



DT Global



# LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT AS AUSTRALIA'S CRITICAL DIFFERENTIATOR

DT Global Submission for DFAT's new International Development Policy

In this new international development policy, Australia has an opportunity to be forward-leaning and explicit in its commitment to local leadership and local ownership of its development partnerships in the region. DT Global believes that locally led development is a win-win for Australia and its partner countries in the Asia Pacific region. It means that Australia's development investments will be more sustainable and effective. It also presents an opportunity to enhance Australia's relationships in the region and enables Australia to come behind and bolster individuals and organisations that are most committed to genuine development outcomes in their countries and communities.

In this submission we outline our experience in facilitating locally led development initiatives. Locally led development does not mean that non-local actors have no role to play – in fact the role that contractors like DT Global can play is critical to facilitate effective locally led development. Our experience in supporting three DFAT initiatives in the Asia Pacific – Balance of Power, Fiji Women's Fund and Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice – demonstrates how and why.

## Why does local leadership matter?

There are two key reasons why local leadership matters and one key reason why it is in Australia's national interest to support it.

The first reason it matters is for effectiveness. Australia can invest aid dollars, but for those aid dollars to support real and long-lasting change, it needs to tackle problems and challenges that are deeply rooted in the cultural, political and social contexts of the various countries we work with. The people and organisations that best understand the context, the challenges and how to tackle them are from that context. They are best placed to understand and navigate the views and interests of various actors. They are in it for the long haul, motivated and committed to bring about long-lasting change for years, decades and generations. Fostering, coming behind and harnessing this motivation, drive, energy and know-how is a highly effective strategy to achieve development results.

The second reason it matters is sustainability. This is often something that gets forgotten in development initiatives or is tacked on in the final year in the form of an unrealistic 'handover strategy'. Those handover strategies don't work if local actors have not been driving and owning the initiative from the outset. Ensuring that sustainability is real and not a tack-on means considering local leadership and ownership from day one.

Why is any of this in Australia's national interest? Locally led development can be Australia's critical differentiator with our partners in the region. Be they government officials, leaders of local NGOs or private sector companies – our partners want to be in the driver's seat in determining their country's future. They look positively on the development partners that enable them to do so. By championing this approach, Australia will remain the development partner of choice in our region.

Locally led development is more effective, more sustainable and leads to more positive relationships in the region, enhancing Australia's reputation and standing and bolstering Australia's national interests.

## How can it be done?

Discussions about localisation have largely taken place in the humanitarian and NGO space in the context of the Grand Bargain. What is less appreciated and understood is the significant role that contractors like DT Global have played in facilitating highly effective examples of locally led development. There are multiple examples of DFAT programs that have achieved strong locally-led results, that were implemented by contractors – the track record is there to be examined. Here we outline three examples here to illustrate this, showing how locally led initiatives are effective, sustainable, and in Australia's national interest.

### Fiji Women's Fund

In 2015, DFAT designed a women's fund to be established in Fiji, to be a women-led organisation that provided grants and capacity building support to other women-led organisations around the country, in support of greater gender equality. A key part of the design was that the Fiji Women's Fund was to become a local organisation within five years. DT Global, under the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program, established and supported the Fiji Women's Fund, including a handover strategy that was developed in year 1. At the end of five years, it is now the Women's Fund Fiji, a registered charitable organisation in Fiji that is completely localised – with a local governance board, staff and systems and processes that meet DFAT and other donor requirements. After recruiting a highly effective local team, our

role had been to support all those elements to be put in place and then withdraw. The Women's Fund Fiji has now reached over 30,000 Fijians, with over FJ\$6m in support through 68 grants, addressing gender-based violence, economic empowerment and supporting women's leadership.

## **Balance of Power**

The Pacific region leads the world in the lowest level of female representation in its Parliaments. Balance of Power is an initiative supported by DFAT to address the underlying social norms behind this phenomenon, focusing on Tonga, Vanuatu and Fiji. It seeks to understand and challenge the social and cultural norms that lead to communities not voting for women, even though viable and impressive female candidates exist. The Balance of Power team is entirely local, led by strategic and committed people from Fiji, Vanuatu and Tonga. This local team determines what strategies to use and what activities and relationships to invest in, to bring about shifts in these deeply held norms. They represent the program and determine how its resources will be applied. This team is well-networked and deeply embedded in the socio-political context of their countries. DT Global supports this team, providing the systems, processes, tools and support they need to get their work done. As a result, Balance of Power has engaged in spaces that traditional donor spaces usually don't. They are respected and accepted as a local initiative, opening up opportunities for influence in sensitive spaces.

## **Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice (AIPJ2)**

As one of DFAT's long-standing initiatives in Indonesia, AIPJ2 represents an almost 20-year partnership between Australia and Indonesia to strengthen Indonesia's justice and security sectors. AIPJ2 works flexibly and adaptively with government agencies and civil society actors to influence systemic reforms such as access to justice for women, girls and people with disabilities, preventing violent extremism and corrections reform. Its key focus is to convene key local actors in ways that can catalyse reforms. Essential to this work in such sensitive spaces is strong local ownership of the reforms and actions that AIPJ2 supports. Coming behind local actors that can identify entry points and opportunities for change and build coalitions for action is core to AIPJ2's approach, which has led to some highly successful examples of policy reform that has benefited communities and improved access to justice. Being locally led and owned has been key to AIPJ2's success.

# **Conclusion: what does this mean for Australia's international development policy?**

The forthcoming international development policy should identify locally led development and localisation as a high priority, noting how critical it is to development effectiveness, genuine and long-lasting partnerships in the region and to Australia's strategic interests. It should be framed as an underpinning and foundational approach of how Australia operates and engages, regardless of country, region or sector. Doing so will send strong positive signals to Australia's partners in the region.

Some concrete ways to take this forward include:

- Every international development strategy – whether at country or regional level or individual investment designs – should consider how locally led approaches can achieve its goals. This should be factored into the implementation approach for the strategy or design.
- Programs and initiatives that have successfully supported locally led change should be examined, so that effective elements can be replicated.
- Contractors and other implementing partners should be directed and otherwise incentivised to operate in ways that foster locally led approaches.
- DFAT should prioritise locally led teams and localised positions, including internally.
- DFAT should seek feedback and be open to contestability from local actors, creating greater transparency around its investments and how and why decisions are being made within them.
- DFAT should become a thought leader in locally led development, particularly in the Asia Pacific, understanding what works and why, helping to share and foster knowledge, good practice and lessons learned across the international development community.