



PAPER 4

The Developmental Leadership Program: Implications for the Humanitarian System

1 Introduction

The Developmental Leadership Program¹ (DLP) is an international research initiative that explores how leadership, power and political processes drive or block successful development. Our research is focused on the crucial role of home-grown and local leadership and coalitions in forging legitimate institutions that promote developmental outcomes, such as sustainable growth, political stability and inclusive social development. From this we also explore the role that development agencies have had, and could have in the future, in supporting these processes.

A synthesis of ten years of research is currently being undertaken. We are exploring the relevance of the findings to different sectors (i.e. health, education, governance, etc.), different themes (state legitimacy, corruption, political settlements, etc.), as well as different approaches (long-term development, humanitarian work and advocacy). This paper explores in particular the implications of the findings for leadership in, and of, the humanitarian system.

In doing so I draw upon in particular on research undertaken by DLP on:

- Service Delivery, Social Stability, State Legitimacy & Leadership in Lebanon and Jordan (McLoughlin 2015, Rocha Menocal et al 2016, Mango & Shabaneh 2016);
- Political Settlements and State Formation in Somaliland (Phillips, 2013);
- Armed groups, political inclusion and Leadership in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (Perera, 2016)
- Gender and collective leadership in the Pacific, the Middle East and South Africa (Fletcher et al 2016, Tadros, 2011, and Hodes et al. 2011);
- Concepts of Leadership and 'Thinking and Working Politically' and how these processes are best supported by international donors (Hudson and Leftwich, 2014);

2 Findings

2.1 State Legitimacy & Leadership in Lebanon and Jordan

Millions of Syrians have been displaced by conflict. Over one million now live in Lebanon, and approximately 600,000 in Jordan. In both countries this has put pressure on social services which has in turn increased tension between host and refugee communities.

There has been a widespread assumption that the delivery of services contributes to the legitimacy of those delivering them, and directly or indirectly, in some circumstances that of local government or the state more broadly. This project was commissioned by the Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK Government to test this received wisdom by looking at two programmes that support municipal service delivery in the context of a growing influx of displaced people from Syria. The aims of the programs were to reduce social instability and to foster the legitimacy of local and national state authorities in the eyes of the host population.

DLP's findings from these programs and from other research we have conducted on legitimacy and service delivery suggests that to be legitimate an institution has to be 'appointed by, and operate in accordance with, a set of local rules that are normatively and morally acceptable in the eyes of their (would-be) followers' (Mcloughlin, C. 2017:1). This means that citizens are often not assessing legitimacy on the basis solely of whether services are or are not being delivered – important as that may be – but whether they perceive those services as being fairly distributed, or whether the organisation delivering them is acting in ways that are consistent with local norms.

This raises three important issues for humanitarian leadership and the localisation agenda:

- a) Service provision can either support or undermine legitimacy, depending on whether it reinforces or undermines local norms of procedural fairness and distributive justice. There is no automatic relationship between service delivery and legitimacy.
- b) Locally appropriate, legitimate institutions are more likely to be effective, and durable, than illegitimate ones imposed from outside, because they are more likely to be able to align themselves to local norms.
- c) Enhancing the space for locally legitimate institutions to emerge – as opposed to by-passing them to deliver services – may be an important long term strategy. Though as we see below in the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo this is not always the case. At the very least a 'Do No Harm approach', which recognises that legitimacy is long in the making and short in the breaking, is probably required.

2.2 Somalia and Somaliland Compared

The comparison between Somalia and Somaliland by Sarah Phillips also points to the importance of local actors having the space and the time to develop their own institutional arrangements. Phillips argues that the relative peace that Somaliland has enjoyed since 1997 is, at least in part, because external support, advice, or indeed interference was relatively low. One reason for this was because the country was not formally recognised internationally as a nation state. About US \$100,000, was provided by international agencies for the Borama Conference in 1993, but other than that there was very little other support to 'peace building' processes in that period. Whereas in contrast Somalia has been subject to a range of external interventions and financing that have skewed local bargaining and negotiations between clans and elite groups in unproductive ways.

It is suggested that the Somaliland was free to develop its own, locally negotiated, legitimate institutions helps explain its relatively peaceful position compared to Somalia not least because 'it was largely ineligible for official aid and was not pressured to accept an institutional template from outside.' This experience begs important questions about the engagement of external agencies in conflict areas and the inadvertent effects this can have on local leadership structures and processes notably:

- a) How can external agencies provide support in ways that do not create perverse incentives which stimulates negative leadership dynamics?
- b) Whether external actors can assist in creating spaces which allow for the emergence of locally determined collective leadership and action which are more likely to be appropriate to the context than external models?

2.3 Armed groups, political inclusion and leadership in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

North and South Kivu in eastern DRC have suffered from violence and insecurity for over 20 years. It is estimated that some 70 armed groups operate in this area (Stearns and Vogel 2015). This project explored why many years of international attempts to reduce insecurity have seemingly led to so little progress.

Some of the major findings which explain this included: a focus on short term fixes; a failure to acknowledge the politics underpinning the behaviour and motivation of armed groups; and the differences between how international and local actors understand the drivers of the conflict.

International agencies and media have a tendency to portray the conflict as chaotic and predatory rather than understanding the political and economic logic of the armed groups. This is despite a raft of literature having

pointed this out for many years (see for example Chabal and Daloz, 1999). The research found that many Congolese perceive membership of armed groups as a political response to a broader breakdown in law and order and governance, as well as a response to a lack of economic opportunities. Few members of armed groups are forcibly conscripted. As such violence has political and economic explanations which are often overlooked.

Implications for humanitarian leadership include:

- The importance of understanding the political logic and rationale which underpins violence and insecurity. There is a tendency to pursue a relatively linear progression from starting with attempts to promote security and the rule of law before moving on to improve livelihoods. A political understanding of the drivers might mean providing support for public services and secure livelihoods 'as a means of improving stability rather than as an outcome of it' (Perera 2016:1).
- Attempts to support state institutions and leadership through state-building programs run the risk of exacerbating the crisis as armed groups are arguably a response to a predatory state. Engaging directly with armed groups because a) they can undermine initiatives which exclude or marginalize them, and b) resolving their members economic and protection needs might make alternatives to violence more palatable.

2.4 Gender and collective leadership in the Pacific, the Middle East and South Africa

It has been suggested that much political economy analysis undertaken in development programs and the related discourse on 'thinking and working politically' are often gender blind (Browne, 2014). Our research on coalitions working on gender equality in several parts of the world reveals a number of ways in which gender analysis expands our understanding of politics and leadership.

Most of the coalitions we looked at worked in informal spaces, not least because they were often denied access to the more formal institutional structures or processes which often govern formal decision making. Effective leaders used and expanded their existing networks and engaged in various forms of 'back stage politics' carefully selecting allies which could bring either particular skills, or access to decision makers, to the cause. Most were also sensitive to the 'hidden' or 'invisible' power which shaped social norms related to gender and how these both constrained their ability to promote change, as well as seeking to challenge them at the same time. This led to careful framing of their concerns so as to minimise backlash from conservative opponents. Mariz Tadros' work in particular noted how links between local leaders and international actors could also be used to politically undermine women's groups and causes by associating them with western feminism (Tadros, 2011).

Implications for humanitarian leadership include:

- a) Ensuring that there is a good gendered understanding of the political context, which includes engaging with women's organisations and movements and analysing how - at the very least - negative gender norms are not inadvertently re-inforced.
- b) Recognising that local leaders and organisations are best placed to frame how gender equality might be promoted, and how international agencies might best support this without triggering a backlash.

2.5 Concepts of Leadership and 'Thinking and Working Politically'

DLP's research suggests a number of important conceptual ways of thinking about and understanding leadership.

Firstly, leadership is nearly always a collective and political process. Whilst individuals are important, the task of leadership is usually about the mobilization of collective action often of groups with divergent interests. The success of these 'coalitions' is often about the diversity of skills and experiences different members bring to the table, and less about the characteristics or traits of leadership that they demonstrate. The negotiation, contestation and 'bundling' of different interests is an inherently political process.

Secondly, leadership is important in determining institutional frameworks or 'rules of the game', or 'how stuff gets done around here'. These formal or informal rules shape what is deemed to be normal. Of course, leaders are also constrained by existing institutions as well as being key in shaping them. However, they can choose to

reinforce existing norms, or deliberately attempt to change them. This is particularly true for example, when it comes to gender roles.

Thirdly, whilst in recent years a lot of emphasis has been placed on how incentives and interests drive behaviour, and how in turn they determine if leaders will be 'developmental' or predatory, this has tended to ignore the important role that ideas, beliefs and values play. DLP's research illustrates the vital role that framing and narratives play in shifting incentives. Politics after all is about a battle of ideas, and as the election of Trump in the USA and Brexit in Britain indicate, perceptions and 'social facts' have real world consequences, which what is deemed to be 'evidence' cannot necessarily counter.

Fourthly, legitimacy is key for institutions to be effective and sustainable. This legitimacy cannot be conferred from outside and is a matter of perceptions and adherence to local norms, as much as it is a matter of effectiveness. These norms seem to often revolve around what is seen to be fair and just in local contexts.

Finally, there is a difference between having political objectives and being politically savvy. Interventions need to be technically possible & politically feasible. This requires putting as much effort into thinking and working politically as it does rehearsing the technical niceties of a given project.

3 Implications for the humanitarian Agenda?

DLP's research underlines the importance of 'political acumen' in humanitarian situations. This is of course nothing very new (Buchanan Smith & Scriven, 2011). However it is perhaps useful to distinguish between 'engaging in politics', and working in a politically smart manner. Furthermore it is worth considering how, following the World Humanitarian Summit, those seeking to transform the sector itself following might need to think and work politically to do so, for example by forming reform coalitions and developing collective action across the sector and maybe indeed beyond.

At the same time our research points to the importance of allowing for, and supporting, the emergence of 'hybrid' institutions and local leadership, not imposing inappropriate 'international best practice'. This echoes recent thinking on the future of the humanitarian sector (Bennett, 2016). It is becoming clearer, for example in the governance sector, that the promotion of organisational forms that are deemed appropriate in wealthy, developed democratic countries, not only can ignore the 'functions' and outcomes which those organisations achieve, it can actually undermine their ability to perform at all (Andrews, 2013). It would be strange if this did not apply in the humanitarian space.

This is not a council of despair but rather it points to the importance of searching for the 'positive deviance' that may already exist in the local system and seek to learn from how, despite the odds, this has been achieved (Pascale 2010). Too often the assumption is that a) local organisations and institutions are not only incapable of resolving problems, but b) outsiders know how to build their capacity to do so.

A positive deviance approach assumes the opposite: that there will usually be some positive variation in the system which provides clues as to how address the problem in question, and the role of outsiders can be to help local actors discover this for themselves, and to provide support to that process.

Finally, this suggests some changes to how monitoring, evaluation and learning is done. In particular this requires an ability to assess the propensity of local systems to manage shocks and seize critical junctures, and respond to them, in ways that are congruent with local political and cultural realities. This will require a greater emphasis on understanding the nature and 'shape' of the relationships and networks of collective action (i.e. the eco-system of response), and what this needs to look like in different contexts and circumstances. Furthermore it will require a different take on what effective support from external actors looks like. As Denney et al (2017) have recently argued this suggests beginning with assessing how people are actually accessing services, however limited this is, and measuring 'systemic capacity' not just that of individual unit's or organisations.

Knox Clarke has suggested that "*humanitarian evaluations in particular tended, implicitly, to use a limited definition of leadership*" (Knox Clarke 2013: 74). If this is more broadly true of the humanitarian sector then perhaps the literature on 'developmental leadership' is worth exploring.

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Endnotes

¹ See <http://www.dlprog.org/>. The research program is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Australian Government