

DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION DIRECTORATE

Peer learning on Locally led development – DAC members deep dive: Ireland

This Perspectives note provides key lessons for Ireland's approach to locally development co-operation. It examines Ireland's approach across four enablers. The first focuses on policy and strategies for locally led development. The second explores the institutional arrangements including the importance of human resources and stakeholder participation. The third interrogates the financing enablers, including the provision of overheads and engagement through a range of intermediaries. The fourth explores the management systems that enable better locally led development including risk management approaches and learning from programming.

Related case studies of member practices can be found on the [OECD platform Development Co-operation TIPs - Tools Insights Practices](#).

This note is part of a broader peer learning exercise on locally led development within the Development Assistance Committee [\[DCD/DAC\(2023\)5\]](#). It can be read together with perspectives on Switzerland and Canada on thematic issues, available [here](#).

Contacts:

Renick Irvine, Renwick.IRVINE@oecd.org,
Joëlline Bénéfice, Joelline.BENEFICE@oecd.org,
Anjeza Llulla, Anjeza.LLULLA@oecd.org.

JT03548130

**Peer learning on locally led development -
DAC member deep dive
Ireland**

1. Introduction

Locally led development co-operation is gaining momentum and traction, galvanised by recent policy commitments. Members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) have long recognised the importance of local actors for achieving and sustaining development progress in partner countries. Many DAC members are now reinforcing their efforts in this area, but understandings and approaches vary considerably. Locally led development means that local stakeholders should have agency for development co-operation: in framing; design; delivery, including control over resources; and accountability.

Despite recent advancements, DAC members continue to face significant barriers to advancing development co-operation that is genuinely locally led. At least two key parameters influence the approach taken by DAC members in their development co-operation and the extent to which it enables locally led development. The first is the DAC member's (or another provider) domestic context. The second is the local context (country, regional, local, international) in which the intervention happens. The relationship between the two frequently determines the approach DAC members take.

This perspective note provides an in-depth institutional analysis of Ireland's system for development co-operation. It aims to understand how its policies, institutional arrangements, financing, and management systems - the foundational enablers - are facilitating or constraining local actor agency in development co-operation (Figure 1). For each enabler, the perspective note unpacks what Ireland is doing and why, whilst highlighting existing good practices, opportunities, and critical barriers to locally led development co-operation. It can be read together with perspectives on Switzerland and Canada. Complementary perspective papers delve into cross-cutting issues and analyse the influence of local contexts. These notes informed a comprehensive synthesis report identifying possible pathways towards more effective locally led development co-operation.

Figure 1. Understanding DAC Member Foundational Enablers¹



2. Policy

Ireland's approach to enabling locally led development co-operation is supported by its commitment to being a flexible funder that prioritises the empowerment of the most vulnerable and marginalised communities. Its own relatively recent experience of economic and political transition provides a strong rationale for its engagement in development co-operation and enables it to emphasise mutuality in its partnerships with local (including government and civil society) actors.

While it has not chosen to develop a standalone locally led development policy, its commitment to the agenda is embedded in its existing policy frameworks and strategies, including in its international development policy, "A Better World". It is also reflected in other documents such as its, Civil Society Policy, Africa Strategy, as well as its commitment to DAC Recommendations on Enabling Civil Society in Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Assistance and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. Ireland is also a signatory of the Donor Statement on Supporting Locally Led Development and the Grand Bargain. Meanwhile, **Ireland's Official development assistance (ODA) budget has steadily increased in recent years and it continues to prioritise its focus on Africa and poverty reduction,** while not neglecting responsibilities in other regions like Ukraine, the West Bank and Gaza.²

Shifts in operating contexts, including fragile contexts where Ireland's on-the-ground presence may be constrained due to security concerns, have influenced its approach to locally led development, through increased reliance on the multilateral system and local actors, for example in Sudan. Ireland adapted very quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic and has continued to apply lessons learned from this in relation to flexibility and the value of local actors. Learnings from the management of the COVID-19 crises also prompted a shift in how Ireland funds and engages with crisis-affected communities.

Over the past year, locally led development has been a central focus of discussions within the Development Cooperation Africa Division (DCAD). The emphasis on "further behind first" and "leave no one behind" is both a policy and a programmatic approach, guiding programming that involves strengthening government systems and capacity, while working directly with civil society and communities. Ireland views locally led development as an approach that can support reaching "furthest behind first". However, Ireland recognises that many of the prejudices and forms of social exclusion that people who are furthest behind face exist at a local level, as well as at a national and global level. Ireland aims to operationalise locally led development by working directly with local actors through its missions, even in challenging environments. Grand Bargain commitments have provided a further framework through which to change how Irish Aid works, aligning with the evolving landscape of locally led development.

Since 2023, Ireland's focus has been on constructing a more comprehensive narrative surrounding its approach to locally led development. Employing a bottom-up approach, it has examined its working methods and programmes and used them as a foundation for defining locally led development.³ DCAD is also engaged in mapping out its interactions with various stakeholders in locally led development, such as national authorities, and assessing their role as an influencer, including in partnerships with multilateral organisations and international non-governmental organisation (INGO) partners. Additionally, Ireland is interested in understanding what lessons can be drawn from the locally led development policies of their partners and how they, in turn, learn from Irish Aid. This includes learning from challenging environments like Viet Nam, Cambodia, and Ethiopia (Box 1).

3. Institutional arrangements

Leadership and responsibility

Internally, support and progress towards understanding and developing Ireland’s approach is led by senior management and is being galvanised by strong champions in DCAD, both at Headquarters (HQ) and missions. It is also supported by political commitment as reflected by the leadership of the Minister of State on supporting board diversity, including representation from the Global South. This is complemented by development of good practice in the areas of locally led humanitarian action, climate adaptation and peace building, as well as broader engagement with civil society organisations.

Ireland has a highly decentralised system, with appropriate programmatic autonomy being given to Irish country missions and national grant managers, which have a long history of collaboration with local actors and are perceived as trusted and principled partners. This enables Ireland’s continued engagement with local actors in increasingly challenging environments (e.g. Viet Nam – see Box 1). Moreover, embassies remain Ireland’s main channel to provide direct (including core) funding to local actors and engage with them in the development of innovative programmes (e.g. Tanzania Grassroot Action for Gender Equality).

Box 1. Working in challenging environments: Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos

Ireland’s approach to supporting locally led development in Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos faces challenges particularly around issues such as registration and obtaining permission for civil society partners to implement projects. Across the region there has also been particular pressure on local organisations that work on themes such as climate change, human rights and anti-corruption.

Ireland is committed to strengthen governance, accountability and citizen participation in Viet Nam, Cambodia and Laos. Efforts are made to identify spaces where collaboration with local civil society can continue despite challenging conditions. When selecting international and local partners, Ireland seeks to drive localisation as much as possible, build organisational capacity, and prioritise the most vulnerable. As part of this approach, Ireland has worked to develop new modalities, such as building consortia between international and local actors, developing joint research initiatives and facilitating local peer learning.

Strong local networks, intelligence-sharing forums (including with other development co-operation partners), and the unique geopolitical position of Irish funding, all contribute to a sensitive approach that seeks to find new solutions and ways of operating in different contexts.

Ireland’s decentralised system is highly aligned with the needs of locally responsive practice, but it can come with challenges. There is a common priority to avoid developing a top-down approach to locally led development, based on compliance for instance with corporate locally led development targets. At the same time, there is space for applying a more coherent evaluative framework to its approach, based on the definition it has developed through its mapping process. This could involve integrating locally led development indicators and principles into existing guidelines and accountability frameworks, for example: the A Better World Tracker, or the guidelines being developed for conducting evaluations by the Evaluation and Audit Unit (see Measurement and Learning section).

Human resources, capacities and skills

Officers in diplomatic and development specialist grades are required by their conditions of service to apply for and to undertake postings on a regular basis throughout their careers. This rotation, although having an impact on continuity of relations, has contributed to strengthening the capacity and thematic knowledge of staff, who tend to have a good general knowledge of both HQ and mission functions. Rotation also creates the opportunity to promote cross-sector, multidisciplinary and integrated expertise on locally led development, across these different functions.

As missions are the primary channel to provide direct funding to local actors, efforts to increase direct partnerships may require either increased human resources in missions, or increasing partnerships with a system of local intermediaries. The presence of local advisors that are not subject to rotation enables the creation of long-standing relationships with local actors. It also enables Ireland to draw on their deep contextual knowledge and experience in its approach to locally led development. The setting up of advisor groups (governance, gender, food systems etc) that hold regular meetings and workshops in Ireland and at missions has really helped to better integrate local perspectives to guide policy development.

Contexts characterised by restricted civic space have significant human resources (HR) implications. This includes the demands created by the need for constant conversations on risks and intelligence sharing among providers and partners. Working in such contexts requires regularly monitoring red lines and adapting approaches.

Stakeholder engagement and participation

There is considerable support amongst the Irish public for the work of Irish Aid. This widespread support for development co-operation, underpinned by human rights and social justice principles,⁴ has benefitted from the DCAD policies and initiatives in the sector of global citizenship education. There is an acknowledgment of a generational shift in Irish public perceptions, with younger people having a better understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and an expanded global view through social media.

Ireland has a long history of strong support to civil society organisations. It has a particularly strong indigenous Irish INGO sector. Amongst OECD DAC members, Ireland is one that provides the highest levels of funding to, and through civil society. This includes a high share of long-term, flexible funding to civil society organisations (CSOs).⁵ Through the Ireland's Civil Society Partnership (ICSP), Irish Aid encourages a shift in CSOs practices from traditional charity-focused approaches to ones that promote mutuality, shared learning and co-developing solutions. For example, one of the benchmarks for each ICSP partner organisation is that it develops a locally led development policy. This requirement is proving to be a key entry point to improve the quality of partnerships between intermediaries and local actors and advance the locally led development agenda. The work of CSOs already advanced in their locally led development policies and practices such as Trócaire, the START Network and GOAL can also support peer learning and further influence internal thinking.

The Dóchas peer learning exercise on locally led development is another example of how Ireland's civil society partnerships are influencing the development co-operation ecosystem. Led by Dóchas, the Irish CSO national umbrella platform, the exercise involved 53 members, including ICSP partners, and smaller organisations, participating in a workshop series. The process was partly triggered by Ireland's requirement for ICSP partners to have a locally led development policy. Facilitated by Shruti Patel, the Global Mentorship Initiatives, the peer learning exercise covered various aspects of locally led development, including risk management, partnership assessment, funding, capacity, and power and decision-making. The exercise aimed to explore the fundamentals of what locally led development means

in the long-term, creating a safe space for sharing and deliberately avoiding a rigid definition to accommodate the diversity of partnerships.

Ireland successfully advocates for locally led approaches in international fora. For example, in the context of its work on climate, it has encouraged other development co-operation providers to adopt the Principles on Locally Led Adaptation (Box 2). Ireland is also active within the multilateral system to better understand and influence locally led development approaches (Box 3).

Box 2. Ireland's Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) Campaign: the Climate Unit

In early 2021, Ireland signed up to the [Principles for Locally Led Adaptation \(LLA\)](#). Since March 2023, Ireland (Irish Aid) and the United States (USAID) have been leading a joint advocacy campaign to raise awareness of locally led adaptation approaches and to encourage more governments to endorse the Principles. In 2023, the campaign resulted in seven additional governments committing to the Principles, bringing the total number of governments to 23. In addition, Ireland was heavily involved in the lead up to and during COP28 (December 2023) in numerous discussions on the implementation of these principles, especially around measurement and accountability for LLA with the Government of Mozambique subsequently endorsing the principles. The second phase of the campaign is continuing in 2024, with further calls for endorsement and the establishment of an intergovernmental community of practice to promote better implementation on the ground.

Ireland has been putting the LLA principles into practice in various ways. In the context of ICSP, many of the partners are in receipt of climate finance funding and their localisation policies align with the LLA principles. Ireland supports the Least Developed Country Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience (LIFE-AR). Established in 2019, it is a vehicle for delivering the LDC 2050 Vision for a climate-resilient future by encouraging a more ambitious climate response LIFE-AR aims to promote at least 70% of global climate finance to be spent directly at the local level, addressing the priorities of communities facing the most significant impacts of climate change. The current baseline is estimated to be 10% of climate finance that reaches the local level. In this endeavour, Uganda for example, as one of the frontrunner countries, has established a decentralised climate finance (DCF) mechanism. The process of setting up systems and structures for managing and implementing LIFE-AR has taken over four years, and has been a much longer and heavier process than originally envisaged. The implementation phase is now underway in a number of countries and Ireland will closely review the impact to see whether the goal of localisation is being met.

Going forward, Ireland can take more concerted efforts to communicate and elucidate its approach to locally led development amongst its partners. Ireland needs to better communicate its position on practices that can enable locally led development, including different opportunities to pass on indirect and overhead costs to local partners and its level of risk appetite. Ireland needs to better clarify its own position on overhead/indirect costs to sub-grantees and actively engage with its partners on how overheads are shared with local partners within the 6% HQ cost cap on ICSP partners, while also better communicating opportunities and flexibility to create other budget lines that can serve a similar purpose. For partners to take full advantage of the opportunities it creates, Ireland may need to package and communicate its approach to supporting locally led development more clearly. Regular dialogues between Ireland and its partners, including through embassies, contribute to this peer learning process, fostering a collaborative environment and ensuring ongoing support for locally led development initiatives. At the same time, Ireland can continue to advocate on this point with multilaterals.

4. Financing

Financing approaches and instruments

Ireland's provision of flexible, predictable and quality funding is an enabler for advancing locally led development. For example, the ICSP programme allows Irish Aid partners across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (HDP Nexus) to sign multi-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs).⁶ Even if funding contracts are signed yearly within the context of governmental annual budgetary cycles, the MoUs offer predictability of funding to partners, as through them Ireland commits to provide the agreed amount of funding to partners over the five-year period. Irish partners are therefore able to pass on this flexibility in the funding agreements signed with local partners. The benchmarks included in the MoUs agreed between Irish Aid and the CSO further help the partner to improve the quality of partnerships established with local actors and keep track of progress achieved. For example, benchmarks can include the level of on-granting to local actors (currently at 31% across ICSP projects) and the coverage of indirect costs for local partners. The mid-term review (MTR) of the ICSP programme in 2025 will provide an opportunity to monitor related progress towards more equitable partnerships.

Ireland has also provided considerable support for pooled funding mechanisms, including 14 Country Based Pooled Funds (CBPF) (constituting 25% of the Humanitarian Unit's humanitarian spend), which are an important, flexible source of funding for local organisations in crisis and conflict-affected settings (in 2022 28% of CBPF funding went directly to local or national organisations).⁷ Emphasis on quality funding in its humanitarian spend aligns with Ireland's Grand Bargain commitments, connected to a positive trend with increased flexible and multi-year funding each year. This includes ICSP, for which the unit provides five-year funding in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, including for local governments. The trend includes an increase in funding to multilaterals, including country-based pooled funds and innovate models like the START network. Irish Aid is also increasingly reflecting on **the role of consortia** in locally led development and has experience to share with mechanisms set up at the country level, for example in Mozambique and Uganda.

Particularly in its multilateral partnerships, however, **Ireland faces challenges in terms of identifying how and the extent to which its partners are enabling locally led development.** In 2021, 32% of gross bilateral ODA was channelled through multilateral organisations (earmarked contributions) and Ireland allocated 46.1% of total ODA as core contributions to multilateral organisations.⁸ Ireland can use its position as a strong funder of multilaterals to incentivise greater transparency and accountability amongst its partners on how they are supporting locally led development, both in terms of levels and quality of funding (Box 3). The development of a more tailored approach to address the complexity of the multilaterals could assist in this exercise.

Box 3. Influencing and supporting multilaterals on locally led development

As a strong funder of multilaterals, Ireland can play an important role in influencing how intermediaries enable locally led development co-operation. Ireland already employs various approaches to influence multilaterals. For example, because core funding is provided, influence on locally led development can occur through engagement with boards and governance structures (usually three times per year for board meetings). Influencing efforts are particularly focused on mobilising more local funding, building local partner capacity, and incorporating local expertise into rapid response mechanisms in its humanitarian funding. Ireland has encouraged capacity strengthening of local actors through, for example, a specific call for proposals in Ukraine on capacity strengthening.

Examination of partners' adoption of Grand Bargain commitments and actions taken to fulfil them is another way that Ireland influences its partners. The Grand Bargain is used by Ireland as both an internal and external accountability tool to advocate for quality funding for local actors, including through examining the progress being made against the Grand Bargain commitments of its multilateral partners. Because Ireland gives flexible funding to its multilateral partners it can pose critical questions to them about whether they enable flexible, long-term funding for local actors. In addition to engagement on the boards, this can occur in intensive bilateral engagements with multilaterals, including the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), where there has been a focus on increasing support to local actors, even those not formally registered. Collaborative efforts with like-minded partners also involve influencing the European Union (EU) and exploring ways to increase the percentage of funds directed to local actors by the EU.

Examples from Viet Nam, Sierra Leone and Tanzania demonstrate how Ireland is supporting direct and more equitable access to funding for local actors in its embassies. Ireland also operates an In-Country Micro Projects Scheme (ICMPS), which provides delegated sanction to participating Missions to directly support local NGOs to carry out small-scale development projects. Examples of working with governments, for example in Mozambique in areas including social protection, disaster risk reduction and health, involve a focus on building and strengthening systems, and identifying entry points within Mozambican institutions that have the capability and leadership required to drive locally led processes. Building on these good practices, **Ireland can take further steps towards working more directly with a diversity of local actors**, within and beyond its humanitarian programming.

Missions are seen as the most effective means to work directly with local actors and they have a significant level of autonomy. In addition to the ability to develop locally responsive country and regional strategies, grant managers at missions also have autonomy in financial decision-making. Nonetheless, enabling more direct access, as a central component of locally led development, will require thinking through resourcing and staffing implications, at both HQ and country level. Examples like Viet Nam demonstrate the additional time, contextual knowledge and engagement required for locally led development, particularly in challenging contexts.

Programming

There is a considerable level of flexibility for designing country programmes that are responsive to local needs and perspectives. Multi-year country strategies are developed following consultative processes involving a variety of local actors and experts. For example, the Southeast Asia regional strategy involved broad consultation with local actors, including academia, government, and the private sector. The regular assessment of country strategies, through their mid-term reviews and end of strategy evaluations, enables country missions to be responsive to changing needs. The guidelines for developing and

monitoring country strategies is another entry point for integrating locally led development, particularly in relation to local agency and influence.⁹

The flexible funding provided by Ireland, including under ICSP, enables its partners to engage in innovative programming approaches and locally led development efforts. For example, Trócaire, through the work of its Global Hub on Partnership & Localisation, has developed an inclusive approach to improving the quality of its partnerships. As part of this work, its local partners take part every two years in a survey to share feedback on ongoing partnerships, with results treated confidentially. The organisation is also engaging with other peers in a pilot project on due diligence passporting, as well as innovative models for capacity strengthening and sharing between intermediaries and local actors. GOAL's approach to supporting local systems is another example of programmatic innovation supported by Ireland, where GOAL is adopting a local systems approach to co-design interventions with various local actors, such as private sector entities, communities, civil society, and governments (Box 4).

Box 4. GOAL Local Systems Approach

Underpinning GOAL's approach to supporting communities to transition from ['from crisis to resilience'](#), is its local systems approach, which involves viewing locally led development as a transformative shift across a diverse range of local actors and their relationships. GOAL partners with 'local systems actors', positioning itself as a facilitator within the local system. This approach has involved collaborating with the private sector, to facilitate access to services for crisis-affected communities. For example, in agriculture, GOAL works with smallholder farmers, helping them enter the formal system with subsidies and training. GOAL strives to use existing markets and businesses, reducing risks for local actors and fostering the co-creation of solutions. The organisation focuses on systems change across different actors, such as in [the blue economy](#), addressing issues like small-scale fisheries, inclusive market systems, sustainable fishery, and traceability.

GOAL employs a resilience assessment approach ([the R4S Approach](#)) mapping local systems, using context-specific indicators, and measuring systemic resilience. GOAL's systems approach emphasises the interconnections between development and humanitarian funding, allowing for flexibility in funding approaches and the need for longer-term funding in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

GOAL aims to hone its technical capacities, leveraging its international expertise as an emergency responder while maintaining a deep connection with communities. Next steps for GOAL include developing a locally led development policy, emphasising partnerships over direct delivery, assessing capacities and skills through the Global Partnership Centre, adopting agile processes, allocating resources to local actors, engaging in conversations about risk-sharing, and strengthening capacities for equitable partnerships.

5. Management systems

Risk management

Ireland has adopted a flexible approach to risk management and has systems in place to manage and mitigate risks when they arise. Internally, risk is not necessarily seen as a barrier to further advance locally led development, despite a political environment sensitive to the risk of fraud in development co-operation. Given the strong reliance on intermediaries in funding programmes, further effort could be put into collaboratively identifying risk-sharing approaches to grant management. Ireland is currently reflecting on how its risk-sharing and risk management approaches could better enable locally led development,

including through learning from its partners like Trócaire (in piloting the ‘due diligence passport’), better communication with its partners and internally to ensure that staff/partners do not feel unnecessarily hamstrung by a *perceived* lack of risk tolerance. Ireland also recognises that there are risks involved in not supporting locally led development, especially in terms of impact.

The Evaluation and Audit Unit, reporting directly to the Secretary-General, plays an important role in the overall stewardship of ODA. The Unit engages with external auditing bodies and director management boards. Their focus extends to advisory services related to risk and evaluation, making them an important player in Ireland’s efforts to consolidate and scale up its approach to locally led development. For example, the unit is currently preparing evaluation guidelines, with an emphasis on updating the evaluation manual to guide colleagues, which provides an opportunity to integrate locally led development practices and principles.

The Standard Approach to Grant Management plays a central role in identifying and managing risks effectively, and it has led to more explicit articulation and analysis of risk in Ireland’s development programming. This involves identifying and understanding political, fiduciary, programmatic and organisational risks during the design stage, and putting in place clear protocols and guidelines for dealing with problems if they arise. This has contributed to a shift in Ireland’s approach to risk, with the need to articulate the case for taking risks becoming a more integral part of decision-making.

Nonetheless, **Ireland recognises that its systems can pose a barrier to locally led development,** particularly for smaller local organisations that may face challenges in terms of meeting risk management and due diligence requirements. There is also a sense amongst Irish civil society partners, surfaced during the Dóchas peer learning exercise, that locally led development involves the absorption of risk on the part of the providers like Irish Aid. Similarly, partners like the START Network have described their position as an intermediary to be akin to a ‘risk sandwich’, with greater efforts being needed on the part of providers to strategically share risk to enable locally led development.

Measurement and learning

Ireland’s ability to progress on its commitments will be greatly strengthened by an enhanced approach to its own internal learning around locally led development. This would enable it to clarify and communicate its approach, which would support its partners and promote peer learning with other DAC members, as well as develop a clearer understanding of its strengths and areas for further progress. Ireland may benefit from more centrally coordinated results monitoring, knowledge management and learning around locally led development. This will support its ability to gain a cohesive and comprehensive picture of what is being done to support locally led development, including what is working well and what can be improved going forward.

To further support this learning process, **Ireland would also benefit from applying an evaluative framework that measures locally led development,** across a range of contexts. It is recognised that Ireland is already working in a way that is aligned with locally led development in many areas, and it has begun to map out existing good practices in this regard. An important next step will be to more closely examine these good practice cases, to identify how and the extent to which they are enabling locally led development, particularly in relation to the fundamental goal of shifting power and enabling local agency.

The ICSP programme is an entry point for developing a bottom-up framework for monitoring and evaluating locally led development. The ICSP team monitors, on an annual basis, benchmarks integrated in MoUs signed with Irish civil society partners, which will form an important component of the mid-term review of the programme. These benchmarks include: accountability to affected populations (especially in the context of humanitarian programming); proportion of on-granting to local organisations (currently at 31% for the programme as a whole); provision of overhead costs for local partners; proportion of Global South leaders on boards; narrative reporting on locally led development progress, against the

partner's locally led development policies. These are negotiated benchmarks put forward by the partners, and so offer an opportunity for a bottom-up approach.

However, **the engagement of local actors in setting and establishing these benchmarks is less clear.** The evaluation guidelines being developed by the Evaluation and Audit Unit are an opportunity to operationalise locally led development principles connected to local agency in setting and establishing accountability frameworks and standards.¹⁰ Ireland plans to collaborate with EvalNet in developing these guidelines, drawing on their work and best practices.

6. Outlook

Ireland's principles of locally led development co-operation include a focus on equitable partnership, local ownership, mutual capacity strengthening and participation. It aligns these principles with its commitment to 'furthest behind first' in its international development policy, A Better World. In many ways, locally led development is already embedded in Ireland's approach to development co-operation, reflected in its commitment to flexible and locally responsive funding, decentralised institutional arrangements, and in its approach to establishing trust-based relationships with local actors (civil society and government) through its embassies.

Ireland has made considerable efforts to influence the development co-operation ecosystem, with notable examples in the climate, humanitarian and peace sectors. It has also used its close relationship with Irish civil society to influence their approaches, especially under the ICSP programme, where the requirement for partners to have a locally led development policy contributed towards triggering a national civil society dialogue on locally led development.

In taking its next steps, Ireland is faced with the challenge of developing a more cohesive and structured approach to locally led development, while maintaining its commitment to decentralised decision-making and flexible partnerships. There is a particular disinclination towards a top-down approach to locally led development involving the prescription of specific indicators or frameworks. Nonetheless, this peer learning exercise has pointed to areas where locally led development principles could be more strategically integrated, and progress tracked. It has also highlighted the need for additional clarity in relation to the opportunities Ireland creates in its funding models for enabling locally led development, including the provision of flexible funding to local organisations. Building on its good practices and addressing these challenges, there are three key areas where Ireland can make progress in consolidating and scaling up its approach to locally led development:

1. The ICSP midterm review will provide an opportunity to test out a **framework for assessing and tracking progress on locally led development.** While Ireland understandably would like to avoid top-down corporate locally led development indicators, its own internal learning would benefit from critically examining its practices through an evaluative locally led development lens. This learning would also support Ireland to package and communicate its approach and the opportunities it creates to its partners. This process can also draw on the locally led development framework developed for this OECD peer learning exercise.¹¹
2. There are opportunities to **integrate locally led development principles and practices into current systems and guidelines.** For example, these include the evaluation guidelines being developed by the Evaluation and Audit Unit, where the agency of local actors in establishing standards and defining lines of accountability can be considered. The Embassy Strategy Cycle Guidance is another clear entry point for integrating a wide range of locally led development considerations, building on the locally responsive and consultative model already in place.
3. In addition to its focus on quality funding, Ireland may need to consider how and the extent to which **working more directly with a diversity of local actors** (national and subnational

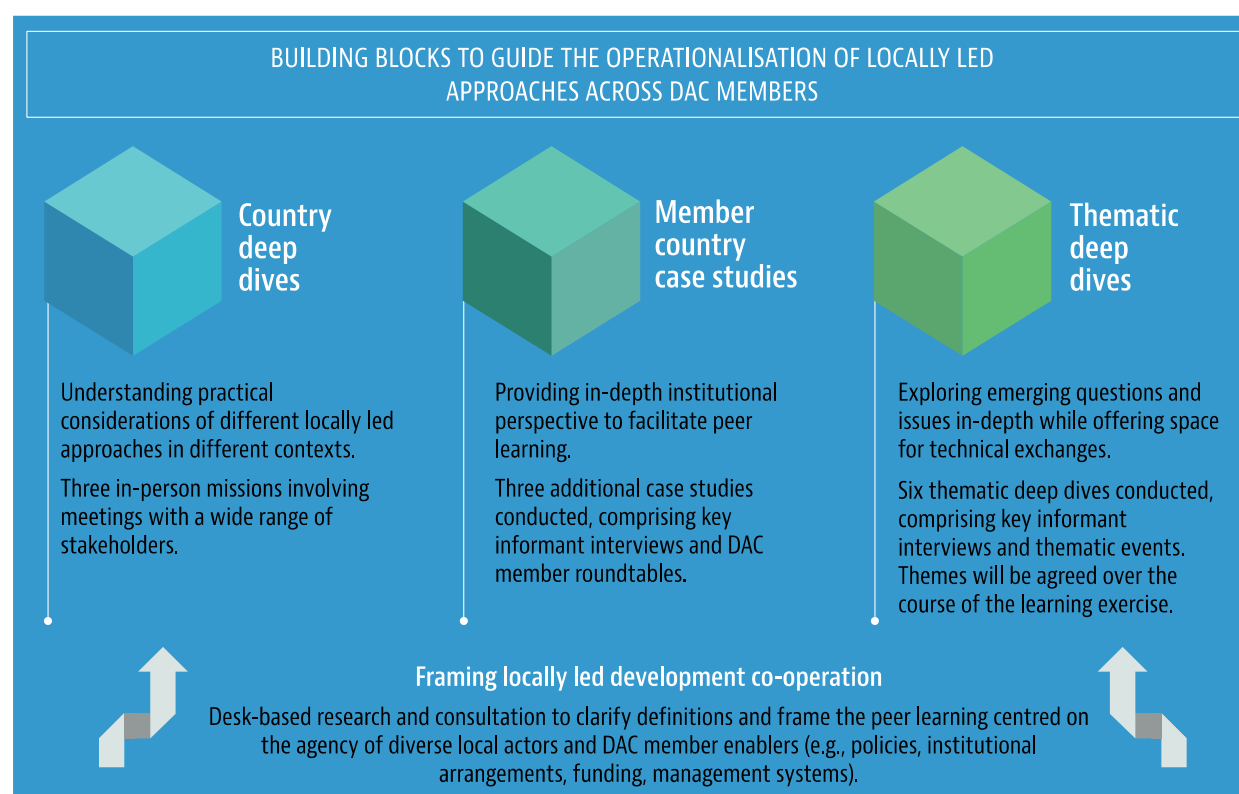
government, civil society, private sector) is incorporated into its approach to locally led development. Ireland has many strong Irish civil society partners, as well as being a strong funder of multilateral agencies. These intermediary organisations will continue to have a role in locally led development, and Ireland is actively involved in influencing and shaping this role. However, there is a risk that focusing on their role overshadows the commitment to provide more direct funding to a diversity of local actors, and the implications that this will have, particularly in terms of human resourcing (in missions and HQ), as well as approaches to risk management and sharing.

Annex

Peer learning overview

Locally led development is rising up the policy agenda as evidenced by the multiple international initiatives on locally led development and the recent [international statement on supporting locally led development](#) signed by 21 development co-operation providers. However, while there are good practices, DAC members meet significant obstacles in their ambition to advance development co-operation that is genuinely locally led. These range from political and power dynamics and systemic constraints to the absence of a shared understanding across development and humanitarian actors, and practical ways to adjust programming. In early 2023, the DAC therefore agreed to carry out a peer learning exercise to share and learn between peers approaches to promote locally led development ([DCD/DAC(2023)5]). The peer learning process will be conducted over a period of approximately 12 months and be organised around four key building blocks.

Figure 2. Peer learning overview



Objectives of DAC members case studies

As part of the peer learning exercise, the Secretariat has committed to conduct three DAC member case studies. These DAC member deep dives aim to understand DAC member contexts, constraints, and opportunities for supporting locally led development. They are an opportunity to address the political contexts, systems and institutional arrangements that underpin the principles, strategies, operations, and funding instruments of all DAC members.

In particular, DAC member deep dives:

- **Identify how DAC member policies, institutional arrangements, financing and management systems, and practices** enable or constrain locally led development co-operation.
- **Identify good practices** for locally led development co-operation with opportunities to scale, replicate and share. These can be both programmatic and organisational and system practices.
- **Reflect on the nature of agency of different local actors** across DAC member instruments, interventions, and funding approaches.
- **Understand how the DAC member contexts** influence the understanding of and approach to locally led development co-operation.
- **Explore DAC member approaches in different operating contexts** and its relation to locally led development.
- **Identify specific learning in relation to thematic deep dives** (i.e. valuing local capacities, accountability to local stakeholders, risk management, locally led development co-operation in politically constrained environments, the role of multilaterals, and measuring locally led development co-operation).

Approach to Ireland deep dive

The Ireland deep dive consisted of four-day mission (22–25 January 2024) conducted by Valentina Lisi (Civil Society Team, OECD) and Rose Pinnington (Consultant, Share Trust). The mission was facilitated by Ireland's DCAD Civil Society Unit. During the mission, 22 meetings were held covering both internal (senior management, thematic units (climate, humanitarian, multilateral, civil society, policy, peace and stability, global programmes) business support, evaluation and audit, embassies (Mozambique, Tanzania, Viet Nam, Sierra Leone); and external actors (including Irish civil society, research organisations). At the end of the mission, Key Impressions were shared in a debrief session to discuss preliminary findings with senior management.

Following the mission, a short (10 page) analytical member case study has been produced. It was sent to Ireland for comments. This document will feed into the perspective from members for the overarching synthesis paper. Visits also helped identify *In Practice* case studies to be developed and published on the [Development Co-operation TIPs page](#). It is anticipated that at least three practices will emerge from this DAC member case study. In this document, they have been highlighted in Boxes 1-4.

The following Table 1 provides an overview of the methodology used in the DAC Member case studies.

Table 1. Approach to DAC members case studies

Preparation	2 remote meetings held with DAC Member key personnel to agree on the proposed approach. Consultees identified and meetings scheduled. Documents shared and reviewed 6 weeks in advance. Agenda prepared 3 weeks in advance.
Visit activities	10-15 key informant interviews (staff from across the DAC member development co-operation system as well as external partners). 1 roundtable discussion on the last day to share findings, and address emerging questions (DAC member only).

Notes

¹ See framing paper for full analytical framework being applied in this peer learning: [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD\(2023\)47/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD(2023)47/en/pdf).

² See: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/941ec6f0-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/941ec6f0-en>.

³ Ireland's principles of locally led development co-operation include a focus on 'equitable partnership, local ownership, mutual capacity building and participation'.

⁴ The outcome of the 'Worldview: Exploring Irish Attitudes to Overseas Development Aid November 2022' shows that three in four Irish people agree it is important for the Irish Government to provide Overseas Development Aid (ODA), with almost one-third believing spending should be increased.

⁵ OECD (2023) 'Ireland's Innovative Funding Empowers Civil Society Partners', at: <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning/practices/ireland-s-innovative-funding-empowers-civil-society-partners-d39e1c25/>.

⁶ OECD (2023), at: <https://www.oecd.org/development-cooperation-learning/practices/ireland-s-innovative-funding-empowers-civil-society-partners-d39e1c25/>.

⁷ See: <https://devinit.org/resources/global-humanitarian-assistance-report-2023/a-better-humanitarian-system-locally-led-action/>.

⁸ See: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/941ec6f0-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5e331623-en&_csp_=b14d4f60505d057b456dd1730d8fcea3&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=chapter#:~:text=The%202020%20OECD%20DDAC%20peer.of%2s0its%20development%20co%2Doperation.

⁹ See: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/941ec6f0-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/5e331623-en&_csp_=b14d4f60505d057b456dd1730d8fcea3&itemIGO=oecd&itemContentType=chapter#:~:text=The%202020%20OECD%20DDAC%20peer.of%2s0its%20development%20co%2Doperation.

¹⁰ See: [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD\(2023\)47/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD(2023)47/en/pdf).

¹¹ See: [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD\(2023\)47/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD(2023)47/en/pdf).