



DLP

Policy and Practice for Developmental
Leaders, Elites and Coalitions

DEVELOPMENTAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Background Paper **01**

The case for leadership and the primacy
of politics in building effective states,
institutions and governance for sustainable
growth and social development

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The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international policy initiative informed by targeted research and directed by an independent steering committee. DLP is supported by a global network of partners and currently receives its core funding from the Australian aid program.

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Abstract

This paper makes the case that effective leadership and the collective action of a relatively small number of leaders and elites, across the public and private sectors, are essential for building effective states, ensuring stability and promoting economic growth. We suggest that there is a significant gap in the international community's knowledge and understanding of the importance of leaders, elites and coalitions in meeting the many different challenges of development in weak states and emerging economies.¹

We argue that successful development depends largely on political processes which involve diverse leaders and elites, representing different groups, interests and organizations, tackling a series of collective action problems in locally appropriate and feasible ways. But, in many developing countries, the limited quality and quantity of leaders and elites with the necessary vision, knowledge and experience means that their ability to shape the strategies and institutions that will mediate the relations between private interests and public goods is seriously compromised. Leadership, and its many forms, is a very complex phenomenon. These forms are everywhere influenced by historical, structural, political and cultural factors. But without effective leadership, current efforts to build effective states, promote economic growth and consolidate patterns of good governance will continue to yield often disappointing results.

Thus we argue that the international community needs to do much more to understand the provenance, nature and forms of effective leadership as it is central to the aid effectiveness agenda. We recommend that donors need to re-think and refine policies, strategies and programmes to support the emergence and expansion of pro-development leadership and growth coalitions.

This paper begins to build a case for leadership which will be developed further as the research and analytical programme unfolds. The first section of this paper sets out the central argument. It then goes on to sketch briefly the forms and functions of leadership, the role of elites in state building, how coalitions of elites forging agreed institutional arrangements can promote economic growth, the centrality of politics in these processes and the implications of this work for aid effectiveness.

¹ This paper was originally written and published under the auspices of the first phase of this work, then called the Leaders, Elites and Coalitions Research Program (LECRP).

01

The Case for Leadership: The Argument

1. Economic growth remains the fundamental and necessary condition for poverty reduction and social development. But long-term and sustained growth occurs only within stable and effective states which implement locally appropriate policies through locally negotiated institutions and organizations of sound governance. All this is generally understood.
2. But what is not recognised or well understood is that none of this is possible without the crucial agency of effective leadership, within and across the public and private sectors. For it is leaders who establish and sustain locally relevant and effective organizations, who negotiate, establish and consolidate over time the fundamental institutions of an effective state, who forge the rules and practices of economic and political governance, and who shape and ensure the implementation of sound and appropriate policies for growth, poverty reduction and social development.
3. Leaders in all fields – whether in government, political parties, armies, or in the bureaucracy; in business or banking; in social organizations, the media, intelligentsia or in NGOs -- constitute elites. The term 'elite' is often used as a pejorative term or adjective ('elitist') to describe an often exclusive dominant group in a society, the socio-economic rich, the wealthy and the powerful, the ruling class, the toffs. In this context, elites are often thought of as monolithic, parasitic and supine. And some are, or have been. But we use the term here in a more analytical sense to refer more simply, as the classical studies of elites all did (see Bottomore, 1964, and Bachrach, 1969, for good surveys of the classical and contemporary elite theory) to those small groups of people, seldom more than 3% of any given population or unit of analysis (Hossain and Moore, 2002)², in formal or informal positions of authority and power who take or influence key economic, political, social and administrative decisions. It is the leaders and elites in their own fields and beyond, whether in the public or private sectors, nationally and locally, in both formal and informal organizations, whether in democracies or not, who are largely responsible for determining the nature of institutions and policies.
4. In stable and effective states, where organizations are often well-established and capable, elites representing different interests and groups will commonly differ over the nature and detail of policy and will seek to influence it in their favour or in what they consider to be the wider collective interest. The particular configuration of such elites and the character of their differences will differ from country to country, depending on many factors including the character of the economy, social structure and level of development. In stable polities their differences and negotiations occur within the context of robust and legitimized institutions and agreed rules of the political game, which include rules for changing the rules.³ And they do so within a broad consensus about the principles

² For instance, in Indonesia in the 1970s, with a population then of 170 million, it was estimated that probably no more than 1000 people constituted the political, military and bureaucratic elites. Today, in Malawi or Benin, the number is probably far lower. Another estimate is that the elite consists of less than 1 person per thousand of the adult population and that 'in countries like Britain, Italy and France, a few thousand individuals would be included in the highest circles of power. Around them gravitate other elites of lesser weight...' (Dogan, 2003: 1).

³ It is this acceptance of the rules of the game which constitutes what is sometimes called 'the political settlement'. It provides for both stability and the possibility of orderly change. Such settlements are rarely, if ever, achieved quickly, and most have only been reached

and institutions governing economic activity and social behaviour:

5. However, in many developing and transitional states, especially where institutions and systems of governance are weak, such consensus and legitimacy do not exist, or exist only in a very weak, informal, conditional, partial or unstable form. Organizations – for instance business associations or trades unions – are often weak and fragmented. Few of them are able to invest in leadership development. Moreover, in these countries both ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ institutions of authority and power co-exist, and the manner in which the elites of these institutions interact is of the greatest importance in shaping growth possibilities and developmental outcomes.
6. Crucially, however, the fundamental goals of economic growth and social development, and the need for often deep-seated reforms in order to achieve these goals, all involve a series of challenging collective action problems. If these problems are to be resolved, enough leaders, elites and reform agents – often with different initial interests and coming from different sectors -- have to work collectively and cooperatively. Such cooperation takes the form of coalitions. A coalition is best thought of as an association of groups and organizations working to resolve specific problems or to achieve specific goals that are beyond the capacity of any individual member of the coalition to resolve or achieve on their own. Coalitions may be transient or longer lasting; they may be official or unofficial, formal or informal; they may be political or they may be promotional; they may be for things or against things; they may be vertical (as in corporatist arrangements), they may be horizontal as in interdepartmental linkages; they may cut across the public-private divide, as in co-production or public-private arrangements (Joshi and Moore, 2004); and they may be the form in which ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ elites and leaders in developing societies work together towards common goals which they could not achieve on their own. But the importance of coalitions is that they represent the practical political expression of the resolution of the many collective action problems which define the central challenge of development: how to achieve cooperation, trust and ‘synergy’ between different interests, groups and organizations – vertically or horizontally for transformative developmental purposes.
7. Moreover, if they are to be tackled effectively, many of the urgent contemporary global challenges affecting developing countries – such as climate change, corruption, HIV/Aids and poverty reduction – all require coordination and cooperation through action-oriented coalitions of leaders and elites, in the public and private sectors, for instance between politicians and officials, on the one hand, and between them and civil society organizations such as business associations and trades unions on the other hand.
8. There are of course always some effective leaders, everywhere. But the empirical evidence suggests that in some developing countries there are too few leaders and elites with wider ‘national’ goals and hence a lack of the critical leadership mass, and with few incentives to form positive coalitions for growth. Instead, where coalitions of leaders and elites do form, they often tend to be largely ‘predatory’ or ‘distributional’ (Olson, 1982) anti-developmental and undermining growth, preying off the society and economy, and remaining locked in conflict and competition in a context of persistent if not deepening poverty and destabilising inequality.
9. On the other hand, where enough leaders and elites are able to generate positive ‘synergies’ within and between the interests, organizations and institutions of both the state and the private sector, on the basis of shared social purposes, they are able to form ‘developmental’, ‘growth’ or ‘reform’ coalitions, capable of devising or reforming institutions which promote economic growth and social

– and subsequently consolidated - through processes of conflict and often violence.

development across a range of sectors and challenges. There is good evidence, for example, that where elites have been able to craft cooperative rather than hostile, rent-seeking or predatory relations between states and businesses, economic growth has generally prospered (Maxfield and Schneider, 1997). The forms of these coalitions, whether formal or informal, have varied greatly as the cases of Finland after the First World War (Jäntti, Saari and Vartiainen, 2005), Korea and Taiwan after 1960 (Fields, 1995; Kang, 2002), Botswana since 1965 and Mauritius after the 1970s (Bräutigam, Rakner, and Taylor, 2002) all show.

10. Building effective states, establishing growth coalitions, designing the institutions of governance for economic activity and solving the collective action problems are all necessarily and irreducibly political processes. In the context of state-building, these processes require enough effective and able leaders from a variety of fields to be able to see and reach beyond their immediate interests to a wider encompassing interest. They require leaders capable of negotiating, taking, abiding by and implementing key decisions. And they require leaders and elites with the education, skills and experience that will enable them to devise and agree the rules of the game (institutions) that will organize and mediate the relationships between private interests and public goods so as to benefit all through growth and social development.
11. While the international development community has increasingly understood the importance of (and what) constitutes effective states, strong institutions and good governance, there is a significant gap in its recognition and understanding of the centrality of politics and leadership in all this. And where donors regularly urge and demand the need for 'stronger' or 'more ethical' leadership', there has been a failure to understand that leadership is a complex phenomenon, deeply influenced by very different historical, structural, political, cultural and ethical characteristics and processes in each country/region and by external factors (such as war, or threat of it, and other competitive challenges).
12. International efforts to establish, build and reform institutions and organisations in developing countries are always challenging, and results are invariably less satisfactory than expected. Furthermore, as the recognition and understanding of the political nature of development has deepened, donors have struggled to determine appropriate policy, strategy and programming responses. Accordingly, important recent and on-going work-streams have focussed on many structural and essentially technical aspects of state and institution building, democratization and governance, which have direct and indirect relevance to the issue of leadership. But much of this work has in many respects failed to recognise the necessary and dynamic political role which indigenous leaders and elites must play as critical agents in these processes. Hence the issue of leadership has significant implications for a number of current aid policy work-streams and also for the international aid effectiveness agenda and the notion of what is truly a 'country led approach'.
13. It is important therefore to understand more effectively how the individual and collective human agencies of change and reform emerge and how they interact with each other. It is inevitable in weak states with weak institutions and organisations that the few good leaders and elites will have to work with corrupt ones. It is crucial that we deepen our knowledge of the political-power relationships and processes so as to ensure that the international community can support and improve the ways in which progressive elites in both the private and the public sectors can use the available political space to develop locally appropriate and politically feasible institutions and reform initiatives.
14. There is therefore much that we need to learn about leadership, elites and growth coalitions and about the socio-economic and cultural context of their provenance; and especially about the political processes which determine how they are formed, how they behave, how they interact, how they

shape or undermine effective states and the institutions which constitute them.

15. The GIA research and analytical programme has as its aim to deepen understanding and deliver new policy messages that will highlight the importance of leadership and will guide donor behaviour. At this early stage, the key message is that it is necessary to support and invest in short, medium and long term strategies and programmes that will enhance the emergence, quality and skills of leaders, elites and coalitions, within both private and public sector organizations and the institutional relationships between them.
16. In the remaining sections below we elaborate briefly on some of the key concepts and issues we have touched on above.

02

Leadership, its classification, forms and functions

Thus far we have talked of leaders and leadership in general terms. But there are many forms and functions of leaders in different societies, at different times and for different purposes. Leadership for war will be very different to leadership for building democracies. And the leadership required for running a successful business may require different characteristics and skills to leadership for a social movement, pressure group or political party. And intellectual leadership – leaders in ideas – will in turn be different. A 'traditional' leader – a chief or a 'big man', for example, in a largely subsistence economy in rural parts of Africa or the Pacific – may be expected to act in ways by his or her followers which are different to the expectations of a 'modern' leader, such as a representative politician or a senior official. Cultural norms, codes of ethics and principles of integrity will also differ. A further distinction is also useful.

'Transactional' leadership, embodying the capacity to negotiate and deal, forge consensus and move forward, may be more suited to (and more common in) stable political and economic contexts and consolidated democracies where the rules of the game are clear and agreed and where players generally abide by them. 'Transformative' leadership, on the other hand, may be more urgently needed in many of the poor and unstable developing countries where the challenge is to transform or adapt prevailing institutional arrangements and to fashion new or modified ones which will enable growth and social development to occur. And of course both contexts require variable mixtures of both kinds of leadership. Classifications of leadership sometimes distinguish between leadership as behaviour, or as a process (the activity of leading), and as a property or set of traits (qualities which leaders have). In our work we will explore these classifications and map them, where useful, onto different cultural and structural contexts and different sets of challenges.

However, the kind of leadership we are specifically interested in is leadership in weak and fragile states for economic growth and social development, the capacity to form growth, developmental or reform coalitions, and the vision to see and reach beyond particular interests to a wider public good. And because development is a complex process which occurs at all levels in a society, leadership for growth is required at all levels, not only at the national level and not only in the public sector.

Leadership is thus important at local or regional level where, currently, often different forms of authority, leadership and elites (traditional, official and elected in many parts of Africa) exist, side-by-side. How do they interact? And with what effects? Ideally there should be synergy, but often they are locked in anti-developmental conflict. We recognise that leadership in private sector organisations – such as businesses, NGOs or unions – is also critical in developing countries. And how the elites in the private and public sectors interact – collusively or developmentally -- has far-reaching implications for growth, job creation, social development and the reduction of poverty.

But before policy recommendations can be made about how to support the development of effective leaders at all these levels, we need to know much more about the patterns, forms and characteristics of leaders and elites in country-specific contexts. The research programme (see separate paper) will

address these issues by seeking to classify and elaborate the different forms of leadership and their possibilities and constraints with respect to promoting growth.

03

Leadership, Elites and State Building

In the last 20 years, the international development community has, with good reason, focussed its attention on the importance of democracy and good governance as key elements in the process of state building and growth. The historical record, however, is very clear. Modern (and certainly modern democratic) states were never built overnight. The fact of the matter is that stable states existed well before the flowering of democratization and good governance (Rose and Shin, 2001) although both democratization and the evolution of good governance were part of the process of their consolidation. Modern states and their systems of governance evolved – over quite considerable periods of time – in the interaction (sometimes violent) between the leaders and elites of a variety of old, new and emerging interests and institutions – incumbent governments (often monarchical or imperial), a parasitic or patronage-based civil service, militaries, landowners, the church, commerce, workers, peasants, and even the intelligentsia. In Britain, for example, the reforms which followed the Northcote-Trevelyan report only started in the 1850s when a Civil Service Commission was first established. In the USA, the Pendleton Act of 1883 was only the beginning of a process of ridding the civil service of the corrupt and inefficient consequences of the 'spoils' system of patronage appointments. Likewise, major transformative shifts in politics and governance established the institutional foundations for other modern states – for example, the Meiji reforms in Japan from 1870, Bismarck's state-building policies in Prussia in the 1880s and beyond, Ataturk's modernization of Turkey from 1923, and the military bureaucratic reform of the constitution in Thailand in the 1930s. These were all brought about by elites, in 'revolutions from above' as they have been described (Trimberger, 1978). Even the negotiation that preceded the formal ending of apartheid in South Africa – though pushed by mass action from below and pressure from abroad -- and the crafting of its new constitution in the 1990s, was the work of elites.

We make these brief historical points here to emphasise one critical point. State-building is not simply a matter of the technical design and erection of the architecture of the state. Effective statebuilding has almost universally been a matter of complex political processes involving the interaction of often rival or competing leaders and elites (in both democratic and non-democratic contexts) who recognise that a greater public good can be achieved, for all, by establishing a new and inclusive set of institutions of rule rather than by clinging to the old and remaining in conflict.

Our work on leadership will therefore seek to derive key leadership lessons from a range of selected case studies. As the associated Research Programme paper indicates, we will look at both historical and contemporary cases, but also at instances and episodes from national, regional and sectoral levels of effective and failed leadership and coalitions. Drawing on these findings, the research and analysis component of the work will help to extract lessons which will help to devise policy messages about how leadership processes might be supported in fragile or weak states by the international community. The work will challenge the international aid community and advocate aid policies, strategies and assistance that will break entirely new ground.

04

Elites, Coalitions and the Politics of Sustainable Growth

There is now a wide consensus that positive 'synergy' between the public and the private sector is necessary for establishing the institutional rules that enable economies to grow (Lange, M. and Rueschmeyer, 2005), though of course the form which this synergy may take will vary. In our research programme we will be undertaking particular case studies to analyse where this synergy has been successful and where it has failed. Leaders and elites are crucial to this synergy between public and private sectors, for negotiating and establishing credible institutions across multiple interests, organizations and groups under which economic activity progresses, and to ensure appropriate relations of state, market and society. As indicated previously, coalitions take many forms. Crucially, coalitions may be 'distributional' and collusive, concerned only with seeking rents for their members' advantage, or they may be 'developmental', concerned with how to expand productivity, growth and social justice. An important focus of our research work will involve analysing how both developmental and predatory coalitions have formed. We are also interested in those circumstances where stable and potentially effective states have degenerated as a result of the activity of predatory or oppressive elites and coalitions, as in Zimbabwe and Myanmar.

Coalitions, moreover, are not always or necessarily political coalitions, as in party coalitions, though all involve political relations and processes in their formation and operation. Businesses, trades unions, associations of NGOs or religious groups and promotional or advocacy groups may all form coalitions (business associations, federations of trade unions, inter-faith coalitions, for instance) for a variety of reasons and goals in conjunction with, or against, the state or parts of the state. Their elites usually have a major role in speeding or frustrating developmental trajectories.

Finally, we have continued to emphasise that the processes by which coalitions form and function are essentially political processes, and it is appropriate to say a little more about the conception of politics which underpins our approach.

05

Leadership and the Political Processes that strengthen institutions and build effective states

We have referred to political processes as being both critical and necessary factors in shaping the institutions and coalitions which enhance or retard the prospects for economic growth and social development, and which are central in state building. But how are we to understand politics?

Instead of the conventional understanding of politics as being concerned with who's in and who's out, who's up and who's down, who's lost and who's won in formal (often electoral) contexts, we see politics as a universal and necessary process in all societies and groups in both formal and informal domains. Politics consists of all the activities of cooperation, negotiation and conflict in the course of taking decisions about the use, production and distribution of resources. It occurs in and between families and farms, factories and federations, and businesses, bureaucracies and schools. But there are two critical and related levels of politics.

First, the contours of politics in any community are framed by the institutions – rules of the political game -- through which it operates. These may be democratic or authoritarian, federal or presidential, unitary or parliamentary. The rules may set up a balance or engender conflict between 'traditional' holders of power and the authority of 'modern' elected governments. The rules may be formal as in a constitution, or informal as in conventions and established procedures (about headship, succession and legitimate power, for instance) in pre-constitutional polities. And, crucially, they will provide the rules for changing the rules by political rather than violent means.

It is clear that the role of leaders, elites and coalitions is crucial in establishing these rules and winning consent and legitimacy for them from their followers. Such institutions and such legitimacy constitute the irreducible foundation of an effective state, the 'political settlement' upon which good governance and democratization can evolve. Without legitimated rules of the game, there can be no state, and certainly no effective state.

But, secondly, once established, these institutions provide the context for the games within the rules. Once again, the roles of political and many other kinds of leader, elite and coalition (in the public and private sectors) are fundamental. For it is they who will have to play by these rules and in general it is they who will have to ensure that other players abide by them. If there is only limited adherence to the rules, a culture of persistent avoidance ensues, thereby undermining the rules, with pathological anti-developmental consequences. For weak or ineffective states are characterised precisely by just such an inconsistency, between rules and behaviour; or by situations in which anti-developmental informal rules overwhelm formal rules.

Finally, economic growth and social development involves a special kind of politics because it is about change and transformation. Thus at its core, the politics of development involves solving a very difficult problem: how to construct or maintain a stable system of governance in conditions of sometimes rapid and far-reaching economic and social change in which resources are being used, produced and distrib-

uted in often entirely new and different ways, commonly requiring or presupposing quite radical shifts in values, norms of behaviour, aspirations and expectations. For when people change the way they use resources, they change their relations with each other. Handling these changes is not simply a 'technical' or 'managerial' matter but a profoundly political one. For example, public financial management reforms, land reform, tariff reduction, gender relations, economic liberalization, democratization (and the implications of the latter for traditional leaders based on inheritance and succession, and commonly for life) can by no stretch of the imagination be considered technical. They are essentially political and will distribute (and redistribute) advantage and disadvantage to different groups and interests in different and often new ways.

Here again, the role of leaders, elites and coalitions is crucial. How they see and how they deal with such change, and the rules they formulate and implement to negotiate the turbulence of change, will largely determine whether the outcome is positive or negative. This has deep implications for the efforts of international donors who have for decades been involved in encouraging, introducing and transposing policies and institutions that have had limited traction.

06

Aid Implications and Effectiveness

The implications of this work for aid policy and strategy are significant and have particular relevance for the aid effectiveness agenda and work on political governance. We think that the leadership work will assist and inform donor approaches in the context of ramping up engagement with, and resources to, 'fragile' and 'ineffective' states, addressing global governance issues, and promoting economic growth. The research and analytical programme will contribute valuable knowledge to tackling complex issues associated with prioritisation, sequencing, stability, growth, risk, instruments and aid effectiveness. In particular, it will accumulate new evidence and provide understanding to support the paradigm of the 'country led approach'. Further, we will consider and evaluate how donors can most appropriately and effectively support and expand the pool of effective leaders, encourage elite interaction and support the formation of growth or development coalitions. Explicit policy and strategy recommendations (short, medium and long term) will emerge from this work, but we shall know much more when our research programme begins deliver and analyse the evidence and findings.

07

Research Themes, Issues and Questions

In our research programme⁴ the main categories of work being undertaken include:

1. Conceptual and analytical classification of forms, characteristics and patterns of leadership, elites and coalitions in diverse contexts at different times and for different purposes.
2. Empirical mapping and evaluation of activities of existing organizations and initiatives in support of leadership development.
3. Case studies at country, organisational, sector, and individual levels of the provenance and functioning of growth (and anti-growth) coalitions of leaders and elites, historically and in the modern era.

In particular we will focus on:

- What are the characteristics and forms of different patterns of leadership across cultures and political and economic systems? What evidence is there about how different forms of leadership interact? What developmental constraints and opportunities do they offer?
- What circumstances and conditions – both national and external -- have favoured the emergence of effective leaders and elites in both public and private spheres, in traditional and modern societies?
- What is the precise provenance of individual leaders, groups and elites in such circumstances? Where do they come from and by what routes?
- Under what circumstances have developmental coalitions formed or failed to form, and under what circumstances have they succeeded, unravelled or degenerated into predatory or distributional coalitions?
- What role has secondary and tertiary education played in the development of leaders, elites and growth coalitions?
- How do such leaders and elites work to establish and maintain appropriate rules of the game?
- What are the implications for aid policy, strategy and programmes? How can donors work in the short, medium and long term to invest in the political and organizational processes which will encourage and support the evolution of leaders and elites and the establishment of growth coalitions?

⁴ The fuller research programme is available as a separate paper.

08

Conclusion

As indicated in the Abstract, this paper serves as an initial outline of the case for an organised focus on leaders, elites and coalitions which we will elaborate as the research programme develops.

Further papers on this and related matters will follow. But in this initial argument we have made the case that work on leaders, elites and coalitions will fill an important gap in our understanding of how effective states, robust institutions and good governance are achieved, with far-reaching implications for aid policy and aid effectiveness.

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The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) addresses an important gap in international thinking and policy about the critical role played by leaders, elites and coalitions in the politics of development. This growing program brings together government, academic and civil society partners from around the world to explore the role of human agency in the processes of development. DLP will address the policy, strategic and operational implications of 'thinking and working politically' - for example, about how to help key players solve collective action problems, forge developmental coalitions, negotiate effective institutions and build stable states.

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