

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of York</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 21, Politics and International Studies</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Thinking and working politically: changing development policy and practice</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Adrian Leftwich’s work has made a decisive contribution to changing the way that decision-makers understand ‘politics’ in development policy and practice. Specifically, Leftwich contributed to a step change in the UK Department for International Development’s (DfID) approach to the governance agenda, from a narrow technocratic focus on administrative capacity—formal structures and rules—to a much broader conceptualisation of governance as a <i>political</i> process. His ‘thinking and working politically’ framework, encompassing leadership, coalitions and political economy analysis, has shaped the thinking, not only of DfID, but also the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and major international NGOs.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research underpinning Leftwich’s impact stems from his theoretical, conceptual and empirical work on the primacy of politics in development, most notably, in his highly influential <i>States of Development</i>. Leftwich taught in the Department of Politics from the 1970s until September 2010, and was a Senior Lecturer in the department when the research was undertaken. From 2005 until his death in April 2013, Leftwich played a leading role in the groundbreaking AusAID funded Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) (<a href="http://www.dlprog.org">www.dlprog.org</a>), which focuses on promoting leadership in developing countries. In September 2010, Leftwich became full-time Research Director of the DLP while remaining as Honorary Fellow in the Department of Politics. His work in this area was furthered in the DfID-funded <i>Improving Institutions for Pro-Poor Growth</i> project (a £5 million project co-directed with Professor Kunal Sen of the Manchester University from 2007-2010) and three papers he was commissioned to write for the DfID <i>Drivers of Change</i> (DoC) project.</p> <p>The central theme running through Leftwich’s work is the recognition of politics beyond the formal apparatus of the state as an essential and unavoidable process in <i>all</i> human collectivities, formal and informal, public and private. In the context of development politics, Leftwich argues for politics as an agent of change and for the necessity of identifying political processes which drive or impede development and change. In short, politics is of fundamental (though not exclusive) importance in shaping development choices, strategies, trajectories and outcomes. Development is an unavoidably transformative process affecting social, economic and political relationships and institutions. It therefore involves challenging the established ‘rules of the game’ regarding prevailing interests, power structures and institutional arrangements.</p> <p>Leftwich uses this conceptual framework for the political economy analysis of the prospects for and possibilities of development in different contexts. This framework assumes that politics operates at two levels: first, there are <i>rules of the game</i>, the procedures and processes which underpin and structure political life, and distribute power and authorise its use in particular ways; and second, there are <i>games within the rules</i>, the ‘normal’ contestations over policy and power. Whereas stable polities are typically characterised by broad consensus on these ‘rules’, in many developing countries they are not yet well established, meaning that decisions are often made through informal political processes. This absence of agreed rules leads to zero-sum outcomes with ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, inducing pervasive unpredictability and a lack of coherent and consistent development policy and planning.</p> <p>With Leftwich, governance is understood as encompassing a broad set of social institutions beyond formal mechanisms of decision making. Leadership, secondly, is an unavoidably political process requiring the skills necessary to mobilise people and resources in pursuit of agreed development goals. Third, these political processes operate at national and sub-national levels across all sectors of society, including business organisations, trades unions, NGOs, professional</p>

bodies, churches and bureaucracies. Fourth, understanding political processes in this way enables aid donors to identify where, how and when they can intervene by 'working politically' to support the emergence and success of progressive political processes and agencies (e.g. by mapping and identifying elites, coalitions and critical junctures), that, in their turn, contribute to poverty reduction and inclusive development.

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

Leftwich, A. (1995) 'On the Primacy of Politics in Development', in Adrian Leftwich (ed.) *Democracy and Development: Theory and Practice*, Cambridge: Polity Press (ISBN: 9780745612676). Edited book and chapter. (Available on request).

Leftwich, A. (2000) *States of Development: On the Primacy of Politics in Development*, Cambridge: Polity Press (ISBN: 9780745608433). Single-authored book. A point of reference in the literature, as indicated by 269 Google citations (September 2013). (Available on request).

Leftwich, A. (2005) 'Democracy and Development: Is there an Institutional Incompatibility?', *Democratization*, 12:5, 686-703 (DOI: 10.1080/13510340500322173). Peer reviewed journal: impact factor 0.958 (2012).

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

Leftwich's 'thinking and working politically' framework, encompassing leadership, coalitions and political economy analysis, has had a significant impact on the developing thinking, policy and practice of 1) DfID, 2) AusAID and 3) the NGO development community.

1) A former DfID senior governance adviser regards Leftwich as 'probably one of the two or three most influential political scientists in the UK on DfID and through that ministry on the international development community'. DfID is a key player in international development policy, being the world's third largest bilateral donor with an overall aid budget in 2011 of £4.2 billion. Leftwich prompted a paradigm shift in the agency's approach to the governance agenda, from a narrow technocratic focus on administrative capacity (formal structures and rules) to a much broader conceptualisation of governance as a political process. In 2006, he was commissioned by DfID to work on the DoC programme. The DoC was launched in 2002 with the twin objectives of identifying 'the long-term structural and institutional factors which enable or constrain reform in different countries' and 'to improve policy-making and programming by identifying short and medium-term opportunities to support strategic change'. Leftwich's role was to produce 'a robust conceptual framework with a clear methodology' to enable DoC 'to make a greater impact in DfID's programming and policy-making' (DfID contract). Leftwich produced three papers for the DoC project published during 2006 and presented his findings at two DfID seminars: 'Thinking Politically: It's The Politics, Stupid' (7 December 2006) and 'Understanding Politics – A New Framework for Analysis' (30 January 2007).

This commissioned work, alongside Leftwich's prior academic research, provided the conceptual foundations for a series of policy papers produced subsequently by DfID between 2008 and 2010. *Political Economy How To Note: A Practice Paper* (DfID 2008), for example, clearly shows Leftwich's imprint on DfID's change of approach: 'This represents **a major step change** from past practice, when development agencies frequently saw their role primarily in terms of the provision of financial and technical assistance to promote particular agendas around governance, growth or service delivery. The tendency was to dispense advice on what "should" be done, without considering adequately the constraints and opportunities created by the political environment. Political economy analysis, in contrast, encourages donors to think *not only about what to support, but also about how to provide support, taking political feasibility into account*' (DfID 2008: 5). The paper proceeds to set out a 'Politics of Development Approach', designed 'to help DfID staff carry out political analysis...to help us to think systematically about *how political decisions are made.*' (DfID 2008: 10).

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Leftwich's ideas also informed DfID's 2009 *White Paper*, which looked at the political challenges associated with promoting state-building and development in conflict-affected and fragile states, emphasising the political dynamics of security, justice and economic growth. To quote the former DfID senior governance adviser once more, 'Adrian's research and writings had a deep influence on the political economy analysis of DfID, and through DfID with the OECD Development Assistance Committee membership. Adrian's influence was in highlighting not only the complexity of politics but also its centrality to development which had hitherto tried to pretend to be apolitical. His thinking gave DfID a focus on power, and attention to the importance of leadership. This fed through into DfID and OECD operational guidance on undertaking analysis on 'political will' behind development, thinking about fragile states, and guidance notes on state-building, which in turn was reflected in the DfID 2009 *White Paper*. Thanks in no small part to Adrian, these topics, almost anathema a decade ago, are now very much part of the regular development discourse'.

2) Leftwich's impact on AusAID has been considerable, particularly after his appointment as Research Director of the DLP in 2010. As with DfID, AusAID has since this time increasingly emphasised the importance of political analysis in its development thinking, policies and programmes. *Effective Governance* (AusAID 2011a), for example, embodies Leftwich's approach in emphasising the importance of understanding local institutional contexts via sound 'political economy analysis' (p.15), working with 'civil society, local developmental leaders and coalitions for change' (p.16) and employing a definition of leadership as 'a political process involving the skills of mobilising people and resources in pursuit of a set of shared and negotiated goals'. Similarly, AusAID's (2011b) *Framework for Working in Fragile and Conflict-affected States* recognises that development challenges are 'inherently complex, political and contested' (p.9) and that agency programs 'are developed based on an understanding of local needs and a realistic diagnosis of local capacities' (p.25). A senior AusAID official observes that Leftwich's work on politics and leadership, particularly through the DLP, 'has contributed significantly to both UK and Australian development thinking, policies and programs, and his impact can be seen elsewhere, for example with stakeholders such as the International Development Assistance Committee... Across the board, international aid agencies now recognise and better understand the centrality and complexity of politics in development, the political dynamics of economic growth and the role of local power and leaderships in legitimate institutional change. Adrian's work contributed to these achievements in no small measure. Few individuals can lay claim to such a contribution' (Principal Director, Pacific Operations Group, AusAID).

AusAID is the major donor to the South Pacific accounting for more than 60 per cent of all bilateral aid flows to the region. AusAID programmes shaped explicitly by Leftwich and the DLP include:

- The Pacific Leadership Program, which supports influential Pacific leaders to shape and lead developmental change, emphasises the importance of working within coalitions and networks of elite leaders (e.g. setting up the Tongan National Leadership Development Forum) and it uses political economic analysis to identify opportunities and critical junctures that might enable or constrain reform (Regional Director, Pacific Leadership Program, AusAID).
- In Vanuatu, AusAID adopted a political approach to national development by working closely with the National Council of Chiefs through the *Vanuatu Kastom Governance Partnership*. AusAID's understanding of the 'contribution of Kastom leadership to change and development processes' (AusAID, 2011b: 53) is influenced directly by Leftwich's work on leadership and development.
- In Papua New Guinea, AusAID supported the National Economic and Fiscal Commission (NEFC), set up to reform the way that funding is distributed to provincial areas. The success of NEFC is attributed to the 'combination of a strong, well-led agency, targeted donor support based on analysis, local ownership and a participative reform process that struck a balance between technical and political concerns' (AusAID 2010, p.4). In short, the hallmarks of Leftwich's politically informed approach to development.

3) Leftwich's framework has also been taken up by key development NGOs. The Asia Foundation (TAF), a major international developmental NGO that disbursed over US\$97m globally in

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programme support in 2011, provides three examples of his influence:

- TAF applied the ‘working politically’ framework to an evaluation of its ‘Civil Society Initiative Against Poverty (CSIAP)’ programme in Indonesia (funded by DfID). It found that where mass-based Islamic civil society organisations engaged in budget advocacy they could ‘tip the balance’ politically in achieving pro-poor budget allocations at the decentralised level.
- Leftwich’s framework informed important recommendations for developmental planning by DfID and other bilateral donors in Indonesia, such as the need to supplement technical budget solutions with political positioning and lobbying and that support for local actors to carry out political-economy analysis and expand their political capital is ‘an effective development investment’ (Deputy Country Representative: Indonesia, TAF).
- TAF pioneered the use of Leftwich’s political approach to the governance agenda in the context of the environment. The framework was used to develop a DfID funded programme on environmental governance in Indonesia, the findings of which contributed to the design of an ongoing £7.6 million programme on ‘Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry in Indonesia’. This programme specifically draws on the Leftwich’s framework and methodology to collect data for informing TAF partner political strategies (e.g. by mapping elites and identifying the coalitions they need to mobilise) required to achieve environmental policy change at the local level (Deputy Country Representative: Indonesia, TAF).

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

DFID (2006) Contract with Adrian Leftwich. Available on request.

Adrian Leftwich (2006) *Drivers of Change: Refining the Analytical Framework*, Parts 1, 2, 3 (London, DFID). Part 1: <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/DOC103.pdf>;

Part 2: <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/DocX.pdf>;

Part 3: <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/DOC104.pdf>.

DFID (2008) *States in Development: Understanding State-building*

<http://tna.europarchive.org/20081212094836/http://dfid.gov.uk/pubs/files/State-in-Development-Wkg-Paper.pdf>

DFID (2009) *Political Economy How To Note*. <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/PO58.pdf>

AusAID (2010) *Linking Central Reform to service delivery in PNG*

<http://www.ode.usaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/servicedelivery-casestudy.pdf>

AusAID (2011a) *Effective Governance: a Thematic Strategy*

<http://www.usaid.gov.au/aidissues/Documents/thematic-strategies/governance-strategy.pdf>

AusAID (2011b) *Framework for working in fragile and conflict-affected states*

<http://www.usaid.gov.au/Publications/Documents/aid-fragile-conflict-affected-states-staff-guidance.pdf>

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