

Lusoma Gazette



ARTICLE

Leading Through Uncertainty

What Social Impact Leaders Need Right Now. Tips on how to empower your team to remain relevant in uncertainty.

FEATURES

Tips on how to empower your team to remain relevant in uncertainty.

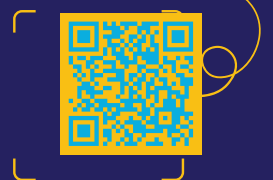
#LUSOMASPOTLIGHT

From Swamps to Strategic Shifts

How KDI Kenya is Building Community Power; With a Little Help from Lusoma

Edited by: Joy Abigail Mwende

Scan me



Women at the Wheel

Editor's Word



Is it just me, or is 2025 moving in fast-forward. One minute we were writing resolutions, and now we're already dodging June deadlines. Time isn't slowing down and neither are we.

This year isn't about waiting. It is about doing. Driving. Shifting gears when the road gets tricky. And at the front of that momentum? Women. Not in the backseat. Not hanging on from the side. But at the wheel... steering communities, building strategies, holding space, and holding it all together.

This issue isn't just a celebration of those women. It's a platform; a space created to empower women and the teams they lead. A place to reflect, learn, and connect around the kind of leadership that doesn't just adapt to change but creates it.

From community organizers transforming flood-prone areas into safe public spaces, to bold boardroom leaders shifting organizational cultures, women across our region are leading with heart and with clarity. And they're showing us that true resilience is about more than bouncing back. That it's about moving forward... smarter, together, and on purpose.

At Lusoma, we believe women's leadership is a source of strategy, strength, and sustainable impact, especially in uncertain times. So we're asking: how can we all, as funders, partners, neighbors, and changemakers, support and accelerate the leadership that women are already practicing? Let this issue spark that conversation and remind you that the future is moving fast. And women are already driving. Buckle up. Let's go.

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Building a Resilient Year

Flexibility in Uncertain Situations

The first quarter of 2025 is done! Congratulations on making it this far. If you're wondering whether your calendar is moving too fast, or even looking for a time machine to pause the day, don't worry. I don't have a solution, but you're not alone. The word 'unprecedented' has become part of our everyday vocabulary, hasn't it?

Few could have predicted how drastically the development landscape would shift, especially if fundamental funding like USAID's were to halt. As the effects ripple through the entire sector, many of us have found ourselves rethinking strategies, restructuring organizations, revising contingency plans and existing in firefighting mode. Then again, uncertain, unprecedented times call for contingency plans, right?

In my role consulting in research and programs at Lusoma, I've seen this disruption up close. Disruptions, whether political shifts, funding cuts, or global crises rarely send courtesy emails before they arrive.

Yet when they hit, organizations often suffer adverse effects, forcing them to pivot programs overnight just to keep the lights on. So, how do we stay resilient? Given, resilience isn't optional, it's the price of admission.

This question resounded at my recent experience at Akili Dada's International Women's Day Leaders Round Table Breakfast, themed "United in Resilience: Building Collective Power for Women's and Girls' Rights." There, in the midst of authentic conversations with women-led CBOs and feminist leaders, the realities of adaptive change came into sharp focus as they grappled with this reality. Three dominant themes emerged that demand our immediate attention and creative solutions;

- The funding paradox: With traditional sources like USAID frozen, organizations need radical flexibility in financing, yet face demands for proven grant experience just to qualify.

- The skills and knowledge gaps: Where leaders lack access to critical knowledge (like fundraising avenues) proposal writing skills as well as strategies for adaptation and alignment, and communities remain unaware of their rights. Both causing a disconnect that stifles advocacy.
- The leadership constraint: Leaders lack the coaching and mentorship needed to navigate new crises, revealing that resilience isn't about tenure, it's about targeted support.

As I ponder on meaningful solutions that truly align with Lusoma's ethos of context-relevant approaches, I've landed on what I dare say is an underrated simple yet transformative answer. The intentional practice of flexibility when everything demands us to freeze, scramble, or adapt short-term survival instincts.

As traditional donors retreat, programs don't and neither does the need for resourcing stop. However, what if we flipped this script and changed our approach? Instead of chasing increasingly scarce donor dollars, how can we monetize what we already have to fill the funding gap? What if we turned the toolkits that we use in organizations like Lusoma into revenue generating models that can sustain our programs? The solutions may be hiding in plain sight - in our expertise, in our networks, and/or in our physical assets. The question is whether we have the courage to see them differently. My key takeaway from this conversation was that funding gaps help reveal hidden assets.

This brings us to the knowledge gaps plaguing the sector. If we look closely, the resources we need already often exist within our own networks. The solutions are there; they're just unevenly distributed. So how might we bridge this gap? Peer-to-peer learning among organizations could take many forms: grant-writing templates shared in learning circles, donor intelligence exchanged among allies, or digital platforms connecting groups with complementary skills.

Fiscal hosting could further sustain our movements by pooling resources. To close these gaps, we must move beyond competition and embrace authentic collaboration.

Finally, we must confront the leadership constraint that most of us recognize, the one we endlessly debate in conferences yet fail to act on. Resilience and flexibility aren't about tenure, they're about access to support, coaching, and adaptive strategies. Too many leaders are forced to navigate modern day crises using outdated playbooks. What would it take for experienced leaders to mentor emerging ones, ensuring the social impact field becomes more dynamic and equitable? It's time to move from talk to action.

Taking action always sounds easy, until you actually lay out the plans and strategies to do so. Based on this ongoing conversation, my urge would be to test our flexibility muscle regularly and not just as a crisis response. In the spirit of collaboration allow me to share a simple exercise that we do at Lusoma that could help your organization.

- This week evaluate one underutilized asset (knowledge, networks, or physical resources)
- This next quarter initiate one reciprocal partnership not just networking purposes, but resource-sharing with accountability
- This year incorporate contingency planning into regular team meetings

Here's to finding new paths to the destination, what's your next pivot?

1 *"Tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today."*
-African Proverb

#LusomaSpotlight

When you think of Nairobi's most beautiful green spaces, an old swamp probably isn't the first thing that comes to mind. But for the team at Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI) Kenya, transforming challenges into opportunity is their specialty and in 2024, they did it with strategy, resilience, and a bit of Lusoma magic.

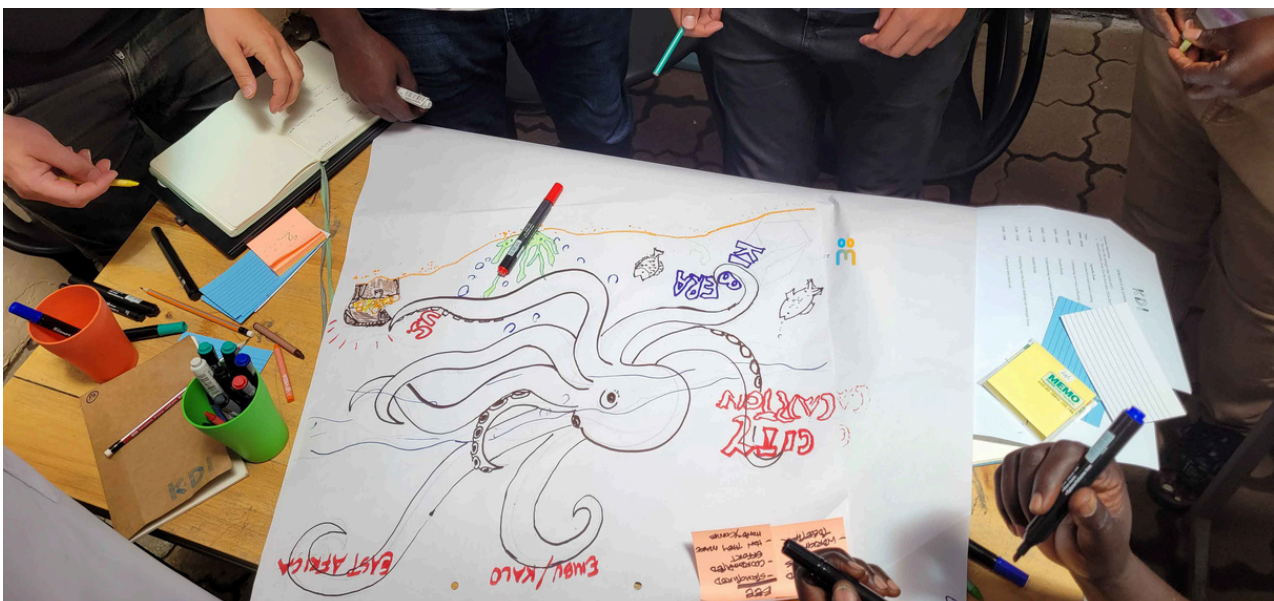
KDI has been rolling up its sleeves since 2006 to tackle some of Kenya's toughest urban development challenges such as climate change, water access, youth empowerment, and public space revitalization. But they don't just deliver services. They partner with communities to co-create solutions, ensuring that local residents aren't just consulted, they lead in the development. From Nairobi to Los Angeles to Stockholm, their 50+ team of designers, planners, engineers, and dreamers are proving that inclusive development isn't a hashtag, it's a blueprint.

Coming into 2024, KDI was ready to level up. After three years of internal strengthening, they wanted to **enhance their program reach, deepen impact, and establish a Research Institute to fuel advocacy**. But with all that ambition came one big question: how do we prioritize without burning out?

Enter Lusoma. We came in to facilitate a strategic review that clarified KDI's direction without killing its creativity. We listened (a lot), asked bold questions (some slightly uncomfortable), and helped the team shape practical priorities across data, resourcing, talent, and accountability. And yes, we're the kind of consultants who still check in after the job is done.

One major win? The transformation of a flood-prone dump site into a vibrant public park... complete with a greenhouse, community facilities, and a leasing arrangement with **Start Somewhere** that's creating local jobs. Another? A once-soggy schoolyard now hosts playgrounds, bridges, and wedding photoshoots. Because why not?

According to KDI, resilience in 2024 meant restructuring mid-way, adapting quickly, and listening deeply. Their advice to peers? *"Start with listening, not assumptions. And always stay flexible, strategic plans are not concrete walls."* We couldn't agree more.



#LusomaTips

Beyond Grants

Rethinking Fundraising for African Organizations



If your funding dried up today, how long could your organization survive?

This question is no longer hypothetical. With global donor cuts and shifting priorities, many African non-profits are confronting a harsh reality: the era of grant dependency is ending.

At a recent workshop by KKCO East Africa, Lusoma Advisory Services, and Good Kenyan Foundation, one theme stood out—organizations must diversify their income to stay afloat and thrive.

Relying on grants alone is no longer viable. The most resilient organizations are those willing to rethink, restructure, and reinvest in their resource generation and management.

Funding models don't need to be flashy, they need to fit. The creativity lies in how well you integrate them into your mission, team, and long-term vision.

5 Practical Models That Offer A Path Forward

1. **Crowdfunding:** *Storytelling That Mobilizes.* Platforms like Kenya's M-Changa and South Africa's Thundafund show that small contributions can add up, if you tell the right story. But success requires more than just posting a campaign. Digital skills and security matter just as much as compelling narratives.
2. **Social Enterprises:** *Funding With Purpose.* Turning part of your mission into a business can create steady income while staying true to your goals. Think of training centres, products, or services that serve your community and generate revenue. It's not easy, but with the right planning, it can be sustainable.
3. **Corporate Partnerships:** *Shared Value.* Businesses are looking for credible community partners. Aligning with their CSR goals can unlock funding, resources, and visibility. But tread carefully set clear boundaries to avoid compromising your mission.
4. **Membership Models:** *Communities That Give Back.* When your supporters become members or subscribers, they're not just donors but stakeholders. This builds loyalty and local ownership, but only if you consistently offer value that keeps them engaged.
5. **Impact Investing:** *Scaling With Accountability.* If your work is measurable and scalable, investors seeking social and financial returns may be a fit. But you'll need strong governance and reliable data systems to make the case.

#LusomaTips

The Adaptive Turn:

Rethinking Due Diligence in a World of Uncertainty

In our work at Lusoma, alongside TechSoup's Strengthening and Tiered Evaluation Process (STEP), we've witnessed how nonprofits in the Global Majority adapt to the dynamic landscape of due diligence. It's clear that the existing model needs transformation.

Due diligence often looms large in conversations within the nonprofit sector, particularly for organizations in the Global Majority. Instead of representing support and growth, it frequently conveys scrutiny and, at times, exclusion. Many nonprofits view due diligence as an intimidating requirement designed more to safeguard funders than to empower organizations. Consequently, they approach it with apprehension, seeing it as a barrier rather than an opportunity for development.

Typically, due diligence is perceived as a gatekeeping exercise, with rigid frameworks misaligned with local contexts, focusing on compliance rather than capacity building. As someone who has conducted organizational assessments, I've met leaders who flinch at the term "due diligence," bracing for scrutiny as their narratives are distilled into checklists. Instead of fostering trust and illuminating growth opportunities, these interactions can lead to defensiveness, making it difficult to uncover an organization's genuine needs or collaboratively create effective solutions.

But what if due diligence could be reimaged as a transformative process? At the heart of due diligence—identifying risks, building safeguards, and enhancing effectiveness—lies the potential for growth, learning and trust building. This is the shift that STEP is advocating for.

STEP is not just a framework; it's an invitation to rethink due diligence as mutual accountability and strategic growth. Rather than asking, "Are you compliant?" it encourages the more constructive question: "How can we support your evolution?"



#LusomaTips

This approach rests on five key shifts:

1. Collaborative Design: Local partners should co-create the frameworks that assess them, rather than being treated as subjects.
2. Transparency and Dialogue: The due diligence process should invite interrogation, not provoke fear.
3. Contextualized Rigor: Risk assessments must reflect the unique realities of organizations in different contexts, be it a women's group in Uganda or a disability rights organization in Nepal.
4. Growth Mindset: Priority should be in supporting both the intrinsic and potential stature of the organization rather than focusing on just gaps.
5. Mutual Accountability: Both funders and organizations must commit to shared learning and adaptation.

The outcome? Organizations become not merely "compliant" but strengthened, with improved strategies and greater agency.

At Lusoma, we embody this ethos daily. Through facilitation, capacity building, and strategic support, we help organizations transcend compliance in favor of resilience, making initiatives like STEP sustainable at the local level.

This adaptive shift in due diligence is essential. Our systems must prioritize adaptability, trust, and local knowledge amid uncertainty, climate volatility, and shrinking civic space.

The outdated model of compliance-oriented due diligence fails to address today's complexities.

We need a new quality standard. One that values partnership over policing, relevance over rigidity, and resilience over risk aversion.

- *To funders:* Review your due diligence tools. Ask if they foster dialogue or just demand documents. Then, invite one local partner to co-design the next review process with you.
- *To practitioners:* Map your last due diligence experience. What felt extractive? What felt empowering? Use these reflections to start a conversation with your next funder.
- *And to everyone:* Let's reject extractive due diligence in favor of adaptive diligence.

The future of equitable development depends on it.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of TechSoup, the STEP program, or any affiliated institutions.

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*"Don't forget what it is to be a sailor because of being a captain yourself."
-African Proverb*

Events to Watch



Wednesday, 05:00 PM

EA Philanthropy Conference

This event brings together 500+ leaders and changemakers to explore emerging trends, foster partnerships, and drive innovative, sustainable impact across the region's philanthropic sector.

June

11 – 13

2025

June
16 – 20

2025

Monday, 08:00 AM

Africa Evidence Summit

This event unites youth leaders, partners, and development experts to celebrate African-led innovation, foster collaboration, and showcase impact.



Wednesday, 09:00 AM

4th International Conference on FfD4

This event is a key global forum to rethink how we fund sustainable development. Held in Seville, it brings together governments, global institutions, civil society, and the private sector to drive financial reforms and unlock investments for the SDGs.

June –
July
30 – 3

2025

Article



Leading Through Uncertainty

What Social Impact Leaders Need Right Now

Today's world is full of change and challenges. For people working to make a positive difference whether in fighting poverty, improving governance, or responding to disasters and climate change, there is no easy or straight path. Leading in such times takes more than skill; it takes steady and thoughtful leadership built on strong values. Real impact comes from consistent decisions that stay true to a clear purpose, even when things are uncertain.

In times of crisis or change, people look for leaders they can count on. Being consistent, doing what you say, sticking to your values, and showing up regularly, gives teams and communities a sense of stability.

It helps build trust, not through flashy actions, but through reliable, steady behaviour.

When a leader is dependable, people feel safe. They know what to expect, and they are more willing to stay engaged and hopeful, even when things are difficult. That is the kind of trust that helps organisations stay focused and strong.

In fast-changing situations, leaders cannot just stick to old plans. The world moves quickly, and so must we. Good leaders are flexible. They listen, learn, and adjust when needed, whether that means changing how a project works or shifting resources in a crisis.

Staying Flexible Without Losing Focus

But flexibility does not mean losing sight of the bigger goal. The best leaders stay grounded in their purpose. They are open to change, but they do not change just for the sake of it. Their ability to adapt is smart, thoughtful, and always connected to the mission.

A strong sense of direction helps people stay motivated and united. When the future feels uncertain, a clear vision shows the way forward. It helps leaders make decisions, and it reminds everyone why their work matters.

Throughout history, the most impactful leaders have been those who could see the bigger picture. They knew where they wanted to go and helped others believe in it too. This kind of vision gives hope and focus, especially when there are many challenges pulling people in different directions.

Great leaders do not try to do everything alone. Instead, they support others to lead too. They give space for new ideas, encourage learning, and build a team where everyone feels valued. When people feel trusted and empowered, they take more responsibility and help the organisation grow stronger.

In tough times, this shared leadership makes a big difference. It creates a culture of resilience, where people are not afraid to try new things or speak up. Everyone becomes part of the solution.

Creating lasting change does not happen overnight. It takes patience, hard work, and the courage to keep going even when progress feels slow. Leaders who focus only on quick wins often miss the bigger picture. But those who commit to steady, long-term effort usually make the greatest impact.

Whether leading a community group or running a big organization, leaders must balance the need for action with the need for patience. Setbacks are normal. What matters is staying focused on the goal and staying true to your values.

In *The Art and Science of Consistent Leadership – Steady Steps to Extraordinary Impact*, I explore how leaders can combine consistency, flexibility, vision, empowerment, and patience. These are not just big ideas, they are practical habits that help leaders stay confident and caring, even in difficult times.

When used together, these qualities help social impact leaders face challenges, support their teams, and stay committed to people-centered change. In a world full of uncertainty, leadership that is clear, calm, and rooted in purpose can truly make a lasting difference.

About the Author

Charles Kojo Vandyck leads the Capacity Development Unit at the West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) and is known for his work in strengthening civil society. He helps organizations improve leadership, governance, and fundraising to become more effective and sustainable.

Charles is a core team member of the RINGO initiative, which is rethinking the role of international NGOs in global development. He also supports civil society as a Trustee of INTRAC and a board member of Disrupt Development. In addition, he serves as the co-chair of the Pledge for Change Global Advisory Panel, furthering his commitment to driving change in the sector. As a certified trainer, Charles teaches organizations how to raise funds and build lasting impact. He is also a podcaster and a strong advocate for change in communities across the majority world.

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Real impact comes from consistent decisions that stay true to a clear purpose, even when things are uncertain.

– Charles Kojo Vandyck



#Lusoma Challenge

If you've read this far, then you already know that navigating uncertainty is no longer the exception, it's the new normal. You've seen the patterns... the funding shifts, the pressure to adapt, the burnout creeping in. But you've also heard the whispers of something more powerful beneath it all: clarity, courage, and community.

So, here's our challenge to you not just to survive change, but to shape it. Not just to adapt reactively, but to lead proactively.


At Lusoma, we believe it's time to raise the bar. Let's build a new normal where flexibility isn't a frantic pivot, but a practiced muscle. Where collaboration isn't a side activity, but a core strategy. Where leadership isn't reserved for a few, but cultivated across every level of the organization.

What would your work look like if you approached it not from scarcity, but from your fullest assets: your knowledge, your people, your shared mission? What if we stopped waiting for perfect conditions and started building bold experiments with what we have?

#LusomaChallenge for Q2:

1. Revisit your "why": is it clear enough to rally others?
2. Reclaim your assets: what are you underutilizing?
3. Reinforce your team: who else can lead with you?

Change isn't coming. It's already here. The only question is: how high are you willing to raise the bar? We're right beside you.



We need a new quality standard. One that values partnership over policing, relevance over rigidity, and resilience over risk aversion.

What if due diligence could be reimagined as a transformative process? At the heart of due diligence identifying risks, building safeguards, and enhancing effectiveness lies the potential for growth, learning and trust building.

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Scenes from Akili Dada's International Women's Day Leaders Round Table Breakfast, themed "United in Resilience: Building Collective Power for Women's and Girls' Rights."

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Inspired? Challenged? Got ideas to share? We'd love to hear them.

#LeadWithPurpose

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