MANAGING TO ADAPT

Analysing adaptive management for planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning

Tika Darlami participates in a meeting of the 'Nari Utthan' ('women ascending') Community Discussion Class. Photo: Jire Carreon/Oxfam

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Adaptive management is at the heart of 'Doing Development Differently'. It emerges from stakeholders' calls for development programmes to be more flexible and responsive to their contexts. Whether it becomes a mainstreamed practice depends on how much it is embraced by donors and implementers alike, especially in funding, design, monitoring, evaluation, and learning cycles.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS

CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CSO	Civil society organization
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
GEM	Gendered enterprise and markets
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LDP	Law and development partnership
LSE	London School of Economics and Political Science
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
MCP	Multi-country programme
NGO	Non-government organization
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
PbR	Payment by results
PDIA	Problem-driven iterative adaptation
PMEL	Planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning
PMU	Programme Management Unit
RCDA	Rural Communities Development Agency
RTE	Real-time evaluation
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SNA	Social network analysis
ToC	Theory of change
USAID	United State Agency for International Development

Managing to Adapt: Analysing adaptive management for planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adaptive management is at the heart of 'doing development differently' (Wild et al., 2016). Whether it is here to stay depends on how much it is mainstreamed into existing development programming by donors and implementers alike, especially in planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (PMEL) cycles. In this report, we find that mainstreaming adaptive management in PMEL involves three strategies:

1. planning for flexibility;

2. developing locally owned monitoring and evaluation (M&E); and

3. creating an enabling environment for learning.

Adopting these strategies contributes to virtuous cycles of PMEL.

Figure 1: Strategies for adaptive management in PMEL
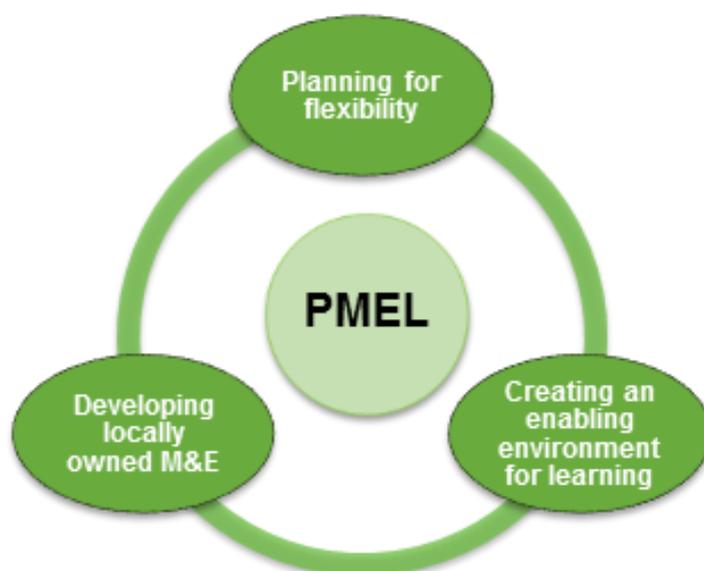
We identify and assess examples of adaptive management within Oxfam's PMEL practice, illustrating enablers and barriers in seven Oxfam programmes. We also showcase examples in Mercy Corps, the World Bank, DFID, and Care International. In doing so, we hope to inform adaptive PMEL approaches and help practitioners be better equipped to address modern challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Plan for flexibility

- **Experiment with evolutionary approaches.** When outcomes are unclear, implementing parallel pilots may help fine-tune programme design. Though this can be time- and resource-intensive, deliberations that align stakeholder understandings and promote buy-in can offset downsides (e.g. resource drain) of trial-and-error approaches.

- **Negotiate flexible funding.** Sharing of budget targets, setting up centralized 'rainy day' funds for need-based adjustments, and innovating payment by results (PbR) contracts by including early grant funding are three strategies to create conditions for adaptation. If donors are reluctant, inviting them to on-site visits and learning events can familiarize them

with programmes, build trust-based relationships, and improve chances for flexible funding arrangements. Training staff to understand flexible budgets is key to such approaches.

- **Design adaptive logframes and contracts.** Logframes are important tools for accountability but often create path dependency. Though donors are interested in adaptive arrangements, they may lack the capacity or knowledge to create them. Negotiating broad but defined indicators and incorporating room for adjustments can help build this capacity and prevent lock-in amid changing circumstances. If donors resist adaptive frameworks, it may help to communicate how building in flexibility during planning can offset the transaction costs of adjusting during implementation.

Develop locally owned M&E

- Invest in training. Broadening data literacy among country staff allows burden-sharing for M&E and improves capacity to collect timely data. Building capacity is initially costly, but can prevent overburdening M&E staff later on.

- Improve partner selection strategies. Selecting partners that are aligned in mandates and resources can (a) help compensate for resource shortages; (b) encourage sensitivity to context; (c) strategically broaden an organization's field networks; and (d) align incentives for sustained engagement and communication. It can also create an 'institutional legacy' for a programme, which enables its long-term resilience.

- Foster bottom-up decision making and data collection. Encouraging bottom-up tools and approaches (such as 'the concept note system' and steering committees) can help foster feedback and delegate decisions to local staff and communities. Not only does this reduce transaction costs of top-down management, but it also promotes locally responsive solutions.

Create an enabling environment for learning

- Facilitate communication between country offices. Centralized models rely heavily on oversight and coordination structures to broker communication, which can create information siloes and bottlenecks. Country staff can take ownership of this process by initiating dialogue with other country offices, through events, on-site visits, or virtual connection. This has the added benefit of creating additional sources of institutional memory within the organization.

- Face-to-face dialogue is key. Though webinars and reports are helpful conversation starters, nothing beats face-to-face communication via learning events, workshops, peer evaluations, and in-person visits. By creating room for discussions, they allow staff to reflect on and internalize lessons. At the same time, these methods can be costly. Organizations can overcome this by communicating to donors the need for flexible, core funds to support such events.

- Shift mind sets, not just practices. Being adaptive is intimidating. Investing in coaching and mentoring, and encouraging learning and reflection among staff at all levels, helps overcome mental barriers to adopting adaptive approaches. Despite high initial costs in terms of time and attention, such strategies build organizational culture and resilience for adaptive management.

CASE OVERVIEW

Within Oxfam	
Chukua Hatua (Department for International Development – DFID, UK)	A governance programme to strengthen civil society in Tanzania.
GRAISEA (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency – Sida, Sweden)	A multi-country programme (MCP) to promote gender-inclusive agribusiness in South East Asia.
MRMV (Sida)	A MCP in eight countries to support rights-based approaches to health and education for citizens.
REE-CALL (DFID)	A programme in Bangladesh to support economic empowerment, adaptation to climate change, leadership, and learning.
South Caucasus (European Commission)	A programme in Georgia and Armenia to foster farmers' rights and promote food security.
SWIFT (DFID)	A programme in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Kenya to provide sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene to citizens.
WWS (DFID)	A MCP in Afghanistan, Occupied Palestinian Territory and Israel, South Sudan, Yemen, and DRC to promote accountable governance by building civil society capacity.

Outside Oxfam	
**LASER	KPMG & LDP** (DFID)	A MCP to strengthen legal and judicial capacity and improve the investment climate in eight countries.
**IGP-PSCM	*World Bank*** (World Bank)	A programme in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda to improve governance in the pharmaceutical sector and broaden access to medicine.
**SOMGEP	*CARE*** (DFID)	A programme in Somalia to improve access to and shift norms regarding girls' education.
**PRIME	Mercy Corps** (U.S. Agency for International Development – USAID, USA)	A programme in Ethiopia to broaden pastoralist market integration and improve climate change resilience.

CASE ANALYSIS: ELEMENTS OF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Adaptive element	Description	Illustrative cases
Planning		
Adopting evolutionary approaches	'Crawling the design space' (Pritchett et al., 2013) by piloting different mechanisms.	• Chukua Hatua • REE-CALL
Employing adaptive logframes	Using broadly-defined indicators and leaving room for adjustments.	• LASER • WWS
Creating flexible financial frameworks	Pooling funds and designing adaptive contracts.	• MRMV • SWIFT
M&E		
Using theory-based participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approaches	Enhancing a common and shared understanding of change processes.	• Chukua Hatua • IGP-PSCM
Collecting and using real-time data	Deploying techniques (e.g. real-time evaluations) for rapid data collection and course correction.	• WWS • SOMGEP
Selecting complementary partners	Using situational studies, social networking analysis, and stakeholder mapping to identify partners.	• South Caucasus • WWS
Promoting bottom-up decision making and data collection	Soliciting community feedback and devolving decision making to local staff and partners.	• PRIME • GRAISEA
Learning		
Leading learning events, informal learning and peer-to-peer exchanges	Facilitating learning events, in-person visits, and face-to-face communication.	• MRMV • WWS • Chukua Hatua
Facilitating working groups	Creating spaces for reflection through thematic working groups.	• GRAISEA

1 INTRODUCTION

Adaptive management is the latest breakthrough in a series of innovations to 'do development differently' (Wild et al., 2016). It emerges from stakeholders' calls for more context-specific and flexible programmes (Bain et al., 2016), in response to business-as-usual practices, often characterized by linear thinking, short-termism, and an emphasis on cost effectiveness (Valters et al., 2016). Two recent, notable publications – the World Bank's *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law* and DFID's *2016 Bilateral Development Review* – reaffirm this trend: they call to move away from 'best practice' towards 'good fit' solutions (Booth, 2017) and promote 'a culture of learning and adaptive programming' (UK DFID, 2016, pg. 46).

This seal of approval from major donors is a defining moment for initiatives that are trying to mainstream adaptive approaches (Wild and Booth, 2016). Adaptive management seems to be 'here to stay' (Green, 2016). However, breaking away from convention is difficult, especially when it is deeply-ingrained among staff and funding for alternatives is limited. In such environments, the dominant practice in the donor community continues to be the prioritization of the accountability function of monitoring and evaluation, rather than embracing its potential to promote evidence-based decision making and change. A cultural change in the sector, supported by innovative PMEL practices, is thus necessary to overcome institutional inertia against adaptive management. Such a shift involves a focus on 'process' – learning, iterating, and adapting along the way – rather than merely 'outputs' or 'outcomes'.

This report illustrates practical steps to infuse adaptive management within PMEL processes. In doing so, it builds on a body of research that is investigating adaptive management within organizations as diverse as the World Bank (Bain et al., 2016), DFID (Wild et al., 2017), CARE (Giordano, 2017), and Mercy Corps/IRC (Proud et al., 2016). Oxfam commissioned our team to analyse case studies within the organization (and comparable institutions) that illustrate examples of adaptive PMEL. Analysing Oxfam is salient because of its diverse reach and global impact: it is at the frontlines of addressing today's complex development challenges. Its core principles also demonstrate a long-standing commitment to flexibility (Shaw, 2016). Thus, our intended audience is all levels of Oxfam staff, as well as other practitioners interested in learning about strategies for adaptive PMEL.

> The following questions guide our report:
> - What are the main elements and practices of **PMEL** for adaptive management?
> - Are there **good examples** in Oxfam or elsewhere? What are the key **enablers and barriers**?
> - How can Oxfam learn from its adaptive approaches – or lack thereof – to **inform and improve its PMEL practices**, particularly in multi-country programmes?

To answer these questions, we structure the report as follows: in Section 2, we review the current trends in research and practice on adaptive management, building a theoretical framework to structure our analysis and recommendations. Section 3 presents a brief description of our research methods and cases. We analyse our cases for adaptive elements along the PMEL cycle in Section 4. We conclude in Section 5 with recommendations for fostering adaptive PMEL practices.

2 CURRENT TRENDS IN ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Defining adaptive management is a key first step in evaluating current thinking and practice about it. We used existing literature and feedback from interviewees to develop the following definition:

> Adaptive management is an approach that consists of 'adaptation[s] [that are] systematic and strategic according to a learning agenda' (Shaw, 2016, pg. 2). It contains the following characteristics:
>
> 1. Context-specific, locally led solutions;
> 2. Experimentation, especially when objectives are known and processes are flexible;
>
> A strategy to 'learn, iterate, and adapt' (Andrews et al., 2015, pg. 128).
>
> Sources: Shaw, 2016; Valters et al., 2016; Andrews et al., 2015; Williams and Brown, 2012

Adaptive management is not new: it found early roots in computer science, the private sector, and the military before emerging in international development in the 1980s (Valters et al., 2016). For example, Korten (1980) contrasts 'blueprint' and 'learning process' approaches in programming, arguing that the former forecloses interventions focused on beneficiary needs. Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) extend this analysis to 'participatory research' by local communities, while Rondinelli (1993) argues for 'adaptive administration' as a counterweight to input–output programming.

This early thinking laid the foundation for recent scholarship from pioneers such as Robert Chambers, Ben Ramalingam, Matt Andrews, and Tim Harford, among others, on complex systems, participatory methods, and problem-driven, iterative adaptation (PDIA) (Andrews et al., 2015). Though these approaches did not make headway in major donor organizations initially, non-government organizations (NGOs) readily embraced them to foster adaptation and learning (Faustino and Booth, 2014; O'Donnell, 2016).

In recent years, actors such as the World Bank (López-Calva and Zhou, 2017), DFID (Wild et al., 2017), and USAID (Salib, 2016) have invested resources to facilitate the uptake of adaptive management in their respective organizations. For example, the USAID Learning Lab has spearheaded the mainstreaming of its Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) framework into USAID's Program Cycle guidance (Haugh, 2017); in DFID, leadership has encouraged emergent approaches within the framework of the Smart Rules (Wild et al., 2017). Accompanying such efforts are various stakeholder-driven initiatives to promote adaptive learning, such as Doing Development Differently and Thinking and Working Politically (Algoso and Hudson, 2016). Systems thinking (Bowman et al., 2015) and contract theory (Bryan and Carter, 2016) have also emerged to structure thinking around adaptive management and bridge 'gaps between theory and practice' (Bryan and Carter, 2016, pg. 24). Finally, organizations such as Mercy Corps, the IRC, and the Asia Foundation have taken stock of adaptive management within their respective organizations (Proud et al., 2016; Faustino and Booth, 2014).

However, crucial gaps remain in the literature. Existing case studies do not showcase adaptive management within multi-country programmes (MCPs), despite its importance for navigating such environments (Chilvers et al., 2016). They also do not illustrate how adaptive management can be part of broader PMEL systems to improve an organization's capacity, reach, and impact. Although Oxfam has emphasized the importance of adaptation in its formal guidelines and

informal processes, we have not yet come across a systematic study of the scope of adaptive PMEL approaches across the organization. This report seeks to fill such gaps.

Building on this literature and the definition above, we argue that PMEL for adaptive management entails the following: 1) fostering flexibility for planning; 2) developing locally owned tools, practices, and partnerships for M&E; and 3) creating an enabling environment for learning. These mechanisms shape the enablers and barriers to adaptive management within PMEL. Below, we analyse the basis for each pillar.

Planning for flexibility: Less rigid and linear logframes are prerequisites for adaptive practices (Valters et al., 2016). Contracts that incorporate these approaches provide implementers with incentives to experiment (Bryan and Carter, 2016). However, as donors and implementers design adaptive contracts, transaction costs emerge in the form of the extensive resources, (Valters et al., 2016), potential for confusion (Bryan and Carter, 2016), and cultural barriers associated with implementation (Bain et al., 2016). Introducing flexibility at the planning stage means being practical, collaborative with partners, and grounded in programme realities.

Developing locally owned M&E: 'Locally led problem solving' (Wild et al., 2017, pg. 8) involves communities identifying and delivering solutions to local problems (Booth and Unsworth, 2014). Doing so creates room for iteration and adaptation to meet communities' actual needs. Communities' involvement in M&E is crucial for such solutions: it leverages their local knowledge (Booth and Unsworth, 2014), renders them active participants in framing problems (Valters et al., 2016), and builds their capacity to make context-driven decisions. Such 'co-creation' (Moolman, 2015), premised on mutual accountability and contestation, allows organizations to adapt to changing environments throughout the course of a programme. Thus, adaptive management in M&E involves adopting strategies to strengthen local decision making, ownership, and partnership. Another equally important aspect entails using M&E tools that enable bottom-up data generation. By this, we mean data and data-gathering practices that reflect local realities (Barr, 2015), are sensitive to a programme's goals (Giordano, 2017), and allow implementers to manoeuvre context iteratively (Rogers, 2017). A major obstacle to community participation and bottom-up data generation lies in finding suitable partners to achieve such objectives (Valters et al., 2016).

Creating an enabling environment for learning: Programmes cannot iterate and evolve absent mechanisms for using and sharing lessons; indeed, '(l)earning and adaptation are two sides of the same coin' (Valters et al., 2016, pg. 5). Learning is dynamic and continuous: actors can learn by doing, seeking and receiving feedback, or questioning their assumptions (Valters et al., 2016; see also Murray and Hasselman (2012)'s analysis of single, double, and triple learning processes). Actors reflect on and leverage learnings to identify alternative strategies, adjust their approaches, and share tried-and-tested practices to other actors or programmes. Doing so builds momentum for shifting mindsets, not just practices – rather than focusing solely on results (the 'what'), actors engage more readily with the process (the 'how'). However, 'learning' often has the connotation of failure (Pritchett et al., 2013). Moreover, top-down approaches to learning – a form of 'checking the boxes' instead of active reflection and engagement – can be self-defeating. They also require high transaction costs in terms of time, attention, and resources. Thus, creating an enabling environment for learning while balancing such costs is crucial to place 'learning at the centre' (Valters et al., 2016) of adaptive management.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND CASE SELECTION

Our research approach was two-fold. In phase one, we reviewed the literature to develop our theory of adaptive management for PMEL, identify salient cases within and outside of Oxfam, and root our research in current debates. This process led us to pick cases that aligned with our terms of reference's criteria or that were of interest to our reference team, such as prominent Oxfam programmes or MCPs. In phase two, we interviewed 16 Oxfam staff at headquarters and regional/country offices who had experience with our selected cases. We obtained seven additional contacts through snowball sampling and Oxfam's guidance, including stakeholders at Save the Children, Sida, DFID, CARE International, and Mercy Corps/IRC. These references, in turn, helped us to understand better donors' involvement in facilitating adaptive programmes. They also allowed us to triangulate cases that were being implemented by similar organizations (i.e. Mercy Corps/IRC) or were considered the 'industry gold standard' for adaptive management (i.e. LASER). Essentially, we analysed external cases that reflected prominent pieces of the wider 'adaptive management' puzzle. We conducted 23 interviews in total.

Such a case-selection process faces several potential challenges. Firstly, it may omit relevant programmes or contacts. It may also lead us to cherry-pick prototypical cases in which adaptive management is heavily featured. Lastly, it may undercut our ability to compare cases using objective, standardized criteria. These limitations may bias our analysis and curtail the wider applicability of our recommendations. We mitigated this risk by casting a broad net, talking to multiple references when selecting our core case studies, and communicating frequently with our Oxfam reference team to ensure that we had included 'the essentials' within and outside of Oxfam.

We narrowed our list to seven cases within and four cases outside of Oxfam. We provide an overview of our selected cases' key characteristics below.

3.1 CASE OVERVIEW

3.1.1 Case studies within Oxfam

> **Chukua Hatua**
>
> - Time frame: 2010–2015
> - Donor: DFID
>
> Chukua Hatua was a governance programme implemented in Tanzania by Oxfam GB and partners. KPMG primarily managed the programme, with support from the 'Accountability in Tanzania' programme. Its purpose was to increase the government's responsiveness to citizens by strengthening Tanzanian civil society (Smith and Kishekya, 2013).
>
> *Adaptive elements:*
> - Evolutionary approach
> - Outcome mapping
> - Peer-to-peer learning

Gender Transformative and Responsible Agribusiness Investments in South-East Asia (GRAISEA)

- Time frame: 2015–2018
- Donor: Sida

GRAISEA aims to promote gender-inclusive agribusiness in South-East Asia, particularly for smallholder farmers. As an MCP, it is designed to influence the region's operating environment, leverage Oxfam's partnerships and comparative advantage in gender-inclusive programming, and influence the policy and behaviour of market actors (Coghlan and Meloni, 2016).

Adaptive elements:

- Bottom-up decision making and data collection
- Working groups

My Rights My Voice (MRMV)

- Time frame: 2011–2016
- Donor: Sida

MRMV supported young people to raise their voice and claim their rights to health, education, and sexual and reproductive health. Oxfam implemented MRMV in eight countries: Afghanistan, Georgia, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Tanzania and Vietnam. It was also Oxfam's first joint affiliate programme, implemented by Oxfam GB, Oxfam Novib, and Oxfam Quebec (Van Esbroeck et al., 2016).

Adaptive elements:

- Flexible financial framework
- Learning events and informal learning

Resilience through Economic Empowerment, Climate Change Adaptation, Leadership and Learning (REE-CALL)

- Time frame: 2010–2017
- Donors: Oxfam Australia, DFAT (Australian Aid), Thankyouwater, Oxfam Hong Kong, H&S Davidson Trust, DFID

REE-CALL in Bangladesh is one of Oxfam's priority programmes and has three specific objectives: 1) to develop a replicable model for community resilience in three agro-ecological zones and create linkages with urban settings; 2) to enhance the livelihoods of targeted communities; and 3) to develop community leadership, especially of women, and improve access to resources, services and opportunities (Mukta, 2012).

Adaptive elements:

- Evolutionary approach

Supporting Community Resilience in the South Caucasus (South Caucasus)

- Time frame: 2013–2017
- Donor: European Commission

The South Caucasus programme in Georgia and Armenia aims to bolster food security by supporting governance and rights for smallholder farmers. It also links national food security policy with beneficiary needs by supporting civil society organizations (CSOs) in evidence-based advocacy. As the programme is winding down, Oxfam is attempting to share learning and hand over operations to 'spin-off' organizations (GeoWel Research, 2016; OXF008, 16/02/17).

Adaptive elements:

- Selection of complementary partners

Sustainable WASH in Fragile Territories (SWIFT)

- Time frame: 2014–2018
- Donor: DFID

The SWIFT Consortium has provided sustainable access to drinking water and sanitation and continues to encourage the adoption of basic hygiene practices in DRC and Kenya. The programme has provided hard deliverables and aims to build capacity for the remainder of its duration to ensure its sustainability (Feeny, 2016).

Adaptive elements:

- Flexible financial framework

Within and Without the State (WWS)

- Time frame: 2011–2016
- Donor: DFID

WWS was a global initiative funded by DFID's Conflict, Humanitarian and Security programme. It piloted approaches to promote accountable governance through civil society in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. Oxfam implemented it in Afghanistan, Occupied Palestinian Territories/Israel, South Sudan, DRC, and Yemen. One of WWS's priorities is to gather evidence and share lessons about what makes programming in these settings effective (OXF014, 22/02/17).

Adaptive elements:

- Adaptive logframe
- Real-time evaluations
- Selection of complementary partners
- Learning events and informal learning

3.1.2 Case studies outside of Oxfam

Legal Assistance for Economic Reform (LASER) | *KPMG & LDP*

- Time frame: 2014–2017
- Donor: DFID

This is a multi-country investment climate reform programme facilitated by KPMG and the Law & Development Partnership (LDP). Providing technical guidance to governments, judiciaries, and other agencies, it is considered a textbook case for designing flexible logframes (Derbyshire and Donovan, 2016).

Adaptive elements:
- Adaptive logframe

Improving Governance in Pharmaceutical Procurement and Supply Chain Management Initiative (IGP-PSCM) | *World Bank*

- Time frame: 2010–2013
- Donor: World Bank

The World Bank implemented this programme in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. It aimed to improve access to essential medicines. To assess its impact, the World Bank conducted an Outcome Harvesting exercise with customized reporting. A detailed description can be found in Gold et al. (2014).

Adaptive elements:
- Outcome harvesting

The Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme (SOMGEP) | *CARE*

- Time frame: 2013–2017
- Donor: DFID

Funded by DFID's Girls' Education Challenge, SOMGEP aims to increase girls' education in rural areas by promoting changes in stakeholder attitudes and addressing causes of girls' marginalization (Gure, 2016). The programme set up an integrated monitoring system that enabled collection and use of real-time data.

Adaptive elements:
- Real-time evaluations

Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement Through Market Expansion (PRIME) | *Mercy Corps*

- Time frame: 2012–2017
- Donor: USAID

Mercy Corps leads PRIME in partnership with ten NGOs in Ethiopia. Its objective is to increase the income and climate resilience of pastoralists. To respond to changing realities and involve partners and field staff in decision making, Mercy Corps uses an innovative 'concept note system' (Picon and Wild, 2015).

Adaptive elements:
- Bottom-up decision making and data collection

4 ANALYSING CASES OF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

In this section, we analyse adaptive tools, methods, and practices throughout the PMEL cycle. We use our earlier framework to structure our analysis using the categories of planning, M&E, and learning. Doing so allows us to identify enablers and constraints to adaptive management at each stage of the cycle and recommend improvements to existing PMEL frameworks.

4.1 PLANNING

Adaptive planning facilitates experimentation with diverse theories of change (ToC) and approaches. It can enhance programmatic flexibility and strategically incorporate learning earlier in the programme cycle. We identify three elements of adaptive management at the planning stage: (a) implementing evolutionary approaches to programme design, (b) employing adaptive logframes and (c) creating flexible financial frameworks.

4.1.1 Implementing evolutionary approaches to programme design

Providing spaces for evolution through experimentation is crucial to design programmes in complex contexts (Harford, 2011). Programme plans can 'crawl the design space' by testing different mechanisms for achieving outcomes (Pritchett et al., 2013). During this process, successful approaches are amplified while unsuccessful ones are dropped. Such an 'evolutionary approach' (Rowlands, 2012) to programme design is promising but faces ethical and logistical concerns: it experiments with people's livelihoods and can be time- and resource-intensive (Green, 2012).

Case studies

> **Chukua Hatua**
>
> For the first nine months of Chukua Hatua, implementers piloted five simultaneous approaches to build active citizenship in Tanzania. At the end of testing, representatives from implementing partners, Oxfam, and donors used four agreed-upon criteria to decide which strategies to scale or drop (Lonsdale, 2012). However, dropping activities revealed a downside to evolutionary approaches: teams had expended considerable resources on the pilots, leading to potential waste and dampening enthusiasm among staff. Staff tackled this limitation through three strategies: (a) hosting learning events and involving staff in M&E, which fostered inclusiveness and helped develop shared understandings of which strategies were chosen and why; (b) leveraging outcome-harvesting to allow partners to identify progress markers; and (c) fostering cooperation with DFID by inviting its staff to participate in learning events. These practices justified Oxfam's use of significant resources in deploying this approach (OXF009, 17/02/17).

> **REE-CALL**
>
> Initially, REE-CALL was based on a pre-set design to foster learning and 'doing better in uncertainties and odds' (Ahmed and Neelormi, 2015). In contrast to Chukua Hatua, it did not adopt a trial and error approach, but started from a minimal project design to 'naturally' develop over a two-year pilot phase. Today, REE-CALL is considered a 'framework' programme that consists of five distinct thematic components, including some not included in the initial design (such as the programme's current gender dimension). However, three factors constrain this programme's evolutionary approach: (a) some goals were unclear, which resulted in inefficient work streams. At the same time, funding for new project components – such as the Gendered Enterprise and Markets programme (GEM) – could be generated independently from core funding, which offset inefficiency by allowing for slight shifts in goals; (b) cross-learning was problematic due to a broad programme framework. Climate change data was especially difficult to obtain from partners, as capacities to collect it were insufficient. Potential solutions to this problem include stronger capacity-building efforts and the establishment of a 'knowledge hub'; and (c) the 'thinking beyond programme approach' (Ahmed and Neelormi, 2015) made it difficult to ensure local ownership. To address this, Oxfam could work more closely with partners through cross-learning and information-sharing systems (OXF005, 14/02/17).

4.1.2 Employing adaptive logframes

Traditional logframes embody the linear thinking that adaptive approaches seek to overcome. To encourage experimentation, adaptive logframes must integrate learning and adaptation as natural parts of the programme lifecycle. However, logframes are also strong accountability tools for donors, who need evidence that programmes are being managed appropriately. To ease the burden of heavy reporting requirements and rigidity, Valters et al. (2016) suggest replacing fixed output indicators with broader, but still-defined, categories.[1]

Case studies

> **Legal Assistance for Economic Reform (LASER) | *KPMG & LDP***
>
> The DFID-funded LASER programme is a leading example of an MCP with flexible logframes. It features a global logframe with nested logframes for each of its countries. Outcomes are tied to the country but connected to the global logframe objectives, anchoring results to context-specific needs. Such nested logframes allow implementers to devise commitment-based targets instead of prescribing a result. Doing so has enabled on-the-fly adaptation and learning by doing, to achieve results tied to needs rather than agendas. The global logframe only requires two broad outputs: a) stories of change, and b) categories of 'major' vs. 'moderate' results, based on a 'menu of desired results' at the global level. Donor buy-in has allowed LASER to change both the global and nested logframes multiple times, based on evaluation, feedback, and reflection (Derbyshire and Donovan, 2016).

> **WWS**
>
> WWS maintains a global logframe with light reporting and broad targets, focused on three principal areas and sets of actors: 1) building CSO capacity; 2) empowering capacity of 'change agents'; and 3) improving engagements between the state and civil society. Country context shapes implementation, allowing staff to conduct different activities and test governance approaches across countries. The logframe's flexibility empowers the global programme coordinator to be an additional resource to advise country offices, facilitate the sharing of lessons, and encourage adaptive thinking and adjustments. However, three drawbacks exist to such flexibility in the logframe: a) context-driven implementation can lead to path dependency and create siloes that curtail reflective learning within and across programme countries. For example, implementing partners in South Sudan did not devise a formal process for sharing lessons between themselves and with other country offices; b) flexible, broadly defined objectives often confused inexperienced staff (OXF014, 22/02/17); in such contexts, if staff are trained to follow 'business as usual', input–output thinking, being adaptive can be daunting; c) donor buy-in for changes is rare. Even rarer is active engagement through on-site visits, which can make donors more sympathetic to the context and amenable to adjustments. Such visits are harder to arrange in conflict-affected settings, but their high payoff during implementation speaks to the need to establish consistent engagement between donors and implementers from the onset.

4.1.3 Creating flexible financial frameworks

Adaptive programmes require flexibility within budgets, programme components, and types of expenditure. At the same time, donors need to ensure budgetary accountability and value for money (Derbyshire and Donovan, 2016). Reconciling these diverging interests is a fundamental challenge for adaptive management. To this end, we discuss several approaches for developing flexible financial frameworks: (a) creating reserve funding for learning and adaptation (Proud et al., 2016); (b) promoting flexible and trust-based partnership arrangements; and (c) designing adaptive contracts to allocate funding in broad categories, such as PbR (Mason, 2015).

Case studies

> **MRMV**
>
> Setting up a programme fund can help ensure budgetary flexibility during implementation. MRMV established a $1m Learning and Innovation Fund to pilot and develop new approaches, components, and technologies over the programme's life cycle (Blommestein, 2014). The fund financed a variety of innovative activities. For instance, the programme introduced participatory videos as a tool for youth-led advocacy, learning and information-sharing. In Nepal, youth activists worked with community stakeholders to produce films that supported health rights to influence local duty-bearers. Because the original budget did not account for this activity, the fund was critical for financing it.
>
> Sida's active engagement in the programme's design was key to set up the fund (OXF002, 31/01/17). However, the fund's evaluation report highlights constraints: a) its designation as a Learning and Innovation Fund limited its ability to finance initiatives that could not directly be described as learning- or innovation-fostering. Keeping funding requirements as flexible as possible can help circumvent this type of constraint. In MRMV, the fund became a Programme Development Fund in the programme's final year; b) there was confusion in the communication between decision makers and applicants. To resolve this issue, the fund's guidelines and procedures documents should clearly outline steps to streamline this communication (Blommestein, 2014).

> **SWIFT**
>
> DFID funded SWIFT under a PbR contract. In theory, PbR contracts allow room for flexible processes and trial-and-error to achieve desired results (Bryan and Carter, 2016). Under this framework, only the programme's goals are co-determined with donors, not the inputs to reach them; funding follows the achievement of these goals. In SWIFT's inception phase, stakeholders innovated and refocused activities after trial and error: teams had autonomy to decide on the scope of their activities and could shift budget items between the programme's components. For example, due to changes in the political and social environment, implementers had to change the initial method for evaluating WASH, resulting in rapid adaptation to the new context. Programme staff identified the following constraints to adaptive practices: a) the required third-party monitor was disruptive because they repeatedly requested highly detailed information about outputs and outcomes; b) there was a short time frame for delivering results, which led to trade-offs; and c) the staff was inexperienced with this type of contract, which led to hesitation and confusion during the programme design and implementation phases. In fact, it took staff up to 18 months to understand PbR's nuances – by that time, the deadline for many deliverables had almost passed (OXF006, 15/02/17; OXF010, 20/02/17). Thus, SWIFT's experience with PbR highlights the need to innovate the design of PbR contracts to encourage longer term outputs. Indeed, much of the effectiveness of PbR stems from how results are defined and by whom: emboldening implementers' and beneficiaries' roles in this process of defining results facilitates context-sensitive adaptation at later stages of the programme cycle.

4.2 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Adaptive management aims to minimize the gap between M&E and locally led decision making (Valters et al., 2016). To do so, appropriate M&E tools, as well as delegating decision making and data collection to local staff and partners, are crucial. Sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 below thus showcases two adaptive approaches linked to data in the M&E stage of the programme cycle: outcome mapping/harvesting and real-time data collection. In sections 4.2.3 and 4.2.4, we present two practices for fostering local ownership of programmes: promoting inclusive partner selection processes and creating mechanisms for bottom-up decision making and data-collection.

4.2.1 Participatory, locally led and theory-oriented MEL approaches

Outcome mapping is one of many M&E approaches that recognizes the importance of local partner involvement, the centrality of behaviour change, and the likelihood of unplanned results in programming. To this end, it provides a template for creating intervention strategies with local partners, each with its own commitments for and definitions of success. Inspired by outcome mapping, outcome harvesting is an evaluation tool to identify, formulate, and verify intervention outcomes that were not necessarily foreseen in the programme's design (Wilson-Grau and Britt, 2013).

Case studies

Chukua Hatua

Outcome mapping has been an effective evaluation tool in Chukua Hatua. Staff adopted a biannual outcome mapping analysis to investigate changes and trends in the programme (Green, 2012). The team found this approach useful, both in terms of systematically recording the programme's impacts on partners and building a common vision between programme staff and partners (OXF009, 17/02/17). Progress markers, defined by the partners, replaced the rigid indicators employed in conventional logframes; they were adjusted during implementation to capture unexpected results and plan for unforeseen outcomes (Smutylo, 2005). Data collection by partners, in turn, allowed for an analysis of factors influencing programme outcomes and created spaces for reflective learning. However, several barriers affected the use of outcome mapping: a) the need for an active effort from management to prepare staff and partners for this new approach (i.e. programme staff had to translate materials, build staff capacity for using specialized data software, and establish feedback and monitoring mechanisms for fieldwork); b) though outcome mapping promoted shared responsibility for M&E, it created an additional burden for staff who were assigned to M&E on a rotational basis; and c) the process of outcome mapping produced substantial, almost un-manageable, amounts of data. These challenges constrained the opportunity to process, use, and share data effectively, pointing to larger capacity issues with outcome mapping approaches (OXF009, 17/02/17).

Improving Governance in Pharmaceutical Procurement and Supply Chain Management (IGP-PSCM) | *World Bank*

In a handbook of 10 cases of outcome harvesting, the World Bank details a case in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda that aimed to improve 'Governance in Pharmaceutical Procurement and Supply Chain Management' (Gold et al., 2014). The team harvested outcome information from stakeholders through customized reporting. They then investigated explanations of the programme's significance and the extent of the World Bank's contributions. In doing so, they identified three outcome areas, which they substantiated by undergoing an additional review process with 15 reviewers. According to the report, this approach successfully demonstrated the project's unintended outcomes and, by engaging various stakeholders, enhanced local programme ownership. However, barriers to outcome harvesting are four-fold: a) skill and time, as well as timeliness, are required to identify and formulate high-quality outcome descriptions; b) only known outcomes are captured, leading to potential bias; c) lack of beneficiary participation may curtail the amount and quality of information collected; and d) starting with outcomes and working backwards represents a new way of thinking for participants who have been conditioned to approach MEL processes in a linear way (Wilson-Grau and Britt, 2013).

4.2.2 Collecting and using real-time data

To allow for short feedback loops, adaptive management demands high-quality and quantity 'real-time' data (Greeley et al., 2013). Such data can allow for rapid course corrections, especially in fragile contexts that require frequent adjustments. Adaptive projects need to be designed to collect, respond to, and use data not only for M&E, but also to build better feedback loops (Valters et al, 2016) that can allow reflective learning.

Case studies

WWS

In WWS Afghanistan and South Sudan programmes, Oxfam conducted real-time and iterative evaluations (RTEs), which are rapid 'sense checks' to identify course corrections or remedial actions in the initial months of a programme. Offices tried RTEs after initial approaches led to data shortages and failed to foster adaptive practices among staff. A renewed focus on learning contributed to realistic appraisals of challenges in South Sudan and led to the adoption of community scorecards, as well as other tools to broaden community engagement and accountability to Oxfam's partners (Green, 2013). However, RTEs fell short of goals in Afghanistan (OXF014, 22/02/17). Consultants hired to conduct them did not understand their purpose, and staff – including M&E specialists – were relatively inexperienced in these types of evaluations. This resulted in trained staff having to devote more resources to coordinating with the firm and building capacity, rather than learning from RTEs to respond to programme needs. Conflict in the Kunduz region compounded these challenges – staff were only able to implement one of the three planned RTEs due to unstable conditions (OXF014, 22/02/17). Despite these challenges, opportunities exist to leverage RTEs with 'action research' for bottom-up appraisals led by communities and partners.

The Somali Girls Education Promotion Programme (SOMGEP) | *CARE*

In its SOMGEP programme in Somalia, CARE established an integrated monitoring system that included trackers for activity, participation, and adherence. It also used participatory tools to understand how participants perceived and responded to challenges. The monitoring system uses online toolboxes, such as KoBo, to collect real-time data and establish short-term feedback loops. CARE highlighted the importance of monitoring a representative group for the programme and concentrating on specific indicators developed in tandem with the donor. Challenges to this approach include a) the volume of analyses required within a short timeframe, b) the lack of robust quantitative and qualitative skills among team members, and c) negative perceptions about the feasibility and validity of participatory exercises. CARE M&E specialists and project implementers addressed such challenges through frequent field visits, heavy investment in training and capacity building, and support for data analysis at the HQ level. To enable the effective uptake of evidence generated through feedback loops, CARE held regular meetings with project partners, discussed data challenges, and made collective decisions on how to advance the project. User-friendly and concise presentations of data facilitated this process, in addition to noting and highlighting links between findings/outcomes and the programme's theory of change. Working in tandem with donors and government partners was also fundamental to enabling the methodological flexibility that characterized this programme (CRE001, 02/02/17; Gure, 2016).

4.2.3 Selecting complementary partners

When partners are 'fit for purpose', they allow programmes to be conflict- and context-sensitive and adapt effectively to local feedback. Good partners are better positioned to understand local dynamics and promptly identify changes in circumstances. They also serve as a mechanism to ensure the sustainability of a programme after its end. Country situation overviews, social network analysis (SNA), and stakeholder mapping are part of the 'toolbox' for selecting partners that align in organizational mandates and have the legal, administrative, and fiscal capacity to implement programmes effectively.

Case studies

South Caucasus

Stakeholder mapping and SNA have allowed staff to maintain particularly strong networks and alliances in the South Caucasus programme. Through social network analysis (SNA), the Georgia office realized that the Rural Communities Development Agency (RCDA), a longstanding partner, was an ideal 'bridger' to other key CSOs, prompting the office to double down on this vital partnership (OXF015, 01/03/17). SNA also helped Oxfam identify 'anchoring' organizations that could help it secure alliances in broader networks. Both tools provided staff with opportunities to reflect on Oxfam's partnerships and paved the way for course corrections. Moreover, in this case, identifying vital partners allowed Oxfam to broaden its influence across networks and commit to working through partners to maximize the programme's impact. A potential weakness of SNA is that it measures the quantity of links within a network, but not necessarily their quality or durability over time. In doing so, it may misrepresent certain power dynamics or misestimate the influence of certain actors. This is especially true if those undertaking it do not have knowledge of context. Thus, SNA is most useful for identifying ideal partners when paired with other tools and methods, such as stakeholder mapping (OXF015, 01/03/17).

WWS

The experience of the WWS South Sudan office highlights opportunities and challenges to partner selection. The process was extensive: staff carefully mapped out potential CSO partners, which delayed implementation for more than a year and confused country staff (OXF014, 22/02/17). Selecting partners can thus be time- and resource-intensive, especially if external circumstances, such as conflict, change the existing context and force staff to restart the selection process intermittently. Partners may also lack the financial and programmatic flexibility to match Oxfam's diverse mandate, forcing staff to choose among second- or third-best options. For WWS South Sudan, it took a strong incoming country director to facilitate this process and clarify its importance amid challenges to finding complementary partners (OXF014, 22/02/17). After narrowing the list through extensive consultations with CSOs and donors (Anthony, 2014), Oxfam selected partners that most closely aligned with its objectives. In addition to finding compatible partners, this inclusive and open process of partner selection mobilized CSOs which were not selected to work on governance reforms, bolstering overall civil society participation in the country. However, due to the lack of formal mechanisms for collaborating between partners, such as face-to-face meetings, the momentum gained from an inclusive partnership selection process dissipated over time (OXF014, 22/02/17).

4.2.4 Promoting bottom-up decision making and data collection

Inclusive data collection and analysis is vital to adaptive M&E approaches. Staff closest to operations have the best understanding of context and are well placed to suggest and try novel approaches. This is especially relevant in complex environments, where a shallow understanding of context can render planned activities irrelevant. Capitalizing on local knowledge and being sensitive to change is thus a hallmark of adaptive programmes that grant significant autonomy to staff and involve them in inclusive decision making processes (Proud et al., 2016).

Pastoralist Areas Resilience Improvement through Market Expansion (PRIME) /
Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps' 'concept note system', adopted in its PRIME project in Ethiopia, is a technology-driven approach to adaptive management by facilitating inclusive decision making and bottom-up data collection. The concept note system is an online platform (Ki-projects) that stores all suggested, approved, and completed programme activities in the form of an electronic 'concept note'. Any member of Mercy Corps staff or partner NGOs can suggest a new activity (i.e. a change in the programme) by uploading a brief concept note. Following a concept note's submission, the system notifies four approvers of the proposed activity, usually a budget holder, an intermediate results leader, an operational staff member, and a technical approver from the field (Picon and Wild, 2015). The system enables inclusive programming by involving field, regional staff, and management across partner organizations in programmatic decisions. Additionally, the system encourages progressive learning across all implementing partners by providing and storing real-time data about the project's progress, which is easily accessible for every staff member across Ethiopia. However, initially the system faced several constraints: it was criticized for a) creating additional administrative burdens for staff; b) failing to nudge staff members to actively suggest activities, and c) requiring internet access. The first two challenges were resolved by providing specific training to staff members. A lack of a strong internet connection in these settings remains the biggest challenge to deploying the system; though staff developed an offline version, a connection is still necessary to synchronize information across offices (MCS002, 20/04/17).

GRAISEA

Programme steering committees, consisting of local partners and communities, featured heavily in GRAISEA to provide strategic guidance and problem-solving at various programme intervals (Coghlan and Meloni, 2016). In practice, such committees embolden locally led approaches that are sensitive to nuance and changing circumstances. However, in GRAISEA staff's experience, these committees have been only moderately effective; namely, a lack of follow-up between committee meetings has limited committees' ability to hold implementers accountable to community needs (OXF007, 15/02/17). This speaks to the need for continuing participatory dialogue to ensure that these committees are effective in encouraging iteration, experimentation, and adaptation to local context. Another key constraint lies in implementers' hesitance to 'step back' and allow steering committees (OXF004, 08/02/17) to shape decision making. Such a case highlights the tension between authority and delegation in adaptive management: despite calls for 'locally owned' processes, implementers may be reticent to delegate decision making if they fear it may compromise programme quality and in turn hinder accountability to donors. Helping implementers navigate this potential accountability dilemma is thus important for promoting locally led solutions, such as steering committees as local agents of change.

4.3 LEARNING

Organizational learning stands at the heart of adapting to changing contexts (Davies, 1998). Thus, creating an enabling environment for learning is crucial to allow stakeholders to reflect on, use, and share lessons in a transparent and honest manner. Adaptive learning therefore entails the establishment of formal and informal spaces of reflection to bring together partners and different levels of management. This is especially relevant for MCPs, for two reasons: first, given different contexts and objectives, country offices across MCPs must have mechanisms to capture, store, and share lessons; second, transaction costs to coordinate and share lessons are higher for MCPs than single-country programmes because there are more stakeholders involved, pointing to the need for strategies that can lower such costs. This section discusses the relevance of learning events, informal learning channels, and Knowledge Hubs, as well as working groups, as mechanisms for sharing learning within Oxfam.

4.3.1 Leading learning events, informal learning, and peer-to-peer exchanges

New information and external shocks are important to encourage innovation and adaptation (Faustino and Booth, 2014). Carefully designed learning strategies therefore stand at the heart of adaptive programming. Face-to-face meetings, as well as informal types of reflections such as blogs and process diaries, are especially useful in this context (Valters et al., 2016).

Case studies

MRMV

Annual global learning events and online communication platforms feature prominently for adaptive learning in MRMV. These face-to-face learning events were organized by Oxfam's Global Learning Team and brought together youth representatives, partner staff, and Oxfam colleagues from country and global teams to share experiences. Despite their usefulness to event participants, staff face significant difficulties in sharing lessons from such events with partners that are not present. A possible solution is to encourage event participants to organize mini-workshops on their return, with room for discussion and collective decision making on possible adaptations. Another risk is that event sessions focus too much on 'sharing' at the expense of 'learning'. Event planners should therefore actively encourage discussions on how programmes can effectively learn from one another. In MRMV events, for instance, participants presented their country-level action plans, discussed them with their counterparts, and altered them based on feedback. As a result, the Nepal team, for example, adopted a strategy to work with religious leaders based on the strategy of the MRMV Pakistan team (OXF002, 31/01/17). Another important effect of the global learning events was that membership and participation in online communication and information-sharing platforms (e.g. Ning and Facebook) increased significantly in their aftermath. The exchange of learning in Facebook groups especially intensified among youth participants. Learning events also helped build a common identity (the 'MRMV family'). They bolstered the culture between country teams and even led to a 'friendly competition' that positively impacted the programme (OXF002, 31/01/17).

WWS
Learning is central to WWS, both between country offices and outside of the programme. The Programme Management Unit (PMU) facilitates lesson sharing at a micro level and through learning events. For example, the DRC office shares lessons regularly with staff in South Sudan through in-person meetings or webinars. However, webinars are not ideal in these cases due to challenges with language barriers and lack of engagement. Face-to-face learning, especially through learning events, is much more effective because it facilitates dialogue and reflection. For example, in January 2015, country offices met to construct a timeline of WWS implementation, which was helpful to capture lessons learned across country offices and to address gaps in institutional memory (OXF012, 20/02/17). Changes in external circumstances are also a learning barrier, such as when conflict in South Sudan prevented peer-to-peer learning meetings between the DRC and South Sudan offices (OXF014, 22/02/17). Lastly, a major challenge lies in learning approaches that focus excessively on documenting lessons in reports rather than encouraging deliberation, reflection, and observation among staff. Our interviewees stress the latter's importance for ensuring that staff internalize and act on lessons (OXF012, 20/02/17; OXF014, 22/02/17).

Chukua Hatua
In the context of the Chukua Hatua programme, Oxfam's Knowledge Hub on Governance and Citizenship (KHGC) supported peer-to-peer exchanges with the Domestic Resource Mobilization programme in Kenya (Crabtree-Condor, 2017). Oxfam's Knowledge Hubs. animate networks of staff and partners to facilitate learning and knowledge exchange between people working in different contexts but on similar themes – virtually and in person. In Kenya and Tanzania, the peer-to-peer exchanges supported by KHGC brought together staff, partners from both countries, as well as Tanzanian community-level animators and their equivalent Kenyan social auditors. The exchange was mutually useful and led to specific adaptation of the programme: Tanzania developed the guiding manual, adding components suggested from Kenya such as tax – an area that their work had not touched on previously. Kenya, in turn, adopted onboard outcome mapping as a more practical MEAL tool that enables adaptive programme management and seeing intended and unintended changes in the lives of communities. The Kenya team explained that learning about the origins of community empowerment was critical for them because it was a 'missing ingredient' in their programme: 'We had a lot to learn from the Chukua Hatua model. For me the underpinning ideology is something that we are missing in our programme. In practice, it is hard to pass on the mantle to communities without this,' said Eric Kinaga, Tax Justice Programme Kenya (cited in Crabtree-Condor, 2017). The exchange supported by the Knowledge Hub allowed the teams as well the community animators and social auditors to be better equipped, in term of ideas and approaches, to respond to the daily challenges they face. Another important achievement of peer-to-peer exchanges is the promotion of adaptive management practices, such as outcome mapping, to different settings.

4.3.2 Facilitating working groups

Building relationships of trust between team members is another important dimension to creating safe spaces for learning, reflection, and adaptation. Establishing working groups with partner organizations is one mechanism to build such trust and collaboration for adaptive learning (Valters et al., 2016).

Case study

GRAISEA
GRAISEA facilitated learning and information sharing by establishing working groups around broad thematic areas. These groups steer the programme at the regional level by serving as a forum for sharing information, learning new practices, and advising country leads on yearly plans, budget exercises, and other programmatic components (Coghlan and Meloni, 2016). Initially, the lack of concrete deliverables and specific learning questions curtailed the effectiveness of working groups. This was compounded by unrealistic burdens on MEL staff to facilitate group discussions, as well as a lack of capacity building to develop local partners' ability to share learning (OXF004, 08/02/17). Ultimately, management and external consultants helped improve working groups' effectiveness by supporting the design and implementation of specific learning objectives and evaluations. Our interviewees identified budgetary constraints as well: face-to-face meetings, Skype calls, and group discussions require money, highlighting the need for the timely disbursement of earmarked funds for learning (OXF007, 15/02/17).

5   RECOMMENDATIONS

In the previous section, we examined salient examples of the enablers and barriers to adaptive management for PMEL. Based on our case studies, key informant interviews, and desk research, we present the following recommendations to help practitioners, within and outside of Oxfam, better integrate adaptive management approaches into their PMEL frameworks.

5.1 PLAN FOR FLEXIBILITY

Experiment with evolutionary approaches

Implementing evolutionary approaches, such as setting up multiple pilots and testing various approaches, can improve the design of programmes in contexts where processes are unclear and open to interpretation. Consulting extensively with stakeholders and developing a shared understanding of objectives can bolster the effectiveness of experimental, pilot-based practices. They can also help offset problems associated with high transaction costs.

Negotiate flexible budgets and funding streams

Flexible budget and funding could include several mechanisms:

- Facilitating the transfer of targets between partners or countries, especially in programmes where milestones are combined or shared (such as in MCPs). In this case, if a target is not met by one office, it can be compensated by over-achieving targets in another context (Feeny, 2016).

- Setting up a centralized, discretionary project fund – i.e. a contingency or 'rainy day' fund – among country offices in a MCP, as well as allowing frequent budget adjustments based on information gathered in progress reports, data, and community consultations. Such a fund could compensate for unforeseen, but necessary, activities during programme implementation and enable need-based adjustments for certain activities.

- Improving the flexibility of PbR contracts could entail combining them with the provision of upfront grants (Mason, 2015). This strategy's effectiveness depends on the type of programme being implemented. When a programme contains soft, hard-to-measure components, such as community mobilization or capacity building initiatives, PbR may not be appropriate because results cannot be readily measured. Such an arrangement is instead more suitable for programmes with 'hard' deliverables and demonstrable results (Feeny, 2016; UK DFID, 2014).

Adopting such flexible financial frameworks involves training staff on their nuances, which can increase familiarity and ease the uptake of flexible budgets.

Work with donors to design adaptive logframes and contracts

Though donors are interested in adaptive management, they may lack the knowledge or capacity to devise adaptive logframes and contracts (OXF016, 05/03/17; SDA002, 24/02/2017). They are also beholden to traditional logframes as an accountability device; often, they may not understand why adaptation is necessary, especially if they remain unaware of day-to-day realities. Organizations such as Oxfam can help fill this gap by designing suitable logframes and engaging proactively with donors to implement them. This involves communicating regularly and building long-term trust-based relationships, such as by inviting donors to roundtable discussions, site visits, and learning events. Moreover, given the resource-intensive nature of embedding adaptive practices in the design phase, organizations can encourage donors to fund design initiatives such as consultation research or context analysis.

5.2 DEVELOP LOCALLY OWNED M&E SYSTEMS

In order to change practices, complement training for programme staff and partners on MEL with accompanying initiatives and persistent follow-up

Oxfam has substantially invested in training staff and partners on MEL approaches and systems.[2] Oxfam's MEL requirements emphasize partners' important role in co-designing and co-implementing MEL frameworks. However, training is not sufficient to bring these requirements to life and actualize them as part of Oxfam's PMEL frameworks. Doing so requires normalizing the practice, and fine-tuning systems and ways of working to support this silent change in practices. Learning from past experiences with varied levels of success, Oxfam is investing in more holistic and transformational approaches to capacity building, where co-ownership and longer term accompaniment is key to more profound changes in attitudes and practices around MEL.

Balance power dynamics with partners

Working with others is part of Oxfam's most fundamental approaches to generate change for social justice. Strong implementing partners provide feedback, enable creative approaches, and broker relationships with other actors. However, unequal power dynamics between Oxfam as a Big International NGO (BINGO) and local organizations (that could be financially dependent on Oxfam) might affect the partnership and the ability to developed locally owned approaches, including MEL. These delicate inter-dependencies can also be affected when evidence from the MEL system indicates the need for a change of strategy and in some cases, even for the termination of a partnership. To resolve this tension, Oxfam can communicate such possibilities to potential partners beforehand, while at the same time emphasizing the value in 'learning by doing' and iteration as an incentive for such organizations to participate in the first place.

Delegate power and facilitate more decision making to actors on the ground

Delegation often meets resistance if implementers are concerned about programme quality or an inability to be accountable to funders. Introducing M&E tools that encourage on-the-fly adaptation, such as steering committees or the Concept Note System, can create spaces for reflection and information-sharing with staff and partners that have contextual knowledge. Not only can such expertise allow staff to make appropriate changes to an ongoing programme, but it also helps overcome resource constraints that are associated with relying solely on Oxfam staff for M&E, thus bolstering both programme quality and donor accountability. Such tactics are especially crucial in fragile contexts that are marred with unpredictability, and align with the principle of 'subsidiarity' (Vernon, 2009), or allowing decision making for programmes to take place at the lowest possible level. Despite agency challenges associated with delegating responsibilities to lower levels, subsidiarity opens the door for 'politically-smart, locally-led' (Booth and Unsworth, 2014) feedback loops, to bolster adaptive practices among implementing staff and partners.

5.3 CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR LEARNING

Promote horizontal communication

Regular, extensive communication between country offices is crucial to promote the sharing and uptake of lessons. Oxfam staff stressed that improved communication, through peer learning and both formal and informal knowledge exchange mechanisms, could promote a culture of information sharing and thus result in faster – and more accurate – decision making (OXF012, 20/02/17). This is especially true for projects implemented in country offices as part of MCPs. In these contexts, PMUs serve as convening platforms to promote multi-level collaboration and

amplify knowledge. However, it is tempting for country offices to depend on them for information or connections, instead of brokering direct contacts with other offices that might yield unexpected or 'surprising' insights. Direct peer-to-peer exchange, in these situations, can enable a free flow of information in the system instead of focusing them on certain hierarchical processes or centralized nodes in a network.

Communicate face-to-face

Webinars and internal management systems can be useful for sharing information, but they are not substitutes for robust discussions. We find that meeting face to face, whether through micro-engagements between country offices or broader learning events, are key to make sure that learning 'soaks in' and is carried forward. Exploring more innovative ways to leverage the benefits of such communication, such as peer evaluation of programmes within and between country offices, is also a priority as programmes seek to stay agile in rapidly changing environments. Though funding constraints to such practices may exist, building in events as an expectation at the start, mid-point, and end of programmes, or as a key indicator in programmatic funding, may create the momentum for cultural shifts towards learning in person, rather than remotely.

Change mindsets, not only practices

Being adaptive, especially in fast-paced, rapidly changing environments, is daunting, especially when the mainstreamed planning tools seem to encourage reducing complex realities into a linear, logframe-type way of thinking about change. It also requires a fair amount of critical thinking and capacity to do continued situation analysis. Changing tools and systems is not as difficult as changing practices and shifting mindsets. Strategies to enable such shifts include investing in coaching from managers, especially for inexperienced staff or at the start of a programme, and facilitating discussions to create spaces for reflective learning.

6 CONCLUSION

Our analysis of these broader elements and embedded recommendations for adaptive PMEL approaches speaks to the importance of considering the relationships, incentives, and institutions – the 'political economy' – that shape the contexts in which practitioners operate. Practices that are depoliticized and technocratic risk reproducing the same criticisms that adaptive management seeks to remedy. At the same time, 'thinking and working politically' (Booth and Unsworth, 2014) requires a set of approaches that facilitate such locally responsive and politically sensitive solutions. Achieving this balance is key to mainstreaming adaptive management in the day-to-day operations of NGOs, as well as scaling up and replicating programmes that are considered the 'gold standard' in adaptive development. Our aim in this report is to illustrate examples of such programmes, in hopes of inspiring practitioners on the front lines. In doing so, we hope to inform management approaches that are agile, responsive, and equipped to 'do development differently' (Wild et al., 2017).

Managing to Adapt: Analysing adaptive management for planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW LIST

Citation code	Organization	Date
CRE001	CARE	02/02/17
DFD001	DFID	10/03/17
MCS001	Mercy Corps	17/02/17
MCS002	Mercy Corps	20/04/17
OXF001	Oxfam	25/01/17
OXF002	Oxfam	31/01/17
OXF003	Oxfam	02/02/17
OXF004	Oxfam	08/02/17
OXF005	Oxfam	14/02/17
OXF006	Oxfam	15/02/17
OXF007	Oxfam	15/02/17
OXF008	Oxfam	16/02/17
OXF009	Oxfam	17/02/17
OXF010	Oxfam	20/02/17
OXF011	Oxfam	20/02/17
OXF012	Oxfam	20/02/17
OXF013	Oxfam	20/02/17
OXF014	Oxfam	22/02/17
OXF015	Oxfam	01/03/17
OXF016	Oxfam	05/03/17
SDA001	Sida	06/02/17
SDA002	Sida	24/02/17
STC001	Save the Children	07/02/17

APPENDIX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Organization	Oxfam GB, Programme Strategy and Impact Team
Project title	'Managing to Adapt: Analysing adaptive management for planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning'
Deliverables	8,000-word report + executive summary Presentation and discussion on findings
Background	Development practitioners, academics and donors are feeding into a growing debate of what is adaptive management, and what enables it. The acknowledgement that political, economic and social change processes are complex and don't happen in linear ways has inevitably led to ask how interventions need to be designed and delivered in order to be responsive to rapidly changing contexts. There is a general consensus that adaptive management depends to a great extent on organizational culture that values learning, iteration and reflection. However, this seems to be at odds with a reality where programme managers are often bound by rigid planning tools, demanding reporting requirements, unresponsive budgeting practices and limited by a donor culture that penalizes deviation from the original design. Moreover, the austerity context has increased the pressure to show value for money. In this environment, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) are too often used for donor accountability purposes rather than serving evidence-based reflection and decision making. Oxfam is a globally renowned humanitarian and development charity with over 70 years' experience working and campaigning with partners in over 90 countries worldwide. Oxfam today focuses on vital issues to tackle the root causes of poverty; from life's basics – food, water, health and education – to complex questions on inequality, climate change and human rights. Oxfam International programme standards reflect the need to be responsive to changes in the context, and to learn and adapt accordingly. Programmes and programme teams need to be open to innovative ideas, to changes in external context, to new insights about local context, to new partners or donor/government priorities [...] Programme strategies should be subject to consistent and regular review, programme teams need to have explicit mechanisms and transparent processes for assessing the value of innovative ideas to the program, and programmes should change over time' (OI Programme Standard #4). According to Oxfam's Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability (CAMSA), programmes are expected to revise periodically their Theories of Change, conduct regular reviews and ensure learning drives programme quality. However, it is not easy to identify examples of good practice that illustrate how to design and implement in practice according to adaptive management principles and how to overcome the tensions generated by a donor-driven culture.
Questions	• What are the main elements and practices of planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL) for adaptive management? • Are there good examples in Oxfam or elsewhere? What are the key enablers and barriers? • How can Oxfam learn from its adaptive approaches – or lack thereof – to inform and improve its PMEL practices, particularly in MCPs?
Objectives	To identify (in Oxfam or elsewhere) good examples of PMEL practices and approaches that enable adaptive management, especially in (but not limited to) MCPs. These case studies will serve to illustrate how adaptive management

	works in practice and provide concrete examples to all levels of Oxfam staff that seek to make their programmes more adaptive.
Work plan and methodology	**Phase 1: Understanding the state of PMEL and adaptive management in academia and within Oxfam** **Methodology:** • Desk research to identify the state of play and theory of adaptive management; • Desk research to identify interesting examples of adaptive management within and outside Oxfam **Phase 2: Identifying key case studies within and outside Oxfam** **Methodology:** • Key-informant interviews with Oxfam staff at HQ, regional and country level; • Key-informant interviews with academics, other international development NGOs and donors; • Selection of top case studies within and outside Oxfam **Phase 3: Developing recommendations for Oxfam** **Methodology:** • Compile key enablers and constraints for selected case studies; • Propose recommendations for improving Oxfam's adaptive management approaches in programme design and implementation; • Have feedback discussions with Oxfam GB staff to test recommendations (in programme planning, M&E and learning). **Phase 4: Report writing**

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

I. Introductory question

How would you define adaptive programming?

II. Context for adaptive programming

Programme design and implementation

Can you give an example of tools or practices that, in your experience, make a programme (your programme) adaptive?

1. Was this element of adaptive programming designed, or did it emerge during project implementation?

2. What are the factors that enabled/constrained the adoption of this element?

3. Could this element be used in other programmes? Under which circumstances?

Technology/tools

Are there any specific technologies, management information systems, or specific management tools that contribute (positively or negatively) to the flexibility of a programme?

1. How does this technology affect the ability to adapt the programme?

2. What are the problems that you face in using this technology?

3. What are the outcomes of using this technology?

Leadership and culture

To what extent does team culture or project leadership contribute to the flexibility of the programme?

1. How do staff members participate in decision making processes? Which members of staff are involved? Which are not?

2. How does management encourage participation and reporting of failure, or create space for reflection?

3. To what extent are learning abilities and soft skills considered in recruitment processes?

Use of evidence for adaptive programming

How do you use evidence/feedback to make changes in an ongoing programme? Can you give an example?

1. How was the evidence produced and communicated?

2. Were there any obstacles in making changes following the feedback? Which ones?

3. What are the outcomes derived from this change?

Donors' role

In your experience, what is the role of the donors in fostering or limiting the flexibility and adaptability of a programme?

1. Are there any specific approaches that, in your experience, donors use to facilitate adaptability?

2. Does your donor(s) make any contractual requests that you feel limit the project's adaptability?

NOTES

1   An example of an adaptive logframe is provided in Valters et al. (2016, pg. 32).

2   To mention some of the most recent efforts, Oxfam has trained all MEL staff on the 'Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability' as part of efforts to harmonize MEL systems in the confederation. Other successful experiences are the Asia Learning Journey on MEL of influencing, a regional initiative that involved face-to-face and remote training as well as mentoring and accompaniment over a period of time on a specialized area of MEL.

OXFAM

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