



**Inside the  
black box of  
political will:**  
10 years of findings  
from the Developmental  
Leadership Program



The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international research program supported by the Australian Government. DLP investigates the crucial role that leaders, networks and coalitions play in achieving development outcomes.

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# Summary

Development is challenged by what can often seem intractable problems – whether it's economic stagnation, patrimonial governance, or fixed and exclusionary power relations. The formal and informal rules of society that lock in these intractable problems are notoriously 'sticky'; they resist change. For example, in August 2015, in Tonga, the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was blocked after people marched in the streets against it. At the same time, change does happen, often with dramatic, unexpected effects. Consider, in contrast to Tonga, the success of the Egyptian CEDAW coalition that worked quietly behind closed doors, away from the media, to bring gender injustices to light and hold the government to account.

How do we explain how, when and why change does, or doesn't, happen? All too often, the shorthand answer has been 'political will'. Change relies on the willingness of key decision-makers – whether politicians or traditional leaders – to expend valuable political or reputational capital in pushing for a reform. But where does political will come from? How does it work? And crucially, can it be built?

Over the past 10 years, DLP research has found that political will emerges through the process of developmental leadership. Developmental leadership is the strategic, collective and political process of making good change happen. It is the mobilisation of people and resources in pursuit of shared goals. It often involves the formation of coalitions of leaders, elites and organisations with diverse interests. Coalitions' power and effectiveness hinges on their ability to contest and de-legitimise the ideas that underpin 'sticky' institutions, and legitimise an alternative set. If they can do that, they can reformulate institutions in ways that are locally legitimate, and make change more sustainable.

The political process of developmental leadership is often protracted, and frequently beset by missteps and reversals. It can be incremental and slow moving, unfolding over time, or more dramatically catalysed by crises or unexpected shocks that mobilise people. People's power and capacity to act is always conditioned by the social context and political system. But regardless of context, developmental leadership invariably relies on three core elements:

- First, on motivated and strategic individuals with the incentives, values, interests and opportunity to push for change.
- Second, because leadership is fundamentally a collective process, on these motivated individuals overcoming barriers to cooperation and forming coalitions with sufficient power, legitimacy and influence.
- Third, coalitions engage in a battle of ideas to help reshape society's rules. Coalitions' power and effectiveness partly hinges on their ability to contest one set of ideas and legitimise an alternative set.

Developmental leadership can be carefully supported from outside. Aid agencies can actively encourage the development of leadership values and motivation by supporting quality education at all levels. They can work behind the scenes to create space for coalitions to form and to work their politics. They can navigate legitimacy politics by identifying opportunities for contesting norms, while avoiding undermining the legitimacy of actors they work with. All of this relies on thinking and working politically. Politics is not the obstacle, it is the way change happens. In turn, supporting these complex, unpredictable and non-linear change processes requires ongoing analysis and more creative approaches to monitoring and evaluation.

# The Developmental Leadership Program

The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international research initiative, established with the support of the Australian Government, that explores the critical role that leaders and coalitions play in achieving development outcomes. DLP focuses on the role of home-grown leaderships and coalitions in forging legitimate institutions that promote good development, such as sustainable growth, political stability and inclusive social development.

Over the past ten years, DLP has gathered significant evidence on the role and importance of leadership and coalitions in developmental outcomes in sectors ranging from education to climate change. This report provides a synthesis of DLP's research. It brings together insights and findings about how power and political processes drive or block successful developmental leadership and change. As of February 2018, DLP has published 114 research papers, covering 44 countries, as well as many state-of-the-art conceptual papers and short guidance notes, such as *Everyday Political Analysis* (Hudson et al., 2016).

DLP was founded in 2007 by the late Dr Adrian Leftwich (see Box 1) and Steve Hogg, senior governance specialist at the Australian aid program. Their aim was to produce

a body of research to address an important knowledge gap about the role of leaders and coalitions in the politics of development to help inform Australia's aid investments. Since the sad loss of Adrian in April 2013, DLP has continued to build on this legacy.

Over the past 10 years, DLP's focus has also evolved to increasingly address challenges of gender inclusion, corruption, and the push for donors to think and work politically. This partly reflects the changing global context, the need to deliver smarter aid in a context where its significance is declining, shifting research and policy agendas, and changing politics within donor agencies.

DLP research was funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through a strategic partnership between the Development Policy Division, the University of Birmingham, University College London, and La Trobe University. DLP's overall research program was comprised of two phases: DLP1 (2008-2014) directed by Dr Adrian Leftwich and DLP2 (2014-2018) directed by Dr Heather Marquette. DFAT has provided funding of approximately AUD6 million for DLP1 and AUD8.6 million for DLP2.

## Box 1: Adrian Leftwich (1940-2013) on the politics of development

For many scholars and practitioners, Adrian Leftwich's work was a key entry point for understanding governance, politics and the role of the state (Leftwich 1984, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2005, 2010).

Adrian's work continually returned to his favourite themes. First, that politics is a much broader phenomenon than often assumed (Leftwich 1984). Politics happens wherever there is power, not just in parliaments and at election time, but wherever groups of people contest or cooperate over resources or values. It happens in families, workplaces, and social movements.

Second, development is fundamentally political. At a time when few questioned a 'best practice', technical approach to development, Adrian pointed to the 'primacy of politics' in explaining success or failure (Leftwich 2000).

The third of Adrian's key contributions was to bring back a focus on individual agency as a counterpoint to the focus on institutions, or rules. As John Harriss (2014: 558) recalls, Adrian was fond of saying 'it's not the rules that matter, so much as the way in which actors play within the rules'.

Adrian's work had a profound influence on DLP's thinking and research over the years. For his part, Adrian described working on DLP as 'the best and most fascinating experience of my life'. He was a highly regarded intellectual, but also an activist committed to making a difference. As he concluded his final DLP paper, 'ultimately, if you wish to defeat poverty, prepare to address the power and the politics that keeps people poor. The rest is detail' (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014: 108).

See Steve Hogg's tribute to Adrian at: <http://www.dlprog.org/about-us/adrian-leftwich/tribute-to-adrian.php>

## DLP1 (2008-2014)

The earliest DLP work made the case for exploring the role of human agency in institutional change (Leftwich, 2009). It criticized existing political economy analysis (PEA) frameworks that (over-)emphasised structures, and interests and incentives at the expense of power and ideas (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014).

The idea of ‘institutional indigenization’ was a core concept in the first phase (see Box 2). This is the process of embedding institutions in local practices and norms, especially as they undergo reform and change (Leftwich and Hogg, 2008: 3). Empirical studies provided evidence of the importance of indigenized institutions in development success (e.g., Banno and Ohno 2010; Beall and Ngonyama 2009; Brautigam and Diolle 2009; Grebe and Natrass 2009; Laws 2010; Sebudubudu and Molutsi 2009; van Wyck 2009).

DLP1 also saw increasing emphasis on research on and engagement with the policy and operational implications of ‘thinking and working politically’ (TWP). TWP recognises that outcomes cannot be achieved by technical solutions alone. Actors – politicians, bureaucrats, civil society, donors and so on – need to better understand the local context (‘thinking politically’) in order to support local actors to bring about sustainable developmental change (‘working politically’) (TWP CoP, 2015).

DLP organised two policy-oriented workshops in Frankfurt (2011) and Sydney (2012), focused on working politically with coalitions (Leftwich and Wheeler, 2011; Leftwich, 2012). This work influenced Australian aid programming in Asia and the Pacific, for example the *Coalitions for Change* program in the Philippines and the *Pacific Leadership Program* in Fiji (The Asia Foundation, 2011; PLP, 2014).

## DLP2 (2014-2018)

Since 2014, DLP has been based at the University of Birmingham, in partnership with La Trobe University and, until early 2017, University College London. In this second phase, DLP built on earlier conceptual work but also expanded into new areas – notably gender, corruption and anti-corruption efforts (Marquette and Peiffer, 2015; Peiffer and Alvarez, 2014; Walton and Peiffer, 2015; Brown, 2016; Peiffer, 2017), state legitimacy and the political settlement (Mcloughlin, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2017; Rocha Menocal, 2015a, 2015b, 2017).

This phase continued to examine women’s coalitions and leaderships, but with a deeper focus on gender as a power relation (Koester, 2015; Fletcher, 2015; McLeod, 2015; Fletcher et al, 2016, Derbyshire et al., 2018). This is reflected in forthcoming work which brings together case studies and lessons on *Gender and Politics in Practice* (see Box 3). More conceptually, recent work has underlined the centrality of ideas, perceptions, values, and narratives in how change happens, echoing wider interest in this topic (Hickey, 2013; Hudson and Leftwich, 2014; Rodrik, 2014; World Bank, 2015).

Finally, DLP2 also saw increasing engagement with the TWP Community of Practice and other forums such as OECD’s GovNet and the World Bank’s Global Partnership for Collaborative Leadership in Development. It balanced this practical engagement with constructive critique of the agenda. For example, Niheer Dasandi and Lior Erez’s (2015) paper explored the normative dilemmas involved in thinking and working politically. DLP’s second phase more extensively used blogs and interactive media to reach out to a wider audience.

### Box 2: Institutional indigenization

In their early DLP paper, Leftwich and Hogg (2008) set out what they call ‘institutional indigenization’. The idea was that the technical process of trying to establish ‘good governance’ and ‘best practice’ institutions from outside had failed. Instead:

‘For appropriate and legitimate institutions to emerge and work, they need be embedded deeply in local politics and culture. Hence they need to be ‘indigenized’, that is made recognizable and acceptable within prevailing political and cultural standards, practices and norms of the host society, especially as they undergo reform and change. And effective indigenization requires the active participation, consent and agreement of local leaders, elites and coalitions. In short, the quality, legitimacy and implementation of institutions depend very much on the quality of leaders and elites and how they work collectively’ (Leftwich and Hogg, 2008: 3).

This idea was the intellectual heart of DLP. It closely aligns with the idea of ‘locally-led development’, a phrase later coined by David Booth and Sue Unsworth. Locally led means programmes are ‘focused on issues and problems that have local salience, both for potential beneficiaries and for at least some individuals and groups with the power to support, influence or block change’ (Booth and Unsworth, 2014: 3).

### Box 3: Gender and Politics in Practice (GAPP)

How can a gendered understanding of power and politics improve development practice? Development programs tend to look at gender issues and politics separately. Through a series of case studies, the Gender and Politics in Practice research project asks what we can learn from more integrated approaches. It provides:

- a briefing note that highlights key lessons from the research
- a literature review on thinking and working politically and gender equality
- a context paper, and three in-depth studies that examine how gender and politics came together in social change processes
  - women political leaders in the Pacific
  - labour reform in Vietnam's clothing industry
  - transgender empowerment and social inclusion in Indonesia
- 14 short case studies of development programs that aim to be both politically informed and gender aware, and a synthesis of their key insights.

The project concludes that bringing gender analysis together with political analysis highlights how men dominate formal decision-making arenas (Derbyshire et al., 2018). It shows how the status quo is reinforced in informal settings such as the household, and indirectly through stereotypes. This integration provides a broader and more positive understanding of power and where it lies in society. It shows power can be used collaboratively as well as competitively. Change can be championed and negotiated at all levels.

Finally, gender analysis highlights whether politically feasible pathways to change are likely to promote gender equality or reinforce the status quo.

Find out more and see all GAPP publications and resources at: [dlprog.org/gapp](http://dlprog.org/gapp)

There are still many unanswered questions about how politics enables or constrains development. Over the past ten years, DLP's main contributions to this field have been:

- Shifting the frame of analysis from leadership as an individual phenomenon to a collective process;
- Working with other institutes to extend political analysis beyond interests and incentives to how they are actively negotiated and contested;
- Drawing attention to policy arenas and spaces
  - whether physical or discursive – where this contestation plays out, to offer an inside view of 'how' the political process unfolds;
- Developing a growing body of case study evidence to better understand how and why politically-informed change happens (or doesn't); and
- Working together with the international TWP Community of Practice and others to help 'translate the evidence that political factors are usually much more important in determining developmental impact than the scale of aid funding or the technical quality of programming *into operationally relevant guidance*'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://twpcommunity.org> DLP has provided the TWP CoP's Secretariat from its inception in November 2013.



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Why developmental leadership

To understand why developmental leadership matters it is necessary to understand the centrality of politics in development. This introduction sets out the rationale underpinning this report, as well as the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) more generally, by locating it within contemporary concerns about failed attempts at reform and institutional change.

Reform failures often have less to do with poor technical design and more to do with not getting the politics ‘right’ (Unsworth, 2009; Carothers and de Gramont, 2013; Fritz et al., 2014). This means failing to understand and work with the politics of a country or sector as they really are, making the pathways to change politically unfeasible (Levy 2014). When reforms have no basis in domestic support, they can fail to overturn vested interests in the status quo (TWP, CoP 2015). Key stakeholders or champions turn out to be either unwilling or unable to use political influence to push for change (Treadway, 2012; Kapoutsis, 2016).

When reforms fail, people often bemoan a ‘lack of political will’. For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) argues that there are ‘many reasons for insufficient progress in reducing hunger and undernutrition. One of these is a ‘lack of political will’ or political prioritisation’ (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2012: 22, cited in te Lintelo and Lakshman, 2015: 2). On the flip side, political will is also seen as a solution for success. UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, pointed to the centrality of political will for achieving the SDGs. He said ‘I call on Governments and stakeholders to recognize the gaps that have been identified in this report—in

implementation, financing and political will—and to now join hands to fulfil this vision and keep this promise’ (UN, 2017).

While popular and tempting to turn to political will, it is not really an explanation at all (see Section 2.2). In fact, it serves only to hide a further set of questions: What is political will and how does it work? Where does it come from? Is it individual or collective? Can it be built or supported? Is it always accepted? Political will, then, is a black box – its inner workings are opaque (see Box 4). The answer is to unpack the black box and understand its inner workings, which, for DLP, is a political process of developmental leadership.

## 1.2 Defining developmental leadership

This report draws on 10 years of DLP research to open up the black box of political will and provide an account of its internal workings that puts developmental leadership at its heart. **Developmental leadership is the strategic, collective and political process of building political will to secure pro-development outcomes.** It is not always successful and, while it can be transactional and effectively so, in its fullest sense it is typically transformational. Developmental leadership is a process of political contestation that allows a diverse set of actors and interests to come to locally-legitimate and therefore sustainable development outcomes.

Leadership happens everywhere and at every level, just like politics does (see Box 5). As Gillian Fletcher, Tait Brimacombe and Chris Roche (Fletcher et al., 2016) detail in their DLP paper *Power, Politics and Coalitions in the Pacific*, developmental leadership happens in the

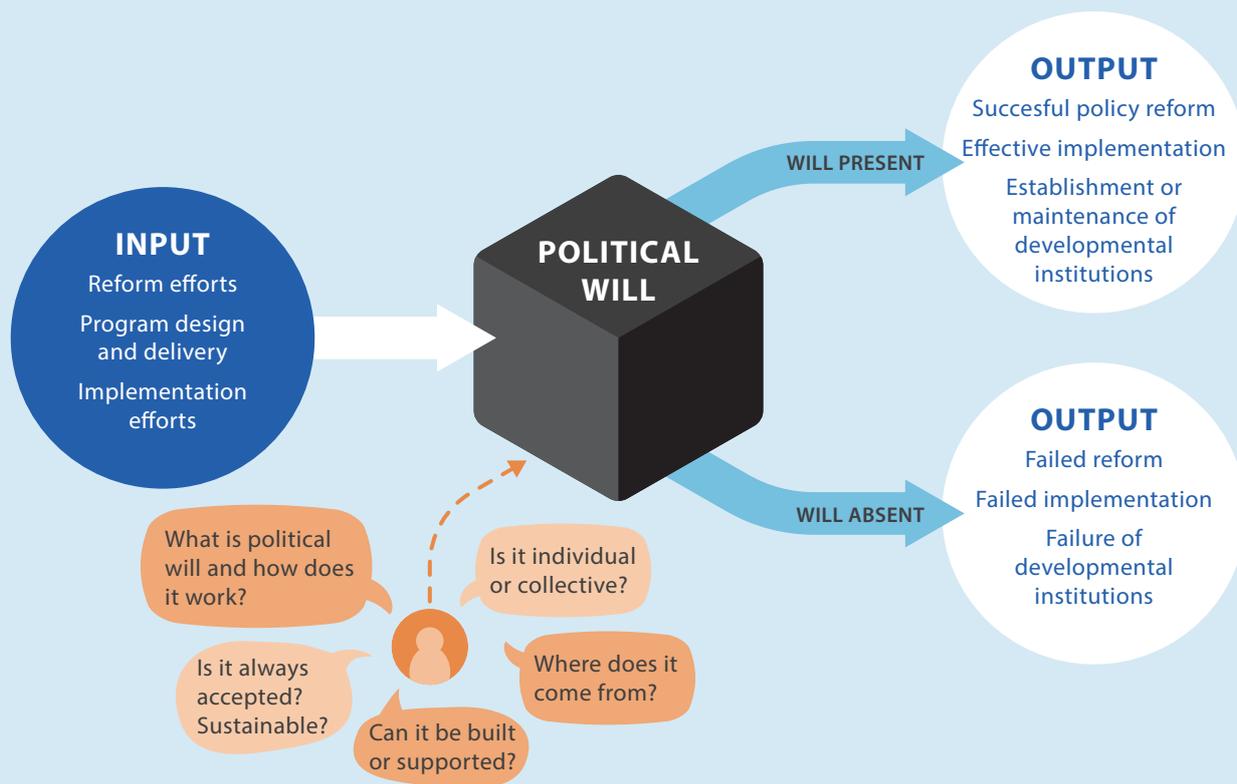
### Box 4: The 'black box' of political will

A black box is a system or object that changes outcomes: things come out differently to how they go in. At the same time, its inner workings – what's really going on inside – are opaque (Glanville, 1982: 1). Political will is a perfect example of a black box. It can change the outcomes of reform: from success to failure, or vice versa.

There are risks in not understanding what's going on inside a black box. If we don't understand it, we can't re-create it. An example is 'Black Box Accounting', where even the most transparent financial statements can't explain how the numbers were arrived at (Liesman, 2002). Or, we might misinterpret how the black box works. While we can create artificial intelligence to drive a car, for instance, no one really understands how an algorithm is learning. That is fine as long as everything goes well, but not when said autonomous vehicle decides to drive off a bridge (Castelvecchi, 2016).

The same risks apply to supporting reforms. As long as the black box remains opaque, we know we need political will, but not how to create, change, or support it. Understanding what goes on inside the black box of political will is therefore key to supporting developmental change.

FIGURE 1: THE BLACK BOX EFFECT



backstreets, meeting halls and homes of Suva, where a social movement of organisers and activists successfully blocked the proposed removal of protection, on the grounds of sexual orientation, from the Fijian Constitution. Or in Jordan, where a coalition successfully helped introduce new legislation protecting women from domestic violence as documented by Mariz Tadros (2011) in her DLP paper *Working Politically Behind Red Lines*. Or, as analysed in Sarah Phillips's paper *Political Settlements and State Formation*, it can work through the clan structures and secondary schools of Somaliland, where peace was secured and has been maintained against the odds.

As Heather Lyne de Ver explains in her influential DLP paper *Leadership, Politics and Development*, leadership research has too often focused on individuals, perpetuating a 'great man' or 'heroic' perspective of leadership (see also Andrews, 2016). Of course, leadership *can* involve traditional 'Big Men' leaders who drive change. An example is Joe Sungi, a politician in PNG, using his district funds to build all-weather roads to help farmers, teachers, and nurses, as described by Oxfam's Duncan Green in his jointly funded book *How Change Happens* (Green, 2016). But even 'big P' politics still demands the interaction of diverse leaders and followers. For example, as Niheer Dasandi and David Hudson (2017) unpack in *The Political Road to Digital Revolution*, the passing of telecoms reform in Myanmar involved not only the president, but ministers, cronies, civil servants, donors, consultants, private investors, lawyers, as well as open public consultation. The process of meeting energy targets in China similarly took the collaboration of state bureaucrats and big business, as demonstrated by Tom Harrison and Genia Kostka (2012) in their DLP paper *Manoeuvres for a Low Carbon State*. DLP's work has explicitly worked from – and defended – a view of leadership as a political process involving the 'interaction of diverse leaders (and their followers) across a range of sectors or institutional domains' (Lyne de Ver, 2008: 31).

Of course, leadership is not always inherently positive, inclusive or developmental. Motivated leaders are not always developmentally inclined, and effective coalitions are not always motivated to bring about progressive change. On the contrary, sometimes the most effective coalitions are those defending the status quo – whether it's exclusive elite settlements, or business interests. By a similar logic, locally legitimate institutions are not necessarily developmental by design: sometimes they work to lock in unequal power structures that reproduce repression and poverty. In effect then, while leadership is always purposive, it is rarely purely 'developmental' against objectively verifiable development indicators.

Developmental leadership, in contrast, implies defending or progressively transforming institutions to subvert, modify or forge new ones that achieve developmental *goods*. This could be to enable poverty reduction, the realisation of rights and freedoms, redistribute wealth, or facilitate inclusive growth or social development (Leftwich and Hogg, 2007). Successful developmental leadership can be transformational. This is exemplified in the case of Botswana, where a 'grand coalition' worked towards a common development agenda which has seen the country transform from one of the poorest in the world, to now a middle income country (Sebudubudu and Molutsi, 2009).

The body of DLP research summarised in this report suggests that developmental leadership is:

- **strategic**, because it involves individuals, organisations and groups consciously deliberating and taking action to realise their intentions (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014: 6). Development and change happens for many reasons: luck, accident or chance, and sometimes it's deeply structural (demographic change, geopolitical shifts). Developmental leadership involves more deliberate action. It is a *strategic* process of agency.
- **collective**, because it implies the organization or mobilization of people and resources (economic, political and other) in pursuit of shared goals. Often but not always, this involves the formation of formal or informal coalitions of leaders, elites and organisations coming together to 'solve the pervasive collective action problems which largely define the challenges of growth and development' (Lyne de Ver, 2009: 3-4).
- **political**, because it is fundamentally about power and the process of contesting, negotiating and cooperating over the values that underpin the distribution of resources in society. And the process of leadership must always be understood contextually, occurring within a given configuration of power, authority and legitimacy, shaped by history, institutions, goals and political culture.
- the effort to **secure pro-development outcomes**. Leftwich and Hogg (2007: 8) defined developmental leadership as 'the vision to see and reach beyond particular interests to a wider public good'. If there is no intention – whether successful or not – to improve economic or social welfare, governance or inclusion, then it is not developmental leadership. However, whether any reform process is developmental is always open to contestation. Toxic or authoritarian leaders can display developmental leadership. Intention is rarely pure, and developmental efforts can be motivated by a desire to secure power or sideline opponents.

- **not always successful.** The process is neither neat, nor linear. It is typically messy, often protracted, and frequently beset by missteps and reversals. It can be incremental and slow moving, or more dramatically catalysed by crisis or unexpected shocks. Its emergence is always conditioned by the opportunity structures present in the political context.
- **gendered and gendering.** The way leadership works can be different for women and men or others with non-conforming gender identities. Gender stereotypes, access to formal power, and questions of legitimacy can mean that gender equality goals have to be framed carefully. Effective developmental leadership has the capacity to successfully challenge gender inequalities.
- a process that **can be transactional and effectively so, but in its fullest sense it is typically transformational.** The distinction between transactional and transformational leadership was famously introduced by James MacGregor Burns (1978, see also Lyne de Ver, 2008). Transactional leadership relies on an exchange-based relationship between leaders and followers, where followers are incentivised with rewards or punishments. Transformational leadership involves motivating followers to change their values and goals towards a higher vision that serves the collective interest, and can convert followers into leaders themselves.
- **functions through a process of political contestation allowing a diverse set of actors and interests to come to locally-legitimate and therefore sustainable outcomes.** Developmental leadership facilitates the contestation of ideas that underpin locally legitimate institutions. This matters because legitimate institutions are more stable than illegitimate ones (see Box 2 on 'institutional indigenization').

### 1.3 Understanding developmental leadership

Inside the black box of political will lies a complex, often protracted, deeply political process of developmental leadership. This is the collective and political process of contestation and legitimation that allows a diverse set of actors and interests to come to a locally-acceptable and therefore sustainable distribution of values or resources. But how does it happen? Insights from a decade of DLP's empirical research highlight three reinforcing processes – at the individual, collective and societal level – that underpin the emergence and trajectory of developmental leadership.

In short, developmental leadership relies on motivated individuals with the incentives, values, interests and opportunity to push for change. But leadership is fundamentally a collective process. Motivated agents must overcome barriers to cooperation and form coalitions with sufficient power, legitimacy and influence to manoeuvre and build, transform or support institutions. In turn, coalitional power and effectiveness partly hinges on their ability to contest and de-legitimise one set of ideas and legitimise an alternative set. Through this political process of contestation, leaders and coalitions accrue power to reformulate institutions in ways that are perceived as locally legitimate and sustainable.

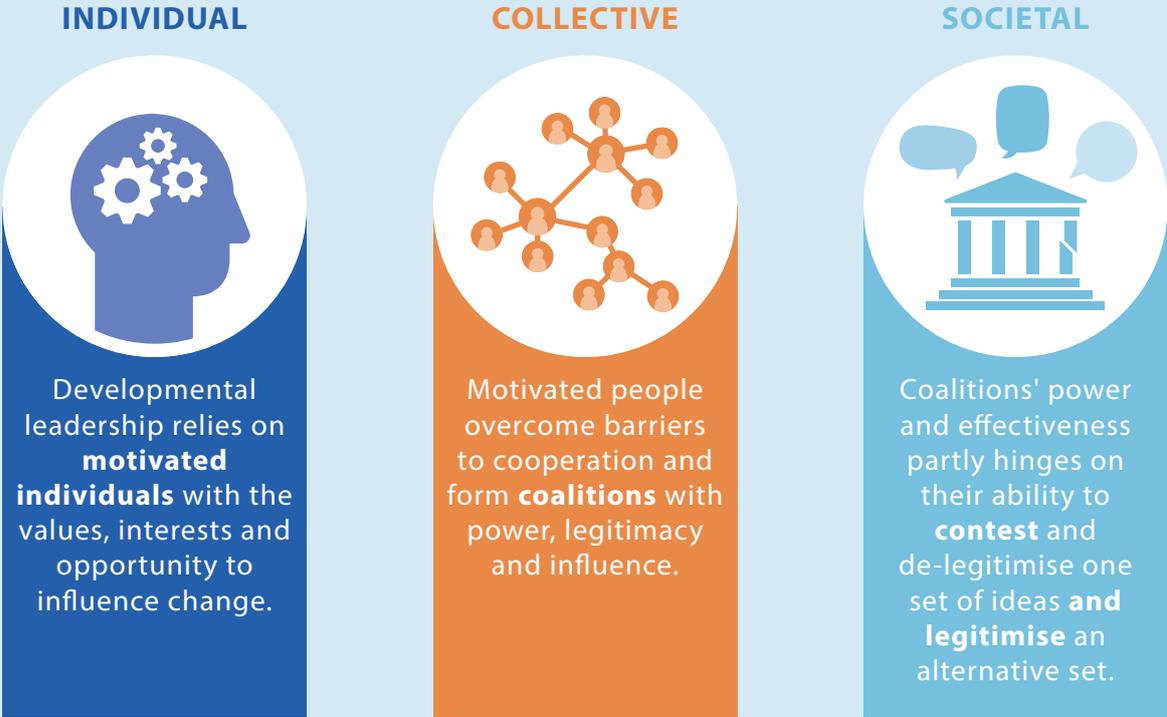
#### Box 5: A broader view of politics

Many people not unreasonably understand politics as the arena of government and formal politics – i.e., the institutions of parliament, voting, and the large bureaucracies. But this is an unhelpfully limited view. Politics can happen anywhere. It is 'all the activities of conflict (peaceful or not), negotiation and co-operation over the use and distribution of resources, wherever they may be found, within or beyond formal institutions, on a global level or within a family, involving two or more people' (Leftwich, 2004: 15).

Likewise, the politics of development is not confined to governance programming: elections, civil service reforms, anti-corruption efforts, citizen engagement, legal reforms public sector management and public financial management (PFM). These *are* all clearly political, but so is roadbuilding, infrastructure, vaccination, cash transfers, agricultural extension, and energy efficiency initiatives. Each has its own politics – vested interests, rules, and conflict, negotiation and co-operation over outcomes.

In *From Political Economy to Political Analysis*, Hudson and Leftwich (2014: 5) argue we need to take more seriously all those things that are 'distinctively *political* about politics – power, interests, agency, ideas, the subtleties of building and sustaining coalitions, and the role of contingency.' This last notion – of contingency – is key. It means there is always the possibility of change, through agency and choice (Hay, 2007).

**FIGURE 2: THE THREE LEVELS OF DEVELOPMENTAL LEADERSHIP**





## 2 How change happens

### 2.1 Institutions and change

Some of the most pervasive and intractable problems in development – whether economic stagnation, patrimonial power relations, or exclusive political settlements – are sustained by strong, durable institutions. For example, in August 2015, in Tonga, less than six months after announcing the intention to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Prime Minister Pōhiva informed parliament that cabinet would not. This was after four petitions amounting to 15,000 signatures (of a population of 107,122) were presented to the palace office and women marched in the streets against the ratification. The formal and informal rules of society – the parliamentary process, and the role of the King in it, class hierarchies, the nobility and land rights, Tongan values around family and gender, and the strength of religious identity and authority – all came together to prevent change in this instance.

Formal and informal rules - or institutions – can be notoriously ‘sticky’; they resist change. They can embed incentive structures and distributional arrangements that produce strong vested interests to maintain the status quo (Thelen, 1999). They can also entrench structural inequalities that disempower other social groups, reducing their capacity to mobilise for change (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Institutions also endure where they produce high ‘sunk costs’, not exclusively in an instrumental or vested interest sense, but because they embody trust, expectations and ways of co-ordinating behaviour (Krasner, 1984). For these reasons, institutions have ‘ruled’ theories of development. Since at least the 1990s, having the ‘right’ set of institutions

has been considered key to inclusive growth and development (Burnside and Dollar, 2000; Hall and Jones, 1999; Acemoglu et al, 2001; Rodrik et al, 2004).

Attempts to transplant institutions often create more problems than they solve, however. As Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock and Matt Andrews (2013) argue, many developing countries are stuck in a ‘capability trap’, displaying almost no improvement in governance capacity in spite of donor efforts. These institutions exhibit ‘isomorphic mimicry’, whereby they appear on the surface to mirror the successful institutions in functional states, but do not actually take root, or function in the intended way. This problem is exacerbated by global incentives for donor agencies to adopt ‘best practice’ institutional change and reforms at the expense of fit and function (Andrews et al., 2017; Evans, 2004). And yet it is clear, as the Tonga example above shows, implanted institutions do not always ‘rule’.

In other cases, *weak* institutions may be better than strong ones. According to Yuen Yuen Ang’s (2016) recent book, *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap*, weak institutions can be a route out of poverty, because they are easier to harness than strong ones. Weak institutions are more open to ‘deliberate improvisation’ - that is, central direction, local innovation, continual evaluation and adaptation. Improvisation means local officials have clear goals, but are allowed a fair degree of leeway – profit sharing with other elites and corruption – to achieve them (see Box 9). The upshot is that there is no necessary logic to ‘institutions before economic growth’, or indeed vice versa. They can evolve together.

While institutions can often seem fixed, change *does* happen, often with dramatic, unexpected effects. There are everywhere examples of institutional transformation and policy reform: whether in progress on climate change regulation and energy use, legislating for greater political representation of women in parliaments, constitutional change such as term limits, the extension of voting rights, the expansion of public-private financing for governments, changing attitudes towards smoking in public or greater rights with regards to disabilities, gender and sexuality. Consider, in contrast to Tonga, the success of the Egyptian CEDAW coalition that urged the government to improve its women's rights record. Here, the coalition worked cautiously to ensure that CEDAW wasn't seen as competing with Islam, quietly behind closed doors away from the media. It prepared shadow reports for the international CEDAW committees, to bring gender injustices to light and hold the government to account.

If institutions are really so fixed, how can we explain institutional change? If people are shaped by institutions, why and how can they break free from them in order to transform them? Or, if institutions don't travel well, how are locally-legitimate and functional institutions established?

Prominent explanations of institutional change tend to focus on major structural factors, both endogenous and exogenous. Change happens in response to a crisis or 'critical juncture' – a conflict, major demographic shift, or economic crisis (Hall and Taylor, 1996). Others point to friction *between* different clusters of political institutions – the governing institutions of the state (legislatures, executives, bureaucracies), the organisational environment (political parties, party systems, NGOs), as driver of institutional decline or transformation (Leiberman, 2002). Alternatively, institutions might transform in response to shifting values or beliefs in society (Mahoney, 2010). Each of these structural explanations is compelling in its own right, but they are also missing one vital ingredient: people.

Addressing the puzzle of how institutions change demands a fundamental shift away from focusing exclusively on institutions; because institutions don't set-up institutions, people do. Institutions are not 'empty boxes' that float freely above societies and determine outcomes independently of human interaction. Rather, they are created, sustained, used and transformed through the purposive action of individuals (Levi 2006). Whether they be opportunists, subversives, or outright insurrectionaries, institutions rise and fall on the actions of individual agents to defend or oppose them (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010). In contrast to the big bang theories of change from structural crisis, individuals may transform institutions through slow moving processes, pursuing incremental steps that over time accumulate into a more fundamental transformation (Boas, 2007; Mahoney and Thelen, 2010).

## Box 6: What is an institution?

The everyday understanding of an 'institution' is an organisation, such as the United Nations, Salvation Army, or the church or parliament. But development economists tend to mean something broader. Douglass North (1990: 3) famously defined institutions as 'the rules of the game in society' or 'the humanly devised constraints that shape human interactions'.

Rules can relate to *formal* institutions, (such as legal systems, property rights, tax systems, electoral rules, and their enforcement mechanisms), or to *informal* institutions, such as cultural practices and social norms (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004; OECD, 2007).

Despite being informal, norms, conventions and shared expectations of behaviour can be extremely powerful; for example reciprocity, deferring to age or experience, turn-taking in conversations, queuing or shaking hands on clinching a deal. Clientelism and patronage are also shaped by informal institutions, which can work alongside, within, or undercut the formal institutions of electoral or meritocratic appointment systems (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014: 40).

But the idea that institutions can be altered by agents also raises several questions. What motivates them to change institutions in the first place? And *how* do they actually do it? What strategies can they deploy to alter the ideas and beliefs that underlie seemingly robust and durable institutions? Addressing these questions is not only key to understanding institutional continuity and change, but the prospects of getting the 'right' institutions for growth and development.

## 2.2 Why political will is not the answer

All too often, the puzzle of institutional change has been explained narrowly through reference to 'political will'. In this catch-all interpretation, change ultimately relies on the willingness of key decision-makers – whether politicians or traditional leaders – to expend valuable political or reputational capital in pushing for a reform (Treadway, 2012; Kapoutsis, 2016). Reform failure, stagnating institutions, social exclusion, poor services are widely explained through a lack of political will. Why did some countries fail to achieve the MDGs? Lack of political will, according to a UNDP Director (Kjorven 2010). Why do some anti-corruption crusades fail? Lack of political will (Kpundeh, 1998: 91). On the other hand, why has Rwanda been so successful in improving virtually all of its development indicators in the twenty

years following its terrible genocide? According to President Paul Kagame 'political will is the one thing that holds the rest together' (Kagame, 2015).

Political will may be a temptingly simple and intuitive explanation for why reforms succeed or fail, but it is a turn of phrase masquerading as an explanation. As Duncan Green (2009) puts it, these two words 'fill a vacuum where political analysis should be'. Others, similarly, label it lazy, default, ambiguous, or an umbrella, catch-all term to describe failure when it is far from clear what the underlying reason is (Thomas and Grindle, 1990; Leftwich, 2006; Green, 2009; Post et al., 2010, Persson and Sjostedt, 2012). Political will is simultaneously the 'sine qua non of policy success [but it is also] never defined except by its absence' (Hammergren, 1998: 12). Of course, conceptual plasticity is part of the attraction, and why it remains 'an important part of the vocabulary of political leaders' (te Lintelo and Lakshman, 2015: 5). But it also precisely why the idea of political will represents a classic 'black box' problem (McCourt, 2003: 1016). In effect, it simultaneously explains everything and nothing about how change does or does not happen.

### 2.2.1 Political will as a collective endeavour

The problem is more than a lack of clarity, however. In important ways, the idea that reform relies on political will is fundamentally misleading. An *absence* of political will in support of reform is not simply 'insufficient personal courage or good sense' (Zalmanovitch and Cohen, 2015: 32), but more likely indicates the *presence* of political will in a different direction. In other words, *too much* political will or vested interest in support of the status quo may be precisely the problem.

Political will is not a psychological phenomenon, but a political one. The default position has been to focus on political will narrowly in terms of intention (Treadway, 2012; Kapoutsis, 2016). But even where there is will, there might not be a way. No individual leader is an island, and no one can usher change by themselves. Reform is rarely the product of the action of politicians on their own, but instead relies on strategic alliances, policy networks, and advocacy (Zalmanovitch and Cohen, 2015: 35). A more sophisticated analysis therefore also needs to go beyond will, to capacity to enact it (Carbonetti, et al., 2014). While on rare occasions individuals may be sufficiently powerful as to act alone, it is more likely that, as Post et al. (2010) argue, political will is a collective endeavour.<sup>2</sup> Casting political will as individual intent obscures this collective process.

### 2.2.2 Political will as a political process

More generally, politics is not a *problem* of political will, it is the necessary process through which agents defend, contest and change institutions, and through which the necessary political impetus for change is *built* and sustained. Political will does not magically appear. It is curated through and embedded through the political process of contestation whereby citizens seek to hold their representatives to account and ensure power is not arbitrary (Pettit, 1997; Skinner, 2008). This is how politics should work and does work. Politics defined by contestation means that the rules of the game themselves, as well as outcomes, are 'open to question, disagreement, contestation, deliberation, negotiation and change over time' (Tully, 1999: 170). This process of contestation is fundamentally necessary for the emergence of legitimate, locally-appropriate and sustainable institutions. It cannot be short-circuited, but it can be engaged with and shaped, both by domestic actors and external actors. In this sense, politics is not the obstacle, it is the way.

### 2.2.3 Political will, structure and agency

In both semantic and substantive ways then, institutional continuity or change cannot be reduced to a problem of political will. The problem is not political will. The problem is narrowly viewing political will as the problem. Political will, or the lack thereof, is something to be explained rather than an explanation in its own right. More broadly, this explanatory weakness epitomises a wider critique of purely agency-centred accounts of institutional change – that is, they are notoriously 'voluntaristic'. Agents are cast as entirely free to act without rules that constrain or restrain them. In the real world, change hinges on the complex relationships *between* individuals and their institutional context. Moreover, agents are embedded *in* institutions; they can individually or collectively work within the existing institutional framework, to disrupt, evade or re-write them, but they are also constrained and empowered by them (Battilana and D'Aunno, 2009).

The key to opening the black box of political will lies in the interaction between institutions and individuals, or structures and agents. It requires a move from a static and reductionist view of institutions initiated and sustained by 'political will', to a more dynamic and temporal view of politics as a process of contestation to establish the 'collective will'. In a more rounded sense, this can be understood as a process of developmental leadership.

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2 Where DLP's contribution departs from Post et al. (2010) is whereas they provide an outcome based definition that makes it possible to measure the presence or absence of political will (see also te Lintelo and Lakshman, 2015), we are interested in the process of how political will is built and how institutional change happens.

## 2.3 Inside the black box: The political process of developmental leadership

### 2.3.1 Three levels of analysis

Inside the black box of political will lies a complex, often protracted, deeply political process of developmental leadership. The findings from a decade of DLP's research show this process occurs at the individual, collective and societal level. Motivations are contested and emerge at the individual level; political power and influence is contested and emerge at the collective level; and legitimacy and sustainability of reform and institutional change are contested and emerge at the societal level.

Crucially, while these three levels are analytically distinct, the reality is usually messier. While we present the three levels here in a logical order, they are not necessarily linear. There are feedback loops within each and between each level. For instance, an individual's motivations can and often will be formed or shaped through the process of coalition formation, not prior to it. The success or failure of a coalition to achieve change will shift the balance of power in a coalition as well as the choice of strategies and the motivations of the individuals within it. For example, in their paper on *Structure and Agency in the Politics of a Women's Rights Coalition in South Africa*, Rebecca Hodes, Jennifer Thorpe and Orly Stern show how the successes and setbacks of the National Working Group on Sexual Offences (NWGSO) changed how it framed its objectives, its key audiences, and challenged the centralised leadership structure of the coalition.

Finally, of course, none of this is mechanical. The emergence and trajectory of developmental leadership can fail at any point – motivated individuals can fail to build developmental coalitions, and coalitions can fail to accrue power or win the battle for hearts and minds to contest institutions.

1. At the individual level, developmental leadership relies on motivated agents with the incentives, values, interests and opportunity to push for change. Political agents have to make sense of their motivations. They are not given, but emerge from the interaction between the external world and their interpretation of their position within it (Archer, 2003; Blyth, 2003). Motivations can be shaped by incentives, such as an electoral or financial pay-off; social norms, such as around gender roles; or education, when individuals are exposed to new ideas and values. Motivation is the impetus to action. It varies from person to person, and indeed over time for the same person. Once motivated, strategic agents seek to achieve their goals by using political skill to manoeuvre, align with others, and build their power and capacity (Giddens, 1984; Fligstein, 1997; Hay, 2002).

2. Collectively, those individuals must be able to form coalitions with sufficient power, legitimacy and influence to manoeuvre and operate effectively. Political agents act collectively to realise their capacity, typically through forging formal or informal coalitions, vertical or horizontal, of leaders and elites. Since development is a political as well as a technical challenge, then the fundamental problem becomes one of aligning diverse interests. Individuals need to work together to devise, mould or tweak institutional arrangements to address collective action problems (Olson, 1965, Ostrom, 1990, Gibson et al, 2005). Acting collectively is, in turn, a power multiplier.
3. The process through which coalitions contest institutions is essentially one of de-legitimising one set of ideas and legitimising another. Ideas about what is right for society, and what is fair, are central to institutions. Challenging or disrupting institutions involves contesting these ideas. This typically, though not exclusively, involves a process of active contestation where various stakeholders within society enter into debate and conflict – though not necessarily violence – over the distributional consequences, and the fairness of those outcomes, of the existing and / or proposed institutional rules (Beetham, 1999; Mcloughlin, 2015a). This political battle of ideas is essential for forging locally legitimate – normatively acceptable – institutions. While there are well known efficiency advantages to keeping decision-making coalitions smaller and exclusive, fair and sustainable institutions tend to demand a more inclusive and open process of contestation.

In turn, the kinds of change that coalitions can bring about – whether small and incremental or large scale – alter the institutional landscape, change power structures, and can create new opportunities for developmental leadership in the future.

## 2.4 Ideas and power: Contestation and emergence

Power and ideas are core elements in each of the three processes that make up developmental leadership. First, at each level, ideas and power are *contested*: they are subject to question, disagreed over, and negotiated. This happens at the individual level within people's heads, at the collective level within groups of people and organisations, and at the societal level between different groups' preferences over the distribution of goods and values in society. Second, the outcome of this contestation is the *emergence* of agency, coalition formation, and the legitimising of institutions. That is, motivated agents, coalitions, and institutions are literally

formed through the process of contestation. They only become 'social facts or have social agency' – things that can act and shape the world – as a function of this political process of contestation. They do not arrive in the world fully formed.

### 2.4.1 Ideas

The concern with ideas is not an academic luxury or affectation. Ideas are powerful in the systematic ebb and flow of winning hearts and minds (Leftwich and Hogg, 2007). All institutions are sustained by normative ideas and beliefs – that is, because the actors involved think they are the right ones or the natural way of the world (Mahoney, 2010: 523). Politics is, ultimately, a battle of ideas. The capacity of actors to successfully contest and challenge the ideas that underpin institutions is central to explaining how change happens. Political elites have to manufacture and mobilise support for certain ideas to justify the normative basis of their power. They have to demonstrate how their ideas align with what is already normatively and cognitively acceptable. For example, in their DLP paper *Leaders, Elites and Coalitions in the Development of Botswana*, David Sebudubudu and Patrick Molutsi (2009) detail how democratic Botswanan elites have grafted the modern judicial and administrative systems to the locally-legitimate, traditional pre-colonial and colonial Tswana institutions of chieftaincy and of the *Kgotla* (traditional assembly place and court).

Ideas are not just as an internal psychological phenomenon – they are collectively held and can be powerful forces in mobilising collective action. The acceptance or rejection of ideas can have dramatic social effects. In the extreme, competing ideas about fairness in a divided society can, underlie the violent rejection of the state's right to rule (Mcloughlin, 2017). Or ideas can help explain why there is so little support for certain reforms. For example, Chipiliro Kalebe-Nyamongo and Heather Marquette (2014) examine the political sustainability of cash transfer programmes in Malawi. Despite there being good evidence for the benefits and effectiveness of cash transfers, elite attitudes were not aligned with the aims of the program. They were formed out of Victorian notions of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, shaping preferences for universal development rather than targeted interventions.

### 2.4.2 Power

Developmental leadership is the political process of accumulating the power to exercise agency, set rules and control resources. Though not always visible to a casual observer, power creates and sustains the 'transformatory capacity' of social agents, agencies

and institutions (Held and Leftwich, 1984: 144). Power helps individuals, organisations, and coalitions to shape the world. It is positive and productive, not just negative and controlling. For example, in his book *How Change Happens*, Duncan Green (2016) describes how Community Discussion Classes (CDCs) in Nepal have galvanised women to impose 500 Rupee fines on men who beat their wives. This collective action is an act of power just as much as the original violence.

Political analysis is often blind to the full workings of power. Too often, it focuses on the formal institutions of parliament and decision-making, and ignores the hidden operations of power. For example, as Diana Koester (2015) details at length, systematic inequalities between men and women are reproduced through a series of unequal power relations – from the family unit, through to wider economic, political and social structures. In Burundi, male elites have consistently blocked legislation to grant women inheritance rights because dividing up land between sons and daughters would significantly threaten land distribution for patronage. In this case, women's rights are restricted by a wider political settlement based on exclusionary land ownership (Koester, 2015: 4).

Taking power seriously means recognising its different forms (Rowlands, 1997; Allen, 1998). For example, 'power over' is the stereotypical controlling power, and manifests as domination, subordination, manipulation, repression, and produces compliance, or resistance. 'Power to' is more productive and doesn't necessarily entail domination – it is the power to do. As Suda Perera (2015) documents, non-state armed groups have the power to provide roads, electricity, law enforcement, judges and other public services in areas of limited state capacity. 'Power with' is a collective and cooperative form of power, and a key aspect of how coalitions work to produce outcomes in ways that individuals alone cannot. For example, John Sidel's (2014: 5) paper on the 2012 'Sin Tax' in the Philippines makes clear how a diverse range of partners, including the President, British American Tobacco, the San Miguel Corporation, as well as doctors and health-related organizations, provided the necessary power to drive reform. Finally, 'power from within' comes from the motivation and agency that gives people their sense of individual self and dignity. Michele Schweisfurth, Lynn Davies, Lorraine Pe Symaco, Oscar Valiente and Chelsea Robles's (2016) paper on *Developmental Leadership in the Philippines* reveals how the extracurricular opportunities enjoyed by Filipino leaders during their education helped build their sense of social capital, leadership skills, and motivation for public service.

Power, in all its forms, works in different ways, and can be found in different places. Political science has tended to identify three 'faces' of power (Dahl, 1957; Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Lukes, 2005; Gaventa, 2006; Koester, 2015; Green, 2016). First, analysing power can mean identifying the powerful individuals who get to decide at key decision-making points – so-called *visible* power. Second, it can mean identifying who or what sets the decision-making agenda. For example, *hidden* power can determine what issues are taken off the agenda behind closed doors and never openly debated or voted on. Or third, the most structural and 'insidious' form of power is that which shapes people's desires, values and ideological beliefs in the first place. *Invisible* power like this can influence people without them even realising it. For example, the acceptance of gender roles such as authority to speak in public meetings, by both men and women, is a deeply ingrained and unquestioned form of power in many societies (Koester, 2015).

Crucially, within the political process of developmental leadership, power is not just about agency, whether of individuals acting alone or collectively. It is not about powerful individuals deciding rules or controlling others. Instead, concrete instances of power only emerge through the interplay of context *and* agency (Layder, 1994; Bailey and Bates, 2012). As discussed in section 2.2.3, this is why the relationship *between* individuals and their institutional context is so important. For example, consider the two individuals – a Swedish female parliamentarian and a Fijian chief – in two different contexts – the Riksdag (Swedish parliament) and a council meeting of chiefs on the village *rara* (ceremonial ground). Switching these individuals between the two contexts should make it very clear how variable and contextual power is. Agents are not imbued with power. It emerges through the interaction between them and their institutional context.



# 3 The political process of developmental leadership

Since developmental leadership is a political process, understanding it implies a particular research approach. Political analysis is sometimes reduced to an exercise in categorisation – of political systems, actors, networks or interests, often through in-depth, snapshot analyses capturing narrow points in time that are inevitably fleeting. Categorisation of formal political institutions, for example typologies of political settlements, can be useful for organising ideas. However, as Ed Laws and Adrian Leftwich put it: ‘classification is not explanation’ (Laws and Leftwich, 2012: 22).

Over the past decade, DLP research has shifted the frame of analysis, from leadership as an individual phenomenon to collective process. It looked beyond interests and incentives to how competing interests are actively *negotiated* and contested – for example, how elites manufacture and maintain political settlements in the pursuit of power. It located politics ‘in time’ by observing how processes of change unfold, what makes them historically contingent and how critical junctures initiate and punctuate them. Finally, it drew attention to policy arenas and spaces – whether physical or discursive – where processes of contestation and negotiation play out. Together, this offers an inside view of how the political process unfolds and what it looks like. What emerges is ‘a much more detailed and granular way of getting to grips with the processes that drive and constrain development’ (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014: 7).

DLP’s series of conceptual analyses, action research, and qualitative and mixed method case studies illustrate *how* the political process of developmental leadership happens. First, it relies on motivated individuals with the incentives, values, interests and opportunity to push for change. Second, motivated agents overcome barriers to

cooperation and form coalitions with sufficient power, legitimacy and influence to manoeuvre and bring about reform and transform institutions. In turn, studies show how coalitional power and effectiveness partly hinges on their ability to contest and de-legitimise one set of ideas and legitimise an alternative set. The outcome of this political process of contestation is that leaders and coalitions accrue power to reformulate institutions in ways that are perceived as locally legitimate and sustainable. Each of these vital ingredients – motivated agents, effective coalitions and legitimation – is illustrated below.

## 3.1 Motivated agents

Motivated agents are the primary ingredient in processes of developmental leadership. Development cannot happen without individuals willing to mobilise and drive change. But to exercise the agency required to change institutions – whether it’s pushing through legal reforms at the macro level, or agitating for women’s rights at the local level – motivation alone is not enough. Even the most willing agents need a combination of power, opportunity and skill to realise their goals. Individuals must be capable of deliberating and working strategically (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014). For example, as Ceridwen Spark, Jack Corbett, and John Cox demonstrate in their DLP paper *Being the First: Women Leaders in the Pacific Islands*, Hilda Heine from the Marshall Islands, Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mata’afa from Samoa and Carol Kidu from Papua New Guinea all used their family and political networks, alongside their education and expertise and international networks, to effectively navigate male-dominated political environments in highly politically-savvy ways (Spark et al., 2018). It’s worth noting that although these were all elite women, they needed strong

social and cultural capital to be adept at manoeuvring within the male-dominated political arena (Corbett and Liki, 2015; Roche et al, 2018).

In their study of the politics of free public services in Indonesia, Andrew Rosser, Ian Wilson and Priyambudi Sulistiyanto (2011) identify the political strategies of *bupatis* [district heads] as explaining differences in health and education outcomes across districts. All four districts were dominated by predatory leadership, but the two more successful districts were ones where *bupati* pursued strategies of 'political entrepreneurship'. This means they tried to develop a popular base among the poor – and became dependent upon their electoral support to remain in power. Where this happened, district governments were more likely to promote free public services than where political leaders were focused on consolidating patronage networks (Rosser et al., 2011: 3). The implication for external actors is to encourage political leaders to incorporate political entrepreneurship into their political careers (Rosser et al., 2011: 5).

DLP research provides further insights into the origins of developmental leadership at the individual level, showing how interests, ideas and values are formed through the institutional environment, and that opportunity for individuals to act may hinge on critical junctures of crisis and change.

### 3.1.1 Self-interest

Individual interests and motivation are shaped by how individuals interact with their institutional environment. Individuals do not hang free from institutions – on the contrary, they are deeply embedded within them. Motivation to mobilise may hinge on how they interpret those rules, and whether they see room for manoeuvre, disruption, or subversion. Calculations of self-interest matter and can explain why 'political will' appears to be absent (Hammergren, 1998; Andrews, 2004). But motivation to act always involves a strategic calculation, because institutions do not come with an instruction sheet (Blyth, 2003). Even conceptions of self-interest emerge from an 'internal conversation' (Archer, 2003), whereby an actor weighs up plausible avenues of action, based on their imagination and judgement of the environment. As Zalmanovitch and Cohen (2015: 38) suggest, leaders *will ask themselves* 'Is it worth it?' How important is it to the public? Will the benefits be realised in the immediate future? Will any benefits reflect on me and translate into electoral or others benefits for me? What are the costs to me, in terms of political capital and other opportunity costs? (see also Malena 2009). Different agents will interpret their context and payoffs differently – self-interest is real and matters, but it isn't a predictable, mechanical logic.

In practical terms, this means that even apparently powerful agents have to make strategic choices about the costs and benefits of maintaining or disrupting institutions. For example, as Sarah Phillips (2011) details in her DLP paper on Yemen, President Saleh weighed up whether his self-interest was better served through developmental reforms or by maintaining the rent-seeking status quo. In this way, motivations and interests are always filtered through, and in turn shape, the institutional environment. Interests are not given, they are constructed via a cognitive process (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014).

### 3.1.2 Beliefs and values

Motivation to act does not come exclusively from rational calculations of material interests, however. Individuals are also shaped by the suite of ideas – whether worldviews, ideologies, or cultural beliefs – that all institutions embody and transmit. In this way, institutions provide the 'filters for interpretation, of both the situation and oneself, out of which a course of action is constructed' (Hall and Taylor, 1996: 939). They carry and impose on agents certain cognitive 'scripts', or moral templates. In a crucial sense then, if we want to understand what mobilises individual actors, we need to understand not only their interests, but also their ideas and values, and the institutions from where they came.

DLP research suggests shared experience of higher education can be significant for forming developmental values among elites, and for facilitating collaborative networking relationships that helps them to push through reforms later on (Sebudubudu and Molutsi, 2009). In Ghana, for example, the diversity of students attending higher education facilitated later broad-based alliances which, crucially, interrupted the cycles of tribal, clan, dynastic or traditional elite loyalty (Jones et al., 2014, see also Box 7). Similar findings about how higher education can help form shared values emerge from Somaliland (Phillips, 2013) and the Philippines (Schweisfurth et al., 2016).

### 3.1.3 Critical junctures

Having the right values and motivation may be insufficient to navigate and change 'sticky' institutions, however. Leaders do not operate in a political vacuum. Even where they acquire power and networks, the *opportunity* to act can very much depend on the political context (Kitschelt, 1986). Critical junctures – or formative periods when institutions emerge, are rejected, or transformed – can alter the landscape of what's possible and feasible, sometimes rapidly. They can be triggered by shifting macro conditions such as economic transformation, changes in cultural norms or ideas or, on a smaller scale, may reflect sudden media attention to an issue, the actions of individual leaders, or shifting

power relations. When these changes happen, relatively stable institutions can suddenly become open to challenge, and people can exercise new agency to change the so-called 'rules of the game' (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007). This is what Baumgartner and Jones (1993), and Krasner (1988) refer to as 'punctuated equilibrium'. These punctuations can give rise to radical shifts in policy, by giving an issue new political salience, or changing power relations (Hill and Varone, 2017).

Several DLP case studies point to the role of exogenous shocks in incentivising elites to work towards development. For example, Kate Maclean's (2014) paper *The 'Medellin Miracle': The Politics of Crisis, Elites and Coalitions* details how crisis created an opportunity for elites to realign their interests towards a more progressive agenda. Elites were losing out on the potential benefits of globalisation due to the city's reputation for violence. This, alongside competition from new elites, created incentives to address inequality and insecurity. But this case also serves to illustrate that people only bring change when they do the political work of capitalising on a changing environment. In other words, critical junctures are hollow without an understanding of how individuals respond to them.

## 3.2 Effective coalitions

Leadership has been primarily analysed as an individual rather than a collective problem – focused on the characteristics of individual leaders as the driver of change (Lyne de Ver, 2008: 28). But romantic notions of development being rescued by individual 'heroes' or champions are outdated (Andrews, 2016). Even with the best intention and 'political will', individual leaders can rarely bring about sustained change single-handedly. Instead, they rely on power and resources – people, ideas, and followers. They need to win legitimacy, work within systems of rules, values, ideas and norms, and mobilise others to implement change.

Even where there are willing agents, challenging institutions usually requires individuals and organisations to forge formal or informal coalitions (Lyne de Ver, 2009). Change emerges from not one but multiple leaders, negotiating and contesting to find a common basis for action. Coalitions in turn have to win legitimacy, accrue power, and use political strategies and tactics to accumulate the necessary power to challenge institutions.

### Box 7: Higher education and development leadership: The case of Ghana

Quality education, at both secondary and higher level, has played a key role in the formation of developmental leadership in Ghana. Ghana has proven remarkably peaceful and stable over time, especially when compared to other countries in West Africa (and beyond). In part, this reflects a state formation process based on the promotion of social cohesion and a unified 'Ghanaian identity'. Elites adopted an inclusive approach to state and nation building that transcended narrower identities based on ethnicity or region or religion.

Shared experience of education was critical to the emergence of like-minded elites, from diverse backgrounds, who went on to form coalitions. Since the days of Nkrumah's rule in the 1950s, good quality higher-education boarding schools and universities have been instrumental in bringing together young adults from different ethnic and social backgrounds from all over the country to study and live together. The origins of many of the key reform coalitions in the 1980s and 1990s can be traced back to networks first formed on and around campus. One school, Achimota school in Ghana, was attended by a quarter of the leaders identified in the study. The school, founded in 1924, had strong Christian roots and taught values of public service. In this way, education helped create shared values and political ideas among future leaders, enabling them to agree on the 'rules of the game'. This is credited as having enabled the emergence of democracy in the country.

Pedagogies were important in fostering shared values among elites. Particularly important was encouraging independent thinking, collaborative working, debate, wide-ranging curriculums, and opportunities for interdisciplinary work. Developmental leaders themselves emphasised the importance of the following for shaping their values and ideas:

- A strong institutional ethos that encouraged thinking beyond self-interest and a sense of patriotic duty.
- Close, mentoring and role-model relationships between teachers and learners.
- Extra-curricular activities which allowed the exercise of leadership and developed bonds between leaders and significant others, inculcated a passion for political activism and empathy for the poor, and opened up debate.

Reference: Jones, A., C. Jones, and S. Ndaruhutse, S. (2014) *Higher Education and Development Leadership: The case of Ghana*. DLP Research Paper 26. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program.

### 3.2.1 Collective action problems

Coalition formation is far from straightforward. It often hinges on overcoming deeply embedded collective action problems. These problems happen when members of a group with shared goals are deterred from working together because of the risks or costs involved in co-operating. The risks can be particularly high in the context of political repression or exclusion. Room for manoeuvre can be closed down where power is concentrated in the hands of a few elites. In the DRC, for example, elections have allowed elites to accrue legitimacy, silence opponents and centralise power. The legitimacy that President Kabila derived from elections enabled him to manipulate the political process at the expense of the very peace and development they were designed to deliver (Perera, forthcoming). In this type of exclusive and violent political settlement, the space for collective action can be limited.

Collective action problems – or barriers to co-operation – can also stem from *internal* group dynamics. There may be lack of trust, or an absence of any guarantees that everyone will pay the costs associated with working together (the ‘free rider’ problem). Ironically, this can deter the co-operation necessary to realise collective benefits for the entire group (Peiffer, 2015: 1). Or, it could be that these groups do not even recognise their common interest in the first place. In many situations, coalitions are formed from groups with different initial interests, from different sectors and policy arenas (Leftwich and Hogg, 2007). In all cases, coalition formation is a political process of negotiation, bargaining and trust-building (Gibson et al, 2005; Booth, 2012). There are, however, multiple practical pathways to overcoming the collective action problems that inhibit coalition formation (see Box 8).

### 3.2.2 Coalition formation

#### *Shared values*

Ideas and values are often critical factors that shape coalition formation and effectiveness. Shared values and ideas can provide glue that holds coalitions together. For example, shared values facilitated new alliances between like-minded women’s groups in Bangladesh (Nazneen et al., 2011). Studies of woman’s coalitions in the Pacific show that the articulation of shared values within a coalition (and having the space to work towards this) can generate a sense of solidarity and commitment to ‘a greater good’, above and beyond the question of shared or competing interests (Fletcher et al., 2016).

But this isn’t automatic. For example, Tait Brimacombe shows the extent to which ongoing political work is necessary to maintain cohesiveness. In Fiji, the women’s human rights movement articulated shared values

and built wider support for them through the creative use of photo, dance and storytelling on digital media (Brimacombe, forthcoming).

However, coalitions do not always necessarily share a cohesive set of values, and sometimes there are advantages to not doing so (see section on Inclusion, diversity, and legitimacy on the following page).

#### *Diverse interests*

In other cases where different actors have diverse interests, it can be important for them to trade assurances of protecting their respective values or assets early on in a process of cooperation. For example, Deborah Brautigam and Tania Diolle (2009) in their DLP paper on Mauritius, show how trust between the public and private sectors was built through leaders using symbolic, public gestures as signals of commitment to cooperation, the business class organising itself into a unified, cross-ethnic constituency with a single voice, and creating dense clusters of consultation for regular government-business interaction.

Coalitions can be successful without necessarily having the same values or interests, so long as they share the same substantive goals (Mahoney, 2010). As John Sidel (2014: 5) makes clear in his account of how President Aquino passed the 2012 ‘Sin Tax’ reform through the Philippine Congress – and the role of British American Tobacco in this – ‘reforms are not made by reformists alone’. Coalition partners can be both ‘bootleggers and Baptists’ (Yandle, 1983) – those who are committed to reforms, and those who are more opportunistic and non-reformist.

#### *Pre-existing networks*

Whether or not coalitions and alliances have shared values, a number of DLP studies identify the importance of pre-existing networks in their formation. As Ceridwen Spark and Julian Lee (2018) make clear in their paper *Successful Women’s Coalitions in Papua New Guinea and Malaysia*, friendship networks provided an initial degree of trust, but these were strengthened through the shared experience of hardship and endeavours.

As noted above, pre-existing personal networks formed through experience of higher education can help to foster the shared values and trust that can address barriers to co-operation. Research from Mauritius (Brautigam and Diolle, 2009), Ghana (Jones et al., 2014), Somaliland (Phillips, 2013), and the Philippines (Schweisfurth et al., 2016) found that elites that went on to play key roles in developmental coalitions were often educated at the same schools or universities.

### *Inclusion, diversity, and legitimacy*

The political process of coalition *formation* shapes the opportunity and power of coalitions to act. Coalition power can be accumulated through a deliberate process of inclusion or exclusion of certain (groups) of actors. This form of power is both reputational and strategic. Reaching out to potential opponents of reform and involving them in decision-making processes can both lend credibility, and diffuse potential opposition. For example, at independence, Botswana's new leaders made efforts to recognise and include traditional leaders to avoid antagonising them (Sebudubudu and Molutsi, 2009). Research in Durban similarly showed how local links into the institution of chieftaincy, as well as strong connections to the ruling African National Congress (ANC), formed a basis for a much broader coalition of traditional leaders, elected councillors, businessmen, social activists and the church (Beall and Ngonyama, 2009: 3). In this way, the configuration of leadership in coalitions is crucial for underpinning their power and leverage.

The value of distributed leadership in bringing together political and technical expertise is demonstrated in studies of civil society-based coalitions (Fletcher et al, 2016) and government-based coalitions involving politicians and bureaucrats (Dasandi and Hudson, 2017). In effect then, collective action can be addressed not only in spite of, but *through*, diverse sets of interests.

### *Coalitions are gendered and 'gendering'*

DLP's research on coalitions recognises the gendered nature of collective action and the opportunity structures and constraints this creates (Hodes, 2011, Tadros, 2011, Mcleod, 2014, Denney and McLaren, 2016, Fletcher et al, 2016, and Derbyshire et al, 2018). This suggests, for example, that how women's coalitions recruit members may be more based on prior friendships than professional relationships (Spark and Lee, 2018), but women leaders may also need to distance themselves from feminist organisations and movements in order to maintain other important political relationships (Denney and McLaren, 2016). As such, how all coalitions function is both constrained or enabled by gender norms, and at the same time either reproduces or addresses these constraints.

## **Box 8: Coalitions in the Pacific: Lessons from collective action on gender and power**

This paper presents findings from five coalition case studies in the Pacific region. It aims to address gaps in understanding role played by civil society and coalitions in challenging gendered power structures and promoting women's leadership and decision-making. Four factors emerged from the case studies as influential in the formation and functioning of coalitions.

- **Formative events:** These brought people together to 'do something' in a concerted way. Whether locally or externally driven, they also moulded the future shape of a coalition.
- **Shared purpose, interests and values:** Common purpose helps coalitions increase their support base, coherence and influence. For example, the Fiji case study illustrates how shared values around universal human rights and a common purpose of fighting a constitutional amendment bound together a broad range of actors to challenge gender relations.
- **Forms of leadership:** The nature of a coalition's leadership can determine its sustainability and ability to respond to changing circumstances, broker relationships, and challenge vested interests. Some coalitions understood and practised leadership as a process of adaptation; others understood leadership to be a characteristic of leaders. One case revealed efforts to divest and decentralise leadership to overcome the limitations of individual leadership.
- **The nature of ownership:** The degree to which a coalition's agenda is locally owned and its ways of working are politically salient appears key to effectiveness. In some circumstances, 'hybrid' ownership can bring together international actors who can help to draw attention to a gender issue with local actors who ensure action is taken at a national and local level.

Coalitions are not static and nor are these factors. Local ownership and leadership inform one other. Taken together, they shape how coalitions address different types of power, and the degree to which they challenge gender norms.

Reference: Fletcher, G., T. Brimacombe and C. Roche (2016) *Power, Politics and Coalitions in the Pacific: Lessons from Collective Action on Gender and Power*. DLP Research Paper 42. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program.

## Box 9: Manoeuvres for a low carbon state: The local politics of climate change in China and India

The politics of climate change in China and India is a good example of how motivated agents strategically manoeuvre within the local opportunity structure. Based on 137 semi-structured interviews conducted in China and India between June 2010 and September 2011 with government, private and state-owned companies, and civil society organisations, research showed how the same motivations – in this case government policy to implement climate change mitigation – do not always translate into similar outcomes.

In China, an authoritarian but decentralised system means that the National Coordination Committee on Climate Change has the formal power to set regular binding targets in the national Five-Year-Plan. It can create incentives such as promotion and bonus payments through an annual evaluation system, and punishments such as redeployment to a remote region to incentivise officials to fulfil national mandates from Beijing. This is a hands-off, 'state-signalling' approach.

In India, the opportunity structure is quite different. State officials have far less power to be confident that national policies will be implemented at the local level. So they used a different strategy. Rather than setting centralised targets, the state intervened extensively, leveraging the high price of energy by supporting the emergence of energy service companies to provide private firms and government agencies with the technical advice and financing they need to implement energy efficiency measures. This is the 'market-plus' approach.

Both the 'state-signalling' and 'market-plus' approaches require intelligent, creative and painstaking work to achieve results. In both cases, effective leaders manoeuvre actively and continuously to build and maintain coalitions, and align interests and policies through 'bundling'. In China, bundling recognises that mitigation is a prominent policy issue because it can contribute to the promotion of energy security and an internationally competitive green technology sector, but also prevent politically destabilising environmental problems. The political story is that new energy efficiency regulations led to the closure of smaller plants. Large and politically important enterprises benefited because it decreased low-cost competition and increased their market share. Officials used this to encourage large enterprises to improve their energy efficiency in return for not having their own plants closed.

For India, lower levels of development mean action on climate change is treated as desirable where it is compatible with more pressing domestic concerns of economic growth and poverty reduction. For example, energy efficiency measures are pursued as much for their potential to alleviate chronic energy shortages as for their contribution to climate change mitigation.

Reference: Harrison, T., and Kostka, G. (2012). *Manoeuvres for a Low Carbon State: The Local Politics of Climate Change in China and India*, DLP Research Paper No. 22. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program.

### 3.2.3 Political strategies

#### *Bundling*

Coalitions may also have to actively deploy political strategies and tactics to challenge or win the support of vested interests. Political negotiations may turn on the ability to generate 'win-win' situations that appeal to a wide range of stakeholders. Bundling can be an important political tactic to do exactly that. It combines distinct policies or interests to strengthen support for a shared policy goal.

In their DLP paper on the local politics of climate change in China and India, Harrison and Kostka (2012) explored the benefits of 'interest-bundling' (where parties with distinct interests are brought together around a particular policy) and 'policy-bundling' (where one initiative is used to pursue multiple policy

priorities) (see Box 9). Climate change mitigation is highly technical, highly political and requires strong state capacity. In both cases, actors needed to balance and align competing incentives. Bundling was the most effective way to do this. In China, for example, this meant bundling climate change with energy security and promoting internationally competitive green technology, while in India it meant aligning with economic growth and poverty reduction strategies, such as alleviating chronic energy shortages.

#### *Framing*

Framing can also be used tactically to create support for an issue or reform. For example, Nazneen et al. (2010) compared the discursive strategies of three national-level women's organisations. They concluded that the strategic framing of women's issues opened up

significant political space and legitimacy to discuss them where little existed before. The framing also provided the social 'glue' for new alliances between like-minded groups.

Getting the framing right requires understanding what will convince key stakeholders to back change. Doing good political analysis is key. The strategies and framing used by women's groups and coalitions in South Africa and Jordan on domestic abuse and sexual violence issues were very different because the organisations knew what would and would not 'work' in these political contexts. In South Africa (Hodes et al., 2011), a large civil society coalition campaigned forcefully in public, drew on international principles of equality and human rights, and combined technical and legal arguments to help shape legislation. By contrast, in Jordan (Tadros, 2011), a coalition also successfully helped introduce new legislation protecting women from domestic violence. But with a more conservative ruling elite, a limited democracy and different cultural norms, using a 'women's rights' frame would have been disastrous. Instead, the coalition framed the issue in terms of the principles of Sharia, focusing in particular on the suffering of children and the elderly. The family frame resonated better with the Jordanian public and avoided contentious social and political issues around women's rights and gender equality that could have resulted in a political backlash against the coalition.

#### *Quiet work and pragmatism*

Informal brokering – forging links to individuals with political influence – whether they are part of the coalition or outside it, can also be pivotal to coalition effectiveness. The key to success for women's coalitions promoting gender equality in Egypt and Jordan, for example, was their ability to quietly work informal contacts and networks of influential players in positions of both formal and informal power and authority (Tadros, 2011).

Successful reform coalitions often take a pragmatic approach to reform, with a willingness to compromise. An in-depth knowledge of the local context enables coalitions to understand when compromise is required. There are different examples of this pragmatism. It may mean accepting a reform that meets most but not all the initial objectives to ensure the reform is politically feasible. It can mean ensuring the reform avoids falling into divisive political cleavages in society, such as the left-right divisions (Maclean, 2014). It can also involve reaching out to potential opponents and involving them in the decision-making process. For example, at independence, Botswana's new leaders made efforts to recognise and include traditional leaders to avoid antagonising them (Sebudubudu and Molutsi, 2009).

This pragmatism might also take the form of what might be seen as relatively exclusive and fluid processes which do not necessarily conform to the ideals of participation, transparency and equality that some might consider necessary (Denney and McLaren, 2016).

#### **3.2.4 Summary: From coalitions to legitimate social change**

Out of these political negotiations may emerge coalitions with the necessary collective and cooperative power (i.e. 'power with' or 'power to') to push for reforms and challenge institutions. Furthermore, as noted in Section 2.3.2, there is feedback between coalition formation and the emergence of motivated agents. Their power and interests are transformed through the political process of contestation inherent in coalition formation. For example, in his analysis of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) in Myanmar, Taylor Brown (2016) traced how the process itself became significant for wider economic and political reforms. Crucially, contestation strengthened the standing of civil society actors in relation to more powerful business and government interests. Nevertheless, even powerful coalitions need to do the persuasive, political and ideational work for change. At its core, this entails a process of de-legitimation and re-legitimation.

### **3.3 Politics of legitimation**

Ideas about what is right for society – whether economic theories, world views, ideologies, cultural or religious conventions – underpin all institutions (Campbell, 1998). Ideas legitimise ways of organising power, the distribution of resources in society, and conventions of social interaction. Even the most powerful institutions can decline or transform when they lose their underlying normative justification in ideas (Beetham, 1999). Because ideas are so central to institutions, challenging or disrupting institutions necessarily involves contesting ideas. By the same logic, forging new institutions always requires creating an ideational foundation for them.

One of DLP's core concerns is with understanding *how* this process of changing ideas happens. It points to the power of ideas in binding coalitions, the strategic importance of narratives and framing, and the role of power in the political process of deliberation and contestation over competing ideas (Mcloughlin, 2015a). This battle of ideas is essential for forging locally legitimate – normatively acceptable – institutions and reforms. It is crucial to a process of 'institutional indigenization', whereby institutions find a footing in local cultural repertoires and ideas (see Box 2). This matters because locally legitimate institutions are more powerful and durable than illegitimate ones.

### 3.3.1 Ideas shape what is feasible

Like institutions, ideas can be remarkably persistent over time and powerfully shape what motivated agents and coalitions can think and do. Reformists often come up against intractable, often hidden, and usually deeply embedded ideas – whether patriarchal values, gender norms and hierarchies, or cultural beliefs. These ideas can be a significant impediment to exercising coalition power or individual agency.

For example, as Claire McLoughlin (2017) details in her DLP paper on Sri Lanka, the long-standing, entrenched idea of free education as an intrinsic birth right cannot be contravened by any government or regime without facing the risk of violent dissent. In this way, ideas about what is and is not legitimate are part of the structure of political constraints and possibilities that frame developmental prospects and actors' 'room for manoeuvre' (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014).

In a similar vein, ideas and attitudes also underlie continuity in institutional responses to social problems. Viewing domestic violence as a 'private' issue, coupled with deep-seated cultural views on respecting family privacy, can underlie the reluctance of public authorities to address or treat victims, for example (Tadros, 2011: 22). Changing institutions relies on understanding the power and persistence of ideas, because understanding is a basis for manoeuvring around them.

### 3.3.2 There is more than one grain

Of course, in any given society, there is never one set of legitimising ideas. Coalitions may have to navigate between competing norms and ideas – for example, between international conventions on women's rights and conservative ideas that confine women to traditional roles. They often tread a careful line between acknowledging norms and conventions while also pushing, or nudging for change. In practice, coalitions may be more legitimate and effective where they at least acknowledge certain moral codes and norms (Grebe and Woermann, 2011). But nudging norms also carries risks. For example, 'when initiatives to empower individual women (such as training and tertiary education) move at a faster pace than institutional and cultural change... enthusiastic women may return to their work places or communities only to face increased discrimination and, in the worst cases, physical violence' (McLeod, 2015: 21).

As a corollary, where institutional design can successfully incorporate potentially competing sources of local legitimacy – for example, norms of traditional leadership – those institutions may have greater chance of local acceptance and resilience (Beall and Ngonyama, 2009). In effect, building legitimate institutions often hinges on strategically accommodating competing ideas about legitimate ways of organising power

### 3.3.3 The power of reform narratives

Often, the battle of ideas that underpins political contestation hinges on the power and capacity of elites to argue persuasively. In several of DLP's in-depth empirical studies of political processes, an elite's capacity to frame, justify and defend policies and actions on the basis of ideas about what is right or proper for society was important for legitimising them (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014).

The creation and projection of reform narratives can be a key mechanism for coalitions to articulate new ideas. Narratives present a story arc which constructs a problem, a need to act, a diagnosis, and a logical solution. National narratives can be a powerful source of social compliance and therefore institutional continuity at the macro level. In Somaliland, for example, the belief that peace is tenuous and its maintenance therefore a priority is purposefully propagated by leaders. This narrative is prime political capital, and is used to justify elite capture of the economy. The idea of the state as peacemaker overrides the pursuit of equality or inclusion, and in turn legitimises an unequal political settlement (Phillips, 2013). In this way, ideas do not just exist in passive sense, they are recruited or created and used in the pursuit of power.

At the more micro level, a strong reform narrative can help mobilise coalitions, win supporters, side-line opponents and win the battle of ideas. Narratives can encourage a sense of shared purpose among disparate coalition members, even where actors have different interests (Dasandi and Hudson, 2017). Reform narratives can equally neutralise potential opposition where they can frame contested political issues in technical terms (Maclean, 2014; Dasandi and Hudson, 2017). Narratives may resonate precisely because they circumnavigate politically sensitive issues or language. For example, in promoting gender equality in the conservative cultures of Egypt and Jordan, more successful coalitions avoided using the terminology of sexuality (Tadros, 2011). DLP's Gender and Politics in Practice research similarly found that effective gender programming sometimes has to avoid using the language of gender entirely (Derbyshire et al., 2018).

Creating successful narratives entails thinking strategically about audiences. The significance of reforms can be magnified by linking them to broader, politically salient issues to generate media interest. Framing reforms in terms that an audience views as legitimate can open up political space to discuss issues that were previously off the agenda (Nazneen et al., 2011). Overall, getting the framing right requires understanding what will convince key stakeholders to back a change. Crucially, this will look different in different contexts.

### 3.3.4 Coalition legitimacy matters too

But coalitions don't just need ideas and convincing narrative frames to be effective. They also need the power and capacity (positioning, opportunity) to actively promote them. Coalitions need to cultivate their own identity and reputation as legitimate actors. DLP case studies suggest coalition legitimacy can derive from their organisational configuration and perceptions of their identity and purpose. All of this builds or breaks their reputation as legitimate actors. Legitimate leaders have to channel and reflect the worldviews, philosophies, values and morals of their potential supporters (Mcloughlin, 2015a). They need to be perceived as: genuine representatives of certain groups; having the skills, knowledge or experience to play a particular role; or aligned with local norms and values (Roche et al., 2018).

As Roche et al. detail in their 2018 paper *Gender and Politics in Practice: The Bigger Picture*, in Tonga the country's potential ratification of the UN Convention on the Eradication of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, for example, was perceived as a threat to local norms. Opponents of the bill were highly effective at mobilising large sections of the population against it because 'gender equality is perceived as threatening Tongan culture and 'tradition', which most Tongans are deeply committed to retaining' (Lee, 2017: 82). Local activists' legitimacy can be rapidly undermined if they are seen as propagating Western ideas.

Whether initiatives are perceived as locally or externally driven can also be pivotal for perceptions of coalition legitimacy. Coalitions can be undermined when they are perceived as too closely linked to outsiders with external

#### Box 10: Working politically behind red lines: Structure and agency in women's coalitions in Egypt and Jordan

How can the international community effectively support women's coalitions in politically closed and socially conservative contexts? This study examined six cases of collective action for women's rights in Egypt and Jordan between 2000 and 2010. It explored the interface between collective agency and structure in two national contexts characterized by authoritarian rule and powerful Islamist movements strongly opposed to any structural transformation of gender hierarchies.

In Jordan, the coalition successfully helped introduce new legislation protecting women from domestic violence. But with a conservative ruling elite, a limited democracy and different cultural norms, using a 'women's rights' frame would have been disastrous. Instead, the coalition framed the issue in terms of the principles of Sharia, focusing in particular on the suffering of children and the elderly. The family frame resonated better with the Jordanian public and avoided contentious social and political issues around women's rights and gender equality that would have resulted in a political backlash against the coalition.

Engaging in informal or 'backstage politics' was equally – if not more – important than formal channels of engagement. Policy change relied heavily on informal relationships rather than formal citizen-state engagements.

The study identifies several ways development agencies and the international community can support women's coalitions:

- avoid creating local coalitions themselves and criticizing progress on gender inequality without careful consideration. Both can severely undermine the work and legitimacy of local actors.
- help create the conditions for the emergence of local coalitions i.e. by supporting international and especially regional activities and events that can have a ripple effect.
- recruit and retain local staff who understand the local history and politics of gender, and have the skills to 'work politically', with understanding and sensitivity, with women and their organisations.
- provide brokering and convening opportunities for women's leaders to meet, to articulate and aggregate their aims and agreements, and avoid funding arrangements which might fuel competition and conflict.
- Explore diversions from the typical project cycle. For example, by investing in the long-term process of building internal cohesion and organizational and political capacity, rather than focusing solely on delivery of outputs, remaining low key and not claiming the formation or outcomes of the coalition as their 'success', and focusing on the actors and the process rather than the 'project'.

Reference: Tadros, M. (2011) *Working Politically Behind Red Lines: Structure and agency in a comparative study of women's coalitions in Egypt and Jordan*. DLP Research Paper 12. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program.

financial support (Tadros, 2011: 34). They may need to promote their organisational credentials as 'legitimate' representatives by demonstrating their expertise and experience of dealing with a certain issue (Hodes et al., 2011). For instance, as part of a program designed to promote social inclusion for man to woman transgender (waria) communities in Banjarmasin, Indonesia, the decision was taken to include local waria as their field officers in order to capitalise on their local legitimacy (Koenig et al., 2018).

In other contexts, building legitimacy may require strategic distancing. For example, individual women leaders may need to distance themselves from feminist organisations and movements in order to maintain legitimacy among other political elites deemed strategically significant (Denney and McLaren, 2016).

In sum, legitimate institutions are more likely to be created by legitimate actors. An example is the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP), which avoided normal competitive tendering processes associated with many development programs, to avoid co-opting local organisations in ways that conform with donor priorities (Denney and McLaren, 2016; see also Box 12). In tangible ways then, coalition legitimacy influences their reputation, power and effectiveness.

### 3.3.5 Summary: Sustainable change requires winning the battle of ideas

Where coalitions can cultivate their own legitimacy and power to effectively contest ideas, they can begin to disrupt what are otherwise fixed institutions, and forge new, locally legitimate and sustainable ones. This matters, ultimately, because legitimacy provides a reason for compliance, and locally legitimate institutions are more likely to be effective, and durable, than illegitimate ones imposed from outside (Leftwich, 2009). The starkest example is brilliantly expounded by Sarah Phillips in her DLP paper on Somaliland's relative peacefulness in comparison to Somalia. This was partly because Somaliland was free to develop its own, locally negotiated, legitimate institutions (Phillips, 2013; see Box 11).

#### Box 11: Political settlements and state formation: The case of Somaliland

Somaliland – the northern part of Somalia – is a relative success story. Whereas Somalia is 'the failed state', Somaliland built taxation systems, basic public services, and saw two peaceful presidential transitions through the ballot box, including one to the opposition.

One of the key reasons for Somaliland's relative success was that the government has received virtually no direct financial aid, largely because it has not been internationally recognised. Without outside support, there were no pre-determined institutional endpoints and the state formation process was given time and political space. This finding, that less is more when it comes to international development cooperation, is challenging for donors.

Processes of contestation and legitimation were locally-driven, often far from international norms and standards. For example, President Mohamed Ibrahim Egal used loans from private businesses to demobilise clan militias. In return, he gave business leaders generous tax exemptions and opportunities for extraordinary profits. For example, in 1994, in a clever piece of political manoeuvring, the President used the loans to print a Somaliland Shilling. In part this was to underline Somaliland's proclaimed independence. But in addition, he declared the old Somali Shillings illegal in Somaliland, and sold them to his creditors at fire sale prices in exchange for hard currency. His creditors and supporters resold them very profitably across the 'border' in Somalia.

Crucially, this helped foster ownership of Somaliland's peacebuilding process among the business elite. Plus, the loans that President Egal received from the business elites were (and remain) widely accepted within Somaliland as legitimate. This is because the idea that peace is primary, underwritten by the trauma of war, overrides other political concerns.

Reference: Phillips, S. (2013) *Political Settlements and State Formation: The case of Somaliland*. DLP Research Paper 23. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program.



## 4 Implications

So what does this all mean for engaging with the political process of developmental leadership? Several implications flow from the findings around how to support individual leaders, build effective coalitions, and navigate legitimacy politics. Collectively, these add up to a bigger picture on how donors can approach politics, power and ideas in aid programming. Institutions do change, whether rapidly or incrementally, through a political process of contestation. Aid actors can strategically support this process if they think and work politically.

### 4.1 Supporting leadership

#### **Support the development of leadership values and motivation through quality education at all levels.**

DLP's research consistently reveals the importance of secondary and higher education in the formation of core developmental values as well as political beliefs and activities. Elites that formed the developmental coalitions that helped bring about change in Mauritius, Ghana, and Somaliland, were well-educated and had often gone to the same schools or universities (Phillips, 2013; Brautigam and Diolle, 2009; Jones et al., 2014; Schweisfurth et al., 2016).

So yes, invest in quality education at all levels, but here's why. First, a high-quality curriculum and extra-curricular activities can support the emergence of developmental values and skills for transformational leadership. Second, in all cases the networks produced during education were key to future easy networking relationships. Third, access to higher education can create a strata of 'sub-elites' who can compete with more established elites and hold them to account for

their actions (Brannelly et al., 2011). By encouraging social mobility, inclusive education can also create a more meritocratic elite. Finally, an active citizenry able to hold leaders to account is a key factor in shaping leaders' decisions to work towards development (Grebe and Nattrass, 2009; Brautigam and Doille, 2009; Maclean, 2014).

### 4.2 Facilitating effective coalitions

**Create space for coalitions to form and to work their politics.** The development of shared agendas requires negotiation, contestation and compromise. This takes time and effort. It can also require financial and technical support i.e. from legal or policy specialists.

Whilst existing networks can already have high levels of trust, these bonds need to be maintained or renewed as they evolve and perhaps grow, diversify or broaden their membership. In these cases, ongoing support providing 'safe spaces' for these processes to occur can be helpful. This might include funding for retreats, workshops, dialogues, support for individuals to travel, the provision of technical advice, or offering assistance for brokering or facilitation. It can mean acting as a 'critical friend' by constructively challenging thinking, and acting as a sounding board for ideas once trust is built. It is important to see these as investments in coalition maintenance and a 'commitment to building internal cohesion and organizational and political capacity' rather than as 'talk-shops' (Tadros, 2011).

**Work behind the scenes and explore the roles of other actors.** Donors can and do assist in advancing reform, by putting reforms on the political agenda through high-level advocacy. This usually means

working behind the scenes, often informally i.e. not through official meetings but using backstage channels to build relationships, obtain information and move things forward. Again, this requires astute political judgement, good local 'intelligence' – often from local staff – and a judicious assessment of the risks of such an approach back-firing. It may also mean recognising that sometimes others are better placed to undertake this advocacy.

A wide range of external actors and processes can impact on coalitions and their efforts to bring about change; hence there is a need to go beyond focusing on donors exclusively. The range of external actors found to influence reform processes in DLP's research

includes not only donors but also INGOs, regional and international organisations, transnational corporations, management consultants and telecommunications experts, foreign embassies and leaders, academics, and international rules and standards of best practice, etc. There is a need to better understand how these might influence reform both positively and negatively, which is something that development organisations may be well placed to assist with.

### **Box 12: Thinking and working politically to support developmental leadership and coalitions: The Pacific Leadership Program (PLP)**

The coalitions and developmental leaders supported by PLP reveal ways of working that challenge some of the conventional wisdom about how developmental change happens, and donors' role in supporting it. PLP's experience demonstrates that thinking and working politically to support developmental change is feasible, although profoundly shaped by the wider donor environment. It suggests the following lessons:

- Donors need to be pragmatic when choosing leaders to support. This involves engaging with leaders and coalitions with the interest, power and ability to influence change, not necessarily those that adhere to 'good governance' principles.
- Leaders do not need formal authority to be effective. They may emerge from both the formal and informal spheres. In addition, leaders can wield both 'hard' and 'soft' power. The latter is especially important to consider when working with women leaders in the Pacific.
- Coalitions can emerge organically or be proactively nurtured. While some coalitions emerge organically with donors playing a supportive role, donors can also play a more proactive convening role to encourage the emergence of new coalitions. What is important is that the reform is genuinely locally led by either the already existing or brokered coalition, and that donors are not seen as using local actors for their own agenda.
- Coalitions do not necessarily have to be inclusive to be effective. Coalitions that are quite exclusive in their membership can still achieve results, such as policy or legislative change. However, exclusive processes may not be able to achieve broader attitudinal changes that support the implementation of policy or legislative reforms.
- Coalition membership does not need to be fixed or formalised to be effective, but rather can be fluid and evolving. This may be particularly important in the Pacific context, given the small population size and the density and overlapping nature of networks.
- Coalition roles need not be equal. Coalitions need members to fulfil a range of functions and some may be required more than others. Often a small core group within the coalition may take responsibility for driving the process, drawing on others as needed.
- It is not always necessary for people to know they are part of a coalition. As long as there is a central leader (or leadership group) coordinating or prompting the inputs of others towards achieving the coalition's objectives, it might not be possible or desirable for all coalition members to be brought together.

Reference: Denney, L. and R. McLaren (2016). *Thinking and Working Politically to Support Developmental Leadership and Coalitions: The Pacific Leadership Program*. DLP Research Paper 41. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program.

## 4.3 Navigating legitimacy politics

**Do support local actors, but don't undermine their legitimacy.** Legitimacy presents a paradox for aid agencies. On the one hand, received wisdoms that legitimacy can be instrumentally built from outside have not held up to scrutiny. The technical tools available to outside agencies are not easily attuned to changing long-standing, and often highly durable, legitimacy norms. On the other hand, because aid always involves choices about where, who and what to invest in, all external interventions have potential to (de-)legitimise some actors and institutions over others.

One risk is that local coalitions become seen as 'creatures' of outsiders. Links with donors or international agencies can often be used to politically undermine local coalitions or collective action. This is particularly the case if it allows vested interests to question the legitimacy of the actors involved, or posit that the issues they are working on run counter to the national interest, or are the agenda of foreign powers. Issues of gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights, or women's leadership can often be painted as running against the grain of local 'culture', and violating social norms. Being sensitive to the potential political use of social norms as a weapon to delegitimise local coalitions by virtue of their links to international agencies has implications for whether programs are supported directly or indirectly (through local NGOs), as well as accountability and reporting, PR and branding investments.

**Identify opportunities for norm contestation but beware.** Good political analysis is about identifying the likely entry points for institutional change. One potential entry point is to look for disjunctures between existing institutions and the ideas that underpin them, which suggest that their legitimacy may well be weak, or declining, and they can therefore be contested. An example is ideas that shape and reproduce beliefs about the roles of men and women in society.

In practice, this means ensuring that ideas, ideologies and beliefs are factored into political analyses. It may also require more research on perceptions and values and ideas about fairness. Measuring ideas and norms is more feasible than is often assumed (see CARE, 2017). This is not a case of 'getting inside people's heads' to know what they are actually thinking: if ideas are collectively held, they are social facts that do not just reside in people's minds. Research can examine the norms, tropes, and narratives that exist in a society, community or group through participant-observation, interviews, media analysis, or aggregated survey data. This can also reveal the extent to which different interests and groups adhere to different 'social facts'.

If interventions or policies do not align or fit with prevailing norms and ideas, they will almost certainly fail. For example, there can be unintended consequences of programming based on universal norms (e.g. based on governance standards relevant in other contexts, or social service provision based on 'equity'). This is not an argument about 'going with the grain' – as there can be many grains and different norms in any given society. Rather, it suggests that not building on, or from, existing ideas and norm perceptions is liable to be ineffective, or backfire.

Local actors may be in a much better position to shape how reforms are framed and narrated in ways that are considered legitimate and which resonate with different groups. Therefore, supporting reform groups or coalitions to develop their own framing or narratives, through appropriate local media channels, can be highly effective.

## 4.4 What it all adds up to: Thinking and working politically

**Politics is not the obstacle, it is the way.** There is still a mental tendency to see politics as something that 'gets in the way' of development, whether through rent-seeking, special interests or corruption. If only they could be removed, development programming would work as it should. But politics is not just about interests and incentives, it is also the ongoing and necessary process of contestation and legitimation around ideas and power. It is *precisely through* these political processes that locally legitimate institutions are built.

These processes of contestation and legitimation can be supported – carefully – but it is crucial that they 'work themselves out' to achieve sustainable and locally-appropriate institutional and social change. If external actors can learn how to work with and through the political process then small but meaningful change is possible. More successful, transformational and legitimate ways of engaging with the political process are often aimed at creating space and strengthening the political environment and process rather than picking winners. This provides the space for institutional indiginization to occur, without being co-opted or short-circuited.

**Development actors can think and work politically.** Thinking and working politically (TWP) is at the heart of DLP's research, which has consistently underlined the centrality of politics. Development outcomes cannot be achieved by technical solutions alone. This means that actors – politicians, bureaucrats, civil society, donors and so on – need to be able to better understand the local context ('thinking politically') in order to support the processes that enable local actors to bring about sustainable developmental change ('working politically').

Working politically is sometimes misunderstood as being about direct engagement with political actors and organisations, perhaps even interfering with a sovereign state's politics, but it is more nuanced than that. It means supporting, brokering, facilitating and aiding the emergence and practices of reform leaderships, organisations, networks and coalitions.

While this implication is nowhere near as radical as it was 10 years ago when DLP first started – as demonstrated by its inclusion in the World Bank's 2017 World Development Report – it still bears repeating. There is a danger that the message remains stuck in the 'governance ghetto', to use David Booth's (2015) phrase. The idea that development actors must think and work politically still needs to be made in other sectors, such as WASH, energy, infrastructure, and so forth. Plus, being clear about what thinking and working politically means, and importantly what it doesn't mean, also remains critical. See the TWP Community of Practice website for the ongoing discussion: <https://twpcommunity.org/>

**Do ongoing, internal political analysis.** The increasingly routine use of political economy analysis (PEA) has been a welcome development in the past decade or so. But DLP work suggests there are at least two problems with it. First, much PEA has been heavily influenced by institutionalist economics rather than political science, meaning that how interests are shaped, and ideas and legitimacy function, has been relatively neglected (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014). Yet both are critical to development success.

Second, since PEA studies tend to be commissioned periodically, are usually undertaken by international consultants, and can quickly become out of date, their applicability tends to be limited. Front-line staff may benefit from internalising 'thinking politically' as a more continuous way of working (Fisher and Marquette, 2014). This has been central to working politically in prominent programmes, including PLP (Denney and McLaren, 2016, see Box 12) and FOSTER (Lopez Lucia et al., 2017).

DLP has produced 'practitioner friendly' guidance on 'Everyday Political Analysis', to help frontline staff relate to people they seek to influence in a more politically savvy way. It focuses on understanding what makes people 'tick', the multiple interests they have, why they behave in particular ways, and what space they really have to make change happen (Hudson et al., 2016). It offers a simple, stripped down approach to political analysis to support everyday decision-making (see Box 13).

**Explicitly address ethical dilemmas.** Donors often face ethical dilemmas when working in contexts where local norms do not align with international standards, rights or freedoms. In such cases, choosing whether to 'work with the grain' can be tricky. For example, when working on gender relations, donors may not be inclined

to 'work with the grain' when 'the grain' includes deeply entrenched patriarchy (Dasandi, et al., 2016; Denney and McLaren, 2016).

In a bigger picture sense, donors also face dilemmas when deciding whether to support non-democratic regimes. They may risk being seen as complicit in any human rights violations committed by actors to whom they have conferred international legitimacy, even though they do not condone nor contribute towards the violations. Or they may need to work with what they consider to be illegitimate actors in order to achieve some higher end, albeit temporary, at the cost of moral concerns (e.g. a 'security first' logic).

While thinking and working politically means grappling with these norms and dilemmas, there is little guidance available on how to do it in practice. To begin to plug this gap, DLP has developed a practical framework in the paper *The Donor's Dilemma* which walks decision-makers through ethical challenges and justifications for action, and the short and long term implications of different ways of working (see Dasandi and Erez, 2015).

**Be creative with monitoring and evaluation.**

Traditional, results-based management approaches are ill-suited for the design as well as monitoring and evaluating of programs which seek to support complex, unpredictable and non-linear change processes. On the other hand, if such programs fail to effectively communicate results, they run the risk of not only failing to learn the lessons of more innovative work, but criticism from sceptics.

### Box 13: Everyday Political Analysis

Lack of 'quick and dirty' guidance for development staff to do their own political analysis is an important gap in the field. To address this, DLP worked with DFID's Sam Waldock's experience of using political analysis in the field to develop a guidance note on 'Everyday Political Analysis'. This framework for thinking about politics and power guides readers through two steps: 1) Understanding interests: What makes people tick? and 2) Understanding change: What space and capacity do people have to effect change? Readers are given five sub-questions under each theme and then a set of 'next steps' to help them with decision-making.

Hudson, D., Marquette, H., and Waldock, S. (2016). *Everyday Political Analysis*. DLP Methods & Methodology No. 2. Birmingham: Developmental Leadership Program.

Programs working in politically astute, gender sensitive and flexible ways need inventive monitoring and learning processes that can cope with these challenges. In addition to more formal and experimental methods a number of other methods and approaches have promise, including:

- Strategy testing
- Social Network Analysis
- Outcome Mapping and Harvesting
- Action-research
- Qualitative Comparative Analysis
- Process Tracing
- Crowdsourcing and big data analysis of social media
- Micro-story collection and aggregation
- Real time simple reporting

It is increasingly clear that one method is not going to answer the kinds of questions these programs need to answer: mixed methods are required. Also, understanding changes in relationships between people, organisations, interests and groups and changes in the space of the 'politically possible', must be at the centre of these methods. Both intervention-centred and context-centred approaches are required if agencies are to understand why something seems to be successful for particular groups in particular places, and whether it might apply elsewhere. The social learning, feedback and reflection processes that programs or organisations develop, and the culture of curiosity they inculcate, is as important as the choice of monitoring and evaluation method.

These methods not only assist with understanding specific outcomes but can generate broader lessons of value to others. Collecting a range of data with mixed methods can also help create the authorising environment for further experimentation. As long as data collected for such instrumental purposes does not drive programming, it can be used strategically to support thinking and working politically.

## **Summary: Don't jump to the answers**

What does this mean for external actors wishing to support the political process of developmental leadership? Taken together, these implications suggest the following stance: although critical junctures can and do provide opportunities for sudden and large scale-change, institutions also change incrementally and endogenously. Programming should recognise and seek to support this through a principle of strategic incrementalism. This means that often longer time frames for results are necessary and greater realism about progress. But it also means that external actors should seek to support agents to change institutions they inhabit rather than engineer or plant institutional change more directly. They can do so by opening up the spaces of politics and for contestation – and not by trying (a) to intervene to determine outcomes and (b) to directly engineer the properties, let them emerge through process. Allow the political process to run its course.

Don't jump to the answers.

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