



Support to local leaders and coalitions as a pathway of change

A conceptual framework for the CALL4Change Learning Journey

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Photo: Youth participants worked in groups to create and share videos countering misinformation, while also learning about elections through role-play in Yogyakarta. YLKis, 2024

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Acronyms

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CALL4Change	Coalitions and Local Leaders for Change
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DLP	Developmental Leadership Program
ESID	Effective States in Development
ODA	Official development assistance
PDIA	Problem-driven iterative adaptation
PLP	Pacific Leadership Program
PRP	Pacific Research Program
SSGM	State, Society and Governance in Melanesia
TOA	Theory of action
TOC	Theory of change

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Introduction – Why this research?

Supporting local leaders and coalitions is increasingly viewed by donors as a pathway to achieving development results. The nuanced local knowledge and deep networks of local leaders and coalitions are considered valuable tools in driving change that is thought to be more sustainable than externally led reforms. This pathway for change has gained greater visibility with increasing Australian policy commitments to locally led development since 2023, **as part of its broader international development agenda**. Such commitments are apparent in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) *2023 International Development Policy* and *2024 Locally Led Development Guidance Note*, as well as in *Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy* and *Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy*. It is further reflected in DFAT's investments in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, with a wide range of programs supporting the emergence of developmental leaders or coalitions. While investments that support local leaders and coalitions are far from *the only* way of operationalising commitments to locally led development – with other key approaches focused on building state capacity and accountability or nurturing a domestic private sector – they are a particularly overt way that positions local agents of change in the driving seat.

Australian support to locally led development has coincided with declining confidence in aid globally, evidenced by the dismantling of the United States Agency for International Development and large reductions in European aid budgets in 2025. Combined with growing calls for the decolonisation of development, challenges to conventional aid models are fuelling support for local leaders and coalitions as an underutilised strategy for change. Yet at the same time, the increasingly transactional use of aid to more explicitly serve national interests risks undermining genuine engagement with local leaders and coalitions for developmental purposes.

Against this backdrop, there are significant gaps in evidence to inform supporting development via local leaders and coalitions. There is no portfolio-wide view of what investments in leadership and coalitions tell us about what does and does not work to support development, for who and why. There are growing accounts of what leadership looks like in different contexts,¹ and there is a general sense of the ways of working required amongst donor and implementing agencies to best support it.² However, there is no body of knowledge about what support might look for different geographies, political systems and populations, when targeting specific areas of change (such as gender or education policy) versus focussing broadly on reform opportunities; or when targeting different kinds of change, such as social norm change or policy change. We want to dig into the different ways that local leaders and coalitions are being supported in practice in order to facilitate more impactful program design, implementation and evaluation in future. Significant investment in 'leadership' and 'coalitions' across the aid portfolio, as well as anticipated growth in this area, make it timely to address these evidence gaps.

To engage DFAT in a deeper exploration of experiences of support to local leaders and coalitions, the Coalitions and Local Leaders for Change (CALL4Change) – Learning Journey was established. The research collaboration is centred around a 'learning journey' in which a cohort of learners from

¹ See, for instance, E. Jackson et al. (2023) 'Finding self, leading others: Leadership journeys of persons with disabilities in Indonesia,' DLP Brief, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-briefs/finding-self-leading-others-leadership-journeys-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-indonesia/>; C. Mccloughlin et al. (2023) 'Co-Producing Local Public Goods in Rural Solomon Islands: Evidence from Malaita,' DLP Brief, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-briefs/co-producing-local-public-goods-in-rural-solomon-islands-evidence-from-malaita/>; R. Vijayarasa et al. (2023) '(Re-)Constructing pathways for grassroots Sri Lankan women's political participation: Tools for valuing the 'feminine' and the 'local',' DLP Brief, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-briefs/re-constructing-pathways-for-grassroots-sri-lankan-womens-political-participation-tools-for-valuing-the-feminine-and-the-local/>

² See C. Roche & L. Denney (2019) 'How can developmental leadership be supported?,' Foundational Paper 4, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/foundational-papers/how-can-developmental-leadership-be-supported/>

DFAT, the participating programs and the research team collectively shape and make sense of the research as it unfolds.³ It will examine what is being learnt from a selection of DFAT's investments, drawing out different understandings of and approaches to leadership and coalitions across programs; what overall lessons can be drawn from this portfolio and what they contribute to; and how they are experienced by those they seek to support. The Learning Journey will bring together the following programs in DFAT's portfolio of investment in leadership and coalitions:

- Balance of Power (Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu)
- Coalitions for Change (Philippines)
- Reclaiming Civic Space to Promote Democratic Resilience Project (Indonesia)
- The Voice Inc. (Papua New Guinea)
- Vanuatu Skills Partnership (Vanuatu)
- Women Leading and Influencing (Pacific)

This paper provides a conceptual framework to inform the CALL4Change Learning Journey. It has been developed by reviewing academic and grey literature on leadership and coalitions in international development. In addition, a mapping of DFAT programs entailed analysis of data on investments available on the AusDevPortal,⁴ a recent initiative by the Australian Government to promote transparency by making ODA data publicly accessible. Finally, a small number of interviews were conducted with DFAT staff to understand why support to local leaders and coalitions is seen to be important, and what programs might fall into this category. From this, pertinent issues relating to support for local leadership and coalitions were identified, enabling the formation of research questions. These were tested with the learning community at the first learning journey event and refined on the basis of feedback.

The conceptual framework provides a co-developed theoretical grounding to guide the case studies. At the end of the learning journey, a framework will be developed to assist decision-making about how best to design, implement and evaluate support for local leaders and coalitions. More importantly, a network of informed policymakers, practitioners and researchers will be in place to more productively engage in design, implementation and evaluation of such programs, supporting DFAT to deliver on its commitments to more locally led development.

Section 1 of the paper recaps the current 'state of knowledge' about local leadership and coalitions, while **Section 2** explores DFAT policy perspectives on how local leadership and coalitions contribute to development outcomes. **Section three** maps current known DFAT investments in local leadership and coalitions. From this mapping, **section four** distils distinct modalities of support that assist in organising the portfolio. Finally, based on this analysis, **section five** outlines key issues and questions about how we might think about investments in coalitions and local leaders. These will be used to guide the initial six case studies undertaken in the CALL4Change Learning Journey.

³ For further information on the learning journey method see: J. Howard, E-J Quak and J. Woodhill (2022) 'Lessons Learned from K4D Learning Journeys: A practical approach for supporting learning in development organisations,' K4D, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

⁴ DFAT (2025) Australian Development Portal, Available at: <https://adp.dfat.gov.au/>.

Section 1: Where have we got to on thinking on leaders and coalitions?

THE DEVELOPMENTAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

The role of local leaders and collective action in driving development outcomes has been extensively documented by the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP), funded by AusAID and DFAT from 2009-2023. For DFAT, DLP is an important starting point, as a significant research investment spanning fourteen-years that has shaped thinking, program designs and implementation within DFAT and further afield.⁵ While global in focus, its in-depth research in the Pacific and Southeast Asia was especially critical in building a more visible evidence base on experiences of leadership and coalitions in DFAT's priority regions. DLP findings provide an account of the role of leadership and coalitions in development that are an important corrective to outdated approaches or received wisdom on what 'supporting leadership and coalitions' means. Here, key findings that emerged from DLP are summarised, followed by key insights from other recent research on local leadership and coalitions. This identifies our current understanding of how support for local leaders and coalitions contributes to developmental change, and it serves as a starting point for this research.

DLP's focus in phase 1 (2009-2013) was on unearthing the political dynamics of development, emphasising the role of leadership, elites and coalitions in driving (or impeding) change. In contrast to other analysis, DLP emphasised the role of motivated agents and coalitions, which it viewed as underplayed in accounts of political economy constraints that emphasised structures and institutions.⁶ It began with the assumption that institutions are informed by processes of leadership and so matters of agency require greater attention.⁷ Contributing to the wider 'thinking and working politically' movement, DLP underlined that developmental leaders work collaboratively to solve collective action problems and forge coalitions for reform, overcoming and fundamentally shaping the institutional environment.⁸ This element of leaders working collectively was in contrast to more individualistic 'heroic' accounts of leadership that have emphasised the 'great men of history.'⁹

In phase 2 (2014-2018), DLP research continued to focus on collective leadership and how leadership was embedded in relationships and networks and always contextually situated. It also drew out the ways in which successful leadership involves navigating contestation and being able to balance diverse interests, values and norms, rather than enforcing a single vision. This pointed to the highly contextual nature of leadership. Critical to overcoming contestation and achieving change, developmental leadership requires material resources, such as funding and technical capacity, but

⁵ C. Adams (2019) 'Developmental Leadership Program Impact Review: Final Version,' Melbourne: Institute for Human Security and Social Change, La Trobe University (unpublished); S. Webb, S. A. Milligan and A. Gibert (2018) *Developmental Leadership Program Phase 3: Design Document*, Canberra: DFAT.

⁶ A. Leftwich (2010) 'Research in Progress,' DLP Background Paper 6, Available at: https://dlprog.org/publications/background-papers/overview-of-the-research-in-progress-the-developmental-leadership-program/?utm_source=chatgpt.com; D. Hudson and A. Leftwich (2014) 'From political economy to political analysis,' Research Paper, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/from-political-economy-to-political-analysis/>.

⁷ A. Leftwich & S. Hogg (2011) 'The Developmental Leadership Program: Overview and Objectives,' DLP Background Paper 5, Available at: https://dlprog.org/publications/background-papers/overview-and-objectives-the-developmental-leadership-program/?utm_source=chatgpt.com, p. 2.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ H. Lyne de Ver (2008) 'Leadership, Politics and Development,' DLP Background Paper, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/background-papers/leadership-politics-and-development/>.

DLP argued these are insufficient on their own.¹⁰ More important, and underappreciated, is the role of locally resonant ideas to mobilise people around and diverse sources of legitimacy on which leaders and their networks draw. The focus on the necessary role of navigating contestation also led to the reframing of politics, not as the obstacle to development, but as the way to it. Developmental leadership was ultimately described as ‘the strategic, collective and political process of building political will to make positive change happen,’ via motivated individuals who form coalitions with sufficient power, legitimacy and influence that contest one set of ideas and legitimise alternatives.¹¹

Key here is the distinction between leaders and leadership. While leaders focus on the individuals who hold positional authority, or who are recognised as having relational or motivational influence in other ways; leadership is focused on the *process or practice* of mobilising people, ideas, and resources towards a shared goal. A focus on ‘leadership’ instead of ‘leaders’ moves away from those in formal positions of authority to a recognition of how a much broader group of people can exercise leadership in different spheres. This phase of the research also had a stronger focus on women’s leadership and the way collective women’s movements have broadened ideas of leadership and collective action beyond purely formal spaces.¹² This highlighted that much political economy and ‘thinking and working politically’ to date had been gender blind and that it is not only the issues that coalitions work on that are gendered but also the coalitions themselves and the strategies for change they pursue.¹³

Finally, a focus on the role of donor support pointed to the importance of creating the enabling environment for leadership and collective action to emerge, rather than ‘picking winners’ and targeting individual leaders. This might involve long-term, flexible funding that coalitions can draw on to navigate often long-term processes of change. It might also involve convening and taking a backseat so that local actors can lead.¹⁴

In its third and final phase (2019-2023), DLP itself pivoted toward a more locally-led research model focused in the Indo-Pacific. It considered how leadership is understood in diverse contexts,¹⁵ how leaders emerge,¹⁶ how they act collectively to achieve change¹⁷ and the role of donors in supporting local leaders and coalitions.¹⁸ The focus on the role of donors opened up and connected with wider research on the political economy and internal workings of external development agencies and how this shapes and constrains what ways of working are possible.¹⁹ This phase focused heavily on the

¹⁰ D. Hudson, C. McLoughlin, C. Roche & H. Marquette (2018) ‘Inside the Black Box of Political Will: 10 years of findings from the Developmental Leadership Program,’ Synthesis report, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/inside-the-black-box-of-political-will-10-years-of-findings-from-the-developmental-leadership-program/>.

¹¹ D. Hudson, C. McLoughlin, C. Roche & H. Marquette (2018) ‘Developmental Leadership: What it is, why it matters, and how it can be supported,’ DLP Brief, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/executive-summaries/developmental-leadership-what-it-is-why-it-matters-and-how-it-can-be-supported/>.

¹² H. Derbyshire et al. (2018) ‘From Silos to Synergy: Learning from politically informed, gender aware programs,’ Research Paper, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/from-silos-to-synergy-learning-from-politically-informed-gender-aware-programs/>; A. McLeod (2015) ‘Women’s leadership in the Pacific,’ State of the Art 4, Developmental Leadership Program, Available at:

<https://dlprog.org/publications/foundational-papers/womens-leadership-in-the-pacific/>

¹³ C. Roche et al. (2018) ‘The Bigger Picture: Gender and Politics in Practice,’ Research Paper, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/the-bigger-picture-gender-and-politics-in-practice/>.

¹⁴ L. Denney & R. McLaren (2016) ‘Thinking and Working Politically to Support Developmental Leadership and Coalitions: The Pacific Leadership Program,’ Research Paper, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/thinking-and-working-politically-to-support-developmental-leadership-and-coalitions-the-pacific-leadership-program/>

¹⁵ D. Hudson & C. McLoughlin (2019) ‘How is leadership understood in different contexts?’ Foundational Paper 1, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/foundational-papers/how-is-leadership-understood-in-different-contexts/>

¹⁶ J. Corbett (2019) ‘Where do leaders come from?’ Foundational paper 2, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/foundational-papers/where-do-leaders-come-from/>

¹⁷ S. Nazneen (2019) ‘How do leaders collectively change institutions?’ Foundational paper 3, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/foundational-papers/how-do-leaders-collectively-change-institutions/>

¹⁸ C. Roche & L. Denney (2019) ‘How can developmental leadership be supported?’ Foundational Paper 4, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/foundational-papers/how-can-developmental-leadership-be-supported/>

¹⁹ See also D. Honig (2018) *Navigation by Judgment: Why and When Top Down Management of Foreign Aid Doesn’t Work*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

role of ‘everyday leadership’ – the idea that leadership extends beyond formal roles of authority and emerges from socially-embedded actors in diverse spaces.²⁰ Here, the importance of identity, relationships and relationality was key, shaping how people view the world and the possibility of change, as well as how ideas get communicated, despite being often invisible to outsiders. It underlined the importance of local leaders working collectively to challenge ideas and ultimately transform them, drawing on a range of material resources, as well as diverse forms of legitimacy.²¹

THE STATE, SOCIETY AND GOVERNANCE IN MELANESIAN PROJECT AND PACIFIC RESEARCH PROGRAM

While not focussed explicitly on leadership and coalitions, the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) Project, funded by AusAID and DFAT between 1996 and 2016, and its successor, the Pacific Research Program (PRP), funded by DFAT since 2017, have also made important contributions to contextually-based understandings of leadership and coalitions, most notably in relation to governance,²² state building, civil society,²³ and political participation and inclusive leadership in the Pacific.²⁴ There has been a particularly strong focus on the role of women’s leadership in the Pacific – and thus the need to account for broad conceptions of leadership, recognising that while women have attained important positional leadership in politics, public sector governance, private sector and civil society spheres, there remain significant obstacles which make less formal leadership approaches important.²⁵ Like the work of DLP, both SSGM and PRP outputs informed approaches to leadership that have contributed to shaping DFAT programming.²⁶

ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP AND PROBLEM-DRIVEN ITERATIVE ADAPTATION

Additional influential contributions have come from writings on adaptive leadership, which bears similarities with developmental leadership. Adaptive leadership maintains that leadership is a practice rather than a characteristic and is cooperative, rather than individualistic.²⁷ While adaptive leadership does not talk explicitly about coalitions, it underlines the importance of cooperative ‘multi-agent leadership’ that draws on the skills, expertise and authority of multiple leaders in solving complex challenges.²⁸ Andrews et al note that ‘deep and broad change is more commonly associated with work by groups of authorizers. These groups typically engage in coalition-like structures, where they agree to combine efforts to address shared problems that they cannot solve on their own.’²⁹ Adaptive leaders create a ‘holding environment’ – or what Andrews et al might call a ‘design space’ for leaders to collectively identify problems and iterate to adaptively learn the best

²⁰ K. Sanga et al. (2022) ‘Contextualising Leadership: Looking for leadership in the everyday,’ Research Brief, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-briefs/contextualising-leadership-looking-for-leadership-in-the-everyday/>

²¹ D. Hudson, C. McLoughlin, K. Pruce, C. Roche & I. Cleary-Watson (2023) ‘Navigating Everyday Leadership: Spaces of contestation in the Indo-Pacific,’ Synthesis Report, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/navigating-everyday-leadership/>

²² See for example G. White (2007) ‘Indigenous governance in Melanesia’, SSGM Discussion Paper 2007/5, Available at:

<https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/81d4c27f-87b5-4c91-a154-1636f826fdbf/content>

²³ See for example D. Hegarty & P. Thomas (eds.) (2005) Effective Development in Papua New Guinea, Development Bulletin 2005, Available at: <https://dspace-test.anu.edu.au/items/fa435460-3c9d-46e0-a41b-28a4eeba5c92>

²⁴ See for example, R.J. May, R. Anere, N. Haley & K. Wheen (2013) Election 2007: The Shift to Limited Preferential Voting in Papua New Guinea. Available at: <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/33530>

²⁵ E. Howard (2019) ‘Effective Support for Women’s Leadership in the Pacific: Lessons from the Evidence,’ Discussion Paper 1, Canberra: ANU Department of Pacific Affairs, pp. 7-8.

²⁶ A. McLeod (2008) ‘Leadership models in the Pacific’, SSGM Discussion Paper 2008/6, Available at <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/58524c63-1efd-405b-aca7-b280e169c7b1/content>; J. Barbara & N. Haley (2014) ‘Analytical Framework to Engage with Developmental Leadership in the Pacific,’ Available at: <https://library.sprep.org/content/analytical-framework-engage-developmental-leadership-pacific>

²⁷ R.A. Heifetz (1994) *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Belknap/Harvard Press.

²⁸ M. Andrews, L. Pritchett, M. Woolcock (2017) *Building State Capacity: Evidence, Analysis, Action*, Oxford University Press, p. 199.

²⁹ Ibid.

way to address them.³⁰ Relatedly, problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) has gained ground as a way of solving complex problems that works with ‘local agents’ to navigate iteratively towards solutions.³¹ This thinking has been influential in the push for more adaptive programming that is seen as necessary when working with local leaders and coalitions to drive change.

THE ASIA FOUNDATION

The Asia Foundation, an experienced supporter of local leaders and coalitions, has documented working through coalitions as a strategic way of fostering relationships between powerful actors while amplifying the voice and influence of the less powerful.³² It suggests that working through local coalitions is particularly useful where conventional aid approaches have failed due to the complex political dynamics that require navigation, and that local actors are best placed to manage. Yet this way of working is not straightforward for implementers and requires long-term relationships, the ability to act as a buffer, meeting donor requirements while also creating autonomy for local actors to lead.³³ It also requires a recognition that donor or implementer branding is not always helpful, and challenges conventional project models of assistance given the long timeframes often involved in change.

EFFECTIVE STATES AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH PROGRAM

Finally, with a link to inclusion, the Effective States and Inclusive Development (ESID) research program has found, over ten-years of research, that coalitions are ‘a key mechanism through which the choppy waters of political settlements can be navigated.’³⁴ They note that most political settlements (the tacit agreement amongst elites about how power and resources are divided in society) fail to deliver inclusive developmental benefits because elites lack the incentives to make this happen. In such cases, ‘positive change for the underrepresented is often catalysed by individuals and groups coming together in coalitions to wrestle with the structural barriers to action and progress.’³⁵ ESID’s work suggests that coalitions play a central role not only in solving development problems, but in making the wider political foundations more inclusive and equitable.

This overview of current thinking on leadership and coalitions is important because it has shaped DFAT’s understanding and approach to how local leadership and coalitions drive change. It reveals that leadership is context specific, exists at multiple levels, works through collectives or coalitions to drive change and is inherently political in terms of who takes on leadership roles and how those are differently pursued. This, in turn, has implications for how leaders, and the coalitions they work through, need to be supported by external actors – adaptively and flexibly. While by no means a comprehensive overview of the vast writings on leadership and coalitions, this overview also provides a foundation on which the CALL4Change research will build. Our interest is not in understanding support to ‘local leaders and coalitions’ broadly, but in that subset of investments that approach leadership in the ways the above literature describes. That is, as developmental, adaptive and working in collective and politically astute ways to achieve developmental change – regardless of whether the ‘leaders’ or coalition members sit in formal positions of authority or not.

³⁰ R. A. Heifetz, A. Grashow & M. Linsky (2009) *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*, Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

³¹ M. Andrews, L. Pritchett, M. Woolcock (2017) *Building State Capacity: Evidence, Analysis, Action*, Oxford University Press.

³² The Asia Foundation (2023) ‘On the Right Tack: Reflections on Coalition-Building Initiatives across The Asia Foundation,’ San Francisco, CA: The Asia Foundation, p. 5.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ S. Hickey & T. Kelsall (2020, 30 September) ‘The Three Cs of inclusive development: Context, capacity and coalitions,’ Effective States and Inclusive Development, Available at: <https://www.effective-states.org/the-three-cs-of-inclusive-development-context-capacity-and-coalitions/>

³⁵ Ibid.

Section 2: How DFAT understands support to local leaders and coalitions as a pathway to change

Australia's 2023 *International Development Policy* emphasises local leadership in two ways – externally and internally. Externally, this is described as involving support to 'local leadership, solutions, and accountability, including by channelling funding to local actors.'³⁶ Internally, it involves investing in the 'skills, opportunities, and careers' of 'development-focused locally engaged staff to take greater responsibility and leadership' in the aid program.³⁷ The policy sets an ambition to 'help local leaders to create local solutions,' invest in leadership and support 'local coalitions to achieve positive systemic change.'³⁸

The 2023 Policy recognises the role of local leadership in driving development results. It makes a strong 'commitment to locally led development and supporting local leadership across different aspects of society (government, business, academia, civil society).'³⁹ Specifically, these include increasing the participation of local actors in 'program planning and implementation, including design, contracting and delivery arrangements, and monitoring and evaluation approaches'; providing 'multi-year funding and capacity development to local organisations'; and designing 'a new Civil Society Partnerships Fund which will support local civil society organisations.'⁴⁰

Increased attention to local leadership is also evident in a range of other DFAT policies, most notably in the 2025 *International Gender Equality Strategy* (IGES),⁴¹ and to a lesser extent in Australia's 2024 *International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy*. While DFAT's 2016 *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy*⁴² recognised the importance of working 'sensitively within the local context' and supporting women's organisations and coalitions, there is a markedly greater emphasis on locally led women's leadership in the 2025 IGES. Supporting 'locally led approaches to women's leadership' is one of five strategic priorities outlined in the strategy, and a commitment is made to remaining a reliable funder of local women's rights organisations and movements. This marks a clear shift from working sensitively locally to supporting locally led approaches as a strategic priority. While "nothing without us" has always been a guiding principle of the disability rights movement, the 2024 *International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy* more explicitly frames the principle in relation to locally led leadership and decision-making, affecting a shift from participation to leadership, and including an ongoing commitment to fund Organisations of Persons with Disability (OPDs).⁴³

Coalitions (or collective action) are mentioned much less frequently in DFAT policies but examples are highlighted where Australia 'supports local coalitions to achieve positive systemic change' by

³⁶ DFAT (2023) Australia's International Development Policy, Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/international-development-policy.pdf>

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 3; 30; 32.

³⁹ DFAT (2024) DFAT Guidance Note: Locally Led Development. Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/dfat-guidance-note-locally-led-development>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ DFAT (2025) Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy, Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias-international-gender-equality-strategy.pdf>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ DFAT (2024) Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy: Advancing equity to transform lives, Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/publications/australias-international-disability-equity-and-rights-strategy-advancing-equity-transform-lives>

connecting leaders and communities.⁴⁴ Similarly, the *Locally Led Development Guidance Note* details examples of programs where ‘strong relationships across ... [diverse stakeholders]’ enables ‘convening and strengthening of these coalitions of actors who are now stimulating demand for and making change.’⁴⁵ Related terms, however, such as ‘networks’ appears more frequently, with references to how these enable Australia award alumni to exercise leadership, or amplify the impact of individual civil society organisation.⁴⁶ While not always explicit, DFAT policies articulate the relationship between local leadership and collective action, and development outcomes in DFAT’s *2024 Locally Led Development Guidance Note*: ‘[DFAT] can leverage and empower local leadership, knowledge, networks, and cultural understanding in delivering effective development assistance.’⁴⁷ This, in turn, is thought to help ‘strengthen local institutions and delivery mechanisms, catalysing key reforms and their implementation’, leading ‘to more effective and sustainable outcomes that are locally owned, embedded and institutionalised at national and subnational levels, and meet local needs and priorities.’⁴⁸ Support to local leaders and collective action is thus understood as one way of strengthening the impact and sustainability of DFAT development investments.

DFAT policy statements regarding local leadership and coalitions also underline the value of learning-oriented approaches that embrace uncertainty, work collectively with others, and are informed by culturally-embedded ideas of what leadership entails. The guidance note on locally led development states that locally led approaches are more amenable to investments that use ‘highly adaptive, evolving or flexible pathways for change, including social accountability, ‘thinking and working politically’, or developmental leadership coalition methodologies.’⁴⁹ However, much remains unsaid. Understandings of what constitutes leadership are not always clear and there is, perhaps unsurprisingly, less emphasis on the ways in which the wider development ecosystem (including DFAT and implementing agencies) constrain and enable local leaders and coalitions to drive development.⁵⁰ Some of the guidance addresses metrics to shift towards greater locally led development, including by increasing procurement through local suppliers and hiring national personnel, as well as targets for locally engaged staff and technical advisers, and capability development, mentoring and skills transfer. Policy statements blend a recognition of the highly contextual, adaptive, and even political nature of locally led development – and the role that local leaders and coalitions can play as one component of this – with more managerialist approaches that focus on the technical tools available to donors for driving change. DFAT’s policy settings thus provide strong references to and coverage of programs that seek to support local leaders and coalitions. While these are significantly broader – covering a wide range of programming approaches – this does mean they remain less specified on what understandings of leadership entail and how a donor agency such as DFAT might effectively support local leaders and coalitions. Unpacking the continuities and tensions between policy and practice is a key objective of the CALL4Change research and will help DFAT to better operationalise its higher-level policy aims.

⁴⁴ DFAT (2023) Australia’s International Development Policy, Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/international-development-policy.pdf>, p. 32.

⁴⁵ DFAT (2024) DFAT Guidance Note: Locally Led Development. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/dfat-guidance-note-locally-led-development>, p. 14.

⁴⁶ DFAT (2023) Australia’s International Development Policy, Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/international-development-policy.pdf>, pp. 30; 39.

⁴⁷ DFAT (2024) DFAT Guidance Note: Locally Led Development. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/dfat-guidance-note-locally-led-development>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ C. Roche & L. Denney (2019) ‘How can developmental leadership be supported?’, Foundational Paper 4, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/foundational-papers/how-can-developmental-leadership-be-supported/>.

Section 3: Mapping of DFAT investments in local leaders and coalitions

While policy documents provide a useful starting point for understanding how DFAT conceptualises the relationship between local leadership, collective action and development outcomes, an analysis of program investments and interviews with DFAT staff provide insight into the ways in which policy commitments do, or do not, translate into practice).

DFAT has made some notable investments in local leadership and coalitions programs, some of which have proved to be influential across the aid program. This includes the Developmental Leadership Program (a research investment), described above, which has contributed to shaping thinking within DFAT about notions of everyday leadership, and has influenced (and been informed by) a range of program designs and implementation, including the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP), Coalitions for Change, Governance for Growth in Vanuatu, The Vanuatu Skills Partnership, Women Leading and Influencing, Balance of Power, The Australia Pacific Training Coalition, among others.⁵¹

The PLP was an AusAID and DFAT investment which operated from 2008 to 2017. It embraced diverse forms of leadership – from the everyday to formal elites – and practically connected leadership with collective action for change, for instance by playing a facilitative role in securing reserved seats for women in Vanuatu’s municipal councils.⁵² The PLP experience and ways of working have been the subject of research and have informed the way in which future investments, such as Balance of Power and Women Leading and Influencing operate.⁵³ Finally, the Coalitions for Change program in the Philippines, implemented by The Asia Foundation and the Australian High Commission (now in phase 3) has similarly been the subject of research and has shaped DFAT’s work on coalitions in particular, with learning shared across other investments.⁵⁴ Other long-standing investments that have both drawn on and contributed to thinking on local leaders and coalitions include Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development (now Pacific Women Lead) and the We Rise Coalition.

Yet beyond this handful of better-known programs, there is little sense of what DFAT’s portfolio of investments in local leadership and coalitions looks like, noting that most development programs now have internal locally led development strategies, and many sector programs have program outcomes relating to leadership and coordination.

Relative to overall global official development assistance spending, only a small amount is spent on leadership development and coalitions. According to Boston Consulting Group, in 2018, USD 15.2 million was spent globally on international development projects with a focus on local ‘leadership

⁵¹ C. Adams (2019) Developmental Leadership Program Impact Review: Final Version. Melbourne: Institute for Human Security and Social Change, La Trobe University (unpublished).

⁵² B. Rousseau and D. Kenneth-Watson (2018) ‘Supporting Coalition-based Reform in Vanuatu,’ Developmental Leadership Program, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/supporting-coalition-based-reform-in-vanuatu/>.

⁵³ L. Denney & R. McLaren (2016) ‘Thinking and Working Politically to Support Developmental Leadership and Coalitions: The Pacific Leadership Program,’ Developmental Leadership Program, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/thinking-and-working-politically-to-support-developmental-leadership-and-coalitions-the-pacific-leadership-program/>

⁵⁴ D. Booth (2014) ‘Aiding Institutional Reform in Developing Countries: Lessons from the Philippines on what works, what doesn’t and why,’ London: ODI and The Asia Foundation, Available at: <https://odi.org/en/publications/aiding-institutional-reform-in-developing-countries-lessons-from-the-philippines-on-what-works-what-doesnt-and-why/>; J. Faustino and D. Booth (2014) ‘Development Entrepreneurship: How donors and leaders can foster institutional change,’ London: ODI and The Asia Foundation. Available at: <https://odi.org/en/publications/development-entrepreneurship-how-donors-and-leaders-can-foster-institutional-change/>

development’ across all donors, amounting to just 0.01% of total development assistance.⁵⁵ Identifying donor spending on ‘leadership and coalitions’ is difficult to do with any precision, however, as project coding does not always capture a focus on leadership and coalitions and, where it does, the terms can be used so broadly that it is not always analytically useful. For instance, the use of ‘leadership’ in DFAT project descriptions is reasonably common, even if the programs are not principally focused on supporting local leaders. Despite these challenges, in order to better understand support to local leaders and coalitions as a pathway of change, it is useful to generate an indication of levels of investment within DFAT’s portfolio. To do this, we undertook three steps:

- **Step 1: Longlist generation** – A longlist was prepared by searching the AusDevPortal to identify DFAT programs containing the keywords ‘leadership’, ‘leaders’, or ‘coalitions’ in the project title, description, indicators or case studies. We omitted ‘local’ from this for two reasons. First, to ensure we were not unfairly excluding programs that did not opt for this language and to understand the diversity of ways in which DFAT uses ‘leadership’ and ‘leaders’ in programming. Second, because the AusDevPortal does not allow string searches and so we could only search for ‘local’+ ‘leaders’ (rather than ‘local leaders’) which increased the project list substantially to include many less relevant investments. This approach produced a list of 89 investments. Since the AusDevPortal only provides data on total annual spend for programs active during the financial years 2022-23 and 2023-24, it was not possible to obtain overall budget amounts or longitudinal data. Further, different phases of a single program are listed as separate investments on the portal. For ease of analysis, the focus was restricted to programs active in FY 2023-24.
- **Step 2: Key informant interviews** – Three interviews were conducted with DFAT officials across geographic and central teams with a view to learning about investments that do not explicitly mention ‘leadership’ and ‘coalitions’ in their description, but that support local leaders and coalitions in practice. This helped to generate a more rounded and accurate list of investments, totalling 106. Several investments mentioned by DFAT officials were excluded because they did not have an AusDevPortal entry, meaning that comparable budget data could not be accessed.
- **Step 3: Cleaning and coding** – The list was cleaned by examining project profiles in greater detail, removing projects that were not a strong fit with ideas of ‘local’ leaders or coalitions. This was important to generate a list of investments that appear to be targeting support to local leaders and coalitions. Investments to multilateral organisations were also excluded. The final list of programs was coded by examining their full AusDevPortal entries (or other publicly available program documentation) to identify programs that exhibited the following approaches:
 1. Programs focused on enabling or supporting local leaders
 2. Programs focused on enabling or supporting coalitions
 3. Sectoral programs containing local leadership as one of their components
 4. Programs focused on local leadership skills development, training, alumni support and/or exchange opportunities.

This coding enables a more disaggregated view of the types of investments DFAT is making in local leaders and coalitions, discussed in more detail below.

⁵⁵ People First Community (2020) ‘Collective Leadership as a Path for Sustainable Development: Putting People, Agency and Leadership First,’ Available at: https://peoplefirstdev.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Updated-People-First-working-paper_6.2.22_final.docx.pdf

Table 1: DFAT Investments - Identification Process Summary

Step	Description	Number of Investments
Step 1: Longlist (AusDevPortal search)	Programs identified through keyword search: 'leadership', 'leaders', 'coalitions'.	89
Step 2: Key-informant interviews	Additional programs identified through 3 DFAT key-informant interviews.	106
Step 3: Cleaning and coding (final dataset)	List refined by removing weak fits with 'local' leaders and coalitions, generic uses, and multilateral contributions; then coded by approach.	77

Table 2: Mapping of 2023-24 DFAT investments in local leaders and coalitions

Recommended by key informants and/or team members	Enabling/ supporting local leaders	Enabling/ supporting coalitions	Sector-based with local leadership focus	Skills/ training/ exchange focused	Project Title	Total Spend (2023-24) AUD	Pacific	South or South East Asia	Sector	Project Initiatives in Leadership and Coalitions
			x	x	ACIAR John Allwright Fellowships 2016-2024	3,000,000	x	x	Agriculture	Long term scholarships are provided to help build the leaders and technical skills required for developing countries to drive their own development and meet regional and global challenges.
			x	x	ACIAR Meryl Williams Fellowship ASEAN cohort	1,000,000		x	Agriculture	Supports 20 women agricultural researchers from across ASEAN and Timor-Leste to develop their leadership and management capability, including through workshops in Australia and the region.
x		x			Addressing Gender Inequality in Solomon Islands	2,271,515	x		Gender	Improves support services for survivors of GBV, increasing the effective representation of women through leadership at all levels of decision making, and expanding women's economic opportunities.
			x		ASEAN Scholars Leadership Program	784,032		x	Education	Supports the enrichment of scholar's experiences in Australia through learning, networking and development opportunities, and builds people-to-people links between Australia and the region
			x		Australia Awards in Indonesia Program	16,141,008		x	Education	Scholarships for study, research and professional development in Australia, targets leaders with potential to effect change in their communities and have a significant impact on the development of Indonesia
			x		Australia Awards in-country costs Tonga	71,557		x	Education	Funding under this investment supports in-country management of Australia Awards for Tonga, including application vetting and selection processes, outreach, student mobilisation and M&E
			x		Australia Awards Papua New Guinea	-15,326	x		Education	PNGAus Partnership Secondary Schools initiative which sought to build educational and leadership capabilities and strengthen P2P links through partnering of 12 PNG with 12 Australian schools.
			x		Australia Awards Papua New Guinea (AAPNG)	14,569,361	x		Education	Scholarships to future PNG leaders, alumni hold leadership positions in PNG's public service and working as senior managers, business owners, health workers and teachers.
			x		Australia Awards Scholarships - 2018 intake	603,723	x	x	Education	Develop leadership potential and stimulate lasting change by empowering a global network of talented individuals through high-quality education experiences in Australia and overseas.
			x		Australia Awards Scholarships - 2023 Intake	45,120,693	x	x	Education	Australia Awards Women Leading and Influencing offers structured leadership training, coaching and mentoring, supporting participants and alumni to take on leadership roles in their countries upon return
x			x		Australia Awards Women's Leadership Initiative 2.0	2,108,089	x	x	Education	Supporting female and male Australia Awards scholars and alumni to develop the skills, networks and capabilities to effectively lead and influence on development issues in their countries.
			x		Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice (Phase 3)	4,284		x	Justice	Focuses on seven areas: accountability, transparency, criminal justice reform, preventing violent extremism, transnational crime cooperation, commercial law, access to justice, and women's leadership
			x		Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice Phase 2	10,101,860		x	Justice	Supported Indonesia's Supreme Court to establish the Indonesian Women's Judges Association supporting the Court's commitment to increasing women's representation in judicial leadership to 50% by 2030
			x		Australia Online Studies Scholarship 2020 Intake (Samoa)	22,819	x		Education	Develops capacity and leadership skills so that individuals can contribute to Samoa's development, builds people -to-people linkages at individual, institutional and country levels
			x		Australia Online Studies Scholarship 2021 Intake (Samoa)	128,309	x		Education	Develops capacity and leadership skills so that individuals can contribute to Samoa's development, builds people -to-people linkages at individual, institutional and country levels
			x		Australia Online Studies Scholarship 2022 Intake (Samoa)	111,347	x		Education	Develops capacity and leadership skills so that individuals can contribute to Samoa's development, builds people -to-people linkages at individual, institutional and country levels
			x		Australia Online Studies Scholarship 2023 Intake (Samoa)	173,063	x		Education	Develops capacity and leadership skills so that individuals can contribute to Samoa's development, builds people -to-people linkages at individual, institutional and country levels
			x		Australia Online Studies Scholarship 2024 Intake (Samoa)	52,171	x		Education	Develops capacity and leadership skills so that individuals can contribute to Samoa's development, builds people -to-people linkages at individual, institutional and country levels
			x		Australia Pacific Church Partnerships Program	153,797	x		Faith based	Strengthens partnerships between Pacific and Australian church leaders and faith-based development leaders to enable exchanges, focused on leadership and capacity building in identified priority areas
			x		Australia Pacific Church Partnerships Program - Phase 2	2,262,185	x		Faith based	The program provides opportunities to engage directly with Pacific church leaders on regional priorities; build and cultivate strong enduring relationships amongst young emerging leaders.
			x		Australia Pacific Training Coalition (Stage 3)	32,811,819	x	x	TVET	Australia's largest skills investment in the Pacific and Timor-Leste contributing to overall skills uplift and improved local employment outcomes by delivering Australian qualifications and strengthening TVET
			x	x	Australia Solomon Islands Partnership for Justice 2021-2025	4,936,570	x		Justice	Through this program, Australia has supported leadership development across various law and justice agencies through formal qualifications, on the job training and learning exchange
x	x				Australia-Indonesia Partnership Towards an Inclusive Society	18,936,336		x	CSO support	INKLUSI continues Australia's support to Indonesia, building on advancements in the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment, disability rights, social inclusion and civil society strengthening
			x		Australian Humanitarian Partnership - global humanitarian assistance with Australian NGOs 2022-2027	11,035,476	x		CSO support	Supporting partner countries and communities to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters and other humanitarian crises. AHP supports local communities to take a leadership role.
		x	x		Australian Red Cross Partnership - global humanitarian preparedness and response programs 2019-2024	14,859,885	x	x	CSO support	The program takes a locally-led approach to improve disaster response capabilities. It helps support climate change adaptation, women's leadership and disability inclusion via its activities.
x	x	x			Building Community Engagement in Papua New Guinea (BCEP)	22,128,652	x		Governance	Supports citizen-government engagement for improved service delivery and provision of public goods, comprises inter-related components, namely: Church Partnerships Program; Coalitions for Change etc
	x				Development Awareness and Leadership Program (Solomon Islands)	569,501	x		Governance	Activities to build awareness of the Solomon Islands-Australia Development Partnership and to build leadership skills and capabilities of current and emerging Solomon Islands leaders.

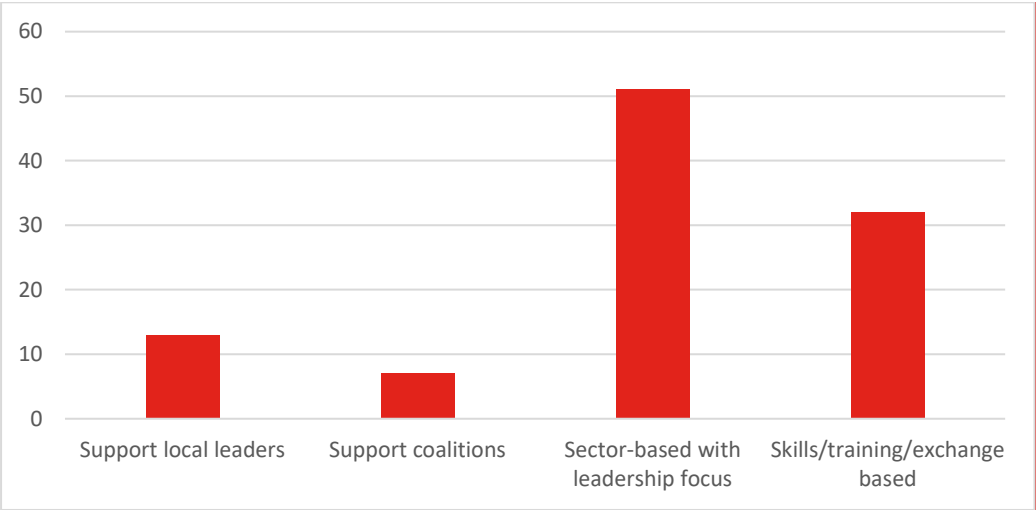
			x		<u>Field Epidemiology (Asia-Pacific)</u>	6,241,389	x	x	Health	Programs will provide continual support and guidance to graduates of field epidemiology training programs through mentoring, train the trainers sessions, leadership training and regional networks.
			x		<u>Human Development Monitoring and Evaluation Services Provider</u>	2,784,247	x		DFAT internal	Provides high-quality advice and independent monitoring and evaluation services at investment and whole-of-program level to the Health, and Education and Leadership programs in PNG
			x		<u>Inclusive Water Governance and Strengthening Climate Resilience in the Mekong Region</u>	1,431,700		x	Water	Supporting civil society organizations (CSO) and community and women leaders to participate in water governance decision-making and strengthen community climate resilience in the Mekong sub-region
x	x	x			<u>Investing in Women (Southeast Asia) 2023-27</u>	12,115,002		x	Gender	Support partners, including business coalitions, to advance workplace gender equality, increase investment in businesses that disproportionately benefit women, and support locally driven campaigns
x			x		<u>Innovation for Indonesia's School Children (INOVASI) Phase 3</u>	2,617,271		x	Education	INOVASI is an adaptive program which trials, learns from and improves collective and localised system approaches in implementing relevant education policies and reforms, including on school leadership
	x		x		<u>Institutional Partnership Program</u>	2,126	x		Governance	Provides public service policy, strategic advice and capacity development e.g. administrative leadership and management support to PNG Government agencies, including in public leadership and policy
			x		<u>Kiribati Gender Development</u>	274,316	x		Gender	Australia's support to Kiribati has been guided by the Kiribati Gender Country Plan under the Pacific Women Lead Program. The priority areas of the program include women's leadership promoted.
			x		<u>Kiribati Health Sector Support</u>	290,820	x		Health	Focused on health sector leadership and coordination following COVID-19. The KAHSP-funded Director General of Health provided strong leadership resulting in the National Health Strategic Plan.
		x	x		<u>Kiribati Leadership, Engagement and Accountability for Development (KirileAD)</u>	389,000	x		Justice	Focused on anti-corruption, justice and corrections, institutional strengthening, and supporting a vibrant civil society. Supports effective, transparent and accountable institutions and government systems.
x			x		<u>Mekong Australia Partnership Phase 1 - Vietnam Economic Resilience Fund</u>	924,696		x	Governance	Building relationships between Australian economic agencies and their Vietnamese counterparts, and, in partnership with UN Women, enhancing women's economic access and leadership
				x	<u>Nauru Education Program</u>	3,834,129	x		Education	Provides support to Nauru's education system and is aligned with the Government of Nauru's policy frameworks and systems. Covers the administration of the Australia Awards in Nauru.
				x	<u>Pacific Secondary School Scholarships Program</u>	2	x		Education	Aimed to prepare students from Pacific island countries for leadership through secondary education scholarships. The program was paused in 2020 in response to COVID-19 and was terminated in 2023.
		x	x		<u>Pacific Women Fiji Country Plan</u>	754,584	x		Gender	Increase women's economic empowerment; support women's organisations and coalitions for change; increase women's participation in leadership and decision-making; enhance knowledge and evidence
x	x	x	x		<u>Pacific Women Lead</u>	25,042,476	x		Gender	Strengthening gender equality through focussing on women's leadership and rights, including safety, health, economic empowerment, responding to and preventing GBV, and through the WeRise Coalition
	x	x	x		<u>Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development</u>	4,703	x		Gender	Focused on improving women's participation in leadership and decision making; improving women's economic empowerment; and reducing violence against women. Supported the WeRise Coalition.
	x		x		<u>Papua New Guinea Institutional Partnerships Program</u>	12,426,461	x		Governance	Provides public service policy, strategic advice and capacity development e.g. administrative leadership and management support to PNG Government agencies, including in public leadership and policy
			x		<u>PNG Australia Secondary School Program</u>	382,891	x		Education	Supports future leaders, and the stability and prosperity of PNG, by improving education at PNG's high-performing secondary schools, with a goal to improve learning outcomes and leadership capabilities.
	x		x		<u>PNG Women Lead</u>	11,153,032	x		Gender	Runs complementary to Pacific Women Lead, focuses on enhancing women's voice in decision-making and leadership; Preventing and responding to GBV; supporting women's economic empowerment
			x		<u>Priority Outcome 1: Improved Basic Education</u>	3,006,646	x		Education	Focusing on improving learning outcomes for basic education for girls and boys, including children with a disability by improving: curriculum; learning environments; quality teaching and school leadership
			x		<u>Republic of Palau Partnership for Economic Growth</u>	1,082,018	x		Gender	Implementation of the Australia – Palau country plan for Gender Equality, to address gender-based violence, and encourage economic and leadership opportunities for all in Palau.
			x	x	<u>Southeast Asia Maritime Consultancy 2.0</u>	1,992,604		x	Security	The Southeast Asian Women in Maritime Security Network hosted a two-week program in Australia on maritime security and women's leadership. Helped build a network to enhance women's leadership.
			x	x	<u>Strengthening Health Workforce in the Pacific (Nursing and Midwifery) (SHWP)</u>	1,250,000	x		Health	Regional initiative across 13 Pacific Island countries, contributing towards developing a sustainable and resilient nursing and midwifery workforce. It will involve enhancing leadership and governance skills.
			x	x	<u>Strengthening Regional Emergency Health Preparedness in the Pacific and Timor Leste</u>	2,000,000	x	x	Health	Delivers training, mentoring, leadership activities and support to health professionals, managers and emergency responders, leveraging Australian skills, regional bodies and national leaders.
			x	x	<u>Support for Pacific Statistics 2021-22 to 2027-28</u>	3,289,780	x		Governance	Provides funding to the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Pacific Community to support their capacity building, technical assistance, leadership and governance efforts in the region and with PIC NSOs.
			x	x	<u>Supporting knowledge-based research and policy dialogues in the Mekong subregion</u>	2,000,000		x	Water	Strengthens the role of research organisations to conduct locally led research and policy dialogues on water and climate issues. Trains young professionals through research fellowships and knowledge events.
			x	x	<u>Timor-Leste Police Development Program</u>	2,750,000		x	Security	Support the Timorese police to deliver skilled and professional policing services, responding to community needs and contribute to a stable and secure Timor-Leste, including through organisational leadership.
			x		<u>Tonga Gender Equality Investment</u>	412,226	x		Gender	Supports implementation of DFAT's Gender Country Plan. Includes partnerships with the gender equality machinery of government and CSO programs on women's leadership and economic empowerment.
			x		<u>Vanuatu Gender Equality Program</u>	2,064,426	x		Gender	Supports ending VAW and increasing and promoting women's leadership. The Young Women's Leadership program provides capacity building to young women. Core funding to Vanuatu's only feminist NGO.
				x	<u>Vietnam – Australia Human Resource Development (Aus4Skills) Phase 3, 2025 - 2035</u>	22,891		x	TVET	Support for Vietnam's higher education and skills system to strengthen Vietnam's public sector leadership capability, and support Australia's alumni to contribute to Vietnam's development.
				x	<u>Vietnam – Australia Human Resource Development Program (Aus4Skills)</u>	15,794,238		x	TVET	Focuses on Australia Awards Scholarships, alumni engagement, higher education capacity building, promoting industry linkages with vocational education and training, supporting Vietnam's future leadership.
			x		<u>Women's World Banking - Southeast Asia (2016 - 2025)</u>	2,000,000		x	Gender	Focuses on 1) understanding women's needs, behaviours and preferences; 2) developing and scaling financial products; 3) strengthening institutions and leadership to better meet women's needs
			x	x	<u>Workforce Skills Development: Kiribati Facility</u>	4,576,015	x		TVET	The Kiribati Australia Skills for Employment Program supports the Ministry of Employment and Human Resources to strengthen its leadership and accountability practices, supporting strategic planning in skills.

	x		x		<u>Young Women's Leadership with World Young Women's Christian Association (Indo-Pacific) 2020 - 2027</u>	1,500,003	x	x	Gender	Supports YWCA in implementing RiseUp! Phase IV which aims to support over 6,000 young women aged 18 to 30 years to build and exercise their leadership capabilities based on local contexts and priorities
x			x		<u>Australia-Papua New Guinea Subnational Program (APSP)</u>	9,659,197	x		Governance	Focuses on strengthening subnational governance, human and economic development, gender equality, and disability inclusion.
x			x		<u>Papua New Guinea Western Province Partnership (WPP)</u>	16,257,762	x		Governance	Focuses on strengthening subnational governance and service delivery, improving access to economic livelihood opportunities, food and water security, gender equality, disability and social inclusion
x			x		<u>Subnational Governance Program for Nepal - Phase 2</u>	5,000,000		x	Governance	Supports the development, implementation and consolidation of new policies, processes and management tools through consultative processes in selected sub-national governments.
x			x		<u>Synergy and Collaboration for Basic Services Acceleration</u>	16,477,200	x		Governance	SKALA supports the Government of Indonesia to strengthen selected elements of Indonesia's decentralised government system responsible for the delivery of basic services.
x			x		<u>Amplify-Invest-Reach Partnership: DFAT support to Women's Funds (Indo-Pacific) 2021 - 2026</u>	3,892,197	x	x	Gender	A-I-R supports women's rights organisations and human rights defenders across the Indo-Pacific region through four key regional funds that work with and provide financial support to grassroots organisations.
x			x		<u>PARTISIPA - Partnership for Strengthening Village Development and Municipal Administration</u>	12,645,719		x	Governance	PARTISIPA continues Australia's long-term support for community infrastructure and supports rural water operations and maintenance, rural roads, and strengthening municipal governance and service delivery
x			x		<u>Australia Indonesia Democratic Resilience Pilot Program</u>	1,142,151		x	Governance	The program aims to pilot approaches that help strengthen democratic institutions and processes in Indonesia, particularly for youth, women and people with disabilities.
x			x		<u>Vanuatu Skills for Economic Growth (phase IV)</u>	6,869,171	x		TVET	This program is supporting economic growth through a network of provincial skills centres, which operate as the primary service delivery coordination mechanism for a decentralised, quality assured skills sector.
x			x		<u>Australia - Indonesia Partnership for Knowledge Sector Initiative</u>	0		x	Governance	Supports Indonesian policymakers to develop pro poor policies through better use of research, data and analysis. KSI works with independent policy institutes and government agencies.
x			x		<u>Australia Indonesia Partnership for Economic Development</u>	43,182,163		x	Governance	PROSPERA works with Indonesian government agencies and provides evidence to base policy to support private sector development, safeguard macroeconomic stability, and improve government performance
x			x		<u>Ponlok Chomnes II: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia</u>	3,000,000		x	Governance	The goal of the investment is "Public policy decisions, based on evidence and informed by inclusive dialogue, are operationalised and increasingly become the norm in Cambodia".
x			x		<u>Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Mindanao - Philippines</u>	0		x	Conflict	Australia's Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Mindanao investment contributes to peace and stability in the Philippines, working towards long-term development in the region's conflict-affected areas.
x			x		<u>Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Mindanao 2 - Philippines</u>	12,688,457		x	Conflict	Reducing the drivers of conflict, helping more combatants return to civilian life, and supporting long-term stability, security, and development in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
x			x		<u>A Partnership for Inclusive Prosperity / Paseria Ba Prosperidade Inkluzivu (PROSIVU)</u>	10,813,786		x	Governance	Provided governance and economic development support to Timor-Leste central government agencies and economic line-ministries. Planned TVET sector enhancements with Australia Pacific Training Coalition
x	x				<u>ActionAid Australia - Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)</u>	1,122,057	x	x	CSO support	Through ANCP funding, ActionAid Australia supports Ni-Vanuatu women's leadership through the Women I Tok Tok Tugeta network where women learn about crises, disasters and climate change.
x			x	x	<u>Partnerships for Infrastructure (P4I)</u>	50,056,544		x	Governance	P4I's goal is to contribute to 'quality infrastructure development that drives sustainable, inclusive, and resilient growth in Southeast Asia', integrating climate change, gender and social inclusion.
x				x	<u>Southeast Asia and Australia Government to Government Partnerships Program (SEAG2G)</u>	1,073,785		x	Governance	SEAG2G will work across four priority themes: climate change and energy transition; education and skills; sustainable agriculture and food security; and effective and inclusive public institutions.
						522,232,607				

Based on the data above, in 2023-24, DFAT spent a total of approximately \$522 million across 77 programs that incorporated local leaders and coalitions in some form. This constitutes 10.95 per cent of Australia’s ODA budget for 2023-24.⁵⁶ This number is far lower for DFAT programs that explicitly mention ‘coalitions’, with only 7 programs spending approximately \$75 million in total during 2023-24, amounting to only 1.57 per cent of the aid budget. Overall, the mapping indicates 77 programs of AUD \$522,232,607 value operating in 2023-24 focused on local leadership and coalitions.

Of the 77 programs in total, 13 of these explicitly support local leaders, 7 support coalitions, 51 are sector-based with a leadership focus, and 32 are skills/training/exchange focused (some support multiple approaches) (see table 3 below). 48 programs work in the Pacific, while 40 are in South and Southeast Asia (11 work in both geographies). The programs work across a range of sectors, with a strong focus on education, governance and gender.

Table 3: DFAT programs focused on leadership and coalitions, by category of programming



⁵⁶ DFAT (2023) ‘Australia’s Official Development Assistance: Development Budget Summary 2023-24’ Available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/oda-development-budget-summary-2023-24.pdf>

Section 4: Making sense of DFAT's investments

The mapping above provides an indication of the span of DFAT's investments in leadership and coalitions. Of the 77 investments, 32 are focused on providing skills development, training or exchange opportunities – suggesting this is the dominant approach to how leadership is supported in DFAT investments. 51 are sectoral programs that contain leadership or coalitions as one component – indicating that there may be a need to look more closely at programs that are not obviously 'leadership' or 'coalitions' focused to understand DFAT's approaches. Thirteen were focused on more directly supporting local leaders and seven focused on supporting coalitions. Five reflections and associated questions stem from this. Not all of these questions fall within the scope of the CALL4Change research, but they inform our conceptual framework set out in section 5, while also opening lines of inquiry that others may wish to explore.

First, the overwhelming majority of programs are focused on leaders or leadership, rather than coalitions. This may indicate a more individualistic approach to thinking about the role of leaders in driving change (or indeed, in building relationships with individual future leaders) – more in line with 'heroic,' 'great men of history,' ideas that much of the literature discredits as being insufficiently aware of collective leadership and collective action.⁵⁷ It may also reflect a loose use of the word 'leadership,' and 'leaders' which is used to apply to a wider range of initiatives.

Second, the second largest category of investments is those focused on leadership training and exchanges. That is, training cohorts of local people in a broad range of topics – ranging from leadership skills to technical specialist skills, with an implicit assumption that more qualified individuals will fill a knowledge or skills gap that will enable better service delivery or will address a key development challenge. In addition, in contrast to policy statements that reflect an adaptive or developmental approach to leadership, some of the leadership exchange programs retain a focus on high-level visits between elite leaders. While these programs have not been analysed individually, critiques of leadership training programs more broadly point to them taking an individualistic approach to leadership, as well as potentially a managerial approach in which leadership is reduced to a set of teachable skills that are imparted to learners.⁵⁸ Critiques also point to the potential for leadership training to decontextualise leadership and the relational elements that give it authority and legitimacy within context.⁵⁹ More would need to be known about the specific focus of each of the programs and the training they deliver (it may be that, in some cases, adaptive leadership skills are being taught that emphasise and locate leadership as a collective, contextually-specific endeavour). Moreover, some programs in this category provide ongoing support for trained cohorts, with alumni programs used to coordinate post-training or qualification support, including opportunities for alumni to engage collectively. Questions flowing from this large cohort of programs are:



- How do leadership programs 'teach' leadership?
- How do they support or connect with collective action?

⁵⁷ Matt Andrews (2013) 'Who really leads development?', CID Working Paper No. 258, Available at: <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/cid/publications/faculty-working-papers/who-really-leads-development>; H. Lyne de Ver (2008) 'Leadership, Politics and Development,' DLP Background Paper, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/background-papers/leadership-politics-and-development/>.

⁵⁸ C. Needham, N. Gale and J. Waring (2025) 'New development: System diplomacy – an alternative to system leadership,' *Public Money & Management*, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2025.2462230>.

⁵⁹ H. Lyne de Ver and F. Kennedy (2011) 'An Analysis of Leadership Development Programmes Working in the Context of Development,' DLP Research Paper, Available at: <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-papers/an-analysis-of-leadership-development-programmes-working-in-the-context-of-development/>; M. Andrews, J. McConnell and A. Wescott, (2020) 'Leadership-led Change: A report for the Global Leadership Initiative', Washington, DC: World Bank, p. 49.

- What ongoing or additional support following training adds value?
 - How are they tailored to the context-specific nature of leadership?
 - How does support to leadership from these programs link to developmental outcomes?
-

Third, the largest category of investments in the mapping are sectoral programs that include components on local leadership or coalitions. As these programs did not always appear in the keyword search of the AusDevPortal, there may be more going on in this area of programming than the mapping above reveals (most of these projects were identified through interviews with DFAT staff). Programs covered in this category include, for instance, the Australia-Indonesia Law and Justice Partnership, which focuses on access to justice, accountability and women's leadership and Inclusive Water Governance and Strengthening Climate Resilience in the Mekong Region, which supports community and women leaders to participate in water governance decision-making and strengthens community climate resilience. These investments imply that working through local leaders and coalitions may be one strategy for progressing outcomes in a particular sectoral or thematic area. How these components focused on local leaders and coalitions sit alongside other components of programming is not clear. Key questions emerging include:

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- ❓ • How are sector-based programs integrating leadership and coalitions in wider programming and is this similar or different to programs focused more explicitly on leadership and coalitions?
 - Are some sectors integrating these approaches more than others? Why and to what effect?
-

Fourth, the number of programs explicitly focused on supporting local leaders and coalitions is significantly smaller. While some of the programs in this category are perhaps the most well-known, this category is also the smallest of the investment portfolio. Programs in this category assume change happens by directly supporting local leaders and coalitions to take action – either on specific policy areas, or more generally. Key questions for this category of programs include:

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- ❓ • Why have these programs come about (to address what problem/opportunity) and why was support to local leaders/coalitions seen as an effective way to address these issues (their explicit and implicit TOCs)?
 - What determines whether their outcomes are focused on specific reform areas or are more generic in focus?
 - What determines whether their outcomes are focused on policy reform, social norm change or behaviour change?
 - How do they work? For instance, how are they staffed? How do they partner? How do they work plan and adapt? How do they monitor results, manage risk, communicate what they do, etc? What are the programs learning about support to local leaders and coalitions as pathways of change?
-

Finally, the above mapping suggests the need for a more nuanced unpacking of DFAT investments and the diversity of ways in which they align with DFAT policy. Policy statements emphasise supporting local leaders and collective action to solve complex development challenges, yet investments in leadership and coalitions appear to contain only a small number of programs explicitly focused on support to local leaders and coalitions. On the one hand, this suggests there is potential for stronger investment in programs directly supporting local leaders and coalitions. On the other hand, it points to the need to dig deeper into different programming approaches – focused on leadership training and sectors – and how these integrate support to local leaders and coalitions. This research seeks to capture the range of approaches that can take. The investment patterns also raise questions about the constraints and perceived risks of supporting local leaders and coalitions and how DFAT's own political economy influences what is possible. It is these questions upon which CALL4Change is principally focused.

Section 5: What questions emerge about investments in coalitions and local leaders?

Consideration of the literature on local leaders and coalitions, alongside DFAT policy commitments to and investments in local leaders and coalitions, raises two primary lines of inquiry that will be explored by CALL4Change. These questions form the basis of our inquiry and will be further refined throughout the research process.

First, in exploring a pathway of change that DFAT is investing in and programs that DFAT funds, consideration of the political economy of DFAT itself is key. This includes understanding what policies, ways of working, rules and processes enable and get in the way of support to local leaders and coalitions. In addition, unpacking the role of key individuals who work within their prevailing political economy to support programming on local leaders and coalitions will likely emerge as instructive. Understanding this political economy is important for arriving at politically realistic recommendations that recognise that donor agencies operate within a set of rules and power dynamics that they can influence and shape but not entirely determine. The following questions arise:



- How does the political economy of DFAT influence what's possible in program terms and how do individuals within DFAT navigate this to create programming space?
 - What are the perceived risks of investing in adaptive approaches to local leaders and coalitions?
 - How does the political economy of the context shape what approaches are employed? Under what circumstances will DFAT “risk” supporting adaptive approaches to local leadership and coalitions?
-

Second, we are keen to understand ‘what works for whom, how and under what conditions’ to support local leaders and coalitions to drive developmental outcomes. This includes understanding how programming supports different kinds of ‘local leaders’ working from different positions of leadership and towards different processes of change in diverse political contexts.

Third, at the core of the literature, policy and investments discussed here are the local leaders and coalitions themselves. A missing element of much analysis that could usefully inform policy and programming is how donor funding is experienced firsthand by local leaders and coalitions. This shifts the focus from the programs to the local actors they support and the ways in which they utilise support and find it either enabling or constraining.

These lines of inquiry will be explored through examination of six DFAT investments, including two regional programs, two programs in individual Pacific Islands countries and two programs in individual Southeast Asian countries, namely:

- Balance of Power (Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu)
- Coalitions for Change (Philippines)
- Reclaiming Civic Space to Promote Democratic Resilience Project (Indonesia)
- The Voice Inc. (Papua New Guinea)
- Vanuatu Skills Partnership (Vanuatu)
- Women Leading and Influencing (Pacific).

These six case studies include investments that are:

- sectoral programs that work via local leaders and coalitions (Vanuatu Skills Partnership)

- leadership training and support programs (Women Leading and Influencing); and
- focused on supporting local leaders and coalitions to change policy (Coalitions for Change), social norms (Balance of Power) or a combination of both (Reclaiming Civil Space to Promote Democratic Resilience Project and The Voice Inc.).

The case studies were not selected to be representative of DFAT's investments. They were purposively selected based on existing relationships and willingness to participate in the research process. They do, however, reflect a range of key elements across DFAT's investments in local leadership and coalitions and for this reason are expected to generate useful learning across DFAT's portfolio.

The set of programs provide fertile ground for unpacking 'what works for whom, how and under what circumstances' by utilising a combination of deep collaborative case studies to generate 'thick description'⁶⁰ and subsequently undertaking comparative analysis of these different programs. By exploring a combination of regional and country specific programs (some in the Pacific and some in Southeast Asia), we do not aim to arrive at a generic set of principles to guide support for local leadership and coalitions. Rather, we seek to understand the nuances underpinning 'promising approaches' so that we can develop guidance on adaptive and context specific investments in local leadership and coalitions.

Consistent with the collaborative learning orientation of CALL4Change, we aim to build, rather than start with a 'theory' about 'what works for whom, how and under what circumstances' to support local leaders and coalitions to drive developmental outcomes. However, we are starting with a range of assumptions about what is important, accompanied by a range of questions relating to program decision-making, implementation and reporting, which we hope will shed light on the conditions that constrain and enable productive support for local leadership and coalitions. Combined, our assumptions and lines of inquiry constitute our working conceptual framework, which we will test and refine over the next 18 months.

As highlighted in Figure 1 below, it is a core assumption of CALL4Change that the political economies of the contexts in which the six case studies operate, and the political economy of DFAT, shape how support for local leader and coalitions is provided and how local leadership and collective action are enacted through that support. That is, the way in which power, interests and incentives and rules operate both within the country context, as well as within DFAT itself, to shape how programs are designed and operate. This makes relevant to our inquiry not just the programs themselves, but how those programs sit within these two wider, intersecting political economies. Through political economy analysis of each context and DFAT, we seek to understand the 'in what context' component of our broader question 'what works for whom, how and under what circumstances to support local leaders and coalitions to drive developmental outcomes?'

Against that backdrop, through our case studies we aim to unpack the 'what, who and how', by exploring a range of specific questions, including but not limited to:

What:

- Why have these programs come about (to address what issue, problem or opportunity)?
- Why was support to local leaders/coalitions seen as an effective way to address these issues?
- What determines whether they focus on specific reform areas or are more generic in focus?
- What determines whether they focus on policy reform, social norm change, behaviour change, etc?
- How do they conceive of 'leadership' and teach, support or integrate this? How do they conceive of 'coalitions' and support them?
- Does this look different for sector-based programs to leadership and coalitions program?
- What forms of support are most effective in supporting leaders and coalitions across public, private and community domains?

⁶⁰ C. Geertz (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, NY: Basic Books.

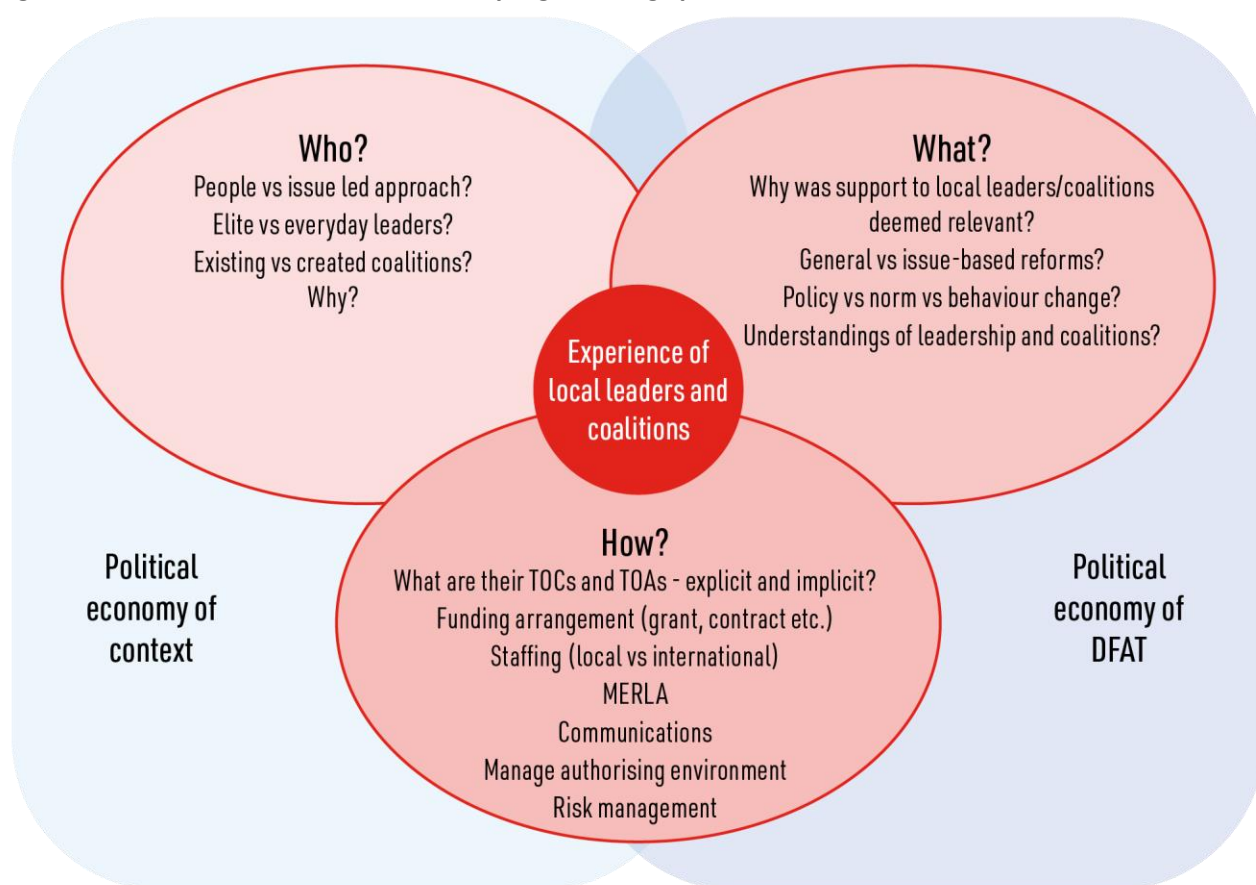
Who:

- Are leaders and coalitions supported because they are seen to be important individuals/groups and the issue of focus comes later (people-led approaches)?
- Are the people involved elites in formal positions of power, bureaucrats, or people exercising 'everyday' leadership? Why? What is relevant in particular places/in relation to particular issues?
- Are the leaders or coalitions existing or does the program seek to create them?
- Are the leaders and coalitions supported because they are deemed relevant to a particular issue?
- How are leaders exercising positional or relational leadership in driving change and what differing supports does this require?

How:

- How do programs work? What are their theories of change (explicit and implicit)? How are they staffed? How do they monitor results, manage risk, communicate what they do, etc?
- How do programs carve out space to operate within the political economy of DFAT? And how do DFAT staff navigate their own political economy to create space for programs?
- What donor and implementing agency systems and practices are enabling and constraining, especially regarding funding arrangements and partnering models?
- How do programs carve out space to operate within the political economy of the context?
- What are programs learning about support to local leaders and coalitions as pathways of change?

Figure 1: The coalitions and local leaders programming space



This conceptual framework provides a jumping off point for the empirical research, aiming to be explicit about our assumptions about what is relevant and important while open to adaptation based on findings.

Conclusion

Over the coming 18 months, the CALL4Change research team will explore the questions outlined in the conceptual framework above through 12 case studies (two per participating program) and a range of policy briefs. Findings will be reflected on through 'learning journey' events that bring together researchers with staff from the participating programs and DFAT, ensuring learning benefits from the insights of practitioners and policymakers and is fed directly back to intended primary users.⁶¹

At the micro-level, the research will document how each investment operates and supports local leaders and coalitions in their context and what is being learnt about how best to do this. At the macro-level, it will shed light on how six of DFAT's key investments in local leaders and coalitions pursue change in diverse contexts and on a wide range of issues, contributing to refined thinking about this development strategy. It will also reveal a spectrum of approaches to supporting local leaders and coalitions that will be unpacked and clarified to enable more informed decision-making about future investments that are more intentional about what is likely to work on a particular issue, in a particular context, at a given time and for particular individuals.

⁶¹ J. Howard, E-J Quak and J. Woodhill (2022) 'Lessons Learned from K4D Learning Journeys: A practical approach for supporting learning in development organisations,' K4D, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

La Trobe University acknowledges that our campuses are located on the lands of many traditional custodians in Australia.

We recognise their ongoing connection to the land and value their unique contribution to the University and wider Australian society.

We are committed to providing opportunities for Indigenous Australians, both as individuals and communities through teaching and learning, research and community partnerships across all of our campuses.

La Trobe University pays our respect to Indigenous Elders, past, present and emerging and will continue to incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems and protocols as part of our ongoing strategic and operational business.

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