



# Briefing paper – Support to local leaders and coalitions as a pathway of change

A conceptual framework for the  
CALL4Change Learning Journey

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*Photo: Former Vanuatu Skills Partnership Director, Fremden Yanhambath and Director of Women's Affairs, Rothina Ilo Noka, delivering a session on inclusion to VSP staff*

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# Introduction – Why this research?<sup>1</sup>

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Supporting local leaders and coalitions is increasingly viewed as a pathway to achieving development results. Since 2023, this pathway for change has gained greater visibility with increasing Australian policy commitments to locally led development as part of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trades' (DFAT's) broader international development agenda. There is also a wide range of investments supporting local leaders or coalitions in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. While these investments are far from the only way of operationalising locally led development, they are a particularly overt way, positioning local agents of change in the driving seat.

While there are growing accounts of what leadership looks like in different contexts,<sup>2</sup> and a general sense of the ways of working required amongst donor and implementing agencies to support it,<sup>3</sup> there is no portfolio-wide view of what investments in local leaders and coalitions tell us about what works to support locally led development, for who and why. We lack knowledge about how support for local leaders and coalitions might look for different geographies, political systems and populations, when targeting specific areas of change versus focussing broadly on reform opportunities; or when seeking social norm change versus policy change. Significant investment in local leaders and coalitions across the aid portfolio, and potential growth in this area, make it timely to address these evidence gaps.

To provide DFAT with deeper evidence about effective support to local leaders and coalitions, the Coalitions and Local Leaders for Change (CALL4Change) – Learning Journey was established. The research examines selected DFAT investments to draw out different understandings of and approaches to local leadership and coalitions; what overall lessons can be drawn from this; and how they are experienced by those they seek to support. The programs include:

- 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 brief summarises the conceptual framework to inform the CALL4Change Learning Journey.<sup>4</sup> This has been developed by reviewing literature on leadership and coalitions and mapping DFAT investments with 'leadership' and 'coalition' components using the AusDevPortal.<sup>5</sup> From this, pertinent issues relating to support for local leaders and coalitions were identified, forming key research questions. The conceptual framework will guide and be informed by the case studies, with the aim of developing a framework to assist decision-making about how best to design, implement and evaluate support for local leaders and coalitions. The research will produce actionable findings to support DFAT to more fully realise its commitments to locally led development and create a network of informed policymakers, practitioners and researchers to productively engage in design, implementation and evaluation of such programs.

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<sup>2</sup> E. Jackson et al. (2023) 'Finding self, leading others: Leadership journeys of persons with disabilities in Indonesia,' DLP Brief, <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-briefs/finding-self-leading-others-leadership-journeys-of-persons-with-disabilities-in-indonesia/>;

C. McLoughlin et al. (2023) 'Co-Producing Local Public Goods in Rural Solomon Islands: Evidence from Malaita,' DLP Brief, <https://dlprog.org/publications/research-briefs/co-producing-local-public-goods-in-rural-solomon-islands-evidence-from-malaita/>

<sup>3</sup> See C. Roche & L. Denney (2019) 'How can developmental leadership be supported?,' Foundational Paper 4, <https://dlprog.org/publications/foundational-papers/how-can-developmental-leadership-be-supported/>

<sup>4</sup> A more detailed version of this conceptual framework is also available [here](#).

<sup>5</sup> DFAT (2025) Australian Development Portal, <https://adp.dfat.gov.au/>.

# Where have we got to on thinking about leaders and coalitions?

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The literature on local leaders and coalitions in international development is vast but a handful of contributions have directly informed DFAT thinking. Most notably, the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) has shaped thinking, program designs and implementation within DFAT.<sup>6</sup> DLP's contributions challenge common approaches to leadership, including:

- Leadership and coalitions or networks deserve greater attention as the agents that challenge (and create) structures and institutions that hold in place the status quo.
- Leadership is not limited to positions of formal authority but is enacted in the everyday. More focus on the informal sites of leadership is required.
- Leadership is collective and relational so that a focus on individual leaders misses the networks and sociality in which it is embedded and derives its legitimacy and impact.
- Leadership cannot be reduced to a set of technical skills or competencies that one is trained in. It is experiential and highly context-dependent.
- Developmental leadership requires collective action to contest and unseat entrenched ideas – leaders do not act alone and developmental change requires collective effort.
- Ideas, norms and legitimacy matter as much as material resources in enabling leaders and coalitions to achieve change. This also puts the role of funders into perspective.
- Developmental change is necessarily uncertain and requires leadership and donor support for it that is adaptive to ongoing learning and iteration.

Other key contributions include:

The State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project and its successor, the Pacific Research Program, have made important contributions to contextually-based understandings of leadership and coalitions in relation to governance,<sup>7</sup> state building, civil society<sup>8</sup> and inclusive political participation,<sup>9</sup> which have informed DFAT programming.<sup>10</sup>

Writings on adaptive leadership, which maintain that leadership is a cooperative practice rather than an individualistic characteristic.<sup>11</sup> They underline the importance of cooperative 'multi-agent leadership' that draws on the skills, expertise and authority of multiple leaders.<sup>12</sup>

The Asia Foundation has described working through coalitions as a strategic way of fostering relationships between powerful actors while amplifying voices of the less powerful.<sup>13</sup> It suggests that working through local coalitions is particularly useful where conventional aid approaches have failed due to the complex political dynamics that local actors are best placed to navigate. Yet it notes that

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<sup>6</sup> C. Adams (2019) 'Developmental Leadership Program Impact Review,' Melbourne: Institute for Human Security and Social Change, La Trobe University; S. Webb, A. Milligan and A. Gibert (2018) *Developmental Leadership Program Phase 3: Design Document*, Canberra: DFAT.

<sup>7</sup> G. White (2007) 'Indigenous governance in Melanesia', SSGM Discussion Paper 2007/5, <https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/server/api/core/bitstreams/81d4c27f-87b5-4c91-a154-1636f826fdbf/content>

<sup>8</sup> D. Hegarty & P. Thomas (eds) (2005) 'Effective Development in Papua New Guinea,' Development Bulletin 2005, <https://dspace-test.anu.edu.au/items/fa435460-3c9d-46e0-a41b-28a4eeba5c92>

<sup>9</sup> R.J. May, R. Anere, N. Haley & K. Wheen (2013) 'Election 2007: The Shift to Limited Preferential Voting in Papua New Guinea,' <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/33530>

<sup>10</sup> A. McLeod (2008) 'Leadership models in the Pacific', SSGM Discussion Paper 2008/6, <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,' <https://library.sprep.org/content/analytical-framework-engage-developmental-leadership-pacific>

<sup>11</sup> R.A. Heifetz (1994) *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, Belknap/Harvard Press.

<sup>12</sup> M. Andrews, L. Pritchett, M. Woolcock (2017) *Building State Capacity: Evidence, Analysis, Action*, Oxford University Press, p. 199.

<sup>13</sup> 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.



this way of working requires long-term relationships and meeting donor requirements while also creating autonomy for local actors to lead.

Finally, the Effective States and Inclusive Development research program has found that coalitions are key to more inclusive political settlements (the way power and resources are divided in society). ‘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.’<sup>14</sup>

These ideas, which have informed DFAT thinking and practice on the role of local leadership and coalitions in driving change, also provide the foundation on which the CALL4Change research builds.

## DFAT policy and investments in local leaders and coalitions

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Australia’s 2023 *International Development Policy* emphasises support to ‘local leadership, solutions, and accountability, including by channelling funding to local actors.’<sup>15</sup> 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.’<sup>16</sup> Increased attention to local leadership is also evident in a range of other DFAT policies, most notably in the 2025 *International Gender Equality Strategy*,<sup>17</sup> which situates ‘locally led approaches to women’s leadership’ as a strategic priority, and to a lesser extent in Australia’s 2024 *International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy*.

Coalitions (or collective action) are mentioned less frequently in DFAT policies but examples are highlighted where Australia ‘supports local coalitions to achieve positive systemic change’ by connecting local leaders and communities<sup>44</sup> and where Australia enables ‘convening and strengthening of ... coalitions of actors who are ... stimulating demand for and making change.’<sup>45</sup>

The relationship between local leadership and collective action, and development outcomes, is spelled out 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.’<sup>18</sup> 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.’<sup>19</sup> 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.’<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> S. Hickey & T. Kelsall (2020) ‘The Three Cs of inclusive development: Context, capacity and coalitions,’ *Effective States and Inclusive Development*, <https://www.effective-states.org/the-three-cs-of-inclusive-development-context-capacity-and-coalitions/>

<sup>15</sup> DFAT (2023) Australia’s International Development Policy, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/international-development-policy.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> DFAT (2025) Australia’s International Gender Equality Strategy, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australias-international-gender-equality-strategy.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> DFAT (2024) DFAT Guidance Note: Locally Led Development, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/development/dfat-guidance-note-locally-led-development>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

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.<sup>51</sup> 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 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. 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.<sup>53</sup>

While policy provides a useful starting point for understanding how DFAT conceptualises the relationship between local leadership, collective action and development outcomes, an analysis of investments provides insight into the ways in which policy commitments translate into practice. To understand what DFAT’s portfolio of investments in local leaders and coalitions looks like, we conducted key informant interviews with DFAT staff and used the AusDevPortal, to map investments. This entailed three steps, set out in the table below:<sup>20</sup>

**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

The mapping provides an indication of the span of DFAT’s investments in local leaders and coalitions. In 2023-24, DFAT spent approximately \$522 million across 77 programs that incorporated local leadership and coalitions in some form. This constitutes 10.95 per cent of Australia’s ODA budget for 2023-24.<sup>21</sup> Only seven of these programs explicitly mention ‘coalitions’, and at approximately \$75 million for 2023-24, amount to just 1.57 per cent of the aid budget. 48 programs work in the Pacific, while 40 are in South and Southeast Asia (11 work in both).

The programs work across a range of sectors, with a strong focus on education, governance and gender. Of the 77 investments, 32 are focused on providing skills development, training or exchange opportunities. 51 are sectoral programs that contain local 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.

<sup>20</sup> More detail on the methods can be found in the fuller conceptual framework paper [here](#).

<sup>21</sup> DFAT (2023) ‘Australia’s Official Development Assistance: Development Budget Summary 2023-24,’ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/oda-development-budget-summary-2023-24.pdf>

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

Recommended by key informants (policy team member)	Enabling/ supporting local leaders	Enabling/ supporting coalitions	Secor-based with local leadership focus	Skill/ 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	<a href="#">ACIAR John Allwright Fellowships 2016-2024</a>	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	<a href="#">ACIAR Meryl Williams Fellowship ASEAN cohort</a>	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		<a href="#">Addressing Gender Inequality in Solomon Islands</a>	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	<a href="#">ASEAN Scholars Leadership Program</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Awards in Indonesia Program</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Awards in-country costs Tonga</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Awards Papua New Guinea</a>	-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	<a href="#">Australia Awards Papua New Guinea (AAPNG)</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Awards Scholarships - 2018 intake</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Awards Scholarships - 2023 Intake</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Awards Women's Leadership Initiative 2.0</a>	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		<a href="#">Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice (Phase 3)</a>	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		<a href="#">Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice Phase 2</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Online Studies Scholarship 2020 Intake (Samoa)</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Online Studies Scholarship 2021 Intake (Samoa)</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Online Studies Scholarship 2022 Intake (Samoa)</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Online Studies Scholarship 2023 Intake (Samoa)</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Online Studies Scholarship 2024 Intake (Samoa)</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Pacific Church Partnerships Program</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Pacific Church Partnerships Program - Phase 2</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Pacific Training Coalition (Stage 3)</a>	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	<a href="#">Australia Solomon Islands Partnership for Justice 2021-2025</a>	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				<a href="#">Australia-Indonesia Partnership Towards an Inclusive Society</a>	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		<a href="#">Australian Humanitarian Partnership - global humanitarian assistance with Australian NGOs 2022-2027</a>	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		<a href="#">Australian Red Cross Partnership - global humanitarian preparedness and response programs 2019-2024</a>	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			<a href="#">Building Community Engagement in Papua New Guinea (BCEP)</a>	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				<a href="#">Development Awareness and Leadership Program (Solomon Islands)</a>	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		<a href="#">Field Epidemiology (Asia-Pacific)</a>	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		<a href="#">Human Development Monitoring and Evaluation Services Provider</a>	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		<a href="#">Inclusive Water Governance and Strengthening Climate Resilience in the Mekong Region</a>	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			<a href="#">Investing in Women (Southeast Asia) 2023-27</a>	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		<a href="#">Innovation for Indonesia's School Children (INOVASI) Phase 3</a>	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		<a href="#">Institutional Partnership Program</a>	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		<a href="#">Kiribati Gender Development</a>	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		<a href="#">Kiribati Health Sector Support</a>	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		<a href="#">Kiribati Leadership, Engagement and Accountability for Development (KirileAD)</a>	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		<a href="#">Mekong Australia Partnership Phase 1 - Vietnam Economic Resilience Fund</a>	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	<a href="#">Nauru Education Program</a>	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	<a href="#">Pacific Secondary School Scholarships Program</a>	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		<a href="#">Pacific Women Fiji Country Plan</a>	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		<a href="#">Pacific Women Lead</a>	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		<a href="#">Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development</a>	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		<a href="#">Papua New Guinea Institutional Partnerships Program</a>	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		<a href="#">PNG Australia Secondary School Program</a>	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		<a href="#">PNG Women Lead</a>	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		<a href="#">Priority Outcome 1: Improved Basic Education</a>	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		<a href="#">Republic of Palau Partnership for Economic Growth</a>	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	<a href="#">Southeast Asia Maritime Consultancy 2.0</a>	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	<a href="#">Strengthening Health Workforce in the Pacific (Nursing and Midwifery) (SHWP)</a>	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	<a href="#">Strengthening Regional Emergency Health Preparedness in the Pacific and Timor Leste</a>	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	<a href="#">Support for Pacific Statistics 2021-22 to 2027-28</a>	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	<a href="#">Supporting knowledge-based research and policy dialogues in the Mekong subregion</a>	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	<a href="#">Timor-Leste Police Development Program</a>	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		<a href="#">Tonga Gender Equality Investment</a>	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		<a href="#">Vanuatu Gender Equality Program</a>	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	<a href="#">Vietnam – Australia Human Resource Development (Aus4Skills) Phase 3, 2025 - 2035</a>	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	<a href="#">Vietnam – Australia Human Resource Development Program (Aus4Skills)</a>	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		<a href="#">Women's World Banking - Southeast Asia (2016 - 2025)</a>	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	<a href="#">Workforce Skills Development: Kiribati Facility</a>	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		Young Women's Leadership with World Young Women's Christian Association (Indo-Pacific) 2020 - 2027	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		Australia-Papua New Guinea Subnational Program (APSP)	9,659,197	x		Governance	Focuses on strengthening subnational governance, human and economic development, gender equality, and disability inclusion.
x			x		Papua New Guinea Western Province Partnership (WPP)	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		Subnational Governance Program for Nepal - Phase 2	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		Synergy and Collaboration for Basic Services Acceleration	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		Amplify-Invest-Reach Partnership: DFAT support to Women's Funds (Indo-Pacific) 2021 - 2026	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		PARTISIPA - Partnership for Strengthening Village Development and Municipal Administration	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		Australia Indonesia Democratic Resilience Pilot Program	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		Vanuatu Skills for Economic Growth (phase IV)	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		Australia - Indonesia Partnership for Knowledge Sector Initiative	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		Australia Indonesia Partnership for Economic Development	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		Ponlok Chomnes II: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia	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		Peacebuilding in Conflict-Affected Mindanao - Philippines	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		Peacebuilding In Conflict-Affected Mindanao 2 - Philippines	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		A Partnership for Inclusive Prosperity / Paseria Ba Prosperidade Inkluzivu (PROSIVU)	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				ActionAid Australia - Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP)	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	Partnerships for Infrastructure (P4I)	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	Southeast Asia and Australia Government to Government Partnerships Program (SEAG2G)	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				

## Making sense of DFAT's local leadership and coalition investments

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Five reflections stem from this, which inform the questions posed in our conceptual framework, although not all will be the focus of this research. First, the overwhelming majority of programs are focused on leaders, rather than coalitions. This may indicate a more individualistic approach to thinking about the role of leaders in driving change.<sup>22</sup> It may also reflect a loose use of the words 'leaders' and 'leadership,' which are used to apply to a wider range of initiatives.

Second, the second largest category of investments is focused on leadership training and exchanges. This category risks taking a potentially managerial approach to leadership, in which leadership is reduced to a set of teachable skills that are imparted to learners.<sup>23</sup> It also potentially decontextualises leadership and the relational elements that give it authority and legitimacy within context.<sup>24</sup> More would need to be known, however, about the specific focus of the training. Questions flowing from this large cohort of programs are:



- How do leadership programs 'teach' leadership?
  - How do they support or connect with collective action?
  - 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 investment is sectoral programs that include components on local leaders 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 than the mapping reveals. These investments suggest working through local leaders and coalitions may be one strategy for progressing outcomes in a particular sector. How the local leadership and coalitions components sit alongside wider programming is not clear. Questions include:



- 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 more commonly integrating these approaches? Why and to what effect?
- 

Fourth, the number of programs explicitly focused on supporting local leaders and coalitions is significantly smaller. Programs in this category assume change happens by providing space, resources and support for local leaders and coalitions to act – either on specific issues, or more generally. Key questions include:



- 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?
  - What determines whether they focus on specific reform areas or are more generic in focus?
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<sup>22</sup> Matt Andrews (2013) 'Who really leads development?', CID Working Paper No. 258,

<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, <https://dlprog.org/publications/background-papers/leadership-politics-and-development/>.

<sup>23</sup> 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>.

<sup>24</sup> H. Lyne de Ver and F. Kennedy (2011) 'An Analysis of Leadership Development Programmes Working in the Context of Development,' DLP Research Paper, <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 determines whether they focus on policy reform, social norm change, behaviour change, etc?
  - How do they work in terms of staffing, monitoring results, managing risk, communicating, etc?
  - What are these programs learning about local leaders and coalitions as pathways of change?
- 


Finally, the 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 the leadership and coalitions space 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 or perceived risks of supporting coalitions and how DFAT’s own political economy influences what is possible in program terms. It is these questions and tasks upon which CALL4Change is principally focused.

## How might we learn from investments in local leaders and coalitions?

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Consideration of the literature on local leaders and coalitions, alongside DFAT policy commitments to and investments in local leadership and coalitions, raises three lines of inquiry that will be explored by CALL4Change.

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 or get in the way of support to local leaders and coalitions. The following questions arise:

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-  How does the political economy of DFAT influence what’s possible in program terms and how do individuals navigate this to carve out programming space?
  - What are the perceived risks of investing in adaptive approaches to local leadership and coalitions?
  - How does the political economy of the context shape what approaches are employed? Under what circumstances will DFAT ‘risk’ more directly supporting local leaders 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 and coalitions 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 by local leaders and coalitions themselves. 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.

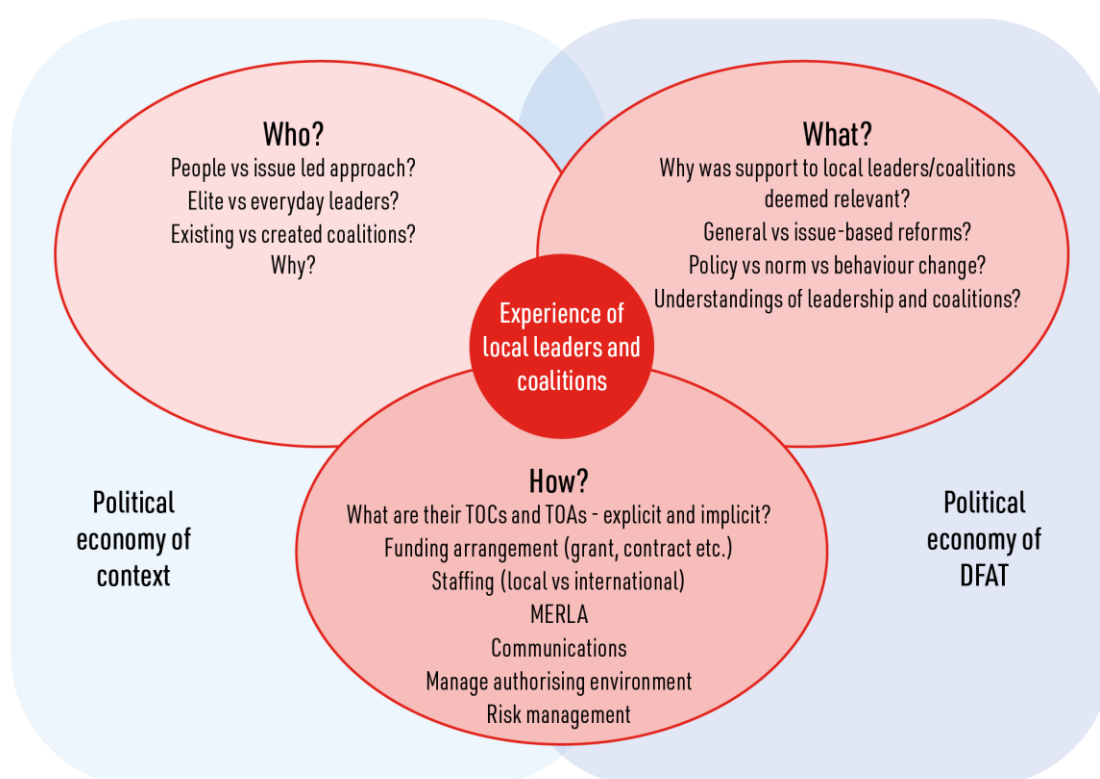
These lines of inquiry will be explored through examination of the six DFAT investments that include:

- 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.).

These programs are not representative of DFAT's investments but were purposively selected based on existing relationships. They reflect a range of elements across DFAT's investments and will generate useful cross-portfolio learning. We do not aim to arrive at a generic 'best practice' approach to supporting local leadership and coalitions but rather seek to develop adaptable guidance on context specific investments.

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 provides a jumping off point for the empirical research that aims to be explicit about our assumptions but remains open to adaptation based on emerging findings.

**Figure 1: The coalitions and local leaders programming space**



## Conclusion

Over the coming 18 months, the CALL4Change research will explore the questions outlined in the conceptual framework 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 users.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>25</sup> 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.