METHODS
LAB

HOW TO DESIGN A MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK FOR A POLICY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Focus

This guidance note focuses on the designing and structuring of a monitoring and evaluation framework for policy research projects and programmes.

Intended users

The primary audience for this guidance note is people designing and managing monitoring and evaluation. However, it will be a useful tool for anyone involved in monitoring and evaluation activities.

How to use it

The framework presented in this guidance note is intended to be used in a flexible manner depending on the purpose and characteristics of the research project.

Chapter 2 identifies three items to put in place to lay the foundations for your monitoring and evaluation framework: developing or reviewing your theory of change; identifying the purpose of your evaluation; and understanding your knowledge roles and functions.

Chapter 3 guides you through the development of a framework and is structured around six areas: 1) strategy and direction; 2) management; 3) outputs; 4) uptake; and 5) outcomes and impact 6) context. Each area is considered with focus on three operational steps.

Case studies are used throughout the guidance note to provide examples of how the framework has been used by research teams.

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

AG – Accountable Grant

AIIM – Alignment, interest and influence matrix

BE – BetterEvaluation

CARIAA – Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia

CCCS – Centre for Climate Change Studies

DFAT – Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

DFID – UK Department for International Development

IDRC – International Development Research Centre

IED – Afrique Innovations Environnement Développement Afrique

KEQ – Key Evaluation Questions

KPP – Knowledge, Policy, Power

KSI – Knowledge Sector Initiative

LSE – London School of Economics and Political Science

M&E – Monitoring and evaluation

ML – Methods Lab

ODI – Overseas Development Institute

OECD-DAC – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee

OM – Outcome mapping

PRISE – Pathways to Resilience in Semi-Arid Economies

RAPID – Research and Policy in Development

REF – Research Excellence Framework

ROMA – RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach

SDPI – Sustainable Development Policy Institute

SIDA – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

ToC – Theory of change

WB – World Bank

Contents

1. Introduction

Research aims to advance and deepen understanding, and build evidence and knowledge. This guidance note focuses on policy research projects that also aim to influence policy in some way. These projects intrinsically face a number of challenges: policy processes are complex, involve multiple actors and often feature a significant time-lag between research and what may or may not happen as a result of it. The role research plays in policy processes is therefore usually more about *contribution* than *attribution*.

To complicate matters further, the scope and scale of policy research projects[1] are increasingly moving away from single research studies towards multi-component, multi-site and multi-sector endeavours. Research, and particularly publicly funded research, is increasingly expected to be:

- relevant to public concerns, to influence policy, and shape programmes to improve human and environmental conditions
- demand-led, explicitly incorporating stakeholder engagement mechanisms and involving stakeholders in identifying research questions from the outset[2]
- combined with other interventions (e.g. accompany development interventions)
- able to deliver results in complex[3] and changing contexts.

These expectations have implications for what is valued and evaluated. Traditionally, the effectiveness or 'success' of a research project has been assessed by the number of articles published in peer-reviewed journals, possibly accompanied by the number of downloads of research outputs. However, this is no longer sufficient as producing outputs captures only a small proportion of what these broadened types of policy research projects aim to achieve. Now, it is often expected that research – even academic research, especially if publicly funded – should have a wider impact. For example, in the recent Research Excellence Framework 2014 rating,[4] which assessed universities and their research, one fifth of the overall score was weighted to the impact the research had beyond academia. This means that the purposes

of research have evolved and, as well as contributing to academia, it may include objectives such as building researchers' capacity (especially in multi-partner and consortia projects) or addressing the needs of stakeholders (especially in demand-led projects).

These types of complicated or complex policy research projects are usually characterised by having multiple components, each with varying numbers of partners and approaches to engaging them; focusing on different countries, sites or contexts; having different time frames for output production; and approaches for establishing demand from primary stakeholders and the end beneficiaries. Using examples from several different projects, this guidance note shows that pulling all of this together into an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework can be challenging. But it is not impossible.

1.1 Aims and audiences

This guidance note is intended as a practical guide to designing a monitoring and evaluation[5] (M&E) framework for policy research projects or programmes.[6] Its primary audience is M&E designers and managers but it can be useful for anyone involved with M&E activities.

The guidance note aims to support the first steps in designing and structuring the M&E framework (that is, what aspects or areas of policy research projects to monitor and evaluate, why, when and how). It does not include guidance on how to build a whole M&E system, which would require more detailed guidance on M&E data collection, storing, management, analysis and use.

The guidance note presents one model for designing a comprehensive M&E framework that goes beyond counting outputs or citations; it works to track changes more closely, paying attention to often-neglected elements of strategy and management. It highlights the importance of identifying key M&E questions for each M&E area as a way to bridge often existing gaps between M&E areas, approaches and specific indicators (often needed e.g. for logframes). It is deliberately concise and somewhat simplified so as to be useful for during the actual design process.

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1   In this guidance note policy research projects mean research projects which aim to influence policy in some ways. The policy influence that projects are aiming to achieve can significantly vary as discussed in chapter 3.4 on outcomes.

2   Throughout this guidance note, demand-led refers here to research projects which have substantial engagement with stakeholders or users of research to the extent that they can influence the scope and content of the research.

3   By complex we mean context or project that is characterised by distributed capacities, divergent goals and uncertainty (Jones, 2011).

4   See, www.ref.ac.uk.

5   Monitoring in this guidance note refers to the ongoing collection and analysis of data about the inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes of a policy research project. Evaluation refers to the process of weighing this data to make judgements about the merit and worth of the project, which can happen informally, through reflection and discussion among partners and stakeholders; and formally, through reviews and targeted studies.

6   In this guidance note, we use the term 'project', though it can refer to either a research project or programme.

There are a number of evaluation discussions ongoing in the field of international development – about attribution and contribution, and the difference between outcomes and impact, for example (which this guidance note comments on briefly but does not cover in depth).

Though many of the steps outlined in this guidance note are applicable to the design of an M&E framework for any large research project, this framework has been specifically developed for policy research projects, programmes or a portfolio of projects that are multi-component, multi-year, multi-country and/or multi-actor, and where dedicated resources for M&E processes are available.

1.2 The basis for this guidance note

This guidance note builds on an M&E framework for policy research projects developed and tested by the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI). As its starting point, the guidance note uses Ingie Hovland's paper on *M&E for Policy Research* (2007), which is based on comprehensive literature review and consultations with practitioners and researchers. Hovland introduces five M&E performance areas: 1) strategy and direction; 2) management; 3) outputs; 4) uptake; and 5) outcomes and impact. This guidance note adds a sixth area: context, which is introduced in the RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA) guide to policy influence (ODI 2014). Those familiar with the ROMA approach will be able to see its influence throughout this guidance note.

The framework is intended to be used in a flexible manner depending on the purpose and characteristics of the research project. Some of the M&E areas can be combined (such as uptake and outcomes) or further divided (such as outcomes and impact) if deemed more suitable for the project. In addition, this flexibility should, if possible, be extended to the whole framework. And, if the project structure (i.e. who the partners are or how the work is divided between them) or context within which it operates changes, M&E plans should be revisited and, if necessary, adapted. However, there are often limitations (such as budget) that make adaptation, if not impossible, at least challenging.

1.3 Chapter overview

Chapter 2 of this guidance note identifies three items to set in place for laying the foundations for your M&E framework: developing or reviewing your theory of change; identifying the purpose of your monitoring and evaluation; and understanding your knowledge roles and functions.

Chapter 3 guides you through the development of an M&E framework for your policy research project. It is structured around the six M&E areas (see section 1.2).

Each area is considered in turn, with a focus on three operational steps:

- clarifying the purpose and deciding the appropriate intensity and timing
- defining your key M&E questions
- identifying appropriate approaches, methods and indicators to answer the M&E questions.

Examples of how this M&E framework has been used by the RAPID and other research teams are included throughout.

1.4 Case studies used

The project examples referred to in this guidance note come from the following research programmes, involving or led by ODI: Pathways to Resilience in Semi-Arid Economies (PRISE), Methods Lab (ML), Accountable Grant (AG) and Knowledge Sector Initiative (KSI). You can read brief descriptions of these programmes below.

Pathways to Resilience in Semi-Arid Economies (PRISE)

PRISE is a research consortium led by ODI, working in partnership with the London School of Economics Grantham Research Institute (London); IED Afrique (Senegal), Centre for Climate Change Studies, University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania); and the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (Pakistan). Started in 2014, this is a five-year, multi-partner, multi-sector, multi-site, demand-led research programme funded by DFID and managed by the International Development Research Centre as part of the Collaborative Adaptation Research Initiative in Africa and Asia (CARIAA), a larger research programme on climate adaptation involving three other consortia.

The consortium's research will support the emergence of equitable, climate resilient economic development in semi-arid lands through research excellence and sustained engagement with business leaders, local and national government decision-makers, civil society, and regional economic communities. The objectives are: i) to develop an evidence base on the risks posed to economic growth in semi-arid lands by extreme climate events, particularly droughts and floods; ii) to identify investment, policy and planning measures for inclusive climate resilient development and growth in semi-arid lands; and iii) to leverage existing initiatives and networks in a stakeholder engagement process that co-creates knowledge, builds credibility with research users and promotes the uptake of results.

As PRISE is a demand-led programme, its M&E approach has to reflect this by having some flexibility to adapt its initial plans and strategies to address the emerging demand. It also needs to identify how to monitor and assess the ways in which the demand-led approach has been played out in different contexts. PRISE uses Outcome

Mapping approach and maps 'expect to see', 'like to see' and 'love to see' changes of key stakeholder groups which may vary by country and/or project.

Methods Lab

The Methods Lab is a three-year research project on impact evaluation. It is a multi-partner, multi-site action-learning collaboration between the ODI, BetterEvaluation (BE) and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The Methods Lab seeks to develop, test and institutionalise flexible approaches to impact evaluations. It focuses on those interventions that are harder to evaluate because of their diversity and complexity, or where traditional impact evaluation approaches may not be feasible or appropriate, with the broader aim of identifying lessons with wider application potential.

As the total budget of the programme is relatively small, the M&E activities focus mainly on reflective sense-making between partners on shifting external context and internal demand which have resulted continuous adaptation of the strategy and direction (and thus, the outputs) to better respond in the changed contexts.

The DFID–ODI Accountable Grant

Over the past five years ODI has implemented a DFID-funded Accountable Grant[7] (AG). This is a multi-million pound, cross-institutional, multi-component programme for the provision of thematic analysis and advice to DFID on key topics over four and a half years. The grant was designed to support desk- and field-based research on themes including: the post-2015 framework process; climate finance; sustainable governance transitions; social norms and adolescent girls; economic shocks, food prices and social protection; and innovation and horizon scanning. While the primary audience was DFID advisers, many of the issues also had much wider – and sometimes global – audiences.

As all the research was supported by a single funding vehicle, DFID needed a single monitoring framework that could bring together different components of this very diverse research portfolio to tell a relatively simple story about emerging impact. This meant devising indicators that were flexible enough to remain relevant to individual components throughout the programme's lifespan but which could be brought together coherently at the programme level, all within a limited budget for M&E. The 'cable of evidence' approach, described later in this guidance note (see box 6), was developed to address the complexity of what needed to be monitored within this limited budget.

Knowledge Sector Initiative

The Knowledge Sector Initiative (KSI) is a joint programme between the governments of Indonesia and Australia that seeks to improve the lives of the Indonesian people through better quality public policies that make better use of research, analysis and evidence. It is a multi-year, multi-partner programme containing four components of work the 'supply side' (producing research and other evidence); the 'demand side' (commissioning and receiving research and other evidence); intermediaries (brokering and knowledge translation between the supply and demands); and the enabling environment (the institutions and rules which affect the knowledge sector).

To reflect the KSI's scale, scope and resources, its M&E plan uses the first five M&E areas described in this guide. The plan includes key evaluation questions (KEQs) for each level as well as more focused sub-questions for specific users (i.e., the programme team, partners, the funder), which results in partly different tools for addressing the identified key issues to track.[8]

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7   The Accountable Grant as a funding mechanism has been widely used by DFID to fund think tanks and NGOs – recognising that their public good remit means that they cannot be expected to behave as for-profit consultancy organisations (Mendizabal, 2012).

8   A summary of the KSI M&E plan can be found at: www.ksi-indonesia.org/index.php/publications/2014/07/17/20/ksi-m-amp-e-plan-summary.html.

2. Laying the foundation for your monitoring and evaluation framework

Before you dive into M&E, key questions, approaches and indicators, it is useful to have the following three things in place in your research project:

1. a good theory of change (ToC)
2. identified knowledge roles and functions
3. clear M&E purposes.

These first two aspects are essential parts of the project strategy and provide an understanding of, and a plan for, where, why and how research is expected to contribute. Clear M&E purposes make sure there is a shared understanding of what and how M&E will be used. Having all these things in place will support the design of a coherent and fit-for-purpose M&E framework.

2.1 A good theory of change

A well-thought out and regularly revisited ToC (also known as a 'programme theory') can be a very useful tool, and provides the 'backbone' of your intervention and M&E structure. If you aim to influence policy, it is essential to think through how you expect change to happen. And, if your project has strong engagement with stakeholders or users of research, it is important to consider where and how this involvement happens, how it feeds into the research project as a whole and what the critical assumptions are behind it.

A ToC will also guide your choice of key evaluation questions, which are are expected to address critical points in the ToC. This will in turn make sure that your indicators are set up to measure all relevant steps and processes, and not only to address one level, such as outputs. A strong ToC also helps review processes – whether these are mid-term reviews or end-of-project/programme evaluations – and allows you to put any unanticipated or unintended outcomes (if they arise) in context.

There are several simplified and illustrative theories of change that can support in designing your own. See for example '10 Theories to Inform Advocacy and Policy Change Efforts'.[9]

A useful tool to support the development of your ToC is outcome mapping (OM).[10] This approach was developed by the IDRC as a way to plan and measure international development work. It focuses on changes in behaviour, relationships, actions and activities of people, groups and organisations with whom they work, engage and influence. It uses the categories 'expect to see', 'like to see' and 'love to see' to map desired changes (see section 3.5 of this guidance note for further discussion of types of changes in project outcomes).

Figure 1: Mapping desired outcomes: changes you expect to see, would like to see, would love to see
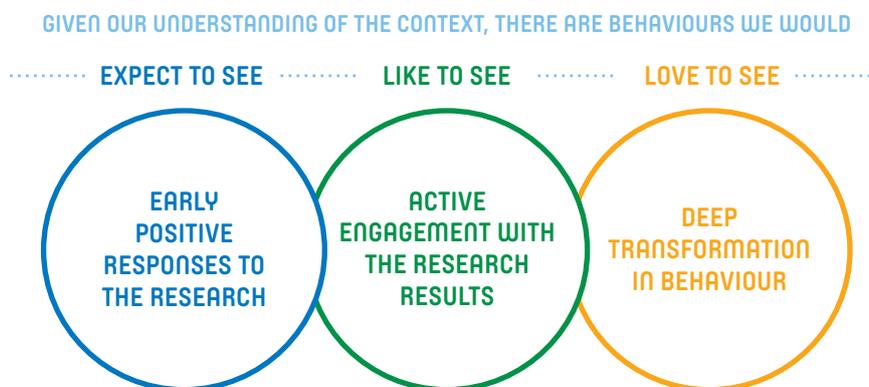
Source: Simon Hearn, Monitoring stakeholder engagement. ODI, 2015.

9   http://orsimpact.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Center_Pathways_FINAL.pdf

10 For more information, visit the OM learning Community: www.outcomemapping.ca

A detailed ToC can become very complex. The challenge is to combine this complexity with a relatively simple M&E framework so that, together, they can provide a coherent narrative about what was planned and what has been achieved, taking into account any changes in context along the way. The process of developing a ToC can help you clarify the purpose of the project, and thus the purpose of your M&E efforts, as will now be discussed.

2.2 Identified knowledge roles and functions

Identifying knowledge roles and functions of project personnel and partners is an important part of strategic planning – and this makes it an important component of monitoring. The process of engaging with policymakers is not a simple one: there are different roles that need to be played to ensure the information is available, understandable and that it is actively used to inform policy debates. Clarifying who should play each role and what they should do makes it easier to monitor the contributions each stakeholder makes to the aim of the project (see figure 2).

For example, in a large research programme, one partner with a strong research background might focus only on producing information – perhaps running a portal to make evidence easily accessible. Another, with more communications expertise, might work to synthesise evidence and translate into policy briefs, ensuring that it is suitable for and can be understood by non-specialist audiences. A third, perhaps a civil society organisation, might focus on bringing together different groups of people to actively debate the information contained in the policy briefs, brokering the knowledge deep inside policy processes.

There is no requirement that a research organisation should also be able to act as a broker: understanding who is best placed to take on which role will help each organisation play to its strengths and determine the types of outputs each organisation would need to produce, for example whether your efforts go to producing research articles, policy briefs, seminars or workshops. Understanding knowledge roles helps refine the M&E strategy by clarifying the purpose of particular engagement strategies or approaches, and working out who is best placed to carry them out.

Figure 2 shows how these different functions are related to each other. It is not necessary for one single organisation or component to cover all four functions; each will have their own mandates and their own strengths that can be built on by the project as a whole. Having a clear ToC and understanding the purposes of your monitoring and evaluation efforts will help you decide, collectively, how to fulfil the different knowledge roles most effectively.

These roles and functions are intended as conceptual tools to help frame and focus research efforts, and should be separated from practical roles for data collection and analysis, which should be decided after the M&E framework is designed.

Figure 2: Different knowledge roles: the K* spectrum
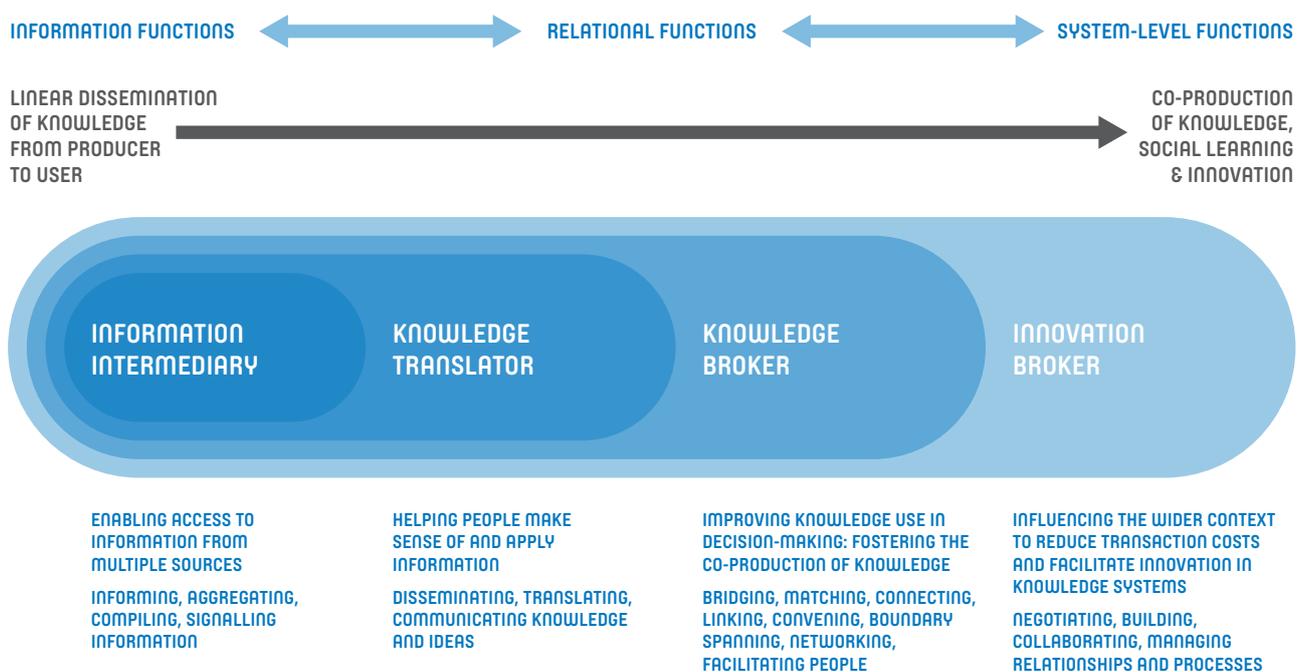
Source: Shaxson et al. 2012. Harvey, B., Lewin, T. and Fisher, C. (2012) Introduction: is development research communication coming of age? IDS bulletin 43(5), pp. 1-8. Available at www.ids.ac.uk/publication/new-roles-for-communication-in-development.

2.3 Clear monitoring and evaluation purposes

Thinking through and agreeing on the purposes, or the uses, of an M&E system will help develop a common understanding of why it is being done. Is it for accountability to the funder? Will it support the decision-making or inform the next phase of the project? Or is it mainly meant for wider, external learning? Thinking through the purpose of the M&E system can be a way to build relationships between partners and other key stakeholders.

As you work through this reasoning, it is important to ensure that your partners (including the donor) share the same interpretation of key words such as 'participatory',[11] 'ownership', 'proven', 'community of practice' or 'rigorous'. If not, the danger is that these become 'empty' words and are either not taken seriously or become a source of disagreement further down the line.

Typical M&E purposes include supporting management and decision-making, learning, accountability and stakeholder engagement. These can be further specified (as in ROMA – see box 1) for nine different learning purposes for policy influence and advocacy. One project can clearly have more than one purpose but it can be useful to prioritise a couple of key ones. There are always trade-offs on what to focus on and which purposes get more attention, and so it's important to think through and weigh up the relative importance of each aim.

Often M&E strategies and plans also state the *underpinning principles* behind M&E such the OECD-DAC (1991) evaluation guidelines or criteria of (i) relevance, (ii) efficiency, (iii) effectiveness, (iv) impact and (v) sustainability. There are also other typical principles – for instance, participatory, utility or equity-focused M&E. While these can ensure the shared understanding of underlying, guiding values on which the M&E system is being built on, how they are used in practice – if at all – varies a lot. For example, OECD-DAC principles are typically used more as final evaluation questions than principles guiding the design of the M&E process (i.e. was the project effective? What was its impact?).[12]

If you want to commit to particular underlying principles, it is crucial to think through and operationalise how these principles are manifested in practice, and provide clear guidance on what this means for individual behaviour.

Box 1: Nine learning purposes for M&E in policy research projects

Being financially accountable. Proving the implementation of agreed plans and production of outputs within pre-set tolerance limits (e.g. recording which influencing activities/outputs have been funded with what effect).

Improving operations. Adjusting activities and outputs to achieve more and make better use of resources (e.g. asking for feedback from audiences/targets/partners/experts).

Readjusting strategy. Questioning assumptions and theories of change (e.g. tracking effects of workshops to test effectiveness for influencing change of behaviour).

Strengthening capacity. Improving performance of individuals and organisations (e.g. peer review of team members to assess whether there is a sufficient mix of skills).

Understanding the context. Sensing changes in policy, politics, environment, economics, technology and society related to implementation (e.g. gauging policy-maker interest in an issue or ability to act on evidence).

Deepening understanding (research). Increasing knowledge on any innovative, experimental or uncertain topics pertaining to the intervention, the audience, the policy areas etc. (e.g. testing a new format for policy briefs to see if they improve ability to challenge beliefs of readers).

Building and sustaining trust. Sharing information for increased transparency and participation (e.g. sharing data as a way of building a coalition and involving others).

Lobbying and advocacy. Using programme results to influence the broader system (e.g. challenging narrow definitions of credible evidence).

Sensitising for action. Building a critical mass of support for a concern/experience (e.g. sharing results to enable the people who are affected to take action for change).

Source: ROMA guide 2014, p. 45. The Learning purposes originate from Irene Guijt's work (see Guijt 2008).

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11 See e.g. Groves and Irene Guijt (2015) blogs on participation in evaluation: http://betterevaluation.org/blog/positioning_participation_on_the_power_spectrum; http://betterevaluation.org/blog/busting_myths_around_increasing_stakeholder_participation_in_evaluation.

12 These principles can be seen matching with the M&E areas presented here to some extent. For example, strategy and direction are about relevance, management and governance about efficiency and so on.

3. The six monitoring and evaluation areas for policy research

This guidance note is structured around the six M&E[13] areas identified in section 1.2:

1. Strategy and direction: 'Are we doing the right thing?'
2. Management and governance: 'Are we implementing the plan as effectively as possible?'
3. Outputs: 'Are outputs audience-appropriate and do they meet the required standards?'
4. Uptake: 'Are people accessing and sharing our work?'
5. Outcomes and impacts: 'What kinds of effects or changes have the work contributed to?'[14]
6. Context: 'How does the changing political, economic, social and organisational climate affect our plans and intended outcomes?'

These six M&E areas are operationalised by taking three practical steps:

1. clarifying the purpose and deciding the appropriate intensity and timing to monitor and evaluate this area
2. defining key M&E questions you want to answer for this area
3. identifying appropriate approaches, methods and indicators to answer the key questions.

i) Clarifying the purpose and deciding the appropriate intensity and timing to monitor and evaluate the area

Clarifying the purpose. Under each section in this chapter, there is an overview table to help you to capture the rationale for why it is important to monitor and evaluate this area – particularly when the project is multi-year, multi-partner, multi-country, multi-component, demand-led – or any or all of these.

Deciding the intensity. It is recommended that you consider each of the six M&E areas – though the focus and intensity can vary depending on the project, its purpose and the stage it is in. In the end, the amount of attention, resources and time you can put towards M&E activities will largely depend on overall M&E resources (personnel, time, funds) and the capacities (experience and skills) of those people undertaking it. If you have considerable funding you can plan and implement time-consuming and in-depth analysis; if not, you can still monitor most of the areas and do a light-touch analysis. This can mean choosing a couple of M&E areas to focus on – such as outputs and uptake – and complementing them with informal discussions and reflections about strategy, management and context.

Timing. Some of the M&E areas are important to monitor and evaluate from the beginning until the end of the project, whereas the focus on some of the areas can be on specific stages in its lifetime. Table 1 is an indicative timetable for when to assess each area but, ultimately, timings will depend on the purposes and activities of the project.

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13 These areas can be also called performance areas (Hovland, 2007) or monitoring areas (ROMA, 2014).

14 For the sake of clarity, this M&E area is shortened as 'Outcomes' in the following sections.

Table 1: Indicative timetable for assessing the six M&E areas

M&E area	When to monitor and evaluate this
1. Strategy and direction	This should be monitored and evaluated at regular intervals (e.g. annually) from the beginning until the end of project but the key questions should be redirected as the project progresses. In the beginning, key questions are around whether strategies are in place and later, they are whether these strategies are being implemented and/or whether they need to be changed as the context or understanding of what is needed to achieve the project goal has developed.
2. Management and governance	This should be monitored and evaluated at regular intervals (e.g. annually) from the beginning until the end of the project. Similarly to strategy and direction, the questions and points of focus develop during the lifetime of the project. In the beginning it is essential to monitor whether management processes and governance structures are set up properly and later to assess whether they have been implemented and/or whether need to be revisited and modified as plans and the structure of project might have evolved.
3. Outputs	Monitoring and evaluation of this area is more important towards later stages of the project. Some outputs can occur/be produced early on in the lifetime of the project – such as scoping papers or stakeholder workshops – but most research outputs tend to appear in the end of the project (or indeed after it has ended).
4. Uptake	Monitoring and evaluation of this area should take place after outputs have been produced or realised.
5. Outcomes and impacts	Monitoring and evaluation of this area should take place after uptake has happened. Usually most of outcomes can be captured at the later stages of the project (or after it has ended).
6. Context	This should be monitored and evaluated at regular time intervals during the lifetime of the project, but focusing especially on the beginning – so as to understand the context in which the project is operating and who are the people involved) – and on the end of the project – so as to capture changes against baseline and assess what has been project's role bringing these changes, if any.

ii) Defining the key M&E questions you want to answer

In practice, this step involves not only identifying and defining your key questions but also prioritising those that are most important and when. It is important to make questions explicit early on; questions have the power to help direct 'sense-making'[15] and inquiry, especially when reflecting on a ToC. However, a common problem with evaluation plans is having too many questions that one evaluation tries to answer. It is far better to prioritise and focus on one or two main evaluation questions, and then support these with secondary questions that don't all necessarily need to be answered every year or at each assessment point. If the project has multiple partners with significantly diverse roles, consider setting up common key M&E questions but having (partly) different supporting M&E questions for each partner or a block of partners.

If you are working on a multi-year research project with multiple stages, where the aims and activities of the project vary considerably, consider identifying different key evaluation questions for each of those stages. For example, for strategy and direction, the key evaluation questions in the first stage may be around whether the relevant strategies – such as communication and

Box 2: Moving from indicators and logframes to questions

It can seem tempting – or even be necessary – to start with indicators instead of M&E questions, particularly if funders want to see a logframe as a part of the initial research proposal. After all, indicators are often easily captured and understood compared with identifying and prioritising evaluation questions and choosing appropriate tools and approaches.

Though a logframe can be a useful tool to capture whether the project is progressing towards its desired goals – that is, a tool for strategy and planning – it is still only a tool and not in itself an end goal. Starting with a logframe can lead to a situation where you become locked into what will be measured (indicators) before thinking through what you want to know (M&E questions) and why (purposes). If possible, logframes should be drawn up after key M&E questions and ways to address them have been decided. Logframes are intended to be flexible: if one has been drawn up as a part of the initial research proposal, it is worth clarifying that it will be revised during the inception period, after the M&E questions have been drawn up.

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15 Sense-making here refers to 'is the process by which data are turned into actionable insights by subjecting them to beliefs and values, existing theory and other evidence. This can happen consciously through structured causal analysis with explicit parameters and questions. It also happens unconsciously through the social interactions and the periodic reflections that make up a natural working rhythm' ROMA, 2014, p. 54.

stakeholder engagement – are in place. Later on in the life of the project, questions may be focused on whether these strategies are being implemented or need adjusting. Similarly, questions on uptake and outcomes are usually more relevant in the latter stages of the project and might not be worth asking in its initial years.

This guidance note provides a sample of common (general) key evaluation questions for each M&E area and gives additional, more defined, examples from previous or ongoing policy research projects which can be modified for varied policy-research projects. The overview table in Annex A provides a longer list of options. The identified M&E questions should guide the next step.

iii) Identifying appropriate approaches, methods and indicators to answer defined key questions

After setting up your key questions, you want to decide what will be measured (i.e. indicators of performance, deliverables and results) and how (i.e. what approaches and methods you want to use for data collection and analysis). Indicators can vary a lot: indicators for outputs are fairly straightforward but what will be measured for strategy and direction can be much more descriptive and reflective, and as such may need more analysis. Wherever possible, it is useful to triangulate multiple sources of data and include objective measures.

This guidance note suggests examples of appropriate approaches and methods for collecting and analysing data to answer typical key questions for each of the six M&E areas. For further detail and full explanations of how these approaches work, there are numerous other guides, books, reports and toolkits. Good starting points are Hovland (2007) and the BetterEvaluation website,[16] which provides overviews of most of the approaches mentioned in this guidance note. There is also a short list of useful websites in the 'Additional resources' section of this guidance note.

The importance of prioritising. It is essential to note that not everything can, or should, be measured. M&E systems should be aligned with the project aims and available resources. It is good to be realistic about the number of indicators you use as, in the end, they are just that: indicators of what you want to achieve. There are always trade-offs between scope and quality of M&E, and between breadth and depth, and it is important to try to a couple of key indicators and collect them systematically rather than try to measure everything possible (the 'cable of evidence' approach mentioned later on can help to do this).

> **Box 3: One tool, different purposes**
>
> Many of the approaches or tools mentioned in this guide can be used for more than one M&E area, depending on when it is done and the purpose of the research. For example, capacity assessments are a way to monitor or assess whether partners are able to perform their roles or whether they need supporting (a tool for management and governance). However, if building partner or stakeholder capacity is one of the main goals, capacity assessments can be used to capture outcomes, especially when done in the baseline and after the programme. Similarly, many of the approaches to monitoring and evaluating context (political economy analysis, stakeholder mapping, sectoral analyses) can be also used to inform strategy and direction and whether it needs adapting to reflect the changing context.

16 http://betterevaluation.org

3.1 Strategy and direction: are you doing the right thing?

This first M&E area involves monitoring and evaluating whether your research project is being strategic and whether its plan, or ToC, is leading to the desired goals. In practice this means, for example, (regularly) revisiting your strategies, reviewing whether your ToC is still relevant, whether the assumptions behind it are being tested by the project and whether it, and thus the strategy, needs modifying.

i) Clarifying the purpose and deciding the appropriate intensity and timing to monitor and evaluate

Monitoring and evaluating strategy and direction is crucial for understanding whether the project is progressing towards its aims, whether its focus or direction has been lost or changed, whether the strategy needs to be adapted to changed external context, or whether the work is having unintended consequences. Moreover, if the research project is 'demand-led' (i.e. will involve substantial engagement with stakeholders or users of research), it is crucial to monitor and evaluate whether this involvement is realised. Typically, research projects are primarily concerned with the production of publications. But, while the publications may be high quality, if they are not meeting demand then the project is not doing what it set out to do.

When the research project lasts several years or when its aims require adaptation as the external context changes, monitoring and evaluating strategy and direction is especially important. It is also important when there are several partners or components that all are expected to contribute to the desired vision and goals.

Unlike some of the other M&E areas, monitoring and evaluating strategy and direction is important from the start till the end of policy research project, though how it is done can vary greatly, from informal discussions to systematic assessments.

ii) Defining key M&E questions

Key M&E questions for strategy and direction focus on the project's strategy or strategies, key stakeholders and ToC and how they can be improved if needed.

Sample key M&E questions for strategy and direction:

- Is the project's theory of change/programme theory appropriate, logical and credible? How has it been developed? Has it changed?
- Are project strategies (such knowledge management, stakeholder engagement, gender and communication strategies) aligned with the ToC, with each other, and have they been adopted?
- How appropriate and relevant are programme strategies for meeting the goals of the project?
- Are the right stakeholders being engaged? Is mapping key stakeholders conducted on a regular basis?
- Are selected research questions and themes in line with funder's or country's priorities or strategies?

Table 2: Why monitor and evaluate strategy and direction?

Programme characteristics[17]	Purpose of M&E
Multi-year	To investigate whether initial plans and aims are still relevant and whether the ToC and strategy (and thus, research activities) need adapting
Multi-partner	To monitor and assess whether partners continue to share the vision and goal and how they all collectively contribute to it
Multi-country	To assess whether the overall strategy and direction is relevant across different country contexts
Multi-component	To monitor and evaluate whether and how components are contributing to the shared vision and goal
Demand-led	To assess whether demand-led approach is still relevant in the current context, whether it has been actualised and whether changes in strategies are needed.

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17 As stated, this framework is best suited for policy research projects that are multi-year, multi-component, multi-country and/or multi-actor, or those that have considerable stakeholder engagement.

Table 3: An example of key and supporting (secondary) M&E questions from multi-year, demand-led research project, PRISE

Key evaluation question	Secondary questions
How appropriate and relevant are PRISE strategies for meeting the goals of the consortium?	Is the theory of change valid, useful and appropriate for each context?
	How is the policy-first approach leading to useful and relevant research?
	How are stakeholder engagement platforms facilitating change? What are the differences across the focus countries?
	Are PRISE component strategies (engagement, communications, gender, M&E, quality assurance and/or any others) developed, approved and adopted?

ii) Identifying approaches, methods and indicators

Chosen M&E questions should guide the selection of appropriate and feasible approaches, methods and indicators. Indicators for strategy and direction are usually more qualitative than quantitative: they revolve around appropriateness and efficiency of plans and strategies. Often analysis on strategy and direction is done implicitly and at management and steering-group level but a more systematic application is worthwhile to strengthen the assessment.

Common ways to assess strategy and direction typically include:

- reviewing (quarterly or annual) reports, other key documents and strategies
- reviewing programme theories and/or ToC and how they have been developed/adapted over time
- conducting workshops and meetings with key partners and stakeholders to identify gaps or lacks in implementation and where strategies and plans need adapting
- formal or informal discussions in steering group or management meetings
- stakeholder analysis and social network analysis (to investigate who is engaged and how)
- employing the alignment, interest and influence matrix (AIIM),[18] which can be used for strategy and direction, but also, especially if repeated at certain time points, for outcomes and context.

For further information and options, see e.g. Hovland (2007), p. 4–15.

Example indicators for strategy and direction:

- the development and implementation of key strategies and documents
- descriptions of changes and gaps in quarterly/annual reports and key strategies and documents
- the extent to which strategy is responsive to the observed changes in context (M&E area 6)
- consistency of progress across components and/or partners.

Box 4: Collecting baselines

Wherever possible – and often this is a donor requirement – it is worth consider collecting baseline information. Baselines can contain different sorts of information and data; as well as quantitative they may also feature descriptive and/or reflective information, e.g. about current capacities of the partners, the context in which research project is operating, stakeholders' attitudes towards the research topic, what kind of research is being used by key stakeholders at the moment and so on. When collecting baseline information it is crucial to document methods and sources used for the data collection, such as people interviewed, online search phrases used or capacity assessment tools applied, in order to be able to repeat the exercise in a similar fashion later on and map and record changes (and reasons for them) against the baseline.

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18 'The AIIM tool is often used in a workshop setting and involves a diverse group of participants – each with insights into different actors or parts of the policy space. After defining the objectives of the intervention and carrying out some background context. Analysis (or in depth research depending on the degree of complexity of the challenge), AIIM can help to clarify where some of the interventions' main policy audiences and targets stand in relation to its objectives and possible influencing approaches.' Menzibal, 2010, 2. More information can be found at www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6509.pdf.

3.2 Management and governance: are you implementing the plan as effectively as possible?

The M&E area of management and governance refers to how a research project is managed: whether its internal systems and processes are appropriate and fit-for-purpose to support the achievement of planned strategy and objectives, and whether oversight mechanisms are sufficient to identify key risks to the project and to guard against any misuse of the project's resources.

i) Clarifying the purpose and deciding the appropriate intensity and timing to monitor and evaluate

Monitoring and evaluation of management and governance is especially important in large, complex projects that often include multiple components, sectors, countries and/or partners. While in its basic form, monitoring can only record what has been done, when and where (including budget monitoring), evaluation can also include more reflective analyses of the capacity and performance of team members and organisations, appropriateness and effectiveness of decision-making processes and other internal systems.

Similarly as with strategy and direction, management and governance are also important areas to monitor and evaluate from the beginning until the end of a project. In the beginning it is crucial to monitor whether management processes and governance structures are set up properly and, later, to assess whether they have been implemented and/or whether need to be revisited and modified.

ii) Defining key M&E questions

Key questions on management and governance typically focus on budget and decision-making structures, and are often complemented with questions about risks and internal communication channels. Value-for-money questions – which concern effectiveness, efficiency, equity and economic value – can also been added as part of management and governance if appropriate. As with the other five M&E areas, prioritising a couple of key questions to focus on is recommended.

Example key M&E questions for management and governance:

Overall management:
- To what extent are deliverables being completed to comply with programme timetables?
- Is the work plan realistic in terms of timing, staffing and resources?
- How well are internal systems working to implement the strategy (to time and budget)?
- How are risks managed?
- In case of data management (platform): are data management systems flexible and user-friendly? How are platforms being used by relevant groups?

Table 4: Why monitor and evaluate management and governance?

Programme characteristics	Purpose of M&E
Multi-year	To monitor progress against plans. To assess whether decision-making and other internal processes set in the beginning of the project are fit-for-purpose or whether they need to be adapted. To ensure that governance processes are consistent over time.
Multi-partner	To assess how different partners are progressing against plans and to investigate where differences are coming from. To assess whether partners' capacities need supporting. To assess whether coordination and communication between partners is frequent and sufficient, and whether decision-making processes are fair i.e. whether each partner is represented in decision-making bodies and processes. To ensure that governance is representative.
Multi-country	To ensure that there is consistency in the overall approach across the different country contexts, to share learning about what management and governance methods work.
Multi-component	To monitor how different components are progressing against plans and evaluate where differences are coming from. To assess whether and which components needs supporting. To ensure that governance mechanisms are consistent across the different components.
Demand-led	To assess whether demand-led activities are progressing against plans. To assess how decision-making is done in case stakeholders have varied or conflicted interests or demands. To ensure that governance is participatory.

Table 5: Key evaluation questions for management and governance in the multi-year, multi-partner, multi-component policy-research project, KSI

Key evaluation question	Secondary questions
How well are internal systems working to manage progress against plans and modify as needed?	What processes are in place to describe, manage, monitor progress against and modify operational plans? How well are they working?
	Is there good governance at all levels with sound financial management and adequate steps taken to avoid corruption and waste?
	What processes are in place for documenting and learning from experiences and adjusting to changing context? How well are they working? (e.g. knowledge management, work plans, internal reporting, communication)
	How can these systems and processes be improved?
	What differences are there in systems across different contexts (implementation environments, sectors, sites, partners)? What has produced these differences?
	What are the features of KSI that have made a difference in terms of internal systems? What has worked and not worked and why?

Budget and value-for-money:
- Is budget spent against plans? If not, why not?
- What has been done to ensure responsible financial management?
- Is the project providing value for money? How?

Partnerships:
- How are partnerships fostered?
- Are there capacity needs to be addressed?
- How are research partners engaging and sharing information among each other?
- Has the scope and depth of collaboration with and between partners increased since the programme inception? If not, why?

Decision-making and governance:
- How decisions are made, with what criteria and how are they documented? Are they consistent, inclusive and transparent?
- What governance systems are in place and are they as effective as they could be?

iii) Identifying approaches, methods and indicators

The first two M&E performance areas – strategy and direction, and management and governance – are closely linked and similar methods and approaches are typically used in both. The indicators also tend to be more qualitative and reflective than with the next performance area, outputs.

Common ways to assess strategy and direction include:

- monitoring and reviewing agendas and minutes of internal meetings
- reviewing progress reports such as quarterly or annual reports to board and/or donors and internal financial management
- reviewing internal strategies, work plans, risk registers, procedures and processes
- visiting partners and/or reviewing visit reports
- assessing performance and capacity of partner organisations and organisational self-assessments
- appreciative inquiry[19]
- stories of change.[20]

Example indicators for management and governance:

- the development and existence of decision-making mechanisms and governance structures
- the extent to which plans are met and budget is used
- the degree to which risks do not materialise, or the effectiveness of countermeasures put in place
- the degree of inclusiveness and transparency of decision-making mechanisms and governance structures
- the degree to which plans are changed based on results and findings
- changes in capacity (from baseline assessments)
- frequency and nature of internal communication channels
- staff turnover.

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19 For more information, see: http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/appreciative_inquiry.

20 'A story of change is a case study method that investigates the contribution of an intervention to specific outcomes. It does not report on activities and outputs but rather on the mechanisms and pathways by which the intervention was able to influence a particular change, such as a change in government policy, the establishment of a new programme or the enactment of new legislation,' ROMA (2014), p 52.

3.3 Outputs: do they meet required standards and appropriateness for the audience?

Outputs are tangible goods and services that the project produces. While most common outputs for research projects are reports, articles, policy briefs and other publications, projects can also generate more varied products and services, including websites, online forums, blogs, tweets, discussions (online and live), workshops, meetings, seminars and other events, networks, (technical) guidance and support. Clarity of strategy and direction will ensure that it's clear what outputs need to be produced for the different audiences.

i) Clarifying the purpose and deciding the appropriate intensity and timing to monitor and evaluate

Research outputs are generally considered the main focus of M&E frameworks for policy research projects as they are, in themselves, tangible and visible evidence that the project has produced 'knowledge'. However, the variety of research outputs has expanded in recent years and now includes more diverse and potentially more complicated elements such as those already mentioned. While counting research reports is fairly straightforward, it can be more difficult to assess online discussions (just that it happens is not usually enough) or the relevance of technical guidance (just that it has been given doesn't say much about its usefulness). Box 5 includes expanded criteria for monitoring and evaluating research outputs.

Whether your programme is multi-year, multi-partner, multi-component or not, it is always important to monitor and evaluate outputs. Whether you do it with in a light-touch way – such as counting main

outputs – or take a more in-depth approach – such as considering appropriateness, credibility, quality and relevance of each output – will depend on your resources and time constraints.

It is important to monitor outputs from the start of the project. Some of the outputs can occur early on in policy research projects – for instance, initial stakeholder workshops or a blog post outlining future plans and encouraging audiences to follow the project from the outset.

Box 5: Criteria for monitoring and evaluating outputs

- **Quality.** Are the project's outputs of the highest possible quality, based on the best available knowledge?

- **Relevance.** Are the outputs presented so they are well situated in the current context? Do they show they understand what the real issue is that end users face? Is the appropriate language used?

- **Credibility.** Are the sources trusted? Were appropriate methods used? Has the internal/external validity been discussed?

- **Accessibility.** Are they designed and structured in a way that enhances the main messages and makes them easier to digest? Can target audiences access the outputs easily and engage with them? To whom have outputs been sent, when and through which channels?

- **Quantity.** How many different kinds of outputs have been produced?

Source: ROMA Guide 2014.

Table 6: Why monitor and evaluate outputs?

Programme characteristics	Purpose of M&E
Multi-year	To capture the sequence, variety and quality of outputs produced each year. To spot 'gaps' in production and investigate the reasons behind them.
Multi-partner	To capture which partners are producing which type and quality of outputs. To understand where potential differences are coming from. To assess whether capacity building aspects (of partners, of women, of junior researchers etc.) are demonstrated through outputs.
Multi-country	To capture the effects of project or programme context on the delivery of outputs (both quality and quantity)
Multi-component	To capture which components are contributing to production of what types and quality of outputs.
Demand-led	To assess whether outputs meet current stakeholder demand.

Table 7: Primary and secondary M&E questions for outputs in PRISE

Key evaluation question	Secondary M&E questions
What has been the quality of outputs produced and communicated?	How many, and what kind of, outputs are being produced (particularly authored by women)?
	How have outputs been communicated and to whom?
	What is the quality of outputs and how is it varying over time and different contexts (implementation environments, sectors, sites, partners)? What has produced these differences?
	Is PRISE producing the right quantity, quality and combination of outputs to achieve its goals?
	Are the research methods appropriate to the research questions?
	Are the research quality standards and processes adhered to?
	Are PRISE events involving the right people and having the desired effect?

However, the main focus of monitoring and evaluating outputs usually comes later, as many traditional outputs – and in particular, peer-reviewed journal articles – take a long time to materialise. For example, a study by Cameron *et al.* (2015) on a large number of impact evaluations concluded that, while reports can be produced relatively quickly (on average, one year from end line data collection), it took as long as 4.7 years for findings to be published in peer-reviewed journals. This means that outputs (and consequently uptake and outcomes) cannot always be properly captured within the lifetime of the project.

ii) Identifying key M&E questions

Typical M&E questions related to outputs focus on the quantity produced or their quality aspects, but can be complemented with inquires on how well outputs are aligned with different project strategies which might require more analysis of the value or worth of the outputs produced

Key M&E questions for outputs typically include:

- What outputs have been produced?
- What has been their quality and relevance?
- How does this compare to what was planned?
- Are outputs aligned with strategies (overall strategy, gender strategy, capacity building strategies)?
- To what extent are the outputs being delivered in a way that represents value for money?

iii) Identifying approaches, methods and indicators

Approaches, methods and indicators for assessing outputs are well-known and often fairly straightforward. The required information is also usually relatively quick to gather – typically number of outputs produced and web statistics related to the outputs. However, consideration of which approaches and indicators could capture some of the more descriptive elements of outputs, such as their relevance or alignment with different project strategies, is strongly recommended.

Common approaches and methods to assess outputs typically include:

- review against plans
- quality review processes (peer-review, internal reviews)
- after-action reviews (after events, workshops, seminars)
- collection of web statistics: Google analytics, twitter feeds, downloads, site visits (can be also seen as uptake).

Example indicators for outputs include:

- the type, number, quality and relevance of outputs produced (publications, blogs, infographics, films etc.) per component/partner
- the number of peer-reviewed journal articles (or similar) published or accepted directly generated by the research project in open access formats (authorship disaggregated by gender and membership in a southern institution)
- the number, quality and relevance of organised national and international conferences and seminars and other key events
- the number of downloads of publications (can be also see as a first step in uptake)
- the number, quality and relevance of presentations in national and international conferences and other important third-party events
- a description of quality review processes.

3.4 Uptake: are people aware of, accessing and sharing your work?

Monitoring and evaluating uptake happens once outputs and services produced by the project are delivered and made available. Evaluating uptake refers to the process of systematically tracking the extent to which outputs are picked up and used, and what the immediate responses to them are. Being clear about strategy and direction will help you define the core aspects of uptake that need monitoring. Conversely, being clear about what uptake is happening (and what is not) will help you refine your strategy and direction; it will help you to understand whether stakeholders are behaving as expected as a result of your work and whether your outputs are meeting their expectations.

i) Clarifying the purpose and deciding the appropriate intensity and timing to monitor and evaluate

Only monitoring what you have produced (outputs) is not enough for policy research projects that aim to have influence: uptake is a first step to eventual outcomes and impact. Uptake is particularly crucial in demand-led projects as the extent to which targeted key stakeholders are accessing and using the outputs, or asking for (technical) advice is one of the key measures of the project's success.

What to monitor and evaluate depends on the outputs produced. While smaller and shorter research projects can focus on whether people are aware of, and accessing, your work ('primary reach'), multi-year, multi-partner projects should also consider whether people sharing, discussing your work ('secondary reach'). Sometimes it may make

sense to combine uptake and outcomes/impact as they are closely linked.

M&E of uptake happens usually during the latter stages of the research project once the outputs have been produced, though some uptake – such as asking for technical advice – can emerge relatively early on.

ii) Defining key M&E questions

Key M&E questions for uptake are primarily concerned with how target audience and influential stakeholders have reacted to the outputs, how they are sharing the results and how are they articulating their demand for research. It may be worth asking slightly varying questions at different stages of the project; questions on how key stakeholders are articulating demand can be included at the project outset but questions on how research is being cited or referenced are usually more appropriate at later stages once the key outputs have occurred or been produced.

Key M&E questions for uptake typically include:

- What outputs have been used by stakeholders and how?
- Where, how and by who is research being cited, referenced, downloaded and shared?
- What is the initial feedback from users, influential stakeholders and/or target audience?
- How are key stakeholders articulating demand for research?
- How can uptake be improved and strengthened?

Table 8: Why monitor and evaluate uptake?

Programme characteristics	Purpose of M&E
Multi-year	To capture variety and sequence of uptake across years. To identify gaps in uptake and reasons behind it. To understand how later outputs build on earlier ones. To confirm the effectiveness of your strategy and direction.
Multi-partner	To capture whether each partner is contributing to uptake (e.g. all their products are available and shared), and whether some of them need support to increase uptake.
Multi-country	To understand how the wider (political, social, economic, environmental) context influences opportunities for uptake.
Multi-component	To capture how each component is contributing to uptake, and whether some of them need to be supported to increase uptake.
Demand-led	To investigate whether key stakeholders are accessing, sharing and using the research. To investigate whether technical support they have received has been useful and used (where appropriate).

Table 9: Key questions for uptake used in impact evaluation action-research project Methods Lab

Phase 1. Development	Phase 2. Testing	Phase 3. Finalisation
How have draft outputs (such as draft guidance notes) been used by programme teams and case study leaders?	How are guidance notes and other forms of advice used within pilot projects? How well received are public outputs by the funder and others in the evaluation community?	What is the evidence that the Methods Lab process and results have been used to inform next phase of the programme or indications that they have contributed to new programmes?

iii) Identifying approaches, methods and indicators

Many of the approaches and methods to assess uptake produce quantitative information, though these can be easily complemented with more qualitative feedback and uptake examples. Some of this information can be collected fairly quickly – for instance, web and social media statistics and feedback using tools available (such as web analytics, different survey tools etc.). However, some of the analysis can require more effort if done in-depth. For example, citation analysis in its simplest form can be very quick if using, for instance, an online indexing tool, such as Google Scholar. It can be done more comprehensively, finding instances of where and how the research outputs have been used or mentioned outside of peer-reviewed journal articles such as in international or bilateral agencies' reports or policy-briefs. But this process is much more time consuming.

Common ways to assess uptake typically include:

- direct feedback from stakeholders e.g. emails, calls
- web statistics, such as downloads, shares
- feedback and user surveys
- social media statistics and feedback, such as twitter and Facebook interactions (comments, shares, 'likes') or comments on blogs
- attendance lists and feedback from events and workshops
- reflection in learning and/or annual partner meetings
- citation analysis
- altmetrics.[21]

As with the previous M&E area on outputs, the indicators of uptake tend to be quantitative and relatively straightforward in nature. However, some of the aspects – such as usefulness of outputs (research products, events, platforms etc.) – can include qualitative indicators that require more reflective descriptions.

Example indicators for uptake are:

- the number of downloads of documents
- the number and origin of website visits
- the number and quality of traditional media (newspaper, radio, television etc.) mentions
- the number and quality of social media (twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn etc.) mentions
- the number and diversity (and origin) of citations to research in journals articles or other research outputs
- the number of requests for project researchers to speak at events
- the number and quality of initial feedback (with information collected through the use of, for example, free-text survey fields or a Likert Scale for audiences to rate statements about the output on a numbered scale)
- the usefulness of seminars, stakeholder meetings and other events (with information collected through the use of, for example, free-text survey fields or a Likert Scale).

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21 http://altmetrics.org/manifesto

Box 6: Example of linking outputs and uptake: the DFID Accountable Grant

For work carried out under the DFID Accountable Grant, the monitoring team defined a set of 'strands' of evidence that each component would contribute to. Taken together, these strands would describe the story of the research and how it attempts to influence change and achieve impact by focusing on the outputs each component produced and how they were taken up and used. This approach is called the 'cable of evidence'. In the list below, the key indicators show how the 'story' of uptake is developed and evidenced. Box 8 shows how this links to reporting on changes in outcomes and contex.

Key indicator	Evidence to validate indicator
We will produce X number of outputs	The number of different types of research reports, communications packages, working papers, methodology papers, briefing notes, and background papers
These outputs will be thoroughly quality assured by external reviewers	Institutionalising a robust peer review process and the logs of peer review comments for each output
The evidence and analysis they contain will be effectively brokered to the different stakeholder audiences	Initial comprehensive stakeholder mapping and analysis exercise; by logs of the different types of brokering activity undertaken by project staff and assessments of their effectiveness
Our stakeholders judge our outputs to be useful	The number of downloads; by stakeholder feedback on outputs via periodic stakeholder surveys or direct requests for feedback; by feedback from the events we hold, by the numbers of solicitations project teams receive to attend/present at external events/ contribute to other publications/sit on boards or taskforces;
Where this is a distinct thrust of the project, we will build local capacity to continue the work	The numbers of training workshops conducted; feedback from capacity building exercises; evidence of the methods and concepts we generated being used in other projects.

Each of the component projects that make up the programme report against the five strands, but choose i) how much emphasis to place on each strand, ii) the specific types of evidence they use and iii) the number of sub-indicators, in order to suit their individual work programmes. On their own, each strand does not account for much, but taken together they begin to build a coherent story of the full extent of what the programme has delivered and how well it has been received. They are also sufficiently generic to be contextualised to different components of the programme, giving projects real flexibility in how they shape their work but enabling the central monitoring team to take a consistent overall approach to monitoring at the programme level.

3.5 Outcomes: what kinds of effects or changes did the work have, or contribute to?

Outcomes and impact refer to the long-term changes (in behaviour, policies, capacities, discourse, or practices) that the research has contributed to.

i) Clarifying the purpose and deciding the appropriate intensity and timing to monitor and evaluate

For a research policy project that aims to influence policy, it is essential to consider what happens after uptake. While uptake refers to people accessing and sharing your research, it is not an outcome or impact yet; ideally, you want to see changes. Changes can come in all shapes and sizes and can often be hard to detect. The DFID Accountable Grant team use the phrase 'plausible and distinct contribution to sustainable change'. This covers two issues funders and research projects are increasingly interested in: that the project can plausibly claim to have contributed to lasting change, and that it is possible to distinguish the contribution the project has made from contributions made by other projects or external factors.

Outcomes and impact have also become a greater focus in the academic world. Traditionally academic research has measured its impact or 'success' by having articles accepted in peer-reviewed journals but now research – particularly if it is publicly funded – is expected to have an impact beyond academia. The recent Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 rating mentioned earlier in this guidance note, where one fifth of the overall weight was given to the impact the research had beyond academia, is an example of this and demonstrates the UK government's wish to reward those education institutions that engage with civil society.

Outcomes can vary significantly depending on who and what your research is trying to influence. A policy change does not only mean a change in legislation, budgets or programmes (see box 7). When looking for these potential changes and impact, it is important to be aware that research was probably only one of the many factors contributing to the change. Thus, we are not usually concerned with *attribution* as such but with the *contribution* the research made.

Investigating outcomes can be a time-consuming data collection exercise, and how much attention this area receives is often dependent on time and M&E budget. If you are working with a limited budget, you can choose to collect a couple examples of stories of change, or of the most significant change at the end of the project, and track back what your project's contribution has been to these. You can also highlight any unanticipated or unintended changes (both positive and negative).[22] If you have more resources and are working in a multi-year research project that has substantial stakeholder engagement, you might consider doing a comprehensive outcome mapping and harvesting exercise at regular intervals – such as at the beginning, mid-point and end of the project/s – to track the direction and scope of the changes.

Box 7: Policy change options to monitor and evaluate

Attitudes of key stakeholders to get issues onto the agenda. How interested and open are policy actors to your issues? What kind of evidence will convince them?

Public opinion. How are the public engaged in these issues?

Capacity and engagement of other actors. Who else is engaging in this policy area? How influential are they? What can be done to involve others?

Change in discourse among policy actors and commentators. What are the influential policy actors saying on this issue? What language are they using?

Improvements in policymaking procedure/process. Who is consulted during policy-making? How is evidence taken into account?

Change (or no change) in policy content. What new legislation, budgets, programmes or strategies are being developed?

Behaviour change for effective implementation. Who is involved in implementing targeted policies? Do they have the skills, relationships, incentives to deliver?

Networks and systems for supporting delivery. Are different actors working coherently together to implement policy? Are the necessary structures and incentives in place?

Source: Keck and Sikkink (1998) and Steven (2007)

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22 It is important that any stories of change, or examples of most significant change, are collected using a robust methodology or they are in danger of being dismissed as anecdotal.

Table 10: Why monitor and evaluate outcomes?

Programme characteristics	Purpose of M&E
Multi-year	To monitor and evaluate how and when changes emerge and/or detect 'sign-posts' towards impact.
Multi-partner	To capture how partners are contributing to observed changes.
Multi-country	To understand how the political, economic, social and environmental contexts affect the programme's ability to achieve consistency in outcomes.
Multi-component	To capture how components are contributing to observed changes.
Demand-led	To assess whether key stakeholders have changed their attitudes and behaviour towards desired direction.

Evaluating outcomes and impact happens usually at the later stages of the project or after the project has finished. Though outcomes and impact take longer time to materialise, you can still try to identify 'signposts' for it during the lifetime of the project.

ii) Defining key M&E questions

Key M&E questions focus on different types of (long-term) changes the research has contributed to. Monitoring and evaluating outcomes is often the most challenging part of the M&E. It is therefore essential to collaboratively think through what are the priority key questions the project wants to and have resources to address.

Examples of key questions for outcomes are:

- To what extent has research influenced policy (e.g. legislation, guidelines, resource allocation)?
- To what extent has research shifted public agendas – what gets discussed and how it is framed?
- How sustainable are observed changes likely to be?
- Are the changes mainly at individual or institutional levels?
- What differences are there in results seen in different contexts (sectors, sites, partners)? What has produced these differences?
- Are there indications on capacity development in partners showing up as improved practices or processes?

Table 11: Key questions for outcomes used in impact evaluation action-research project Methods Lab

Phase 1. Development	Phase 2. Testing	Phase 3. Finalisation
Long-term outcomes and impacts will be considered in phase 3	Long-term outcomes and impacts will be considered in phase 3	**Change in policy / practice** • What changes have occurred in policy / programmes in relation to (impact) evaluation in the funder organisation? • How did that change happen? **Contribution to priorities** • How have or could these changes contribute to revisions to evaluation priorities and practices? **Contribution to policy making environment** • How have these changes contributed to the wider policy making environment e.g. use of evaluation evidence, stakeholder involvement, accountability etc.? **Capacity development** • Are there indications on capacity development in the funder organisation showing up as improved practices or processes?

iii) Identifying approaches, methods and indicators

Unlike with some of the other M&E areas, none of the approaches or methods to assess outcomes and impact are simple or straightforward. Most, in fact, need significant evaluation expertise and knowledge as well as time to be conducted properly and systematically. Fortunately, there are some good guides that describe these approaches in details (see, for example, aforementioned Hovland (2007) and Tsui *et al.* (2013), which provide more information on how and when these methods can be applied).

Common approaches and methods to assess outcomes typically include:

- capacity assessments (in cases where increasing partner or stakeholder capacity is one the goals)
- structured stakeholder interviews
- bellwether interviews
- outcome mapping,[23] outcome harvesting
- most significant change
- stories of change
- episode studies

- contribution analysis
- process tracing
- time series analysis and experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluation approaches to some extent. See, for example, Beynon *et al.* (2012).

Examples of indicators for outcomes include:

- the number and nature of documented cases of shifts in policy thinking identified in sectoral, national and sub-national government plans, programmes, strategies and speeches
- the nature of changes in stakeholders interest, attitudes and/or behaviour
- the number and nature of written references to the research area in policy, sector, programme or business documents
- the scores in capacity assessments (when building partner or stakeholder capacity is one of the goals)
- assessed changes in language in the overall discourse.

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23 Outcome mapping (also mentioned as a tool to help you develop your ToC on page 6) is a useful way to trace changes in behaviour, relationships, actions and activities of people, groups and organisations you work with and/or try to influence. OM uses 'expect to see', 'like to see' and 'love to see' categorisation in order to track the desired changes.

3.6 Context: how does the changing political, economic, social and organisational climate affect your plans and intended outcomes?

The last M&E area involves monitoring and evaluating political, economic and organisational context, and changes happening within it. Justifying an assessment that a project has made a plausible and distinct contribution to sustainable change means recognising how the context has altered and what others factors may have contributed to this. It is important to recognise the importance of any change; a poor of understanding of context may lead to an inappropriate focus on greater number of insignificant changes rather than a single, significant one.

i) Clarifying the purpose and deciding the appropriate intensity and timing to monitor and evaluate

Monitoring political, economic and organisational context can sometimes be overlooked in policy research projects. While it can be quite common to conduct sectoral analysis, stakeholder mapping or context studies before the research project starts to inform its strategy and design, regular context monitoring or evaluation activities are not often included in M&E plans. However, tracking and explaining changes in context during the lifetime of the project can have significant implications on several research aspects and other M&E areas.

First, context analysis should inform strategy and direction, and agenda setting (that is, strategy should be responsive to the context). Whether it is a change in a country's legislation (e.g. Tanzania's new law on using statistics)[24] or an unexpected event (e.g. an earthquake in Nepal when your research is on resilience) it has an effect on your plans, and may change whether what you are trying to do is still appropriate and relevant.

Second, context analysis can help you frame your research and communicate outputs for greater uptake, e.g. what kind of information is needed or seen as credible after the change and by whom? Third, it can explain why uptake of your research is happening (or not) and why you are seeing (or not) the outcomes you expected. For example, in a multi-country project you might discover that your research had good uptake and lots of influence in one country but none in other. Investigating context can shed light on the observed differences.

Assessing context is often done intuitively by researchers or managers working with a research topic. However, whenever possible it is useful to do it systematically at regular intervals, using comparisons – for instance, different project sites or sectors. If your M&E resources are limited you can still do light sectoral analysis or alignment, interest influence matrix (AIIM) mapping exercises, both at the beginning of the project, when producing a baseline, and after the project.

Table 12: Why monitor and evaluate context?

Programme characteristics	Purpose of M&E
Multi-year	To capture the changes in context during the lifetime of the project, including who else is doing what. To inform strategy and direction.
Multi-partner	To capture whether and how partners are affected (differently) by the changing context. To explain variations in uptake and observed outcomes.
Multi-country	To inform other monitoring efforts about how different political, social, economic and environmental issues might have affected the programme's achievement. To also help explain variations in uptake and observed outcomes.
Multi-component	To capture whether and how components are affected (differently) by the changing context and what this implies for how they can best contribute to change.
Demand-led	To assess whether and how changes in the context affect demand, and whether there are new possibilities or risks.

24 Tanzanian Parliament passed a new law in May 2015 limiting the publication of data to only those from the government's own Bureau of Statistics (NBS). However, there are some confusion and different opinions how the law is interpreted. The bill: www.parliament.go.tz/assets/uploads/files/64318-A-BILL--STATISTICS-ACT--2013.pdf, clarification: www.nbs.go.tz).

ii) Identifying key M&E questions

Key M&E questions for context look at changes, opportunities and constraints in external environment (policy area, country, sector etc.) and examine how those changes can have an effect on and inform research strategy, activities, uptake and outcomes. They can also focus on policy actors and their involvement in the policy area or issue. All of these questions require a considerable amount of time and resources for analysis to be properly undertaken.

Key M&E questions for context typically include:

- What opportunities and constraints exist in the external environment?
- What political, economic or organisational changes are taking place? How do the changes affect the research plans and activities?
- Are there any relevant, high-profile, unexpected or electoral events or new ideas that can be capitalised on?
- What influences decision-making? What type of evidence is seen as credible?
- Who else is working in the same policy space? What are their agendas and motivations?

iii) Identifying approaches, methods and indicators

Approaches and methods for monitoring and analysing context tend to be qualitative and require in-depth analysis such as different types of political context studies and stakeholder analysis. These studies can be conducted first, to provide a project M&E baseline, and can then be repeated at certain points over the course of the project lifetime (midterm, end) to map changes against this baseline. Data collection usually includes several methods, such as conducting literature reviews, stakeholder and/or bellwether interviews.

Qualitative analyses can be complemented with quantitative monitoring indicators such as the number of government regulations or amount of public spending in the research topic area. However, descriptions of these regulations and changes are much more informative than enumerative data, and so it may be appropriate to focus your M&E efforts on targeted baseline and end-of-project context analysis, especially if you have limited budget.

Which approach or approaches you choose depends on what type of context questions you are most interested in. If your key context questions are around influential actors, their interests and power distribution, as well as changes happening in those relationships, political economy analysis or a similar approach might be an appropriate choice. This kind of analysis typically includes doing a stakeholder mapping exercise, AIIM matrixes or other types of stakeholder analysis. Social network analysis can also look into actors and relationships but it usually addresses different sets of questions. Approaches mapping political context include KPP – Knowledge, Policy, Power (RAPID, ODI), Drivers of Change (DFID), Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (World Bank) and Power Analysis (Sida).

Similarly, context indicators should be specific to context the project is operating. Examples of context indicators include:

- changes in national laws and regulations related to the research area
- changes in levels of transparency or participation in key processes
- description of government policies, regulations and practice that promote or are linked with the research topic or area
- amount and percentage of public spending on the sector research is focusing on
- number and description of policy changes in favour of (or against) research area.

Box 8: The 'wrapper' around the cable of evidence: using stories of change to report and learn about outcomes and context

The cable of evidence in the DFID Accountable Grant structures the way the monitoring team collects and monitors evidence of progress against the logical framework. This is summarised in periodic stories of change that each component uses to demonstrate how it has made a plausible and distinct contribution to change: these provide the 'wrapper' around the cable that hold the individual strands together. Each component puts forward a selection of stories of change at the mid-point of the grant, and these are then updated annually. They are shared with the donor to demonstrate progress, but are primarily seen as a learning vehicle for the teams. The stories of change are structured as follows:

- **The introduction.** Offering a brief insight into the story that will be told, including information such as the location, the date, the moment in the timeline of the project, and where the story fits within the organisation(s)/stakeholder(s) involved.
- **The challenge.** Outlining the 'as was' policy discourse, attitudes, behaviour, processes and/or content at the time the story began (which could be before the project began). A challenge might be a problem, threat or opportunity.
- **The action.** Describing the activities undertaken and outputs delivered by the project to address the challenge and bring about change, and mapping the sequence of events before, during and after the key 'change points'.
- **The wider environment.** Describing changes in the wider environment that may have affected how the project was implemented, how stakeholders behaved, etc.
- **The result.** Setting out the change in policy discourse, attitudes, behaviour, process or content resulting from the project's actions; as well as any areas where the project appears to be stuck. It also gives a sense of the likely trajectory of the project, and its impacts, in the longer term.
- **The conclusions.** Examining the factors that seemed to be critical to achieving the outcomes, but written in a reflective rather than a self-promoting way that outlines difficulties and failures as well as successes.
- **The sequel.** Summarising what happens next, whether this seems to be the end of the story or whether the project will continue to track changes. Crucially, this section also asks teams to reflect on how they will actively incorporate the lessons learned from compiling and evidencing the story of change into planning for the next stage of the project.
- **References.** Directing the reader to any additional sources of information that are being used to support the story of change.

Each strand of the cable is reported to DFID for each of the components, together with one or two stories of change. Deciding on which stories to tell is a matter of judgement by the project teams: presenting them as learning vehicles rather than external communications pieces means that the teams can be frank about what went well and not so well.

Strategy and direction, management and governance, and value for money are reported separately to DFID. Value for money is reported in terms of the unit cost of each of the different types of output produced: while it is recognised that this does not really represent 'value' to DFID, it is a helpful way of demonstrating that over a five-year programme baseline costs are not creeping up, the funding is being spent efficiently and it is possible to link outcomes to specific outputs – giving an indication of those outputs' effectiveness.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this guidance note is to provide a comprehensive but flexible model for how an M&E framework for a policy research project can be designed and structured, with practical examples from several ongoing or recently ended policy research projects. It does not attempt to provide comprehensive guidance on all aspects of developing an M&E system, for example how to collect, manage, analyse and use data. There are, however, a number of helpful references for these areas, included in the additional resources section.

The framework of six M&E areas focuses on tracking changes more closely and paying attention to often-neglected elements of strategy and management. We recommend all six areas are chosen for designing the M&E system but advise that you are clear about the rationale for why to include them and that you are realistic and flexible how the framework is applied in the project.

Ultimately, many of the choices about deciding the scope, intensity and timing of the M&E areas will depend largely on the resources available – personnel, time and funds as well as capacity, experience and skills of those people dedicated to, and involved in, the M&E work. It is better to be realistic and practical about what can be done and how much time people can truly spend on M&E activities, rather than trying to do everything possible but in a hasty or unsystematic manner.

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Additional resources

- 3ie Policy Impact Toolkit. http://policyimpacttoolkit.3ieimpact.org
- DFID (2013) Research Uptake: A guide for DFID funded research programmes. London: DFID. Accessible online: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/200088/Research_uptake_guidance.pdf
- Evidence Based Policy in Development Network: https://partnerplatform.org/ebpdn
- The International Evaluation Partnership Initiative M&E platform. http://mymande.org
- Research to Action website: www.researchtoaction.org
- Mansfield, W. and Grunewald, P. (2013) The use of Indicators for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Knowledge Management and Knowledge Brokering in International Development. Report of a workshop held at the Institute for Development Studies 8th March 2013. www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Knowledgeindicatorsworkshopreport8thMarch2013.pdf

Annex A: Overview table of examples of key questions, typical approaches and indicators for the six M&E areas

1. Strategy and direction

Key questions	Typical approaches and tools	Example indicators
• Is theory of change / programme theory appropriate, logical and credible? How it is been developed? Has it changed? Are assumptions in the ToC still relevant? • Are project strategies (such knowledge management, stakeholder engagement, gender and communication strategies) aligned with the ToC, with each other, and adopted? • How can these strategies be improved? • How appropriate and relevant are programme strategies for meeting the goals of the project? • Are the right stakeholders being engaged? Is mapping key stakeholders conducted on a regular basis? • Are selected research questions and themes in line with funder's or country's priorities or strategies? • What differences are there in strategies across different contexts (e.g. partners, countries, sectors)? What has produced these differences?	• Reviewing (quarterly or annual) reports, other key documents and strategies • Reviewing programme theories and/or ToC and how it has been developed/adapted over time • Conducting workshops and meetings with key partners and stakeholders to identify gaps or lacks in implementation and where strategies and plans need adapting • Informal or formal discussions on steering group or management meetings • Stakeholder analysis social network analysis (to investigate who is whether right people are engaged and how) • The alignment, interest and influence matrix (AIIM) (can be used for strategy and direction, but also, especially if repeated at certain time points for outcomes and context)	• Development and implementation of key strategies and documents • Descriptions of changes and gaps in quarterly/annual reports and key strategies and documents • The extent to which strategy is responsive to the observed changes in context (M&E area 6) • Consistency of progress across components and/or partners

2. Management and governance

Key questions	Typical approaches and tools	Example indicators
Overall management: • To what extent are deliverables being completed to comply with programme timetables? • Is the work plan realistic in terms of timing, staffing and resources? • How well are internal systems working to implement the strategy (to time and budget)? • How are risks managed? • In case of data management (platform): are data management systems flexible and user-friendly? How platforms being used by relevant groups? **Budget and value-for-money:** • Is budget spent against plans? If not, why not? • What has been done to ensure responsible financial management? • Is the project providing value for money? How? **Partnerships:** • How are partnerships fostered? • Are there capacity needs to be addressed? • How are research partners engaging and sharing information among themselves? • Has the scope and depth of collaboration with and between partners increased since the programme inception? If not, why? **Decision-making and governance:** • How decisions are made, with what criteria and how are they documented? Are they consistent, inclusive and transparent? • What governance systems are in place and are they as effective as they could be?	• Monitoring and reviewing agendas and minutes of internal meetings • Reviewing progress reports such as quarterly or annual reports (to board and/or donors) and, internal financial management and reporting (processes, reports) • Reviewing internal strategies, procedures and processes • Risk registers • Visiting partners and/or reviewing visit reports • Assessing performance and capacity of partner organisations and organisational self-assessments • Appreciative inquiry[25] • Stories of change[26]	• Development and existence of decision-making mechanisms and governance structures • The extent which plans are met and budget is used • The degree to which risks do not materialise, or the effectiveness of countermeasures put in place • The degree of inclusiveness and transparency of decision-making mechanisms and governance structures • The degree of adaptation to which plans are changed based on results and findings • Changes in capacity (from baseline assessments) • Frequency and nature of internal communication channels • Staff turnover

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25 For more information, see: http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/appreciative_inquiry.

26 'A story of change is a case study method that investigates the contribution of an intervention to specific outcomes. It does not report on activities and outputs but rather on the mechanisms and pathways by which the intervention was able to influence a particular change, such as a change in government policy, the establishment of a new programme or the enactment of new legislation,' ROMA (2014), p. 52.

3. Outputs

Key questions	Typical approaches and tools	Example indicators
• What outputs have been produced? • What has been their quality and relevance? • How does this compare to what was planned? • Are outputs aligned with strategies (overall strategy, gender strategy, capacity building strategies)? • How can these outputs be improved? • Are the research methods appropriate to the research questions? • What differences are there in outputs in different contexts (e.g. partners, countries, sectors)? What has produced these differences? • To what extent are the outputs being delivered in a way that represents value for money?	• Review against plans • Quality review processes (peer-review, internal reviews) • After-action reviews (after events, workshops, seminars) • Web stats: Google analytics, Twitter feeds, downloads, site visits (can be also seen as uptake)	• Type, number, quality and relevance of outputs produced (publications, blogs, infographics, films etc.) per component/partner • Number of peer-reviewed journal articles (or similar) published or accepted directly generated by the research project in open access formats (authorship disaggregated by gender and membership in a southern institution) • Number, quality and relevance of organised national and international conferences and seminars and other key events • Downloads of publications (can be also see as a first step in uptake) • Number, quality and relevance of presentations in national and international conferences and other important third-party events • Description of quality review processes

4. Uptake

Key questions	Typical approaches and tools	Example indicators
• What outputs have been used by stakeholders and how? • Where, how and by who is research being cited, referenced, downloaded and shared? • How are key stakeholders articulating demand for research? • What is the initial feedback from users, influential stakeholders and/or target audience? • How are different groups (e.g. male/female, junior/senior officials) using and sharing outputs? • How can uptake be improved and strengthened?	• Direct feedback from stakeholders e.g. emails, calls • Web statistics, such as downloads, shares • Feedback and user surveys • Social media statistics and feedback, such as Twitter and Facebook comments and shares, comments in blogs • Attendance lists and feedback from events and workshops • Reflection in learning and/or annual partner meetings • Citation analysis • Altmetrics	• Number of downloads of documents • Number and origin of website visits • Number and quality of traditional media (newspaper, radio, tv etc.) mentions • Number and quality of social media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn etc.) mentions • Number and diversity (and origin) of citations to research in journals articles, or other research outputs • Number of requests to speak at key events • Number and quality of initial feedback (e.g. using likert scale from very positive to very negative) • Usefulness of seminars, stakeholder meetings and other events (e.g. using likert scale from very useful to not at all useful)

5. Outcomes

Key questions	Typical approaches and tools	Example indicators
• To what extent has research influenced policy (e.g. legislation, guidelines, resource allocation)? • To what extent has research shifted public agendas – what gets discussed and how it is framed? • What longer-term results have been achieved? • What has been the contribution (or attribution) of research project-related activities on observed changes? • What type of changes have been observed in target groups behaviour? • How sustainable are observed changes likely to be? • Are the changes mainly at individual or institutional levels? • What differences are there in results seen in different contexts (sectors, sites, partners)? What has produced these differences? • Are there indications on capacity development in partners showing up as improved practices or processes? • What has worked and not worked and why? • How does this compare to similar interventions?	• Capacity assessments (in cases where increasing partner or stakeholder capacity is one the goals) • Structured stakeholder interviews • Bellwether interviews • Outcome mapping,[27] outcome harvesting • Most significant change • Stories of change • Episode studies • Contribution analysis • Process tracing • Time series analysis and experimental and quasi-experimental impact evaluation approaches to some extent. See example Beynon *et al.* (2012).	• Number and nature of documented cases of shifts in policy thinking identified in sectoral, national and sub-national government plans, programmes, strategies and speeches • Nature of changes in stakeholders interest, attitudes and/or behaviour • Number and nature of written references to the research area in policy, sector, programme or business documents • Scores in capacity assessments (when building partner or stakeholder capacity is one of the goals) • Assessment of changes in language in the overall discourse

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27 Outcome mapping (also mentioned as a tool to help you develop your ToC in page 6) is a useful way to map out changes in behaviour, relationships, actions and activities of people, groups and organisations you work with and/or try to influence. OM uses expect to see, like to see and love to see categorisation in order to track the desired changes.

6. Context

Key questions	Typical approaches and tools	Example indicators
• What opportunities and constraints exist in the external environment? • What political, economic or organisational changes are taking place? • How do the changes affect the research plans and activities? • When, where, how are decisions being made? (from ROMA) • A there any unexpected events or new ideas that can be capitalised on? • Who are policy actors involved? What are their agendas and motivations? How much influence do they have? Who are they influencing? How are they related formally or informally? (from ROMA) • What kind of new evidence is emerging related to your research topic? Who is producing it? What kind of discussion it raises? • What influences decision-making? What type of evidence is seen as credible? • Who else is working in the same policy space? What are their agendas and motivations?	• Political Economy Analysis • Stakeholder mapping • AIIM (RAPID, ODI) • Drivers of Change (DFID) • Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (World Bank) • Power Analysis (Sida) • KPP – Knowledge, Policy, Power (RAPID, ODI)	• Changes in national laws and regulations related to the research area • Changes in levels of transparency or participation in key processes • Description of government policies, regulations and practice that promote or are linked with the research topic or area • Amount and percentage of public spending on the sector research is focusing on • Number and description of policy changes in favour of (or against) research area

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