



LOCAL LEADERSHIP LABS
Theory of Change - First Update

Methodology

INTRODUCTION

The Local Leadership Labs (LLL) is an initiative aimed at tackling some of the barriers (political, technical, behavioural) preventing governments, donors and other stakeholders from adopting and delivering on commitments that recognize, enable and resource diverse local civil society groups as key development actors in their own right. The initiative will support radically inclusive spaces where local civil society groups can drive, alongside other key actors and decision-makers, the development of context-appropriate policies and solutions. Moreover, the initiative will seed trans-local spaces for cross-pollination, reflection and strategizing among disparate likeminded efforts and multi-stakeholder initiatives that could help accelerate systemic changes towards Locally-Led Development.

The LLL key drivers are six convening partners from local civil society based and operating in Southeast Asia and Southeast Africa, who are able to reach out to and meaningfully engage representatives of groups and movements who are dually affected by civic space restrictions and structural discrimination (e.g., indigenous and traditional peoples, youth, women, LGBTIQ+, rural communities, people with disabilities).

Each of the Local Leadership Labs conveners will facilitate sustained safe dialogue processes as well as inclusive co-creation spaces so that policies, practices, and enablement approaches of different stakeholders will be more joined up and responsive to the lived experiences, priorities and asks of diverse local civil society actors. Besides enhancing reciprocal accountability, in the end, this process would positively impact the relevance and accessibility of resources, support infrastructure and solidarity available to local civil society actors.

CIVICUS, a global civil society Alliance, plays the role of catalyst and connector in the LLL initiative, and is responsible for identifying and providing financial support and non-financial accompaniment to local partners, brokering connections and direct engagement opportunities with other stakeholders, coordinating with likeminded processes and initiatives, facilitating learning across the labs and with others in the support ecosystem, and – where appropriate – amplifying the analysis, asks and solutions to a global audience.



METHODOLOGY

Local Leadership Lab was designed to have a participatory approach to constructing, adapting and learning from its Theory of Change (ToC). As principles of the project include locally driven, radical inclusiveness, and sharing our learnings – it was important the ToC embraced these values too. Unlike traditional models, where projects are designed and funded before engaging local actors, LLL placed local input at the core of both its design and its ToC.

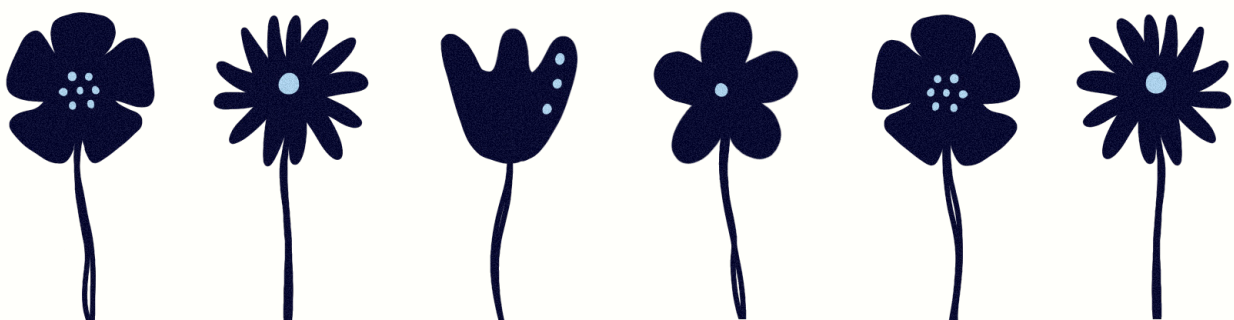
LLL was co-designed with civil society, with early support from the Hilton Foundation, which provided consultation grants to facilitate extensive discussions among civil society organizations. These discussions—held in collaboration with CIVICUS members, civil society networks, and local actors—shaped the project’s design before it received funding from the Hilton Foundation. This approach contrasts with traditional models, where projects are typically designed and funded before engaging local actors. In LLL’s case, local input was not only integral to the project’s design but also formed the foundation of its Theory of Change.

The ToC was intentionally designed as a learning tool, evolving throughout the project to facilitate continuous reflection, learning, and adaptation. This flexibility allows LLL to refine assumptions and respond to shifting contexts. During the initial gathering of LLL convening partners, the ToC was discussed in detail, incorporating additional local context. The convening partners’ input grounded the ToC in real experiences and increased the ownership and trust of the project as participants mentioned in subsequent feedback. The ToC also became more precise, addressing challenges such as how election cycles—especially under leaders’ hostile to civic space—affect project timelines and how radical inclusivity requires special considerations, such as convening high-risk individuals (e.g., LGBTQ+ participants) separately to ensure their safety.

To systematically analyze the ToC, a data specialist coded the information according to the most relevant results chain for each of the phases: Discovery, Ideation, and Action. The Sharing Knowledge and Learning of Solutions results chain was identified as relevant across all phases. To clarify the numerous actors referenced—but not explicitly defined—in the ToC, the data specialist first consulted LLL staff and then reviewed findings with the convening partners committee.

Using insights from the LLL inception meeting, the data specialist proposed updates to the ToC, which were reviewed by a dedicated ToC committee composed of representatives of the LLL convening partners. As a mark of respect for their time, members were compensated for their contributions. The committee refined definitions and suggested updates, particularly in the Discovery phase. For example, the definition of “locally led development” was synthesized from individual contributions into a single, agreed-upon definition.

The updated ToC was then shared with all convening partners for final review before publication. As a living document, the ToC will continue to be revisited and updated throughout each phase of the project.



DEFINITIONS

Based on convening partners' discovery phase work

Civil society

Our LLL definition of civil society is expansive and reflects the fact that civil society is a constantly evolving sphere. Among others, it includes non-governmental organisations at all levels, individual or network of activists, civil society organisations or coalitions, grassroots organisations, social movements, voluntary bodies, campaigning organisations, charities, faith-based groups, trade unions and philanthropic foundations. Civil society is often considered the third sector – aside from government and business.

Local civil society

Local refers to the civil society's scope and presence. Local civil society is a subset of civil society that operates within a community, sub national space, country or region who are rooted in and accountable to local communities, including local groups and networks but not local branches of INGOs (not nationalisation of international INGOs).

For example, all LLL convening partners (sub-national, national, and regional) are local civil society.

Key enabler actors for locally led development

Key enabler actors have the power, resources and capacity to support the change agenda that is locally created and driven. LLL understands that key enablers include more than just financial donors to all that can amplify, support and implement local civil society's articulated demands and solutions.

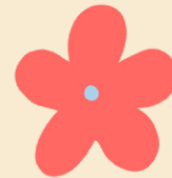
Who can be a key enabler: They are diverse stakeholders (all levels of civil society, government, business sector, academia, media, etc.). For example, media can bring the challenges of the local communities to a larger audience. Academia can invest in research for the challenges articulated. The private sector can contribute with skills and financial resources. Government can change or produce regulatory laws and policies to assist. Key enablers can also include national and international support organisations like INGOs (e.g CIVICUS), bilateral donors (eg. USAID), and philanthropic organisations (e.g. Hilton Foundation).

Traditionally excluded groups from civil society

They are LLL priority groups and include those not connected to networks of power; they are dually impacted by civic space restriction and power dynamics and structural discrimination. The project was primarily designed to serve these groups.

Yes. Depending on the context, some examples include indigenous groups, groups with disabilities, LGBTQ+, environmental defenders, remote organisations, survivors of human rights violations and abuse, last mile civil society actors and other networks and groups that are not connected to networks of power and who have been systemically not included in decision-making processes that affect them. Traditionally excluded groups include the local group and communities that the LLL convening partners are bringing together.

No. Groups from where leadership is not representative and accountable to the traditionally excluded group from civil society. Examples of this include a young women group led by men or an urban group on freedom of expression but not accountable to the local community.



Radically Inclusive

Challenging basic assumptions; prioritizing co-created approaches that unleash collective leadership and shared ownership; and ensuring that no policy or solution will be decided without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) directly affected by that policy or solution.

This includes building trust with and ensuring the safety of marginalised communities through intentional and deliberate mechanisms and tools throughout the above processes, as marginalised communities face more challenges than general local actors.

On trust, for example:

Use of intentional mechanisms and tools to foster trust among intergenerational groups; gaining trust of groups dealing with previous violence from decades ago.



On safety, for example:

LGBTQ communities are likely to be convened on their own and not with other communities to keep them safe.

Human rights defenders activists' data is sensitive and should be handled accordingly (e.g. confidential submission of information).

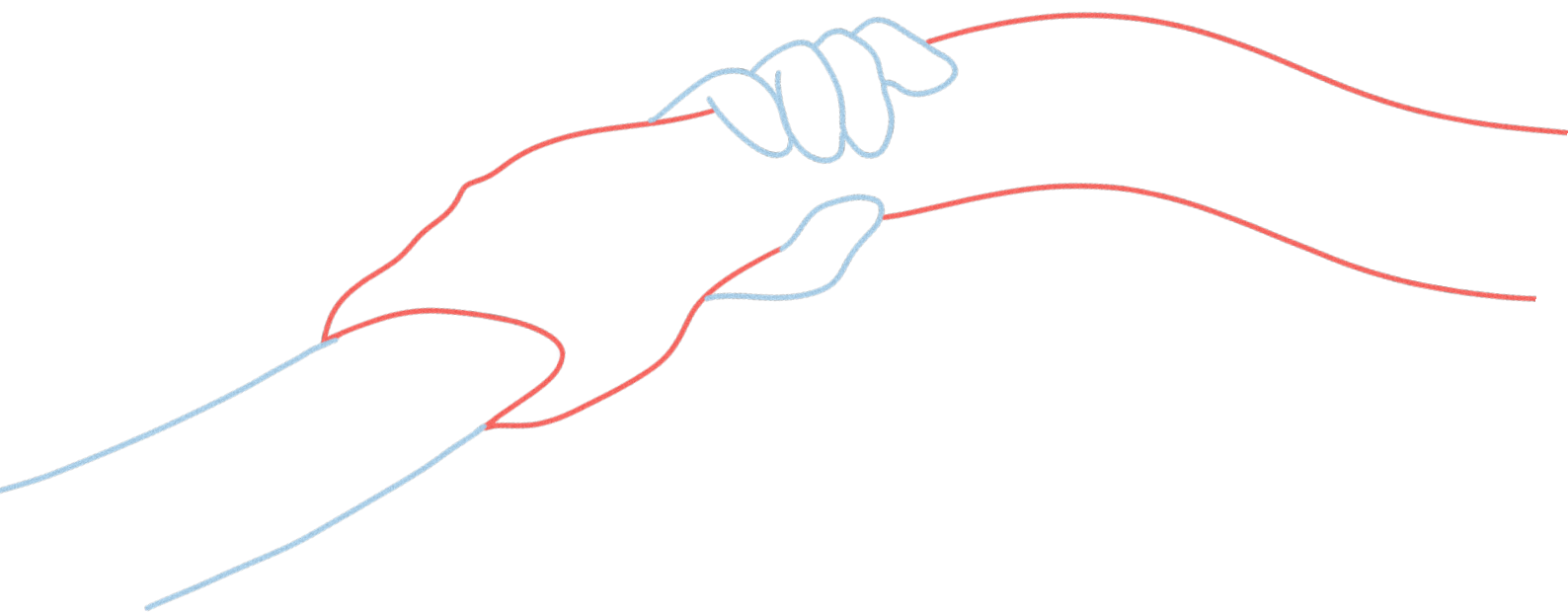
LOCALLY LED DEVELOPMENT

How does the LLL community define 'Locally-led Development' in Civil Society?

Locally-led development (LLD) is an approach that is centered around local actors (grassroots, individuals*, communities, organisations, institutions, social movements among others**) and places agency in the voices of the minoritized, marginalized, and silenced to lead their own decision-making in identifying, planning and implementing their development processes with local or foreign resources. It intentionally leverages local knowledge, expertise, and resources and prioritizes local ownership, sustainability, contextual relevance and mutual accountability, as locals are the key development actors in building their agenda, devising solutions, sustaining initiatives, engaging various stakeholders and power holders, and driving long-term change within their communities that addresses their context-specific needs. LLD is both culturally-appropriate and culturally-responsive, emanating from the local communities' identified strategies and is geared towards the pursuit of development that is rooted in equality, inclusion, diversity, and intersectionality. LLD fosters an open, transparent and safe space for locally owned and led strategies' testing, knowledge exchange, collaboration and participatory decision-making to drive long-term, transformative change.

* This covers activists and can include, for example, artists.

**During the LLL Discovery Phase, some LLL communities identified 'local journalists' as local actors.




DISCOVERY PHASE

Language updates for the Theory of Change

Long term outcome:

Increased participation of traditionally excluded groups in decision-making processes. (No changes)

Original Language	Proposed Updates
Improved consciousness, confidence & agency from traditionally excluded groups to articulate demands and engage directly key stakeholders	Traditionally excluded groups have improved consciousness, confidence and agency to articulate demands and engage key enablers directly*
Stronger CS connection and collaboration based on trust, collective knowledge, work, and shared positions	Traditionally excluded groups have improved connection and collaboration among themselves, and key enablers based on trust, collective knowledge, work and shared positions.**
Collective positions and key asks to target stakeholders	Locally led articulated demands***
Civil society [Local Leadership Lab] collectively identify problems, solutions, asks and influencing strategies	Local Leadership Lab Discovery Phase - Local civil society prioritizing traditionally excluded groups to identify articulated demands***
<p>Challenge</p> <p>Fragmentation and competition within the sector, which undermine inclusive and coherent demands and collective energy</p> 	<p>Challenge in the Sector</p> <p>Fragmentation and competition within the sector, which undermine inclusive and coherent demands and collective energy</p> <p>Challenge in Local Contexts</p> <p>Timelines change due to political changes**** For example: Political shifts, such as the rise in autocratic power, can lead to further restrictions of civic space, forcing local groups to adjust their plans cautiously to protect themselves and marginalized communities they collaborate with, resulting in delays of envisaged timeline of work implementation.</p>

Reasoning for changes:

* Made it active voice to emphasize the agency of the traditionally excluded groups. Streamlined actors and aligned to our ToC definitions by using key enablers.

** Clarified the actors by using traditionally excluded groups and key enables instead of CS connection.

*** Streamlined the ToC language and emphasize the locally led aspect of the articulated demands.

**** Added the context of local politics that factors in the ability and timeliness of the proposed activities and changes.



Our Values

Locally Driven

Power-building

Radically Inclusive

Systems Thinking

Cultivating Accountability

Reflective

Impacts

Increased participation of traditionally excluded groups in decision-making processes

Stronger relationships between local leaders and key enablers based on mutual accountability and trust

Blueprints for spaces, solutions, and approaches that support local leadership

Transformative commitments from diverse actors in the system

Outcomes

Traditionally excluded groups have improved consciousness, confidence and agency to articulate demands and engage key enablers directly

More informed commitments and priorities/approaches by key decision-makers and allies

CS support ecosystem actors are more familiar with inclusive processes to build trust and codesign solutions with local actors

Traditionally excluded groups have improved connection and collaboration among themselves, and key enablers based on trust, collective knowledge, work and shared positions

Collective reflection inspires accountability and changes in mindsets, policies, and practices

Locally led articulated demands

CS and decision-makers have improved understanding of different realities, needs, solutions & roles

Solutions that advance local leadership based on co-creation

Insights & solutions are reflected in the actions of diverse actors with shared purpose

Strategies

Local civil society prioritizing traditionally excluded groups to identify articulated demands

Sustained dialogue between civil society and donors

Solutions Labs: Civil society with key stakeholders develop or discover solutions in experimental spaces

Sharing knowledge and learning of solutions

Discovery Phase

Challenges

In the Sector
Fragmentation and competition within the sector, which undermine inclusive and coherent demands and collective energy

For example: Lack of equitable partnerships, insufficient spaces for shared learning, and insufficient coordination of efforts.

In Local Contexts
Timelines change due to political changes

For example: Political shifts, such as the rise in autocratic power, can lead to further restrictions of civic space, forcing local groups to adjust their plans cautiously to protect themselves and marginalized communities they collaborate with, resulting in delays of envisaged timeline of work implementation.

Lack of accountability, resources, and equitable partnerships, because of unequal power dynamics and lack of trust between local CS and governments, donors, and other enablers

Insufficient, exclusive, or disconnected spaces for local CS to lead solution building with key stakeholders

Insufficient spaces/mechanism for sharing learning and for collective sense-making across the civil society ecosystem

Disparate efforts and initiatives with insufficient mechanisms for coordination and cross-pollination

Partners





Local Leadership Labs Theory of Change - Discovery Phase with Indicators

Our Values

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Reflective

LLL Convening Partners updated the Theory of Change (ToC) with challenges in local contexts that grounds the ToC – including timelines, impacts and outcomes - in real experiences. Elevating local concerns in the ToC grounds it in local realities and ensures that LLL remain locally relevant, flexible, and truly representative of the communities it serves. The indicators were updated and validated by the LLL convening partners as relevant and appropriate measures of implementation and evaluation, co-designed to build ownership.

Long-term Impact

Increased participation of traditionally excluded groups in decision-making processes

Outcomes

Traditionally excluded groups have improved consciousness, confidence and agency to articulate demands and engage key enablers directly

Traditionally excluded groups have improved connection and collaboration among themselves, and key enablers based on trust, collective knowledge, work and shared positions

Locally led articulated demands

Indicators

Number of representatives convening partners and their local communities from traditionally excluded group who participate in key processes and forums because of their engagement with LLL

Percentage of representatives from the target constituents engaged in the process who report that they are more knowledgeable and feel more confident in articulating directly asks to key stakeholders

Number of convening partners that articulated demands addressing the issues identified during the reality analysis

Strategy

Local civil society prioritizing traditionally excluded groups to identify articulated demands

Indicator

Number of convening partners able to create "constituency-building" spaces co-hosted by traditionally excluded groups. Example: Equip circles

Challenges in the Sector

Fragmentation and competition within the sector, which undermine inclusive and coherent demands and collective energy

For example: Lack of equitable partnerships, insufficient spaces for shared learning, and insufficient coordination of efforts.

Challenges in Local Contexts

Timelines change due to political changes

For example: Political shifts, such as the rise in autocratic power, can lead to further restrictions of civic space, forcing local groups to adjust their plans cautiously to protect themselves and marginalized communities they collaborate with, resulting in delays of envisaged timeline of work implementation.



Local Leadership Labs Theory of Change - Discovery Phase Additional Context

Our Values

Locally Driven

Power-building

Radically Inclusive

Systems Thinking

Cultivating Accountability

Reflective

The updates to the Theory of Change (ToC) were co-created with LLL convening partners to ensure the ToC continues to be grounded in real experiences and that the contexts of the local communities that the LLL serves are reflected in it.

The original ToC, which was co-created with local actors before the start of the LLL, was intentionally designed as a learning tool and is meant to evolve throughout the project to facilitate continuous reflection, learning, and adaptation. The ToC is a living document and will continue to be revisited and updated throughout each phase of the project, based on the LLL Partners' input. Below are the actual input of the LLL convening partner, as recorded during the rounds of feedback.



Partners



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LABS



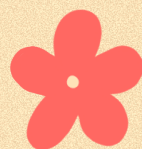
**Locally
Driven**



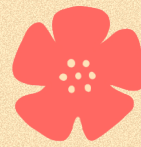
**Power-
building**



**Radically
Inclusive**



**Systems
Thinking**



**Cultivating
Accountability**



Reflective