From global to local: Multilateral actors and the pivot to locally led development

This paper was developed to examine how the multilateral system supports locally led development**.** The paper shows that despite several dilemmas, multilateral actors can - and are - supporting the pivot to locally led development, and indeed that some multilateral actors are leading the way, particularly those with larger budgets and greater in-country presence and influence. It highlights the critical role that bilateral providers play in enabling locally led development as members of governing boards and funding partners. Finally, it outlines ways multilateral and bilateral providers can advocate for and support locally led development.

This paper is part of a broader peer learning exercise on locally led development within the Development Assistance Committee [DCD/DAC(2023)5]. The complete series of perspectives papers is available here.

Related case studies of member practices can be found on the OECD platform Development Co-operation TIPs -Tools, Insights, Practices.

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From global to local

Multilateral actors and the pivot to locally led development

This *Perspectives paper* provides key lessons for DAC members, multilateral actors and their stakeholders. It is part of a broader peer learning exercise on locally led development within the Development Assistance Committee [DCD/DAC(2023)5]. The paper highlights the role multilateral actors play in locally led development and how bilateral actors can best support and enable them as they make this pivot.

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1. Introduction

What is this peer learning exercise about? This paper seeks to highlight how multilateral organisations can, and are, promoting locally led development, through a range of mechanisms, systems and partnerships. Further, the paper identifies the ways in which bilateral actors – donors – can support multilateral organisations in the pivot to locally led development. Examples throughout the paper are based on interviews with eight multilateral and seven bilateral providers. They serve to illustrate the roles and enablers of locally led development through the multilateral system, including United Nations funds and programmes, vertical funds, and multilateral development banks.

Who is this paper for? The paper – part of the OECD's Perspectives on Locally Led Development series (Figure 1) - is written primarily for members of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in their role as funders and governors of the multilateral development system. However, multilateral organisations (and other intermediaries), and non-DAC providers and multilateral member states will recognise ways in which they too can strengthen their role when it comes to locally led development.

Figure 1. Navigating locally led development: enablers of change
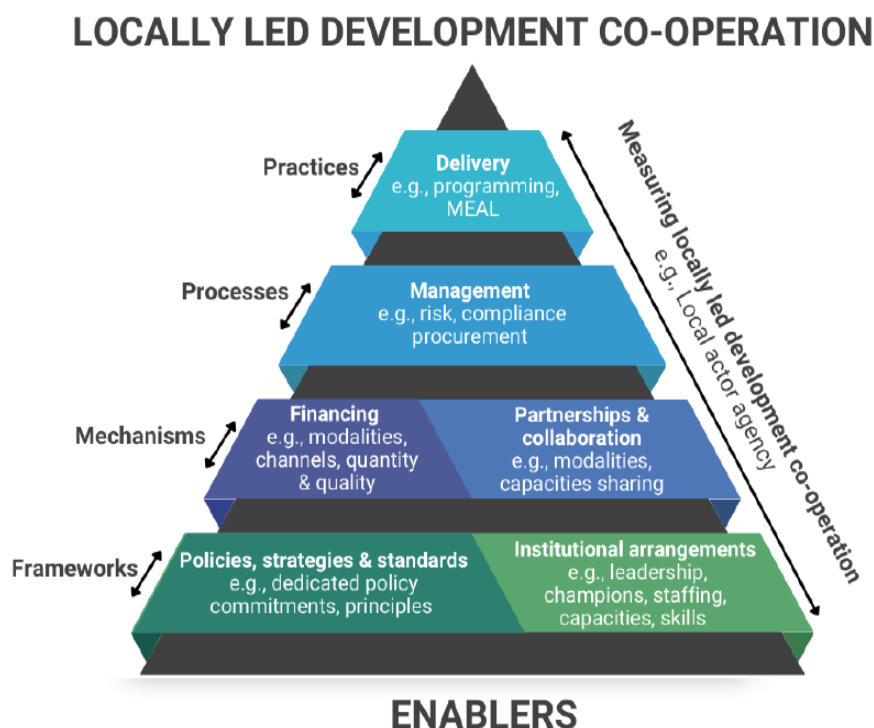
Note: MEAL = Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning

Source: *Learning by example: Pathways towards effective locally led development co-operation* (OECD, forthcoming).

What is locally led development? There is no consensus amongst bilateral or multilateral providers on what constitutes "local actors" or "locally led development". Instead, the growing view is that development is considered "locally led" when all people in a given society – from national governments to communities – are agents in their future and development co-operation providers allocate funds accordingly. For the purpose of peer learning, this paper uses the definition of local and locally led development that is common across the Perspectives in Locally Led Development series (Box 1).

> **Box 1. Definitions**
>
> **The following definitions are used across the Perspectives in Locally Led Development series:**
>
> **Local actors**: citizens and entities based and operating within the local context of reference, subject to local laws, whose actions are centred on local issues.
>
> **Locally led development co-operation**: development co-operation that supports locally led humanitarian and development assistance by recognising and enabling diverse local actors' agency in: i) **framing**; ii) **design**; iii) **delivery,** including control over resources; and iv) **accountability and learning**.
>
> **Locally led development**: an ongoing development process where diverse local actors exercise agency across development policy and programme dimensions (framing, design, delivery, accountability) in given local operating contexts.
>
> Source: *Learning by example: Pathways towards effective locally led development co-operation* (OECD, forthcoming).

Why is locally led development important? Locally led development puts local and national actors at the centre of development and humanitarian programming. Doing this ensures that development solutions are more relevant – catering to local conditions – right from the design phase; that delivery of programming has greater reach and is more timely, cost-effective, and sustainable; and that there is greater accountability to, and feedback from, local people and institutions. In this way, locally led development approaches are good for all development partners – including multilateral organisations – fostering sustainable results and impact across all development and humanitarian efforts.

Why should multilateral organisations play a role in locally led development? DAC members have identified four main reasons:

- Member state interest: many member states – who govern and thus decide on multilateral organisation strategy – are actively promoting locally led development, and would like multilateral organisations to play a key role.

- Comparative advantage: multilateral organisations have comparative advantage in several areas related to locally led development. These include the ability to work in conflict affected environments and other politically sensitive areas that can be complicated for bilateral actors, the ability to work at scale, and – depending on the country context – the use of partner country systems. In addition, multilateral organisations are often perceived as more 'neutral' actors by local actors and country governments.

- Positive disruption: because of their presence on the ground, resource mobilisation ability and size, multilateral actors can be 'disruptive' in terms of approaches to development, and can access and drive agendas that may be out of reach for other actors.

- Resources: the share of ODA allocated to multilateral organisations is significant. In 2022, forty-three per cent of official development assistance (ODA), or about USD 98.6 billion, was channelled to and through multilateral providers.

So how is funding to the multilateral system supporting locally led commitments? This paper has been developed to examine the evidence related to that question**.** As such, the paper shows that despite several dilemmas (Box 2) multilateral actors can - and are - supporting the pivot to locally led development, and indeed that some multilateral actors are leading the way, particularly those with larger budgets and greater in-country presence and influence (Section 2). The paper also highlights the critical role that bilateral providers should play in enabling this work, as members of governing boards and in their funding partnerships (Section 3). Finally, there are also suggested next steps: how multilateral and bilateral providers can pivot together to support locally led development (Section 4).

How will this paper be used? The results of this peer learning will serve three purposes. First, this paper will contribute towards commitments set out in the 2023 DAC High Level Meeting Communiqué: the development of practical approaches, measurement, and common guidelines on locally led development, and to help inform guidance on more effective engagement with multilateral partners. Second, findings will shape interviews with partners in the context of DAC Peer Reviews, which already consider how members enable and support local and participatory approaches. Finally, the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) will use the findings of this paper to inform the development of its new methodology for assessing multilateral organisations – MOPAN 4.0 – due to be rolled out from 2025 onwards.

Box 2. Dealing with the challenges inherent in locally led development

Development partners, including multilateral organisations, are encountering a range of challenges as they engage in locally led development.

Time is needed. Inclusivity will take time, dialogue platforms will need to mature, development systems will need to change, technical and absorption capacity will take time to scale up, and partnerships will need time as different actors learn to work together.

Locally led development will be different in different contexts. In some contexts, governments may be parties to a conflict or actively persecuting marginalised groups, complicating engagement. Capacity levels of local actors vary, meaning that locally led approaches will be easier, cheaper and faster in some places than others. Local laws and regulations – including around registration of civil society organisations (CSOs) – can restrict funding arrangements.

Safeguards will be needed around politically sensitive issues. Locally led development is not about sacrificing values or international good practice and evidence, but local actors may be uncomfortable about raising sensitive issues, such as LGBTQI+ rights or conflict prevention issues, with their government counterparts. Worse still, local CSOs working on sensitive issues may be at risk of becoming victims of harassment, arrest, or other physical danger.

Divergent priorities between DAC members, multilateral actors and local actors will need to be managed. Some global commitments and critical issues, such as those related to climate and human rights, may not be a priority for all governments.

Clarifying which local actors should be shaping the agenda. Local community, local government and national government priorities may be difficult to reconcile, particularly when marginalised and vulnerable groups have different needs and views from their national governments. Care will also be needed to avoid elite capture.

Disbursement pressure and absorption capacity will need to be responsibly reconciled. Multilateral organisations are often under pressure to disburse large sums rapidly, but local actors may not be able to absorb major funding injections.

Tokenism should be avoided. One local organisation is not a legitimate voice for an entire population. Funding a few local actors, especially if these actors are solely implementing international partner programmes, does not mean that the response is designed for the people and by the people. Inviting one local person to an international conference does not guarantee that all local concerns are now being heard.

Sustainable financing will be needed into the long-term. Local or national authorities may not be able to finance development approaches once international actors leave. Instead, if locally led solutions are to be sustainable, international actors will need to work with authorities to ensure domestic resource mobilisation or appropriate budget allocations, so finance can continue post-exit.

Locally led development should be seen as an investment, not a cost-saving measure. There are concerns that the pivot to locally led development might be motivated by a desire to save money, or used as a convenient way of phasing out when funding is cut, rather than as a real shift in the development approach.

Organisations will need to find ways to address these challenges, notably through policy dialogue, strategic investments, good financial analysis and management, and context-driven and evidence-based decision making.

Infographic 1. Multilateral actors and LLD

The PIVOT to LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

Multilateral actors

enabled by: *Bilateral actors*

Bilateral actors play a key role in influencing + enabling multilateral actors in the pivot to locally led development

DOING DEVELOPMENT DIFFERENTLY

- Breaking down power dynamics
- Fostering inclusivity + participation
- Enabling crisis pivots

ON GOVERNING BOARDS

- Hearing local voices
- Inserting LLD into strategy + norms
- Discussing risk tolerance

PROGRAMMING TO DRIVE CHANGE

- Promoting coordination + coherence
- Supporting decentralisation
- Valuing + strengthening local capacity

IN CAPITALS

- Multiannual, quality predictable, financing
- Promoting delegated authority
- De-risking lending

FINANCING INTERMEDIARIES

- De-risking financing
- Delivering at scale

IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

- Listening to local actors
- Harmonising approaches
- Investing in risk management systems

OUTLOOK

- Complementary bilateral/multilateral approaches to supporting locally led development in country
- Understanding what works and why

2. Multilateral organisations: supporting the pivot to locally led development

The multilateral system plays a useful role in locally led development. This includes joining the shift towards a locally led approach to development, driving change through programme design and delivery, and getting resources into the hands of local actors.

However, multilateral organisations are heterogeneous in mandates, governance, function and funding. This means that each organisation will have a particular comparative advantage in engaging with, and adding value to, locally led development. Therefore, strategic approaches and delivery of locally led development will vary from organisation to organisation.

Multilaterals and locally led approaches: doing development differently

How, and how much, to support and promote locally led solutions will always be context specific. In crisis contexts, if local or national authorities are parties to a conflict, under international sanctions, or actively persecuting people, then multilateral actors cannot actively engage with them as partners in the response. In these cases, locally led approaches will be limited to approaches led by communities. In other contexts, a wholesale shift to locally led development may be much more attainable, with national governments, local authorities, civil society, communities, and the local private sector all well positioned to drive and deliver their own development results.

In all these cases, multilaterals can play a key role by actively seeking entry points in their portfolios to ensure that development and humanitarian programming is led by local actors as agents in their own future.

Breaking down power dynamics

Multilateral organisations, as multistakeholder forums, play a key role in tackling the unequal power systems and structures that stifle human development, prosperity, and stability, thereby ensuring that the benefits of development and humanitarian programming are extended to all. This includes:

- **Ensuring local voices are heard in global debates.** For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) enabled 320 forcibly displaced and stateless persons to participate meaningfully in the 2023 Global Refugee Forum (UNHCR, 2024[1]).

- **Establishing multistakeholder forums** with local actors to advance development thinking. For example, the Local2030 coalition brings together UN entities, local and regional governments and their national governments, businesses, community-based organisations and other local actors, to support the localisation of the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Local2030, 2017[2]). Similarly, through South-South and triangular co-operation frameworks, and through Multi Partner Trust Funds, UN Development System organisations including UNDP and UNFPA foster co-operation between national government and non-government institutions.

- **Involving local actors in funding decisions**, and if possible, in steering committees that oversee and monitor project delivery. For example, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Country-based Pooled Funds are required to ensure the genuine, equitable and vocal participation of national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (OCHA, 2022[3]). Delivery of Lebanon's Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF), a multilateral/government partnership, is overseen by an Independent Oversight Board, including six civil society representatives (Lebanon 3RF, n.d.[4]).

- **Shifting dynamics around loan applications**, so that all major development projects are truly co-designed, and where possible, loan applications are initially developed by the client state rather than being designed by the staff of multilateral development banks (MDBs) – noting that environmental and social safeguards, including gender aspects, must be part of the design cycle.

Fostering inclusivity and participation

Multilateral actors play a useful role in increasing inclusion of local actors. They can make proactive efforts to ensure that programming is "whole of society", attuned to the diverse needs of different groups while also ensuring that no one is excluded. This is done by recognising the capacity of local actors to shape and co-produce how development decisions and policy are designed and delivered, including:

- **Promoting initiatives to ensure that marginalised groups**, for example internally displaced people and LGBTQIA+ groups**, have input into national policy and development plans**, including how these plans are financed, particularly if the finance will result in additional debt. For example, UN-Habitat builds and finances dialogue platforms between local government and communities living in informal settlements (UN-Habitat, 2022[5]). UN Women supports states to implement global gender standards, including providing technical and financial support to the Government of Liberia to ensure that policy, plans, programmes and budgets are gender responsive (UN Women, n.d.[6]).

- **Holding broad consultations as part of programme design**. This may include allowing local actors to choose the solution that works best for them from a range of options, and ensuring that programmes are based on an assessment of impacts and unintended consequences across all areas of society. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works with local actors to localise the SDGs (UNDP, 2024[7]); country ownership is at the heart of Gavi's dynamic resource mobilisation model (Gavi, 2020[8]); and Global Fund allocations are made through Country Co-ordinating Mechanisms, which include academic institutions, civil society, faith-based organizations, government, multilateral and bilateral agencies, nongovernmental organizations, people living with the diseases, the private sector and technical agencies. (Global Fund, 2023[9]). As of June 2022, the World Bank supported 373 active community led development projects in 96 countries, mostly supported by IDA. These community-led projects are particularly prominent in conflict, fragile and violence situations, and including responding to COVID-19, working in remote or insecure areas, climate change mitigation, local economic development, and decentralisation reforms (World Bank, n.d.[10]).

- **Shifting procurement to local providers of goods and services**, and ensuring, where possible, that the local private sector has a voice in how tender processes for development-related goods and services are set up and decided. More than half of Gavi vaccine suppliers are based in emerging markets, and a representative of the developing countries' vaccine manufacturing network has a seat on Gavi's board (Gavi, 2020[11]). The United Nations Children's Fund's (UNICEF) provides support to strengthen national supply chains, premised on the fact that strong national supply chains are critical to well-functioning public welfare systems and a driving force toward the achievement of the SDGs and advancement of the 2030 Global Health Security agenda (UNICEF, 2024[12]).

Enabling crisis pivots

Multilateral organisations often have a good understanding of which local actors are best suited for rapid scale-up if a crisis occurs, drawing on their long-term presence on the ground and their knowledge and existing partnerships with local actors and communities. Accordingly, multilateral organisations can be a useful intermediary for operational continuity in new and escalating crises, helping the international community to rapidly shift gears towards a crisis response led by local civil society actors. This might involve:

- **Rapidly moving funding for essential programmes towards non-governmental actors**. For example, following the events of August 2021, the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund, under Approach 2.0, shifted its projects outside the control of the Interim Taliban Administration to UN agencies and NGOs, including support to national civil society (World Bank Board of Executive Directors, 2022[13]) – keeping the response as locally led as possible in a complex operating environment.

Multilateral programming to enable locally led development: driving change through programming

The capacity and skills of local actors, and how well multilateral actors can engage with local actors and listen to the voice and needs of local communities, including from a gender angle, varies significantly from context to context. Therefore, promoting a locally led approach will also be context specific: easier, cheaper and faster to implement in some places than others.

Promoting co-ordination and coherence

Multilateral actors can help reduce transaction costs for local actors by implementing a co-ordinated approach to partnership between international and local actors, ensuring that local actors are not overwhelmed by paperwork and a plethora of different partners. This can be achieved by:

- **Establishing coherent strategies for partnering with local CSOs**. For example, Gavi has set out three strategic priorities for partnerships with civil society: political will and accountability, building and maintaining community demand for vaccines, and complementing public service delivery (Gavi, 2024[14]).
- **Ensuring that local organisations are not overloaded by multiple requests for partnership:** each with different approaches, different requirements for funding, and different reporting systems. For example, the South Sudan Humanitarian Country Team has adopted a coherent localisation strategy, accompanied by an action plan with targets and timelines (OCHA, 2023[15]). In other contexts, multilateral organisation practices still need to be aligned, including overhead allocation to local and national partners (Development Initiatives, UNICEF, 2023[16]), risk assessments and reporting requirements, short term funding and long turnaround times for proposals and onerous due diligence. In addition, DAC members would like multilateral actors to work harder to ensure that local actors are not over solicited, especially in crisis contexts, where local organisations are often asked to deliver projects that shift focus away from their core areas of intervention – shifting from advocacy to emergency food distribution, for example.
- **Finding ways to overcome the challenges that local CSOs face in difficult operating environments**. For example, almost no participatory mechanisms were established for discussion and decision making between CSOs and other COVID-19 stakeholders during the pandemic (OHCHR, 2022[17]).

Supporting decentralisation

In many contexts, effective local governance and local authority systems can play a key role in enabling locally led development. Multilateral actors can support this in various ways, all of which involve placing more staff in places where they work, outside of capitals and moving from "fly in fly out" experts to staff who can remain on the ground for long periods:

- **Involving local authorities in programme design and oversight structures.** For example, UNHCR co-leads protection clusters with local authority counterparts, where appropriate (MOPAN, 2024[18])

- **Supporting local authorities to monitor development progress at local level**. For example UN-Habitat supports cities, local and regional governments to carry out voluntary local reviews of progress towards the SDGs (UN-Habitat, 2024[19]).

- **Supporting decentralisation**, including advocating for local governments to receive a proportional share of national tax revenue and international funding. For example, the United Nations Recovery and Peacebuilding Programme is enhancing capacity for decentralisation and supporting administrative reforms to improve governance, local planning and delivery of services by local authorities across Ukraine (UNDP, 2024[20]).

Valuing and strengthening local capacity

Valuing and supporting the technical and institutional capacity of local and national actors (including country systems) is one of the first steps to advancing effective locally led development, albeit a commitment that must be supported long term. Multilateral actors, with their global reach and large, long-term country presence, thus who can accompany local actors for many years, have a critical role in:

- **Identifying institutional capacity gaps and needs**. For example, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has developed a toolkit to help countries identify gaps in their capacity to address climate change (UNFCCC, n.d.[21])

- **Building technical capacity to ensure that key local stakeholders have the knowledge, skills, and tools** to deliver development and humanitarian results. This can extend to building advocacy skills and quality assurance capacity. For example, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) provides online courses to build capacity for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation into sustainable development (UNDRR, 2024[22]). The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) created a Peer Learning Project that supports business communities in different countries to act in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (OHCHR, 2024[23]).

- **Strengthening the capacity of organisations, including government**. For example, UNDP in Sri Lanka supports local government, including improving local planning and service delivery, strengthening local governance systems and enhancing the ability of central government to support local government authorities (UNDP, 2024[24]). UNDP's Independent Evaluation office runs National Evaluation Capacities Conferences and supports related national evaluation capacity building activities (UNDP, n.d.[25])

- **Respecting duty of care for local actors.** When disaster strikes, local actors and their families may themselves be affected and in shock, and will need time to recover. In addition, local actors should not be put in harm's way in conflict situations – i.e. asked to work in insecure areas that are not considered safe for international staff.

Multilateral organisations as financing intermediaries: getting the resources to local actors

Many bilateral donors are reducing their direct partnerships with local actors, and are increasingly relying on intermediaries, particularly multilateral organisations, to channel funds and undertake the related administration and due diligence work.

De-risking financing for local actors

Providing finance to local actors can seem risky for donors. Donors have identified a range of risks, either directly related to funding, such as financial risk and absorption capacity, or related to different expectations around quality standards and expected delivery timeframes, or to more fundamental issues such as the respect of humanitarian principles.

To help manage risks in international-local partnerships, multilateral organisations are:

- Managing coherent due diligence processes with local actors and sharing the outcomes to reduce the burden of multiple assessments on local partners. For example, the UN Partner Portal, established by 12 UN agencies, helps local CSOs learn about UN partnership processes, set up single online profiles accessible to all, view UN partnership opportunities and submit concept notes. It includes a harmonised CSO partner declaration accepted by all 12 UN agencies (UN Partner Portal, 2018[26])

- Ensuring the right safeguards are in place. This includes raising awareness and ensuring the right training and tools are in place to deliver on, for example, global commitments on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (PSEAH). For example the UN Partner Portal features a common assessment on PSEAH for implementing partners (UN Partner Portal, n.d.[27]).

- Delivering policy aims without compromising the political presence or security of the in-country staff of DAC members. For example, the Global Financing Facility (GFF) works with local partners, including governments, civil society, and youth, on access to contraceptives, reducing adolescent pregnancy rates and other sensitive issues that could be too controversial for foreign actors to engage in directly (GFF, 2024[28])

- Taking on risk that is beyond the risk appetite of bilateral actors. Some donors have domestic legal frameworks or policy commitments that prevent them from working in different environments. Where these donors are unable to intervene directly, multilateral actors, with their ability to partner with local actors, can help these donors deliver results that are locally led.

- Managing multiple small grants. In some situations, local actors do not have the absorption capacity to take on the large grants that bilateral donor systems are often set up to provide. In these cases, multilaterals can step in to deliver the smaller funding and grants for local organisations. For example, in 2022, OCHA's Country-Based Pooled Funds allocated 28% of their total funds to local and national organisations, many in the form of small grants (OCHA, 2023[29]). UNOPS's LIFT livelihoods programme in Myanmar partners with over 260 CSOs under a two-tiered funding model, and is working with local NGOs to help them become intermediaries in their own right in the next phase (UNOPS, n.d.[30])

- Ensuring overheads of local organisations are covered. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has produced guidance on the provision of overheads to local and national partners, recognising that overheads are critical for these organisations' survival and sustainability, but that donors are often unable to provide these costs directly (IASC, 2022[31]).

Delivering at scale

The extensive footprint of multilateral actors can help scale up local successes, transfer ideas from one local context to another, including across countries and regions, and ensure that learning about locally led development is applied across a range of programming.

- Locally-led development as part of the business model. As of June 2022, the World Bank supported 373 active CLD projects in 96 countries – including 96 countries supported by the International Development Association (IDA) – for a total lending of USD 42.4 billion (69% of which is IDA or IDA/blend). (World Bank Group, n.d.[32]).

- Taking local ideas to scale. For example, UNDP's Accelerator Labs promote local innovations to fast-track sustainable development, taking them to scale where possible and sharing learning across the 91 Labs around the world (UNDP, 2024[33]).

- Promoting peer learning across local actors. For example, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) organises an annual International Mayors' Forum to accelerate local progress (UN DESA, 2024[34]).How bilateral partners enable and reinforce multilateral actors in pursuit of locally led development.

3.   How bilateral partners enable and reinforce multilateral actors in pursuit of locally led development

As funders and board members of multilateral organisations, and development partners present in partner countries, bilateral partners have a huge stake and responsibility in the governance, programming and operations of multilateral partners. Accordingly, how bilateral partners decide to partner and wield influence from their administrative headquarters and on governing boards can enable or obstruct multilaterals from actively seeking entry points for locally led development, and ensure that development and humanitarian programming is led by local actors as agents in their own future.

How bilateral partners can support multilateral actors to do development differently

The broad mandate and membership of multilateral actors offers an opportunity for bilateral partners to untangle themselves from national interest and benefit from a more politically neutral cover to engage and partner with local actors in partner countries, including in politically sensitive environments like fragile contexts. By adapting their own behaviour, bilateral providers can strengthen multilateral systems, allowing for greater inclusivity and flexible procedures that recognise and promote the agency of local actors. The following sections include ways in which DAC members can support multilateral actors in the pivot to locally led development.

Fostering inclusivity and participation

Board level:

- **Strengthen lines of communication between board-level discussions and their national presence in partner countries** by systematically requesting partner country offices to provide feedback (based also on contact with national and local authorities) when country strategies and programmes are discussed by the board. For example, Switzerland implements a so-called "elevator approach" within their institutional set up that allows for systematic knowledge sharing and co-ordination from local level to influence policies at the board level (OECD, 2024[35]).
- **Include local voices.** Where relevant, invite diverse groups, communities and stakeholders (e.g. women-led organisations) to participate in formal and informal board sessions, and in governance structures, mirroring the important role of youth organisations as a sounding board for advice. In particular:
  a) Ensure that structurally excluded groups are heard, as local power structures may determine which voices are included or excluded in formal consultations.
  b) Seek to ensure all views are heard, as decisions on what local voices to elevate necessarily excludes or can delegitimise other diverse views.
  c) Avoid a tokenistic, or symbolic nod to diversity and inclusion, without an intent of meaningful engagement with local actors or openness to advance greater inclusivity and participation.
  d) Ensure that partner country governments represented on boards of multilateral organisations are not overloaded with documents, and have the space to contribute meaningfully.

- **Push multilateral organisations towards simplified reporting templates and lighter operating procedures** to allow more local organisations to access funding and demonstrate accountability**.** This may include adapting reporting requirements in proportion to funding volumes, accepting reporting in local languages, and/or standardising third-party certification or mutual recognition to minimise the burden on local actors. Canada's support for the Equality Fund illustrates how international intermediaries can streamline due diligence. The Equality Fund supports women's rights organisations with core, flexible funding, using a common reporting framework to reduce grantee demands (Equality Fund, 2024[36]).

Partner country level:

- Work to ensure that local authorities and actors, including women and structurally excluded groups, sit on steering committees for projects and programmes funded multilaterally. This can help ensure that local actors are involved in defining country programmes alongside partner governments. To support this work, accept higher administrative costs to pay for the travel costs and per diems of local actors. Elevate the role of local voices in pooled fund advisory boards or steering committees, including clear roles in decision making. For example, Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) encouraged the inclusion of local civil society representatives in the steering committees of UN Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund - including the window on Forced Displacement (WPH Fund, 2024[37]).

- Ask multilateral organisations to plan for sufficient time and budget sufficient resources for thoughtful outreach, feedback, the translation of materials into local languages and the closure of feedback loops. Be willing to accept trade-offs between budget execution and locally led approaches that may take more time.

Breaking down power dynamics

At capital:

- Review delegation of authority to country offices, to make best use of donor staff that know and understand the context and relevant multilateral partners well. Country offices that can make operational and resourcing decisions themselves are likely better positioned to observe how multilateral partners can contribute to shared objectives and goals. Channelling funding through multilateral partners, and ensuring multilateral engagement with a locally led development approach, is likely best done at country level rather than at headquarters.

- Equip country offices with the capacity to engage with multilateral partners, including in support of locally led development, as part of their objectives. A strong country presence can help strengthen relationships with multilateral partners in partner countries, establish stronger local networks and enable robust feedback loops from country office back to capital and board.

Board level:

- Support formal roles for local stakeholders (individuals, businesses, communities, institutions, and governments) as agents primarily responsible for defining priorities, standards involved in the framing, design, delivery and accountability of multilateral programming. For example, member states can ask multilateral organisations to systematically encourage and support civil society engagement in operations and to transfer information to local communities. For example, with encouragement from its board, the African Development Bank (AfDB) will soon release its first ever Bank-Civil Society Action Plan 2024-2028. The AfDB is also working to equip its five regions with a dedicated CSO officer and is piloting systematic civil society participation of steering committees for regional agriculture projects and programmes.

- Incentivise multilateral actors to increase numbers of staff with advisory, expert or fiduciary responsibility in partner countries. These staff will be critical for ensuring that local actors are involved in identifying needs, setting priorities, designing programmes, implementation, setting standards, monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Indeed, locally led programming is more likely when people in country offices have the delegation of authority to react and adapt procedures and operations close to where implementation takes place. For example, forthcoming research on multilateral development bank reform refers to the fact that clients (partner countries) are demanding a stronger country presence to engage in policy dialogue – which provides an opportunity to also value and include other local voices.

Partner country level:

- **Ask difficult questions and listen.** Bilateral partners can incentivise multilateral actors to scale up the involvement of local actors in programming, working towards a solution where local actors are primarily responsible across each of the dimensions outlined in Table 1. Taking time to listen, engaging in a two-way dialogue, and considering a diversity of views - including those of locally employed staff – early in the process is an important aspect.

Table 1. Dimensions to consider when discussing the involvement of local actors

What is the agency of diverse local actors in development co-operation?			
Framing	**Design**	**Delivery**	**Accountability**
Priorities: identifying challenges and needs and setting development co-operation priorities including capacity strengthening	**Programmes & projects:** planning, designing, and adapting	**Funding:** accessing flexible and sustained funding and controlling its use	**Accountability locus:** defining the lines of accountability and learning
Standards: setting guiding principles and standards for accountability and learning	**Partnerships:** designing partnership & collaboration mechanisms	**Processes:** selecting management & delivery processes/practices (e.g., financial, auditing, procurement)	**Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL):** developing frameworks and selecting, producing, and sharing evidence

Source: Learning by example: Pathways towards effective locally led development co-operation, OECD (forthcoming[38]).

Enabling crisis pivots

At capital and board level:

- **Provide multi-year, predictable and preferably unearmarked funding to multilateral actors**. Flexible funding can be redirected to underfunded emergencies or priorities and can more easily pivot towards working with local actors. Predictable, multi-year funding recognises that locally led development requires a long-term time horizon, commitment, and patience. Core funding and flexible budget lines allow multilateral institutions to maintain a country presence and scale up funding via local organisations should a crisis occur, and to better adapt to the evolving needs of affected communities in a timely manner.

How bilateral partners can support multilateral actors to drive change through locally led development

Bilateral providers often choose to fund and partner with multilateral organisations because they can absorb and spend large amounts of money. This efficiency argument, and the need to disburse at scale, is, for some donors, a major blockage to providing direct funding support to local actors. Because of this, multilateral actors will continue to play a major role in not only ensuring that development is locally led, but also in passing through funding to local organisations and actors.

Promoting co-ordination and coherence

At capital:

- **Consider staff exchanges with multilateral organisations** to build greater awareness of policies or strategies that create right conditions to support locally led development, identifying future opportunities for collaboration. For example, Switzerland seconds staff to UNHCR, in part for this purpose.

Board level:

- **Encourage the multilateral system to commit to locally led development at a system-level.** For example, the United Nations Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) – to be negotiated at the end of 2024 and adopted by the UN General Assembly – is an opportunity to set out expectations around the role of the UN development system in locally led development.

- **Set out a clear statement of purpose on locally led development at board level and integrate locally led development into strategic policy documents and monitoring requirements.** Regular reporting to executive boards on progress towards locally led development will help signal successes and identify challenges to address. For example, board members ensured that UNICEF's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan included a renewed focus on local actors (UNICEF, 2022[39]). In addition, UNICEF's annual reporting to the executive board shows that 30% of its humanitarian resources go directly to local actors, exceeding the Grand Bargain target of 25% (UNICEF, 2023[40]).

- **Encourage the collection of corporate-level data to better understand how multilateral organisations are engaging with locally led approaches.** This may include, for example, incentivising greater transparency around where resources are going, what type of support is provided to local actors (emergency, long-term), the type of local actor (grassroot, women-led, local authority), the sector, criteria to report against, etc – using harmonised reporting practices where possible, and focusing on the direction of travel and learning, rather than on quantitative milestones. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contract awards with UNICEF specify how the organisation is expected to report on localisation.

Partner country level:

- Agree on joint outcomes with multilateral actors based on local results frameworks to co-ordinate localised approaches with government and incentivise multilateral actors to work together. For example, discussions on the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCF), help the UN system to systematically engage with national and local authorities.

Supporting devolution or decentralisation

Partner country level:

- **Harmonise support to decentralisation with multilateral actors.** Where a country has a decentralisation agenda, bilateral and multilateral actors can co-ordinate their support to local authorities. For example, UNDP and USAID work with the Kenyan Council of Governors and county governments to support the country's devolution agenda, by strengthening institutional capacity, financing development programmes and delivering basic services at the county level (Council of Governors, 2022[41]).
- **Ensure that multilateral actors support local governance and work with municipalities and communities.** This includes engaging local authorities in programme design and delivery, capacity development and technical assistance, and/or lead roles in monitoring and accountability. For example, bilateral and multilateral partners can work together to support subnational structures closer to service delivery (where these exist) and look into opportunities to increase sub-sovereign lending for MDBs and non-sovereign lending for bilateral donors.

Valuing and strengthening local capacity

Board level:

- **Accept higher overhead and administrative costs for multilateral support.** Local actors require funding for their own systems and administrative processes, so that they can access, deliver, use and report on international funding. All this comes at a cost. For example, UNICEF, with board support, now advances 7% overhead cost to all its partners, including local partners.

Partner country level:

- **Ensure overhead costs are systematically accessed and used by local actors.** For example, UNICEF is translating its commitment of including 7% in overhead costs to local actors into its Programme Cooperation Agreements.
- **Ensure that, where possible and appropriate, multilateral organisations are working to strengthen country systems by using them.** National procurement and public financial management systems, including at the subnational level, are unlikely to improve if they are bypassed. Investing in public financial management and procurement systems, including by working with civil society and community groups to ensure greater accountability, can help strengthen local capacity.

How bilateral partners can support multilateral actors in getting the resources to local actors

Multilateral organisations are attractive for donors; they can absorb a significant volume of funding, pass it on to local actors, and deliver at scale. Bilateral providers can play an important role in making sure that in funding multilateral organisations risks are managed and not simply transferred to local actors. The aspiration to share – rather than transfer – risks to the final implementer creates a more conducive environment to rebalance power in favour of local actors.

De-risking financing for local actors

<u>At capital</u>

- **Promote the use of instruments and modalities that help shift some risk away from the partner country or client.** For example, local currency loans protect governments and local communities against foreign currency fluctuation and financial risk, helping create security against future financial shocks. The *Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau* development bank (KfW) partnered the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and the African Development Bank (AfDB), along with other partners, to promote corporate bond issuances in local currencies by working with African issuers, investors and intermediaries (ALCBFUND, 2021[42]).

- **Promote dialogue on risk sharing from the start:** A good example can be found in the Risk Sharing Framework for humanitarian actors established under the joint leadership of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) and InterAction in 2021 (Risk Sharing Platform, 2022[43]). The idea is to avoid transferring risks, or generating new risks, that actors in the delivery chain may not be able or equipped to respond to or accept. The following principles to improve risk sharing are slightly adapted to apply both to the humanitarian and development co-operation chain of delivery from bilateral to multilateral/intermediary through to the final implementer.
  1. Decide on a collaborative approach through dialogue based on an aspiration to equitably share risks.
  2. Encourage a confidential, non-punitive process of sharing information to enable collaboration.
  3. Focus on sharing "key" risks – systemic or severe risks – that have the most profound consequences for the delivery chain.
  4. Consider all risks, not only risks to one's own organisation, ensuring that local actors in less equitable positions are adequately considered and represented, and that their capacity is valued and strengthened.
  5. Openly discuss how norms, requirements and partnership approaches transfer or generate new risks either directly or indirectly (via multilateral or other intermediaries) and impact ability to delivery effectively.
  6. Consider the risk and cost of inaction.
  7. Deploy good practices and preventive measures to reduce likelihood of risks arising. Agree on measures for sharing or not sharing risks in advance.
  8. Work to ensure that contracts, budgets, risk sharing policies and internal guidelines clarify, codify and resource risk-sharing measures.

<u>Board level:</u>

- Review international organisations' risk appetite statement on what risks an entity is willing to accept as the basis for making strategic risk decisions. Strengthening locally led development may require the Board to accept higher programmatic risks to achieve longer-term sustainable results. USAID's recently updated risk appetite statement goes in this direction (USAID, 2022[44])

- Talk openly about risk tolerance. Upfront conversations between multilateral organisations and their boards to manage risk management expectations will be important so that the organisation feels authorised to work with local actors as much as possible. This may include agreements about risk tolerance levels, a mutual statement of understanding that working with local actors inherently bears more risk.

- Ensure that the due diligence operations of multilateral entities are funded and fit-for-purpose. Living up to commitments in the UN Funding Compacts regarding core contributions is one way to strengthen core systems that identify and manage risks related to partnering with local actors. As core funding decreases as a share of overall funding provided to United Nations' organisations, ensuring that the core systems, or "scaffolding", withstand the test of time is paramount. In addition to regular resources, a handful of donors have invested in strengthening systems in place for preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, countering corruption, whistleblower mechanisms and protection.

- Support multilateral organisations to practice local procurement wherever appropriate. Earmarked funding to multilateral organisations should not come with special requirements or conditions to procure goods or services from the donors' private sector. Parallel financing, which leaves the door open for bilateral providers to promote the provision of goods and services tied to their national private sector, should also be avoided.

Partner country level:

- **Invest in risk management systems in collaboration with other partners.** Invest in national and local accountability mechanisms, such as audit bodies or civil society watchdogs and promote the awareness of whistleblowing mechanisms for local populations. Strong systems, when fully used, benefit both development partners and local actors.

4.   Outlook

As this paper demonstrates, multilateral actors can, and do, support the pivot towards locally led development, through adapting their approach to development, shifting towards locally led design and delivery of programming, and by enabling local actors, including by acting as funding intermediaries. Alongside this, DAC donors are making efforts to create an enabling environment, with examples of good practice at capital, board level and in partner countries.

However, the approach to locally led development is still piecemeal across the multilateral system. Ensuring that all multilateral actors make the necessary shift, and that all DAC members enable this pivot, will take further learning and effort. This will require two actions:

Complementary approaches to support locally led development in-country

As demonstrated in this paper, approaches to locally led development will always be situation specific, linked to the characteristics of the particular context, to the range of local actors present, and to the types of bilateral and multilateral engagement in that country. This means that the right approach to locally led development will vary from country to country, but it must be coherent and complementary across the international community, and should include:

- A political economy analysis of local actors can help development partners understand the relevant economic and political dynamics that may constrain or enable change. One aspect of political economy analyses is understanding and reflecting on the allocation of decision-making power. To this end, a decision mapping tool can provide a method for an inclusive process of mapping, reflection and discussion throughout the programme cycle (King et al., 2023[45]).

- A mapping of local actors to help identify opportunities for locally led approaches and programming that could be brought to scale. For example in 2021, Luxembourg decided to shift its bilateral support to 22 municipalities in Cabo Verde to fund a larger Joint Programme led by the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO), UNDP and UN-Habitat with the government and local authorities to address capacity constraints, generate revenue, manage existing resources, and provide better access to basic services and economic infrastructure.

- A coherent approach to equal partnerships with local actors, to avoid overwhelming them with different approaches, timeframes, access and due diligence requests and reporting requirements.

- Working through country programmes where local actors play a leadership role. Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) are a new plurilateral structure for accelerating the phase-out of fossil fuels. These intergovernmental partnerships coordinate financial resources and technical assistance from countries and multilateral actors together with communities and partner countries. To date, JETPs have targeted emerging economies that produce and consume coal on a large scale (DCAP, n.d.[46]).

- A focus on promoting greater accountability to citizens and other local communities – strengthening local systems to track local leadership of the development efforts, the flow of resources, and results, and to disseminate the results via appropriate media, in a range of languages and at community level – taking account of, giving account to and being held to account by the supported populations.

Understanding what works and why: learn and document good practices

This peer learning paper is an attempt to map the range of approaches that multilateral and bilateral actors are using to pivot towards locally led development. There is scarce evidence about whether locally led development leads to more sustainable outcomes and impact. Researchers should consider this an important issue for donors, governments, communities and the research community in the Global South and Global North, and evaluation plans should include locally led initiatives. Some approaches are already considered good practice, others will take time to bed down, and some will fail. It will be important to learn from all of these efforts, including:

- **Developing a theory of change about how and why locally led development leads to more sustainable outcomes and impact**. The theory of change will help build the narrative and case for locally led development, and enable collection of the right evidence to back up the assumptions.

- **Set out ambitions, strategies, and objectives for locally led development and measure results.** Qualitative and quantitative methods can be used to measure progress in locally led development efforts. This will help multilateral organisations communicate results and encourage bilateral providers to enable multilaterals in this work.

- **Documenting good practice examples, where possible based on evidence collected and analysed by local actors.** These good practice examples could be shared in a global repository – like the OECD's Tools Insights Practices platform - to ensure that they can be replicated and scaled up across contexts, that failures can be avoided, and that emerging trends and challenges can be acted upon by the global policy community, including DAC members. DAC Peer Reviews, and MOPAN performance assessments, could also help to document good practices by DAC members, and multilateral organisations, respectively.

- **Pooling and drawing on existing resources, using locally available data**. For example, the IASC Task Group 5 on Localisation includes guidance, policies, good practices, case studies, and information on localisation initiatives in its online repository (Reliefweb, 2024[47]; IASC, 2024[48]). Supporting data collection efforts at the community level, including household surveys and census data can help better map the population and needs, establishing metrics to track progress over time.

- **Reviewing the successes and challenges of locally led development in particular contexts,** to help shift mindsets, debunk false assumptions and inform future funding decisions. Informal groups led by local actors could provide the right forum for this work.

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