staff, members and other advisory groups within and outside the organisation.

2.1 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

The argument of this study is that CSO sustainability has everything to do with governance and leadership. The study is therefore within the framework of civil society sustainability as well as Mace's managerial hegemony theory (Mace, 1971). There are four key dimensions of CSO sustainability under which some fifteen indicators can be discussed.[2] The dimensions include financial, interventions, identity and operational sustainability. The present study focuses on the operational and identity dimensions of sustainability (Vandyck, 2017). While Vandyck presents a more holistic view of sustainability to include some global factors, the importance of internal structuring (what is termed controllable factors) for CSO sustainability cannot be overemphasised. The study therefore concentrates on governance and leadership structure, legitimacy and accountability systems as factors of sustainability.

As a complementing theory, Mace's managerial hegemony[3] theory throws more light on governance and leadership as key factors of sustainability. The theory holds that due mainly to the voluntary nature of CSOs governing boards and the subsequent constraint on the time of board members, the power of CSO boards are *practically* limited thereby ceding control to managing directors and their staff (Kreutzer, 2009, p. 119). This situation according to the theory consequently renders governing boards symbolic and makes their roles those of "rubber stamps". The present study argues among other things that this hegemony threatens the sustainability of CSOs considering the pivotal nature of governance and leadership to civil society sustainability.

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[2] WACSI (2015) gives some details on these indicators among other discussions on sustainability.

[3] The concept of hegemony dates back to the works of the Hegelian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci. It was Gramsci's central concept which reflects his Hegelianism (See Ritzer, 2008, p. 139-144). Gramsci defines hegemony as a cultural leadership exercised by the ruling class. His concept of hegemony contrasts the coercion as "exercised by legislative and executive powers, or expressed through police interventions" (Gramsci, 1932/1975, p.235). Unlike Gramsci's application of the concept to capitalism, Mace uses it to explain institutional governance or leadership. In its original application, Gramsci used it to explain how some intellectuals working on behalf of the capitalists, achieved cultural leadership with the express approval of the masses.

3.1   RESEARCH CONTEXT, SCOPE AND LIMITATION

There are two broad categories of civil society in Ghana. They include the loose groups termed the "organic" mostly driven by interests and urgency and the "organised" civil society with formalised operational structures and systems (Vandyck, 2017). The organic groups are not the interest of the present study because the study explores governance systems and structures which are mostly absent in the organic types of civil society. This focuses on the organised civil society with emphasis on their governance systems and leadership transitions.

While there exist many definitions of what organised civil society is, the structural and operational definition given by Salamon and Anheier (1992) and cited by Lewis (2001, p.37), highlights many of the key characteristics exhibited by many CSOs. These characteristics include volunteerism, independence, organisation and non-profit distribution. It is generally expected that the organisations which make up organised civil society should have a degree of formality. Some argue that these organisations must be formally established with a coherent governing document, display transparency and generally conduct themselves in a manner that is 'consistent with high standards of management' (Garton, 2009). It is this kind of organisation that helps us distinguish organised civil society from acts of altruism often undertaken by individuals on a less formal basis. As emphasised by Garton (2009), it is "desirable that CSOs are not merely organised but organised according to principles of sound management" (2009, p.37). Some recommend an 'adequate governing structure', whilst others talk about 'organisational integrity' when we speak of properly organised civil society which is distinguishable from the informal sector.

In line with the interest of this study (exploring the governance and leadership structures of CSOs and how transitions of leaders are managed in them), organisations with some level of formality are selected. The minimum selection criteria therefore were that an organisation must have first and foremost been formally registered with some level of operational structure. The selection of the sample organisations was purely purposive. It was limited to certain organisations selected either based on their experiences with leadership transitions, size or the length of stay of their founding leaders in office. Beyond these organisations, an attempt was made to have the perspective of some other experts and practitioners knowledgeable on the subject matter. The researcher admits that this selection is limited thereby making the sample non-representative of the vast population of the civil society sector. While aware of the limitation of generalisation with this approach, respondent representativeness is not the main interest of the study considering its interpretivist approach to enquiry. It sought a qualitative appreciation of the research problem.

4.1   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a purely qualitative approach. The researcher's wish was to select a manageable number of organisations and their leaders for a comprehensive appreciation of the research problem. The case study and cross-sectional designs were believed to be the most appropriate designs to guide the research in terms of its context –specific focus (Blaikie, 2010) in getting detailed information regarding the governance and leadership of specific organisation types.

In terms of sampling, the study selected some key civil society organisations for in-depth analysis of their governance structures, processes and approach to managing leadership transitions. It therefore focused on a population of CSO leaders, members, and experts (including academics, media practitioners and some political actors) in Ghana. In the selection of key informants, only top and middle level personnel of CSOs were considered for the study. The thinking was that having worked in the civil society space in privileged positions, leaders of these organisations would possess in-depth knowledge on the subject matter. The study sampled 15 participants for the key informant and expert interviews, and 9 participants for a focus group discussion (FGD) session. Considering its qualitative approach, respondent representativeness was not prioritised in this research. In line with this, it used non- probability sampling strategies in reaching these participants. It employed purposive and snowball techniques in the selection of the key informants, experts and focus group discussants.

For a detailed understanding of the subject matter, the study employed a multiple of qualitative methods in the gathering of its primary information. It employed interviews, observation and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Interview guides were developed to conduct key informant and expert interviews on CSOs' governance and leadership transitions. FGD guide was also developed to guide the conduct of the focus group on some themes of the research. Aside these methods, the researcher embarked on some field visits to the selected organisations to observe the work environment and how these organisations run either prior to the interviews or after. Some official documents were also perused during this stage of the study.

The data from the field were transcribed and organised into themes for easy appreciation and analysis. As usual with most qualitative research, a huge amount of data was generated; some of which were not very useful in the present study. Data reduction was therefore done to determine which part of the data is meaningful and significant in the context of the present study. During this exercise, the raw data was transformed into simplified data formats that could be well appreciated in the context of the objectives of the study.

The data analysis was done using content and thematic analysis. Emerging themes were identified in the data and examined for their patterns and how their interpretations fit into the general framework of the problem of study. The analysis of the data began during the data collection stage to help organise the emerging themes for examination as they appeared in the subsequent data. The patterns or common themes that emerged in the text of the data were examined to see how they shed light on the research objectives. Patterns and relationships observed within and across groups were presented and discussed. Where deviations existed, factors responsible for those atypical responses were examined and presented as well.

4.2   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There is the need for researchers to anticipate the ethical issues that may arise during their studies and address them (Blaikie, 2010). The basic ethical principles of research were adhered to in the planning, execution and report of this research. Participants' rights to decision and protection from harm were safeguarded under the project. First, the central intent and purpose of this study was well communicated to the participants before securing their consent to participate in both the interview and FGDs, and before tape recorders were used. Respondent confidentiality and anonymity is protected as well. No information given was or will be released to any third party. Also, names and positions of respondents and their organisations are excluded from the text of this report and its discussion. In cases where names are necessary for impact, pseudo names have been used to keep the ethical standards.

5.1   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Acknowledging the limitations of the findings at this stage is important. The study primarily used interviews, focus group and a few observations. This prevents the effective use of multiple data sources for triangulation. These methods were however deliberate considering the exploratory nature of the research. The researcher was well aware of the sensitivity of the subject of leadership transitions within CSOs in the Ghanaian context. While admitting the inability to carry out proper data triangulation, the deliberate diversity of the respondent selection for the interviews offers some great validity for the findings.

One can admit that selecting respondents purposively and by snowballing does not constitute an exhaustive scope of perspectives on the subject. However, interviewing 15 different respondents ranging from practitioners to academics of different institutional backgrounds, gave the study multiple perspectives of agreements and disagreements on the subject. The wide and varied selection of the respondents was an effort to enhance validity and also reduce biases. The case being researched into required identifying participants who can provide information about the subject and the context within which it is being analysed. So, while the actors within the civil society space are numerous, there are still people who are key and deemed better informed on the subject of the present study. In its present form however, the findings have limits of generalisability but provides a unique baseline for further enquiry and even more case studies.

Following the 12th interview, the data gathered begun to show some redundancy in several respects indicating data saturation. The remaining three interviews were however done because howbeit little, the researcher thought they will bring some varied insights. To further increase the validity of the interviews and observational notes, some of the participants were given the opportunity to validate the accuracy of the verbatims after the transcriptions were done. The FGD was also in some sense an attempt to confirm, corroborate or dispute participant information put out during the interviews. It is important to state that meaning in this study is jointly constructed. What is presented here is therefore a joint interpretation of both the interviewer and the interviewee of what the meaning of a particular context is.

5.2   GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND SYSTEMS IN CSOs

Governance and executive leadership are probably the two most critical components that explain the success or otherwise of nonprofit organisations (Carothers 1999; Froelich, Mckee & Rathge, 2011). This is essentially because non-governmental organisations are not exactly subject to the rigorous regimes that other state agencies are subject to. Therefore, CSOs are by themselves supposed to develop effective internal standards and systems to ensure control and accountability

(Trivunovic, 2011). It becomes imperative therefore for CSOs to have governance structures and systems that specify accountability, internal conflict of interest rules, clear operational policies and financial management systems that are in line with good practice.

For there to be a thriving third sector, the governing processes of CSOs must be clear to include the basic responsibilities and powers of their respective governance organs and operational structures, membership rules and terms of office (length of term and limits on re-elections) and other decision-making procedures. One could speak of conflict of interest provisions for both the board and management, as well as board member remunerations. Other considerations include board competencies which could cover a review of the CEO or ED's performance, review of financial management performance, responsibility in the recruitment of CEO and the management of executive transitions among others. It has been argued and rightly so that a review of the soundness of the governance structures of CSOs in terms of their adherence to these indicators is what differentiates them from profit making and private enterprises.

The other concern (mostly driven by donors) is the existence of sound financial management systems. This is demonstrated in the existence of basic accounting practices, financial reporting and record-keeping, audit practices and fraud prevention practices among others.

It is important that the policy formulation and guidance role of governing boards be understood and separated from the purpose of management. Management and governance should not be confused with one another. These are and should be separate functions (Howe, 1995). From Carver's (1990) policy governance model, the board is always in the driver's seat while recognising the key roles of management in attaining the goals of the organisation. The model proposes a system that allows the board to deal with policy without meddling in the operation or programming of the organisation. The board is supposed to give strategic direction while the management led by the chief executive concentrates on the implementation of the strategy.

The present study had as one of its objectives to explore the governance structures and systems existing in the selected organisations. The finding with respect to this shows that all the organisations studied – small and big, theoretically had governance structures and in some cases systems in place. This is however not so because these structures were in all cases established true to the real purpose they serve. They are required in registering these organisations. For some of the CSOs therefore, these structures and systems only exist on paper. Its theoretical existence also aids in the sourcing of funds and reporting to donors but were not operational in practice.

Within the civil society sector, internal accountability mechanisms are institutionalised through an effective governance structure. There are a set of standards within civil society that are agreed to be the main indicators of effective governance structures (Trivunovic, 2011); and in many

jurisdictions, these standards exist as self-regulatory mechanisms. These self–regulatory mechanisms may include a clear governance structure in terms of the role of the principal governing body (in this case, the Board or Executive council) with clear separation from the management.

Regarding these governance structures, while all the organisations had governing bodies, many of them were not effective. The ineffectiveness of many of the governing bodies who are the trustees of the public was found to originate from their initial constitution. The dominant situation in most small organisations sampled as regards governance structures is epitomized in the following response given by one executive director of an NGO in a telephone interview when he was asked about how the present governing board of his organisation was constituted:

> "...it was something of a flash, like we had not actually talked so much about what even goes into constituting a board, ok, so we just came up with some people that we thought had much interest in what we did and, who also have the skill and then the knowledge in the field. So basically, that has been it. We looked out for people with integrity; some level of pedigree and also very much educated" (Interview with Barnes on August 3, 2017).

Clearly, in the above quote, the foundation is weak. It was the case in many of the NGOs. Many of the participants admitted that the governance structures and systems in their organisations were not really thought through and therefore the accompanying processes become deficient.

A majority of the CSO leaders emphasised the importance of their governance structures for effective control and accountability. Quite curiously however, in discussing these systems, they tend to emphasise their overriding importance for meeting the expectations of donors rather than ensuring internal control and good governance practices. Academics and politicians on the other hand noted strongly the need for broader accountability practices that involve all stakeholders including beneficiaries, staff and members of the CSOs themselves.

In the present study, we found that there were no proper financial control mechanisms in place in smaller CSOs allowing for arbitrary use of financial resources by founders, executive directors and other members of the organisations. For some of these organisations, they simply could not afford these financial and accounting systems and the personnel that come with it.

Another observation was that in cases where there were long-serving executive directors or founders, it so happens that so many people within the organisation report directly to them. This renders the need for structures useless. In most cases, the founder possessed much of the knowledge base and institutional memory of the organisation. This situation further limits the opportunity for other members and staff of the organisation to develop their own leadership abilities and potentials. So, as would become clear in latter parts of this report, not only are

succession plans absent in most of the CSOs studied but also, there are no effective structures and systems in place to sustain the organisations if their current leadership leaves. The governing boards which would be saddled with the responsibility of managing the leadership transition if it happens are either "non-existent" or ineffective.

In sum, many of the structures, systems and procedures in most of the organisations remain undeveloped. In effect, there are no safety nets in place and therefore in the event of a sudden departure of the leader or founder, these organisations will indeed be hamstrung. Some executive directors of these non-profits hold close to their chests all the key information regarding the organisation, key documents on contracts, accounts and investment details and even computer passwords in some cases. These organisations may be functioning and vibrant alright but may cease to operate by the mere absence of the founder or leader. Some share comments to the effect that the organisation is their "baby", their "idea", their "vision" for which reason they are best suited to nurture it.

The study can speak of two different kinds of boards. The first is so busy, uninterested and uninvolved from the perspective of the respondents. The other extreme is the overly involved and meddling board. While the first presents a challenge of producing a hegemonic management who together with staff clothes itself with the powers of the board, the second situation of board governance also breeds conflicts between the management and staff and the board. In the latter, the boards according to the respondents meddled in the day to day management of the organisation and therefore had clashes with executive directors and in some cases, staff of the organisation over how certain processes should run. In one such case encountered in this study, the situation ignited a feud between the executive director and the board chairman which eventually led to the premature departure of the executive director. It is important to note however that while the earlier case of board behaviour exists in most of the organisations observed, the latter is a rare case. It appears the likelihood of conflicts between boards and the executive leadership are common only in networks and membership –based organisations as compared to individual organisations. The reason is obvious. In many of the individual organisations, the board is often appointed by the executive director or founding leader and therefore everything is according to the whims and caprices of this leader.

One important deduction that can be made from the findings is that one of the key reasons for which CSO leaders enjoy weak governing boards is for flexibility. They want to be able to change their focus wherever and whenever they find needful. This partly accounts for the demand for a regulatory framework for the non-profit sector, with a tight requirement for CSOs being to remain true to their vision and mission. In such a framework, if an organisation must change its vision or

mission, it has to go back to the registration authority and change it. You cannot be a governance NGO then when you see free maize coming from USA for distribution, immediately you start distributing maize. Unfortunately, however, this is the common behaviour of some of the nongovernmental organisations studied. They are project dependent and so their focus changes according to the wind of aid flow. Such organisations and their leaders are not fans of effective governing boards and processes.

In some of the big national organisations, sound governance structures and systems were found to exist but not in the smaller organisations. According to leaders of the smaller NGOs, they do not have the financial resources to support these governance systems even though they recognise their importance. As the findings show, leaders and especially founding managers get used to having absolute control and doing things their way. They usually want to continue to hire and fire staff at will and control access to financial accounts which good governance structures will not permit. One can argue based on the same field interviews and focus group discussions that this largely accounts for the lack of governance structures and systems in many of these organisations other than the lack of capacity as is argued by some practitioners.

The need or desire for structures and systems usually per the observations in this research and some interviews create challenges within the organisations especially between passionate old members and staff and new comers who in most cases are less fiercely passionate. Some executive directors especially founding directors do not understand why one should question their organisational structures and the loosely defined roles of actors when that is what in their view has always worked for the organisation. This seeming little disagreements can launch the organisation into what Linnell (2004) calls "all-out battles between the champions of mission and the champions of systems" (2004, p.10). There are the founder –type personalities who bully staff and members under the guise of the mission or cause of the organisation or movement. This was also observed particularly in two of the organisations during the field visits. Sometimes these leaders felt that what they demand is politically right or even that their way is always the right way. Some of these leadership attitudes were even noticeable through careful observation without asking questions.

Good and effective governance in CSOs is important for two key reasons: (i) CSOs use public funds – whether internally or external, [it is still from *some public*]; and (ii) they are intended as organisations to influence public business. Considering their important roles in society, the weak internal governance and accountability of CSOs whether real or perceived, is an important problem worthy of attention (Moore & Stewart, 1998). This problem goes to the core of CSO sustainability because some governments may leverage non-accountability (and sole

accountability to foreign donors) as an excuse to control and harass CSOs. Many CSOs are said to set themselves up as experts or specialists on problems that are defined by themselves. They are accused of living almost entirely on foreign funds and could therefore do whatever they please provided they find a way to make their funders happy. While this may not be a true representation of CSOs in Ghana, the absence of effective governing bodies (who are the trustees of the public), tends to give credence to these accusations.

Even though non-profit organisations are mostly non-governmental, they are public entities just like government and its agencies. Their effective management is therefore essential. As public entities, they are expected to be accountable or bear some responsibility towards stakeholders of public funds, private donors, members and staff. CSOs in Ghana have often demanded for good governance from political/ state actors in the public sector. While calling governments to order, many of these CSOs often downplay the importance of the effectiveness of their own institutional governance and accountability. How individual organisations are run internally affects their credibility, effectiveness and viability as organisations and this cannot be overemphasised.

Unlike other jurisdictions where there is proper supervision and higher expectations of public accountability, CSOs in Ghana have not been that responsible and accountable even to the state and its people. Speaking to practitioners in the present study, the dominant argument is that they [CSOs] do not benefit directly from state funds. Assuming without admitting that this argument is so, these practitioners often forget however that CSOs unlike the private sector are public organisations from which high accountability and corporate responsibility is expected whether or not their funding source is the state. Besides, it is based on their public nature/ interest that certain privileges and exemptions are granted them by the state.

It appears in some of the organisations in this study that the board, which should be policy and value −oriented to lead, is often spoon fed by the executive director or management. Their activities in some cases can at best be described as reactive. Some of the major CSOs visited had systems and processes that they stick to, but the smaller organisations had boards who only met (if they ever meet) to deal with issues that arise. These boards are brought together especially where a funding opportunity requires the board to meet. *"We sometimes get the board to meet so that we can get minutes of these meetings to apply for one project or another"*. This was the response of Jack, one of the respondents in an interview in his office in July 2017 when probed about the infrequent nature of their board meetings. It is worth noting here that *governing boards* do not exist in nature. They are organisational creations and therefore they are only what they are created to be. Therefore, a board put together for registration and causes like the above, cannot be anything more than ineffective.

The nonexistence of proper governance structures and systems is also largely because some non-profit boards happen to be competent, yet busy individuals brought together to support the organisation with their reputation without any clear design of what their role should be. Consider the following response from a focus group discussant on the effectiveness of the board of her organisation:

> "…because we have to make sure that we are adhering to the law, the yearly [requirement] you know; making sure that they look at the accounts and sign off and that kind of thing, audit and stuff, it's done. Beyond that, then the challenge begins. Meetings set up, it doesn't come on; somebody is gone here, ok let's have [an online] meeting… you know what I mean. Various challenges, but they do try to meet. So, it's the effectiveness of it that's the problem" (Williamson, August 17, 2017).

Both small and well established CSOs face the challenge described above.

Indeed, many of the governance deficits uncovered in this research can be blamed on 3 main factors:

1. The lack of understanding on the part of board members of their place in the organisation;
2. The composition of the board usually to include friends and family relations;
3. The lack of clear distinction between the role of the board and that of management in these organisations.

When these three are present, what we find is a passive listenership of boards to management reports and sometimes a possession with budgets of foreign travels of their staff and management. In many cases, because of their busy schedules, everything that is put out by the board is only what the management and staff have produced for them to "approve". As has been mentioned, these boards are either busy or overly engrossed in the trivial matters of the organisations. As Carver (2006) notes, most of these challenges of boards and their governance do apply to most if not all nonprofit boards. Most nonprofit boards like public boards, fail to do what needs to be done for a strategic leadership of their organisation. Unlike other sectors, executives of nonprofits instead of being concerned about the ineffectiveness of their boards rather enjoy the weak boards because of the hegemonic situation the weakness creates.

One thing that has not been contested anywhere in the nonprofit literature is the fact that generally, CSO founders are special beings. They are visionary, risk-taking, no-barriers and courageous human beings (Linnell, 2004). They will go where governments and private businessmen will not. They have the special ability to take a cause and turn it into a mission and rally people around this great mission. They are creators of a sort. Quite often however, these great abilities have at the same time been their downfall. Some do not appreciate the need for

structures; and even where these structures exist, they deliberately impede their proper functioning.

It has often been said that political patronage in Africa and patronage appointments results in the weakening of essential public service institutions. What is often seen in these institutions is loyalty to ruling governments as against institutional integrity. This could sometimes create mistrust between these institutions and their stakeholders including their beneficiaries. Paradoxically, this picture is no different from that which is found within sections of the civil society sector – [a sector which should otherwise be the torch bearer in society showing the way to govern right from the institutional level to the national level]. As this study confirms, the lack of structures and systems to ensure internal control and accountability is sometimes not because these systems were implemented and are lacking effectiveness but rather these initiatives never get to see the light of day. They meet stiff opposition. Where they are accepted and instituted too, they are done in a tokenistic way to have no effect. Why? These structural weaknesses serve the interests of their perpetrators.

5.3   LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS AND SUCCESSION PLANNING

Leadership, and executive transitions is a process that is often challenging to all organisations. This is essentially because when judged wrongly, even the basic decision to hire a successor from within or without alone could throw an organisation into turmoil. Consistent with existing nonprofit management literature, the present study did not find organisations ready for executive successions. There is some stability in most of the organisations in the sector because a lot of the top leadership has remained stable for many years. Only a few of the organisations had experienced some leadership transition or succession at the level of chief executive.[4] In most cases, these organisations were still under the charge of their founders as chief executives. While acknowledging generally that succession planning does have positives for organisations, many CSOs according to the present data have no such plans.

Respondents in this study expressed conflicting opinions about, executive heads, boards and fixed terms. While some practitioners are of the view that changing boards' composition for example holds some tangible benefits for nonprofit organisations, others thought that NGOs are special organisations and should therefore be allowed as they wish. One senior manager advanced the latter view so strongly during the focus group discussion:

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[4] Even in most of the cases, the founders in question were still very instrumental in the determination of who their successors were.

"I really don't have a problem with board members staying on for life. I said earlier on, I think that non-governmental organisations are a special breed whether we like it or not. It's a business really but it's a special kind of business. People who start a certain course, have a certain vision, a certain passion, a certain drive around it and I decide that..." (A position expressed by Asaase, August 4, 2017)

Even though this is a minority view, some executive directors interviewed shared similar views. In their view, NGOs are special businesses and should not be compelled into having systems and practices of corporate entities and public institutions. For some of these CSO leaders, they find it therefore absurd that people are discussing the long terms of executive directors and founders in the nonprofit sector as though it were any special problem. What appears contradictory however is that the same leaders cite cases of founders who lead their private /family organisations until they die to justify the above position.

"You know, one of the things that came up that I want to comment on was the fact that founders or members of this institution want to be part of the management or board; there is nothing wrong with those things. The law allows it and a company can have two shareholders and the two of them are the only board members. There is nothing wrong with it... It's a private company and what makes you think the NGO or the CSO is not a private company. Where he sits, he started this venture because he had such a passion for it and he started it. Ok so let's call you a shareholder in the normal circumstances of it, that's a member, the owner, why do you want to force him out of the management of the organisation? Simply because he is the owner, somebody else should be doing the management? He's the owner; in him is the best vision and drive for his company" (Mrs. McCarthy, August 16, 2017).

One can sense the passion in the above quote. What is fascinating in all of these is that in one instance CSO leaders are quick to justify their arguments with what happens in private and family businesses and in another breath, argue that the nonprofit is a special breed not to be compared with business corporate and the government.

While acknowledging that the departure and replacement of executive directors is a crucial task, the study found that there are no proactive steps toward smooth executive transitions in many of the organisations. This is even much pronounced when the executive director happens to be the founder or co-founder of the organisation. Stating it bluntly, there are no preparations and no one talks about it until the leader on his /her own volition decides he/she has had enough and wants to move on. It is only at this stage that some "planning" begins. Here again, the "planning" is done

solely by the founder or at his instance. They have mostly actively directed who their replacements should be. Mostly, at this stage, the founder is tired, sometimes old and simply wants to move on so not much of a mentoring is done.

Some of these founders have some funding sources tied to their personality, influence and personal integrity other than that of their organisations. When this is the case, there is the need for the founder to introduce the successor to these funding sources and build safety nets for the continuous flow of these funds for the survival of the organisation in his/her absence. Sadly, this hardly happens because the transitions are not proactively and systematically approached in most organisations.

The departure of an organisation's most senior person is no mean activity. It could be disruptive and traumatic for both the leader and the organisation. It is for this reason that executive succession planning has attracted considerable attention from practitioners and academics. Succession planning is described to mean "a systematic and long-term practice that an organisation follows to ensure it has the necessary pool of managerial talent to enable it to meet its business objectives and achieve its mission" (Rothwell, 2002 in McKee & Driscoll, 2008, p.341). There is a strong view in the management literature that there are tangible benefits that accrue from the development and implementation of succession plans (Fulmer & Conger, 2004; Mckee & Driscoll, 2008). Researchers in the global north consider succession planning as part of the strategic plans of the nonprofit sector.

There are several definitions of succession planning without agreement. However, all these definitions connote some form of formal rules and procedures designed to ensure succession. Rothwell (2001) offers a comprehensive description of what succession planning entails. Rothwell defines the concept as;

> "a deliberate and systematic effort by an organisation to ensure leadership continuity in key positions, retain and develop intellectual and knowledge capital for the future, and encourage individual advancement" (Rothwell, 2001, p.6).

While the very activities included in succession planning may differ, what it represents should never be in doubt. In the evolution of the practice of executive succession planning has emerged two popular approaches: "horserace" and "relay", each of which must be approached intentionally and deliberately. Either one is mentored specially for it or it is open for others to takeover at the end of one's term. Considering that a succession plan is a plan specially put in place to aid the preparation for either a long term or short-term departure of a member of an organisation, it could happen at every level of an organisation. This is however crucial at the level of the executive director because of the sensitive role he/she plays in an organisation. Indeed, before any executive

director transition will take place, the organisation ought to put together both an emergency (short-term) and long-term succession plan. This will prepare the organisation and its members for the short or long-term departure of the leader (Allison, 2002; Chapman & Vogelsang, 2005, p.3 -6). The plan is also expected to guide the organisation in ways to sustain itself during this process and even how to prepare for a new leadership. A succession plan should be able to be clear about who should take over the role of the executive director in his/her absence in the interim. It should also give clarity as to the process to be followed in looking for and hiring a replacement for the executive director in the event of a permanent departure (Chapman & Vogelsang, 2005).

Such deliberate and well thought –out plans as described above were absent in all but one of the organisations studied. Where a plan exists at all, it was not detailed and therefore gave no clarity as to how the transition should go. It was so in many of the cases because the organisations are still led by their founders and co-founders. In such organisations, succession planning as an organisational practice becomes a taboo. Asking for a succession planning would mean an attempt to whisk the organisation from its founder and leader. Some of the practitioners, many of who are part of management in their organisation expressed dissatisfaction with lack of planning but like the average Ghanaian, they will not stick their neck out on it at the organisation. Here, we find the unquestioning acquiescence of the average Ghanaian within organisational context.

In some of the cases encountered in this study, the founders on their own, without any clear plans in place decided it was time to leave and hand over to a new leadership. In all those instances, the decision to leave, the time to leave and who the replacement should be were handled by the founder-leaders. One co-founder and present executive director of his NGO admitted the lack of succession planning in most CSOs including his own organisation but had the following to say:

> "…so what we are talking about really is a leadership culture problem which you find even in the private sector. I know one of the biggest private companies in this country which is foreign owned. When the lead, the man who ran it for many years was leaving, it wasn't hard to hand over to a successor, you see, because of the robustness of the governance structures. So, what I am telling you is that it's not only the NGO sector that you find this problem…in every society, there's a culture around power which you can point to which is quite different. In the Ghanaian context, we have what I call a chieftaincy culture to power. A chieftaincy culture to power which feeds the male dominance, unaccountable behaviour, and assuming that you can sit in office until you are ready to go, and you should not worry about who comes next. And in private limited liability companies which people set up, they tend to collapse precisely because of this problem. And I think it's not an NGO problem. So, in discussing this phenomenon, I think it's important to discuss those issues that are

attributable to the CSO sector as far as the larger social and cultural soil within which institutions operate because institutions are creatures of their context" (Interview with Mensah in Accra, August 22, 2017).

If the above quote is anything to go by then one can say that it does agree to some extent with the accessibility of people to traditional leadership in Ghanaian cultures. In traditional Ghanaian society, leadership is ascribed and not easily accessible –it is not by achievement. However, in some western coasts the title of a "chief" could be borne by anyone with the resources to engage in the elaborate rituals that come with the position and also sponsoring a number of community– feasts. Chieftaincy in Ghana is restricted to royals and their close relations (Ebow, 1993, p.35). The power that comes with being a chief cannot be worked for. It is interesting however to note that the finding relating to this discussion is not particularly contextual. The lack of succession planning is a challenge that has been observed in many other contexts in the nonprofit literature. In one such case, Froelich et al. (2011) did a survey in which succession planning of executive directors of charitable nonprofits and CEOs of cooperative organisations were explored. In their study, they found that planning and preparation in those organisations did not commensurate the level of concern and interest in executive successions. In the said study, while replacing long – serving leaders is acknowledged to be a difficult task, very few organisations were found to be forward –looking about it.

The other challenge that arises in this discussion is what the role of a founder or long serving executive director of an organisation should be (in that organisation) after his or her departure. While I agree that founding leaders should continue to be relevant to their organisations after they depart, the capacity in which they serve is important and must be decided with tact. When asked the ways in which founders could serve the organisation after leaving office, many of the respondents (founders especially) thought these gallant leaders could be of great use on the organisations' board. Two of the founders who had departed from their executive positions in the organisations they each founded and led were serving as board members of the organisation at the time of the study. This in some respects presents a lot of opportunities for the organisation. However, its challenges are also not farfetched. While many success stories may exist of founders transitioning onto the boards of their organisation, there are equally damning cases. The practice is common in the management literature but it cannot be described as a healthy organisational practice that should be encouraged. One reason why this cannot be good practice is that the structure of nonprofit organisations is such that the board exercises some leadership and supervisory role over the management. Therefore, if an influential founder –leader should leave an organisation he created and takes a position as influential as a role on the board, then in my

view, that individual never left. This is particularly so because as indicated earlier in this report, many of these founders are mostly either instrumental in finding their replacement by handpicking a successor. It is only politically correct therefore to think that such a successor making an entry into the executive position through the vehicle of the founder would continue to do the business of the founder. Where the successor acts otherwise, the result has often been the failure or early departure of the new hire. A similar case in the nonprofit management literature is that which Chapman and Vogelsang (2005) reported a decade ago.[5]

There is no one size that fits all when it comes to dealing with what the role of the founder should be after a departure. The capacity in which an outgoing founder or executive director should serve an organisation is a critical decision which the governing board ought to make with a lot of consideration and tact.

Despite recommendations from practitioners and some researchers during my interviews that the founders' transition unto boards could serve the organisation well, I hold the guided opinion that a founder's place on the board after departing from the position of an executive director is not the best for nonprofit organisations. There are several other capacities in which the founder can serve the interest of an organisation he just exited but it is obviously not the best on the board which to some extent exercises supervisory role over the management.

5.3.1 THREATS TO EFFECTIVE EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS

In analysing the present findings, the question arises about what the threats to successful executive transitions are. This question was posed to many of the respondents in this study and the common responses could be grouped into four key factors. These factors include: the lack of effective governance structures, fear of the unknown, livelihood, power and prestige; and are discussed below.

5.3.1.1 Lack of Effective Governance Structures

The first key factor found to threaten successful executive and founder transitions in this study is the lack of effective governance structures in many of the organisations studied. Nonprofit organisations are organisations limited only by guarantee. This organisational type lacks the relational bonding of families and the commitment to success given by the profit motive of the private sector. What drives civil society and the nonprofit generally is a commitment to a vision

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[5] In Chapmann and Vogelsang (2005), a 73 year old founder during the negotiation his exit after considerable pressure from the board to retire, managed to secure himself a place on the board among other benefits. The executive director who came directly after this founder lasted only nine months in office. The second was willing only to take the position when the initial agreements with the founder were changed.

and mission. Therefore, if a group of individuals have set themselves up as an organisation in pursuit of a vision, there should be a way of ensuring that there is commitment to this vision and this is what governing bodies do. Unlike the private business however, the nonprofits' commitment to a public cause accords some public services and privileges to them requiring that the same public has a stake in these organisations. This is why the board is a trustee of the public. It holds the nonprofit company in trust of the public.

5.3.1.2 Fear of the Unknown

The second factor worthy of note is what has been termed here the fear of the unknown. Many of the founders the researcher spoke to during this study confessed of a genuine anxiety about the future of the organisations they have long toiled to build. They ask themselves, "what will become of this organisation should I decide to permanently depart from here?" They believe in the vision and are passionate about it and therefore feel they are the only people well placed to pursue or lead that vision. Indeed, some founders of these nonprofits during the interviews expressed genuine believe that their organisations could not succeed without them. While this is an acceptable human condition considering all that founders go through to establish a cause, it is the possible creations of this feeling that threatens the future of these organisations. It was clear in the data gathered that this feeling makes many of the founders hold on tight to their positions even when there are clear indications that their strengths and intellects could no longer offer anything new to the organisation.

One mark that is missed in all of the above is that the leadership and direction of the organisation is the primary responsibility of the governing body and not that of the founder or management. It thus becomes the responsibility of the governing board or council to determine when a change is required for the organisation and how that transition should be handled.

Some respondents drew attention to the fact that many of the organisations that have remained relevant and vibrant may have been under stable leadership. One of them was quite insistent. Consider the quote below:

> "If you check, the strongest CSOs in Ghana still are those that are still led by their founders and there are a few successful NGOs beyond their founders and they are struggling. They are not so stable. They are not as stable as when their founders were there. Check." (Interview with Rayat in his office, 28th July, 2017).

In relation to Rayat's position, one can indeed point to many failed CSOs whose failure is attributable to the loss of their founders. This observation prompted a casual count of influential CSOs in Ghana and I can affirm that indeed most of the CSOs that have remained active and relevant have been under the leadership of their founders or long-serving executive directors.

While this is worthy of further interrogation, one could argue that even the so called relevant CSOs could have been better under new leadership. Assuming without admitting that the fact in the quote applied, would that mean these founders lead better? These are pertinent issues yet to be addressed by any empirical observation in this part of the world. What is known however is that where an organisation – be it public or private, is run single –handedly by its founding manager without the effective participation of others, it most likely will not survive beyond the 'lifetime' of that founder. That is why it is even more important to understand the reasons behind the founder syndrome to find effective ways of addressing them for a thriving third sector.

While many of the respondents thought it is about time a dispassionate discussion is made about the "sit tight" syndrome of CSO leaders, a section of the leaders and especially founders argued strongly that the call to such a discussion is misguided. One founder who doubles as executive director who has been in his position for over 15 years and insisted "one should not make it [look] like there's some principle somewhere that requires that organisations change their leadership or that people leave an organisations after any period" (Interview with Yago, July 20, 2017).

One can admit that the argument in the above quote is valid. However, one should not misconstrue the call for a dispassionate consideration of leadership transitions and succession planning to mean a call on CSO founders and executive directors to necessarily quit their jobs. The understanding that is required is that the departure or otherwise of a chief executive and how such a transition is handled is a governance function and should therefore be a policy decision. What is the policy of the entity as regards the tenure of its top executive office holder? Staying true to the mission and related policies of the organisation is what is important and consistent with good organisational governance. If the stated policy of the organisation is that the executive director could serve 30 years, this should be followed. However, such an important decision should not be left to any one individual's whims and caprices.

5.3.1.3   The Livelihood Challenge

There is the economic angle to effective leadership transitions and the lack of it thereof. The decision to remain in their position as leaders of the organisations they created even amidst social and natural calls for change in leadership is economically driven in most cases. For many of these leaders, they do not foresee any other source of livelihood beyond what they do for their organisations. So, it becomes a question of survival rather than a genuine fear that the organisation may not survive in their absence as has been advanced in some cases. The financial incentive that makes commercial entrepreneurs move on without difficulty is almost always absent in the nongovernmental sector. As a social entrepreneur, when you feel like moving on, you cannot sell of your enterprise and retire and this some admit is a problem.

5.3.1.4   Power and Prestige

This factor is hardly ever accepted by the founders themselves. Though hesitantly, some do agree that leading these organisations come with some power and fame depending on the size of the organisation. Letting go such privileged positions in society can be very difficult. It is human and must be understood and handled in the best way possible.

Considering the factors mentioned above and their strength in determining human behaviour, one can understand why people hold on to their positions even when there are calls to give others the opportunity to contribute to these organisations. Too often, senior and experienced officers in CSOs burn out and feel frustrated because they do not foresee career progression opportunities. As one senior officer put it during our interview session, *"I've been the programmes officer for years, so now what? Where do I go from here?"* This sentiment, as simple and ordinary as it may appear, represents a great constituency of senior and middle level managers of the civil society sector. Many of the respondents at some point expressed this frustration of limited opportunity to advance in their career in the nonprofit sector. While the turnover intentions of respondents were not a focus in this study, a careful interrogation of this fact reveals it as one of the effects founder syndromes produce. It is important however for all who care about the success of the civil society sector to recognise that the career space of civil society actors is very limited and therefore demands a lot of thinking and effort into programming and organisational structuring and re – engineering. Especially in our part of the world, because no one is monitoring the rate of turnover in nonprofit organisations, not much discussion exists on these issues. They are however important if the intention is to live true to our organisational missions.

Founders' understanding of succession planning is often limited to efforts towards planning for successions in the top management and therefore since they do not plan for their exit anytime soon, they turn to neglect its value. Meanwhile, succession planning in its true sense is much more expansive than that. It includes a systematic development of talents internally at all levels of the organisation.

Except for one network organisation, all the selected organisations in this study had no limit on the tenure for the executive director. What exists at best were unlimited office tenures during which the governing board had the right to terminate the appointment of the executive director based on performance and conduct. On the face of it, this may sound great. That the board exercised the oversight and could ask the executive director out for poor performance sounds awesome but considering the little that is known about CSO boards in this study, one wonders

whether this has a chance of ever happening. While boards still remain the leaders of executive transition processes as the sole body laden with the authority to hire and fire the top management, it is clear that these boards (at least 80% of them in this study) are not prepared and do not have any well-designed processes to oversee effective leadership transitions. As could be deduced from many of the responses, this challenge goes back to the basics of board membership composition. Once this is wrong, it follows that the board will most likely be ineffective in governing the organisation, especially the transitions it goes through.

In addition to the absence of a well thought through executive succession plan, most of the organisations in this study who had gone through executive transition did not seek the help of professionals in managing the process. This in part affirms the fact that organisations attached little seriousness to this process and therefore did not think it worthy of investment. But one thing is certain -in the absence of formal succession plans and professional support, the result of many such transitions is chaos or the quiet demise of organisations. Although some of these organisations are alive today, they are not effective when it comes to the pursuit of their missions.

5.3.2   FOUNDERITIS: A CSO PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

Call it founder syndrome or whatever you may – *founderitis* is a disease that can collapse any organisation once it gets a hold of the organisation. It is fondly known as founderitis but founders and long-serving leaders are equally susceptible to its venom. If untreated, founderitis has the potential to result in organisational fatalities; it could frustrate staff and other members of the organisation and increase turnover to unsustainable levels (Linell, 2004, p.11-14). While all organisations are susceptible to this ailment, the susceptibility of nonprofits is high for many reasons (McKee & Driscoll, 2008; Tandon, 2016b). The nonprofit sector is only limited by guarantee and there is no regulation as to who can or cannot serve as a trustee of the public. Also, the profit that drives the private entrepreneur is here absent; neither do they have the qualities that bind families together. The nonprofits are purely driven by a mission drawn from the vision which is often that of the founder(s) thereby increasing the sector's susceptibility to founderitis.

One point worth reiterating is that the sustainability of civil society is imperative for the survival of Ghana as a democratic society and indeed, this country's history can never be well-written without the heroic roles of civil society and nonprofit leaders. From advocacy to service provision and all that comes in between, the role of civil society can in no way be overemphasised. They go where government and the private sector will not go. The nonprofit founder –leader is a creator and a genitor. However, understanding to build, maintain and transition both personally and organisationally are core leadership competencies that some CSO founder –leaders have proven to lack in this study. While acknowledging that organisations need stability to be sustainable,

excessive stability at the expense of flexibility could make an organisation static in areas that are not helpful.

What is founderitis and what are the symptoms of the syndrome? The condition describes a situation where a founder or leader stays on too long in a leadership position to the effect that the continuous stay of this leader begins to serve the organisation in a dysfunctional way. The symptoms may include a show of absolute power and control over the organisation and its functioning, they lack the ability to delegate, the organisation beginning to be oriented towards the personality of the leader (leaders having role-bound identities), when there are indications that the organisation has outgrown the leader and requiring a change, yet the leader remains in charge (Linnell, 2004; James, 2016; Tandon, 2016a; McKee & Driscoll, 2008). They ignore the inputs of subject –matter experts. These leaders hardly ever want to change what has worked in the past even in the face of changing trends. They tend to focus much on loyalty as compared to good performance of the people they work with and do not value the importance of formalised planning. In most cases, any attempt at instituting measures that decentralise decision making is fought against by this leader. These symptoms are concerns that threaten the survival and continuity of the nonprofit sector.

In many of the organisations visited during the 45 days of data collection, even though there existed organisational structures, they were mostly undeveloped. In terms of management, many of the staff members report directly to the executive head which is not a very good sign of organisational development. In most cases, other members and staff of the organisations are barely granted any opportunity to grow and aspire to other leadership responsibilities. Speaking to staff during field visits revealed that some of these workers are close to the point of burning out. Many of them do not find their roles exciting anymore because they claim they are very limited in operation and contribution. Others complain of the monotony of "writing reports, attending meetings they are sometimes uninterested in and responding to emails". These interactions also confirmed some observations during the interview sessions. That is, a bulk of the knowledge base of the organisations in many cases resided with the founder –leader. He/she bears the institutional memory and also the understanding of what it is the organisation is doing and the rationale behind those projects and programmes.

Speaking to CSO founding –leaders as a researcher gave me a sense of why the founder syndrome is such a big deal in the nonprofit sector. They call the idea that birthed their organisations "my baby" for a reason. They conceive the idea, toil so hard to birth it and watch it grow. This they described with a lot of passion and emotion during the interviews with founders in this study. Letting go of a baby you have toiled to birth is no mean activity. From the founder's perspective,

the process of founder transition can be likened to "giving one's child for adoption". Giving your child for adoption while still alive can be emotionally threatening but as one founder did admit, "it looks like sometimes it is just the right thing to do if you wish better for the child" (Interview with Mr. Barnes, August 3, 2017). The question should rather be about how this all-important activity can be managed so it is less disruptive, less painful and healthy.

Why is discussing and eventually dealing with founderitis in CSOs so important? The answer is quite simple. Unlike the private sector, CSOs are "publicly funded". While many of the respondents appear to present a contrary view on this, it is a fact that cannot easily be disputed. Public funding is not to be understood only in terms of government funding locally. The donor funds on which CSOs so heavily depend for their survival are public funds. It could be sourced from which ever public– whether individuals or foreign governments. It is for this reason that founderitis may pass unnoticed in a private family –run enterprise but it is of a serious 'public health' concern in the nonprofit sector.

The founderitis challenge can be addressed through well-developed and implemented succession plans. However, as has been mentioned earlier, the present study found no formal succession plans in place at any of the organisations in this study. The networks had some statements or regulations regarding succession nebulously stated in their constitutions or foundational documents. The process of planning was however absent. Preparing for any transition in leadership is therefore left to the discretion of whoever manages the process. The result of such "vague plans of succession" has been chaos. The study encountered two classic cases where the leadership of networks failed to relinquish their positions at the expiration of their tenure. One of these cases is presently at the Department of Social Welfare's NGOs office for resolution. Clearly therefore, the solution to founderitis is not in vague constitutional provisions per se. It is an exercise that requires deliberate plan and commitment.

One can admit that *founderitis* is indeed a deadly organisational disease but it can be cured. Founders can let go. Transitions can be healthy when done more intentionally. CSO founders should find wisdom in learning to support the independence of their boards and the people they work with. It is time to realise and move away from the "dependence and compliance" model of board leadership to one that is appropriate in composition and prepared to use well –designed processes to deal with changes organisations experience.

5.3.3 GOVERNING BOARDS AND EXECUTIVE TRANSITIONS

In the case of a transition, one can admit the added challenges it presents which is why the role of the governing board is even so crucial. In a leadership/ executive transition, it is the board's responsibility to provide leadership. This is the time to develop and also enhance cohesiveness

and trust in the organisation. This comes on the backdrop of the fact that resisting change is a common organisational behaviour that must be appreciated and managed appropriately. Decision making during a transition is so important and must be participatory to avoid inflammation of passions.

As has already been acknowledged in this report, most of the organisations and their boards are not prepared for leadership transitions. However, considering the crucial nature of transitions, boards and managements will be better served by acting rather than reacting during transitions. Where transitions are not handled deliberately, it leads to a lot of disruptions – one of which is the resignation of experienced senior staff, a weakening of board relationships and ultimate disruption in service provision. In two of the organisations observed in this study, the lack of deliberate planning for executive transition resulted in some disruptions. In these organisations, the changes in leadership and the boards' ill preparation resulted in key staff resignations and a disruption in board relationships.

One can argue that no organisational development professional worth his sort will put together an interview panel to hire a new chief executive during a transition on which a senior staff who wished for this same position serves as secretary. As bizarre as it may sound, this was the case in one of the organisations I studied in this research. The resulting impact of such a blunder is obvious. The new executive director and this senior staff never got along. The staff subsequently had to resign from the position. Confirming this ill-treated transition, the same senior staff returned to the organisation following the retirement of the said ED.

In other cases, the outgoing chief executive and in the worst-case scenario, founder, dominates the succession process without any formal plan. This clearly demonstrates Mace's theory of managerial hegemony in practical terms. All governance experts agree that processes leading to the departure and hiring of chief executives is the responsibility of the board. It is the governing board that leads and directs a transition. However, in the present study, I found a common practice where this responsibility was consciously or otherwise ceded to the executive led by the outgoing leaders themselves. In many of these cases, the board was only given the outcomes of these processes to approve to fulfil all righteousness.

In the management of executive transitions that supports organisational growth, the board exercises the leadership role. It is a governance issue more than an executive act especially when it has to do with the top executive position. The process must be forward –looking and involve two major phases – the planning and preparation phase and the transition phase itself. In the first phase, there is the need to institute long term and short term/emergency succession plans. Such a plan should try to include transition coaching and a deliberate attempt at building executive

legacy. In the period leading to the planning and the transition itself, there is the need for organisational assessment. This includes putting together a competent team (a committee) to manage the process. During this assessment, efforts should be made to reaffirm the mission and vision of the organisation. Priorities are set for the next activity of bringing in a new chief executive. All of these processes must be deliberate and formal.

The recruitment and selection of new chief executive becomes the next big thing. A job description is developed by the committee with expert help and the search begins whether internally or externally. This could then be followed by the interview and a shortlist presented to the entire board for consideration. After the board has made its selection, issues of benefits can then be determined before the hire.

Also, in most organisations, the post hire period is left to chance but this could be dangerous since the period immediately following the hire is as important as the period preceding it. It requires planning and deliberate actions. Here, there is the need for executive director coaching and mentoring of a sort. The reason is that the literature has shown the top position in the nonprofit sector is not one that many people hold twice. So, hardly does there exists an experienced executive director. Studies around the world have shown that the majority of executive directors who experience turnover do not transition into another organisation as executive directors. Therefore, most fresh executive director hires are fresh hires. There is also the need to introduce the new chief executive to a network of peer executive group immediately after the hire. These are all to help the new executive in his/ her new role.

Failure to engage in this deliberate executive coaching and mentoring could create a situation where the new inexperienced nonprofit chief executive looks up to senior staff for direction and guidance which could subsequently create ineffectiveness or conflict. Some senior staff by their mere guidance of the chief executive in the period immediately following their employment, become kingpins. In some cases, these staff later rally a constituency of workers around themselves and rule a section of the organisation while the chief executive controls the other. The dangers of these are only obvious. It is for this and many other reasons that boards should treat their role in a leadership transition with utmost importance.

5.4   STRENGTHENING GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

One fundamental challenge that CSOs face at least from the perspective of their critics has been the lack of effective governance systems and internal democracy. This challenge can be traced to the regulatory framework for CSOs in Ghana. The sector is regulated in much the same way as ordinary companies under the company's code and they are registered as companies limited by

guarantee. The one difference found is that CSOs do not have shares and do not make profit. The regime for managing their directors, removing their directors, and for appointing their directors is all managed by the company's code. These nonprofit organisations operate within this strange amorphous milieu where all the other companies, limited by shares and for-profit companies all operate. It is therefore not surprising that we find the governance systems of many of these CSOs correspondingly compromised. Even as we call for democratic processes in CSOs, we must not forget that the company's code which also guides CSOs is not a democratic regime.

Companies are controlled by their owners, those who own the shares but there are no shares in the registration of NGOs. And the next most important set of people are the directors (Companies Act, 1963). In Ghana, and in many other places, most directors are either related by family or friendship or strong business ties (McKee & Driscoll, 2008). In the case of CSOs, the directors are people who seem to share a certain vision. So, there is a disjoint between what binds directors in for-profit companies and what is supposed to bind directors in CSOs and yet they are directed by the same regime. Hence, the first step to ensuring effective governance of the civil society sector in Ghana is to reconsider the regulatory framework /regime within which these organisations operate. This is not to call for a gagging of CSOs by the state as is the present attempt in Nigeria. After several years of democratic rule, many commentators have described the strenuous attempts by Nigeria's House of Representatives to set up a Federal agency to regulate the activities of NGOs as a blow to the civil liberties of the Nigerian people. This is because of the content of the Bill and what it seeks to achieve.[6] What is being proposed for Ghana in the present study is to come out with a regime different from the company's code which will take into consideration the peculiar challenges that confront the nonprofit sector.

While civil society regulation has been fought by many practitioners, there are cases where there can be positive regulation. In the broadest way, regulation could mean a 'form of behavioural control, whatever the origin' (Hammann, 1987). In another context, legal for example,it could be used refer to 'the realm of legislation, governance and social control' (Ogus, 1994). In the academic field, regulation comes with a rather narrower definition as recognised by Garton (2009). The concept has often received attention from law and economics. Selznick describes it as the 'sustained and focused control exercised by a public agency over activities that are valued by a

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[6] The Bill specifies among other things that an Executive Secretary and a 17 member board will be appointed by the President to serve a five year term. This board will among others look into funds received by these NGOs and how they are spent. Interestingly, in this regime, an NGO cannot spend without the express approval of the Commission's board.

community' (Garton, 2009, p.4 -5). Such a sustained and focused control will be expected to among other things, direct or encourage behaviour which (according the present study) may not occur without such an intervention; and by so doing correct the real and perceived deficiencies in the system in meeting the collective or public interest goals (Hansmann, 1987; Garton, 2009).

As has been mentioned earlier in this report, the researcher is well aware of the successes of self-regulation in other jurisdictions. That notwithstanding, the kind of regulation suggested in this study will serve to streamline the structure and governance of organised civil society. This is expected to correct the existing deficiencies of the sector towards the maximization of the sector's benefits to society.

This study therefore calls for a shift of nonprofit organisations from the company's code towards the establishment of a different regime for their governance. In that regime, certain things can be determined there. First and most important is the caliber of people who should sit on the governing boards. Every nonprofit must have a governing board and provide for the caliber of people who can sit on that board. Second, provide for their functions, their responsibilities and then their benefits. Then establish that every NGO must have an executive agent – however the organisation chooses to call the person. The occupant of this office should be appointed by the board who sees to the management of the affairs. Then every NGO must have its vision and mission spelt out and it must stay true to its mission. In this scheme, there must be a deliberate attempt to reduce the powers of the executive and the leadership role of the board emphasised.

There are many responsibilities of the boards of nonprofit organisations. Key among these is the selection of an executive director or CEO as the case may be. This has so been proven over the years because even though it seldom happens, whenever it happens that a new executive director is to be selected, it becomes number one on the board's agenda. This is partly informed by the available evidence of the outcomes of poor hires in the sector (Golensky, 2005, p.9). The process of selecting a chief executive is so important and must remain on the front burner of every nonprofit governing board. Where need be, professional help should be sought. However, one other strategy affirmed in the nonprofit literature is the setting up of a small committee of a cross section of board members (Weisman & Goldbaum, 2004; Golensky, 2005). This small committee oversees the process until the point where selection is to be made of the new executive director. It is at this point that the full strength of the board is brought to bear on the hiring process. This is also important because if a hire is to be made at this point, then the benefits of the position must also be determined by the whole board and not just a subcommittee.

Allison in his work shared the experience of the Presbyterian Church of Northern California which had in place a formal pastor transition programme. What is interesting about this example is the church's view of transition as a window of opportunity for renewal and its unique way of supporting transitions with skilled interim leadership. The church unlike many of the organisations in this study understood transition as a long-term process as opposed to change which usually is external to individuals and organisations (Bridge, 1991).[7] According to Allison, the Presbyterian church "treats leadership transition as a naturally occurring event in the life of a congregation [rather than an unanticipated crisis to be avoided]" (Allison, 2002, p.343). It is this realisation that led the church to adopt a national transition programme aimed at supporting congregations that undergo transition. In the present study as has been mentioned already, nothing of the sort really exists in the CSOs. It is a discussion that is not happening. At least, not constructively. In the case of the church's example, a cadre of interim pastors are usually trained and readied for temporal leadership and guidance in procuring a new pastor while the congregation is allowed the space of up to a year to reflect on its goals and the kind of leadership it will appreciate in the next pastor. While this cannot be practiced by all organisations, the philosophy is great and the model can be amended and followed in many nonprofit organisations. For there to be effective executive and most importantly founder transitions, founders and long serving executives must themselves appreciate the need to transit and the dividends of doing it right. It is about time founders especially recognised that sometimes all their organisations need is a leadership transition if it is to be a sustainable organisation.

Boards of CSOs must embrace their role as custodians of nonprofits and rise to the occasion when their role is most required. As has been emphasised in this research report, managing an executive transition is a board function and so boards of nongovernmental entities must be seen playing their functional role. Exercising institutional leadership for an organisation going through changes is the best any board can do for its organisation. This again has a lot to do with the constitution of the governing boards. Organisations should by themselves eschew the habit of assembling friends and family when constituting their boards. The purpose and key roles of board members must also be clearly spelt out to them. As has been emphasised time and again, boards do not exist in nature, we create them and they only become what we create them to be.

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[7] Details can be read from William Bridges three –stage model in which the emotional process of transition is well described. It is the emotional process people go through as a result of a change. The process includes ending, neutral zone, and new beginnings (Bridge, 1991).

Most often the organisations are themselves not ready for these changes that they go through. It has been one of the reasons if not the main reason for the demise of many organisations after the departure of their founders and long serving directors. Organisations should generally be prepared for changes and succession plans should be taken seriously if the nonprofit sector is to survive and thrive. The argument has often been advanced that founders of organisations make a lot of sacrifices and investments for their organisation than their followers. That is true most of the time. However, while one can appreciate that founders make a lot of intellectual, emotional and if you like, material investments in the organisations they have founded, we need to understand that the founder is not the only person to be destabilised by a transition. It is the whole organisation that goes through the kilning process and so every part of the organisation must be readied for the big change. A ready organisation is also able to carry other stakeholders like donors and beneficiaries along during a transition. One of the things that starve organisations to death after their founders is the fact that CSO funding sources can really be a personalised field. That is to say some donors and funding sources are attached to the personalities of founders and long serving executive directors and so a failure to plan and involve all stakeholders to appreciate the changes will mean a huge fall in revenue and support for the organisation.

One economic view point worthy of note in strengthening founder transitions is the case of compensation. The problem of livelihood or financial insecurity as has been mentioned in this study cannot be ignored if we are to have effective leadership transitions. Many founders have been irritated by the subject of transitions and succession planning primarily because they have not been compensated enough. We cannot lose sight of the fact that organisations start out small and in their teething stages, founders tend to earn little as compensation for their time and service to the organisation. It therefore becomes difficult for them to plan a befitting retirement because in some cases, they only just started earning something meaningful. There should therefore be a proper consideration of compensation of founders during a transition if we are to start experiencing healthy founder transitions.

Sociologically also, founders and long serving executive directors should be coached in the best way to create a balance between their professional lives and social lives. Most often than not, founders and some executive directors become so attached to their organisations and the vision they pursue to the neglect of their family relationships and social networks. In the end, only their identity as founders or leaders of those organisations gives them social connection. When this happens, it becomes very difficult to accept the realities when they finally dawn on this individual that he/she must stand somewhat detached from the only social environment he/ she has. It is the responsibility of the community of people interested in a thriving third sector to help founders

prepare for their transition and the sociology of it cannot in any way be ignored. Founders should be taught to have a life beyond their organisations.

Also, as emphasised in the church's example presented above, there should be a conscious attempt at making the best hire of a successor. How prepared a successor is could determine whether the organisation will be sustainable or not. In this respect, post hire executive coaching is a good initiative that must be utilised. Also, succession plans should include efforts at introducing new executive directors to their peers for some peer mentoring and networking in their new career.

In a nutshell, getting the nonprofit sector to thrive should be approached collectively and dispassionately. All the above recommendations may not lead to the success of the sector if we do not have vision carriers and people with passion on the boards of nonprofits. While this is not in doubt, what the sector in Ghana needs is a proper balance of passion with professionalism. An organisation is as good as its board but as it is now, what we have in Ghana is an organisation that is as good as its executive director. This is not good. It is not sustainable and therefore there is the need to approach this problem head-on. And mind you, this effort at solving the problems of civil society must not be left to state actors to decide. Civil society must lead its own change.

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

CSOs in developing democracies may be restricted in their activities and the impact they make due to a host of challenges. These challenges include a lack of popular support for CSOs' place in society, organisational inefficiencies, apathy, lack of access to funding and in some cases government hostility or opposition. This has led many to question the sustainability of civil society in West Africa. I believe that the twin concept of governance and leadership has an overarching impact on CSOs sustainability which is what this study has sought contribute to understanding.

Indeed, it can be said without any equivocation that many civil society organisations in this study do not reflect the democratic principles of the present society which we all so heartily celebrate. Some of the leaders of these organisations have a belief that the nonprofit sector is special and therefore should be left to run in a way parallel to other organisations. However, the lack of adherence to proper democratic principles of participation in organisations creates challenges many of which have been observed in the present state of CSO governance structures and board leadership. There is obviously a sort of managerial hegemony in many of the organisations. The situation gives too much power to the executive and also creates a situation where drawing the lines between management and governance roles becomes difficult. The hegemonic situation created by the ineffectiveness of governing boards witnessed in this study deserves attention from researchers and practitioners alike.

In the true sense of governance, you cannot have the same officers playing the role of the executive and the board or council. However, this appears to be the reality in some organisations according to the findings in this study. Sequel to this challenge, a majority of CSOs demonstrate a lack of preparedness for leadership transitions in all sizes of organisations –big, small and those in between as the findings prove. To deal with this challenge, all organisational actors especially founders and boards should recognise that transitions are facts of organisational life and must therefore be seen and approached as part of the normal developments an organisation goes through. While admitting that founders are special in their commitment to the success of organisations they found, it must be accepted and appreciated that one man's effort is never going to be enough in ensuring the sustainability of any organisation let alone a nonprofit one.

The study has unravelled pertinent issues regarding governance practices in civil society organisations and drawn attention to the importance of good governance practices for CSO sustainability. The proffered measures could help strengthen the ability of CSOs to monitor the allocation of internal and external resources for a thriving third sector. They encourage inclusivity and balanced decision making within CSOs. The discussion is therefore hoped to arouse a proper discourse on executive and founder transitions with the hope to finding a lasting cure for the

'founder's syndrome' and its associated devilry in the nonprofit sector. It is also expected to serve as a baseline for a much broader study on CSO governance, accountability systems and leadership transitions. It is the hope of the researcher that the report will serve as a good resource to practitioners and academics who are interested in CSO governance and sustainability in the West Africa region.

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