



# “Re-imagined leadership”

## Invitation leadership programme

If we want to meet the ambitions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, we have a lot of work to do. How can we be more impactful in our efforts for an inclusive society and a liveable planet? While leadership is certainly not a panacea for accelerating impact on the SDGs, progress without new leadership is much less likely.

### **WHERE SHOULD IT GO?**

The challenges facing development organisation leaders from their role are great. Social issues and also the global playing field are becoming increasingly complex. This also affects strategic choices, and thus the internal organisation.

### **LEADING CHANGE**

What does all this mean for you as a director and how you manage your organisation? As a CEO, you sometimes have a lonely role, with plenty of daily worries and constantly emerging opportunities. Working intensively on strategy is often under pressure. Space for reflection is needed to then move forward again. How beautiful and meaningful it is then to spend some time with colleagues - who are in the same boat - to work hard on this, to gain enriched insights, make cross-connections and perhaps find new cooperation partners.

With this opportunity, Partos has expressed a desire to explore whether (and what) can be organised so that, together with other directors, we can look to the future with contemplation and reflection. Initially, we focus specifically on directors of Dutch development cooperation organisations.

## PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

In the summer and autumn of 2022, several initiatives were undertaken to get a picture of where the needs lie among directors, what themes are at play and what form would be appropriate.

### Innovation festival:

- Ten short pitches from directors on an innovative perspective for the future
- Future leadership workshop, with participation of 25 directors/participants

### Interviews:

- YouTube & podcast series 'Future Leaders', where our with manager Innovation & Learning Alexander Medik interviews directors on the future of development cooperation
- Focus groups (online and live) where 7 directors zoomed in on leadership experiences
- Bilateral discussions between Partos & directors

## THEMES

The following themes have emerged several times in various ways. The themes and their challenges have been briefly explained. The themes are not necessarily in order of importance.

### 1 Collectively making impact

The world is bursting with major challenges that are complex, large and comprehensive. Too big for NGOs to tackle on their own. So should we rise above ourselves and decompartmentalise the sector? Are we too much in a development cooperation sector bubble? Are we pushing the right buttons?

It seems necessary to make broader connections between sectors and between organisations, for more collective impact. Systemic work, whereby not just a few

organisations in the South, or from the West, but a joint course is set. Where precisely a network of interconnecting programmes (and/or organisations, movements) make the difference, rather than money-driven projects. With big ambitions, needed to tackle big challenges. Working together in alignment to be maximally effective. This has implications for organisational form, planning, funding, M&E, communication and ambitions.

### 2 Participative and inclusive decision-making

Putting ownership where it belongs. Namely with those who will do it together, based on their reality. Working from the local demand. Engaging the interests of people in vision and implementation, with ways of working that do full justice to them. Inclusive. In which working is both bottom-up and top-down. And where participation and inclusion is much more than 'just' consulting people. Where the highest levels of participation are pursued, because that puts people in their power and passion.

### 3 Congruence with NL

Getting its own house in order, within its own organisation, but also within the Netherlands. If the world is to change in the South, a big battle needs to be struck here too. Many causes come from here, and we need to address that. That too is taking responsibility. And much we can do, in action. What are we going to do here, now? And can we perhaps harness wisdom from the South in doing so?

### 4 Control and power

Understanding and navigating formal and informal power. How does this relate to local ownership and cultures/structures where traditional power structures are common practice. How do we distribute power? How do we really let go of control, and connect to working with southern dynamics - including everything we value and don't value about them. What are the decisions really about? What role do financial flows play in this (which

are moving more and more to the Global South in the process), and decision-making about it.

### 5 Universal leadership principles

Many 'Western' management models are well suited to the Western world. For the non-Western world, this provides limitations. When these western models are deployed in non-western communities, it leads to misconceptions, miscommunication, micro-management, resistance, over-regulation and frustration. Which principles are more universal and deployable? What preferred styles do we ourselves have that suit ourselves, but are in need of revision? How does feminist leadership find its way into this?

### 6 Moral leadership

How do you shape moral leadership and discuss ethical issues with each other? This requires a safe working environment, in which people are also able to give and receive feedback. How does that work, how do you implement it, where does it derail, how do you keep it pure? And what consequences do you then attach to the insights and what you do/don't do anymore as an organisation? As a manager, there is a role model task here. How do you strengthen feminist leadership as an important contribution?

### 7 Self-awareness

Knowing yourself, looking in the mirror to gain more insight into how you come across and highlight blind spots. This is also a key to good communication. Are we brave enough? Do we dare to step out of our comfort zone, and do we have any visibility at all? What is actually the kind of courage we need? Which old paradigms do we need to let go of so that new ones can start to find a place, and do we dare to? Or do we convince ourselves we are right?

### 8 Changing roles & legitimacy

The world around us is changing rapidly, and so is the world of development cooperation.

This has major repercussions on organisations. To maintain legitimacy, relevance and effectiveness, Dutch development cooperation organisations need to reflect on their roles & responsibilities as well as transition structures to new organisational forms, with the necessary culture. What is our added value? What can or should we let go of? What important(est) roles do we see for ourselves?

## 2023 – THIS IS WHAT WE WILL DO

There is great potential for learning by mobilising existing experience, and facilitating reflection, interaction and deepening. Directors have so much expertise in-house that mobilising it, by creating conditions in which it can be shared and utilised, can add tremendous value for those involved.

In consultation with the advisory group, consisting of directors Heske Verburg - Solidaridad Network, Kees Zevenbergen - Cordaid and Danielle Hirsch - Both Ends, Partos proposes to pilot the following activities in 2023:

### Thematic deepening meetings

Explore substantive themes (including those described above) to then jointly deepen the more strategic elements. The starting point is from the substantive themes, with awareness about issues, complemented by inspiring, exchanging and learning from practice. Followed by drinks with space for networking.

The first thematic meeting will take place on **Thursday 23 March 2023 from 14.00 - 17.00** with subsequent drinks. The theme of participatory and inclusive decision-making will be the focus this afternoon. Further details to be announced. [Register here](#)

### Intervisions

This was in high demand. A platform to zoom in on cases and challenges that directors have faced and are facing now. These can be small or large cases or questions. Mostly (but not necessarily exclusively)

tactical/ operational in nature. Zooming in on personal leadership challenges in real-life situations, with the aim of exchanging and learning, inspiring and supporting. We are keen to find out who is interested in participating in intervision. [Please express your interest by leaving your details here.](#) After a short consultation on 9 March 10.00 - 11.15 with those interested, we intend to organise the first intervisions in April 2023.

### For whom

Members or directors of administrative units or substantive programmes or otherwise is excluded, so that a closed peer group can be formed. However, it is our intention to open up this programme to other leaders within development cooperation in the future.

## We look forward to great collaborations in 2023

**Alexander Medik** – Manager quality, learning & innovation Partos

**Bart Romijn** – Director Partos

**Han Rakels** – Consultant Perspective