

POLICY BRIEF NO. 1 OF 2025

The Place-Based Leadership Development (PBLD) –Towards Ethical Policing: Leadership Development at the National Criminal Investigations Academy (NCIA)

Lessons from the delivery of PBLD at the National Criminal Investigations Academy (NCIA) in 2024

About this Brief

This Policy Brief presents key lessons from the implementation of the Place-Based Leadership Development (PBLD) programme at the National Criminal Investigations Academy (NCIA), delivered by MIDRIFT HURINET between 2024 and 2025¹. The programme aimed to strengthen leadership capacity among law enforcement instructors by equipping them with the tools to foster ethical, reflective, and collaborative leadership practices. Grounded in the Mindset Skillset Toolset – Systemic Challenge (MST-SC) Model, the PBLD programme explored critical leadership dimensions including personal and professional identity, emotional intelligence, challenging systemic corruption, and poor management.

The eight-module curriculum promoted a value-based, strengths-driven approach to leadership and emphasized the need for transformational change within law enforcement institutions. Participants engaged in experiential learning and collective inquiry to identify and respond to corruption and other systemic challenges. Through this, they developed actionable strategies and context-specific plans aimed at reinforcing professionalism, accountability, and integrity within their respective training environments.

This brief captures the impact of the PBLD programme in fostering a culture of ethical leadership and institutional change within the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) and the National police service. It illustrates how reflective practice, emotional intelligence, and collaborative leadership can support a shift toward more transparent and responsive law enforcement.

Finally, the brief offers recommendations for scaling this leadership development model within NCIA and other training institutions, as well as replicating the approach across all 47 counties and within the broader African region. These insights contribute to building safer, more resilient communities through empowered and principled leadership.

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Introduction

Preventing violence and ensuring community safety is a complex task that cannot be addressed by any single organization or sector acting alone. The solution lies in cross-sectoral collaboration, where diverse stakeholders bring together their unique expertise and resources. MIDRIFT HURINET has been working alongside civil society and government institutions with mandates in violence prevention, peacebuilding, and security to foster these partnerships. One of its flagship strategies is the Place-Based Leadership Development (PBLD) programme, an evidence-based initiative aimed at building local intersectoral leadership coalitions committed to collective action.

PBLD focuses on transforming leadership mindsets to enable collaboration across sectors and places. It aims to reduce the risk and impact of violence by empowering leaders to understand and address root causes, build resilience, and mobilize resources in a coordinated way. This leadership development framework enhances the collective capacity of both state and non-state actors, making it a key resource in building safer, more secure communities. Recognizing the need to strengthen law enforcement leadership, MIDRIFT HURINET partnered with the National Criminal Investigations Academy (NCIA) to deliver the PBLD to police instructors.

NCIA, based in South C, Nairobi, operates under the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) and serves as a center of excellence for investigative training in Kenya. Inspired by the success of an officer from the first PBLD cohort in 2023, NCIA nominated two instructors to join the second cohort in Nairobi. Their positive experience led to a formal collaboration with MIDRIFT HURINET.

PBLD was delivered on-site at NCIA through a tailored eight-module training program between November and December 2024. The modules addressed themes such as values and value-based leadership identity, corruption, investigative interviewing, and reflective practice. They were contextualized to align with NCIA's mandate and vision, promoting ownership of institutional change and equipping instructors with the skills to foster ethical leadership and intersectoral collaboration. This policy brief outlines the process, outcomes, and recommendations from the on-site delivery of PBLD at NCIA through a tailored eight-module training program between November and December 2024.

The Place-Based Leadership Development (PBLD) programme at the NCIA

At the National Criminal Investigations Academy (NCIA), the initial modules (1 and 2) emphasized the critical role of personal and professional identity in leadership, particularly in the context of violence prevention. Instructors were guided through reflective practices that fostered trust, inclusivity, and connection, both within the police force and with the communities they serve. Exercises like storytelling and the “straw castle” activity demonstrated how personal narratives can bridge divides and build empathy. These sessions also highlighted the importance of adaptable leadership that can navigate diverse perspectives and sectors in the broader effort to prevent violence.

Building on these foundations, Module 2 delved deeper into emotional intelligence and leadership values. Through a value inventory exercise, instructors explored how personal principles shape leadership behavior and decision-making. They completed an emotional quotient (EQ) test, which helped them assess their emotional awareness and regulation, essential qualities for transformational leadership in policing. This module reinforced the idea that emotionally intelligent leaders are better equipped to inspire, motivate, and ethically guide their teams.

Modules 3 and 4 shifted focus towards collective inquiry and addressing corruption within the criminal justice system. Participants engaged in group activities to identify systemic barriers and design strategic responses to corruption and unethical behavior. A key insight was that ethical leadership involves not only efficiency but also commitment to justice and integrity. The process revealed that many officers lacked a full understanding of their organizational context, prompting renewed dedication to informed, principled leadership.

In Modules 5 through 8, the emphasis turned to leading change and sustaining reform, particularly by confronting entrenched norms that enable corruption. Instructors reflected on the implementation of action plans and shared insights from field testing their strategies. Through sessions on investigative interviewing and systems thinking, they explored how discomfort and challenge are necessary for leadership growth. Finally, the Place-Based Leadership Development (PBLD) component empowered participants to act as change agents by using human-centered design to develop solutions, tackle systemic issues, and foster collaboration across institutions—laying the groundwork for transformative impact within the DCI and the larger justice system.

Key Outcomes from the Leadership Development Programme

- 1. Strengthened Self-Awareness and Values-Based Leadership-** Participants deepened their understanding of personal leadership identity through structured self-assessment and reflection. Emotional intelligence (EQ) assessments, combined with values inventories and peer feedback, highlighted the importance of self-awareness, empathy, and authenticity in effective leadership. These practices helped embed emotional intelligence as a foundational leadership tool in law enforcement training.
- 2. Confronting Corruption and Challenging Systemic Norms-** The PBLD framework created a safe space for open discussions on corruption and systemic weaknesses within the justice system. Participants critically examined how corruption has become normalized and explored their own roles in sustaining or challenging these patterns. The training encouraged honest reflection, questioned authority structures, and reimagined law enforcement rooted in integrity and accountability.
- 3. Transforming Institutional Culture through Courageous Leadership-** Participants identified organizational resistance to change as a major barrier, citing rigid hierarchies, fear of conflict, and poor management practices. Through experiential learning, they recognized that meaningful reform requires discomfort, intentional reflection, and courage to challenge the status quo. Discussions emphasized that shifting mindsets and fostering a culture of inquiry are essential to transformational leadership within the criminal justice system.
- 4. Practical Action Planning and Systemic Reform-** Participants developed actionable plans addressing real institutional challenges, such as managerial inefficiencies and entrenched corruption. These were grounded in their lived professional experiences and supported by tools like Human-Centered Design, the butterfly metaphor, and the Pareto principle. Additional insights emerged around systemic gaps, including weak interagency collaboration with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), oversight limitations by the Police Service Commission, and perceived biases by the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA). These findings highlighted the urgent need for integrated reforms and cross-sector collaboration to strengthen accountability and public trust.

Lessons Learned and Insights

- 1. Personal Reflection Strengthens value-based Leadership:** Participants gained a deeper understanding of their own values and how they affect their leadership styles. This was done through self-assessment and reflective exercises, revealing the power of reflection as a leader, continuous development and self-awareness in transforming leadership approaches.
- 2. Building Trust and Inclusivity:** Corruption emerged as a pervasive issue, affecting not only law enforcement but also other sectors that interact with the justice system. Addressing this requires a holistic, collective approach and strong ethical leadership at all levels. There is a need to build trust within the DCI, with other agencies working in the criminal justice system and the wider community. Having a mindset shift on collective action for collective impact is paramount in fostering trust within both the DCI, other agencies and the wider community. Participants learned that leading in Volatile, Uncertainty, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA), having uncomfortable discussions and the three-mindset shifts for collective impact were key to developing stronger relationships. Leaders must work collaboratively across sectors to address complex societal challenges such as corruption.
- 3. Leadership influence as an agent of Social Transformation:** This emphasized leadership's crucial role in driving systemic change. Participants were guided to reflect on their leadership styles and recognize the impact of effective leadership on an institution's culture and performance. Many participants acknowledged the importance of fostering intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness in leadership to be an agent of change in social transformation.
- 4. Conflict Management and Systemic Challenges:** Participants recognized that conflict, often avoided within the DCI, is a barrier to change. The program highlighted the importance of using constructive conflict resolution strategies, such as collaboration and compromise, to address tensions and improve the investigative process. They noted that different conflicts can be addressed using different conflict resolution strategies. Unresolved conflict within and beyond the institution hinders collaboration with other agencies. Importantly, instructors acknowledged systemic issues, such as corruption, impunity, and poor resource allocation, which hinder effective investigations and public trust.
- 5. Human-Centered Design for Action Plans:** This approach also known as design thinking guided the participants to develop actionable solutions to the identified systemic challenges. Participants worked in groups to create action plans that will be implemented by them in the National Criminal Investigation Academy (NCIA) and beyond. These plans focus on real-world solutions, reinforcing the importance of adaptability and practical approaches in addressing systemic challenges.
- 6. Mindset Shift for Organizational Change:** Instructors acknowledged that for any substantial change to occur, a shift in mindset is required—both at the individual level and institution-wide. Participants stressed the importance of embracing honesty and openness in discussions, particularly in navigating the Zone of Uncomfortable Debate (ZOD), where honest conversations about leadership and systemic problems could drive real transformation in the organization
- 7. The Need for Systemic Reform:** Several challenges identified by participants in the development program include bureaucracy, rigid hierarchical structures, resource constraints, political interference, and lack of collaboration with other agencies such as the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP). These challenges were seen as key barriers to the effectiveness of DCI's operations and the larger justice system.
- 8. Commitment to Change:** The trainers' reflections were encouraging, demonstrating a strong commitment to applying the lessons learned. Participants committed to using the PBLD materials to enhance their training curriculum especially in leadership and conflict management courses and implement their action plans to facilitate transformative change at the academy.

Best Practices

1. **Reflective Practice:** Encouraging leaders to engage in self-reflection can foster growth, emotional intelligence, and adaptive leadership, crucial in managing complex and sensitive issues like violence prevention and corruption.
2. **Storytelling and Shared Experiences:** Using storytelling as a tool for building trust and a common purpose proved highly effective. It created a platform for leaders to share their experiences, fostering a sense of unity and commitment to collective action.
3. **Actionable Leadership Models:** The MST-SC model design of PBLD served as an effective framework to guide leaders in addressing systemic challenges. By encouraging leaders to take ownership of their actions, the model promoted a culture of accountability.

Conclusion:

The Place-Based Leadership Development (PBLD) programme, delivered by MIDRIFT HURINET at the National Criminal Investigations Academy (NCIA) in 2024, proved to be a pivotal intervention in strengthening leadership capacity among law enforcement instructors. Grounded in the Mindset Skillset Toolset – Systemic Challenge (MST-SC) Model, the programme enabled participants to build individual and collective leadership capabilities necessary for collaboration across sectoral, intersectoral, and territorial levels. Through eight modules, the training addressed personal and professional identity, leadership values, systemic corruption, strengths-based action planning, and transformational change.

Participants developed actionable, context-specific plans focused on enhancing professionalism, ethical conduct, and institutional culture. These efforts laid a strong foundation for tackling systemic challenges within the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) and the wider criminal justice system.

The success of the programme demonstrates the value of embedding reflective practices, emotional intelligence, and collaborative leadership into institutional training. With continued commitment, mentorship, and support from senior leadership, these approaches can drive sustainable reform. By adopting the recommendations outlined in this brief, MIDRIFT and the DCI can build a culture rooted in accountability, integrity, and justice, contributing to a more transparent and effective criminal justice system in Kenya.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen and Institutionalize Place-Based Leadership Development

Continuous leadership development is essential for sustaining meaningful change, particularly within the complex structures of the criminal justice system. Leaders who consistently refine their skills are better equipped to challenge entrenched norms, foster ethical decision-making, and drive systemic reform. The current leadership training curricula at NCIA and across most government institutions lack a model grounded in human-centered design. To address this gap, the MST-SC (Mindset, Skillset, Toolset – Systemic Challenge) model should be formally incorporated into the DCI's leadership development programs. This model offers a structured, practical framework for addressing systemic challenges such as corruption and for cultivating a culture of professionalism and accountability.

Furthermore, the integration of ongoing mentorship and guidance is critical. Establishing a mentorship mechanism will support instructors in embedding Place-Based Leadership Development (PBLD) principles into the academy's curriculum. This continuous support will enable them to deepen their understanding, foster innovation, and promote collaborative leadership practices within and beyond the institution.

2. Support from Senior Leadership:

Senior officers from the Directorate of Criminal Investigations are encouraged to take an active role in supporting the implementation of leadership development programs. Their involvement ensures that the programs align with organizational goals and fosters an environment where leadership development can flourish.

3. Strengthen Facilitator Capacity and Integrate Advanced Investigative Techniques

MIDRIFT HURINET should continue enhancing the facilitation skills of NCIA instructors through the Co-Facilitator Development Programme. Strengthening these capabilities is essential for enabling instructors to lead transformative, participatory sessions and effectively model the principles of ethical and reflective leadership within the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI). In parallel, development workshops at NCIA should incorporate advanced investigative techniques, with particular emphasis on the Méndez Principles. Embedding these globally recognized ethical standards into training will improve the quality and credibility of investigations. This dual focus on facilitation and investigative excellence will empower instructors to serve as agents of change and contribute to a more professional and accountable justice system.

4. Enhance Cross-Sector Collaboration for Systemic Reform

To effectively address corruption and strengthen public trust in the criminal justice system, NCIA and MIDRIFT HURINET should prioritize building strategic partnerships across government agencies, civil society, and the private sector. Sustainable change requires a systems leadership approach that enables collective action to identify and address root causes rather than surface-level symptoms.

As part of this strategy, NCIA should facilitate a joint leadership development initiative involving key institutions such as the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (ODPP), the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC), Law Society of Kenya (LSK) Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) and the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC). This collaboration will enhance sector-wide capacities in investigative integrity, legal reform, and anti-corruption strategies, laying the groundwork for a coordinated and impactful approach to justice and accountability.

MIDRIFT HURINET

MIDRIFT HURINET is a Non-Profit organization operating in Kenya since 2008. We are dedicated to advancing Peace, Good Governance, and Human Rights in Kenya. Our work is anchored on three strategic priorities: Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation, Good Governance and Human Rights Advocacy, and Institutional Strengthening and Development. With support from the Danish Institute Against Torture (DIGNITY) and in partnership with the National Criminal Investigations Academy (NCIA), MIDRIFT HURINET delivered the Place-Based Leadership Development (PBLD) programme at the Academy in 2024.

National Criminal Investigations Academy (NCIA)

The National Criminal Investigations Academy (NCIA) is a formation under the Directorate of Criminal Investigations. It is the institution tasked with training in matters of investigations in the National Police Service and also trains other governmental and non-governmental organizations with investigative mandates. During the delivery of the PBLD programme, the Academy provided the venue, meals and refreshments besides selecting and mobilizing participants.

Danish Institute Against Torture (DIGNITY)

DIGNITY is an independent human rights and development organization founded in 1982. In close collaboration with partners in more than 20 countries, DIGNITY develops, promotes, and applies research-based knowledge to prevent torture and violence, rehabilitate survivors, and promote justice and accountability. DIGNITY provided financial and technical support to MIDRIFT HURINET in the delivery of the PBLD programme at the NCIA in 2024.

