Transforming Communities through Leadership Development: A Pan-African Example
British Academy of Management Conference, Belfast, 12-14 Sept 2006

Richard Bolden (contact author)
Centre for Leadership Studies
Xfi Building
University of Exeter
Exeter EX4 4ST
UK
Tel: 01392 262579
Richard.Bolden@exeter.ac.uk

Philip Kirk
Department of Organisational Studies
University of the West of England
Bristol
UK

Abstract
Recent theories of leadership have shifted emphasis from the traits and behaviours of "leaders" to the social and contextual processes of "leadership". Despite this, however, much leadership development remains firmly focussed on the individual leader rather than the social context of leadership. In this paper we will draw on our experiences of researching a pan-African leadership development initiative to explore the manner in which individuals can be encouraged to use their learning to facilitate social change within their communities. We identify a number of levels at which the programme seems to be having an impact (self, family, work, community and society) and argue that this programme differs from more traditional interventions by the manner in which it encourages participants to reconsider and debate their sense of identity, to engage in collaborative action with those around them, and to facilitate a process of social construction that helps redefine community values and purpose. We conclude by proposing a theoretical model of how initiatives such as this can act as a catalyst for social change by offering a means by which participants and members of their communities can engage in the processes of seeing, walking and talking together.

Introduction
Over recent years the call for more inclusive and embedded notions of leadership has become increasingly evident. There is now widespread acceptance of the limitations of theories that focus on the traits and behaviours of "leaders" to the near exclusion of factors such context, task and other actors (including "followers", stakeholders, collaborators and other leaders). Process and relational theories that shift the emphasis from *leaders* to *leadership* are now coming to the fore (e.g. Rost, 1993; Alvesson, 1996; Yukl, 2002; Wood, 2005). Such models argue for a more systemic perspective, whereby leadership is considered as a dynamic social process that can not be abstracted from the context in which it occurs.

This call has arisen from research, theory and practice that highlights the limitations of the traditional 'leader-follower' dualism that places the responsibility for leadership firmly in the hands of the 'leader' and represents the 'follower' as passive and subservient. Instead, it is argued that: "leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group" (Gibb, 1954, cited in Gronn, 2000: 324) and in which

leaders and followers are co-collaborators in the leadership process (Rost, 1993). As such, this approach demands a dramatic reconsideration of the distribution of labour and power within organisations.

> "It may be that we need to understand leadership differently, not as something enacted by an individual or small group, but rather as the volition of an organization, and as such, outside the gift of any single individual or small group... It is not the gift of an individual, but created by the community, and as such offers opportunities for many to contribute." (Lumby, 2003: 291-292)

Whilst such views of leadership are being embraced within the academic literature their uptake within the fields of leadership practice and development are somewhat less prevalent. Thus the rewards for leadership still tend to be issued on an individual-basis to the select few at the top of organisations and the majority of development continues to be for individuals in formal leadership roles.

Day (2001) draws a distinction between 'leader' and 'leadership development'. Whereas *leader development* is an investment in human capital to enhance intrapersonal competence for selected individuals, *leadership development* is an investment in social capital to develop interpersonal networks and cooperation within organisations and other social systems. In his account both of these are necessary but the latter is all too often neglected.

The concept of leadership development as an investment in social capital is very different from that of developing leaders in isolation. At the very least it requires consideration of the context in which leadership occurs and an attempt to build and sustain social relationships rather than just the personal capabilities of participants.

> "Taking this view, leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. It involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information and assumptions through continuing conversations. It means generating ideas together; seeking to reflect upon and make sense of work in the light of shared beliefs and new information; and creating actions that grow out of these new understandings. It implies that leadership is socially constructed and culturally sensitive. It does not imply a leader/follower divide, neither does it point towards the leadership potential of just one person." (Harris, 2003: 314)

Barker (1997) argues that at the heart of this approach to leadership is an engagement with the ethical values of the community in which leadership is situated. Drawing on Harré, Clark and DeCarlo's (1985) three-tier construct he proposes that individual behaviour is driven largely through sub-conscious "morals", derived from a conscious system of "ethics" which, in turn, is defined by the sub-conscious "mores" of the social system in which actors find themselves. He thus describes leadership as "a process of change where the ethics of individuals are integrated into the mores of a community" (p.352). From this perspective leadership development is integrally related to community development and offers a means for the surfacing and negotiation of social values and purpose.

In this paper we will draw on our experiences of researching a pan-African leadership development initiative to explore the manner in which participants use their learning both for personal change but also to facilitate wider social transformation within their communities.

Background to the study
The research for this study was conducted within the context of a major UK-funded Pan-African leadership programme being delivered across 19 sub-Saharan nations, described thus:

> "InterAction is a high-profile British Council initiative that will support emerging African leaders as they face up to the challenges of the 21st Century. It is aimed at supporting those dynamic individuals who are innovating, searching for alternatives and challenging accepted ways of doing things. It is central to the British Council's corporate strategy to achieve greater impact in sub-Saharan Africa." (InterAction website, June 2006)

Following a period of consultation with the British Council and main delivery agents, Questions of Difference (QoD), the authors were recruited to explore the impact of the first cohort of this programme both in terms of the manner in which it facilitates the emergence of new concepts of leadership in Africa and how it impacts upon the communities in which the participants engage. To this extent the research was distinct from the more formal programme evaluation conducted by the British Council and QoD, by the way in which it considered leadership within the broader social context within which individuals live and work, rather than being exclusively concerned with the process and content of the programme. The InterAction programme was thus conceived of as providing a framework within which they developed and explored their understandings and practice of leadership in different settings, but to which they each brought a whole host of external factors (including past experience, personal circumstances, age, gender, etc.) that helped shape their process of engagement.

As an independent research partner, our intention was to gain insights into the mechanisms and processes by which this initiative builds upon and challenges traditional conceptions of leadership in Africa and facilitates engagement with transformational social change. A guiding principle of the research was, therefore, to give voice to new ways of thinking by Africans about leadership in Africa and to explore the mechanisms by which, through a process of leadership development, they can facilitate beneficial social change within their communities.

Programme philosophy
The InterAction programme seeks to transform Africa through the development of a new generation of leaders who are encouraged not only to take up their own leadership roles but to share their insights and learning to develop and inspire others within their communities. The emphasis on appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1987), "Africa for Africa through collaboration" and leadership within a community context makes this distinctive from more traditional post-colonial development initiatives. Indeed, rather than bringing in "experts" from the "developed world" the first phase of the initiative involved identifying and training in-country facilitators for each of the participating nations as well as a number of Pan-African facilitators for larger events. Thus the intention was to embrace African wisdom (using local stories and examples wherever possible) and to treat participants as equal partners in the learning process. Furthermore, a framework of principles and values, developed from an extended period of consultation within Africa and across all partners, was introduced as the basis and underlying philosophy of the programme (see Table 1).

Passions	Principles	Assumptions
(1) Africa (2) Age (3) Gender (4) Community (5) Leadership (6) Me	(1) Africa for Africa through collaboration (2) Appreciation, good will & good intent (3) The power of questions (4) Exploiting the magic of difference (5) Inviting & working with chaos & order to allow great things to emerge (6) Enabling people to do great work (7) Working towards congruence	(1) In every organisation something works (2) What we focus on becomes our reality (3) Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities (4) The language we use creates our reality (5) The act of asking questions to an organisation influences that organisation (6) It is important to value differences (7) People have more confidence to journey to the future when they carry forward parts of the past (8) If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be the best about the past

Table 1 – Philosophy of the InterAction Leadership Programme

Please note: the Passions and Principles are the intellectual property of QoD; the eight assumptions are based on Cooperider's principles of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, and Srivastva, 1987).

Programme structure
The programme comprised a series of elements as follows:

1. **Application**: candidates applied for the programme on the basis of adverts in their national press that demanded "do you consider yourself a leader and are you passionate about Africa?"
2. **Selection**: following application, a selection of candidates was invited to a one-day selection event in their own country where they were introduced to the programme philosophy and recruited to the main programme.
3. **In-country launch**: in each country there was a one-day event where participants were thrown in at the deep end and asked to create and run their own launch event.
4. **Pan-African event**: the main programme began with a series of three 3-day Pan-African events (100 people at each) where participants had the opportunity to meet, discuss and learn with colleagues from all of the 19 African countries as well as a small contingent from the UK.
5. **In-country module 1**: Module 1 was a 4 day programme in-country where participants were introduced to programme tools and models and had the opportunity to work together as a group.
6. **In-country module 2**: this was a community engagement where groups of 4-5 participants spent 3 days visiting local community groups to see how they could embrace the ideas raised during the programme.
7. **In-country module 3**: the programme finished with a 3 day module where participants reviewed the outcomes of the community engagements and worked out personal and group plans for continuing the learning after the programme.

Research methodology
The research took a narrative action inquiry approach to exploring the impact of the InterAction leadership programme both in terms of the manner in which it facilitated changing conceptions of leadership and how it impacted upon the communities in which the participants engage. The research, thus, provided a space for participants to surface the theory

that informed their practice, with the intention that this may inform their future practice, and that of others.

Our approach was to engage with participants (and other stakeholders) in the programme as co-inquirers into the meanings they were attaching to the notion of leadership and how they enacted these meanings, as leaders, to bring about wider social impact within their communities.

The research was founded upon a set of guiding principles that were consistent with the overall ethos of the programme but still enabled an independent and critical engagement with the data. Our primary methodological assumptions included that as participative action researchers we acted as co-inquirers, co-creators and co-interpreters of narratives and texts; that meanings and actions are socially constructed; that meanings and action inter-relate to inform each other (i.e. theory *from* practice and theory *for* practice); and that leadership is a socially and culturally embedded process.

The research was designed to draw on (and triangulate where possible) a range of data collection methods that would enable an inductive understanding of the manner in which the InterAction programme facilitates new ways of thinking about and enacting leadership. These can be broadly grouped into seven categories.

1. **Context immersion**: participant observation during a range of modules and activities in the InterAction programme, including: Pan African Event, Kenya; Module 1, Uganda; Module 3, Ghana; and UK programme design workshop.
2. **Preliminary conversations**: narrative inquiry group interviews with participants on Module 1 in Uganda and Module 3 in Ghana, exploring concepts of leadership, identity and impact amongst participants.
3. **Online survey**: a qualitative survey inviting views on leadership and impact from the whole cohort of 300 participants in the first round of the InterAction programme (70 responses received).
4. **Follow-up conversations**: a series of one-to-one biographical interviews conducted with participants from the InterAction programme in Tanzania (15 interviews) and Zambia (12 interviews) 1-2 months after the end of the first round of the programme.
5. **Community visits**: follow-up visits to the communities attended by participants during Module 2 of the programme (3 in Tanzania and 3 in Zambia, supplemented by feedback conversations with 4 communities in Ghana).
6. **Stakeholder conversations**: ongoing discussions and conversations with various key stakeholders including the British Council, QoD, LEAD International and the African facilitation team.
7. **Secondary data**: programme materials, evaluation data and participant stories developed and collected by the British Council, QoD and LEAD International.

Analysis and interpretation
The rich and diverse body of data called for a variety of analysis methods. The primary mechanism, however, in the spirit of action research, was an inductive, qualitative approach whereby the researchers immersed themselves in the observations and narrative accounts, letting patterns, concepts and ideas emerge over time. In order to maintain validity, the two researchers initially interpreted the data independently, drawing their own interpretations prior to a mutual process of verification and moderation, both with one another, the British Council Programme Director and colleagues. As such, the final interpretations are the result of a

cyclical process of reflection and dialogue, and the research process can be considered as one of provocative social engagement, whereby the researchers, in collaboration with other actors, constructed, challenged and reconstructed varying representations and interpretations of the data over time.

Limitations of the study
Whilst this research has been conducted to the best of our abilities (given the available time and resources) it is worth noting that it offers only a partial view of the InterAction programme and its impact. There are key development and strategy debates to which we were not party, we only attended small parts of the programme, spoke to a limited number of people, concerned ourselves with a limited number of questions, only studied the first cohort of the programme and gave limited attention to the wider social, political and economic contexts of the intervention. Furthermore, it should be noted that both researchers were white, male and British (although a female member of the team, of different ethnic background, did attend the Pan African Event in Kenya and participated in early research discussions). To this extent, what is included in this paper can only represent a limited number of voices and if others have been neglected or misrepresented then we sincerely apologise.

Research findings
Our analysis of the data comprised two principal dimensions: (1) an exploration of the meanings that participants were associating with the concept of leadership and (2) evidence of the impact of their participation in this programme. Findings from the first part of this analysis are explored in other papers (Bolden and Kirk, 2005; Kirk and Bolden, 2006), whilst the focus of the current paper is on programme impacts.

Almost without exception all participants who discussed their experience through conversations and questionnaires reported significant, life-changing impacts of their participation in the programme. The range of impacts span the whole spectrum of participants' life experience, from self-confidence and identity, through relationships with partners, family members and friends, to the workplace and wider community. Indeed, it was striking how the programme treated the person in a holistic manner, placing equal importance on their role in the family and other communities, as at work (unlike many more commercially orientated professional development programmes). In order to give a sense of the range of impacts experienced, these will be grouped under the following headings: impact on self, family, workplace, community and society.

Impact on self
Of the six guiding passions of the InterAction programme (see Table 1) the focus on "Me" was seen to be the most important by a large number of participants. In effect the importance of developing and caring for oneself was seen as a fundamental precursor to taking up ones leadership role within a community. Thus the focus on self was not selfish but rather for the collective benefit of the community:

> "On the InterAction programme we learnt that leadership starts with understanding yourself, realising yourself, what are your strengths, what is working and even what is not working. Then you put these things together and while it is not simple or easy, it is a good way to lead people. So you lead yourself and then you can lead others." (Male, Consultant, Tanzania)

Key elements of the impact on self included enhanced self-awareness, confidence, inter-personal skills (including listening, questioning and appreciation of the views of others), tolerance and patience.

> "Before I had no confidence in questioning something because they will ask me why, who are you to be asking this? But right now I feel it is my role, to question our political leaders because they are our leaders and they are accountable to us the people. In this way they also learn from us, they become aware of our feelings and of our needs. Right now I have confidence. People ask me to be the leader and I am willing to do this because I know it is just about doing what I can do. The way I look at things now is different after InterAction." (Female, Teacher, Tanzania)

At the core of this change has been a shift in personal identity whereby participants have come to recognise themselves as leaders with the potential to exert influence and bring about change no matter what their position in the system.

> "I have confidence in myself now, I see myself as a leader, I can talk to people and listen to them and that I would enable them to listen to them rather than it is me who tells them what to do. That is why perhaps they have trust in me. I think they see that I give them the confidence to make their own decisions. When people do not want to be leaders sometimes it is because they are lacking that confidence. When I give them the opportunity to make their decisions and facilitate that process it builds confidence in them. It is not the same as thinking you have to be a born leader or you have to be taught to be a leader. But even leading is a process and it involves all the people." (Male, Student, Tanzania)

Adopting such a facilitative, inclusive approach to leadership helps to empower others. The leaders' role is seen as one of concern for, caring and developing others rather than being distant and judgemental (cf. Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe's (2005) notion of "nearby" and "distant" leadership and Gilligan's (1982) "ethic of concern" versus "ethic of judgement").

Impact on family
A distinctive feature of the impact of the InterAction leadership programme on participants is the way in which it influences the nature of their social interactions in all aspects of their lives – personal and professional. Impacts within the immediate family environment were particularly commented on and, in effect, this appeared to be one of the first places where participants began to practice and apply what they had learnt during the programme.

Many spoke of improved relationships with spouses, siblings and other family members, primarily arising from the application of principles such as "appreciation, good will and good intent" and "the magic of difference". Giving others the benefit of the doubt reopened dialogues and enabled an enhanced appreciation of the potential contribution (and personal circumstances) of different family members.

> "We grew up in my family with my father not taking care of us. He never bought me a pair of shoes a Tshirt or paid my school fund but above all he was abusive to all of us including my mother, physically and emotionally. I had a great anger upon him. I never wanted anything to do with him because of that but because of the TICing model *[a model of communication developed by QoD and used on the InterAction*

programme] I looked into him and asked myself how was he raised was he loved by his family? Was he recognised as a person who may do something for himself? Most of the things were not there he was never loved even by his mother, she turned his sisters against him, he was very much rejected so he grew up like that. Then I asked myself this question: "How can he love if he was never loved" everything that he did was of the impact his growing up life style had on him. My father is not stupid, he does not hate us, it is just that he does not know how to love. I took a big step I FORGAVE HIM for everything and started to look at him as somebody who needs to be loved - guess what it worked! It can not happen overnight but we are now growing closer together and the others are following as well. Sometimes he seems to be worse but he is changing gradually. He will even say nice words about us and my mother and it feels so good. The TICing model is working to understand other people and yourself - do not just talk or conclude on anything without checking the TICing model." (Female, Community Development Manager, South Africa)

There are also examples of where participants have acted as mentors for siblings and other family members:

"My brother who is 20 years old, for example, has no confidence. I gave him the questions I was given in InterAction to reflect on (what are your strengths and weaknesses, what are you proud about achieving in your life, and so on). He wanted to show me his answers and talk about them. It was a powerful conversation, the first real one I had with him, because he was so honest and he was so shocking about the way he felt. I think that was a bit like I had felt too like a loser with no confidence, although not so much as he did […] So I thought I would make it my mission to talk with him about what was happening to me in InterAction. One day I gave him some money to go and deposit in the bank, into my account for me. He could not believe that I had done that. Nobody trusts him […]. We never gave him a chance. He was so excited that I did not think he would lose it. When he came back I did not expect him to talk to me about it, but he told me about the whole process, the forms he had to fill in. It was a big boost to his confidence, his morale."(Female, Sales Executive, Tanzania)

And for others, the family is a powerful source of support, but one that needs to be worked at:

"First I am a leader of myself. And you have to be that same leader in all your communities. I am an activist a women's activist, a HIV/Aids activist. I am an activist and I have to take that with me wherever I go. But you cannot do it on your own. You need support, psychological, financial, emotional support. I get this from my husband. If members of your family do not understand what you are doing because you are not there and they think you should be doing other things you will be worrying about that and involved in family quarrels. I have had to work at doing this, with some members of my family showing them how what I am doing by not being at home will help all of us. It doesn't just come." (Female, Member of Parliament, Tanzania)

Impact at work
Other than family, the workplace is perhaps the context in which participants felt there had been the greatest impact of their changing approach to leadership and inter-personal relations due to the amount of time spent there. Most of these impacts involved arose from the

increased personal capacities outlined above, leading to career progression, improved working relationships and a greater appreciation of the contribution of others.

> "Before InterAction, I believed so much in myself that I never believed in any other person. Of course this left me with so much headache and undue deadlines to meet. I had an unfair share of official responsibilities which could have been comfortably and effectively delegated. With InterAction, I am able to appreciate that my colleagues could do well also, or even better than me given the chance. I provided the opportunity and amazingly, they can do many things better than myself, and they get better with more enabling environment created. The result? My headaches have become reduced, less deadlines to meet, improved output, more satisfaction among my colleagues and more progress for the organisation." (Male, Development Worker, Nigeria)

As indicated in the previous quote, this change in style has been well appreciated by colleagues and bosses and, in effect, started a ripple effect throughout the organisation.

> "As the Executive Director of the NGO, I have not only developed the ability to relate well with managers of bigger corporate organizations, but I have started a mentoring process to prepare others to succeed me with time. My colleagues in the office give me feed back in these areas all the time and with the community networking going on now, my office has become an "interaction" office." (Male, Researcher and NGO Director, Ghana)

Impact on community
Besides work and family, many of the participants were engaged in other social communities (including church, schools, women's groups, community projects, etc.), where they have found other channels to apply their learning from the programme.

> "It has been wonderful, at home, at work, even on the pulpit when I am preaching I now find myself ending my sermons with powerful life-giving questions. What I have noticed is that there has been a change in my approach to people and issues." (Male, CEO of IT Company and Lay-Pastor, Nigeria)

> "The fact is that as a woman in my tradition you cannot challenge or question decisions by men. I have tried to change this. By using appreciation, goodwill and good intention and through questioning by letting them know they are doing great things but things will be better if the women participate. Through my influence as a leader of a female association we have done this by examples of handling projects in the community where we have proved our worth. The women are now taking a leading role in community projects, which has improved a lot their status in the community." (Female, HR Director and President of Women's Association, Cameroon)

A central part of the InterAction programme was the concept of leadership within community and participants were encouraged to identify communities where they have influence (indeed, this actually formed part of the selection process). In order to practice engaging at the community level the programme comprised an experiential element where participants spent time engaging with local communities. These engagements typically involved a small group of participants spending a day within the chosen community speaking with a wide range of people, asking questions, sharing insights and offering a positive appreciation of the work being done. Within the current paper there is insufficient space to enter into a detailed

description of the kinds of impact that were achieved in this short time but, suffice it to say a number of the changes were substantial, transformational and sustained. For example, two months after engagement with an artisanal collective in Zambia, the community had purchased a vehicle (something previously considered impossible) to enable the transportation of materials and access to a small farmstead recently purchased on the outskirts of the city; the women's group in the village had started running classes on traditional practices (such as female initiations) for members of the local city community; villagers were looking to implement regular dance performances for locals and tourists; and a member of the community management committee had gained a place on the next round of the InterAction programme.

Impact on society
Not surprisingly, through these changes at a local level, participants are starting to have an impact within the wider society – national, regional and international. Much of this impact is achieved in the same way as in local communities – through listening, questioning, appreciation, tolerance and self-confidence – and arises primarily from changes in self-identity in relation to community. For many, however, they now see their position within society in a broader context than their immediate local communities. Some participants have been moved to stand for parliament, seeing their potential to influence national policy; others are developing regional and international networks within and beyond Africa; others are using their positions in the media, broadcasting and other domains to share the InterAction message with a wider audience; and nearly all have re-engaged with their identity as Africans.

> "I have a new identity as an African – not just a Ghanaian – I am now more passionate and concerned about things that happen in other parts of Africa. I never used to look at the African column in the daily paper, I wasn't interested, but I now take that part and read it and I sit down and think and come up with ideas and solutions that I think would be an opportunity to change positions around in these countries and the situations people find themselves in." (Female, Administrator, Ghana)

Discussion
The stories and examples presented give a flavour of the kinds of effect that a programme of this type can have on participants and their communities. The intention of this paper, however, is not to argue whether or not the programme has been successful but to explore the underlying processes by which a development activity such as this can impact on individuals and their communities. To this extent we would like to begin by focussing on three elements of the programme that, we feel, make it distinct from more individually-orientated initiatives, namely identity, collaborative action and social construction.

Much of what has been revealed during the process of our research is how this programme has offered participants the opportunity to reflect on and challenge their sense of *identity* in context. People have been able to recognise themselves as leaders, as members of their communities, as equal to others (regardless of age, gender, race, etc.), and as part of a wider "Africa". The opportunity of experiencing, discussing and reflecting on the nature of leadership with a diverse group of peers has challenged outdated and limiting perspectives and replaced them with something more positive and enriching. It would seem that this may be practical evidence of what Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) call 'identity work' – the ongoing struggle to create a sense of self and provide answers (all be they often temporary) to questions such as 'who am I?' and 'what is my purpose?' What is important within the current context, however, is that this process of identity construction is conducted through

dialogue and exchange in a social context, rather than through more individually-orientated or "objective" mechanisms such as psychometric testing, 360° feedback or one-to-one coaching.

A related concept at the heart of this approach is that of *collaborative action*, or "sharing". Whereas more "academic" programmes, such as MBAs, may emphasise the benefits of expertise and professionalism, the InterAction programme attempts to break down boundaries. Thus, participants are encouraged to share and practice their learning at home as well as work and to disseminate and exchange models and ideas within their communities for mutual benefit. The learning process is thus truly dynamic and collective, occurring through interaction and exchange rather than personal transformation alone. Indeed, the programme seems to have engaged people more at an emotional and behavioural-level than a cognitive level.

And thirdly, is the significance of *social construction*. To this extent, it can be argued that how people conceive of leadership affects how social systems operate and as a consequence affects the well-being of the social system and the people in it (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). Thus, this programme is not so much concerned with the traits of leaders, nor what they do, but how, through dialogue and exchange, they can collectively reshape the environment within which they operate. Thus, the programme operates not so much through creating "leaders", as through stimulating debates that may transform social values and perspectives. This is embedded within the appreciative approach used, as well as the consistent use of dialogue and inter-personal contact.

Towards a model of engagement
So how do the findings thus far presented connect with existing concepts and theories of leadership? Well, firstly, there are clear parallels to social process theories of leadership. The data here speak of a deeply personal appreciation and expression of leadership but one that is only meaningful *in relation* to a wider social network. Thus, we look to the collective without losing sight of the individual. The findings also relate to models and theories of leadership development. If the processes of discussion, experience and reflection contribute towards a reconceptualisation of self and ones' role in community then these should form a fundamental part of any leadership development intervention.

To help explain the manner in which this programme encourages participants to facilitate social change within their communities we would like to build on Kirk's (2005) model of "System leadership development". This model, derived from research and education in a number of community contexts, argues that a systems perspective on leadership development should offer opportunities for actors to "see", "walk" and "talk" together.

When considered in relation to the InterAction programme it is clear how the different elements of seeing, walking and talking together are facilitated through different developmental tools. *Seeing together* (or "connective leadership"), for example is facilitated by the programmes' guiding principles, passions and assumptions, which offer a common language and mode of engagement for participants. *Walking together* (or "collective empowerment") is facilitated by the 'community engagements' and Pan-African networking events, each of which offers a powerful shared learning experience that brings participants together and gives them the chance to practice and enact their learning in a safe and supporting environment. And *talking together* (dialogue) is enhanced by the facilitatory approach, emphasis on equality and diversity, and a number the practical tools used (including

questioning, listening and communication). Thus, despite not being explicitly designed to these specifications it appears that the InterAction programme still contains all of the elements of a system leadership development initiative.

To extend this model beyond programme participants to other members of their communities we need to consider how the tools and techniques used in the programme offer a practical means for engaging others in leadership and, as a consequence, influencing social change within communities. It would seem that through their engagement in the InterAction programme participants are encouraged to act as ambassadors for social change within their communities. Their impact, however, is not through directive action or personal qualities (as might be implied by more individualistic models of leadership), nor necessarily through transformational or inspirational influence (although this could be used), but primarily through the facilitation of a perceptual shift from the idea of the leader as an exceptional (and usually senior) individual to the notion of 'everyone as a leader'.

This inclusive and communal view of leadership, associated with a set of straightforward concepts and tools, creates a model of leadership development that can easily be replicated and transmitted within social groups. This chain reaction was most easy to see within the community engagements where, in a very short time, significant change was brought about through the use of effective questioning and the sharing and exchange of ideas and tools. Figure 1 represents this diagrammatically by showing how an individual participant (the bottom triangle) can use the processes of seeing, walking and talking together to engage others in leadership and, as consequence, community development. At the heart of this model is the concept of the relational self or "self in community".
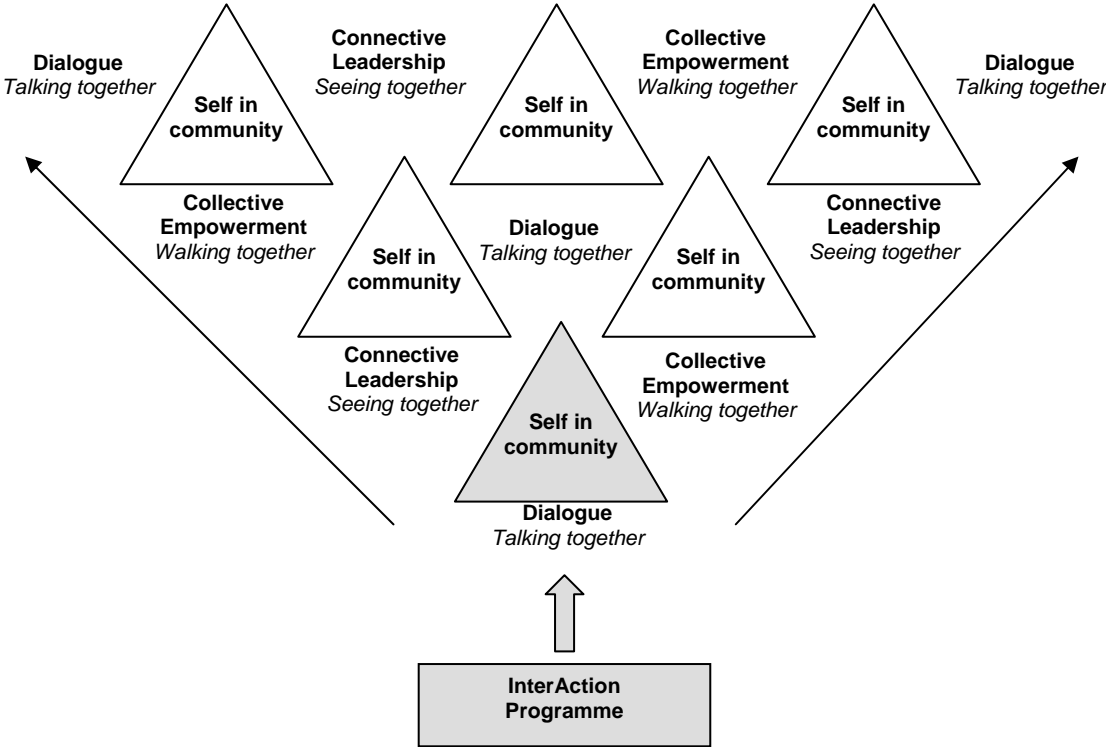

Figure 1 – System Leadership Development in Communities

This model offers a framework in which leadership development can facilitate the kinds of process Barker (1997) outlined when describing leadership as community development. A

fundamental element of this is the opportunity to discuss and explore personal and community values and identities and to construct new (or alternative) realities. What is also significant is how this is done in a highly contextualised environment and the way the person is treated as a whole rather than just at work.

A development initiative such as this, therefore, seems to be able to engage both with the development of self *and* community without giving precedence to one over the other. Whilst Reynolds (2000) warns that community development initiatives may "mask darker tendencies towards coercion and the assimilation of differences" (p.67) in this case, it seems, this initiative offers the opportunity to reframe and challenge individual and community norms in a constructive manner and to co-create sense of meaning.

Conclusion
This paper has demonstrated how leadership development can act as catalyst for community-level social change by engaging participants in a collective process of identity work - the construction and reconstruction of a concept of self within community. Through shedding negative and restrictive images of leadership participants have been able to (re)engage with a view of themselves as leaders and a belief in their ability to bring about change no matter what their position within the system. Using the System Leadership Development model we have revealed how an initiative such as *InterAction* can offer an environment in which participants learn to see, walk and talk together and embark on the process of sharing their learning with others in their communities, largely through the conceptual and practical tools acquired during the programme. Such an approach is inclusive, engaging and highly transferable, enabling a small number of participants to rapidly influence the lives of many people around them. The implications of such an approach both for theoretical concepts of leadership and practical applications of leadership development in Africa and elsewhere are beyond the scope of this paper but are worthy of consideration by those who seriously wish to challenge outdated representations of leadership and the 'leader-follower' relationship.

References
Alvesson, M. (1996) 'Leadership studies: from procedure and abstraction to reflexivity and situation', *Leadership Quarterly*, 7(4), pp. 455-485.
Alimo-Metcalfe, B. and Alban-Metcalfe, J. (2005) Leadership: time for a new direction? *Leadership*, 1(1), 51-71.
Barker, R.A. (1997) How can we train leaders if we do not know what leadership is? *Human Relations*, 50 (4), 343-362.
Bolden, R. and Kirk, P. (2005) 'Leadership in Africa: meanings, impacts and identities', *Studying Leadership 4th International Conference*, University of Lancaster 12-13 December 2005.
Cooperrider, D.L. and Srivastva, S. (1987) 'Appreciative inquiry in everyday organizational life' In Woodman, Passmore (eds.) *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, Vol.1, pp.129-169, JAI Press Inc.
Day, D. (2001) Leadership development: a review in context, *Leadership Quarterly*, 11(4), 581-613.
Gibb, C.A. (1954) 'Leadership', in G. Lindzey (ed.) *Handbook of Social Psychology*, vol. 2, pp.877–917. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Gronn, P. (2000) Distributed properties: a new architecture for leadership, *Educational Management and Administration*, 28(3), 317-338.

Harré, R., Clarke, D. and DeCarlo, N. (1985) *Motives and Mechanisms*, London: Methuen.

Harris, A. (2003) Teacher Leadership as Distributed Leadership: Heresy, Fantasy or Possibility? School Leadership and Management, 23 (3), 313-324.

InterAction website (2004) [http://www.bc-interaction.org/], accessed 01/06/06.

Lumby, J. (2003) Distributed Leadership in Colleges: Leading or Misleading? Educational Management and Administration, 31(3), 283-293.

Kirk, P. (2005) 'System leadership development', *21st European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) Colloquium 2005,* Freie Universität Berlin, Germany, June 30–July 2.

Kirk, P. and Bolden, R. (2006) 'African Leadership: Insights, meanings, and connotations', *Leadership and Management Studies in Sub-Sahara Africa Conference*, Zanzibar, 26-28 June.

Reynolds, M. (2000) Bright lights and the pastoral idyll: Ideas of community underlying management education methodologies, *Management Learning*, 31(1), 67-81.

Rost, J. C. (1993) Leadership development in the new millennium, *Journal of Leadership Studies,* 1(1): 92-110.

Smircich, L., and Morgan, G. (1982) Leadership: The management of meaning, *Journal of Applied Behavioural Studies*, 18: 257-273.

Sveningsson, S. and Alvesson, M. (2003) Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle, *Human Relations*, 56(10), 1163-1193.

Wood, M. (2005) 'The Fallacy of Misplaced Leadership', *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(6), 1101-1121.

Yukl, G.A. (2002) *Leadership in Organizations: Fifth Edition*, Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice-Hall.