



Collective Leadership for Sustainable Development:

Evidence from Research and Practice

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Authors*:

Jean Arkedis, Teach For All

Mac Benavides, Kansas State University

Laurence Dessein, Teach For All

Lori Kniffin, Fort Hays State University

Sonia M. Ospina, New York University

Kerry Priest, Kansas State University

* The authors of this report contributed substantially to the conceptual and written work of this report. We list ourselves alphabetically to recognize the shared contributions of the collective.



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Brigid Carroll, University of Auckland Business School

Viji Iyer, STIR Education

James Kassaga-Arinaitwe, Teach For Uganda

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² Teach For All is a global network of more than 60 independent, locally led organizations and a global organization united by a commitment to developing collective leadership to ensure all children can fulfill their potential. Each network partner recruits and develops promising future leaders to teach in their nations' under-resourced schools and communities and, with this foundation, to work with others, inside and outside of education, towards a world where all children have the education, support, and opportunity to shape a better future.

³ The People First Community is a cross-sectoral and globally diverse group of practitioners, academics, and public and private sector actors with a shared belief in the importance of prioritizing investing in collective leadership development as a path for sustainable development.

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Executive Summary

This report will make the case that, while the global development paradigm has been evolving in important ways in recent decades, this evolution is incomplete.

Specifically, this report contends that global development efforts are still mostly focused on developing proven practices, policies, innovations, and technologies that have a short-term and direct impact on outcomes and can be scaled, instead of doing so *alongside* strategic efforts to support the development of leaders and leadership within systems. And yet, evidence demonstrates that people are a critical part of the development equation; who leads, as well as how they perceive their purpose and their motivation, effort, and agency, matters for development outcomes.

At the same time, realizing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals is not just about getting existing systems to perform better, it will require improving and, in some cases, transforming them. We won't have healthy, well-educated, thriving people or a thriving planet without changing the local and global systems that are leading to a global learning crisis, poor-quality healthcare, and economic, racial, and social inequality.

Collective leadership is a vital ingredient for transformative change. Collective leadership is a dynamic force that occurs when diverse people come together to tackle complex problems and make meaning, so they can find direction and collaborate to achieve a socially useful outcome that each would not have produced on their own.

Collective leadership is itself a new paradigm within the field of leadership, which guides how to practice and develop meaningful leadership. It differs from previous paradigms of leadership by upending the idea that leadership is the purview of individual people in positions of authority, instead positing that it is a collective pursuit. Collective leadership is an approach to leadership that is well-fitted to the information age, a globalized world, and the complex problems and vast opportunities of the 21st century which require the contributions, strengths, and capacities of many.

We have surfaced empirical evidence that substantiates the major claim of the People-First Community: that people and leadership matter for development outcomes, and to make the case that collective leadership development is a promising lever for systemic change. Though the terminology of collective leadership originates in Western discourse, its underlying concepts and approaches have been practiced by social movements and Indigenous communities for centuries. There is also evidence that collective leadership enhances community resilience and that, when it is practiced within mainstream organizations, it improves the performance of organizations, groups, and teams.

Evidence and practice also show that collective leadership can be developed. It is most likely to emerge under certain conditions: when a critical mass of leaders at many levels of

the system share a purpose, represent the perspectives of the communities served, are deeply connected with and trust each other despite their differences, and have the capacities, spaces and processes for dialogue, reflection, collaboration and learning.

These conditions suggest outcomes and design considerations that practitioners can consider when developing their strategies and approaches to collective leadership development. Common approaches to developing collective leadership include:

- **Cohort based programs:** These programs aim to attract and develop new talent often from diverse backgrounds to create new leadership pathways for individuals in leadership roles. The key objectives include shifting the overall leadership landscape at the system level. The fellowships provide a combination of on-the-job experiences, training, and time-bound leadership development activities, all the while developing collective leadership capacities in individuals or groups as part of their professional development.
- **Network building activities** connect individuals with shared interests or a commitment to shaping specific areas of practice or policy. Networks foster collaboration, information sharing, and support among leaders, enhancing collective leadership.
- **Efforts to convene stakeholders and facilitate dialogue** seek to directly relax the constraints to collective action and learning. They do so by creating spaces and facilitating processes for individuals to develop a shared sense of purpose, collectively understand problems, imagine and pursue solutions, and co-construct meaning from experience and/or evidence. They develop insight and practice necessary for working on complex issues, emphasizing systems thinking and problem-solving.

While momentum is building around collective leadership development, there are still a number of gaps that practitioners, funders, and the research community need to address to realize its potential for systems change. They include:

1. **Focusing collective leadership development efforts on growing collective capacity to change the system, not just develop individual leaders.** This involves practitioners focusing on the scale of the effort needed to reach a critical mass, as well as considering network building and process facilitation as complements to leader development.
2. **Prioritizing long-term investments and operational support for global, regional, country- and community-based organizations dedicated to developing collective leadership capacity at different levels.**
3. **Investing in measurement and strategic research to further the field of collective leadership development.**

The [People First Community](#) initiated this project. We are a globally diverse and cross-sectoral group of stakeholders who share a belief in the importance of increasing

practice, research and learning, and investment in collective leadership development as a path to sustainable development. This report is intended for practitioners, scholars, and funders of global development across all sectors to illuminate how collective leadership can be harnessed for sustainable development.

It was designed as a collaborative endeavor between the research team and other collaborators, including the People First Steering committee and an advisory committee formed for the project. The project unfolded in two phases: an Evidence Review (Phase I) and Co-operative Inquiry (Phase II).

- **Phase I: Evidence Review.** The research team gathered evidence from diverse sources, including academic research, input from the People First Community's members and committees, and by following citation trails within the collected evidence. They intentionally sought a broad range of evidence, including publications in multiple languages. Over 300 documents were collected, cataloged, and reviewed for relevance. The team applied an interpretive and pragmatic approach to their review.
- **Phase II: Co-operative Inquiry.** The evidence review indicated that collective leadership matters for sustainable development and can be developed. However, it also revealed a disconnect between academic and practitioner sources. To bridge this gap, the research team engaged in a co-operative inquiry process. This phase involved collaborative meetings among the authors, blending insights from academic research with practical knowledge from the field of global sustainable development.

Establishing an advisory committee as well as having the two-phased approach to write the report were intentional efforts to ensure that the perspectives and findings represented evidence and insights from diverse contexts. As a result, the report is supported by literature from 110 sources, including peer-reviewed and practitioner-oriented publications, government and institutional reports, and examples of organizations engaged in the work of collective leadership to catalyze sustainable development. In spite of these efforts, the research team recognizes that the findings are an imperfect representation of the evidence, insights, and impact of collective leadership globally.⁴

⁴ Please see Section IX and X for more information on the authors and methodology, including the breakdown of the geographical context of the authors for the sourced evidence and the geographical representation of the content.

Table of Contents

- I. Introduction: Evolving the Global Development Paradigm to Embrace Collective Leadership**
 - II. Evidence that People Matter for Development Outcomes**
 - III. Toward a Collective View of Leadership: Leadership Paradigms in Flux**
 - A. The Three Waves of Leadership Theory and Practice**
 - B. Defining Collective Leadership**
 - IV. Collective Leadership Matters: Evidence on the Relevance and Impact of Collective Leadership**
 - A. Collective Leadership in Social Movements**
 - B. Collective Leadership Supports Community Resilience**
 - C. Collective Leadership Promotes Organizational, Group, and Team Effectiveness**
 - D. Collective Leadership Supports Individual Transformation**
 - V. Collective Leadership as a Lever for Systems Change and Sustainable Development**
 - A. Realizing Sustainable Development Requires Systems Change**
 - B. Collective Leadership as a Lever for Systems Change**
 - VI. Developing Collective Leadership for Systems Change and Sustainable Development**
 - A. Defining Collective Leadership Development**
 - B. Approaches to Collective Leadership Development**
 - VII. The Way Forward: Three Key Recommendations**
 - A. Focus collective leadership development efforts on growing collective capacity to change the system, not just develop individual leaders.**
 - B. Prioritize long-term investments and operational support for global, regional, country- and community-based organizations dedicated to developing collective leadership capacity at different levels.**
 - C. Invest in measurement and strategic research to further the field of collective leadership development.**
 - VIII. Works Cited**
 - IX. Glossary of Terms**
 - X. Methodology**
- Annex A. Strategic Leverage Points for Systems Change Descriptions**
- Annex B. Resources for Implementing Process Facilitated Dialogue and Shared Sense Making**
- Annex C. Collective leadership development design tool**

I. Introduction: Evolving the Global Development Paradigm to Embrace Collective Leadership Development

While there has been notable progress towards the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, achieving them remains elusive. Emergencies, crises, and conflict undoubtedly lead to recurrent setbacks; according to the United Nations' (2022) Sustainable Development Report, COVID-19 erased four years of progress against poverty and interrupted decades of global health gains.

Nevertheless, even before COVID-19, the global development community had increasingly recognized that existing approaches to supporting development were a part of the problem. At best, aid investments might be impactful in the short-run, but they do not necessarily catalyze long-lasting progress. At worst, the global development system may be undercutting or displacing national institutions and capacity, or perpetuating unequal and unjust systems inherited from the past (Moss et al., 2006). And, in between, many seemingly benign development programs have not realized their intended impact.

At the heart of this challenge is the reality that the traditional global development paradigm relies heavily on technical solutions (policies, programs, technologies, and innovations) that can deliver direct, short-term impact, without changing the underlying dynamics of the systems that had resulted in poor outcomes in the first place.

A few examples from the health and education sectors illustrate these challenges. Global health is a sector where there has been notable progress towards the SDGs thanks to the existence of proven and cost-effective interventions — including drugs, vaccines, bed nets, and other health commodities — that have a large impact on health outcomes. With sufficient funding, they can be scaled even in contexts where public health systems and governance are weak, sometimes by creating parallel systems to deliver these interventions directly to people. This enabled the global development community to contribute significantly to reducing childhood illness and death rates prior to the pandemic. But sustained and systemic changes, such as improving the overall quality of health services, has proven to be a more complex and persistent problem; complex public and private sector health systems are involved in delivering primary care services (Kruk & Pate, 2020). Moreover, political, economic, cultural and other community systems influence both the supply of quality health services and the social determinants of health.

Meanwhile, the global development community's contribution to sustained improvements in educational outcomes has been less impressive, in large part because of the limitations of a similar technical approach to education; finding the education equivalents to vaccines and drugs has, thus far, proven an elusive quest. Many more children in the world today have access to education than they did several decades ago. However, increasing access to schooling has not led to improved educational outcomes. As a result, most children in

developing countries and many in developed countries are attending schools which are not helping them to learn, let alone thrive (World Bank, 2018). This phenomenon, often referred to as the global learning crisis, pre-dates COVID-19, but was nevertheless worsened by it (Bryant et al., 2022). This is particularly true for children in marginalized communities or those who live in countries particularly prone to conflict, natural disasters, political instability, and other shocks (United Nations, 2022).

Beyond these sectors, persistent “wicked” problems such as climate change, economic inequality, racial injustice, and others are complicated by the interconnectedness of our global system. This further underscores the limitations of a global development paradigm that does not fully embrace the systemic, political, and cultural dimensions of development. COVID-19 demonstrated how a wicked problem such as a public health crisis can quickly expand across the globe, impact the global economy, and exacerbate existing inequities.

It’s important to note that the global paradigm has not been static in the face of these challenges. There has already been an important move to try to bring systems thinking into development practice and recognize the complex, adaptive nature of local systems (Barber, 2012; United States Agency for International Development, 2014). The global development community has begun to embrace the idea that development also involves social and political elements which require learning, innovation, and adaptation (Akmeemana et al., 2018).⁵ However, this report contends that this evolution is incomplete until the global development community prioritizes strategic efforts to support the development of leaders and leadership within systems.

Momentum around leadership development is growing. It is visible in calls to rethink the role of local actors, such as governments, civil society, the private sector and individual citizens in the development process. Previously these local actors were often implicitly viewed as the recipients of technical assistance or the adopters of solutions or innovations developed elsewhere. However, a shifting paradigm is increasingly viewing local actors as leaders themselves — critical in setting development priorities, identifying solutions, and implementing programming. Terms such as the “localization agenda” and “locally led development” mark a shifting discourse, and programs that embrace participatory development approaches put these ideas into practice by actively engaging and empowering communities, individuals, and other stakeholders in decision making and implementation of development strategies (Burns et al., 2021).⁶

⁵ See also, for example, <https://twpcommunity.org/>, <https://odi.org/en/publications/doing-development-differently-who-we-are-what-were-doing-and-what-were-learning/>, <https://usaideallearninglab.org/community/blog/what-adaptive-management>, <https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/the-global-learning-for-adaptive-management-initiative-glam/>, <https://r4d.org/how-we-work/evaluation-adaptive-learning/>, <https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/>

⁶ Burns et al.'s handbook features multiple examples of participatory methodologies used in development programs.

These efforts are important steps forward in stressing the importance of local participation, knowledge, and expertise. Yet evidence from research and practice suggests that a broader and more ambitious change in thinking, practice, and funding priorities is needed. Very little official development assistance is directed toward leadership development. An analysis Boston Consulting Group conducted in 2018 found that only \$15.2M went to projects related to local “leadership development” across sectors in 2018 — approximately .01% of total development assistance (People-First, 2020).

Moreover, investing in leadership development is not all that is needed, but also reconsidering what kind of leadership will help to achieve sustainable development and solve many of the problems of the 21st century — from climate change, to economic and education inequality, to health crises. These challenges require abandoning previous notions of leadership to re-imagine it as a collective and adaptive pursuit. Collective leadership involves a group of diverse collaborators working together to find direction, coordinate actions, and achieve shared purposes, often including changing the systems which are contributing to inequality and suboptimal development outcomes. It is characterized by a commitment to power sharing, an asset-based approach, a relational way of being, and a systems lens. This approach leverages the strengths and knowledge of diverse leaders to collectively contribute to create sustainable change.

Current investments in developing the capacity of local actors focus on developing the technical or managerial skills necessary for their success and better performance in a current role. Instead, there are still few efforts to develop a cross-cutting set of leadership capacities that might help individuals and groups participate and lead the work of changing the systems within which they operate.

These challenges also present an opportunity to re-imagine collective leadership and how to develop it, based on insights from theory, practice, and research. The purpose of this report is to help provide some conceptual clarity, context, and evidence to support that work, by:

1. Synthesizing evidence which demonstrates that people and leadership matter for development outcomes.
2. Defining collective leadership and highlighting what distinguishes it from other concepts of leadership.
3. Synthesizing evidence which demonstrates that collective leadership is effective and impactful.
4. Describing the connections between collective leadership, systems change, and sustainable development.

5. Defining collective leadership development and presenting a framework to understand how practitioners can develop it.
6. Synthesizing a set of high-level recommendations to operationalize the insights of this research.

The report is intended for practitioners, scholars, and funders of global development across all sectors. It was commissioned by the [People First Community](#), a globally diverse and cross-sectoral group of stakeholders who share a belief in the importance of increasing practice, research and learning, and investment in collective leadership development as a path to sustainable development. Additional details on the authors, methodology and sources for the report are available in Section IX and X.

II. Evidence that People Matter for Development Outcomes

Even before considering what collective leadership is, how it can be developed, and whether it can be a lever for changing systems toward sustainable development, one basic premise of a people-first approach to development must be stated: people and leaders matter, at least as much as structural or technical inputs to the system, which are often the focus interventions to improve development outcomes. Does evidence support the idea that differences in people's capacity, agency, participation, leadership, motivation and/or effectiveness can lead to different development outcomes?

There is, in fact, a growing body of evidence documenting the critical role of local actors — people working within systems—in driving development outcomes across a range of key sectors, including economic development, government, education, and health.

First, the research demonstrates that *who* occupies positions of authority matters for a range of development outcomes. For instance, in a cross-national econometric analysis, economists found robust evidence that individual leaders do shape the growth of nations by directly influencing fiscal and monetary policy, as well as political institutions (Jones & Olken, 2004). In education, a 2020 evidence review report conducted by Global School Leaders summarized knowledge showing that school leaders have an impact on student success:

An emerging evidence base...[finds] quality school leaders (also referred to as principals, school heads, school directors, headmasters/headmistresses) are critical to ensuring [that] students learn. After studying school leaders in eight countries, Bloom et al. noted that a one-point increase in their scoring on school management practices was associated with a 10% increase in student performance (2015). Leaver et al. extended this work with evidence from 65 countries participating in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and found that school leaders moving from the bottom 25% to top 25% of their quality management score

was associated with a large increase in student learning outcomes, equivalent to an additional three months of schooling for every year (2019). This same relationship has been validated by other researchers in other Global South countries. (Global School Leaders, 2020, p. 9)

In health, effective leaders can improve organizational performance, patient outcomes, and staff satisfaction by supporting evidence-based policies and practices, building strong health systems, and stimulating innovation and collaboration (Alilyyani et al., 2018).

In the civic sector, cities and regions with effective leaders have shown to be more successful economically in that the city or region will take a strong role in setting a vision for the future and then move to implement plans and processes that bring about that change (Beer & Clower, 2014).

Second, research shows that an individual's commitment, motivation, and effort are likely key determinants of their effectiveness. Studies have documented how a lack of effort of health providers in some contexts is correlated with poor health outcomes and poor quality health services (Duflo et al., 2012). Similarly, in the education sector, the impact of teacher absenteeism, particularly in developing countries, has been well-documented (Patrinos, 2013). Many attempts to solve these issues by monitoring workers or providing them with incentives have failed to sustainably shift effort, motivation, or performance (Banerjee et al., 2008). New empirical research compares different levers for improving health care worker performance by randomly testing interventions to remind workers of the purpose or mission of their work, providing them with performance-linked financial incentives, or both. The research finds that the mission-oriented treatment increases motivation of local leaders and improves the quality of services they provide (Yasir Khan, 2023).

III. Toward a Collective View of Leadership: Leadership Paradigms in Flux

If people and leadership matter for development, what kind of leadership is needed to support sustainable development? Evidence highlighted in the previous section demonstrated not only that leaders and leadership matter, but also pointed to the promise of a collective leadership paradigm that considers the potential leadership contribution of other actors without “formal authority” in a given system. This is especially true of those who, being closer to the problem, can effectively articulate its solution and commit to act around a common purpose around a mission. This section discusses the shifting paradigms in the leadership field in order to define and situate collective leadership within a broader landscape of leadership thinking and practice.

A. The Three Waves of Leadership Theory and Practice

Alongside the shifting global development paradigm, the paradigms underpinning leadership theory and practice have also been evolving in response to a changing global context. Scholar John Dugan has identified three main waves of leadership thinking and practice. The first wave, the industrial paradigm, was management oriented, focusing primarily on an individual leader's traits and behaviors in managing others and placing leadership responsibility of outcomes on the "leader" alone. The second wave, the post-industrial paradigm, focused on the influence relationship between leaders and followers working toward a shared purpose (Rost, 1993), with primary attention still on how the leader manages such relationships. Although the focus between the first and second waves shifted from leader traits to leader-follower relationships, both can be characterized as "leader-centric" perspectives of leadership.

A new, third paradigm represents shift away from these leader-centric perspectives toward a conceptualization of leadership that is appropriate for the information age, a globalized world, and the complex adaptive systems in which individuals and groups are attempting to lead and make change (Dugan et al., 2015; Dugan, 2017). Instead of viewing leadership as the purview of a particular individual leader who works to mobilize followers, scholars and practitioners engaged in defining leadership in this new paradigm as the work of a group of people — a collective — who collaborate and learn together for a common purpose, and where formal leadership positions and roles may be shared or distributed in a more flexible way (Ospina & Foldy, 2016).

While the first two waves failed to adequately address the adaptive nature of complex social issues, the type of leadership conceptualized by scholars and practitioners most aligned with the third wave is more fitted to the realities of the 21st century and its social problems. Challenges like those behind the Sustainable Development Goals occur across organizations, sectors, and other social differences. Ronald Heifetz and colleagues refer to these as adaptive challenges and distinguish them from technical challenges. The latter have clear problems and solutions and require experts with experience to solve them. Adaptive challenges, by contrast, require learning about both the problems and solutions and entail the involvement of all stakeholders through a process of iterative interventions to make progress (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009).

B. Defining Collective Leadership

The kind of leadership needed to address these adaptive challenges can be referred to as collective leadership. Literature on collective leadership and the practice of collective leadership is still evolving, nevertheless, we draw on these diverse perspectives to present a succinct working definition of collective leadership:

Collective leadership happens when a group of people (a “collective”) make meaning together so they can find direction and coordinate their interdependent actions to achieve a socially useful outcome that each would not have produced on their own.⁷

Collective leadership is a way of approaching leadership (a lens) and also a way of being in the world and doing leadership (a practice). Those practicing collective leadership locate the epicenter of leadership beyond the visible leader — understanding the leader and leadership as interdependent but different realities — to focus also on the processes and practices that make leadership happen in a system.

Collective leadership practitioners understand that leadership emerges from a system of relationships — a collective, where individual and group decisions, interactions, and actions are embedded and influence each other. Leadership is collective work that is expressed in how members of a group agree on a path forward and commit to achieve something they value, while adapting to changing circumstances when pursuing it. In this view, leadership manifests in the outcomes of a group’s work, not in the specific individuals who produce it, hence the emphasis on its collective dimension.

While there are diverse collective leadership approaches in the literature,⁸ all share a view of leadership as an emergent, interactive process intended to cultivate group members’ capacity and adaptability to navigate complexity toward advancing and accomplishing an agreed-upon purpose.

A collective approach to leadership flips basic assumptions about the sources, the object, and the end result of leadership work (Ospina & Foldy 2015). If a traditional leadership practice views the leader or the leader-follower relationship as the primary source of leadership, collective leadership practice instead promotes many sources of leadership beyond the leader. This includes, for example, processes that distribute leadership roles among many; the interdependent networks of relationships influencing and constraining what its members can and ought to do; or organizing processes and structures that enhance meaning-making, decision-making, participation, and engagement toward desired outcomes that become collectively owned.

In collective leadership, the object of leadership (what is targeted to be changed) also broadens, from a focus on followers, or on the quality of the leader-follower relationship, to include a focus on work or activities aimed at intentionally creating environments that

⁷ This definition integrates various approaches to collective leadership drawing from the leadership studies literature and from the practice of collective leadership. In particular, it draws from the scholarship of a team working with Professor Sonia Ospina at New York University and from the People First Community’s praxis.

⁸ E.g. network leadership (Cullen-Lester & Yammarino 2016); complexity leadership (Uhl-Bien & Marion 2009); discursive leadership (Fairhurst, 2007), constructionist collective leadership (Drath, 2001; Drath et al., 2008; Ospina et al. 2012); and relational leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006; Cunliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Fletcher 2012).

support and foster leadership in organizational members — what Raelin (2003) calls creating “leaderful” organizations, that is, environments full of leadership.

Finally, the end result of leadership is not only motivating followers or creating a good relationship between leader and follower, but generating environments where participants gain the capacity to effectively collaborate, produce desired results together, and experience them as collective achievements.

Table A below provides a working description of the main concepts and attributes underpinning collective leadership.

Table A. Collective leadership attributes

Collective Leadership Attribute	Description
Common challenge and shared purpose	Each individual, group, or organization working together within a collective may have differing types of work and specific goals, but together they are advancing a shared purpose through their leadership work.
Diverse collaborators and power sharing	The leadership work belongs to all actors within the system — not just those with authority — which requires power sharing.
Asset-based approach	There is a firm commitment to draw upon the strengths and knowledge of local leaders and to align the leadership work to these.
Relational way of being	Leadership emerges from the relationships and interactions of individuals within the collective working together. This relational quality of leadership informs the work.
Systems lens	Leadership challenges often exist across multiple levels and across boundaries of systems and differences.

Source: Authors’ elaboration.

IV. Collective Leadership Matters: Evidence on the Relevance and Impact of Collective Leadership

Though the terminology of collective leadership originates in Western discourse, its underlying concepts and approaches have been practiced by social movements and Indigenous communities for centuries, providing evidence of its effectiveness in practice. There is also evidence that collective leadership enhances community resilience; improves the performance of organizations, groups, and teams; and contributes toward individual transformation. The evidence presented in this section demonstrates that collective leadership matters, which is an important precursor for many who are considering investing in developing collective leadership.

A. Collective Leadership in Social Movements

From a Western-based leadership perspective, collective leadership reflects a new paradigm. However, the ideas and practices of collective leadership are not new. They have been present throughout history in social movements and Indigenous cultures.

Social movements are often characterized by the participation and collaboration of diverse individuals and groups who come together around a shared purpose, cause, or goal and mobilize power to create action (Ganz, 2010). Social movement practices include political models (e.g., winning campaigns) and practices of organizing, mobilizing, and networking that work to build individual capacity and change civic structures (Voss & Williams, 2009). These practices often promote inclusivity, participation, and value a broader distribution of power, enabling diverse individuals to contribute to and shape the movement's trajectory and impact. While not all social movements succeed at their aims, many have resulted in systemic change helping to shape public discourse, mobilize communities, and drive policy changes on a range of critical social issues.

For example, the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti San, or Workers' and Farmers' Power Organization (known as MKSS) demonstrates how grassroots activism embodying the principles and practices of collective leadership can bring about significant societal changes. MKSS emerged in India in the early 1990s, joining more than a hundred activist organizations in an advocacy campaign for government transparency and accountability, and empowerment of marginalized people to demand their right to information about government policies, expenditures, and social welfare programs. The movement empowered local actors to take on leadership roles. Movement leaders and members engaged in shared decision making to give voice to community concerns, build consensus and ownership, and foster unity and common purpose. The MKSS movement played a crucial role in enacting the 2005 Rights to Information Act in India, which had an impact on the Indian social and political landscape, and also inspired other movements and

contributed to the broader discourse on transparency and accountability in governance (Baviskar, 2010; Jenkins & Goetz, 1999).

Aside from individual cases, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan (2011) compiled data on social movements and civil resistance efforts globally between 1990 and 2006 and found that non-violent movements were more than twice as likely to succeed than violent ones. Perhaps even more compelling is their finding that the scale of a social movement matters—when a critical mass of people constituting at least 3.5 percent of the population is actively participating in social movements, it becomes difficult for political elites to ignore their demands (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Collective engagement disrupts power in service of collective goals.

Principles and practices that have supported effective social movements also disseminate across time and space generating collective learning that is useful in other contexts. El Hadidy et al. (2010), for example, show how assumptions about “popular education” (as an approach to leadership development that emerged in Latin America) converged with later work in the United States to become a core dimension of community organizing in the United States (Su, 2009). Even without calling it collective leadership, these experiences help to illustrate the values, relationships, processes, and collective leadership practices that contribute to broader social change.

B. Collective Leadership Supports Community Resilience

Collective leadership is evident in community responses to shocks and setbacks through practices that promote resilience, such as affirming diverse perspectives, collaboration and coordination, empowerment and participation, and adaptive capacity.

Parés et al.'s (2017) comparative study of social innovation in urban neighborhoods links community resilience to civic capacity and leadership. It documents the relevance of collective leadership work in generating innovative solutions of resilient communities in four neighborhoods whose lives were impacted by the 2008 worldwide financial collapse and economic recession. Despite important variations in the studied innovations, researchers found evidence of collective leadership practices in all the cases, which helped communities resiliently bounce back from the shocks. Leadership work included reframing the community's understanding of the experience of the crisis within a broader context to identify action strategies; connecting with local government officials to marshal helpful resources; and supporting community members to engage in active work to solve specific problems via organizing and advocacy.

Though the process of creating an ecosystem of collective leadership “is slow to build and initially consumes more organizational resources” (ben Asher, 2021, p. 29), evidence suggests that developing collective leadership can subsequently result in community self-determination. In another example of crisis response, McNulty and colleagues (2018)

found that collective leadership enhanced intra- and inter-organizational capacity for managing the complex demands of urgent community needs. They found that the practice of collective leadership amid the aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings in the United States facilitated information and resource-sharing, cooperative decision-making, and collective sense-making.

Another key example of how collective leadership supports community resilience can be seen in the effectiveness of responses to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Wilson (2020) shared lessons from New Zealand's approach to COVID-19 and the leadership practices that were instrumental in fostering a shared purpose to minimize harm to lives and livelihood. In addition to being guided by scientific advice and expertise, key leadership practices included *mobilizing collective efforts* through conveying direction, meaning, and empathy, fostering unity and soliciting feedback.

Examples of the links between community resilience and collective leadership illustrate the capacity of communities to come together, support each other, and rebuild during and after a crisis and challenging circumstances. Collective leadership interventions create space for reflection, dialogue and network construction to mobilize local action and collaborative work, thereby broadening the scope and scale of their impact (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010). According to Chrislip et al. (2022), communities that are better at responding to civic challenges in the United States are more competent at marshaling material and human resources in service to their own needs. They collectively solve problems, make decisions and act, manage power disparities and divisive politics through radical inclusion, authentic engagement and mutual learning.

Effectively building the collective leadership capacity of communities is “based on collaboration, power sharing, a forward-looking approach and flexibility” (Beer & Clower, 2014, p. 16). The Stop AAPI Hate Reporting Center embodies this commitment, as it emerged early in the COVID-19 pandemic to address growing racialized violence against Asians and Asian Americans in the United States. The center was established as “a community-driven tool that collects self-reports of racist incidents and uses data to advocate for policy responses to anti-Asian racism and xenophobia” (Takasaki, 2020, p. 341). The focus on meeting community needs, collaborative efforts, and public education flourished within a network of interacting community organizations, community members, and university collaborators, resulting in a sustainable community resource capable of meeting emergent needs.

C. Collective Leadership Promotes Organizational, Group, and Team Effectiveness

While collective leadership fits well within the realm of social movements, many organizations and teams experience challenges that can benefit from leadership that diverges from traditional top-down and leader-centric models.

Research and practitioner evidence suggests that the performance of teams, organizations, and other groups improves when they embrace collective leadership practices and processes. Ospina and her colleagues (2008, 2009, 2010) found that social change organizations engage in collective leadership practices — reframing discourse, bridging differences, unleashing human energies — to leverage power and to enhance their effectiveness in core tasks of their organization. Based on their research, they propose a social change leadership framework that connects leadership work to the development of individual, organizational, and collective capacity to attain their social change mission (Ospina et al., 2012). The Center for Creative Leadership has similarly found that collective leadership empowers individuals within organizations, fostering a shared sense of ownership and accountability (Hernez-Broome & Hughes, 2004).

The positive impact likely occurs because a collective approach leverages diverse perspectives, promotes collaboration and communication, fosters adaptability and innovation, involves wide-spread leadership development, and ultimately nurtures a positive organizational culture. As a result, individuals throughout organizations more actively contribute to shared vision and goals, leading to greater performance outcomes overall.

Key levers for effectively instilling a culture of collective leadership include networking, which creates the bonding social capital needed to make an effective team, and access to external resources that support internal efforts. By establishing and strengthening relational connections between organizational actors and minimizing barriers to effective collaboration, evidence strongly suggests that collective leadership interventions can promote more effective team working, enhance quality of work, and increase internal and external satisfaction (de Brún & McAuliffe, 2020; Kunze et al., 2016; Maldonado Franzen & Steffensmeier, 2022; Wang et al., 2014).

In schools, for example, where collective leadership is integrated into educators' everyday practices and processes, collective leadership has been shown to be positively correlated with student achievement. Using a path model, a large-scale survey study based on data from 2,570 teachers in 90 schools in the United States tested the relationships among collective leadership, teacher capacity, motivation and work setting, and student achievement. The findings suggest that collective leadership influences student achievement through teacher motivation and work setting, and, as a whole, explains 20% of the variation in student achievement (Seashore Louis et al., 2010).

Similarly, in healthcare, quality of care, patient safety, and staff and patient satisfaction have all been positively impacted by collective leadership interventions (de Brún & McAuliffe, 2020). Collective leadership can generate powerful outcomes because it moves

beyond traditional strategies relying solely on the development of senior executives and instead promotes leadership development across all levels of organizations and teams.

D. Collective Leadership Supports Individual Transformation

As discussed above, collective leadership supports large-scale systems change in social movements and community resilience; it also improves organizational effectiveness for organizations, groups, and teams. Though the focus of collective leadership requires attention to the work of collectives, it is important to keep in mind the individuals who engage in that work, since it is through their agency that collective leadership emerges (Dodge & Ospina, 2015; Ospina et al., 2012). Evidence suggests that when individuals engage in collective leadership practice, they themselves are transformed by the experience.

Research on community-based action supported by the Kansas Leadership Center has demonstrated positive short-term impacts of collective leadership programs for participants and facilitators, including increased civic engagement and efficacy (Maldonado Franzen & Steffensmeier, 2022). After engaging in collective leadership development, participants felt empowered and prepared to participate meaningfully in public issues, and consequently acted.

In a project related to sustainable water management in Tunisia, the use of process tools like dialogue and the focus on collective intelligence, innovation, and wholeness led to mindset shifts (e.g., recognition of need to change, power to change, and need to act). It also produced a sense of empowerment for marginalized stakeholder groups to find their own voice in developing concrete solutions to water management problems (Kuehn, 2017).

Evidence from the Teach For All network similarly demonstrates that participating in a teaching fellowship designed to recruit new and promising leaders into the education sector had an impact on the participants' beliefs in their own potential to make a difference (Mo et al., 2018). Teach For America female alumni are, on average, 10 percentage points more likely to be interested in running for political office and six percentage points more likely to participate in political campaigns than similar applicants who did not do the fellowship. The effects are particularly stronger for women of color, who were 22.7 percentage points more likely to pursue a political office (Mo et al., 2019). Teach For America also has a large effect on civic participation, substantially increasing voter turnout rates among applicants admitted to the program. This effect is noticeably larger than that of previous efforts to increase youth turnout. Particularly, after their two years of service, it is estimated that these young adults vote at a rate 5.7 to 8.6 percentage points higher than that of similar nonparticipant counterparts (Mo et al., 2022).

Because collective leadership interventions often involve identifying leadership potential across all levels of organizations rather than only those already holding positional power, individuals experience benefits related to self-efficacy, motivation, and enhanced capacity to enact leadership. Enseña Chile participants have higher levels of perceived self-efficacy – they are more likely to agree with sentences like "I am effectively contributing to improving educational opportunities" and "I can make an impact in the field of education" (Claro, 2018).

V. Collective Leadership as a Lever for Systems Change and Sustainable Development

If collective leadership matters at individual, team, organization, community, and societal levels, what is the link between collective leadership and sustainable development? The sections below will make the case that systems change is needed to realize sustainable development and collective leadership is a lever for systems change.

A. Realizing Sustainable Development Requires Systems Change

Realizing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals is not just about getting existing systems to perform better. It will require changing, and in some cases transforming, the very systems contributing to poor health, inequitable education and the learning crisis, as well as a changing climate, within countries⁹ and at the global level. The insight that "every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets"¹⁰ draws attention to the idea that achieving sustainability will require engaging with and changing the systems that are producing suboptimal outcomes.

However, in spite of a changing global discourse around locally-led development and its contribution to sustainability, many global initiatives still primarily conceive of development as a technical challenge. As a result, they focus their efforts on changing the visible, easy-to-target symptoms of an under-performing system, while leaving more fundamental aspects of the system such as mindsets, beliefs, and power distribution intact (Teach For All, 2022).

⁹ Systems within countries are sometimes referred to as 'local systems'. Local systems can be defined as the "interconnected set of actors—government, civil society, the private sector...individual citizens and others that jointly produce a particular development outcome" (United States Agency for International Development, 2014, p. 4). Local systems can refer to education systems, health systems, political systems, or others and they can be national, provincial or sub-national, or community-wide in scope. This is in contrast to the global development community, composed of the interconnected actors who advocate for fund and implement interventions and investments to advance development outcomes, including those in the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹⁰ This quote is attributed to a range of people who work on healthcare system improvement including: Don Berwick, W. Edwards Deming, and Dr. Paul Batalden.

Marla Spivack, from the Directorate of one of the largest research endeavors in global education — Research on Improving Systems of Education (RISE) — summarizes this challenge:

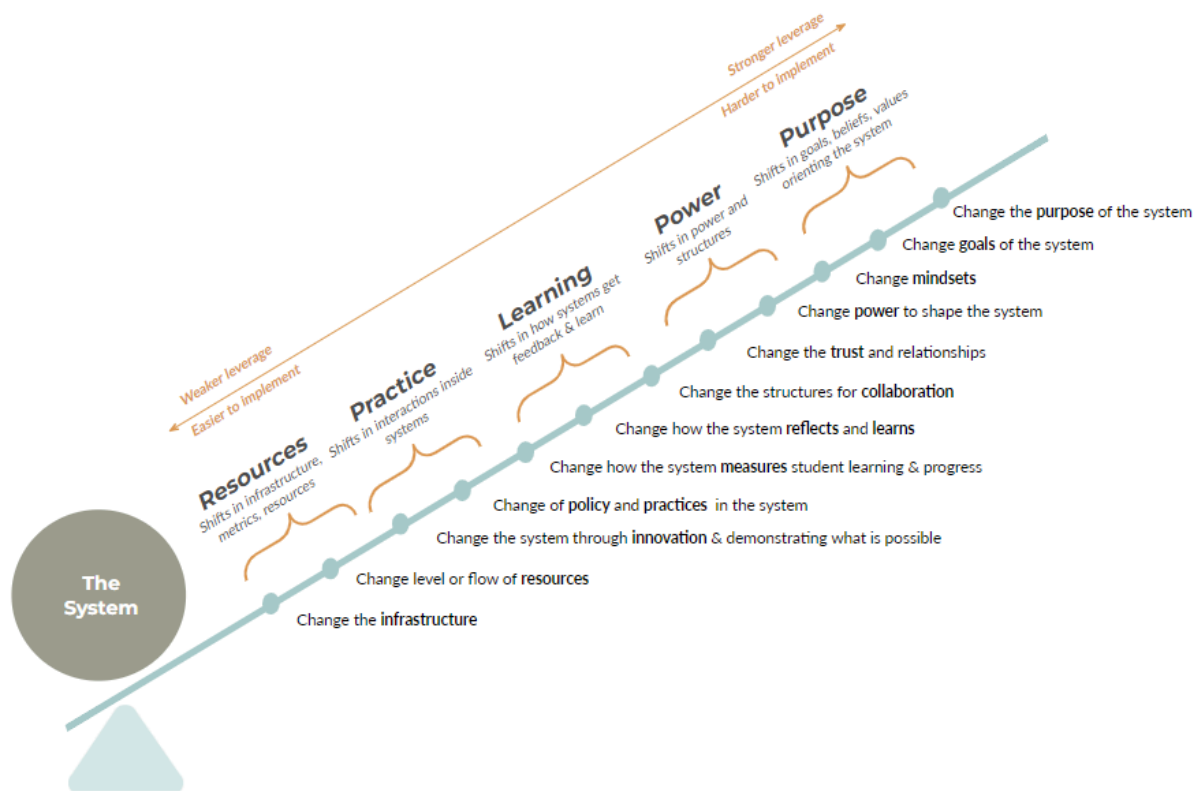
All too often, programs are designed to address one of these symptoms (e.g., student dropout, teacher motivation), are implemented faithfully, and yet fail to improve learning outcomes. When a program fails to have the desired impact, it is tempting to look for a devil in the details, some aspect of program design or execution that could be tweaked to produce better performance. But often, the devil is in the system, not in the details. The program failed not because of a design flaw, but because of its overall incoherence with the rest of the education system. (Spivak, 2021, p. 5)

B. Collective Leadership as a Lever for Systems Change

What is the alternative to conceiving of development as a technical challenge? As mentioned previously, a shifting global development paradigm has increasingly embraced systems thinking and viewing development as an adaptive challenge that emerges within complex, adaptive systems (Burns & Worsley 2015).

Systems theorist Donella Meadows (1999) explained that leverage points are places in a system where, “a small shift in one thing can produce big changes in everything” (p. 1). Meadows developed a framework for thinking about what leverage points might be the most strategic to target, describing them in increasing order of effectiveness. They range from those that are easier to implement with weaker leverage (such as resources and practice) to those that are more challenging to implement but possess stronger leverage (such as power and purpose). Consequently, the most powerful leverage points, which bring about structural changes in the system, are also the most difficult to push. These are included in the graphic below (See also Annex a for a further description of the leverage points included in Graphic A below).

Graphic A: Systems Leverage Points



Source: Teach For All, 2022, adapted from Meadows (1999) and further informed by publications from Kaffenberger, M. (2022), Sengeh, D. et al. (2022), and Goddard, C. et al. (n.d.)

This idea has two primary implications for the global development community seeking to work in ways that not only realize short-term impact, but also support the “ability of a local system to produce the desired outcomes over time” (United States Agency for International Development, 2014, p. 5).

The first is to reinforce a people-first orientation to global development. Systems are made up of people and thus the ones who can change them. Evidence presented in prior sections demonstrates the impact of collective leadership as a dynamic force which can be exercised by groups of local actors — that is, leaders, citizens, community members and other individuals as well as relevant groups, organizations or institutions — to change systems. When it comes to sustainable development, the collective leadership of local actors will be required to change the very systems in which they operate. This may help explain why global development strategies that focus only on resource or practice levers may be limited in their impact and their sustainability; it’s possible to use global development resources to have a short-term impact on the health, well-being, or educational outcomes of individual people without catalyzing changes in local systems that make the positive outcomes likely to be reproduced over time.

These points are underscored by recent work from the Research on Improving Systems of Education programme (RISE), particularly in the working paper, *The role of purpose in education system outcomes: A conceptual framework and empirical examples* (Kaffenberger, 2022). What distinguishes countries that are advancing learning, the author argues, seems to be their core purpose and commitment to advancing learning rather than differences in technical know-how or resources: “in many low- and middle-income countries that have achieved significant gains in learning outcomes, higher income and resources and greater knowledge of what to do to achieve learning *cannot* explain the differences in outcomes relative to lower performing countries” (Kaffenberger, 2022, p. 1).

According to this research the systems that change are those that want to change: it is systems where there is a collective commitment to the purpose of advancing learning, rather than only advancing educational outcomes for the elite (or to other corrupt purposes). These systems are able to iterate and adapt their way, thus improving learning outcomes for all children (Kaffenberger, 2022). The leadership literature further supports this idea. Hickman and Sorenson (2014) argue that in today's complex world, the charisma of purpose replaces the charisma of individuals as the motivating force generating leadership and connecting individuals (they label this invisible leadership).

The second implication is a need to define and understand how the global development community might contribute to shifting purpose, power, and how the system learns in ways that catalyze dynamic and systemic change processes. We argue that there are certain conditions under which the collective leadership of local actors is likely to emerge *and* that it is possible for the global development community to shift those underlying conditions through investments and intentional programming. These conditions include when a critical mass of leaders at many levels of the system share a purpose, represent the perspectives of the communities served, are deeply connected with each other despite their differences, and have spaces and processes for reflection, collaboration and learning.

In the next section, we begin to define and describe collective leadership development as the investments and programmatic strategies to bring about these conditions and in doing so, either directly shift purpose, power, or learning in the system *or* make it more likely that they will unleash collective leadership processes and practices that can do so over time.

VI. Developing Collective Leadership for Systems Change and Sustainable Development

If people and their collective leadership should be central in an evolving global development paradigm, how can the global development community and local actors develop collective leadership that leads to sustainable change? What role does collective leadership development play? The sections below will define collective leadership development and describe what evidence from research and practice says about the common interventions or programmatic approaches associated with it.

A. Defining Collective Leadership Development

Collective leadership development is a process that includes any program, intervention, or activity that intentionally promotes the capacity and practice of a group of local actors who engage with each other in advancing a valued common purpose.¹¹

This definition of collective leadership development involves a number of key concepts. First, developing collective leadership is an intentional, or purposeful, endeavor. While there are types of programs, interventions, and activities that share commitments to health, well-being, and social impact and a vision of a more just, inclusive, equitable, and sustainable world, not all of them identify as leadership programs. The following section includes a proposed taxonomy of key interventions involving an intentional goal of developing collective leadership.

Second, this definition of collective leadership development highlights a common aim among approaches: to promote the (collective leadership) capacity and practice of local actors. The Aspen Institute's Leadership Development Index (n.d.) posits that capacities are the building blocks of leadership development. Collective leadership development capacities include an individual or group's commitment to a shared purpose; a set of lenses, mindsets, values, attitudes, and beliefs that shape leaders' worldview; and the knowledge and skill sets that leaders employ to engage with each other in advancing a common purpose.

Practice is included in this definition separate from capacities to underscore that the ability or propensity to think and act in a certain way is different from the actual doing or practice of collective leadership (although ideally, worldview and actions should align). Practices are forms of relational engagement — the ways people engage together over time to produce a desired outcome. Because leadership happens through the practices of people in collectives, collective leadership development also occurs through intentional immersion and everyday experience of those practices within and among people, organizations, and communities (Carroll, 2015; Raelin, 2016).

Evidence suggests that leadership capacities and practices vary across programs and models.¹² Within the context of global development, the specific capacities that are most important to develop should be culturally and contextually grounded. However, there is a

¹¹ Implicit in this definition is the idea that collective leadership development considers both individual local actors and groups of actors who are in some way connected by their commitment to a "common purpose" that is of value to the group. As mentioned earlier, collective leadership can be practiced by individuals, groups, teams or organizations, or by actors across a local system. In general, the more expansive the "common purpose," the more expansive the bounds of the collective will be. For example, where collective leadership is being developed with a purpose of reimagining or transforming a local education system to address systemic inequity, the collective may involve community members, teacher leaders, school leaders, advocates, government officials at different levels, political leaders, and others.

¹² For examples, see the Aspen Leadership Index, Collective Leadership Compass (Kuenkel, 2016), Social Change Leadership Framework (Ospina et al., 2012).

clear and important distinction in the literature between the leadership capacities that are relevant for effective managerial or technical practice (e.g., planning, budgeting, technical know-how) and others that are likely more important to develop individual and group capacity to practice collective leadership (Ospina et al., 2012). For example, leader humility (the practice of leaders in authority to create space and permission for those without authority to lead) is an important component of collective leadership (Chiu et al., 2016; Altvater et al., 2004).

Other scholars and practitioners point to emerging areas of focus for collective leadership development such as: systems thinking (Drier et al., 2019; Teach For All, 2022); building well-being and safety (creating an environment where people feel good about themselves and their work), belonging (the sense of being a part of something bigger than oneself), and compassion (empathizing with others' suffering) (Center for Creative Leadership, 2023); reframing discourse (challenging how problems and solutions have been framed), bridging difference (finding connections across people with different perspectives to work together, while still valuing diversity), and unleashing human energies (helping participants understand their potential contributions and what additional capacities they need to make them) (Ospina et al., 2012).

Identifying capacities and effective practices is essential to answer the “what” of collective leadership development. Equally important are the “how” (how is collective leadership developed?) and the “for what” (the outcomes of collective leadership). Global development programs or initiatives that develop collective leadership tend to target one or more of the following outcomes in a given system:

- A critical mass of purpose-driven leaders taking up key roles across the relevant local system
- Individuals and groups with the capacities necessary to do collective work across the system within and among leaders and other local actors
- Strengthened relationships and trust among actors in a system that enable collaboration despite differences
- Competency to promote and engage recurring process-facilitated dialogue to support learning, problem solving and action

Below, we describe three possible categories of collective leadership development interventions we have identified that aim to make progress on these outcomes in support of sustainable change.

B. Approaches to Collective Leadership Development

Evidence from research and practice point to a number of design features common among collective leadership development programs or strategies that underpin their theories of

change. They include navigating choices around four main domains. They include how to: 1. recruit and select participants; 2. develop collective leadership capacities in groups and individuals; 3. connect or build networks; and 4. convene to facilitate dialogue and learning. For example, a program may choose to recruit new leaders or develop existing leaders. Others work to support individuals within collectives to become leaders in order to enhance the overall collective leadership competencies within teams or groups. Still others bring leaders around a systemic problem or challenge, and in doing so, develop their collective capacity.

Most programs make deliberate choices to combine work in several domains to achieve their goals. For example, organizations like African Leadership Academy¹³, Ashoka,¹⁴ Acumen,¹⁵ and Atlas Corps¹⁶ offer intensive fellowships, programs, or other scholarships that seek to identify high-potential and purpose-driven individuals (leaders, entrepreneurs, social innovators), invite them into one or more formal developmental experiences often around group convenings, and connect them to an ongoing network of alumni and resources.

In the next section, we describe three broad types of programs to further illustrate examples of collective leadership development and synthesize existing evidence on the impact of programmatic design choices.

1. Cohort-Based Fellowships

Because collective leadership relies on leadership activity from many players in the system and not just those in authority, it is important to build leadership capacity across the system. Fellowships and other immersive, cohort-based collective leadership development programs are one type of intervention which can target building collective leadership capacity through a variety of means. These programs are often characterized by efforts to select and recruit new talent into a sector, creating new leadership pathways for individuals who might not otherwise commit their careers to the relevant sector. They also often have a specific goal of trying to shift the capacity and composition of leadership at the system-level, for example by attracting new talent to the sector or targeting individuals with diverse backgrounds who are otherwise under-represented in the sector. Fellowship programs also often have development objectives for participants. They primarily develop the leadership capacities of individuals through on-the-job experiences, but often supplement them with training and other time-bound leadership development opportunities to give fellowship participants the opportunity to develop specific collective

¹³ African Leadership Academy, <https://www.africanleadershipacademy.org/>

¹⁴ Ashoka, <https://www.ashoka.org/en-us>

¹⁵ Acumen, <https://fellowship.acumenacademy.org/es/colombia>

¹⁶ Atlas Corps, <https://atlascorps.org/>

leadership capacities. Evidence on recruitment into professional pathways in public service and development professions reveals several key features of this type of intervention.

Training and other time-bound, structured leadership development learning activities can be a part of a fellowship or other immersive leadership development program or they can be targeted to existing leaders and other local actors within a system. These interventions are often designed to develop specific collective leadership capacities alongside other technical capacities necessary for the individuals' current or future roles. When leadership development programs focus on reorienting existing leaders to a new purpose, they also contribute to creating a critical mass of collective leaders around a particular purpose, policy area, or profession. For example, Falcons University,¹⁷ the educational arm of Gerando Falcoes, aims to expand the number of local leaders who are working to interrupt cycles of poverty within Brazil's favelas (informal settlements). Social leaders engage in six months of in person and online training to build leadership capacity and develop competencies around innovation, fundraising and use of data. This is followed by over three years of monitoring and support, linking leaders to a broader network of people and projects working together to create social and economic transformation.

The best examples of a leadership development learning experience complement the individual level interventions with workshops focusing on technical issues and spaces where transformations also occur via sharing experiences and collective problem solving. For example, The Collective Leadership Institute¹⁸ offers open courses for individuals and small groups who seek to develop and apply collective leadership towards efforts in sustainable development.¹⁹ Training is designed around research and practitioner-based strategies related to stakeholder collaboration, process facilitation, and transformative change.

Research from a number of cohort-based fellowships from the Teach For All network and Global Health Corps demonstrates that it is possible to shift the career trajectories of participants, contributing to a change in the composition of leadership in systems over time as alumni of the program remain in the sector. For example, rigorous research from Teach For India demonstrates that alumni from their 2-year teaching fellowship are approximately 55 percentage points more likely to be working in the field of education (broadly defined) than similar, non-selected applicants (Conn et al., 2021). Nearly 79 percent of Enseña por México alumni are working in the social sector. Compared to non-participants, their alumni are 26 percentage points more likely to pursue careers in social sectors (Peña Peralta & Rodriguez Leonardo, 2021).

¹⁷ <https://gerandofalcoes.com/falcons-university/>

¹⁸ <https://www.collectiveleadership.de/>

¹⁹ <https://www.collectiveleadership.de/blog/article/open-courses/>

A similarly designed study on Enseña Chile’s participants demonstrated the impact of the fellowship on career trajectories and on participants’ worldview, mindsets, and policy preferences. In line with beliefs about the systemic nature of education inequality, alumni demonstrate decreased preference for technical policies (i.e. reduced classroom size; improvement of infrastructure; increase in school funding; improvement of social services to the poor) and increased or constant preference for adaptive policies (i.e., improving principal quality; focusing efforts on encouraging teachers, principals, and parents to believe in their students’ potential; empowering parents to give support and demand better education for children; promoting the integration of students from lower and higher economic backgrounds in schools; facilitating the replacement of ineffective teachers) (Claro, 2018).

Like the Teach For All network fellowships, the Global Health Corps (GHC) fellowship has a similar aim of developing leadership for the health sector and also has rigorous research demonstrating the impact of the program on the careers of participants. Participating in the fellowship increases the likelihood that an individual will remain in a career in global health by 1.908 times (statistically significant, $p=0.001$), compared to similar, non-selected finalists to the program: “The comparison of alumni to finalists in this analysis tested the effectiveness of the GHC fellowship in achieving one of the organization’s stated goals to increase the supply of leaders and managers with diverse skills, and to build a leadership pipeline to ensure health equity” (Lockwood, 2009).

With regards to *how* to recruit, evidence shows that recruiting messages matter. For example, research from The People Lab²⁰ has explored how to attract diverse talent to government jobs in the United States. They partnered with Govern for America²¹ a two-year fellowship program that seeks to recruit, train, inspire, and empower the next generation of public sector leaders to address challenges like dismantling inequities, building more inclusive public systems, and creating more effective government. In their study, they tested different framing messages reflecting attributes of government work on motivation to apply for the fellowship and found that prospective applicants who received a “change the system” recruitment message were more likely to apply for the fellowship than candidates who were sent other messages (The People Lab, n.d., p. 2). Understanding how recruitment messages influence motivation to enter public service has implications across public sector organizations and agencies who desire to recruit mission-driven diverse talent.

According to Dan Honig’s (2021, 2022) research on supporting mission-driven bureaucrats, individuals with higher levels of intrinsic motivation and commitment to organizational missions, in combination with more collective approaches to leadership, were found to be

²⁰ <https://www.peoplelab.hks.harvard.edu/>

²¹ <https://www.govern4america.org/>

a lever for improved performance outcomes in public sector work. This reinforces that selecting, supporting, and developing purpose-driven leaders can help to create shifts towards collective leadership across systems and drive development outcomes.

2. Network building activities

The kinds of adaptive challenges faced within the global development community require a network mindset and approach. People with a network mindset or network perspective are aware of and understand how their dynamic web of connections have an impact on their work, and reciprocally, how their work creates ripples through an ecosystem (Cullen, et al., 2014; Meehan & Reinelt, 2012).

A network is a set of relationships that are characterized by both strong ties (supporting trust, reciprocity, and sense of community) and weak ties (supporting boundary crossing, source of innovation and resources) (Meehan & Reinelt, 2012, p. 3). In practice, collective leadership happens through networks as people connect, work together, and align efforts across traditional boundaries to make progress on global development outcomes. Hoppe and Reinelt (2010) define *collective leadership networks* as self-organized systems of social ties among local actors focused on a common cause, purpose, or shared goal. As local groups grow to interact with one another, they begin to align and connect to form larger networks rooted in a sense of community and purpose.

Network and relationship building plays a crucial role in collective leadership development by fostering opportunities to practice collaboration, information sharing, resource mobilization, amplifying influence, and providing support. *Peer networks* foster relational bonds among individuals who are connected through shared interests, commitments, work, or experiences, such as participation in a leadership program (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010).

Often organizations working to develop collective leadership combine leadership development programs with the cultivation of robust peer networks. For example, networking is a key feature of the Ubuntu Program,²² an initiative by Vector Brazil that aims to enhance and solidify the presence of Black leaders, particularly women, in influential government roles. After leaders are recruited, they are invited to join *Rede Vetor Brasil*, which connects more than 1,000 young people who are participating in innovative public projects of high impact around the country. Participation in the network connects them to what a member describes as a broader “movement” where there is support, mentorship and exchanges as stated in the webpage: “To belong to the Network is to be in connection with people who really make a difference in the sector in which they operate, it is to participate in collective exchanges, build friendships and live experiences of how collective

²²Ubuntu Program, <https://www.vetorbrasil.org/service/ubuntu/>

construction can generate a positive impact on society.”²³

The network approach to collective leadership development can be found in many leadership programs. STiR Education²⁴ utilizes peer networks to support government education systems and improve learning outcomes for children through reigniting motivation to learn at every level of the system. They emphasize deep learning partnerships to ensure sustainability. Likewise, a key feature of the Emerging Public Leaders²⁵ fellowship for aspiring public leaders in Africa is access to a regional network of mentors and alumni as a source of trusted resources and support for navigating challenges of civil service. Partners in the Teach For All’s global network often supplement their two-year fellowship with efforts to build strong networks among their alumni working in key roles in country education systems. Evidence from Enseña Peru demonstrates the strength of the connections among alumni of the program (Masters et al. 2023). The African Leadership Academy²⁶ (mentioned earlier) is also illustrative. In 2022 it had over 3,200 young leaders from 57 countries in its alumni network.

Often, the leadership development program is the network itself. The James Irvine Foundation’s New Leadership Network provides insight into an approach to social change that recognizes the need to catalyze and develop collaborative networks, underpinned with a focus on building trusting relationships (Grant, 2018). This program is an example of an *inter-organizational leadership network* (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010), that brought together a network of local cross-sector civic leaders interested in learning new approaches and collaboration to change their community. They emphasized connecting in physical space (in-person convenings) to create shared approaches to work, build deep trust, and achieve a critical mass for change.

Field-policy leadership networks connect leaders who share a common interest and commitment to shaping environments that influence fields of practice or policy (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010). For example, Resource hubs like the Collective Impact Forum²⁷, created and supported by FSG²⁸ and the Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions, which is an online resource and connection point utilized by more than 30,000 collective impact practitioners. While collective impact is distinct from collective leadership, this approach shares commitments to collaborative approaches to systems change. Leaders can find relationships and resources that help them to create conditions for groups to collectively identify challenges, engage in dialogue and meaning-making, and influence support,

²³ <https://redevetor.vetorbrasil.org/>

²⁴ STiR Education, <https://stireducation.org/>

²⁵ Emerging Public Leaders, <https://www.emergingpublicleaders.org/>

²⁶ African Leadership Academy, <https://www.africanleadershipacademy.org/>

²⁷ Collective Impact Forum, <https://www.fsg.org/initiatives-programs/collective-impact-forum/>

²⁸ FSG was founded in 2000 as the “Foundation Strategy Group.” In 2006 they became a nonprofit and shortened name to “FSG” <https://www.fsg.org/blog/fsg-story/>

policy, and action (Hoppe & Reinelt, 2010).

3. Convening to facilitate dialogue, collaboration and learning

By definition, collective leadership involves groups coming together to make meaning, reflect and take action. In some contexts, the spaces, practices, and processes to do this already exist. In other cases, intentional efforts to convene stakeholders to facilitate dialogue, identify and develop shared understanding of problems, imagine novel possibilities, catalyze action, and support group reflection and learning are necessary to drive collective action and impact. These strategies have a dual purpose: they are building the collective leadership capacities of the group of participants (by seeing how collective work is done) and also are the collective work itself (driving the work needed to find solutions to challenges).

There are a range of collective leadership development approaches that fall within this category, with some using codified methods for participatory inquiry, facilitating dialogue, and advancing learning through action-research, while others rely on creating less structured spaces for relationship building, peer-learning, and sense-making.

For example, literature exploring participatory forms of inquiry define it as inviting people to articulate and understand the problems affecting their lives and use that knowledge to find solutions that are turned into action to improve their lives (Burns et al., 2021).²⁹ There are multiple forms of participatory inquiry; however a common feature is the way inquiry engages the needs and aspirations of actors through iterative cycles of action-reflection to develop capacity and change their local contexts. The process of participatory inquiry empowers participants, fosters collaboration, builds critical consciousness, enhances problem solving skills, and supports shared learning and capacity building. In many cases, these approaches encourage co-inquirers to systematically name and address power relations that emerge throughout the process and commit to level the playing field among researchers and practitioners (Ospina et al., 2008).

Action learning and *cooperative inquiry* are particular forms of participatory inquiry which aim to engage small groups in cycles of action and reflection to address a burning question of the members' practice, encouraging them to critically reflect on their experiences, assumptions, and beliefs, and enabling them to develop new insights, perspectives, and skills, to enhance their practice and produce more efficacious change.

Analyzing 11 cooperative inquiries (CIs) with participants of several cohorts of a leadership recognition program, Ospina et al. (2008) found an unexpected result.³⁰ The original aim

²⁹ For arguments about the relevance of participatory research in development contexts, see Burns et al., (2021) Introduction, and Chapters 2 and 71.

³⁰ Leadership for a Changing World was sponsored by the Ford Foundation from 2000-2007. See <https://wagner.nyu.edu/leadership/research/past-projects/changing-world> for a description of the

was to generate knowledge about the participants' leadership practice, given the proven success of their social change organizations. However, the CIs also became opportunities for leadership development by allowing practitioners facing similar challenges to engage in a democratic space where they supported each other and shared knowledge as they engaged in action in their local communities. Many extended the CIs to include members of their own communities, indicating that the process helped them enhance their leadership.

Participatory action research, systemic action research and collaborative research are more formal in their approach to collecting, analyzing, and reflecting on data and evidence. They engage larger groups of researchers and local actors acting as co-researchers to identify and address issues of mutual concern, generating knowledge for action, and acting on it to create change at scale (Burns & Worsley 2015).

Collaborative research is illustrated in the work of the Girls Agency Lab. This organization is part of Amplify Girls³¹, a collective of community-driven organizations leading global change, specifically to improve the lives of adolescent girls. Their strategies include investment in organizational development, collaboration, locally designed research, monitoring and evaluation, and elevating voices of community-driven organizations. The Girls Agency Lab convened leaders from 18 different community-driven organizations across Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Tanzania to identify shared outcomes that demonstrate the collective impact of Amplify Girls partner organizations. They utilized collaborative research and analytical tools to identify the priority of girls' agency. Following two years of collaborative work, they created a comprehensive measure, the AMPLIFY-Sidle Agency Tool. This validated tool has been used in a longitudinal study of over 900 girls across East Africa. The Girls Agency Lab is now taking this community leader-developed tool into new regions to assess girl-focused programs' capacity to improve the lives of the girls they serve (Sidle et al, 2022).

The Harvard Kennedy School's Building State Capability program trains and engages with practitioners to convene teams within local governments around the world working to implement public policies. They use a process of problem driven interactive adaptation (PDIA), a learning-by-doing approach that helps organizations develop the capacity to solve complex problems while they are actually solving such problems (BSC, n.d.). PDIA is a process by which teams utilize a set of tools for dialogue and sense-making to break down problems into root causes, identify entry points, search for possible solutions to take action, reflect on learning, adapt, and then act again. The dynamic, iterative process uses feedback loops to develop local and contextual solutions.

participatory research, and <https://wagner.nyu.edu/leadership/teaching/resources> for some of the resources produced.

³¹ Amplify Girls, <https://www.amplifygirls.org/>

While there are robust codified methods in this space, like Participatory Action Research and PDIA, some efforts combine methods or come up with new facilitation processes on their own. Annex B highlights selected tools and resources that could be useful in implementing process facilitated dialogue and shared sense making interventions within collective leadership development programs.

VII. The Way Forward: Three Key Recommendations

This report has made the case that collective leadership is needed to bring about the transformative change required to realize locally led and sustainable development. It has also begun to identify how practitioners are developing that collective leadership.

There still remain a number of gaps that practitioners, funders, and the research community need to address in realizing the potential of collective leadership development as a strategic lever to change systems and contribute to sustainable development.

A. Focus collective leadership development efforts not only on developing individuals, but also on growing collective capacity to change systems. This includes considering the scale of the efforts to develop a critical mass of leaders as well as network-building and convening activities as complements to skill-based leader development.

Currently, where there are intentional efforts to build the capacity of local leaders, they tend to be tied to sector-specific initiatives and are focused on only developing the technical and managerial capacities of the existing local actors. Little attention is paid to developing the capacities necessary to lead and engage in collective endeavors to transform systems.

Moreover, even where there are organizations thinking about developing collective leadership capacities, the focus tends to be on developing individual leaders, rather than thinking about how to develop collective leadership across groups and local systems. As Kniffin & Patterson (2019) argue, leadership development practices must align with the paradigm of leadership that is trying to be developed. To develop collective leadership, more attention should be paid to considering what it will take to develop the critical mass of leaders needed to deliver change, developing the collective leadership capacities in those leaders, *and* pairing these interventions with network building and convening activities to further relax the constraints to collective action. Annex C offers a tool to explore, discuss, and reflect on the right mix of collective leadership development approaches and outcomes that best suit an organization or program's overall purpose and available resources.

B. Prioritize long-term investments and operational support for global, regional, country, and community-based organizations dedicated to developing collective leadership capacity at different levels.

While momentum is growing for collective leadership development, global development funding for leadership development is limited; where funding does exist, it is often tied to sector-specific initiatives.

A recent report by Schmidt Futures, which synthesized extensive conversations on youth leadership development in the Global South with 56 organizations and experts, highlights the prevalence of “vertical/sector-specific philanthropic funding streams” and the lack of “horizontal/cross-sector funding in philanthropy” (Whitney-Johnson, 2023, pg. 11). To be clear, collective leadership development should be a central pillar of sector-specific strategies, as we argue that collective leadership has the potential to transform systems. But alongside these investments, it is important to fund collective leadership development in ways that allow practitioners to take a long-term view. Efforts to recruit and develop new leaders, support collective leadership capacity across ecosystems, develop collective leadership networks, and create the spaces and processes for dialogue, joint-problem solving, learning and collaboration do not necessarily pay off in a typical global development project cycle of a few years. They also require capable organizations at the community, country, regional, and global levels which are deeply embedded in their relevant contexts.

To address this, funders looking to catalyze long-term, sustainable change should provide unrestricted support and/or long-term core operating support to enable organizations in the field of leadership development in taking on even more ambitious projects and becoming stronger and more sustainable. Several recent reports support this perspective, including the Schmidt Futures piece referenced above and a Ford Foundation report, which outlined lessons learned from BUILD, an initiative supporting 300+ social justice organizations with flexible five-year grants (Bisiaux et al., 2022). BUILD’s evaluation found that their flexible long-term support resulted in improvements in program quality and adaptability, as well as organizational and financial resilience. 91% of BUILD grantees reported that BUILD’s institutional strengthening contributed to their ability to achieve mission impact (Bisiaux et al., 2022). Their final evaluation report encourages other funders to deploy “flexible, multiyear funding dedicated to institutional strengthening—into grantmaking as a strategy to support partners to be most effective and impactful” (Bisiaux et al., 2022, p. viii).

C. Invest in measurement and strategic research to further the field of collective leadership development.

We have surfaced empirical evidence to substantiate the major claim of the People First Community and make the case that collective leadership development is a promising lever for change. Yet it is clear that there are a number of key gaps in the evidence base and key barriers to enabling global learning about collective leadership development.

To take this agenda forward, we need to innovate and improve how we measure collective leadership development in individuals and in ecosystems; put practitioners at the center of research and evidence generation efforts for how to develop collective leadership; and invest in supporting emergent research that establishes the link between collective leadership development and systems change.

A big gap holding back learning and evidence about collective leadership development is measurement of collective leadership capacities in both individuals and groups. In individuals, this includes how we measure leaders' commitment to common purpose; a set of lenses, mindsets, values, attitudes, and beliefs that shape leaders' worldview; and the knowledge and skill sets that leaders employ to engage with each other in advancing their common purpose.

In ecosystems, this likely includes developing approaches to measuring concepts such as purpose, trust, learning, and other early indicators of ecosystem change that can be connected to other explicit systemic outcomes, such as policy change.

Since collective leadership is a new leadership paradigm, creative thinking about how to measure individual and ecosystem collective leadership capacities must be fostered to avoid developing measures that replicate the assumptions of a leader-centered perspective. If relational qualities are harder to observe than behaviors, for example, new and alternative methodologies must be found, invented and encouraged in the search to find appropriate measures. Thinking outside the box will help to imagine creative approaches grounded on the assumptions of collective leadership and collective leadership development.

Better measures and metrics will enable more practitioner-based experimentation and exploratory research to understand how to develop collective leadership. The primary motivation for a research agenda should not be to prove the impact, but rather to foster organizational learning and innovation within practitioner organizations, while also contributing to thinking and practice across the emerging field of organizations, researchers, and funders working to develop collective leadership.

At the same time, it is important to generate more evidence on whether and how developing collective leadership leads to systems change. This will involve relying on and experimenting with methodological approaches beyond randomized control trial evaluations or other predominant research methods used to evaluate social programs. Examples of alternatives include mixed-method research or comparative case studies,

developmental evaluation approaches (Patton, 2011), participatory research and inquiry (Burns et al., 2021), including participatory techniques already in use in evaluation, such as ripple effects mapping (Chazdon et al., 2017), and outcome mapping (Earl et al., 2001). These methods largely focus on establishing contribution rather than attribution, they seek to understand emergent and diverse impacts, and they generate evidence relevant for global audiences alongside feedback important for organizational learning and strategy. Some of them could be pursued as participatory action research to learn about organizational strategies as they unfold over time. At the same time, there may also be instances where particular cases could be studied retrospectively — for example, understanding the long-term impact of fellowship models, such as those run by the organizations in the Teach For All network, on collective leadership in cities and regions where there have been decades of fellows serving in schools and going on to other leadership roles across the ecosystem.

VIII. Works Cited

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IX. Glossary of Terms

Collective leadership: The dynamic force that occurs when diverse people come together to make meaning, so they can find direction and coordinate their interdependent actions to achieve a socially useful outcome that each would not have produced on their own.

In the context of Sustainable Development Goals characterized by an aspiration to fight inequity, where systemic change is needed, collective leadership becomes a dynamic force that can contribute to push leverage points toward a tipping point and ultimately propel transformative change within a community or a system. This happens when people at all levels of the system share a purpose; generate a critical mass of leaders; represent the perspectives of the communities served; influence the entire ecosystem; and are deeply connected with each other despite their differences. Source: Authors' definition, adapted from Drath et al. (2008); Ospina et al. (2012); Parés et al. (2017)

Collective leadership development: Any intentional program, intervention or activity that promotes the capacity and practice of a group of local actors who engage with each other in advancing a valued common purpose. Source: Authors' definition

Leadership capacities: The building blocks of collective leadership development. These include an individual or group's commitment to a shared purpose; a set of lenses, mindsets, values, attitudes, and beliefs that shape leaders' worldview; and the knowledge and skill sets that leaders employ to engage with each other in advancing a common purpose. Source: Authors' definition, adapted from Aspen Leadership Development Index (n.d.)

Sustainability: The ability of a local system to produce desired outcomes over time. Discrete projects contribute to sustainability when they strengthen the system's ability to produce valued results and its ability to be both resilient and adaptive in the face of changing circumstances. Source: United States Agency for International Development (2014).

Global development community: The interconnected set of actors who advocate for, fund, and implement interventions and investments designed to improve sustainable development. These actors include both organizations and people such as multi- and bilateral aid agencies, foundations and other funders, non-profit organizations, companies, universities, researchers, consultants, entrepreneurs, and other advocates. Source: Authors' definition

Local System: The interconnected sets of actors — governments, civil society, the private sector, universities, individual citizens and others — that jointly produce a particular development outcome. Local actors can be individual people and organizations working within a country. As these actors jointly produce an outcome they are "local" to it. And as

development outcomes may occur at many levels, local systems can be national, provincial [or sub-national], or community-wide in scope. Source: United States Agency For International Development ([2014](#))

Systems thinking: the set of analytic approaches — and associated tools — that seek to understand how systems behave, interact with their environment, and influence each other. Common to all of these approaches is a conviction that particular actions and outcomes are best understood in terms of interactions between elements in the system. Source: United States Agency For International Development ([2014](#))

Systems change strategies for sustainable development: Confronting root causes of issues (rather than symptoms) by transforming structures, customs, mindsets, power dynamics and policies, by strengthening collective power through the active collaboration of diverse people and organizations. This collaboration is rooted in shared goals to achieve lasting improvement to solve social problems at a local, national and global levels. (Whitney-Johnson, A. 2023)

Leverage points: Specific areas or elements within a system where strategic interventions can lead to significant and lasting change that range from those that are easier to implement with weaker leverage (such as resources and practice) to those that are more challenging to implement but possess stronger leverage (such as power and purpose). Source: Authors' definition, adapted from (Meadows, 1999)

Levers: Strategic actions and priority interventions that will push those leverage points. In the context of this report, the global development community and local actors often collaborate to identify, fund, and implement levers to realize systems change. Source: Authors' definition

X. Methodology

The People First Community commissioned this report to gather and synthesize evidence on collective leadership to answer the questions: What is local leadership, agency, and collective leadership development? Does local leadership, agency, and collective leadership matter for sustainable development? How do you develop collective leadership? The People First Community believes in investing in collective leadership development as a path for sustainable development, and it sought external researchers to review evidence to understand if their assumptions were supported by academic and practitioner evidence.

This project was designed as a collaborative endeavor with planned engagements between the research team and other collaborators (the steering committee, advisory group, secretariat, and funder). The research team met with all of these collaborators early in the process for a co-creation workshop to clarify the scope of work and gather resources and key perspectives. From there, the project occurred in two phases: Phase I: Evidence Review and Phase II: Co-operative Inquiry.

In as much as possible, there was an effort to ensure input in the process from diverse perspectives. The research team is based in the Global North but included two researchers of color and representatives of three different countries. Considering the valuable input from the Advisory Group, the group included members from Australia, Brazil, Colombia, Denmark, India, Indonesia and Uganda. The diversity of perspectives was further broadened with the input from the geographically diverse representatives of the People First Community Steering Committee.

In addition, the research team made an intentional effort to source evidence globally. This report is supported by literature from 110 sources, including peer-reviewed and practitioner-oriented publications, government and institutional reports, and examples of organizations engaged in the work of collective leadership to catalyze sustainable development. In writing this report, the authors made efforts to search for evidence that reflect the vast diversity of contexts in which sustainable development takes place. The authors also acknowledge that further work is needed to amplify evidence from sources in the Global South to ensure that understanding and practice of collective leadership does not inadvertently ignore the wealth of knowledge that these communities can contribute.

The following table reflects the geographic context (and countries represented) of authors of the sources included in this report at the time the source was published:

Table A. Geographical context of authors of source material

Region <i>(Countries)</i>	Sources
Europe <i>(Germany, Switzerland, United Kingdom)</i>	9*
Latin America <i>(Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico)</i>	5
Oceania <i>(Australia, New Zealand)</i>	3
North America <i>(Canada, United States)</i>	71**
South Asia <i>(India)</i>	2
Sub-Saharan Africa <i>(South Africa)</i>	1
Global <i>(International Organizations)</i>	4
Cross-Region Collaborations	15
East & Southeast Asia, Europe Latin America, Middle East & North Africa, & North America <i>(Australia, Belgium, Colombia, Dubai, Nigeria, Singapore, & United States)</i>	1
Europe & North America <i>(Spain & United States; United Kingdom & United States; Sweden & United States)</i>	8
Europe, North America, & Sub-Saharan Africa <i>(Belgium, France, Ghana, Sweden, United States)</i>	1
North America & Oceania <i>(Australia & United States)</i>	2
North America & South Asia <i>(India & United States)</i>	1
North America & Sub-Saharan Africa <i>(Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, & United States; South Africa & United States)</i>	2

*Including one co-authored source from Switzerland and United Kingdom

**Including one co-authored source from Canada and United States

Though authorship of the sources supporting this report largely stemmed from Western contexts, the content of these sources was much more varied. Many of the original authors were actively engaged in sustainable development efforts outside of their immediate context, which is reflected in the following table outlining the context of the work examined within the original source:

Table B. Geographical representation of content

Region (Countries)	Sources
East & Southeast Asia (<i>Taiwan</i>)	1
Europe (<i>Germany</i>)	1
Latin America (<i>Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Peru</i>)	7
Oceania (<i>New Zealand</i>)	1
Middle East & North Africa (<i>Tunisia</i>)	1
North America (<i>United States</i>)	28
South Asia (<i>India</i>)	5
Sub-Saharan Africa (<i>Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia</i>)	4
Unspecified	19
Global	34
Global South	3
=Cross-Region Context	6
East & Southeast Asia, Middle East & North Africa, South Asia, & Sub-Saharan Africa (<i>Burma, India, Iraq, Mali, & Vietnam</i>)	<i>1</i>
East & Southeast Asia, South Asia, & Sub-Saharan Africa (<i>India, Indonesia, & Uganda</i>)	<i>1</i>
East & Southeast Asia & Sub-Saharan Africa (<i>Rwanda & Vietnam</i>)	<i>1</i>
Europe, North America, Oceania, & South Asia (<i>Australia, Canada, India, United Kingdom, & United States</i>)	<i>1</i>
Middle East & North Africa & North America (<i>Pakistan, United States</i>)	<i>1</i>
Middle East & North Africa & Sub-Saharan Africa (<i>Pan-African Collaboration</i>)	<i>1</i>

Phase I: Evidence Review

During the evidence review phase, the research team compiled and reviewed literature and wrote an evidence review report presenting the findings to share with the other collaborators on the project.

Evidence was compiled in three ways: (1) searching through academic research databases using a variety of terms related to collective leadership for sustainable development, (2) crowdsourcing data from People First Community’s Advisory Group, Steering Committee,

and members, and (3) using a snowball method to identify additional evidence referenced within evidence that was already being reviewed. Evidence was intentionally invited and sought with a wide scope, including practitioner magazines and blogs, organizational websites, peer-reviewed academic articles and book chapters, and program reports. With access to translation services, the research team invited evidence in any language; however, the evidence identified was primarily published in English or Spanish.

The evidence review initially included sources that explicitly referred to leadership such as “collective leadership,” “locally led leadership,” and “civic leadership.” However, the research team later expanded the search with revised search criteria informed by the key tenets of collective leadership for sustainable development:³²

- Shared purpose and vision for sustainable development
- Collaboration across system levels
- Leadership by and with people who experience inequity
- Bridges across lines of difference
- Learning with and from peers

In doing so, the review also included connections to other related terms (e.g., social movements, cross-sector collaboration) that inform collective leadership for sustainable development.

Over 300 documents were collected through this process, and each piece of evidence was cataloged in a spreadsheet to capture source and content details, then reviewed for relevance. This set of documents was not a finite and complete list of all evidence that could inform collective leadership for sustainable development. However, it exhausted many of the avenues for new terms and the research team began finding saturation among evidence included.

The research team utilized an interpretive and pragmatic approach to this review, aligned with the assumptions that they were (1) building on the prior work of of the People First Community, (2) drawing from multiple sources of knowledge, and (3) seeking to co-create a document that both expands conceptual understanding and is useful to policy and practice.

After screening for inclusion/exclusion criteria, annotated bibliographies were created for each piece of evidence by research team members. Evidence related to each of the three questions in the scope of review was noted, and later used to draft the subsequent sections of this report. A draft of an evidence review report was provided to the collaborators of the project.

³² As named in the People First Community (2020) working paper.

Phase II: Co-operative Inquiry

The review report revealed that there was sufficient evidence to support that collective leadership matters for sustainable development and that collective leadership can be developed. It also revealed that evidence from academic databases and practitioner reports were siloed from one another. In an effort to bring the two silos together and write a report featuring both academic and practitioner evidence, the research team engaged in a co-operative inquiry process. Co-operative inquiry is a way of working with other people who have similar concerns and interests, in order to understand our world, make sense of our life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things, learn how to act to change things we may want to change, and find out how to do things better (Reason & Heron, 1995). It has also been known to provide opportunities to build more meaningful relationships across the academic-practitioner divide (Ospina et al., 2008).

Phase II involved numerous collaborative meetings among the authors of the report. We infused the knowledge from the practice context of global and sustainable development with the evidence found in Phase I to develop this version of the report. Our intention was to use the evidence from the initial review purposefully, rather than comprehensively, to share the most relevant information to advance collective leadership development. The list of works cited in this report only includes the evidence used in the text of the report.

Annex A: Strategic Leverage Points for Systems Change Descriptions

Table B below provides further definitions of the leverage points from the Graphic A which is also below discussed in section IV.B of the report. Both the graphic and table were originally developed for a forthcoming Teach For All report (Beard et al, 2023)

Graphic A: Systems Leverage Points

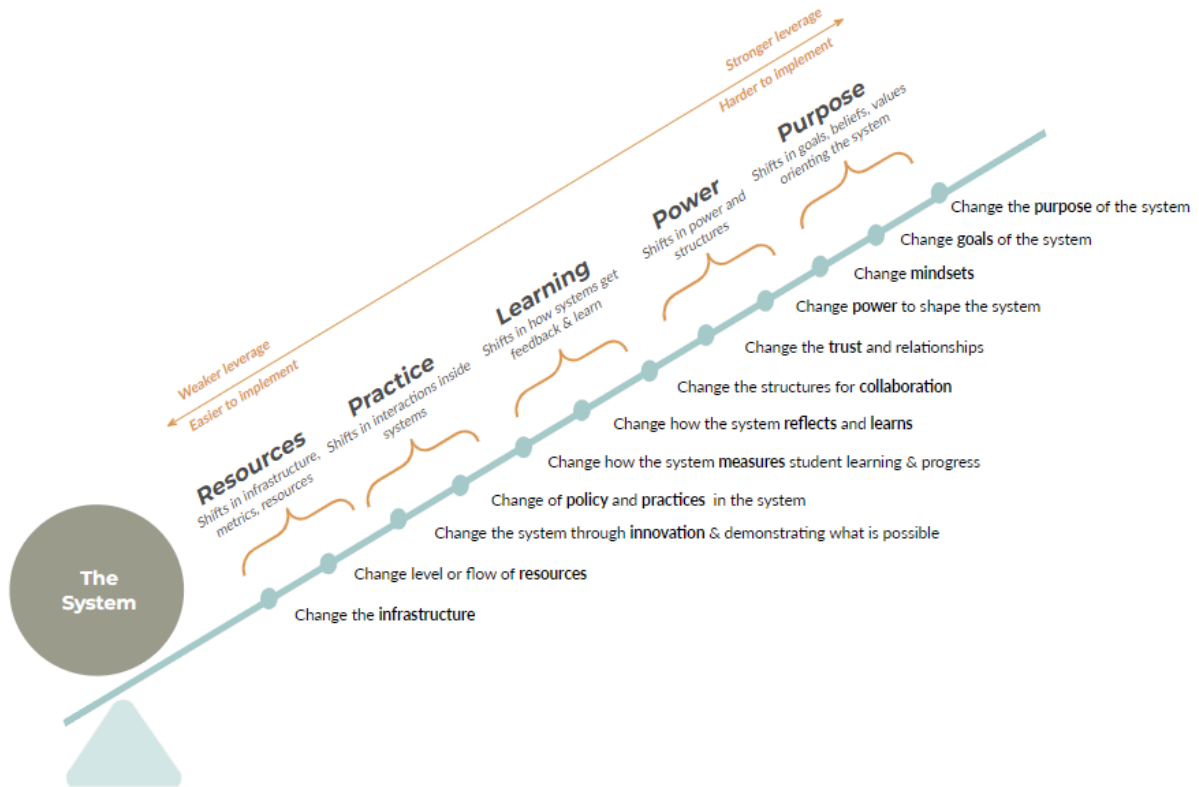


Table B: Leverage point descriptions

Leverage point	Description
Purpose & Goals	Purpose is the goal or desired outcome of a system. A shared purpose fosters commitment, coordination, and system resilience that endures over time. ³³

³³ [RISE shares how a consensus-based commitment to the purpose of learning is a critical missing link in addressing the learning crisis. RISE found that shared purpose was a driver of progress in Brazil, Vietnam, and Tanzania. Other research corroborates the importance of purpose for system change. For example, the Center for Universal Education at Brookings published a policy brief arguing system change “must entail a fresh review of the goals of your system” and developing a broadly shared vision and purpose.](#)

Mindset	Mindsets and lenses represent the underlying assumptions and thought patterns that influence how people within a system perceive and interpret the world around them. ³⁴
Power	Power describes the ability to influence the distribution of resources, opportunities, and decision-making. Power can come through various means — from the top-down, from policymakers, through funding; or can be built from the bottom-up by people coming together and getting organized. ³⁵
Trust & Relationships	Trust is the intangible thread between stakeholders that enables effective collaboration, communication, and cooperation within a system. ³⁶
Collaboration	Collaboration involves diverse stakeholders and organizations working together towards a shared goal; it is not just the technical process of connecting separate projects — it is about building structures that include purpose, trust, and power, and the ability to manage and respond to complexity, and continuously learn and adapt. ³⁷
Reflecting & Learning	Learning triggers, fosters, and sustains changes at individual, community, and system levels. Learning includes transiting from the traditional and linear paradigm of knowledge to more iterative alternatives to create, use, reflect, assess, and reflect on it. It represents structural changes in our way as a network to approach and build learning globally from very localized iterations that inform our collective action and impact.

³⁴ [Global research](#) by [Big Change](#), [RewirED](#), [Teach For All](#), [HundrED](#), [OECD](#), and others, points out that transformation requires a new mindset, with all actors — educators, students, parents, communities and peers — thinking differently about; purpose — the goals and outcomes of education; power — expanding who has voice and agency in education; and practice — unlocking innovation that has transformative potential that works with all actors of a system.

³⁵ The [System Innovation Initiative](#) by ROCKWOOL Foundation has identified power as one of the four keys to unlock system innovation, alongside purpose, relationships and resources flow. Moreover, [global research](#) by [Big Change](#), [RewirED](#), [Teach For All](#), [HundrED](#), [OECD](#), and others, identified power to be one of the three levers for transforming systems.

³⁶ While there is no single study that comprehensively covers the role of trust and relationships in system change, there are various examples and studies that highlight their significance. In Ontario, Canada, the implementation of the [Ontario Literacy and Numeracy Strategy](#) serves as an example of the role of trust in system change. The strategy aimed to improve student achievement in literacy and numeracy by implementing province-wide initiatives. Research by [Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, and LeMahieu \(2015\)](#) examined the turnaround efforts of Chicago Public Schools. They found that trust-building among district leadership, principals, teachers, and community stakeholders was essential for successful system change.

³⁷ [Putting collective impact in context: A review of the literature on local cross-sector collaboration to improve education](#) (Henig et al, Columbia University, 2015). [Collaboration and collective impact: how can funders, NGOs and governments achieve more together?](#) (Mulgan, NESTA, 2016).

Measurement & Feedback	Measurement and feedback involve the systematic collection, analysis, and utilization of data and information to understand and guide the dynamics of a system. ³⁸
Policy & Practice	Practice entails deliberate actions, strategies, and interventions undertaken to influence the behavior and dynamics of a system. It involves implementing changes in policies, structures, processes, and behaviors that align with the desired outcomes of system change. ³⁹ Policy refers to the set of rules, regulations, and decisions that guide behavior and outcomes within a system. It encompasses the strategic development and implementation of guidelines. ⁴⁰
Innovation / Demonstrating what's possible	Innovation includes the development and implementation of novel ideas, approaches, and solutions to address complex challenges within a system. It involves introducing new concepts, technologies, processes, or strategies that have the potential to bring about transformative change and improve system dynamics. ⁴¹
Resources & Infrastructure	Resources and infrastructure are including the financial, structural, and other inputs into an education system that are mobilized by school systems to enable teachers to provide, maintain, and improve teaching and learning. For example, buildings, books, computers, and funding for teachers and other personnel are all examples of resources and infrastructure. ⁴²

³⁸ The [Global Partnership for Education](#), [UNICEF](#), and others argue how measuring the impact of new policies is critical for building stronger and more equitable education systems. With reliable data, policymakers, school managers, teachers, and communities can identify problems, pose solutions, and direct resources where they are most needed. [A New Education Story](#) identifies “make data and information more accessible, useful, and interesting to stakeholders” as one of the actions to expand who has voice and agency.

³⁹ In “[Transforming Education Systems, Why, What, And How](#),” The Center for Universal Education at Brookings establishes the importance of (re)designing teaching and learning experiences to ensure students achieve the system’s goals as one crucial step in system transformation. Moreover, [global research](#) by [Big Change](#), [RewirED](#), [Teach For All](#), [HundrED](#), [OECD](#), and others identified practice to be one of the three levers for transforming systems.

⁴⁰ Rebecca Winthrop, Senior Fellow and Director at the Center for Universal Education at Brookings, [argues](#) that transforming systems so that they address the deep gaps in equity and relevance requires a participatory policy-making approach that puts those inside the system at the center.

⁴¹ For example [HundrED](#), a Finland-based global organization, operates upon the belief that identifying, amplifying, and facilitating the implementation of education innovations contributes to transforming education systems. HundrED recently published the [2023 global collection](#), which identifies 100 of the most impactful innovations and trends in education.

⁴² Adapted from Shirell, M. et al. (2019)

Annex B: Resources for Implementing Process Facilitated Dialogue and Shared Sense Making

<p>Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) Toolkit⁴³</p>	<p>PDIA is a step-by-step approach teams can take to break down problems into root causes, identify entry points, search for possible solutions to take action, reflect on learning, adapt, and then act again. The dynamic process utilizes feedback loops to develop local and contextual solutions. This resource draws from Andres et al.'s (2017) book, <i>Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, and Action</i> that describes how PDIA empowers people working in local governments to find and fit solutions to problems they face.⁴⁴</p>
<p>FSG Systems Thinking Toolkit⁴⁵</p>	<p>Includes six tools that support systems thinking and practice, including actor mapping, trend mapping, timeline mapping, ecocycle mapping, appreciative inquiry, and World Café method.</p>
<p>Leading Systems Change</p>	<p>A Workbook for Community Practitioners and Funders (Open Impact) shares stories of experience as well as exercises and activities to create and facilitate networked leadership systems for change.⁴⁶</p>
<p>The Art of Hosting</p>	<p>This approach is based on the assumption that people give their energy and lend their resources to what matters most to them, and this requires engaging in deep processes of conversation. The Art of Hosting community develops practices and tools aimed at harnessing collective wisdom and self-organizing capacity to step in and take charge of the challenges facing a group.⁴⁷</p>

⁴³ <https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/tools/toolkit/#::~:~:text=Problem%20Driven%20Iterative%20Adaptation%20>

⁴⁴ <https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/publications/building-state-capability-evidence-analysis-action/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.fsg.org/resource/systems-thinking-toolkit-0/>

⁴⁶ <https://openimpact.io/2019/09/leading-systems-change-a-workbook-for-community-practitioners-and-funders>

⁴⁷ Definition accessed at <https://artofhosting.org/what-is-aoH> July 19, 2023. For practice stories, trainings and resources see <https://artofhosting.org>

Annex C. Collective leadership development design tool

Groups or organizations seeking to design collective leadership development initiatives can use the table below as a tool to reflect and better articulate the elements they want to prioritize. The tool invites exploration, discussion, and reflection on the right mix of collective leadership development approaches and outcomes that best suit the group’s overall purpose and available resources. Use the cells to capture design insights and ideas that emerge from the conversation prompted by the questions below.

As you consider your collective leadership development program or initiative, what are your target outcomes? What collective leadership development approaches best support achieving these outcomes?

	Collective Leadership Development Approaches			
Collective Leadership Development Outcomes	Recruitment & Selection	Developing leadership capacities	Connecting or Network Building	Convening to Facilitate Dialogue & Learning
1. A critical mass of purpose-driven leaders taking up key roles across the relevant local system				
2. Individuals and groups with the capacities necessary to do collective work across the system within and among leaders and other local actors				
3. Strengthened relationships and trust among actors in a system that enable collaboration despite differences				
4. Competencies to promote and engage recurring process-facilitated dialogue to support learning, problem solving and action				

Source: Authors’ elaboration.