

Understanding Locally-Led Action

Background

The international development and humanitarian sector is inherently shaped by politics and power. ACFID members [recognise their shared responsibility](#) to establish equitable partnerships, and to contribute to a more just system where local actors are resourced, supported and trusted, to lead and respond to the needs of their communities.

The movement towards locally-led action - reflected in global commitments such as the [Grand Bargain](#), the [Charter for Change](#) and [Pledge for Change](#) - is important to redress historic and ongoing imbalances in power and resources between local and international actors, including both donors and international NGOs.

Working in a locally-led way means transferring power and ownership of development activities and outcomes to local actors who are best placed to understand and make decisions about the needs of their communities. It is inextricably linked to the concept and practice of anti-racism.

Research commissioned by ACFID in 2022 showed that ACFID member organisations hold diverse objectives for engaging in locally led action. The most common objectives focus on:

- **Improving the effectiveness, relevance and sustainability** of development and humanitarian action through recognising the intrinsic value of local knowledge, networks and cultural understanding in the design and delivery of programs.
- **Nurturing strengths-based partnerships** to build local capacity for development and humanitarian action.
- **Redressing historic and ongoing imbalances in power and resources** within the development and humanitarian architecture, particularly between local and international organisations.

Visit the online [Locally-Led Action Resource Hub](#) to explore the concept and practice of locally-led action further.

Defining Locally-Led Action

There are a wide variety of definitions of 'locally-led action' and related terms including 'localisation' and 'local actors'. The term localisation is often used to refer to the *process* by which development and humanitarian initiatives become more locally-led.

Following consultation, the following definitions have been adopted in the ACFID Code of Conduct:

Locally-led development and humanitarian action	Locally-led development and humanitarian action recognises, respects and strengthens the leadership and decision-making of local actors who are best placed to understand and respond to the needs of their communities. By its nature, this will look different in each country context, and even within countries or programs. Successful locally-
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	led action recognises how power imbalances influence development and humanitarian initiatives. It is facilitated by strong and equal partnership, quality direct funding, transparency and mutual accountability, and diversity and empowerment in staffing and leadership.
Local actors	A wide range of individuals, organisations and institutions, who have the knowledge and expertise to understand and respond to the needs of their communities. This can include local and national governments, local and national NGOs, civil society organisations, community-led organisations and communities.
Anti-racism	Anti-racism refers to the everyday deliberate actions that aim to eradicate the racism that exists at interpersonal and systemic levels. It means actively standing up to and challenging racism.

ACFID Code of Conduct

As signatories to the ACFID Code of Conduct, ACFID members have made a commitment to:

- seek to reduce power imbalances and invest in locally-led development and humanitarian initiatives.
- invest in the sustainability and effectiveness of their collaborations and partnerships.

To demonstrate their commitment, ACFID members are required to:

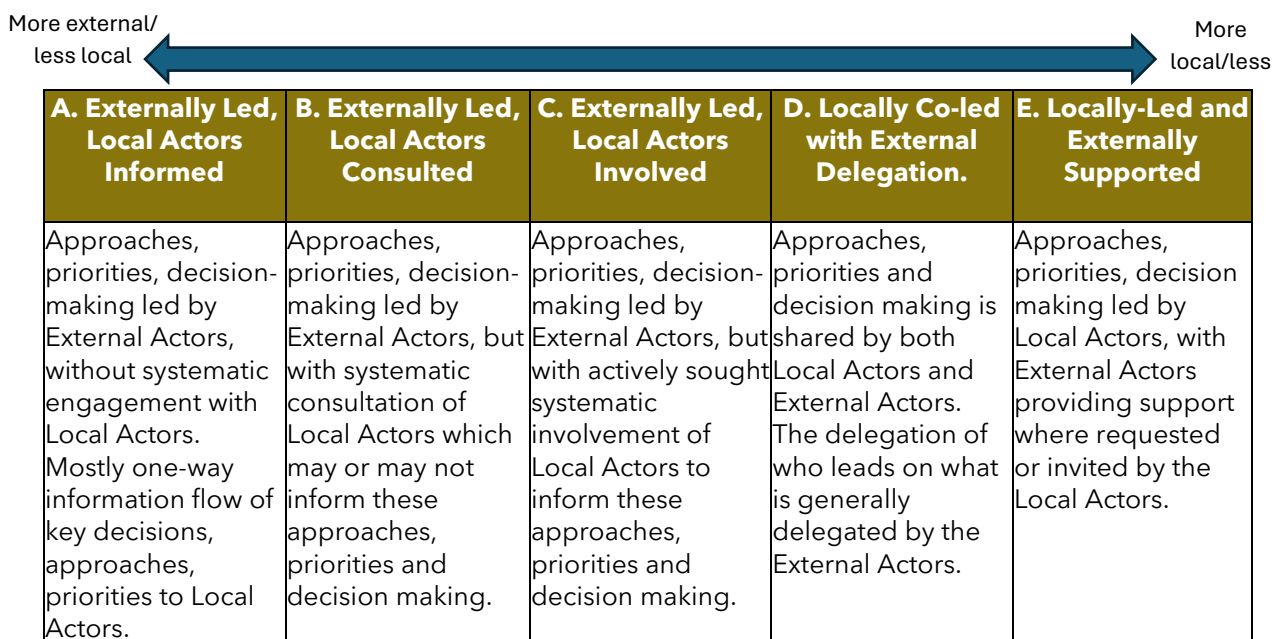
- have an organisational commitment to locally-led action, which is evidenced by a policy, statement or guidance document.
- name and address power imbalances in organisational relationships relevant to the member's development and humanitarian initiatives.
- ensure the voice and decision-making of local actors is evident in:
 - all stages of a program
 - the allocation of resources
 - the design and evaluation of feedback and complaints mechanisms.
- listen to and respond to the priorities of their local partners around organisational strengthening.

ACFID members also commit to actions which promote locally-led action in other areas, including managing risk with partners, their research approaches and communication materials. Download the [full list of ACFID Code of Conduct requirements](#) related to locally-led action.

Locally-Led Action Continuum

The following continuum aims to help your organisation assess and monitor its progression towards more locally-led development and humanitarian initiatives. While it identifies five stages, the continuum should be considered a continuous progression.

The Continuum focuses on who and how decisions are being made. This is closely linked to the concept of **power**, which can be thought of as *'the ability to influence the outcomes of decision-making'*¹.



There are many areas where decision-making takes place, even within a single project. For example, program design, the allocation of resources, design of monitoring and evaluation plans. This Toolkit refers to these areas as Domains, which are aligned with the Quality Principles in ACFID's Code of Conduct.

The Continuum deliberately does not include specific indicators for each stage in the continuum. It is designed to be applicable across a wide at a variety of Domains, operating structures and models, and scales of operation.

¹ Elbers, W., and Schulpen, L. (2011). Decision-making in Partnerships for Development: Explaining the Influence of Local Partners. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 20(10): 1-18.

Domains

This Toolkit uses nine Domains, which reflect key areas of an organisation's systems and processes. The Domains provide a structure to help organisations reflect on the different levers and areas in which they can progress their efforts towards locally-led action.

The Domains broadly align with other international frameworks and tools, and use terminology aligned to the ACFID Code of Conduct. They are not exclusive, and there may be activities and actions which fall outside or across the Domains which your organisation may wish to discuss.

Visit the online [Resource Hub](#) for practice examples from other organisations and additional resources related to each Domain.

Quality and Effectiveness: Planning and Design

Activities such as program design and planning processes of development and humanitarian initiatives.

Quality and Effectiveness: Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

The ongoing implementation of development and humanitarian initiatives. It also includes activities which monitor the projects implementation and progress towards the agreed outcomes. It also includes end of project evaluations and sharing of lessons learnt with stakeholders.

Collaboration

The relationships our organisations have with other organisations (or parts of organisations) and groups.

Communication

External communications products, representation to the public and ANGO engagement with their donors.

Advocacy

Activities undertaken to change the systemic and structural causes of poverty and disadvantage which may include popular campaigning, lobbying, research, policy positions, alliances and use of the media. It may occur both in Australia and globally.

Risk

Activities such as risk management, contractual compliance.

Governance

NGO senior management and boards, and internal and external organisational commitments.

Resource Management

The management and use of resources, including fundraising and financial management.

People and Culture

Recruitment and staffing, identifying and planning for future staff competencies and experience, capacity strengthening including mentoring and twinning approaches.