

## THEORY OF CHANGE: Local Leadership Labs

### Introduction

Our vision is of strengthened civil society and civic action that drives locally led development processes, advances expanded civic and democratic space, human rights and a more just, equitable and sustainable world. We expect that the Local Leadership Labs initiative will contribute directly to this vision.

The Theory of Change underpinning the Local Leadership Labs is based on the principle that the initiative is locally-owned and locally-led, and focuses on solutions that are context specific, building on what we know about practicing constituency accountability, creating safe and inclusive dialogue spaces, and facilitating locally-led and co-created processes.

More specifically, we will ensure that the design and implementation of the Local Leadership Labs reflect our common values:

- Locally driven – diverse local civil society actors in the Global South will be the key drivers of the initiative in the ways they will deem more appropriate to their contexts; NEAR and CIVICUS will stand accountable to them and play a catalyst and connector role.
- Power-building – the work will be informed by a power-building lens (redistributing power, building collective power, organizing power holders and transforming power structures) centering the political power of diverse local civil society groups and activists representing traditionally excluded communities.
- 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.
- Systems thinking – recognizing that systems change requires new mindsets, cultures, tools, processes and organizing approaches, this initiative will catalyze collaborative leadership and shared ownership across sectors at various levels to unleash the potential for transformative change through relational and experimental trust-building, co-designed solutions and peer learning.
- Cultivating accountability – the initiative will accelerate existing processes or commitments through intentional coordination and complementarity and by creating conditions for mutual accountability between decision makers and local civil society groups.
- Reflective – a collective learning mindset will be cultivated to help acknowledge our own biases and silos, stimulate innovation, ongoing adaptation, evidence-based change and to foster periodic reflection to support deep (transformative) learning.

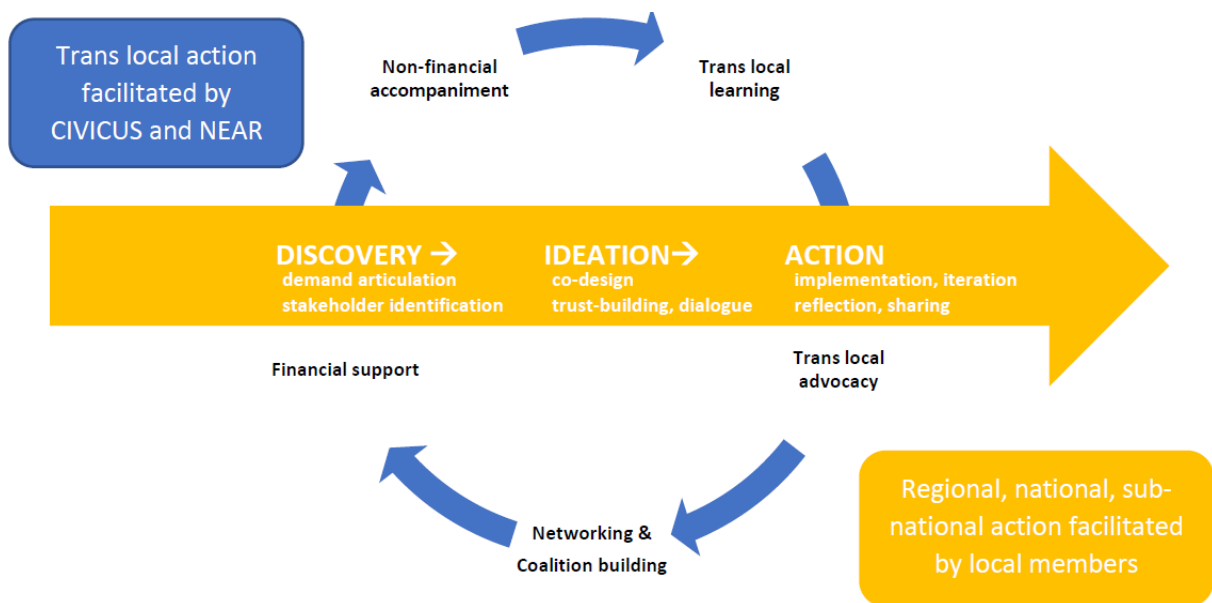
In line with this thinking, the key drivers of the initiative are diverse local civil society actors in the Global South. They will be responsible for convening, co-creating and facilitating activities, including: (1) constituency building/ demand articulation, (2) multi-stakeholder engagement, (3) solution labs and (4) collective learning.

The catalysts and connectors in the initiative are CIVICUS and NEAR, global civil society networks working to improve the support ecosystem for local civil society actors. They will be responsible for identifying and providing financial support and non-financial accompaniment to their local partners, brokering connections and direct engagement opportunities with other stakeholders, coordinating with likeminded processes and initiatives, facilitating learning across local leadership labs and with

others in the support ecosystem and – where appropriate- amplifying the analysis, asks and solutions to a global audience.

The initiative will be implemented in three stages, while learning and influencing activities will take place throughout the project period.

1. **Discovery:** demand articulation, stakeholder identification, sense-checking/ co-creating with target groups and other actors in the ecosystem
2. **Ideation:** local co-design exercises, curation of trust-building spaces, dialogues on policy issues
3. **Action:** implementation and iteration of solutions, reflecting and sharing key insights



The Theory of Change outlined below reflects CIVICUS and NEAR’s initial thinking on how we will tackle the challenges we face in realising local leadership based on consultations with our respective members and allies. We will further sense-check this version during the inception co-design phase and regularly revisit the theory of change with the various stakeholders of the Local Leadership Labs and continue to iterate based on our collective learning and reflections.

Long term change: A more effective, supportive ecosystem for local civil society, underpinned by dynamic accountability, equity and local leadership

- Project Values
- Locally driven
- Power-building
- Radically inclusive
- Systems Thinking
- Cultivating Accountability
- Reflective

