

Locally Led Action Policy

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline Mary MacKillop Today's principles and commitments to achieving Locally Led Action, guiding strategic, operational, and programmatic decision-making across the organisation.

- Additional Authority:** Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).
- Scope:** Applies to all employees, Board members, contractors, and representatives of Mary MacKillop Today, across all programs and operations, in Australia and internationally.
- Responsible Party:** CEO and Mary MacKillop Today Board.

Policy Statement

Mary MacKillop Today believes that local actors are best placed to understand, respond to and lead on the needs of their own communities. Guided by the core Catholic Social Teaching principle of subsidiarity, we commit to shifting power, responsibility and ownership of development activities, decision-making and outcomes to local actors working through strengths-based partnerships that recognise technical, contextual and lived expertise.

This commitment stems from our belief in the transformative power of strengths-based partnerships and the need to challenge and redress existing power imbalances in the development sector. By supporting local leadership and enabling systems change, we contribute to more sustainable and impactful outcomes. Our role includes not only providing funding and implementation support but also acting as advocates for local leadership within the broader development system.

This policy is informed by the ACFID Locally Led Development Toolkit, Australia's International Development Policy and DFAT Guidance Note on Locally Led Development.

Scope

This policy applies across Mary MacKillop Today's operations, country programs, development projects, and organisational culture. It is binding for all staff, Board members, senior leadership, and contractors; and influences our partnerships both in Australia and internationally.

This policy establishes core principles and accountability mechanisms to influence programming and internal operations.

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Provide a shared understanding and clear definition of Locally Led Action to guide strategic, operational, and programmatic decision-making across the organisation.
- Establish a set of principles that enable authentic engagement with local systems, while recognising the diverse and evolving contexts, capacities, and needs of different communities, countries, and regions.

Policy Commitments

Mary MacKillop Today commits to a fundamental shift of power to our local partners in the countries where we work, and our Timor-Leste in-Country office as part of a five-year roadmap to deepen locally-led development across our programs and operations.

We will:

- **Identify and address unconscious bias, norms, and assumptions** that shape how we engage with local partners and the Timor-Leste Country office through honest, regular dialogue and reflective practice.
- **Define clear principles for mutual knowledge-sharing**, promoting two-way learning and equal appreciation of technical, contextual, and lived expertise.
- **Influence the broader development sector** by advocating for a fairer, more equitable, locally driven and people-centred development model.
- **Foster equal partnerships** that recognise and strengthen the leadership of national and local actors.
- **Embed mutual accountability and transparency** through policies, governance and systems, demonstrated by tangible shifts in strategy, governance, and capacity development.
- **Develop and periodically update a context analysis** of the different places where MMT is located, in order to have a closer knowledge of the sociocultural dynamics and living conditions, to achieve more informed and equitable decisions.

Core Commitments by Domains

Quality & Effectiveness: Planning and Design

We commit to engaging communities and local partners from the earliest stages of project planning, ensuring their voices shape goals, design, and decision-making. Participatory processes will be embedded into organisational culture and program cycle management.

Quality & Effectiveness: Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

Program goals and learning agendas will be established collaboratively with local actors. We will invest in peer learning, reflective practice, and participatory monitoring and evaluation methods to measure progress towards Locally Led Action. The ACFID Locally-Led Development Continuum will be used to guide and track progress.

Collaboration

We will acknowledge and address power dynamics in all partnerships. Transparency and mutual accountability will guide decision-making, communication, and day-to-day collaboration, ensuring partnerships reflect shared ownership, mutual learning, and respect.

Communication

Content development will be led or co-created by local staff and partners. Communities will have agency and informed consent in storytelling. We will ensure that local partners have editorial control over how their communities are represented, and that data and image rights and consent processes are co-created and respected. We will provide opportunities for local voices to be heard, through diverse media and communicational resources, traditional and digital opportunities.

Advocacy

Advocacy efforts will be locally driven. Mary MacKillop Today will assume support roles – such as facilitator, connector, or amplifier – especially to vulnerable communities, when engaging in regional or international spaces, ensuring that local leadership is at the forefront.

Risk Management

We will promote shared ownership of risk assessment and mitigation. Local partners and the Timor-Leste Country office identify, prioritise, and manage risks relevant to their contexts. Risk tools and processes will be co-designed to be effective, accessible, and proportional to partner needs and capacities. In managing risk, Mary MacKillop Today will integrate approaches to locally-led development in a way that continues to meet obligations under International Conventions, Australian and partners' legislative requirements, and Mary MacKillop Today (MMT) and DFAT policies which seek to safeguard against harm and ensure funding is used for its intended purpose.

Governance

Mary MacKillop Today is committed to inclusive governance structures. We will seek representation on our Board and advisory structures that reflects primary stakeholders and local leadership, ensuring diverse voices shape organisational strategy.

Resource Management

We commit to multi-year, quality, and direct funding for local partners, including support for core costs and administrative overheads. We will apply where possible, funding mechanisms that allow for overheads and flexibility in a way that is fair and partner-informed, ensuring partners can sustainably lead programs.

People and Culture

We will prioritise recruitment strategies that emphasise the relational and facilitative skills required to support locally led processes – especially in INGO roles. Diversity and empowerment in staffing and leadership will be embedded across our team.

Next Steps and Accountability

To operationalise this policy, Mary MacKillop Today will:

- Develop departmental workplans that reflect the goals of this policy.
- Track progress using ACFID's Locally Led Development Continuum.
- Engage staff and partners in ongoing dialogue, training, and reflection to embed this shift across the organisation.
- Socialization of achievements, difficulties and challenges, so that the various actors assume responsibilities and commitments of co-responsibility.

Annex 1. Definitions

Locally Led Action

The transfer of power and ownership of development activities and outcomes to local actors, recognising their leadership, agency, and contextual knowledge.

Local

A broad term encompassing individuals, communities, organisations and institutions with lived experience

and deep knowledge of their context. "Local" is best defined by proximity to the impact of a project: community members and direct participants are the most local; followed by local civil society organisations, national NGOs, and governments; then INGOs and donors. (*Refer to ACFID Local Actor Exercise for further detail.*)

Localisation

The process of shifting power from less local actors (e.g., international NGOs) to more local ones, embedding leadership, ownership, and decision-making closer to communities.

Power

The ability to influence decisions about development priorities, resources, and outcomes. Locally led development recognises and seeks to address historical and systemic power imbalances.

Systemic Change

Transforming structures, mindsets, and norms to address root causes of inequity. This results in long-term, sustainable shifts that benefit entire systems rather than select groups.

Transparency

Providing open, clear, accessible, and timely information about activities, locations, decisions, and performance to build trust and ensure mutual accountability.

Linked Policies

- 5.7 Code of Conduct Policy

Linked Documents

- N/A