

How is WLI putting a locally-led approach into practice?

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How does WLI understand locally led development?

What does a locally led approach look like for WLI?

What is locally-led development?

Growing momentum within the development sector for more locally-driven approaches has prompted widespread reflection among development programs on their role and how they operate. Although there are some differences in how locally led development is understood, a common concern is shifting funding and decision making from international organisations to the people whom development is intended to support. DFAT's Guidance Note on locally led development, for example, defines "locally led development cooperation" as "sustainable and effective development co-operation that supports locally led development by respecting and enabling the agency, leadership and decision making of diverse local actors in framing, design, delivery, resourcing and accountability, in given local and operating contexts.

Putting a locally-led approach into practice therefore requires changes to practices and ways of working as well as changes to relationships, values and attitudes.

However, it is important to point out that 'local' can mean different things. For donors, 'local' often means country-level governments, while for international NGOs, it is often interpreted as referring to civil society organisations. There is also a tendency to oversimplify 'local' in a way that ignores important variations in capacity, and power relationships within and between local communities, civil society organisations, local and national governments and other actors.

How does WLI understand locally-led development?

At its core, WLI is concerned with nurturing and supporting women's developmental leadership in the Pacific. This is underpinned by a recognition that Pacific people are best placed to drive their own development and that the role of international organisations and programs is to support Pacific priorities and efforts for change. WLI is therefore designed to provide tools, opportunities, networks and funding to support participants and alumni to achieve their own leadership goals – in their own contexts. WLI's approach to supporting local leadership through program activities is outlined in a separate Briefing Paper 'How Does WLI Support Local Leadership?'.

WLI's commitment to locally-led development is grounded in respect for – and valuing of – Pacific knowledge, skills and ways of working and relating to each other. This begins with the WLI program team and extends to how we view and relate to participants and alumni, members of the Steering Committee, Pacific leaders

and others with whom we engage through the program. Without these foundational values, efforts towards locally-led development are “window dressing”. Importantly, respect and a commitment to enabling and supporting Pacific leadership also needs to be reflected in WLI's – and DT Global's – organisational policies, practices and funding flows.

What does a locally-led approach look like for WLI?

With the commencement of the new phase in June 2022, WLI has shifted from a predominantly in-Australia program to an in-Australia and in-Pacific program. This has prompted the program team to reflect on what a locally led approach looks like for a program such as WLI. From the outset WLI has taken a staged, iterative approach which recognises that a locally led approach comes with fiduciary, coordination and resourcing risks and considerations as well as cultural and political sensitivities around who is engaged on the program, where they are located and which 'Pacific' interests they purportedly represent.

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In line with this approach, WLI has identified a range of opportunities to adopt a more locally-led approach in the program's staffing and operations. An important step was establishing Pacific-led governance arrangements. WLI's Steering Committee is currently chaired by Mrs Adimaimalaga Tafuna'i, with four of the seven other members also being from the Pacific. Pacific representation on the Steering Committee aims to harness a diversity of Pacific cultures and perspectives in support of the program. In recognition of Pacific Steering Committee members' interest in being involved in the program in practical ways, particularly in the Pacific, WLI will continue to work with them to identify opportunities for ongoing engagement for the remainder of the current program phase.

To provide guidance on in-country activities, WLI has recruited Alumni Representatives in five countries, with plans to extend this arrangement to an additional two countries in mid/ late 2024. Feedback from participants and alumni continues to inform new and ongoing program activities.

For example, in response to participants' requests for more Pacific content, the program team has incorporated additional case studies demonstrating Pacific leadership in action and featured male and female leaders from across the Pacific in Tier 1 events, WDLP and *LeadershipConnect*. WLI has also encouraged participants and alumni to consider Pacific mentors, workplace internships and professional development opportunities. This is balanced with the need to continue to offer opportunities for Australian mentors, workplace internships and professional development, which is sometimes preferred by participants.

An important new initiative for Year 3 is the provision of training for Pacific-based leadership coaches in ontological leadership coaching. This aims to build a cadre of Pacific-based coaches who can continue support for WLI alumni as well as other aspiring Pacific leaders. WLI has also taken steps to include more Pacific staff on the program.

In the last six months, two new Pacific program staff have joined the Suva-based team, as well as a new GEDSI and Safeguards Specialist based in Papua New Guinea.

In recognition of the importance of values and attitudes in underpinning a genuinely locally led approach, the program team has sought to articulate the 'culture' that we seek to embody in how we work with each other and with program stakeholders. Team members identified genuinely listening to each other and valuing diverse perspectives, creating an environment where team members feel comfortable about making mistakes and asking for help, solving problems collaboratively, being self-reflective and seeking to understand how social and cultural differences and power dynamics impact on interpersonal relations and ways of working, and valuing relationships and non-work related strengths as key to a positive, respectful team culture. The team also recognises that these values need to be reflected in internal policies and practices, including promoting Pacific team members' autonomy, supporting the development of their skills and expertise, and providing opportunities to lead and be visible.

Finally, WLI has also sought to ensure that program policies, practices and funding flows reflect a commitment to enabling and supporting Pacific leadership. This has included funding for locally-led initiatives in the region through the Leadership Fund, as well as procurement of a range of goods and services from Pacific-owned and Pacific-based businesses and service providers. The program team is also working closely with DT Global to ensure that financial, administrative and contractual requirements and processes support a locally-led approach.

**Interested?
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To learn more about WLI,
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