

A photograph of three Black women with dreadlocks embracing each other from behind. The woman on the left wears a vibrant, patterned dress with red, yellow, and white geometric designs on a dark blue background. The woman in the middle has her hair styled in a bun with beads. The woman on the right has purple-tinted dreadlocks and is wearing a dark grey dress. The background is a warm, out-of-focus indoor setting.

Celebrating
LEGENDS

In the early afternoon of Friday September 1st, my stomach was in a knot. I was at Protea Hotel where my team had organized an event to celebrate, recognize and appreciate elders from different backgrounds ranging from civil service, civil society, academia, and politics.

I was anxiously awaiting our honoured guests. I wondered if they would come. I wondered if we had made a mistake to invite them for an event on a Friday afternoon knowing the heavy traffic that is a common feature in Kampala on Fridays. I wondered if they would find the event worth their while and befitting of their stature.

The backdrop to that Friday event is the [CivSource Africa, Mopane Leadership program](#). One of the services we offer is called [Change Ready](#), through which we support organizations going through succession and transition moments.

Everyday, our organizations morph, our leaders get older and they transition into retirement. While our Change Ready program mostly supports leaders in active service, we paused to think about our elders and the fact that they represent a bridge between the past and the present. We turned our focus to that side of the bridge - our past.

We thought it logical that as we supported current leaders, we needed to connect to and link with our leaders who have gone before us, who have blazed trails, who have fought battles for fairness and justice, while advancing community wellbeing.

Indeed, as one African proverb so eloquently puts it, *“A village without the elderly is like a well without water.”* Part of thriving as a society requires that we keep our elders close.

Another beautiful Central-African proverb from the Ntomba people advises that, *“A youth that does not cultivate friendship with the elderly is like a tree without roots.”*

And so that’s what we set out to do - to reach for our wells (elders), to reconnect with our roots. We made a list and invited as many elders as we could. Many of them said over and over *“thank you for remembering us”*, or *“we thought you had forgotten us”*.

Beyond celebrating our elders, our desire was to listen to them and glean wisdom from them. Many of them have transitioned and have stories and lessons to share, which if we listen to and learn from, we will avoid making the same mistakes. Indeed, as we gathered the elders in the room that day, we said our role was to sit at their feet and listen, espousing the proverb, *“A child among elders conversed with its ears.”*

As the elders streamed in one by one that Friday afternoon, my heart was filled with joy and reverence. Hearing the chatter in the room as they caught up with each other filled my cup in ways I can’t quite explain. The elders appreciated the opportunity to reconnect and fellowship with each other. There were hugs, smiles and hearty laughter in the room. The warmth in there was like a comfort blanket - soft, rich, and enveloping.

Each elder spoke briefly about their career and the key leadership lesson that resonated with them. They also shared gems for leaders of today - the things we should do or avoid.

It was clear to us that an afternoon was not enough.... We should have planned a longer event. All is not lost though. CivSource Africa plans to start a podcast in which we have conversations with the elders where they can expound on their leadership lessons. This will be both an archive of wisdom and a way to memorialize our elders.

I also believe linking to, including, and listening to elders is a way to sow seeds of greatness for the current and next generation, for *“One who pays respects to the great, sows seeds for his own greatness.”*

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