

Dynamic Leaders for Just, Prosperous, and Inclusive Societies

IREX's approach for developing leaders who catalyze positive social change

Leadership at every level of society is essential to creating just, prosperous, and inclusive societies. Without people who are capable and willing to step up and act, positive change cannot occur. Leadership development programs often focus on building the capacity of people to improve their own organization's work, but today's challenges also require people who can and will lead transformative change.

IREX's approach to developing leaders prepares individuals to make positive change in their communities, governments, organizations, and businesses. IREX develops leaders to engage and inspire others, advocate thoughtfully, take action, and continue to learn and adapt. We call these people Dynamic Leaders because they are steadfast in their pursuit of progress and embrace change, in themselves, others, social institutions, and communities, in order to serve others.

Dynamic leaders are **values-driven, ethical, and visionary** in their character and actions toward positive change. They are inclusive and make value-based and evidence-informed decisions.

The Challenge

The world is facing a leadership crisis characterized by a lack of meaningful social inclusion, distrust of leaders across sectors, and the complexity and pace of change. This leadership crisis creates an opportunity for Dynamic Leaders to capitalize on growing public awareness for the need for ethical leadership to drive positive outcomes.

Lack of Meaningful Inclusion

Leaders must foster inclusion and equity, encouraging diverse individuals to lead at all levels of society.

The global population is expected to reach 9.8 billion by 2050 as countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia face unprecedented population booms among young people. This drastic increase will make the African continent the most populous in the world.¹ Yet, leaders in too many countries across the continent hinder youth from ascending to key leadership roles as aging leaders across society maintain their decades-long rule. As new leaders negotiate their own power or lead on the margins of existing power structures, we believe they must do so with values that foster inclusion and equity, allowing a more diverse group of individuals to lead.

Current and future leaders must fully reflect their communities, and promote and cultivate a diverse group of voices and decision-makers. Research shows that, "teams with inclusive leaders are 17% more likely to report that they are high performing, 20% more likely to say they make high-quality decisions, and 29% more likely to report behaving collaboratively."² Yet, it remains difficult for marginalized groups, including women and youth, to access leadership

1 Mariama Sow, "Figures of the Week: Africa's Growing Youth Population and Human Capital Investments," Brookings, September 20, 2018, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2018/09/20/figures-of-the-week-africas-growing-youth-population-and-human-capital-investments/>.

2 Juliet Bourke and Bernadette Dillon, "The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution: Eight Powerful Truths," Deloitte Insights, accessed April 08, 2019, <https://www2.deloitte.com/insights/us/en/deloitte-review/issue-22/diversity-and-inclusion-at-work-eight-powerful-truths.html>.

opportunities and influence decisions, especially in environments where their needs and interests are diminished. In addition, opportunities for marginalized groups to lead are not easily obtained by circumventing the power structures in place. Therefore, leaders that foster inclusion and equity are needed to ensure that diverse voices are represented and heard in decision-making spaces at all levels of society.

Decline of Trust in Institutions and Leaders

Leaders must engage and inspire people with credible information to address societal challenges.

There is a dispersion of authority from leaders of institutions around the world to people as trust becomes increasingly more distributed in society.³ This is compounded by a leadership credibility crisis stemming from people's lack of confidence that current leaders can address challenges such as corruption; immigration; the economic and socio-political impacts of globalization; eroding social values; misuse of data and information; and the social and economic consequences of rapid technological change. For example, in 2017, only 37% of the general population said CEOs were credible, and 29% said the same about government officials.⁴ By contrast, 60% of people surveyed globally saw other individuals like themselves as more credible than experts, CEOs, or government officials.⁵ Furthermore, people rated spokespersons from NGOs, CEOs, and government officials among the least credible as compared to their peers, academics, and technical experts.⁶

From peers to employees and followers, leaders must strengthen trust by transparently using credible information and data, to influence others and act for the greater good. With more trust, leaders and their followers can better collaborate to create positive change in communities, governments, organizations, and businesses. If distrust in leaders across sectors persists, societies will continue to face rising tension between people, leaders, and institutions. With the shifting perception of credibility from leaders to non-leaders, those in positions of power must increasingly engage people and inspire collaboration.

Compounding Complexity

Leaders must be values-driven, adaptable, and visionary to navigate complexity and change successfully.

Rapid global change – driven by a range of factors including technological advances to rising social inequalities and major demographic shifts – is generating complex social challenges. For instance, technology creates opportunities for using data collection to provide better, more efficient goods and services, yet raises issues around privacy and control of personal data. Social media connects people around the globe instantaneously, yet enables the spread of misinformation. A fluid economic environment motivates businesses to innovate for long-term survival, yet innovation solely driven by profitability can compromise social responsibility. Leaders that do not understand the nuances in navigating this complex environment can do more harm than good for people and institutions, and that is why leaders who are flexible in their thinking, approaches, and actions are so critical.

3 "2017 Edelman Trust Barometer." Edelman. Accessed April 08, 2019. <https://www.edelman.com/research/2017-edelman-trust-barometer>.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

Our Approach

IREX's approach to leadership development results in Dynamic Leaders across sectors who act and catalyze others to create positive social change. We identify these leaders, develop their capabilities, provide opportunities, and build their networks to amplify their impact.

This approach prepares leaders to navigate complex challenges, build trust with people across sectors, and mobilize coalitions to create more just, prosperous, and inclusive societies.



How We Develop Dynamic Leaders

IREX works with people around the world who embrace a learning mindset and demonstrate the potential to lead positive social change. IREX invests in developing Dynamic Leaders who engage and inspire others, advocate thoughtfully, take action, and continue to learn and adapt. Considering individuals' unique circumstances and environments throughout their leadership journey, we identify them, develop their capabilities, provide opportunities, and build their networks. This approach both strengthens their abilities to drive change and amplifies their impact.

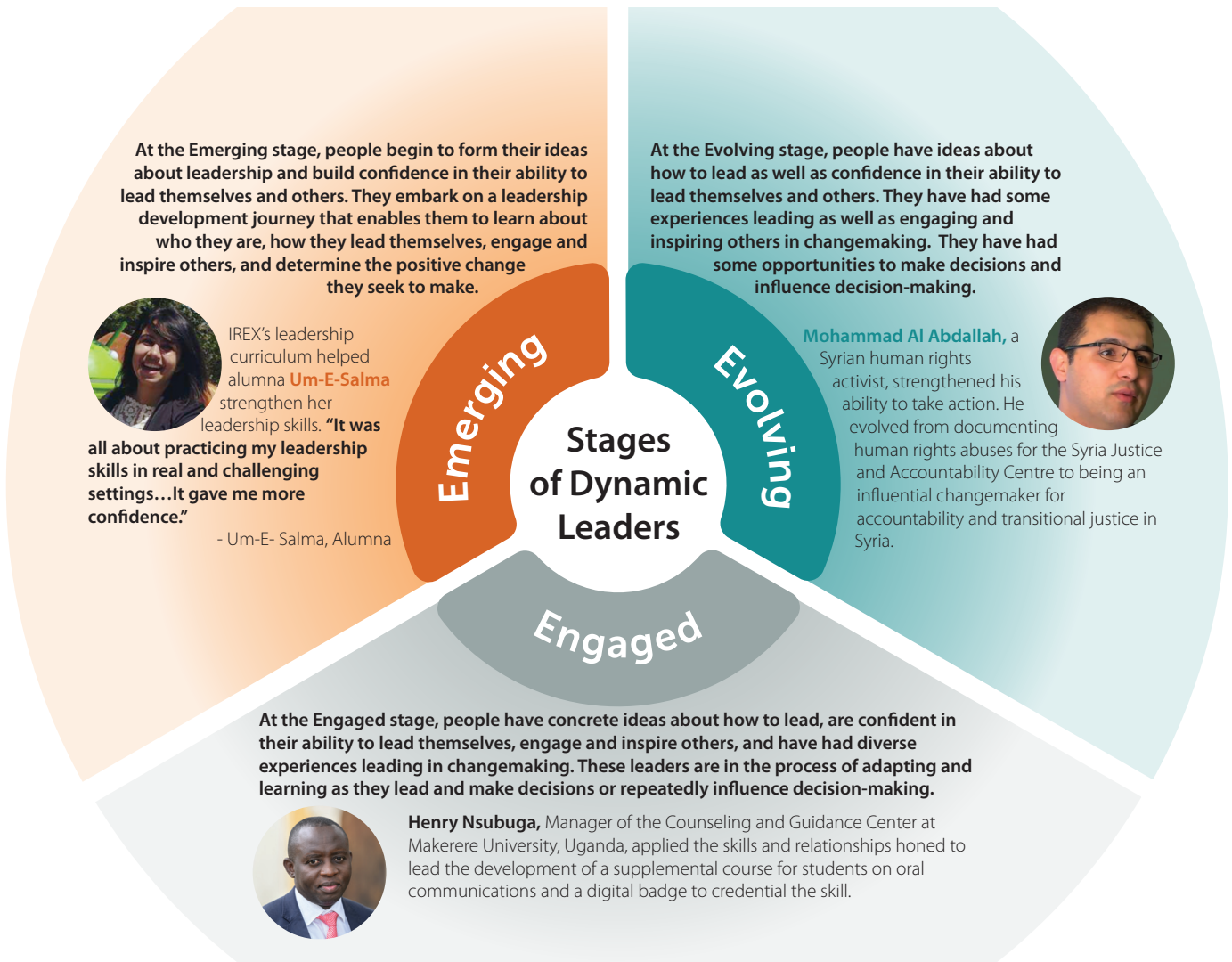
Identify Potential

People with the potential to lead exist in every country, in every part of society. IREX finds these people where they are and reviews their demonstrated actions – small or large – and not just their stated visions or existing credentials. From the young person who organizes a tree planting in her neighborhood to combat deforestation, to the college dean who leads a transformation of the student recruitment process to ensure more diversity, the leaders IREX identifies have shown their ability to turn ideas into action, whether in the home, school, workplace, or community.

Once we find these individuals, we assess their contexts, resources, skills, and needs so that we can support their leadership growth over time. This purposeful identification and assessment of leadership potential contributes to a diverse network of leaders capable of confronting complex issues together.

- ▶ **Find Potential:** IREX uses an inclusive recruitment strategy and framework that engages partners and alumni around the world to identify people who can benefit from our leadership approach and maximize their impact. Using application data, IREX adapts our recruitment strategies in real-time to ensure our applicant pools represent the diversity of the communities we aim to strengthen.

- ▶ **Assess Potential:** IREX provides individuals with tailored professional development opportunities by first assessing them and determining their leadership development stage– Emerging, Evolving, or Engaged. We use tools such as a Leader Assessment Framework to identify a leader's development stage based on their experiences in leadership roles and as changemakers.



IREX primarily targets the leaders at the Emerging and Evolving stages of their leadership development growth. It is critical to focus on this group as they have an immense opportunity to influence the trajectory of societal challenges over time. Recognizing that leaders at the Engaged stage also play key roles in driving positive change, IREX draws on this experienced group to mentor, advise, and support Emerging and Evolving leaders as they grow.

Consider Environment

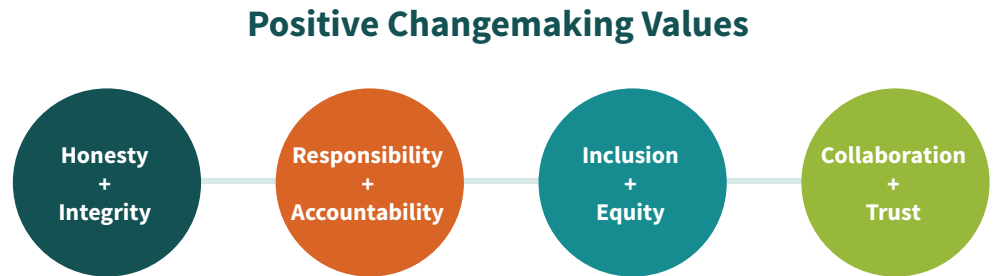
Around the world, people have different realities that impact the way they lead. IREX recognizes that understanding culture and the economic, social, and political environments of individuals is essential to providing opportunities to build effective leadership. IREX uses resources, such as political, economic, and gender analyses to understand individuals' contexts as we match their needs with the most appropriate leadership development experience. In addition, we ensure that brave spaces, where leaders can engage with courage and authenticity, are created and maintained throughout these experiences to maximize learning and development.

Develop Capabilities

IREX develops capabilities that prepare leaders to adapt to evolving challenges and enable them to lead successfully throughout their lives.

► Personal Character

An individual's character influences the way they lead. Dynamic Leaders are self-aware. They have confidence in their ability to lead, they embrace positive changemaking values (see text box) and demonstrate a learning mindset that allows them to adapt in changing circumstances. IREX provides opportunities to learn and grow these personal capabilities, and to develop and reinforce key values such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, accountability, inclusion, equity, collaboration, and trust. These values are at the core of leading ethically and affect how leaders engage and inspire others, act, advocate thoughtfully, and learn.



► Evidence-Informed Decision-Making

Dynamic leaders must arrive at evidence-informed decisions that advance social good in complex environments. IREX prepares leaders to interpret data responsibly and accurately, combine evidence with experience to navigate political economies, think critically about biases in data collection or analysis, and respond to unanticipated consequences of evidence-informed decisions. IREX uses dynamic facilitation and experiential learning approaches to help leaders build the important soft skills they need to distinguish signal from noise and translate evidence into decisions that reflect informed, collaborative leadership.

► Adaptability

Dynamic Leaders listen and observe, learn constantly, and adapt to the changes around them. The technological revolution, demographic shifts, and growing social inequalities require leaders that can adapt and thrive in uncertainty. IREX builds adaptability in leaders by introducing approaches like adaptive management and providing young leaders with professional experiences that expose them to new perspectives and allow for opportunities to practice and refine their new skills.

► Professional Expertise

Dynamic Leaders are knowledgeable in their professional areas of expertise. IREX collaborates with partners to support leaders in acquiring the knowledge and technical skills they need to lead effectively. For example, IREX strengthens sector-specific skills and leadership capacity of diverse individuals and groups such as young entrepreneurs, educators, activists, and journalists.

► Relationships

Transformational change cannot happen without individuals working together. Dynamic Leaders build interpersonal skills for connecting, engaging, and working with others to drive positive social change. IREX uses cohort models to strengthen connections at the onset of a transformative leadership development journey to enable shared experiences that bind people together over time. IREX enables relationship-building by connecting leaders with one another as well as with mentors, partners, and relevant institutions for personal and professional growth.

Today, relationships are also built through digital communication. Social media allows for fast connections, community building, and engagement among people, yet it also poses a challenge because of false information and divisive rhetoric that exist on those platforms. Dynamic Leaders leverage the positive aspects of digital communication for relationship building across sectors and borders while encouraging safe and ethical digital practices.

Provide Opportunities

To confront the world's challenges, leaders must have opportunities to learn, practice, and reflect, as well as access to and experience using relevant tools and resources. IREX provides the following mutually reinforcing opportunities:

▶ **Learning:** Dynamic Leaders value and understand the importance of life-long learning. To address challenges in a fast-changing world, leaders must continue to expand their knowledge. IREX provides opportunities to learn about leading oneself and others through curricula, resources, and practice.

▶ **Practice:** Dynamic Leaders practice what they learn, through experiences that enable them to build on their knowledge and test out new approaches. Through both in-person instruction and blended-learning that combines technology-enabled education with personal contact, IREX helps individuals apply what they learn. Through trainings that emphasize “learning by doing” and practical opportunities such as internships, we ensure that Dynamic Leaders have the space to practice their leadership.

▶ **Reflection:** Dynamic Leaders understand the importance of reflecting on what they learn and practice. IREX guides leaders at all stages through the reflective process to draw relevant insights for the purpose of improving how they lead themselves and others. A key tool is the Leadership Development Plan, which enables leaders to set goals for their personal growth as well as their changemaking efforts.

▶ **Mentorship and Coaching:** Dynamic Leaders identify gaps in their own leadership, professional knowledge, and technical abilities and seek out opportunities to continue to grow. IREX uses both mentoring and coaching to supplement individuals' long-term leadership development. Mentors, through demonstrated leadership skills and advice, guide individuals in their learning and cultivate relationships to support their mentee's changemaking path. Coaches encourage individuals to find their own solutions and approaches along their leadership development journey.

▶ **Tools and Resources:** Dynamic Leaders look for tools and resources to continue building their individual leadership capabilities over time, support others in their leadership development, and improve their changemaking work. IREX supports them through online training opportunities and tools such as the Peer Mentorship Toolkit which helps Dynamic Leaders maintain mentorship relationships with one another by supporting, advising, giving feedback, and holding each other accountable to personal and changemaking goals.



"Back home after the Fellowship I took time to work on my Leadership Development Plan (LDP) and I was able to draw a clear picture of who I want to be and what I want to do for my Burundi community and beyond. The LDP helps to start from small and grow progressively, that's what was happening in my life. The LDP is helping me to achieve my goals and build my nonprofit in a sustainable way."

-Janvier Manirakiza, Alumnus

Build Networks

Creating positive change at scale requires networks between people and institutions across communities, governments, civic organizations, and businesses. Dynamic Leaders participate in and leverage their networks to maximize their impact. IREX provides brave spaces where leaders can connect, and facilitates and strengthens networks through:

▶ **Purposeful Groups:** IREX establishes networks during and after leadership development interventions that not only allow individuals to connect for personal growth opportunities, but also enable collaboration and innovation for positive change. Through Communities of Practice that link Dynamic Leaders with experience and interest in specific issues, IREX connects leaders so they can support and learn from one another as they work toward a common goal.

▶ **Network Learning:** As networks form and evolve, IREX invests in measuring them to continuously learn and adapt. We use methods like Network Mapping and Social Network Analysis to facilitate understanding and provide support. Learning about the networks we help Dynamic Leaders build, allows IREX to provide leaders with useful data on how to effectively leverage their networks for individual and collective goals.



"We are diverse... We work better as a network and building in collectiveness makes the effort sustainable."

-Marielos Chang, Alumnus

The Result: Dynamic Leaders Addressing Current and Future Challenges

Our approach to developing leaders results in Dynamic Leaders across sectors who act and catalyze others to create positive social change. They are values-driven, ethical, and visionary in both their individual and collaborative efforts. These Dynamic Leaders seek to positively transform their communities, governments, organizations, and businesses. They:



Engage and Inspire: They listen to, work with, and catalyze people with vision to work toward positive change, and seek opportunities to use participatory and inclusive approaches and methods to reach a common goal.



Take Action: They find opportunities where there are challenges and address them.



Advocate Thoughtfully: They think critically and strategically leverage their assets and networks to influence people, institutions, and communities.



Continue Learning: They constantly learn, adapt, and find opportunities to practice and reflect on their actions, decisions, and efforts toward positive change.

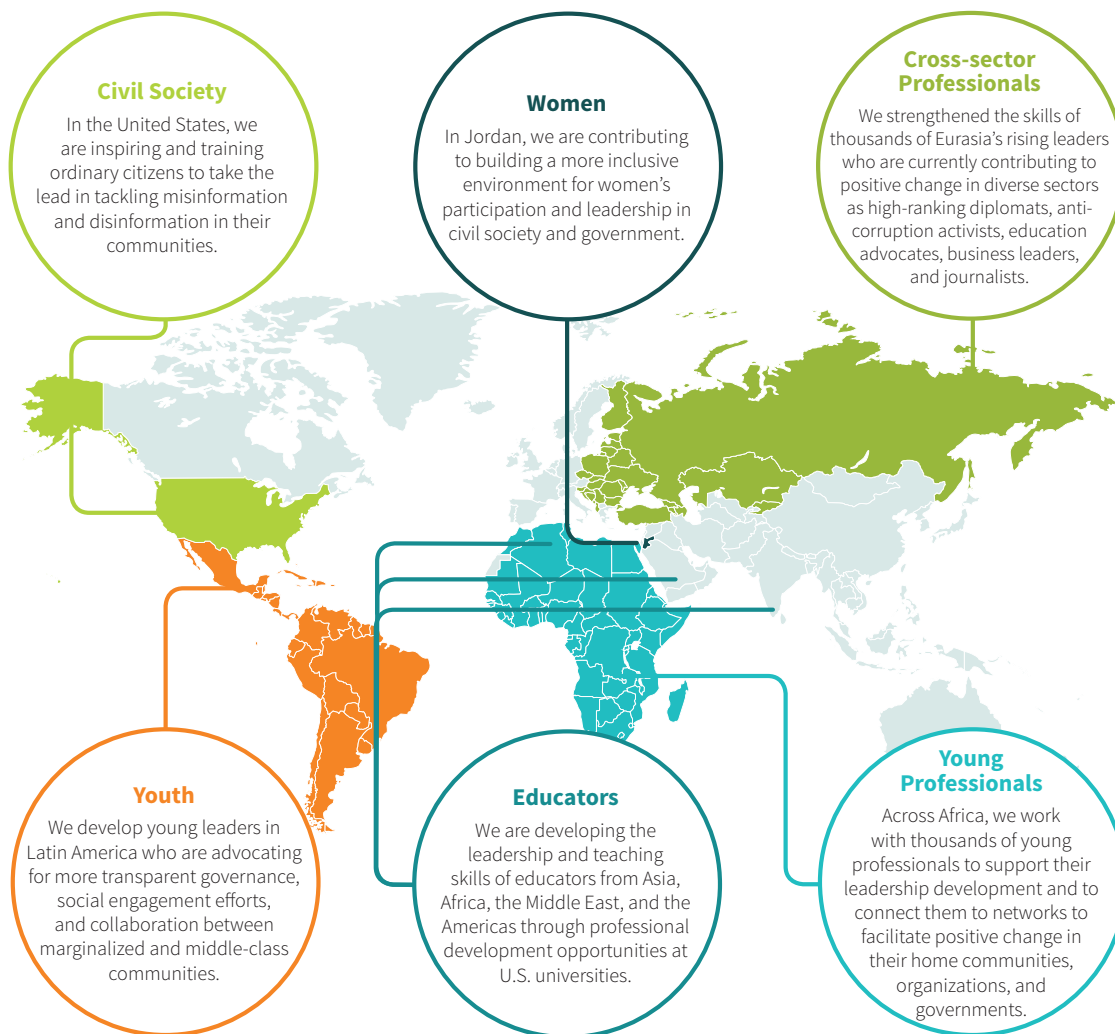
Despite facing complex challenges, these Dynamic Leaders use their abilities and roles to work toward the just, prosperous, and inclusive societies we know are possible.

Why IREX

IREX has over 50 years of experience building the capacity of diverse leaders across sectors. At our founding, we recognized the importance of investing in leadership development through exchanges between the United States and the former Soviet countries, and our work has expanded to over 100 countries on six continents since then. Over the years, working in partnership with organizations like the U.S. Department of State, USAID, Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, IREX has invested in people and inspired change. Our work cultivating leaders at all levels of society by enriching new professional experiences and networks is a critical component of our mission to create a more just, prosperous, and inclusive world.

Our past and current work demonstrates our extensive experience developing leaders and our investment in learning to strengthen our work over time. In 2018 alone, IREX strengthened the skills of over 26,000 leaders through fellowships and trainings.

IREX's expertise in leadership development cuts across sectors, geographies, and social challenges.



To learn more about IREX's work and how you can partner with us to strengthen leaders around the world, please reach out to us at communications@irex.org.