



Research Paper **40**

Thinking and Working Politically to Support Developmental Leadership and Coalitions: The Pacific Leadership Program

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PACIFIC LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

An initiative of the Australian aid program

The Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) is a regional initiative of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). It builds, applies and shares knowledge on developmental leadership – how individuals, organisations and other stakeholders can work together on inclusive policy and institutional change for the public good. PLP supports leaders across the Pacific at the regional level and in four target countries: Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. It began in 2008, and since 2014 has focused on supporting reform coalitions.

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The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) is an international research initiative based at the University of Birmingham, and working in partnership with University College London (UCL) and La Trobe University in Melbourne. DLP aims to increase understanding of the political processes that drive or constrain development. Its work focuses on the crucial role of home-grown leaderships and coalitions in forging legitimate institutions that promote developmental outcomes. DLP's independent program of research is supported by the Australian Government.

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of PLP, DLP, the Australian Government or partner organisations.

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Abbreviations

AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CSFT	Civil Society Forum of Tonga
DDD	Doing Development Differently
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DLP	Developmental Leadership Program
DWA	Department of Women's Affairs (Vanuatu)
GGLC	Green Growth Leaders' Coalition
IHSSC	Institute of Human Security and Social Change (La Trobe University)
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PDIA	Problem-driven iterative adaptation
PLP	Pacific Leadership Program
R&R	Reflection and Refocus
SWIBDI	Samoa Women in Business Development Incorporated
TAF	The Asia Foundation
TNLDF	Tongan National Leadership Development Forum
TSM	Temporary special measures
TWP	Thinking and working politically
WISDM	Women in Shared Decision-Making (Vanuatu)

About this paper

This study was carried out by independent researchers Lisa Denney and Rebecca McLaren. It was commissioned by the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), through La Trobe University's Institute for Human Security and Social Change. It is part of an ongoing action research partnership between the Institute and PLP. This paper is co-published by PLP and the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) because of its relevance to DLP's research agenda. It does not reflect the official views of DFAT, PLP or DLP.

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Executive summary

This paper explores the experience of four reform coalitions supported by the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and what this tells us about supporting developmental leadership and thinking and working politically in the Pacific. It was commissioned by PLP with two aims. First, to capture PLP's ways of working. Second, to contribute the experiences of a program in the Pacific to the growing international movement that recognises developmental change is fundamentally political, that understanding local politics is thus crucial and that donors are best placed to play a facilitative, rather than direct, role in bringing it about. The PLP experience demonstrates that such ways of working are feasible and relevant in the Pacific context but are shaped by the wider donor environment.

The study was conducted by two independent researchers contracted through La Trobe University's Institute for Human Security and Social Change. It does not reflect the official views of DFAT, PLP or the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP).

What is PLP?

PLP is an Australian aid program supporting leaders across the Pacific at the regional level and in four target countries: Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. It began in 2008, and is currently scheduled to end in 2017, with a budget totalling nearly AUD 52 million over the life of the program. Since 2014 it has narrowed its focus to working specifically on reform coalitions.

PLP has adopted some unique features over its lifespan that have shaped the program. Its approach to leadership has been pragmatic – alert to the dangers of an Australian aid program being seen to take a strongly normative stance on principles of leadership in the Pacific. PLP has skilfully found ways to work on sensitive issues in a respectful, and thus likely more successful, way and has been open to testing new approaches to supporting long-term, locally led change. PLP has also adopted a strong partnership approach, built around cooperative agreements. These support local priorities and provide space for partners to lead their change processes, with PLP playing a role as a convener and 'critical friend'. Since 2014, PLP has also been a 'knowledge-based program' – building relationships with and drawing on a range of experts on developmental leadership and thinking and working politically.

In the early phases of the program, AusAID staff were co-located with the PLP team to help create an enabling environment for 'doing development differently'. Co-location strengthened relationships between program and donor staff and streamlined decision-making, approvals, communication and risk management. However, this arrangement was discontinued following integration of AusAID and DFAT in 2013 and PLP has since adopted some more conventional working arrangements, demonstrating that program ways of working are inseparable from the wider donor environment.

Overview of the reform coalitions and developmental leaders

This paper focuses on four coalitions supported by PLP that have been the subject of action research:

- **Women in Shared Decision-Making (WISDM), Vanuatu** – This coalition, led by the Director of the Department of Women's Affairs, has focused on increasing women's political representation. It has succeeded in achieving the passage of legislation confirming temporary reserved seats for women at the municipal level.
- **Tongan National Leadership Development Forum (TNLDF)** – This coalition includes representatives from across Tongan society, and used a wide-ranging consultative process to broker national conversations about leadership. This led to the development of a Tongan Leadership Code in 2013, which was signed by 20,000 people (of an estimated population of 105,000 in 2014), including the King, Crown Prince, Prime Minister and Cabinet.
- **Simbo for Change, Solomon Islands** – This coalition develops niche agricultural exports on a remote island to empower women and their families and address safety concerns. It is led by a local woman and a Samoan sustainable livelihoods organisation interested in working across the Pacific. Early results include the start-up of new export industries, a process underway to become the country's first registered organic island and reinvigorated community cooperation.
- **Green Growth Leaders' Coalition** – This regional coalition of leaders from government, faith-based organisations and the private sector was formed to drive a 'green growth' and sustainability agenda across the Pacific. It has succeeded in catalysing the emergence of national green growth coalitions in various Pacific countries and building consensus on a green growth agenda at the regional level.

PLP experience of supporting developmental leadership and coalitions

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

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

PLP experience of thinking and working politically

Thinking and working politically (TWP)¹ – alongside other initiatives such as 'Doing Development Differently',² and 'problem-driven iterative adaptation'³ – draws attention to the need for a step change in the way that development programming happens. It recognises that, while technical soundness is necessary for development to succeed, an emphasis on technical solutions has often meant that the political dimensions of developmental change are overlooked. Yet it is these political dynamics that are often more influential in determining developmental impact. A growing literature attempts to capture the different ways in which development organisations are integrating TWP insights into their programs. For PLP, the way this is done in practice involves **four key elements**.

First, the program strongly emphasises *knowledge of the local context and political dynamics*. Staff are almost entirely Pacific Islander and make extensive use of their personal networks to obtain information and build relationships. Significant time is spent in-country and meeting with partners and other stakeholders, and an investment has been made in having full-time staff located in each of the Program's four focus countries. Staff not only have their ear to the ground but are able to situate what they hear in a nuanced country understanding to make more informed decisions.

Second, PLP staff *strategically use local knowledge to identify potential partners and inform ways of working*. PLP does not call for grant applications, but approaches groups or individuals that staff networks and local knowledge have brought to light. In some cases, PLP has played a more proactive role in convening coalitions. Strategic use of local knowledge also allows PLP to work on difficult issues by broaching them first through less sensitive areas of engagement.

Third, PLP staff *work formally and informally behind the scenes*, keeping a low profile and allowing local actors to lead reforms. This is important in ensuring reforms are genuinely (and seen to be) locally led. This is facilitated by PLP's light footprint in-country, with just a country representative, as well as by the space that PLP provides to convene local stakeholders to develop locally feasible ideas. Working behind the scenes also means using back channels to build relationships and support, for instance by using family, school and church networks to get things done.

1 See the Thinking and Working Politically Community of Practice: <https://twpcommunity.org/>

2 See the Doing Development Differently (DDD) Manifesto Community: <http://doingdevelopmentdifferently.com/>

3 See Andrews 2013.

Finally, PLP takes an *open-ended 'purposive muddling'* approach to developmental change. This means it does not begin with pre-determined solutions, but appreciates ongoing uncertainties and therefore the need to make incremental changes through learning. However, its approach to learning and adaptation is relatively informal. Six-monthly Reflection and Refocus (R&R) sessions encourage reflection on program direction or particular implementation challenges but do not focus on reform strategies themselves. While PLP has certainly been flexible enough to adapt, this has largely been triggered by informal, regular conversations with partners and internal discussions and knowledge-sharing across program areas, rather than by inbuilt learning and adaptation processes.

PLP has avoided many of the pitfalls of conventional aid programs, such as overly prescriptive, technically-focused, supply-driven aid that fails to gain real traction with local partners intended to drive it forward. It offers a useful example of what thinking and working politically can look like and how to effectively support developmental leadership in the Pacific. However, it has not been without challenges.

PLP has encountered difficulties in maintaining an arm's length relationship with DFAT. Preserving this relationship, as envisaged in the initial program design, is important so as not to crowd out the local leaders and coalitions that PLP aims to support, and to limit potential reputational risk for the Australian government. Protecting an arm's length way of working has been difficult within a challenging aid environment in Australia, characterised by reduced aid spending, integration of AusAID into DFAT and an ever stronger emphasis on short-term, quantifiable results. This environment has encouraged PLP to keep a low profile. This has been in contrast with program efforts to use monitoring, evaluation and learning to communicate results to demonstrate the potential for its ways of working, and build wider institutional appetite. PLP's current phase focuses on being a knowledge-based program but it has not, to date, actively contributed to debates on thinking and working politically and developmental leadership (although it is beginning to do so).

The partnership approach of the program has not always been easy to maintain. Inevitably, tensions can arise when issues of funding are at stake, despite efforts to avoid such dynamics. And finally, funding local leaders and coalitions can risk formalising or 'projectising' them, so that they become less a dynamic collection of the right people mobilised around an issue, and more an NGO looking for the next advocacy issue that they might not be well placed to lead.

PLP's experience demonstrates that donors can play a role in supporting existing coalitions and brokering new ones as long as there is a supportive donor environment. Such an environment requires internal supporters within the donor agency who can advocate and make space for these approaches; close working relationships between donor and implementing staff; flexible and long-term funding arrangements; and a recognition that change trajectories and results are not easily predicted.

Implications for donors and development programs

PLP's experience suggests the following implications for consideration.

Recognise that 'good governance' ideas about developmental change are often not realistic and adopt a more pragmatic approach: Developmental change can come from leaders who are assertive or dominant and have a range of motivations, and coalitions that are exclusive. It is less important that leaders and coalitions fit the mould of what they 'should' ideally look like, and more important that they are fit for purpose. There are, of course, risks and trade-offs that flow from this that require management by all partners (see below).

For genuinely locally led development, focus on partnerships not programs: A partnership approach that is, for the most part, genuinely supportive of its partners can help to move beyond transactional relationships. This can mean less control for the donor, which is challenging given pressures of the results agenda and (in Australia) diminishing aid resources. Yet it is critical if the recognition that developmental change must be locally led is to be realised. It does not mean there is no role for donor input, though it may mean a more arm's length role. For example, donors can perform a challenge function for program partners, and create space to convene and broker – even help form coalitions. They can identify potential reform opportunities and, importantly, help to ensure that a shared sense of accountability and risk management is maintained over the life of the program.

It's not about the money – but it is about how money can be spent: Developmental change does not necessarily require large injections of donor funding. Yet there is a need to be flexible in how money is spent. Cultivating developmental change is time-intensive: good staff are required who travel frequently to maintain relationships and keep abreast of emerging opportunities. Being able to fund meetings and travel costs might appear wasteful, but can be a strategic use of funds to catalyse change through building and leveraging networks.

Identify staff who think and work politically and provide them with an enabling environment: Thinking and working politically relies on employing staff (preferably for the long term) who have detailed local knowledge and are sensitive to the politics that infuse day-to-day interactions. Donor and contractor recruitment procedures need to be calibrated to capture such skill sets. Further, staff require an environment that enables them to put their skills to use – including devolved authority, risk tolerance and a culture of openness and learning.

Dedicated sessions that provide a space for learning, challenging and refining programming approaches can help, but greater efforts are needed to open space for critical reflection: Putting in place mechanisms to encourage staff to reflect and consider whether a change of course is needed is critical to a program remaining relevant and responsive. While PLP used R&R sessions and action research, learning and adaptation is an area that could be stronger. Having more formalised reflection and learning mechanisms within programs can help to capture emerging learning.

Find ways to monitor and communicate program ways of working: To build the appetite for flexible and politically smart ways of working, programs need to effectively communicate and demonstrate results. This is crucial to ensure the wider aid program learns from more innovative programs, but also to protect the already constrained space for innovative programs. This is not easy for programs based on relationships and unpredictable change processes. It requires inventive and appropriately flexible monitoring that can cope with a lack of rigid logframes and fixed indicators.

Be realistic about the risks of supporting developmental change and manage accordingly: Donors need to adjust their risk tolerance where they are aiming to support change processes that are by their nature unpredictable. Each leader or coalition supported can be understood as a 'small bet'. Not all bets will pay off, and donors need to accept that some change processes they support will fail and others will not be achieved within the timescale of programming. This is especially the case when working with leaders outside of traditional elite circles, whose reforms may take longer to overcome resistance from entrenched interests. Mechanisms that can help manage this inherent risk, such as co-location, can play an important role. Such mechanisms can also help to ensure that all partners maintain a shared understanding of their respective risk appetites and preferred management strategies, and how these change over time.

1

Introduction

A growing movement is gaining pace to change the dominant ways of working in development, based on a recognition that developmental change is fundamentally political, that understanding local politics is thus crucial and that donors are therefore best placed to play a facilitative rather than direct role in bringing it about. Part of the effort to advance this movement has been documenting how aid programs are attempting to integrate these insights into their work – to be more politically smart, locally led and adaptive in their ways of working. This paper contributes to that literature, capturing the experience of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Pacific Leadership Program.

Over eight years of operation to date, PLP has cultivated strong partnerships with local leaders at regional and national levels in the Pacific to support long-term policy and development change processes in a range of areas – from women's economic empowerment to collective action on climate change. In doing so, it has avoided common problems encountered in some more conventional aid programs, which can tend to establish transactional relationships and undermine local ownership by imposing external priorities.

This paper examines four initiatives that PLP has supported to draw out insights about supporting developmental leaders and coalitions for change and 'thinking and working politically' (TWP).¹ Moreover, it does so from a Pacific perspective. To date the emerging literature on programs working in more politically smart, locally led and adaptive ways has not typically included examples from the Pacific. Questions have been raised about the applicability to the Pacific of examples of such ways of working from larger, more developed and less geographically disparate locations. PLP's experience highlights, however, that such ways of working are indeed possible in the Pacific – albeit with some slight variations given the particularities of context.

The story that emerges is one of a highly politically astute and contextually aware program that built strong partnerships with a range of local leaders and coalitions. Some of these leaders adopted a fairly exclusive and tightly managed process to achieve reforms, rather than necessarily relying on inclusive processes. Some of the coalitions were organically formed, but others involved PLP playing a more proactive role in facilitating their emergence, at least initially. These experiences challenge some of the conventional wisdom about how developmental change happens and supports ideas that change should be 'best fit' or 'good enough', attuned to the political and country context. This aligns with the wider recognition, including by DFAT in its Effective Governance Strategy, that the overly prescriptive nature of the good governance agenda can be unhelpful and that governance arrangements must be both technically sound but also politically possible (DFAT 2015: 5).

But this is also a story of how changes in the wider donor environment fundamentally affect the space available for programs to work in non-conventional ways. PLP started with a strong focus on supporting the priorities of local partners, later shifting to a more explicit focus on leadership and coalitions for change, and then towards more donor-identified priorities. These shifts were partly due to changes in staffing and learning within the program. However, they were also the result of the integration of the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and DFAT in 2013 and the 33% reduction in the aid budget that followed. This affected PLP's organisational arrangements and space for operating. The story of PLP and its ways of working is, of course, inseparable from the wider transitions taking place within the donor environment.

These more innovative ways of working are also not without their limitations and challenges, and some of these emerge as recurring themes in this report. For instance, providing donor funds to local leaders or coalitions can formalise or 'projectise' them – meaning they become less of a dynamic collection of the right people on a given issue and more of an organisation looking for the next big issue that they may not be well placed to push forward. In addition, while PLP has invested heavily in building genuine partnerships, tensions can arise when issues of funding are at stake. Strong partnerships are key to being able to navigate these largely inevitable tensions. Finally, PLP has found it difficult to balance preservation of its operational space within a challenging aid environment by maintaining a low profile, with building wider institutional appetite for future programs that might work in innovative ways by using monitoring, evaluation and learning to communicate results.

This paper was commissioned with the intention of exploring four cases of reform coalitions supported by PLP that have been the subject of action research. The aim was to analyse what they tell us about supporting developmental leadership and coalitions and thinking and working politically/doing development differently. In addition, there was an interest in the gender

¹ TWP is the recognition that 'political factors are usually more important in determining developmental impact than the scale of aid funding or the technical quality of programming' (see: <https://twpcommunity.org>). An international community of practice has emerged around this concept that meets to discuss the implications of TWP for development programming. DFAT has been at the forefront of this initiative. For further information, see TWP Community of Practice (2015).

and Pacific implications of and influences on these ways of working. This paper is one of three related outputs. A second paper being commissioned by PLP looks at the evolution of PLP over time and the impact of the changing institutional environment within Australian aid (Rhodes, forthcoming). A third paper is being produced independently by La Trobe University, in cooperation with PLP, that will provide a detailed view of thinking and working politically at the operational level among Pacific staff (Wild, forthcoming).

This paper proceeds as follows. First, it introduces PLP and its evolution from 2008 to 2016. Second, the paper provides an overview of four coalitions that PLP supports, providing the empirical basis for the remainder of the paper. The third and fourth sections set out respectively what PLP's experience tells us about developmental leadership and coalitions for change, and about thinking and working politically. Finally, the fifth section identifies implications for donors and other aid programs.

Methods

Qualitative research methods² formed the basis of this paper. It synthesises and builds upon action research field reports on four coalitions supported by PLP, which were produced by action researchers contracted by PLP through its research partnership with La Trobe University's Institute of Human Security and Social Change (IHSSC).³ These documents were analysed, with key themes verified through a focus group discussion with action researchers. PLP documents were also reviewed. The second phase of the research involved both in-person interviews with PLP staff (past and present) during a week in Fiji in December 2015 and desk-based telephone interviews from late 2015 to early 2016 (see annex for a list of interviewees). Finally, in order to situate the PLP experience within the wider literature, published research on developmental leadership, coalitions for change, thinking and working politically (and its associated bedfellows of doing development differently, adaptive development and problem-driven iterative adaptation) was reviewed. Particular attention was paid to research relating to these issues in the Pacific and to gender.

The primary research material and notes from documentary reviews were analysed and coded for common themes, using Nvivo software to verify the emerging messages. These key themes were then analysed in light of the wider literature reviewed to highlight commonalities and divergences between PLP and international experience.

The relatively short timeframe allocated for this research means there are inherently some limitations. This research was predominantly desk-based and relied on interviews with PLP staff (past and present) who work with the coalitions that are the focus of this study and on existing action research conducted with these coalitions. It was not possible, however, for the authors themselves to interview PLP partners or observe each coalition's work on the ground. However, the previous action research on which this analysis draws was a collaborative process with the coalition partners. Speaking with both current and former PLP staff who are in regular contact with partners helped to ensure changes in the partnerships over time were captured.

2 Ethical approval was obtained from La Trobe University's Human Research Ethics Committee (ID# E15-128).

3 The coalitions drawn on this paper are those that opted into PLP's piloting of action research in 2013. PLP has also supported a range of other coalitions that have not been supported by action research and therefore are not discussed here.

2

What is PLP?

The Pacific Leadership Program is an initiative of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that began initially under the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) in 2008. Its current phase is scheduled to run until 2017.

PLP supports established and emerging leaders across the Pacific at the regional level and in four target countries: Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. Through partnerships with government and non-government counterparts, PLP aims to support leaders and reform coalitions to undertake collective action to achieve developmental change for the public good. Support includes funding, capacity development (including training and mentoring), networking and information-sharing. It has tried to move away from the idea that all that is needed to achieve change is more funding. PLP has spanned three phases:

- *Phase 1: April 2008 – June 2009*; budget: AUD 2,556,123⁴
- *Phase 2: July 2009 – June 2014*; budget: AUD 32,404,759
- *Phase 3: July 2014 – June 2017*; budget: AUD 16,901,538 (with a potential two-year extension until June 2019).

PLP's emphasis and organisational arrangements have shifted across these phases, which is unsurprising in a program that has spanned eight years to date. All the more so, given significant shifts in the Australian aid environment including the integration of AusAID into DFAT and reductions in the aid budget.

This section aims to summarise key features of PLP's approach, which point to an interesting example of attempting to 'do development differently'.⁵ While staff involved actively sought to develop a program that avoided many of the pitfalls of conventional development, this was not based on the principles of the DDD Manifesto or thinking and working politically (TWP)⁶ until Phase 3, when these emerged in development debates as a rallying cry for better ways of working. That being said, PLP was heavily informed by the thinking of key individuals within DFAT who went on to be central to the TWP Community of Practice, and in this sense the program was perhaps ahead of the theory – though not explicitly using the terms that emerged later.

Pragmatic focus on leadership

A striking element of PLP has been its ability to work on issues of empowerment, voice and accountability without falling into the trap of being too normatively prescriptive. PLP was devised as an attempt to improve leadership in the Pacific, on the back of a 2005 Australian Aid White Paper focused on political governance. Yet those involved in designing and implementing PLP were acutely aware of the sensitivities – and indeed potential backlash – to Australian aid programs imposing ideas of leadership and good governance in the region. PLP was thus skilfully crafted as a way to work on such sensitive issues in a manner that was respectful, palatable and ultimately more successful in the Pacific context.

This is in keeping with DFAT's latest guidance on governance, which notes that there is no single prescription for how governance can support development. It suggests the appropriate approach 'can only be identified by examining the specific context of that country's development, recognising that institutions both shape and are shaped by a country's history, evolution and political culture' (2015: 5). PLP has attempted to operationalise such a contextually driven approach to governance and leadership.

4 These budget figures are the total contracted amount and do not include the costs of AusAID co-located staff, present in Phases 1 and 2.

5 Doing Development Differently is a community of practice dedicated to improving the impact of development programs by focusing on locally defined problems, working with local actors and embedding learning and iteration in programming (see Doing Development Differently Manifesto, DDD 2014).

6 The Thinking and Working Politically (TWP) Community of Practice emerged around the recognition that development is inherently political and that programming often fails to take account of this, falling back on overwhelmingly technical approaches to development problems. TWP encourages more politically astute thinking and working based on a deep understanding of the local context, an appreciation of the limited influence that donors often have, and a commitment to flexible programming through learning (TWP Community of Practice 2015).

Co-location: a unique organisational arrangement

PLP was set up with unique organisational arrangements – implemented jointly by two AusAID staff who were co-located with a team engaged by Cardno, a private support contractor. PLP was not the only AusAID program to have co-located staff at the time but it was not a commonplace arrangement. Co-location made it possible for the program to take calculated risks in-house and short circuit sign-off and communications procedures by having AusAID staff located within PLP. This arrangement made PLP agile enough to respond to opportunities as they arose and to be able to manage the risks inherent in supporting reform processes that challenge the status quo. Co-location thus afforded a degree of protection for PLP staff from the regular reporting requirements of AusAID (for more on this see Rhodes, forthcoming).

PLP held an identity that was distinct from the rest of AusAID by virtue of its links to the wider aid program not being made very visible. This gave it a degree of independence from the Australian aid program and helped to build the trust and credibility underpinning its partnerships and to manage the risk of any perception of “pushing an AusAID agenda” (Henderson and Roche 2012: 2). While this might raise eyebrows in terms of visibility of Australian tax payers’ money, this unique identity was helpful in ensuring PLP support was welcomed, rather than seen as interference by a large regional power. This independent identity could be maintained by having AusAID staff in-house to provide oversight, risk management and sign-off as necessary without needing to revert back to Post.

Co-location was discontinued in Phase 3 following integration. Under Phase 3 Cardno thus became the managing, rather than support, contractor, with full responsibility for management and strategic direction of the program. The absence of co-location has contributed to a slowdown in PLP’s communications and decision-making and created challenges in building an awareness of what PLP does within DFAT, as there is no longer an inbuilt day-to-day link. It has also impacted on the ability of PLP to think and work politically. It is now treated much like any other DFAT project that must demonstrate attributable results quickly to justify itself (see also Rhodes, forthcoming). Nonetheless, the experience of co-location more broadly underscores the importance of finding ways to maintain close working relationships between donors and implementers with regular communication and feedback loops.

Partnership approach

Perhaps the most distinctive element of PLP has been its strong partnership approach. This was its core focus at the outset and was intended to take the place of the more transactional relationships that often develop between donors and ‘partners’. The partnership approach aims to be explicitly aware of, and attempts to counter, the unequal power relations that exist between donors and partners in conventional grant relationships – with the donor holding the purse strings and setting priorities that partners must comply with. Instead, the partnership approach emphasises equity, transparency and mutual benefit and has sought to build more equitable relationships based on shared interests. This has had quite practical implications in terms of contracting, for instance. Rather than using grant agreements, PLP co-wrote each partnership agreement from scratch with partners and put in place entirely bespoke expectations, standards and indicators for each party.

Initially, in Phase 1, partnerships were pursued with potential partners identified during the PLP design process. By Phase 3, criteria were used to assess current and potential partners, coalitions and activities to ensure the program’s engagements were not only technically sound, but also politically possible. The criteria identified relevance to PLP’s priority areas (listed below), whether there were other partners who could support the reform, the political feasibility of the reform, its technical soundness and its relevance to Australian foreign policy objectives. These were not formal, publicised criteria that potential partners had to respond to – but rather factors for PLP staff to bear in mind when deciding whether to enter into, or remain in, a partnership. Ultimately, however, the most cited criteria that PLP staff came to see as most important in deciding whether to support a coalition was whether a partner wanted the change more than PLP. This was seen as critical to ensuring the changes supported were genuinely locally led and sustainable.

To protect the partnerships, program discussions with partners were separated from financial discussions and PLP provided staff support (including mentoring and training) to strengthen the financial capacity of partners so that this did not compromise the wider partnership. A midterm evaluation notes that of the 11 partners examined during the evaluation, PLP support was found to have increased implementation capacity or enhanced leadership capabilities in nine of them (Henderson and Roche 2012: 1). The evaluation goes on to note that partners were almost universally positive in their assessment of their relationships with PLP (Ibid.).

The partnership approach recognises that developmental change emerges ultimately from local leaders and coalitions, not from donor programs. While PLP plays a supportive and facilitative role, it is ultimately Pacific leaders who know the context, identify solutions and drive change.

While the partnership approach has remained an important feature of PLP, the scope of partnerships has changed over time. In Phase 1 the focus was on building solid, trusting relationships with partners and providing core funding and institutional support to enable them to focus on issues they deemed important. Phase 2 shifted towards more strategic engagements. Emphasis was placed on identifying leaders and coalitions with developmental aims and supporting them through funding,

training and mentoring. By Phase 3, the emphasis had shifted again to finding leaders and coalitions with overlapping interests in priority areas stipulated by DFAT in the design document. These priority areas are:

- Women's leadership
- Private sector leadership
- Future developmental leadership
- Political-bureaucratic leadership interface
- Community leadership
- Melanesian leadership.

These shifts raise questions about whether the degree to which the change processes are locally owned and led has waned over PLP's eight years, moving from open partnerships to more donor-led priority setting. PLP seems to have avoided falling into the conventional grants-making role that donors often play. It has done this primarily by keeping the priority funding areas broad and by ensuring that where staff find a change process they believe to be viable, a way is found to support it. Arguably the initial partnership phase was not particularly strategic in terms of identifying change processes ripe for reform. Yet, as a number of PLP staff noted, this first phase did help to build solid relationships with a number of organisations in the region, providing the basis for later phases to leverage these in potentially more strategic ways. It also built PLP's credibility and legitimacy as a supportive actor in the region.

It may be the case, then, that the latter stages were only able to find the leaders and coalitions they did because of the partnerships that had been invested in earlier (for more on this see Rhodes, forthcoming). Whether PLP is able to continue to do this as the program changes shape in its most recent phase remains to be seen.

Knowledge-based programming

Since 2014, PLP has also sought to be a 'knowledge-based program', although it had a strong engagement with development research communities before this. PLP has built relationships with and drawn on the expertise of a range of researchers and experts. These range from the Developmental Leadership Program and Harvard University on the latest thinking on leadership; to key individuals such as Jaime Faustino, Steve Hogg and Graham Teskey in deepening ideas about supporting developmental leaders; to action researchers who have provided insights into how reforms have unfolded.

PLP introduced Reflection and Refocus (R&R) sessions during Phase 2 to critically reflect on program direction, and this also provided the opportunity to share such knowledge and bring this to bear on PLP work. While PLP has only begun contributing to this knowledge base in its latest phase (when this became a specified priority in Phase 3), the program clearly benefits from much of the latest thinking in development and has sought to share this knowledge through practice.

PLP has thus evolved over time and been influenced by the distinctive features set out above. These features ground the program's ways of working that will be unpacked throughout this paper, with reference to the four reform processes introduced in the next section.

3

Overview of the reform coalitions and developmental leaders

This section provides an overview of four coalitions or developmental leaders supported by PLP that form the empirical basis of this paper's analysis. These seek to capture: the nature of the coalition or leader; the problem they have sought to address; the process for doing so; PLP's support; and emerging results. Of course, these results are tentative – all of the reform processes are ongoing, so longer-term impacts remain unknown. Nonetheless, the cases provide important stories of change (or potential change) from which the remainder of the paper extracts learning on developmental leadership, coalitions for change and thinking and working politically.

Women in Shared Decision-Making (WISDM), Vanuatu

Women's political participation in Vanuatu has been limited since independence in 1980, with women under-represented at all levels. As of 2010, women members of parliament constituted just 1.4% of the total; provincial councillors constituted 0.3%; and municipal councillors constituted 4.3% (Ilo-Noka and Dalesa-Saraken 2010). The Women in Shared Decision-Making (WISDM)⁷ coalition was loosely formed in 2011 to push for greater representation of women in politics, with funding from PLP from 2012 to 2016 totalling AUD 283,433.

WISDM is a coalition of unclear boundaries and fluctuating membership – one PLP interviewee notes that 'it comes and goes.' This has allowed it to morph as necessary in order to achieve its aims (Rousseau 2014). Initially it appeared to include a number of women's civil society organisations, as well as Vanuatu's Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) Director. The DWA Director notes women's political participation was her priority on taking up the role of Director in 2009. She felt that while women's economic empowerment and gender-based violence were being dealt with through other channels, political participation was comparatively neglected. The DWA Director and representatives from Vanuatu women's organisations were invited to participate in a PLP Symposium on Adaptive Leadership, held in Brisbane in October 2012. The DWA Director noted the training she received in Brisbane taught her how to identify wider stakeholders that she would need to engage to improve women's political participation. The adaptive leadership approach focused on collective action, the differences between authority and leadership (which spoke to the Pacific experience), understanding the rules of the game and unpicking how to build networks capable of making change happen within a given context.

Ultimately, WISDM came to be led by the DWA Director, who draws on personal and professional networks from across government and civil society as she deems necessary. She was keen to ensure women's political participation did not become a ghettoised 'women's' issue as domestic violence previously had in Vanuatu. As a result, she opted to make the inclusion of reserved seats as temporary special measures (TSMs) in parliament one element of wider technical parliamentary reform. She also took the decision not to push for national level reform (which many women's organisations were focused on) as this was too contentious for male MPs. She focused rather on the municipal level where reform was more politically possible (national level reforms have since opened up as a possibility).

In pursuit of this, the DWA Director lobbied key individuals across government from the State Law Office, Department of Statistics, Minister of Lands and the Electoral Office, and an academic from the University of the South Pacific. Interestingly, she did not engage Vanuatu's women's civil society organisations in getting the legislative reform passed, as fragmentation among the organisations meant their involvement was not seen as conducive to bringing about the reform. Further, she realised that ultimately the decision on the reform would be made by male parliamentarians, not by women's organisations, and so she needed a reform coalition (or taskforce, and she calls it) that could influence them. Control of the reform process has thus been quite centralised. The DWA Director has built relationships with those she identifies as necessary to getting the reform passed. She does not see value in making the reform a more widely inclusive process for the time being. Her

⁷ It should be noted that at least three different groupings are variously referred to as 'WISDM'. The first, and the grouping referred to in this report as WISDM, is an extant select grouping brought together by the Director of the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) around late 2011, with the aim of bringing about temporary special measures legislation for reserved seats for women at the municipal level. The second is a primarily CSO grouping led by the DWA that emerged from a training workshop for female candidates by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Regional Rights Resource Team (RRRT) (supported by PLP) in June 2011 and 2012. This WISDM is believed to no longer operate. The third WISDM at times referred to is made up of the unsuccessful female candidates from the 2012 national elections (Rousseau 2014: 2).

relationships tend to be one-to-one, less about bringing everyone together in a room and more about using her individual connections with key stakeholders to push the reform along bit by bit. These connections are personal – both familial and clan-based – and professional. Formal and informal lobbying opportunities were thus critical to building support for the reform.

Following the Brisbane Symposium, PLP provided more sustained support to the DWA. This included training for women candidates and elected women, and funding for travel to important meetings and to conduct research on the effects of TSMs. A critical turning point in the reforms was an island retreat that PLP supported, bringing together many stakeholders the DWA Director needed to lobby away from their hectic schedules in Port Vila. This enabled a concentrated period of intensive lobbying that proved critical in getting support for the TSM reform. PLP's financial support has enabled the DWA Director to bring together and make use of her networks, but she has also said she regards the knowledge gained from the Brisbane Symposium and ongoing discussions with PLP staff as helpful. These are reported to have given her ideas about how to better mobilise her significant networks and map out how change can be achieved. In this process, the close relationships and high levels of access that PLP staff built with the DWA Director were key to them acting as 'critical friends' who could constructively challenge her ideas, make suggestions and act as sounding boards.

In 2013, Vanuatu's Parliament passed legislation confirming the TSMs, reserving between 30% and 34% of municipal seats for women. Five women were elected at the municipal level in the following elections in January 2014 (four winning reserved seats and one winning an open seat). Reforms have not stopped here, with emphasis shifting to the promotion of a closed party list that requires all political parties to field a minimum percentage of female candidates in municipal elections. In Luganville in 2015, five women were elected in municipal elections on this basis. While political turbulence in Vanuatu continues, these improvements in women's political participation are significant. Efforts are now under way to attain TSMs at the provincial and national levels (in recent national elections, no women were elected), on the back of success at the municipal level.

Tongan National Leadership Development Forum (TNLDF)

The Kingdom of Tonga remains the only monarchy in the Pacific, with the first Parliament to be democratically elected in 2010. Governance is extremely hierarchical with the King holding executive power and nobles continuing to play a strong role in formal and informal politics (nobles have nine reserved seats in the 26-seat parliament) (O'Keefe and Lee 2014b: 5). While a pro-democracy movement has been under way since the 1980s, Tonga's centralised power means that reforms must engage with the monarchy and nobility to be sustainable, and the movement did not see real results under the 2010 elections (Ibid.; O'Keefe and Lee 2014a: 4).

PLP developed the idea of National Leadership Development Forums in August 2009 during a six-monthly Reflection and Refocus (R&R) session, as a way to strengthen leadership support and raise the profile of the program at the national level in a range of Pacific countries. Discussions with existing Tongan NGO and government partners, as well as AusAID personnel, led to PLP's decision to trial this idea in Tonga. Key individuals were invited to a lunch to discuss what leadership issues might be ripe for change in Tonga. The emphasis was on creating space for a group of Tongans to decide what the priorities were in their country, without being told by a donor what those should be. PLP staff recall the risk this represented for them, but trusted in the knowledge of their networks to choose a focus that was genuinely locally led and relevant to the Tongan context, given its constraints.

Conscious of the need to engage with the monarchy and nobility to further democratisation within Tonga, and building on the advice of Tongan staff, the group decided to focus on developing a National Leadership Code. The Tongan National Leadership Development Forum (TNLDF) was established in 2010 to support this, with broad membership cutting across Tonga's social hierarchy, with a patron from the Royal family, representatives from the nobility, churches, government and key sectors of society. As O'Keefe and Lee note: 'This wide-ranging credible and respected membership was deliberately chosen to ensure 'buy-in' from all levels of society and thus increase the potential for TNLDF to have a wide-ranging impact on developmental leadership in Tonga' (2014b: 2).

To develop the Code, the TNLDF decided to undertake a wide-ranging consultative process setting out Tongan expectations for good leadership in the 21st Century. The consultative process commenced in 2010, involving royalty, nobles, senior politicians and public servants, civil society and local participants at the town level. Nobles and other leaders were taken back to the communities they are meant to serve and represent to connect with and hear from their constituents. A detailed Model of Consultation was developed by TNLDF to guide this process, with a strong focus on including women and youth. Ultimately, the extensive consultation process was viewed as being as important as the Code itself, as it began to instil a democratic process in agreeing standards for leaders.

The development of the Leadership Code has been described as a 'campaign', rather than a conventional development program and therefore needed an institutional home within Tonga in order for it to be locally owned. This was to be found in the Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT). PLP already had close relationships with key individuals working in CSFT and relied on them for guidance on the best direction and approach for the TNLDF. This was critical given sensitivities in Tonga about external involvement in domestic affairs and meant PLP's support had to be low profile and hands-off. PLP support was thus

provided by way of funding for CSFT as the TNLDF Secretariat (paying the half-time salary of one staff member), technical advice and training and funding for consultation and validation activities. This totalled AUD 999,022 in support from 2010 to 2016. The TNLDF directed the vast majority of these funds to developing the Model of Consultation and activities around the Leadership Code, and to travel and event expenses for bringing together those needed to make the code a reality (including members of the Royal family). In some cases, spending on such hospitality expenses was viewed by PLP as excessive, bringing to the fore hard-to-avoid tensions between donor budget and accounting processes and the realities of what is perceived as necessary and appropriate in bringing together important coalition members in the Pacific. No direct salary or subsistence support outside of CSFT was provided and there was very little administrative support. This underscores the extent to which individuals' involvement in the TNLDF was voluntary and based on genuine commitments to improving leadership. Activities supported included Leadership Week, Community Governance Empowerment Programs, Prefects' and Young Nobles' and TNLDF Board Retreats, consultations across all islands and two National Forums and the Launch of the Code.

Despite PLP support, the strategic direction and activities were left to the TNLDF to shape, given the critical importance of ensuring the process was genuinely socialised and owned by Tongans themselves. Here it is the way that PLP and the architects of TNLDF operated, rather than what they did per se that demonstrates their skills in adeptly navigating Tonga's politics to achieve reform. The most important role for PLP was playing an initial convening role in bringing together key influential people. Drawing on the knowledge of Tongan staff and advisers, PLP held a meeting drawing together this influential group, which provided the space to discuss what might be a viable way to work on leadership issues in Tonga. PLP then adopted a more hands-off approach, allowing this group to develop its own plans and agenda that were genuinely Tongan owned. Those ultimately involved in the TNLDF were brought together by this group, due to the importance of the constituencies they represented and their networks that could then be mobilised to draw into the consultative process all those needed to make a Leadership Code politically possible. PLP continued to have regular strategic discussions around the shape and progress of the Leadership Code and acted as a 'critical friend', challenging key TNLDF partners.

In December 2013, the Leadership Code was formally launched. It has since been signed by 20,000 people out of a national population estimated to be 105,000 in 2014, including the King, Crown Prince, Prime Minister and Cabinet. The Code sets out a Tongan vision for good leadership and reflects progressive leadership norms, such as accountability and transparency, in a manner suited to the Tongan context. The Code is now inscribed on a wooden carving that hangs in Tonga's Parliament House. Of course, the extent to which the Code influences leaders' behaviour remains to be seen. In the 2014 elections, Tonga's first commoner Prime Minister was appointed by the King on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly following general elections in which 17 of the 26 members elected were people's representatives, rather than nobles. Such changes of course cannot be attributed to the TNLDF or Leadership Code alone; however, both have played a role in opening up more democratic conversations about leadership at a critical juncture in Tongan politics. The work of the TNLDF is also continuing, although with limited PLP support. A project to nurture and train young nobles receives a small amount of PLP funding, and another to train the next generation of leaders in schools was discontinued by PLP against the wishes of TNLDF due to funding constraints.

Simbo for Change, Solomon Islands

Simbo for Change is a local initiative on Simbo Island in Solomon Islands which seeks to develop niche agricultural exports as a means of empowering women and their families. It is the result of a partnership between a local woman leader, a Samoan sustainable livelihoods organisation and PLP, which has provided AUD 232,824 between 2012 and 2016.

Simbo is a remote island in the Western Province of Solomon Islands, home to 1,782 people. They have few natural resources, poor access to services, weak infrastructure and few employment opportunities, particularly for women and youth. Most of the population rely on subsistence farming and limited income from selling coconuts, fish and megapod eggs. Access to markets is difficult and expensive, with the nearest market, Gizo, more than two hours away by motor boat and no ferry access due to the lack of a wharf on Simbo (a wharf is due to be built by the Asian Development Bank in the coming months to improve access to markets in Gizo).

Women are the main breadwinners in Simbo and given the poor market access, spend several days at a time in Gizo trying to sell their products at market. Yet this yields little profit due to competition from other sellers and having to pay for transport, food and provisions while away from home. With few safe places for women to sleep at the markets, they are vulnerable to sexual assault, intimidation or exploitation. While Simbo women are in Gizo, the men look after the children on Simbo, leading to problems of child protection.

This situation motivated a woman leader in Simbo to take action to improve the lives of women and children. Her request for help from a newly established Solomon Islands' women's group was turned down, and so she approached the Samoa Women in Business Development Incorporated (SWIBDI) while joining her husband on a business trip to Samoa. SWIBDI is a Samoan organisation with over 20 years' experience of building sustainable livelihoods by connecting rural Samoan households to local and overseas markets. The Executive Director of SWIBDI and the Simbo woman leader developed an immediate bond, both motivated by religion and an entrepreneurial vision for helping women. SWIBDI, which had previously worked with PLP, introduced the Simbo woman leader to the program.

This led to the formation of 'Simbo for Change', a partnership between PLP, Simbo's woman leader and the four tribes of Simbo and SWIBDI. The partnership's goal was to develop niche agricultural exports as a means for developing sustainable livelihoods for Simbo and empowering their women and families. This was to be achieved by creating value added organic products for international markets so that women could reduce their travel to Gizo, spend more time looking after their children and reduce child protection concerns on Simbo. Importantly, approaching the issue in this way was perceptive to sensitivities regarding child protection on Simbo – using women's economic empowerment as an entry point for dealing with other problems.

From May 2012, PLP provided funding for a project to address these issues, managed by SWIBDI. Having previously worked together, PLP and SWIBDI had a strong relationship of trust which enabled PLP to play a hands-off role and let SWIBDI mentor the Simbo woman leader and, with her, jointly drive implementation. PLP has provided flexibility for the project to develop and room for SWIBDI to work in ways it deems culturally appropriate. In some cases, this led to PLP supporting approaches that most donors would see as unconventional, but which were important in a Pacific context. For example, when early in the project the partners sensed tensions within the community, PLP trusted and supported the partners' approach to seek advice from a church pastor to understand these dynamics – although this ultimately did not come to pass as the pastor was too busy (Hoatson 2015: 16). This has required a willingness to accept risks and uncertainty.

While implementation continues and change will take time, the partnership is producing some early results and has adapted based on learning from results. Production of coconut oil and soap has begun, with the establishment of a virgin coconut oil (VCO) production facility and training of community members to operate it. A number of families have begun selling coconuts to the family managing production, although new coconut trees will need to be planted for VCO production to be viable. However, it has become apparent that VCO production alone will not transform Simbo's economic prospects. As a result, in 2016 the island has also established 22 bee hives. These have a number of advantages: they bring a regular crop of honey to sell (every two to four weeks); provide an accessible crop that eventually all in the community could own (alleviating jealousies that may arise with the more exclusive VCO production facility); delivering the added benefit of fertilising other crops on the island (such as mangoes, mandarins, melons and pumpkins); and thus maximising yields and increasing Simbo's available food sources. In addition, the partnership is also training communities in fabric screen-printing for handicrafts to sell in Gizo. Communities are preparing the island for organic certification by the end of 2017 (initial plans to apply in 2016 have been delayed due to the extensive preparatory work required). This will make Simbo the first registered organic island in Solomon Islands. Specific markets and supply chains have yet to be investigated, but one idea is to sell VCO to the international Body Shop company with whom SWIBDI has an existing contract. Finally, SWIBDI male staff have made initial inroads into discussing issues of child protection with men in Simbo. This was possible largely due to the chiefly status of the SWIBDI male staff and historical ties between Solomon Islands and Samoa.

The project has re-invigorated the community, stimulating cooperation between men, women and community leaders. Women's confidence is growing as they participate in training and livelihood activities such as newly created savings clubs, and women's economic empowerment has enabled early conversations about child protection within the community.

Green Growth Leaders' Coalition

The Green Growth Leaders' Coalition (GGLC) was formed in 2012 to 'drive the introduction and implementation of green growth and sustainability principles in policy and decision-making' (IUCN, undated) in Pacific Island countries. This coalition of Pacific leaders arose due to a shared sense of urgency about the threat posed by climate change and the need to address it. There are varying accounts of how GGLC was formed. Some suggest GGLC already existed as a loose arrangement and PLP support allowed it to formalise; others see PLP as playing a role in brokering its formation.

At the regional level, the GGLC consists of a Secretariat of two people from the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and a Core Leader's Group which has small but broad regional membership involving politicians, bureaucrats, faith-based and private sector representatives. Together these entities have played a key role in driving forward a Green Growth agenda across the Pacific. The Secretariat in particular has played an important role in helping facilitate agreement on a coherent Green Growth agenda, manage the process and organise key forums.

The GGLC first convened a meeting of the Core Leaders Group at the regional level in May 2012 to develop a joint green growth agenda. This forum may not have happened without PLP's funding, given the cost involved in bringing participants from across the Pacific. This forum resulted in the coalition agreeing a joint agenda to mainstream green growth principles across all government and non-government agencies, through traditional fono/talanoa⁸ practices. It also agreed on a set of principles to act on collective regional interests and promote inclusive and sustainable economies while protecting rights, critical ecosystems and threatened species, and shifting to zero carbon emissions in the Pacific.

The Secretariat then conducted scoping visits to Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Tonga to invite stakeholders from across government, the private sector and civil society to participate in national Green Growth dialogues.

8 These practices are described as creating a space for open discussion, understanding different perspectives, jointly owning outcomes and going on a journey together (O'Keefe 2013: 25, citing the LEGGASI Report).

GGLC members drew upon their pre-existing networks to facilitate this, leading to strong overlaps between the regional and national coalitions. These dialogues provided the space for senior representatives from across different sectors of society to discuss and collaborate on Green Growth issues, resulting in the formation of ad hoc national coalitions. A number of prominent leaders have participated in those coalitions.

PLP's support for GGLC emerged from discussions between PLP and a key representative of IUCN. They jointly agreed a package of support, including small amounts of flexible funding to cover the coalition's operations (such as travel and meeting costs, and the program manager's salary) – totalling AUD 737,430 between 2011 and 2016. At the same time, the partnership has not crowded out support for the GGLC from local contributors and other development partners. For example, the Solomon Islands' government paid for the majority of the Solomon Islands Roundtable, with IUCN providing organisational support and PLP providing some travel and salary costs. PLP has thus played a low profile role in supporting and interacting with the GGLC, providing IUCN and coalition members with autonomy to drive the process.

PLP's support for the regional coalition meetings has also provided space for GGLC members to reflect on their leadership styles and how best to employ them to achieve their goals. GGLC members attended PLP's Adaptive Leadership Symposium in Brisbane in October 2012, soon after the coalition became formalised. As reported by O'Keefe (2013: 24), through this Symposium GGLC members participated in training and a simulation of Western-style leadership. They contrasted this to ways of working in the Pacific, which reinforced for them that a Pacific Leadership style exists. This prompted them to think about how to better define this approach and institutionalise it within the GGLC. This Pacific style can be seen in the nature of the GGLC and the way it works. The GGLC and its Secretariat are not formal institutionalised entities, and membership at the regional and national levels is fluid. PLP has handled this reality by providing funding to the GGLC through IUCN, a formal organisation with adequate financial management and reporting capabilities. Pacific styles of deliberation of *fono/talanoa* have been adapted for use in GGLC forums, particularly at the national level. These approaches have helped the GGLC formulate its agenda and ownership at the regional level.

Early results indicate that the GGLC has built consensus on a Green Growth agenda across the Pacific, including with the private sector, which has typically been excluded from discussions on green growth more broadly.⁹ In doing so it has cemented bonds within existing networks at a regional and national level, and a number of policy commitments have been made to achieve green growth. For example, GGLC support in Vanuatu has helped to shape the National Strategic Development Framework, which incorporates sustainable development policies and which is soon to be tabled in parliament. In Tonga, collaboration is under way between GGLC and TNLDF to develop the Ha'apai Development Plan to protect the island's depleting marine resources, while at a subregional level GGLC has been instrumental in the development of the Melanesian Spearhead Group Green Growth Framework.

⁹ For more on GGLC results and ways of working see Craney and Hudson, forthcoming.

4

PLP experience of supporting developmental leadership and coalitions

Drawing on PLP's eight years of experience and its support for the four initiatives described in Section 3, this section examines what this suggests about supporting developmental leadership and coalitions. It highlights seven **key messages** for consideration:

- Be pragmatic when choosing developmental leaders
- Leaders can be found in both formal or informal spheres, exercising hard or soft power
- Coalitions can be organic or more proactively nurtured
- Coalitions do not have to be inclusive
- Coalition membership can be fluid and evolving
- Coalition membership need not be equal
- People do not necessarily need to know they are part of a coalition

Before turning to discussion of these messages in the following sections, the evolving **understanding of developmental leadership** requires clarification. There is extensive literature on leadership and myriad definitions. For example, there are contrasting views on whether leadership is about the innate personal qualities or traits of leaders (Bowden 1926; Bingham 1927), or about leaders' behaviour or actions (Fiedler 1967). While the literature often tends to focus on individual leaders, some studies conceptualise leadership as being about group dynamics, how individuals relate to each other within a group (Uhl-Bien 2006) and their combined capabilities and skills (Andrews et al. 2010). Some academics believe it is the functions that leaders contribute to a group, rather than their personal traits or behaviours, that are most important (Andrews et al. 2010: 13).

Those working in international development increasingly view leadership as a collective process that is inherently political, whereby individual leaders are only effective to the extent they can mobilise and work with others to pursue a shared objective (Lyne de Ver 2008: 5; Leftwich and Wheeler 2011: 5; Andrews et al. 2010). Successful leadership that leads to change requires working together in groups (teams, coalitions or networks) (Andrews et al. 2010; DLP 2012: 5). Coalitions are 'individuals, groups or organisations that come together to achieve social, political and economic goal that they would not be able to achieve on their own' (DLP 2012: 5).

Leadership becomes *developmental* when individuals, groups or organisations mobilise politically to achieve developmental change (Hayley and Barbara 2014: 4-5), which 'requires reconfiguring prevailing uses and structures of wealth and power in support of new development goals' (Hayley and Barbara 2014: 2). This implies development is a political and contested process, with 'winners' and 'losers' in any change process. Developmental leaders need to be able to work politically to change how power and resources are distributed in order to achieve development outcomes.

PLP's understanding of leadership has similarly shifted from a focus on individual leaders to leadership as a collective process. The early phases of PLP emphasised individual leadership, with the purpose of PLP Phase I to 'improv[e] leadership practices emerging at national, local and regional levels' (PLP 2007: 19). This included seeking changes such as 'improved knowledge, values and practices of current and emerging male and female leaders' (PLP 2007: 21). This focus on individual leadership was also borne out in the partnership approach at that time, with PLP providing core funding and organisational strengthening to individual organisations. The early focus on individual leadership may continue to have some influence within PLP. A number of staff interviewed talked about the importance of particular leadership traits – for example, having authority and power (due to formal position or membership of a chiefly clan), being accountable, being committed and able to champion a cause or set the agenda. This reflects similar tensions in the literature between individual and collective leadership, but perhaps indicates that both individual traits and collective interactions play a role in effective leadership.

Over time, PLP has grown to understand leadership as a collective process, as reflected in the move to support coalitions rather than individual organisations or leaders. This shift seems to have been influenced by thinking from the Developmental Leadership Program (DLP), Cambridge Leadership Associates/Harvard University and Jaime Faustino (The Asia Foundation)

shared with PLP through training, knowledge-sharing events and research dissemination. This is reflected in the PLP Phase 3 Draft Design Document (AusAID 2012), which draws upon this body of work and defines leadership as 'the harnessing of skills, knowledge and perspective, combined with the use of influence to mobilise people and resources towards a collectively desired objective'. Interviews with PLP staff reinforced this understanding of leadership as a collective process (though they continued to reiterate individual characteristics as well). They emphasised the importance of leaders being able to build relationships with and mobilise others, and being able to draw on networks and leadership as a means to achieving developmental change. Thus, individual leaders are important within PLP, but only insofar as they are able to mobilise and work with others, which requires working politically to build coalitions to achieve developmental goals.

Be pragmatic when choosing developmental leaders

PLP's experience suggests that donors need to engage with leaders and coalitions with the power and ability to influence change, not necessarily those that adhere to 'good governance' principles.¹⁰ Coalitions pursuing development change may be controlled by an individual or small group of people, who may have mixed motives and adopt quite closed processes to achieve their ends. They will not necessarily pursue transparent, inclusive and participatory approaches to achieving that change. Often those with the power and ability to make change happen will be elites (Faustino and Booth 2014: 2; Lyne de Ver 2009: 4). Faustino and Booth (2014: 15), in their discussion of a coalition in the Philippines that pursued land title legislation, note: 'Some of those who played the leading roles in steering the bill through House and Senate committees were regarded in Philippines advocacy circles as *trapos*, the typical kind of unprincipled patronage politician'.

Most of the coalitions PLP supports are made up of elites, in some cases very prominent people in the ruling class. These leaders are driven by a range of motivations, including developmental, spiritual/religious, pragmatic/opportunistic and personal benefit (for example, increased power, influence, reputation or material benefit). What is most important, however, is that these leaders have a keen interest in pursuing a developmental change (whatever the underlying driver) and have the power, influence, networks and ability to mobilise others and work politically to achieve these outcomes.

Similarly, donors and the coalitions they support do not need to agree on everything. Rather, it is about donors and coalitions identifying areas of mutual interest that support developmental change. For example, there have been certain aspects of the GGLC's work and affiliations which PLP could not support for political reasons, yet they were able to find overlapping interests around issues of climate change where they could work together.

The reality is that often the leaders with the power and ability to influence change are not those adhering to 'good governance' principles. This can pose challenges for donors in deciding which leaders or coalitions to support (Dasandi 2013). However, ultimately a pragmatic outlook is needed, recognising that change will not necessarily come from solely developmental motives.

Leaders can be found in formal or informal spheres, exercising hard and soft power

Leaders do not need formal authority to be effective. PLP-supported coalitions show that leaders may emerge from the formal and informal spheres. WISDM, GGLC and TNLDF largely involved leaders occupying formal positions in either government, parliament, the nobility or the private sector. In contrast, the woman leader playing a central role in Simbo for Change held informal authority by virtue of her status in the informal sphere as a traditional leader of her tribe, a prominent local businesswoman and a key player in local women's organisations and the church. This is reflected in the literature on women's leadership, which highlights that women's participation is often strongest in civil society and that these experiences provide women with an opportunity to learn and practice leadership skills and to advance their social status (McLeod 2015: 16-18; O'Neil 2016; O'Neil and Domingo 2016: 12). However, it is also important to note that in the Simbo context, the matrilineal system also enables women's leadership. One PLP staff member went further than this, emphasising the leadership roles Pacific women play within the household:

Women have informal power in the home and they can move mountains with this. We may not be as present at the international and political level but within the household, women are the influencing power. (Interview with PLP staff member)

Given the gender bias within the formal political sphere across the Pacific (and more broadly), donors wishing to support female leaders need to look to informal spheres of leadership, where women are often found playing prominent roles. Indeed, overlooking such informal spheres of power could lead to inadvertently diminishing such power. Female leaders in particular are also often found to be wielding 'soft' rather than 'hard' power, which it is important to look out for.

Women in the Pacific face significant challenges in exercising leadership, particularly due to entrenched social norms and cultural beliefs that hinder women's participation in all spheres (McLeod 2015). However, women have developed strategies to overcome these constraints. McLeod notes how Pacific women in civil society have achieved influence in 'quiet rather than

¹⁰ 'Good governance' is described in different ways, but here it refers to Western liberal democratic ideals such as transparency and accountability, responsiveness, participation, equity, inclusiveness and the rule of law (see Gisselquist 2012).

overt ways, to avoid alienating those resistant to change' (2015: 4). An example of this is the woman leader who drove the Simbo for Change process, who sometimes asked her husband to speak for her. This may be construed as submissiveness, but may also be a means of exercising soft influence within established gender roles and norms. This may also be seen in this leader's more consultative approach, as one PLP staff member noted:

[She] operates differently as a woman: she is pushing forward with things – she is also very cautious and mindful about what people might say about her because she's in a very small community. With her own analysis there is a need for her to share and get input into what she's thinking. (Interview with PLP staff member)

This suggests that women may exercise leadership differently to men – a perception endorsed by most PLP staff. They suggested women can be more consultative (although not in all cases), more focused on building relationships and more passionate about and committed to the issues they pursue than men. The disadvantaged position of women in the Pacific may mean that they have to develop unique strategies to exercise their leadership that may not be as immediately apparent as men's use of power. This is in keeping with wider emerging literature on what 'adaptive' approaches to development can learn from gender communities that have long supported feminist action (see for instance, O'Neil 2016).

Coalitions can be organic or more proactively nurtured

Coalitions may emerge due to a wide range of factors, with PLP's experience showing that donors can also play a role, both in supporting existing coalitions or brokering new ones. In both cases, it is important that the reform is genuinely locally led and that donors are not seen to be using local actors or coalitions to forward their own agendas.

Multiple factors can enable the emergence of a coalition. A critical juncture, policy window or political opportunity can often create the catalyst for a coalition to organically form, so long as those actors are able to spot and respond to these opportunities (Leftwich and Wheeler 2011: 9). A sudden threat or issues which are particularly relevant to groups and individuals can also prompt collective action (Leftwich and Wheeler 2011: 10). Other enabling factors are prior or existing networks and previous experience of acting collectively (Leftwich and Wheeler 2011: 9; 25), as well as a conducive institutional and political context (Leftwich and Wheeler 2011: 6).

There is less consensus in the literature on whether donors should build coalitions or only support those emerging organically through locally driven forces. Coalitions created by a donor may lack local legitimacy if they are perceived to be pursuing a donor agenda or motivated by financial interests, rather than being driven by a desire to address local issues (Leftwich and Wheeler 2011: 26). They may not be sustainable if formed around donor, rather than local, priorities.¹¹ For these reasons, some argue donors should create an enabling environment for coalitions and social movements, rather than directly seeking to build coalitions (Leftwich and Wheeler 2011: 27; GSDRC 2009: 1).

However, there is also evidence that donors can build coalitions for development change. DFID and DFAT/The Asia Foundation's (TAF) Coalitions for Change programs have successfully constructed issues-based coalitions to achieve reforms in a number of countries (see Booth and Unsworth 2014; Faustino and Booth 2014). In such cases, close attention is paid to selecting coalition members who are passionate, determined and resilient, with the right mix of functions and skills and high levels of trust within the coalition (Faustino and Booth 2014: 9-11; 20-23). Booth and Unsworth (2014: 3) argue donors can play a useful role in brokering relationships and alliances between stakeholders based on common interests but that the change must ultimately be locally led. They explain 'locally-led development' as working on issues that have particular salience for local beneficiaries and those with the power to address those issues; it is also about giving local coalitions the space to drive the process and develop locally relevant solutions (2014: 3-4).

Most of the PLP coalitions in this study emerged organically, with local players approaching PLP to support the process. Critical junctures, threats, salient issues and prior or existing networks all played a role in the emergence of these coalitions. For example, the GGLC was prompted by a heightened sense of the threat climate change poses to the Pacific. Members of its Secretariat and Core Group had pre-existing relationships and drew upon their networks to encourage establishment of national level coalitions. In each case, PLP supported the agendas proposed by existing coalitions, rather than building the coalitions themselves around a particular agenda.

TNLDF is the only coalition in which PLP played an active brokering role. While the emergence of TNLDF responded to a critical juncture – democratic opening in Tonga – PLP played an initial convening and brokering role in its formation. Following a decision to focus on leadership in Tonga, PLP held a forum to provide space for key Tongan stakeholders to explore issues and identify ways in which PLP could support them. As one PLP staff member explained it:

We got them together – invited them for lunch – and said this is a space for you to think about what is an issue that is relevant and a priority for Tonga. It's not a priority for the Australian government or PLP. Think about it and how you go about this is up to you. It is basically buying space for people to come together. No one had given this space to think before. (Interview with PLP staff member)

¹¹ See for example the experience of DFID's Coalitions for Change Program in Nigeria (DLP 2012: 26).

It was this process that led to the formation of the TNLDF, consisting of members of the initial forum and expanding to include their own networks. The fact forum members already knew each other and had worked together before helped.

While PLP played a key role in establishing TNLDF, it was careful not to impose its own agenda and the activities that PLP supported were locally led. PLP staff remained committed to the partnership approach, even backing ideas that they were initially unsure about but trusting the partners' judgement:

They ended up ... focusing ... on the development of a leadership code – we were pretty unsure what this would do. But we had to be careful with the partnership model and they sort of just wanted us to tell them what to do and we had to encourage them to decide. So we ended up basically giving them the money and let them decide what to do (within the bounds of what's legal) as long as we can be involved in asking questions. And what we realised is that it wasn't really about the leadership code – that was just the formal output that they could mobilise people around. But it was really about the process of bringing MPs and their people together to get people to start asking questions about how money was spent. This helped to start sparking accountability. (Interview with PLP staff member)

These findings illustrate that coalitions can emerge in many different ways (see also Brimacombe et al., forthcoming). Factors such as critical junctures, perceived threats, the salience of the issue to local stakeholders, and pre-existing relationships or networks can enable coalitions to form. The cases demonstrate that donors can successfully support such organic, locally owned coalitions, but also that donors can play a brokering role, bringing together key actors to form a coalition. The key issue appears to be that, regardless of whether a coalition is organic or more proactively catalysed, the reform it embarks on is locally owned and led. Donor involvement is not seen as simply using local actors to legitimise their own agendas.

Coalitions do not have to be inclusive

The composition of PLP's coalitions indicate that coalitions do not necessarily have to be inclusive to be effective – although questions remain about longer-term effectiveness of what may be superficial legal or policy changes. Similarly, reports from DLP research and policy workshops have noted that coalitions should be as small as necessary to achieve the objective (Leftwich and Wheeler 2011: 7; DLP 2012: 12, 19). For example, collective action processes may start with a narrow coalition to explore problems and solutions, then expand at later stages into broad coalitions and networks to build acceptance for the change (Andrews et al. 2010: 38). The Asia Foundation's 'development entrepreneurship' approach favours a small team driving a broader coalition, citing evidence that smaller groups make more accurate decisions (Faustino and Booth 2014: 22). Even the process of building a coalition does not have to be inclusive or transparent. Booth describes a coalition in the Philippines that was pursuing land title legislation:

It was important that, in building a support coalition for the reform, the team was free to discover an approach that worked without being constrained to comply with donor or international NGO 'good practice' principles. The coalition building was neither open nor transparent. It involved tacit agreements by different groups or individuals to spend political capital – exercise influence, call in favours – in support of a particular step in the campaign. The team did not convene large meetings to thrash out a consensus position. It did not feel obliged to involve representatives of broad sectors of the population for the sake of any general commitment to 'inclusiveness and transparency'. (Booth 2014: 16-17)

In summary, the literature seems to advocate a pragmatic approach to coalition building, as necessary to achieve the desired goal.

This is reflected in the PLP coalitions, which had differing levels of inclusiveness. WISDM was the most exclusive coalition, with taskforce membership only from the public service and parliament. While civil society organisations played a role earlier in the process (and are seen by the DWA Director to continue to be part of the wider network pushing for women's political participation), they were not involved in the coalition that eventually brought about the electoral reforms allowing for reserved seats for women in municipal councils. This appears to have been due to an explicit strategy acknowledging that ultimately, legislative change only needed government support to be passed. As one PLP staff member explained:

These people understood the local dynamics and they knew who we would need on board. Some people say it's like a clique. And I say, well, if it's working, maybe it has to be a clique. It's a sensitive issue and so we have to have the right people to bring everyone along. (Interview with PLP staff member)

Such an approach is indicative of the 'good enough' approach to reform that focuses on getting those necessary on board, but not necessarily on the broad inclusivity required by good governance approaches (Grindle 2004).

While coalitions may be exclusive, this can carry risks. In the case of Simbo for Change, the partners made an explicit decision to expand the process from a single tribe to all tribes on the island, as a calculated strategy to avoid creating jealousies between communities. Despite this, however, the families closest to the coalition have initially benefitted most, although the more recent introduction of beehives is helping to spread benefits more widely.

The experience of TNLDF also reveals that sometimes having an inclusive process is just as important as the outcome. This was the most inclusive coalition, with representation from across Tongan society. However, it also employed a very comprehensive and inclusive consultation process, from the top levels of Tonga down to the grass-roots level, to inform development of the Leadership Code and the Ha'apai Green Growth Plan. The purpose of TNLDF was not just about passing a leadership code, but strengthening accountability of leaders to the people. TNLDF's inclusiveness was arguably necessary to build a common understanding and acceptance across all levels of Tonga about what citizens should expect of their leaders. How inclusive a coalition is may have implications for the type of outcomes that can be achieved. WISDM sought to achieve legislative change and adopted an exclusive coalition to achieve this. However, questions remain as to whether this legislative change will be enough to lead to the attitudinal change needed for effective implementation of the legislation. At the other extreme, TNLDF used an extremely inclusive approach to achieve a technical outcome (the Leadership Code), but also an arguably more important attitudinal change (around perceptions of what people expect from their leaders). The PLP experience demonstrates that coalitions need not be inclusive. What is important is that the composition of the coalition is appropriate to the objective being sought.

Coalition membership can be fluid and evolving

PLP demonstrates that coalition membership does not need to be fixed or formalised to be effective – rather, membership can be fluid and evolving. This accords with DLP's (2012: 5) broad definition of coalitions which accepts that they can take many forms, ranging from formal (for example, with a specific name, structure and even constitution) to informal arrangements where members still realise they are part of a broader group. Coalitions can even constitute loose networks or groups joined by those with overlapping interests.

The coalitions supported by PLP were fairly loose, with very fluid membership that changed over time and overlapped with other groups. This is particularly the case for the GGLC and WISDM and to a lesser extent for TNLDF and Simbo. As a PLP staff member notes:

What we perceive as a coalition looks very different in different places. It can just be two or three people, but expands and contracts as it achieves what it needs to. We're more interested in what is to be achieved than on how it's done. (Interview with PLP staff member).

O'Keefe (2013: 4-5) describes the fluid nature of GGLC membership. Membership of its Core Leaders Group has never been fixed or formalised, however those involved all identify as members and know who the other members are. Membership has changed over time as original members have drawn upon their own networks to invite others to the group. The Core Leaders Group and Secretariat have used their networks to foster national coalitions to form around issues of local significance. There is a level of overlap between membership of these national coalitions and the Secretariat and Core Leaders Group. Members often have multiple 'hats', such as government official, charity volunteer or church member.

The nature of the WISDM coalition has also been fluid and evolving (Rousseau 2014: 1-2). Originally membership comprised civil society members led by DWA. But civil society involvement in WISDM was replaced over time by a tighter group of officials from various government departments, politicians and academics, all led by the Director of DWA, who suggested that the CSOs should form a wider network and that select government officials should form the TSM taskforce. There are differing interpretations as to why this occurred. Some believe the CSOs had already fulfilled their role in the process by formulating a policy paper on TSMs. Others felt the CSO sector was too fragmented to drive change and, in any case, change would come from engaging with key decision makers in government, not civil society. However, even this tighter membership was fluid as the DWA Director drew in other players as necessary to achieve the TSMs.

TNLDF started with a core membership of representatives across government, the nobility, private sector, civil society, churches and youth. At a later stage this membership was expanded to include additional key representatives from the nobility, government, women and community. More recently, PLP staff have noted there are signs that TNLDF membership may be changing again as the political context changes and different coalition members are needed to pursue the desired changes. In contrast the TNLDF board membership has been relatively stable, although it too has admitted new members as needed, such as when moving into new sectors (O'Keefe and Lee 2014a: 8).

This fluid and evolving nature of coalition membership may be symptomatic of working in the Pacific context. The small populations of many Pacific countries means there is a high level of interconnectedness between groups through family, school, church and workplace and this may account for the overlapping and fluid membership. However, the multiple 'hats' that members of the coalitions wear have the potential to lead to complaints of conflict of interest from donors, whose funding requirements expect a clearer legal-rational accountability process. In contrast, as action researchers noted during the focus group discussion, these multiple hats are not seen as problematic in the Pacific for the commonplace fluidity mentioned above.

In each case, the challenge for PLP has been finding ways to fund these coalitions in spite of their informality and fluidity. This has been done by channelling funds through formal organisations that are part of the coalition (for example, SWIBDI for Simbo, IUCN for GGLC, CSFT for TNLDF and a Port Vila-based accounting firm for WISDM). In three of these cases, these

organisations were part of the small, centralised group driving these coalitions. It is important, therefore, to consider how PLP's funding of these organisations has shifted the power differentials within these coalitions, or whether PLP has simply supported players which already had strength within the coalition.

Development experience in the Pacific has shown that sometimes the formalisation of local informal processes and networks into organisations with systems and processes that meet donor funding requirements has ultimately constrained their effectiveness. There is some indication the coalitions supported by PLP may have become more formalised, although it is not clear how this has impacted their effectiveness. For example, while GGLC emerged organically, PLP funding to the Secretariat may have helped formalise its existence. Further, one staff member raised the question of whether PLP's involvement in the emergence of TNLDF influenced it to take on a more formal structure:

TNLDF is the outlier here ... we did engineer them to some extent. And we have questions now about whether they're now more like an NGO with their clear working group looking for the next issue to build a coalition around, rather than that happening to some degree organically. (Interview with PLP staff member)

PLP recognises the risks of putting funding through one coalition member and the potential for this to skew the power relations within the coalition, to formalise or 'projectise' the coalition, and to create donor dependency. To avoid this, PLP pays directly for a number of coalition expenses, rather than passing the funding to a local coalition member to administer. This can be significantly more labour intensive where it involves, for instance, arranging travel, local venue hire, hardware and supplies for coalition activities. Future research might usefully consider how funding mechanisms and relationships have impacted on the effectiveness of these coalitions over time. These findings from PLP show that coalition membership can be fluid and evolving and that this is particularly relevant in the Pacific context. However, support for a coalition may lead to a formalisation of coalitions or an alteration of its internal power dynamics.

Coalition membership need not be equal

Coalitions need members with a range of different roles and functions and these do not necessarily require equal input. Rather, most of the coalitions supported by PLP were driven by a core individual or group within the broader coalition. This reflects work by Andrews et al. (2010: 13) that emphasises functions over traits of coalition members. The most important function is the 'connector', a central player who connects, facilitates and coordinates group members to achieve their objective (Andrews et al. 2010: 32).

The description by Faustino and Booth (2014) of 'development entrepreneurship' similarly acknowledges the importance of team composition, but also emphasises that within any broader coalition there needs to be a small team of leaders driving the change. These 'development entrepreneurs' undertake iterative learning, set the direction and coordinate the efforts of the broader coalition (Faustino and Booth 2014: 20). Development entrepreneurs are said to be 'brokers, facilitators, doers, shakers, movers, operators, orchestrators and activists who knew when, where and how to mobilise other people ... interests, ideas and resources to bring about institutional innovation or change ...' (Leftwich in Faustino and Booth 2014: 20). These teams of development entrepreneurs need complementary skills, including a team leader who coordinates the group, technical expertise, political skills and networks, and insider knowledge and experience in the reform area (Faustino and Booth 2014: 23).

The PLP cases of Simbo, GGLC and TNLDF all involved a small, central group of people within the coalition who took responsibility for driving the process. For example, Simbo was initiated by a woman leader with a vision, strong commitment and local networks. However, she was assisted by her husband, and by the head of the Samoan NGO who has provided technical advice, introduced new ideas and acted as a sounding board to strengthen strategic direction. The GGLC Secretariat of two people have played a key role in setting the Green Growth agenda, working behind the scenes and using their networks to mobilise national coalitions, managing the process and organising the logistics for the various forums. O'Keefe (2013, p. 3) notes that the 'operations of the Secretariat may be the singular most significant factor in the achievements of the GGLC.' Similarly, in the case of TNLDF, it was its Secretariat of two people who largely drove the strategic direction and actions of that coalition.

The WISDM coalition was slightly different to the other cases in that it was driven by an individual. A woman leader set and framed the agenda and tightly controlled the whole process, using her networks to mobilise key coalition members as necessary to achieve her vision. She had the political skills to achieve this vision, working through formal and informal routes. As a few PLP staff members explained:

'So it's recognising that a coalition exists to some degree [but] there's a lot of work being done by an individual.'

'There is some shared purpose but it's much more one person's vision and often works independently from the coalition. And there is only nominal membership in the coalition for some.'

'In the coalition for change she includes other women and other men, but she controls this and she knows who to work with and will later include others.'

These cases reinforce the findings in the literature that a small group of committed individuals within the broader coalition often take responsibility for driving the change process. These small teams or individuals displayed similar characteristics to the 'connector' and 'development entrepreneur' roles described in the literature; they set the agenda and direction, mobilised people and coordinated inputs. However, while these leaders inherently worked adaptively to pursue their objectives – navigating roadblocks and opportunities as they emerged – it was less clear whether or how they took a more formal and purposive iterative learning approach, as envisaged in the 'development entrepreneur' model. This highlights that coalitions do not need to be made up of equal membership from all involved but that some members will play stronger roles than others.

People do not necessarily need to know they are part of a coalition

Building on the findings above that coalitions are fluid, with people playing different roles (some more important than others), PLP experience also suggests that it is not necessary in all cases for people to know that they are in fact part of a coalition. As noted by DLP (2012: 22), 'coalitions are not only made up of those who show up at meetings'. Rather, key leaders within a coalition can draw on individuals without necessarily drawing them into group meetings or wider discussion.

This was most clear in the experience of the WISDM coalition. In this case, the DWA Director hand-picked a selection of people to form a taskforce. Rather than bring these members together, the DWA Director tended to engage with each of them on an individual basis. The coalition thus operated more as a 'spokes and wheel' operation than as an integrated group. Given their direct relationship was with the DWA Director, they did not necessarily even know they were part of the wider reform process. As one PLP staff member put it:

One thing [Jaime Faustino] shared with the program was that it's possible to work collectively with people who have no idea that they're working collectively with others. That struck a chord. Because it challenges the generally held notion that in a coalition everyone sits around a table and shares the same thing. (Interview with PLP staff member).

Such an approach is not necessarily problematic for developmental change, as long as there is a more central leader (or leaders) coordinating or encouraging the inputs of various stakeholders in a way that pulls the inputs together and moves the process forward. One upshot of this is that this way of pushing for developmental change is likely to be less inclusive than conventional understandings of coalitions might suggest – but not necessarily less effective.

Summary of findings on developmental leadership and coalitions

These findings challenge traditional notions of what a coalition should be. Coalitions may come in a variety of forms and operate in myriad ways: they can emerge organically or be more proactively nurtured; be inclusive or exclusive; formal and structured or informal and loose; and can be driven by a small core team of leaders, with members not even aware that they are part of a broader collective process.

What seems to be most important is that the form and operation of coalitions is fit for purpose and that the issue and process is locally led in order to be legitimate and sustainable. Much of this resonates with the emerging literature on developmental leadership from the DLP, the Overseas Development Institute and The Asia Foundation. The PLP experience provides additional examples of what coalitions for change can look like, particularly in the understudied Pacific region.

5

PLP experience of thinking and working politically

Over the last five years there has been an increasing focus in the aid industry on changing ways of working to support developmental change. While there have long been advocates for more politically aware ways of working in development (see for instance Ferguson 1994), this agenda has been on the ascendance recently, with a number of communities of practice and different nomenclatures emerging in support. These include thinking and working politically (TWP), doing development differently (DDD), problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) and adaptive development (Dasandi et al. 2016; DDD 2014; Andrews 2013; Wild et al. 2015). While there are differences between these agendas, they have a common core in their recognition that development is a fundamentally political, not merely technical, endeavour, requiring a deep understanding of the context, of the political interests and power structures at play, and takes a learning approach to programming that encourages iteration and adaptation (Booth and Unsworth 2014; Laws 2013; Hudson and Leftwich 2014). The centrality of local knowledge of political dynamics means that local reformers – not external donors – are in the driving seat (Booth and Cammack 2013). It is also local reformers who are most likely to have the necessary networks to mobilise in support of a given change. As Booth notes (2014: 36):

Thinking and working politically is about operating with a degree of political intelligence, and in particular liberating and harnessing the potential of local reformers to shape and steer processes of change in politically informed and attuned ways.

These clearly resemble ways of working within PLP. This is both directly apparent in the language used by PLP staff to describe how they work, as well as more implicitly apparent in how PLP staff operate day-to-day. The explicit packaging of PLP as a program that thinks and works politically has been informed by knowledge-sharing between PLP and key thought leaders around the TWP and associated agendas. Training has been provided by academics and practitioners from Harvard University and Cambridge Leadership Associates on adaptive leadership, and Jaime Faustino from The Asia Foundation Philippines office has spoken to PLP about development entrepreneurship. In addition, the close relationship between PLP and DLP has provided a channel for some of the latest development research to feed into programming. This kind of knowledge-sharing has provided PLP with both a pool of ideas and thinking, and a lexicon for articulating its ways of working. This has complemented the knowledge and modes of operation that PLP staff already possessed and put into practice. PLP has thus both explicitly sought to couch the program as part of the movement towards more innovative and politically informed ways of working, and brought together a team who already implicitly think and work politically in their day-to-day lives.

This section unpacks how PLP thinks and works politically and what might be unique (or not) about this in the Pacific. PLP can be seen to think and work politically at a number of levels; its partners think and work politically in getting their reforms passed. PLP Country Representatives think and work politically in supporting local partners and using their own networks to help forward the change processes underway. And PLP headquarters staff think and work politically in identifying partners and finding the best ways to support them and to influence the way a reform unfolds. In unpacking what TWP looks like within PLP, examples are drawn across all of these levels. **Four key features** can be identified as key to PLP's approach to TWP:

- Emphasis on knowledge of the local context and political dynamics
- Strategic use of this knowledge to identify potential partners and inform ways of working
- Formal and informal work behind the scenes, allowing local actors to lead
- Periodic reflection and challenging of ideas.

This section discusses these four features, then considers the influence of the donor environment and how this has shaped the ways in which PLP thinks and works politically over time. Finally, it considers how unique PLP's experience might be to the Pacific. Of course, those involved in different parts of PLP think and work politically in different ways, and these variations will be brought out below as much as possible, along with a consideration of how gender issues feature.

Know the local context and be politically aware

A number of scholars note that developmental change is best led not by donors but by local reformers who have the knowledge and networks necessary to achieve change (Booth and Cammack 2013; Booth and Unsworth 2014; Laws 2013). This builds from the recognition that development is fundamentally political and requires a deep understanding of the local political dynamics – something that is more difficult for donors than local agents to acquire. As Booth and Unsworth note (2014: 3):

... development is a political process (that is, shot through with politics in the Leftwich sense). It is largely endogenous and cumulative – though influenced by changing regional and global contexts; and not dictated by any universal sequences, such as those associated with modernisation theory or liberal internationalism. This suggests that donors, as outsiders, can play a supportive but not a leading role in facilitating progressive change.

These insights are clearly reflected within PLP. Currently, all staff (with the exception of the team leader) are locally hired and are Pacific Island nationals. Country representatives are all nationals of the countries they represent and have significant formal and informal networks through (often overlapping) professional, political, educational, religious and family connections. This Pacific orientation of the team matters in the countries in which they are working, where foreign (particularly Australian) expertise and advice can be poorly received or be inappropriate for the local context. The shared history, culture and often religion of Pacific Islanders can mean that expertise and advice offered among them is more welcome. This was the case, for instance, in relation to Simbo for Change, where assistance provided by SWIBDI – a Samoan organisation – was welcomed and seen as natural given historical exchanges of missionaries between Samoa and Solomon Islands. In other cases, the fact that PLP staff can speak local languages and share some cultural practices allow for more familiar relationships to be built with partners. This is only possible once trust and credibility are established between the program and partners. However, this 'Pacific' identity is not monolithic, nor without other influences. The backgrounds of individual staff members also matter and where it is perceived that country representatives, for instance, represent donor rather than partner interests, relationships can be strained despite all involved being Pacific Islanders.

This knowledge of local context is paired with being politically aware and recognising how even the seemingly mundane carries with it implicit power relations that structure and influence relationships. As one PLP staff member told us:

Most aid is treated as values free but this was very values laden – our staff had to embody that. Where they sat was important, who made the phone call was important, where the meetings were held, whether there was food or not, etc. All of this mattered. If any of us showed a lack of humility the whole process would be undone. (Interview with PLP staff member)

Being able to combine knowledge of local context with politically astute thinking is thus key.

In addition to PLP staff bringing with them a good understanding of national and regional contexts and networks in the Pacific, the knowledge-based aspect of PLP means staff are also acculturated to much of the latest development thinking on leadership and adaptive development. This means they have been familiarised with thinking about how their knowledge and networks could be mobilised for developmental change. Many PLP staff can thus be understood to have been thinking and working politically in their day-to-day lives prior to joining PLP, but perhaps not articulating it this way or putting it to use professionally. As one PLP staff member recounts:

I live in a village ... [I]n the community there are a lot of dramas happening there and so you watch and see things play out and you're able to say that that person is doing that because of this and so if we want to change or resolve something we have to think about how you need to engage with different people differently to get the outcome you want. I didn't realise this was TWP until last year [2014] – but when I learned about it I was like "that's what I do". (Interview with PLP staff member)

PLP staff build their knowledge of context by reaching out through their networks to a variety of individuals through regular country visits (for headquarters-based staff) and through what one PLP staff member described as 'the judicious collection of gossip'. These channels of knowledge-building mean that staff not only have their ear to the ground but also are able to situate what they hear in a nuanced understanding of the country. They can thus make more informed decisions than those whose lesser knowledge might lead them to misread or misjudge a scenario.

It should be noted that PLP staff do seem to think and work politically in different ways at different levels. At the headquarters level in Suva, for instance, PLP staff seem to think and work politically by building networks within the countries they are responsible for and influencing partners by providing informed advice about leadership and change and other support. In part, choosing the leaders/coalitions to partner with and (where relevant) building the coalitions in the first place involves thinking and working politically. This means making judgments about the potential success of a change process and how best to support it. PLP headquarters staff also, at times, influence the direction of the change processes. While it is certainly the case

that the reforms are locally led by partners, the partners are influenced to varying degrees by PLP staff. There are examples of PLP staff convincing partners to focus on certain activities as opposed to others where PLP staff felt their initial plans were unlikely to work, for instance. While this could take on the surreptitious air of the 'dark arts' – as Duncan Green has called them (2013) – it is more accurately understood as effective use of the 'critical friend' approach, whereby the strength of the PLP partnerships enables staff to speak openly and constructively challenge partners. Here, the strength of PLP's relationships with partners, founded on the partnership approach, is key. The 'critical friend' role comes with responsibilities attached. It is not an opportunity for program staff to push donor interests or impose conditions. Using the 'critical friend' role in such a way would very quickly shut down the relationship. Rather, the role requires a judicious balancing of the benefits that a wider, external perspective can bring, with a respect for the more nuanced local knowledge that partners possess.

At the country level, PLP staff play the roles set out above in cooperation with their headquarters colleagues, but they also navigate local networks to build coalitions, get information to support a change process and bring their own influence to bear. As one PLP country representative explains:

When there are meetings that have been called, I know when to go and when not to go – because I understand the context and who the key individuals are. I also use my networks to build relationships with others. I am also able to link different partners to different people and [help them think through] how they are going to do what they are aiming to. (Interview with PLP staff member)

There is, in fact, an acknowledged division of labour between PLP headquarters staff (all Fijian nationals) and country representatives. The former use to their advantage their (relative) 'outsider' status in partner countries to have conversations with partners that can be difficult for country representatives who are intertwined in local networks and clan structures. Country representatives, on the other hand, can gain deeper insights through their local networks and bring these to bear in discussions with partners and PLP.

These ways of working resonate strongly with articulations of what TWP looks like in other contexts. Booth and Unsworth (2014: 16) have highlighted, for instance, that:

It mattered that the process of finding solutions was undertaken by individuals who were both knowledgeable about, and skilled at operating in, the relevant context. It was this awareness and ability that allowed them to identify the opportunities and obstacles, and to make good judgements about what was both useful in the particular development context and likely to work.

An understanding of the local context and being able to interpret unfolding events through this lens is clearly a key feature of PLP's way of working.

It is striking that the vast majority of PLP staff, and two of the reform leaders supported by PLP covered in this paper, are women (however despite this, many of the most senior and influential positions have been held by men). The relationship between thinking and working politically and gender has widely been overlooked (Koester 2015). But the very apparent dominance of women within PLP raises questions about whether men and women think and work politically in different ways. No clear consensus emerged on this question in interviews with PLP staff. Some felt that to work politically women had to act more 'like men' – being authoritative and strong – and faced greater challenges breaking into male-dominated forums than their male counterparts. Some said they were not able to use humour in the same way to build relationships (Wild, forthcoming). Others, however, highlighted how women might more naturally think and work politically because they are used to being marginalised and having to find ulterior ways to exert their power. As one PLP staff member explained:

I think women are better at thinking and working politically [than men] because we always have to be fighting all the time to get power – whereas men are automatically born with it and so don't learn. (Interview with PLP staff member)

These varying perspectives reflect the diversity of ways in which women work, as has been noted in wider literature on women's leadership (see for instance O'Neil and Domingo 2016). While the research does not find anything conclusive about the differences between how men and women think and work politically, the fact that staff had not thought about how gender might affect their ways of working suggests further research is needed to unpack this question.¹²

¹² For further discussion of this issue see Wild (forthcoming).

Use this knowledge to strategically identify who to work with and how

While there is very little disagreement about the need for donor programs to think politically, it has been harder to operationalise this by working politically (Rocha Menocal 2014). Indeed, this is why Carothers and de Gramont (2013) have described the turn to politics within the aid industry as an 'almost revolution.' PLP works politically by bringing together key individuals to work with in pursuing change and approaching sensitive issues in strategic ways.

In identifying partners, as well as in playing a more active role in nurturing coalitions, PLP relied on its networks and politically informed staff. In contrast to putting out a request for proposals in pre-defined areas and getting potential partners to apply, fitting with donor priorities and processes, PLP's approach was much more of a headhunting search for the right leaders and coalitions. There were no calls for proposals or 'challenge funds'. Rather, PLP staff kept their ear to the ground, visited the countries for which they had responsibility often and met with a diverse range of stakeholders. Through this open-ended searching, potential partners were found.

This avoided the potential problem of competitive donor processes undermining cooperation among local actors and skewing local organisations to – at best – represent their programs in ways that conform with donor priorities, or – at worst – proposing programs that fall outside their competence or locally defined priorities. As one PLP staff member explains:

The reason we (Country Reps and Program Managers) 'find' the people [to partner with], we know who the people are – this has been helped by the fact we've been there for a while and know who the key people are – these are small places. [We] try to find issues that are defined enough that you can work on and then map out the people you could potentially work with on this. People refer you to other people and you build up the networks that way. Initially it's trying to connect the people around the issue and trying to understand everyone's position on it and seeing how viable change might be. And checking in with Post who will have their own perspective on these issues. (Interview with PLP staff member)

While this process often involved tapping into existing coalitions for change, as has been noted earlier, PLP played a more active role in forming a coalition in the case of TNLDF. Without a clear sense of the best approach to working on issues of leadership in Tonga, PLP turned to the networks it had developed through existing relationships to bring together a group of influential stakeholders from across Tongan society (including civil society, churches and private sector). This group was able to identify a process that it thought would be politically possible within Tonga (the development of the Leadership Code) and began to piece together a coalition of those necessary to make this a reality. This included, for instance, drawing in nobles and representatives of the monarchy they knew to be interested in issues of leadership to give the process legitimacy locally.

PLP staff thus leveraged their networks of local stakeholders to help convene a viable coalition to achieve the change sought. This way of working politically also reflects Booth and Unsworth's depiction of programs brokering relationships and building alliances. They emphasise how programs that work politically are 'able to play a useful and sometimes catalytic role in bringing together different interest groups and provide them with small amounts of timely support through studies, training or workshop opportunities' (2014: 26).

PLP staff not only had to work politically in identifying and building partnerships, but also in ending them. As PLP evolved from a partnership approach focused on institutional strengthening of partners in support of their wide-ranging priorities to more strategic partnerships around particular reform initiatives, not all partnerships survived. Throughout its eight years, PLP has had to end some partnerships that were found not to be making much headway (see Wild, forthcoming). Managing these 'break ups', as one staff member referred to them, also requires significant skill. If your ability to think and work politically is based on having strong relationships with organisations and individuals, you have to cultivate and protect those relationships. Cutting funding and ending a partnership can ultimately undermine your ability to think and work politically.

This is especially sensitive in parts of the Pacific where there is limited donor funding and where personal networks are very dense – so that PLP staff who have to end a partnership might well have to do so with someone who is a member of their own church, tribe or even family. This requires a delicate balancing act and one PLP staff member noted that 'we have to think about how these relationships affect the individuals we have on the ground because they have to live with the consequences.'

In addition to working politically by bringing together coalitions for change, PLP also works politically by being strategic in how it works on sensitive issues. Both Simbo for Change and TNLDF are examples of programs in which partners were able to move conversations and action forward on critical issues that it would not have been possible to directly 'program' around. In the case of Simbo for Change, the partnership has focused on women's economic empowerment, but in doing so has also been able to begin conversations around the sensitive issue of child protection in the community. Similarly, in relation to TNLDF, a partnership explicitly focused on democratisation would have been politically unfeasible. Yet the process by which the Leadership Code has been developed has opened up conversations about principles of leadership and what people have the right to demand from leaders in a way that is locally appropriate.

PLP and its partners have thus been able to work on sensitive issues by working on other, less sensitive issues as the entry point. This strategic way of working demonstrates Booth's description of TWP as 'a guerrilla operation, not a war of fixed positions' (2014: 18, citing Chikiamco and Fabella).

Of course, there is also a danger – as PLP staff noted – that such ways of working come back to bite you. When the ability to think and work politically is built on relationships and networks, maintaining these is also critically important. Part of working politically is ensuring that ways of working do not end up undermining the relationships that allowed you to do so in the first place.

Work formally and informally behind the scenes, allowing local actors to lead

PLP's manner of thinking and working politically involves a large amount of low profile work behind the scenes, allowing the local leaders and coalitions they support to lead. This is critically important for the change processes to be seen to be locally legitimate and thus ultimately more successful. Were the change processes to be explicitly badged as Australian aid, it is likely they would not gain as much traction locally. While there is a danger of TWP being seen as external interference, at least in this case this overlooks the degree to which PLP works through genuine partnerships – so that the agendas for change are locally owned, but also PLP-supported. Indeed, a key criterion for the selection of partners is that they must want the change more than PLP. This mirrors Booth and Unsworth's description of TWP in other contexts (2014: 18):

... the starting point is a genuine effort to seek out existing capacities, perceptions of problems and ideas about solutions, and to enter into some sort of relationship with leaders who are motivated to deploy these capabilities.

Working behind the scenes also often means working informally – not merely holding official meetings but using backdoor channels to build relationships, obtain information and move things forward. Some of this happens in very practical ways. For instance, PLP's first office in Suva provided food and outdoor seating to encourage the Pacific style of hospitality that is so important in relationship building. While such expenses can be viewed by donor accounting as wasteful, this was a strategic use of (relatively small amounts of) resources based on an understanding of regional ways of working. Indeed, even within PLP, high levels of hospitality spending by partners was not always welcomed by headquarters, leading to some tensions with partners who felt such spending facilitated work towards reform. This highlights the potential limits of even strongly locally led and contextually aware donor programs that ultimately bump up against administrative and budget procedures that are more rigid. Such issues can place a degree of strain on the very partnerships that are key to the developmental changes sought.

PLP staff also note the importance of working informally to build relationships in the countries they work in:

[B]eing able to establish relationships with church leaders meant going to church every Sunday even though you didn't understand the language and going to shake the Pastor's hand so he knows you are there. It's not meetings, it's just that. That's the way you need to build the relationship. Much of our work is built outside the office, not in it. (Interview with PLP staff member)

Similarly, PLP partners work informally to further reform efforts. The DWA Director notably relied on family and clan-based connections from her home island in Vanuatu to arrange out-of-office meetings with key stakeholders in the evenings or on weekends so that she could lobby them outside the formal government setting. PLP describe this as key to her success in getting the TSMs legislation passed. It brings to mind Jaime Faustino's suggestion in developmental entrepreneurship training that his best work is done at weddings, baptisms and funerals.

Working informally and in a low profile way is also possible for PLP given the multiple roles and connections that its staff play and can draw on. This was described by one country representative in the following way:

I played different roles to strategically place the PLP at a winning advantage. The PLP plays a very background role – not very obvious and sometimes people involved don't know about PLP. I had to selectively identify with PLP – sometimes if I told people or made it apparent I worked for PLP then people wouldn't share with me because I'd be seen as a donor. Because I wore lots of hats – PLP, civil society ... etc. – I was able to blur roles and have very frank conversations that would not have been possible if I just wore one hat all the time. (Interview with PLP staff member)

This suggests that PLP at times plays a kind of 'arm's length' role – with the donor program sitting at a remove from partnership activities (Booth 2013). This is certainly true at the country level, where PLP's footprint is very light with just a country representative (who wears multiple hats) on the ground. In some cases, those involved in a coalition might not know about PLP's support, not because it is hidden but because it is not overtly apparent. Country representatives can also act as buffers between partners and PLP. As one country representative explains: 'There are often things partners will say to me that they won't say to donors, and so I can be a buffer.'

Yet, at the same time, PLP has not represented an arm's length aid approach in the manner Booth describes it. Donor staff were actually embedded within the program itself prior to DFAT integration, suggesting a much closer donor-implementer relationship than is often the case. Similarly, country representatives have at times been active members of, or at least sympathetic to, the coalitions PLP supports. Instead of denying the political interests and networks of its staff like many aid programs, PLP uses this to its advantage. PLP appears to strategically use its various staff and their connections (be they to

local networks or to the Australian government and embassies) in ways that further the program's interest in facilitating developmental change. At times this involves a buffer between partners and the donor, and at other times it involves a tight feedback loop with the donor to enable fast decision-making (see the section below on the influence of the wider donor environment). In both cases, PLP is working politically to make the program work in the interests of the change process.

One PLP staff member raised concerns about the gender implications of some aspects of supporting locally led change. Implicit within this is an acceptance of the importance of 'working with the grain' and supporting local reformers working on issues they have prioritised (Levy 2014). Yet if 'the grain' is supportive of status quo power relations, then working with it can mean continued marginalisation of those groups without power and a focus on reforms that are in elite interests. As the PLP staff member put it: 'For those working on women's rights, "working with the grain" is scary – how much of the grain is against us?' There are no easy answers but several points are worth highlighting.

First, there are inevitably, in all societies, multiple 'grains' and working with the grain is partly about being politically savvy in finding those that are developmentally inclined. Going with the grain should not imply an unquestioning acceptance of the status quo. Instead, it should mean searching for developmental change processes that have local resonance (and may be ongoing or in existence already) and leadership so that they are more likely to be successful.

Second, there is a question of timeframes for supporting change. Reform efforts that fit within conventional development program timeframes are likely to prioritise quick wins and these may be less likely to challenge entrenched interests. This is all the more so in the current aid environment (in both Australia and internationally) that focuses more than ever on 'results'. This can incentivise programs to look for short-term policy changes without ensuring that these are also accompanied by corresponding changes in institutions, attitudes and behaviours; or to work solely with elites rather than supporting leaders outside of traditional elite circles. Ensuring that change processes in the interests of the marginalised are also supported means finding ways to support what are likely longer-term endeavours that do not fit three to four year programs.

Third, this challenge highlights the importance of the point raised earlier about looking for reformers outside the formal political sphere (where elite interests tend to dominate); and supporting coalitions (that can amplify the collective interests of more marginalised individuals) rather than individual leaders (O'Neil and Domingo 2016: 12). Supporting gender equality in local meaningful and relevant ways means finding local leaders who will champion the issue.

Reflect periodically and challenge ideas

A key feature of DDD, PDIA and adaptive development is an emphasis on learning and iteration so that the trajectory of reform changes as teams learn more or the context changes (Andrews et al. 2012; Booth and Unsworth 2014; Wild et al. 2015). TWP also encompasses this focus to the extent that it is necessary to adapt programming to remain politically relevant and responsive.

PLP clearly takes an open-ended 'purposive muddling' approach to developmental change and certainly does not start partnerships with pre-determined solutions to problems in mind (Andrews 2013). However, they have a less formalised approach to iteration than much of the wider literature advises, in which – for instance – quarterly reporting involves a reappraisal of the current theory of change (Ladner 2015), or fortnightly problem diaries reflect on changing dynamics and impacts on reform efforts (LASER 2015). So while the program has been flexible enough to change course and adapt, this has largely been triggered by informal, regular conversations between partners and PLP staff rather than through any inbuilt learning and adaptation process. This is partly connected to challenges encountered in PLP's monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) processes.

PLP did introduce Reflection and Refocus (R&R) sessions in Phase 2 that take place every six months but these are for core PLP staff (not partners). They focus more on the overall direction of PLP or, in some sessions, the particular implementation challenges that staff are facing, not so much on the reform initiatives themselves and whether their strategies are those most likely to achieve the change sought. All PLP staff reported finding the R&R sessions helpful but few could point to any precise changes that emerged out of one of the sessions. This is not to suggest that the change processes PLP is supporting have not been adapting but rather that this happens on the basis of regular informal conversations between partners and PLP, with PLP staff acting as critical friends. For instance, PLP staff pointed to instances when they had dissuaded partners from undertaking certain activities that PLP felt would not be helpful to the wider change process. Such frank conversations were made possible by their solid relationships. But this is different from a formalised reflection process for each reform.

Embedding more formalised reflection and learning processes may be a particular challenge for PLP given its limited control over many of the change processes it supports. Because PLP is not itself usually the instigator of a reform, but rather a supporter of it, its ability to encourage the leader or coalition to change course is limited. In this sense PLP is somewhat unique compared to other examples of TWP. Its partnership approach means that partners are entrusted with leading a reform however they see fit, since they have the best local knowledge, networks and so forth. One upshot of this is that PLP plays a more limited role in influencing the strategies its partners use to pursue their reform. Where PLP does play a role, it is as a critical friend and sounding board, rather than as the facilitator of a more formal reflection process. There may also be a Pacific element to this wherein formalised processes of questioning are eschewed for more informal discussions that are seen to be more culturally respectful and appropriate, and are less beholden to the donor-partner power relations.

In part, challenges in embedding iteration and learning are connected to difficulties in establishing MEL processes that are both flexible and light touch enough to capture coalition results, and yet robust enough to build a strategic level case for the program's unconventional ways of working within AusAID/DFAT. Early in Phase 1, PLP deliberately sought to maintain a low profile to give it the space to establish itself and develop its approach. While this perhaps made sense early in the program as it was finding its feet, over time it was necessary for the program to develop ways of effectively communicating its approach and achievements to AusAID/DFAT in order to build a supportive enabling environment for its work. However, a common challenge PLP staff have referred to is the program's difficulty in communicating its complex work in ways that will resonate with DFAT.

During Phase 1, an adviser supported PLP program officers to report on a limited number of simple and relatively unstructured questions following regular meetings with partners. This was intended to be sufficiently light touch so as not to be a burden on capacity and time, and flexible enough to capture the ways in which coalitions were unfolding (Roche and Kelly 2012a). PLP saw this approach as useful but not systematic enough, and felt that it was unable to answer some of the bigger questions about program-level contributions around issues such as leadership and coalitions for change.

As a result, a more integrated and systematic approach to MEL was introduced in Phase 2. Research and communications staff were hired; coalitions were tracked over time; outcome harvesting was used to demonstrate results; action research was used to explore how coalitions evolved. However, those leading PLP at the time did not prioritise the development of a more systematic approach, which they contrasted with more flexible entrepreneurial styles of learning.

With the reductions in the Australian aid budget that took place as Phase 3 got under way, PLP did not replace research and monitoring and evaluation staff who had left the team, reducing the program's capacity to undertake MEL. The program returned to simpler monitoring processes with advisers providing guidance on light touch questions and helping to pull out numbers in order to 'feed the beast', as one interviewee put it.

The ways MEL has evolved over the life of the program underscore a range of challenges PLP has grappled with. Principally, this has revolved around how to tell a complex story simply in an increasingly challenging aid environment. Strategies to do so have moved between getting program staff to undertake data collection, having full-time MEL staff with responsibility for this, or using consultants to draw this out, including through action research which this paper builds on (see O'Keefe et al. 2014). Shifts in approach have reflected different views among PLP's leadership about the degree to which formal MEL is important or helpful. Perhaps the most critical question is how a program like PLP that works in some unconventional ways can create an enabling environment for its ways of working.

Influence of the wider donor environment

It is widely recognised that the ability of implementers to think and work politically is shaped by the wider donor environment within which they operate. Donor processes therefore have a significant impact on the ability of aid programs to work in new and innovative ways (Hout 2012; Booth et al. 2016; Unsworth 2009). As Booth and Unsworth highlight in their review of seven programs that have acted in politically smart and locally led ways (2014: 21):

... just as important [as effective reformers] was the relatively benign bureaucratic environment within which they worked, providing them with sufficient room to innovate, experiment and seize opportunities.

The donor environment had shifted significantly between 2008, when PLP was set up, and 2016 when this report was being finalised. This has fundamentally impacted on the space available to PLP to operate in more innovative ways. Two key factors in donor set-up explain the unique ways of operating that have come to characterise PLP: the co-location of AusAID staff with PLP between 2008 and 2013; and the qualities of PLP staff.

Co-location saw dedicated AusAID staff sitting within PLP, acting as a continuous link between the program and funder. This served multiple positive purposes and was highlighted by a cost effectiveness assessment in 2011 as bringing considerable benefits compared to conventional program arrangements (Henderson and Roche 2012a: 22). At a very practical level it enabled fast sign-off and approval procedures that allowed PLP to respond quickly to both new opportunities and problems that arose. For instance, in negotiating partnership agreements, an AusAID staff member was integrally involved and was able to make decisions about what could and could not be included in such agreements without having to go back to the donor.

Co-location also allowed PLP to manage risk effectively and got around the risk-averse behaviour that entirely subcontracted programs can encourage due to concerns about a donor's risk appetite. Having AusAID staff embedded meant that they were able to take calculated risks and ensure that decisions to take risks were informed by the various sources of information available to the Australian government. A good example of this was concerns around working with groups such as the Green Growth Leaders' Coalition (GGLC). Coalition members had a diverse range of political interests and affiliations, some of which did not always align with the Australian government's own priorities and interests. Having an AusAID staff member in place to monitor such risk was key to the program being able to make informed decisions that struck an appropriate balance between supporting coalitions for change and ensuring Australian aid was not diverted for other purposes.

Co-location also enabled quick feedback loops between the program and its funder, benefiting both PLP and AusAID. PLP understood what AusAID wanted and expected and the direct access to other AusAID and embassy staff was useful for relationship building in-country. By the same token, having co-located AusAID staff meant that they were able to build an understanding of PLP's unique ways of working within AusAID, thus 'providing cover' for the program to work in such ways (although, as discussed in the final section, even with co-location there were some challenges in communicating PLP's ways of working). PLP staff suggested that this included creating acceptance for some degree of failure. A critical part of thinking and working politically is experimentation – recognising that while some investments will succeed, others will fail and programs need to learn from this. When co-location was in place, it was felt that there was an understanding from the donor that some partnerships would not deliver results but that this would inform future ways of working. This enabled PLP to operate in more flexible and responsive ways.

With the election of Tony Abbott's Liberal government in 2013, however, AusAID was absorbed into DFAT. Integration saw the discontinuation of the co-location model within PLP, as aid staff were reduced across the board and having two embedded staff within a small program was no longer tenable. The positive impacts that co-location afforded have thus been difficult to maintain within PLP. Its staff highlight there is now a more formal process for communication, approvals and sign-off with DFAT, so the program feels more hesitant to take risks and PLP staff feel that they must keep a low profile in order to capitalise on opportunities and provide timely support for coalition activities. Other staff explained the change by saying there is now 'more of a guessing game' in terms of what DFAT wants and what the program can do. At a practical level, while PLP retain some flexibility to define their work as they go, annual plans are now more rigid with changes in partner activities or movement of funds across projects now requiring DFAT sign-off. This is complicated by a lack of consistent engagement by Post due to their multiple competing priorities. While the partnership approach was already changing prior to integration, since integration this has changed further with DFAT setting priority areas and PLP having to ensure partners fit within these. The priority areas are broad and PLP maintain they are able to retain prioritisation of locally led reform agendas and then fit these within DFAT's priority areas. There is nonetheless a shift in the underlying logic of how change processes are identified. PLP has arguably now reverted to a more conventional grants program with less of the flexibility and ability to take risks that characterised earlier stages of the program. This shift demonstrates how important the wider aid context is in shaping the ability of programs to think and work in politically savvy and flexible ways.

Yet while the wider donor environment is strongly shaped by the program structures that donors put in place, it is also influenced by donor staff themselves and how they work within these structures. The co-location design might not have provided the space for innovation and risk taking if the staff who occupied those positions reinforced conventional, risk-averse programming styles. But from the very beginning PLP benefitted from AusAID staff and contractors who themselves supported, and thus carved out space for, politically smart ways of working. An early example of this was the original PLP design which, in response to the 2005 White Paper on anti-corruption, had the potential to become a normatively-driven, good governance program. Yet the designers skilfully crafted a program that responded to the Australian government's concerns with corruption in the Pacific, without falling into unwelcome (and unhelpful) paternalistic lecturing about good governance. AusAID staff co-located with PLP then went on to build extremely close working relationships with Pacific colleagues and partners, and were themselves proponents of thinking and working politically within the Australian aid program. They played a key role in navigating the bureaucratic and political intricacies of AusAID to enable PLP's unique ways of working to be possible. Of course, this would have been much harder for them to do were they not co-located, but co-location would not have been sufficient without the right kind of people. Similarly, once co-location ended, PLP's ability to continue its support to partners and encourage locally led development has been largely thanks to the ability of its staff to make this work despite a wider aid environment that did not encourage such ways of working.

Since the end of co-location PLP has arguably resembled a more conventional aid program compared to its earlier phases. Its focus has shifted from very open partnerships to engaging developmental leaders to issues-based coalitions with more set annual plans. That being said, the continuity of many of PLP's program and country-level staff and the natural proclivity of many of them to think and work politically means that PLP remains a unique DFAT program supporting locally led change initiatives.

How unique to the Pacific are these ways of working?

A recurring challenge for efforts to normalise thinking and working politically across aid programming is the claim that the examples covered in the literature are somehow unique and not generalisable to other contexts. The volume of emerging cases alone suggests this argument is not particularly convincing. But is there a sense in which the PLP experience is unique to its time and place?

The Pacific does offer a unique development context in certain respects. There are approximately 7,500 islands that make up the region, spread across roughly 30 million square kilometres of ocean, cutting across diverse colonial histories (British, French, Australian, American and New Zealander) and representing a wide spectrum of governance arrangements (from monarchy, to non-self governing to democracies) (Laws 2013: 5). The Pacific includes some of the most sparsely populated countries on the planet and the isolation of many of the islands presents a unique development challenge. Development indicators remain low in spite of substantial international assistance.

In terms of how unique the ways of working within PLP are to this environment, some of these features are important. For instance, the small population sizes mean that networks are particularly dense and concentrated. Finding developmental leaders and thinking and working politically can benefit from these tight-knit networks, as has been demonstrated in a number of the PLP cases. It is not hard to get access to the right people and build relationships through existing and often overlapping networks. Small, closely knit communities can also encourage people to naturally operate in ways that resemble thinking and working politically, as described by one PLP staff member:

[I]n a bigger pool of people you're going to be able to do things more unnoticed. In a small population you can't do that – everyone knows everyone else's business. I think that actually makes people work in more TWP ways because they're trying to do things under the radar and keep things secret a bit. (Interview with PLP staff member)

But it also makes working in such ways harder. Some PLP staff point to the low population and low levels of development as limiting diversity of ideas and the ability of people to engage in collective action when they are busy concentrating on basic survival. In this sense, PLP staff see their experiences as quite different to those in more developed Southeast Asian countries. In addition, the density of networks in the Pacific can mean that backlash against those seeking change is more apparent and keenly felt. As one PLP staff member explained:

Because it's a small place it's much more insular and so repercussions of speaking out are different. For example, in Tonga a woman who speaks out has the PM's wife write a letter to her husband telling him to keep her in line, and no one will sit next to her at church. The repercussions are different because of the close kinship networks in the Pacific. (Interview with PLP staff member)

It has been argued that there is a 'Pacific Way' that characterises politics in the Pacific (Mara 1997). This centres on informal dialogue to achieve consensus, using *talanoa* – talking and exchanging ideas without necessarily highlighting areas of opposition to maintain respect for sovereignty and the principle of non-interference (Dobell 2008; Moala 2015; Rhodes, forthcoming). This raises the question of whether what we see in PLP is indeed unique to the Pacific. However, PLP staff did not agree, arguing that while there are some unique features to the Pacific that influence their ways of working, that this does not imply their ways of working would not be relevant elsewhere. Some strongly rejected the idea of the 'Pacific Way', viewing it as simply a cultural cover used to justify the status quo.

While every context of course has distinctive characteristics that influence ways of working, this does not mean that the findings here, drawn from PLP's experience of thinking and working politically, have no wider relevance. The most important differences are perhaps the geographical isolation and small population sizes, which provide both opportunities and risks for TWP. There is potential to explore and compare forms of TWP in similar contexts (that is, in other small island developing states).

6

Implications for donors and donor programs

This final section suggests considerations for donors and development programs based on PLP's experience.

Recognise 'good governance' ideas are unrealistic: be more pragmatic

PLP's experience indicates that developmental change can come from leaders who are assertive or dominant, with a range of motivations, and coalitions that are exclusive. This challenges good governance ideas about developmental change having to come about through inclusive, open and participatory ways of working. In PLP's case, judgment was reserved on the form of leaders and coalitions, with a greater focus on their function in achieving change. Coalitions may be exclusive, loose or highly structured, and leaders may not fit the mould of what a leader 'should' look like. It is more important that the leader or coalition is fit for purpose – that is, they have a keen interest in pursuing the development change (whatever the underlying driver) and the power, influence, networks and ability to mobilise others and work politically to achieve these outcomes. Early results suggest that this approach has delivered changes quicker than might have otherwise been the case.

Some questions remain about the impacts of this approach in the longer term; for instance, whether a focus on the legal change to get reserved seats for women in Vanuatu will result in a thin reform that does not lead to attitudinal change. It could be argued that without bringing all stakeholders along the change is not as meaningful or sustainable. For instance, regressive attitudes towards women leaders, or resentment at having to share parliamentary seats with women remains. But this suggests that change can come about only when everyone is on board and ready. This overlooks the fact that change often happens in fits and starts, with key steps forward when they prove politically possible. This will of course create uncertainty and resistance but will nonetheless add up over time to greater acceptance of change. Having reserved seats for women in parliament is not a wholesale change for women's leadership but it is an important step, paving the way for further change.

Yet in the case of TNLDF, PLP experience suggests that, in some cases, the process of change was as important as the outcome. What seems most important, then, is that the process of change is appropriately tailored to the outcome sought. There is no particular blueprint that must be followed in all cases; rather, decisions about how inclusive or participatory a change process needs to be should be made according to the outcome sought and how best the power and interests stacked against change can be challenged.

For genuinely locally led development, focus on partnerships not programs

PLP's partnership approach is useful in building relationships that get beyond the merely transactional to a partnership in which the program is for the most part genuinely supportive of its partners and their priorities. Inevitably, this can mean less control for the donor and this is challenging in the current climate of results agendas and (in Australia) reduced aid spending. Yet it is critical if the recognition that developmental change must be locally led is to be realised. It does not mean that there is no role for donor input. PLP has demonstrated that the role of 'critical friend' can be important in supporting partners in their work by constructively challenging their thinking and acting as a sounding board for ideas. Donors can also play an important role in creating space for stakeholders to meet, and in bringing together groups of people to discuss overlapping interests. This can even extend to helping form coalitions (Brimacombe et al., forthcoming). But the importance of working behind the scenes in support of local actors does mean that the emphasis of many aid organisations on branding aid and ensuring visibility is unhelpful and potentially damaging to partners and their reform efforts.

In an increasingly complex aid landscape characterised by the rise of new donors and South-to-South (and even Fragile-to-Fragile) cooperation, traditional donor-recipient relationships are outdated and increasingly less attractive to partners. Donors need to explore new ways of working that invest in genuine partnerships based on equity, transparency and mutual benefit and that afford partners the room to manoeuvre as they see fit given their superior knowledge of local politics. This is not about less accountability of partners to funders but rather about mutual accountability, trust and, ultimately, greater development effectiveness.

It's not about the money – but it is about how the money can be spent

PLP's experience illustrates that developmental change does not necessarily require large injections of donor funding. Indeed, PLP explicitly took the approach of not making partnership agreements about funding. Discussions about money were 'taken off the table', as one staff member put it, early on in negotiations. Starting with the assumption that a partnership is about funding distorts the conversation and encourages falling back into a transactional relationship (the donor provides money for the partner to do something). Rather, PLP partnership negotiations started by looking at the different resources that each party brought to the table – be they networks, skills or funding. This recognised the value of what each partner brought to the table and tried not to overemphasise the importance of funding. This helped to shift the focus of conversation to what is really needed to get a change process over the line, which may or may not involve financial support. While funding was provided in some cases, for instance to part-pay staff salaries or fund activities, the majority of funding was invested in training symposia that brought emerging leaders together to learn from each other. This fostered mentoring and created space for leaders and coalitions to meet, network and lobby. Program budgets thus do not have to be large. In times of constrained aid budgets this may represent a smarter use of aid spending. Yet it goes against the increasing move towards large, outsourced projects that struggle to spend money quickly enough to meet milestones.

Yet while partnerships might not involve high cost outlays, there is a need to be flexible in how money is spent – and on what. Thinking and working politically to cultivate developmental leadership or coalitions for change is time intensive work. Good staff are required who travel frequently to maintain relationships with partners and keep abreast of emerging opportunities. Being able to fund meetings and the associated travel costs might appear wasteful but can in fact be a strategic use of funds to catalyse change through building and leveraging networks. In addition to what funding can be spent on, PLP's experience also indicates that how it can be spent is important. Flexibility across budget lines enables a more adaptive and responsive program that can take advantage of opportunities and changing context in real time. This, of course, poses some challenges for donor reporting requirements, but as far as possible these need to be tailored to suit what we know about facilitating developmental change. Reporting requirements should not be grounded on the expectation that developmental change processes will align with the bureaucratic processes of donor countries.

Identify staff who think and work politically and provide an enabling environment

A clear implication from PLP's experience is that its ways of working rely on employing staff (preferably for the long term) who have detailed local knowledge and are sensitive to the politics that infuse day-to-day interactions and can put those to effect in their work. This raises the question of whether donor and contractor recruitment procedures are calibrated to recruit such skill sets. It also has implications for the value donor agencies place on local staff and their knowledge and networks (for more on this see Rhodes, forthcoming). These skills are almost certainly found in much higher supply among nationals of the countries a program is operating in. Donor staff and managers of implementing partners must recognise that these staff require the space and authority to put their skills to use. Too often, locally engaged staff play supporting roles; yet, wherever possible, they should have a more substantive role in program activities and direction.

But having the right staff is just half the battle. In addition, staff require a wider enabling environment for them to put their skills to use. This includes, for instance, the already mentioned risk tolerance, as well as a culture of openness and learning. This can enable staff to trial approaches to problems or test out partners in an accommodating environment that encourages ongoing learning and iteration. Donors can also play a role, as PLP has done, in providing staff with knowledge about wider development debates that can help them apply their own skills and knowledge more strategically.

Provide more space for critical reflection

One area where PLP could be stronger is in relation to learning and adaptation. While investments were made in action reflection early on, this has not been sustained. Similarly, while Reflection and Refocus (R&R) sessions were introduced, these have focused more on addressing challenges of implementation and the overall direction of PLP, rather than on critically engaging with whether strategies for reform with partners were on track. Action research was introduced in Phase 2 to assist with this, but it is not clear how far this has played a role in assisting PLP staff to facilitate change, adapt their ways of working or communicate learning.

What has been missing is the building of a catalogue of learning about what it takes to find (or make) developmental leaders and coalitions and how best to support them to achieve change. This information is important to build internal support for the program from the donor. There is a need for programs like PLP, that sit on the 'lunatic fringe' (as one PLP staff member affectionately described it) of aid programs, to more confidently claim their ground and tell their stories of reform, even where these might be partial, uncertain or still unfolding. Having more formalised reflection and learning mechanisms within programs can help to test and refine the messages and learning emerging from the program. While this paper and others about PLP's experience (see Rhodes, forthcoming and Wild, forthcoming) are an effort to contribute to such critical reflection, they come eight years into the program.

Find ways to monitor and communicate program ways of working

To build the appetite for these ways of working, it is important for programs like PLP to effectively communicate what they are doing and demonstrate results. This is not easy for programs supporting complex, unpredictable and non-linear change processes. As Kleinfeld notes, it is important to recognise how change actually happens in these sorts of programs:

... progress looks less like a freight train barreling down a track whose forward motion can be measured at regular increments, and more like a sailboat, sometimes catching a burst of wind and surging forward, sometimes becalmed, and often having to move in counterintuitive directions to get to its destination. (Kleinfeld 2015: 4)

Moreover, where donors are supporting locally led change processes, it becomes difficult to know whether the change would have been achieved regardless of donor support. PLP has faced these challenges, routinely feeling misunderstood within the wider aid program – a problem only heightened since integration – and working through how to demonstrate the ways in which the program has contributed to the changes led by partners. The danger of not promoting these ways of working and why they are effective is twofold; not only will the rest of the aid program fail to learn from lessons of more innovative programs but also more innovative programs will be viewed with a degree of scepticism and their already constrained space to operate will be threatened.

Traditional, results-based management approaches are inadequate for monitoring and evaluating these types of programs. Such approaches tend to assume change happens in a linear way that can be predictably mapped out at the outset. They often measure simple, short-term results that can be directly attributed to a program, rather than longer-term and more complex changes (see for example ICAI 2015). Programs working in politically astute and flexible ways thus require inventive monitoring processes that can cope with issues such as their lack of rigid logframes and fixed indicators (see for instance Davies 2016; Eyben et al. 2015).

PLP has trialled different approaches to address this challenge, including action reflection, outcome harvesting, action research and investigative monitoring alongside more conventional partnership monitoring. One challenge has been having a consistent approach to monitoring over time, with MEL practices changing across Phases 1, 2 and 3. This has made it difficult for the program to communicate its results with consistency, particularly at the strategic level. Less concerning are the results or outcomes of particular coalitions, which can be captured in a number of ways. More concerning is that the higher level questions that PLP should be well placed to answer – what developmental leadership looks like in the Pacific, how leaders and coalitions can be found and supported, what ways of working for a donor program are suited to this – have not easily emerged from PLP's MEL processes. While it might not have been possible to pin down a precise monitoring framework at the outset, given the need for MEL to be flexible and adaptive, like the wider PLP program, formulating an appropriate monitoring approach at the outset would have been helpful. Evidence could have been gathered more consistently over time to demonstrate learning and progress and such information could then have helped to make the case for innovative ways of working within DFAT.

This speaks to the challenge facing programs that aim to work politically and flexibly more broadly. In recognition of both the limitations of conventional M&E and of the importance of demonstrating results, experimentation with more innovative evaluation efforts are under way. These share a number of commonalities: a focus on learning and adaptation; an emphasis on contribution rather than attribution of results; capturing a wider range of possible outcomes; and the use of multiple, mixed methods to capture results.

The unpredictability of complex change processes means programs need to regularly capture and feedback information to continually learn and adapt. PLP has used periodic Reflection and Refocus (R&R) sessions to consider program monitoring information and analyse program implementation and strategic direction. The Asia Foundation has developed more regular Strategy Testing to test program assumptions and strategies in light of learning (Ladner 2015). Similarly, problem diaries are also used by implementers to keep track of the changing environment (LASER 2015). Real-time simple reporting through short, frequent updates from program managers and partners is another way of promoting tighter and more regular feedback loops (UNDP 2013: 8).

There is also an increasing recognition of the need to shift from focusing on only measuring results directly attributable to the program (often outputs or short-term outcomes), to measuring the program's contribution to the broader change process (Roche and Kelly 2012b: 6-7; Saferworld 2016). As Roche and Kelly state:

Rather than asking “did it work?”, it is more helpful to ask “did it make a difference?”. This allows space for various causes to be identified and to examine how, together, they contributed to the observed change. (Roche and Kelly 2012b: 7)

This focus can also help to move from an emphasis on explaining what was done and how by an individual agency, to capturing what is also being contributed and done differently by others as a result of a particular development intervention (Saferworld 2016).

Given the difficulty in predicting what changes may occur and how, it is important that M&E captures a wide range of outcomes rather than focusing narrowly on pre-determined outcomes. This is important in recognising the potential unintended consequences, both positive and negative. As Kleinfeld explains:

Determining success ... requires broadening the picture and measuring the entirety of the phase space – the realm of the possible options, whether they are present at that moment or not ... To measure success, one must measure whether the space of the politically possible is moving in a direction that is more amenable to reform and inimical to those who oppose one's policy goals. (Kleinfeld 2015: 47)

Using multiple, mixed methods enables this wider range of outcomes to be assessed and promotes greater rigour and triangulation of results (Stern et al. 2012; Roche and Kelly 2012a: 11; Woolcock, 2013). While the M&E gold standard is often seen to be randomised control trials, these are often not suited to complex change processes; they help to identify what has changed but not how or why (Deaton and Cartwright 2016).

Other methods, such as case studies, not only allow for a more exploratory analysis of different outcomes and how and why these happened, but as a result can contribute to broader lessons of value to others (Woolcock 2013). Collecting a range of data with mixed methods can also enable a multitrack approach to M&E that combines some collection intended to 'feed the beast' which then create the space for experimentation. As long as data collected for such instrumental purposes does not drive programming, this can be done strategically as a way of thinking and working politically within the development community's own political economy.

It may be risky for flexible programs to actively communicate results that are often partial, still unfolding and the result of multiple influences, but it is also necessary to build an enabling or authorising environment for such ways of working in future. While the low profile approach made sense in the PLP case, allowing it to operate with minimal interference, it does not help to encourage more innovative ways of working within DFAT in the longer term. For this, programs need to engage with the burgeoning range of more innovative M&E practices tailored to adaptive ways of working.

Be realistic about risks involved in supporting developmental change and manage accordingly

Relevant monitoring processes are, however, just one step. In addition, donors themselves need to adjust their risk tolerance where they aim to support change processes that are, by their nature, unpredictable. Each leader or coalition supported should be understood as a 'small bet' (in the language of DDD). Not all bets will pay off and donors need to accept that some change processes they support will fail and others will not be achieved within the timescale of programming.

Given that risk is an inherent part of working on processes of developmental change, mechanisms to manage this risk can play an important role. In the case of PLP, co-location assisted this in the first two phases of the program. For effective risk management, it is invaluable to have staff who have a detailed understanding both of the program and what it is trying to achieve (and what this realistically entails) as well as of the donor environment, procedures and red flags. Having donor staff sitting within a program is just one example of what this might look like, but it is an excellent strategy for overcoming this challenge and avoiding either risk-averse programming that is less likely to achieve results or risky programming that unacceptably exposes the aid program.

7

Conclusion

If development programs are to achieve more meaningful results, there is a need to learn from innovative approaches that take seriously calls to be locally led, flexible and politically smart. These ways of working are increasingly associated with improved development outcomes and are widely believed to be more sustainable. While most examples of such cases have, to date, been documented in Africa and Southeast Asia, this paper has sought to capture the experience of a Pacific program, showing that thinking and working politically is relevant to the Pacific context and that the way this is practised in the Pacific has relevance beyond the region.

PLP's work with leaders and coalitions to support local change processes demonstrates that donors can play a role in both supporting existing coalitions and brokering new ones, as long as there is a supportive donor enabling environment. Such an environment requires, for example, internal supporters within the donor organisation who can advocate and make space for these approaches; close working relationships between the donor and implementing team; flexible and long-term funding arrangements; and a recognition that change trajectories and results cannot be predicted.

However, PLP's experience also highlights possible limitations and the risks inherent in many aid programs:

- First, this is a new and more complex way of working that is difficult to effectively communicate to donors in a way that builds support for the program. This has not been helped by PLP's moves back and forth between attempting – understandably – to keep a low profile in a challenging aid environment, and to more proactively communicate the program's learning and results.
- Second, working in this way means less direct spending on activities and more on staff costs, travel, meetings and hospitality. This expenditure is critical for playing a convening and brokering role in the Pacific context, but is not always welcomed by donors.
- Third, there are risks that donor funding to local stakeholders can skew power relations and formalise otherwise informal networks and processes which, in a Pacific context, can undermine their effectiveness. PLP has been aware of this and adopted inventive ways of delivering funding, but despite this some coalitions appear to have become more formalised, although it is not clear how this has influenced their effectiveness.
- Finally, while PLP's early phases strongly focused on supporting locally led priorities, more recently it has been supporting local priorities that are in clear alignment with donor priorities.

Consequently, while PLP has shown it is possible to think and work politically with developmental leaders and reform coalitions, it needs to be constantly alert to these possible limitations and develop strategies to mitigate these risks. This can be difficult if the broader donor environment is not supportive.

PLP also provides insight into the myriad forms that leadership and coalitions can take and challenges the convention that 'good governance' leads to developmental change. The program's ways of working also contribute to the growing catalogue of examples of what thinking and working politically, or doing development differently, might look like. This centres on having staff with a deep understanding of context and local politics and an ability to leverage that understanding to make strategic decisions about who to work with and how. Building strong partnerships, convening and brokering relationships, playing a behind-the-scenes role and allowing local actors to lead are critical elements of PLP's approach.

PLP's ability to work in these ways has been shaped by the wider donor environment, in particular the integration of AusAID into DFAT, reductions in the aid budget and changed organisational structures. These changes have influenced PLP's evolving focus and room for manoeuvre within the aid program.

For donors and development programs keen to explore these ways of working, the following implications emerge:

- There is a need to accept that developmental change does not necessarily require good governance, and this means adopting more pragmatic approaches.
- Organisations that are serious about supporting locally led development need to focus on building genuine partnerships.
- These ways of working do not necessarily involve large sums of money, but they do require flexibility in how money is spent.

- Perhaps most indispensable is the need to recruit staff who have deep local and political knowledge and networks. The organisational systems people work within matter a great deal, but good staff are able to 'work within the rules and flex them when ... needed' – as one PLP staff member put it.
- Programs need to critically reflect on, learn from and adapt approaches regularly, preferably through formal mechanisms. Linked to this is the importance of appropriate monitoring to capture achievements and learning, which is critical to build donor support and carve out space for future programs.
- However, it is also important to recognise that developmental change is complex and non-linear: risks are inevitable, but can be managed through mechanisms such as co-location.

PLP's experience demonstrates how programming can move away from the transactional relationships that often exist between donors and partners to partnerships that focus on locally led change processes. This requires changes in the business-as-usual practices of donors and implementers, but this case shows how it is possible even in a difficult donor environment and in the challenging context of the Pacific.

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Annex: Interviewees and focus groups

Cameron Bowles, Former AusAID Program Director, PLP

Georgina Cope, Team Leader, PLP

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Siale Ilolohia, Former Tonga Country Representative, PLP

Rose Isukana, Former Solomon Islands Country Representative, PLP

Sheona McKenna, Former AusAID Program Director, PLP

Louise Morrison, Principal, Cardno

Evan Naqiolevu, Program Officer, PLP

Mereani Rokotuibau, Programs Manager, PLP

Yeshe Smith, Former AusAID Program Manager, PLP

Lilieta Takau, Tonga Country Representative, PLP

Peni Tawake, Program Officer, PLP

Nelly Willy, Vanuatu Country Representative, PLP

Focus group discussion with Aidan Craney, Lesley Hoatson, Linda Kelly, Helen Lee, Michael O'Keefe, Chris Roche, Benedicta Rousseau and Yeshe Smith.



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