



# DLP

Policy and Practice for Developmental  
Leaders, Elites and Coalitions

DEVELOPMENTAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Background Paper **12**

## Monitoring & Evaluation when Politics Matters

Notes from Program Experience

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**The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP)** is an international policy initiative informed by targeted research and directed by an independent steering committee. DLP is supported by a global network of partners and currently receives its core funding from the Australian aid program.

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## 01

## Introduction

The international community has increasingly come to acknowledge that ‘politics matters’<sup>1</sup> for development, and consequently there is a small, but growing, number of projects and programs that are seeking to ‘work politically’. But what does this new way of working mean for monitoring and evaluation practice? The challenges of thinking and working politically – of engaging with local leaders, elites and coalitions in the struggle to achieve sustainable developmental change through local political processes – suggest that conventional monitoring and evaluation practices may not be sufficient to fully capture value and impact in the context of this kind of complexity. But what can practitioners, program managers and donors do about it?

To address this issue DLP held a series of three workshops to begin to develop ideas about how different monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices could be applied to these complex contexts. Over the past year these workshops have brought together a range of organisations<sup>2</sup>, all of which have programs focused on supporting local leaderships and coalitions, who are working for change in their communities.

The first workshop introduced a number of key concepts – such as the importance of being able to deal with complexity and non-linearity, the links between individual and collective empowerment, and the different ways in which we can view power relations (including formal and informal expressions of power, and gender and cultural experiences of power) – and asked participants to share the

different approaches and ‘theories of change’ used in their programs. After this workshop, participants were asked to try to incorporate the lessons they had learnt into their own ongoing monitoring and evaluation practice. The second and third workshops then focused on the ways in which the participants had been able to do this, how successful they had been, and what lessons they could share about the practical application of these ideas and concepts.

**Box 1: Working in ‘real time’**

“The challenges of preparing technical analysis, maneuvering in the political arena, building coalitions in ‘real-time’ are enormous. Most development professionals are comfortable with, and stay within, the technical dimension. Armed with defined terms of references with clear timetables and outputs, their world is predictable and rational.

“In contrast, the world of reform and politics is murky and uncertain. Relationship-building, networking, and coalition-building are primary ingredients for success. Some will join, others will drop out and still others will betray the reform to work for the opponents of reform. It requires constant and astute understanding of individuals and dynamics.”

(Faustino, 2012: 9)

The workshops provided the participants, and DLP, with some interesting and useful lessons about the challenges of monitoring and evaluating ‘working politically’. This paper aims to share some of those key lessons, focusing particularly on how participants were able to address a number of well-known challenges<sup>3</sup> to assessing the processes and outcomes of ‘working politically’.

<sup>1</sup> See Leftwich & Wheeler (2011) & Bavister Gould & Leftwich (2012, forthcoming).

<sup>2</sup> The organisations participating in the workshop series included: The Developmental Leadership Program, Oxfam Australia, Leadership PNG, The Asia Foundation, The Pacific Leadership Program, the AusAID Scholarships program, The AusAID Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE), the AusAID Governance and Social Development Branch and the AusAID Indonesia Knowledge Sector Initiative.

<sup>3</sup> See Roche and Kelly (2012) p 6-7 for a summary of some of these challenges.

# 02

## The Implications of Working Politically

### Technical and political assessment

Working politically requires a level of engagement with local leaders, networks and coalitions that brings with it a recognition of the importance of informal relationships and institutions, as well as the formal organisations and power structures more often identified in program management processes and analysed in monitoring and evaluation practice. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks for these programs, therefore, need to be able to analyse both technical and political aspects of the work; to understand and assess the – less tangible – results of program engagement in these informal processes and relationships as well as the values and outputs of more technical inputs.

### Assessing long term impact

A further lesson from the workshop discussions was the recognition that some of this information may take some time to emerge, and that the full impact and outcomes of this kind of work may not be evident until some time after a particular program has come to an end. However, programs still need to know whether they are on the right track: whether their approaches are likely to lead to the desired change, and whether their strategies and stakeholder engagements are appropriate for the change being sought.

### Attribution for donors

It is also clear that donors want to be able to identify results during the program's life. Donors want to understand the specific contribution made by their resources, and how this can be attributed directly to a given intervention.

### Multiple purposes of M&E

During discussions in the first workshop it quickly became clear that no single monitoring and evaluation system would meet all these needs. There are multiple objectives for monitoring and evalua-

tion that include accountability (both upwards and downwards), program improvement, learning, and communication. Programs that are 'working politically' need to pay careful attention to how to collect and communicate information that will meet these multiple purposes, and clearly no single method would be sufficient to achieve this.

Throughout the workshop series participants agreed to try to develop monitoring and evaluation approaches that would address the various challenges, as well as the needs of different stakeholders. The rest of this paper explores the key lessons of that experimentation.

## 03

## Meeting the Monitoring and Evaluation Challenge

**Having a theory of change that provides an explanation for the program**

Having an evidence-based theory of change that can identify the complexity of the operating environment and provide a good rationale for program strategy, is critical to being able to explain and communicate the program more widely. It also provides the basis for identifying the important factors to assess throughout the development of a program.

While there is currently a lot of discussion about theories of change in international development programming, much of this assumes a 'simple' or at best 'complicated'<sup>4</sup>, operating environment where causal links can be drawn between external inputs and actions, and eventual outcomes. Participants at the DLP workshops suggested that these simple linear, or 'systems', explanations were often inadequate for the complex arenas in which their programs took place.

Instead, the theories about what drives change in often 'complex' program environments put forward by the workshop participants were more often based upon analysis of political and social relations and processes as well as careful analysis of influential stakeholders and the relationships between them.

This kind of analysis can provide an informed starting point for program strategy. By providing a rationale and justification for change theories and associated action strategies, programs are in a better position to build and maintain stakeholder engagement and support. This also provides a useful basis upon which to decide what should be measured and assessed.

**Box 2: The Oxfam International Youth Program (OIYP)**

OIYP is a global network of over 1000 young people, called action partners, working with their communities to create positive, equitable and sustained change. The OIYP theory of change is based upon five interrelated domains: empowerment of individuals; building networks and coalitions for collective action; changes in formal and informal power relationships in communities; changes in policy and institutions; and change in people's lives.

The program's monitoring and evaluation is focused on understanding the outcomes in each domain as well as the interaction between them. Through this OIYP hope to learn how the program can improve and work more effectively. To this end, they have identified desired outcomes across each domain and developed focus-questions that need to be explored in their M&E framework to examine their progress towards those outcomes.

Using these focus-questions as a guide, OIYP evaluated one of their major project areas, looking at change across the domains. While change in some of the domains was not yet evident, using a mixture of methods including semi structured interviews, document reviews, third-party reporting and participatory enquiry, they were able to identify significant change in three of the domains (empowerment of individuals, building coalitions and networks, and changes in community relationships).

These significant changes in individuals, networks and communities provided useful information for program learning, in particular about the interrelationship between the five domains and how to better effect change in the remaining domains. It also provided solid information to communicate to stakeholders about the outcomes of the program to date.

(Oxfam International Youth Partnerships, 2012)

<sup>4</sup> See Roche & Kelly (2012) for an explanation of 'simple', 'complicated' and 'complex' operating environments.

### Box 3: Coalitions for Change in the Philippines

The Coalitions for Change program (CfC) is an initiative of AusAID (Manila) and the Asia Foundation in the Philippines. CfC works with 'change agents' within government and civil society to identify and form issue-based networks or coalitions for developmental change. Those networks and coalitions are given resources and capacity building support to develop quality evidence and analysis of their issue. This provides the basis for their engagement with the government, enabling them to influence the government on that particular issue, contributing to policy development and implementation. CfC's theory of how change can be supported in this way is based upon extensive analysis of AusAID support for civil society within the Philippines and the history of reform and policy change in the country over many years.

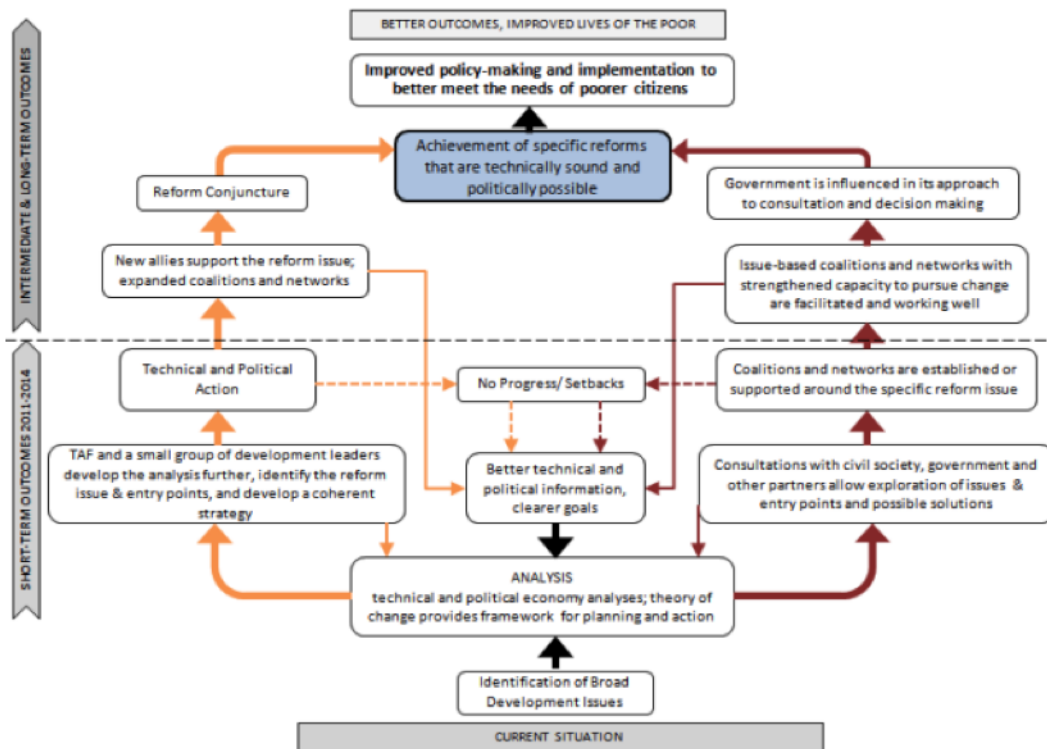
The program is very sensitive to the complex environment within which it operates, as well as the need to take a strategic approach to understand change over the long-term.

“Successful advocacy efforts are characterized not by their ability to proceed along a predefined track, but by their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances. The most effective advocacy and idea-generating organizations... are not defined by a single measurable goal, but by a general organizing principle that can be adapted to hundreds of situations... The key is not strategy so much as strategic capacity: the ability to read the shifting environment of politics for subtle signals of change, to understand the opposition, and to adapt deftly” (The Asia Foundation, 2012).

At the same time the program has developed a diagram of its approach and strategy in order to communicate to its many stakeholders, as well as providing a means of identifying key areas where assessment (and changes to program strategy) ought to be undertaken throughout the life of the program.

(The Asia Foundation, 2012)

### CfC Outcomes Pathways



### Short-term results in a long-term program

While all the organisations that participated in the workshops have been working towards long-term, substantial social change, they were also able to identify short- and medium-term results. For many of the programs in the early stages of operation the short-term or intermediate changes noted included differences in individuals and organisations.

#### Box 4: Developmental Leadership Program – Assessing Uptake

The key aims of DLP are first, to improve understanding about the critical role of leaders, elites and coalitions in forging the locally legitimate institutions that promote sustainable growth, political stability and inclusive social development; and, second, to embed a better understanding of these processes in the thinking, policy and practices of the aid community. DLP's M&E therefore focuses on the following performance questions:

- What has been produced?
- Are the 'products' reaching people?
- Are people talking about the products? What are they saying?
- Are people using the products?
- Have development actors' policies and practices changed?

This has involved: tracking downloads of DLP publications (c.3,000 per month, including research papers, background papers, concept papers, and workshop reports); analysing citation of DLP research and ideas in formal publications, the blogosphere, and agencies program proposals, reports and evaluations; and, assessing influence within AusAID in particular.

In looking at contributions to change within large organisations such as AusAID, DLP acknowledges that there will be many influences upon staff and management. In order to assess the more significant outcomes such as change in the policies and practices of AusAID staff, the program is using outcome mapping alongside key informant interviews to track changes in the knowledge and understanding of DLP-type processes over time. The interview process allows them to ask not only what outcomes are being observed but also to explore the range of influences and determinants that might have led to those outcomes.

(Developmental Leadership Program, 2012a)

For example, the AusAID funded Indonesian Knowledge Sector Program was able to identify the changes in the quality of information produced

by research organisations supported by their pilot program. Oxfam International Youth Partnerships (OIYP) and Leadership PNG were likewise able to identify changes in the people who have participated in their programs and, further were able to identify and attribute those changes to specific aspects of their programs.

In the medium-term, some programs were in a position to identify how people's actions had changed as a result of program inputs and the outcomes of those changed actions. For example, the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) was able to track the way young leaders from Pacific countries used the new skills and capacities acquired as a result of PLP support, in a campaign to raise awareness around issues of youth unemployment across the Pacific region. This in turn led to increased awareness of the issue among Pacific Island leaders and a resolution for action at the Pacific Island Forum Leaders meeting.

#### Box 5: Oxfam International Youth Partnerships

In order to assess long-term change to which the program has contributed, OIYP is about to undertake a retrospective study to explore the data and material it has collected over 12 years of operation.

The study will use SenseMaker® a software program that provides a platform on which to gather, process, and visualise 'fragments' of knowledge. These fragments will include: original data on the Action partners; information from a small grants programs and other programs and events; reports, emails and correspondence between stakeholders; findings from more formal evaluations, reviews and impact assessments; and data on the OIYP database.

(Oxfam International Youth Partnerships, 2012)

Short- and medium-term changes do not tell the whole story, but systematic collection of data about these changes can be important for donor accountability. It also provides a useful base for understanding the causes and processes of longer-term changes as these become evident.

### Understanding contribution to long-term change

When trying to assess significant, and usually long-term, social change, it is more realistic to use moni-



toring and evaluation systems to identify a program's contribution to change. Rather than asking "did it work?", it is more helpful to ask "did it make a difference?". This allows space for various causes to be identified and to examine how, together, they contributed to the observed change. Programs working to support local leaders and coalitions to influence or act for developmental change are able to acknowledge that they are not the only influence.

By using appropriate methods they can test the significance of their particular influence and contribution against other processes and interventions.

#### Box 6: Value for Money & the Pacific Leadership Program

In 2011 a cost-effectiveness analysis of the program was undertaken in order to assess the relative costs and benefits (efficiency and effectiveness) of the PLP delivery model in comparison to other modalities. The costs were estimated by developing proxies for different delivery models and comparing these with PLP's own costs. The benefits analysis focused on those aspects of PLP that represented services or benefits that the program delivers over and above the other models.

This was done through a formal survey of AusAID and PLP partners, supplemented with structured interviews with a sample of stakeholders, and an analysis of other M&E data. The survey and interviews tested the existence of these additional benefits and the results showed that stakeholders considered them to be of significance.

Overall the study concluded that although PLP is more expensive than other modalities the program "delivers benefits and services considered to be very important by partners and valued by AusAID and unlikely to be achievable under other delivery models" (this included in particular, the program's ability to be flexible and responsive). That is, the program achieved increased effectiveness for its increased costs.

(The Pacific Leadership Program, 2012)

The participating organisations adopted a mix of strategies to explore their contribution to change within these complex political processes. These have included:

- direct observation,
- asking participants and observers,

- using databases and software to assist analysis and pattern detection,
- organisational capacity assessments,
- value for money assessments,
- social network analysis,
- case study narratives,
- developing and testing theories of change,
- cross-checking findings through independent reviews and evaluations.

In a number of cases this has meant putting some effort into what might be called 'getting the basics right', that is, capturing basic data about participants in leadership programs, or tracking the use of publications and research products. This provides an evidence base to start to compare the influence of a particular donor program against other influences on change in a particular context. In other cases it has involved investing in different methods to analyse existing data that the programs have collected over several years.

#### Box 7: AusAID Policy Dialogue Evaluation

For the evaluation of AusAID policy dialogue activities, the evaluation team developed a hypothesis of policy dialogue 'success' based on a review of international practice in policy dialogue. From this a number of likely success factors were identified:

1. AusAID and its counterparts approach the dialogue with reasonable clarity of intent and reasonable expectations.
2. AusAID and its counterparts have comparable negotiating capital — values are balanced, and all parties engage on relatively equal terms and with equally good information and analysis.
3. AusAID staff and their counterparts have a shared and credible evidence base on which to base their engagement.
4. The fora in which dialogue take place are neutral and provide space for formal and informal, technical and political engagement.

These factors were then 'tested' by looking at case studies of 'successful' policy dialogue, as well as a survey of AusAID staff and stakeholder interviews.

(AusAID, 2012a)

In programs that involve 'working politically', relationships are important. Especially relationships between influential groups and individuals who can act together for effective change.

In recognition of this, some programs have also sought to elicit feedback from allies and partners, using formal and informal methods as well as independent third party assessors, in order to assess the quality of the relationships they have. PLP has gone a step further and tried to use this feedback to assess the value for money of the modality it uses to support leaders and coalitions (see box 6).

Others have sought to track the achievements of those involved in leadership support programs through tracer studies and alumni surveys. A common challenge for these kinds of programs is to assess the counterfactual, i.e. what would have happened without the program? In most cases programs are attempting to use theory-based monitoring and evaluation approaches, case studies, direct observation and participatory methods to address this issue. As recent reviews suggest, these can be credible alternatives to experimental approaches, which require the use of 'control' or 'comparison' groups. While experimental methods have their place, for small-scale programs where the sample size would not be large enough for experimentation, or for complex multi-stakeholder programs where variables are unable to be controlled, programs need to look to high quality and rigorous qualitative methodologies to identify impact.

In this sense most of these programs are seeking to understand their *contribution* to the broader changes associated with their interventions, as well as the more directly attributable outcomes. This usually involves verifying their theory or hypothesis about how change happens, which includes an analysis of other influencing factors, and thus seeks to reduce uncertainty about the contribution being made as much as it seeks to 'prove' impact.

### **Assessing the quality of the program response**

Another approach to assessing programs that are 'working politically' is to build from current practice knowledge to look at what is known to be 'good practice'.

DLP's research has made a major contribution to this area, identifying several features that are readily present in effective social change processes. These features include: programs that have a solid basis of political and social analysis of the context; investment in the emergence of local developmental leaders and coalitions who are able to act for change; having the flexibility and capacity to act quickly when critical junctures or opportunities arise; supporting locally led processes and development solutions; and, working for change over the longer term.

#### **Box 8: AusAID Governance Performance Assessment Framework**

Following the adoption by AusAID of the new Aid Policy Framework (AusAID, 2012a) the agency's governance sector was required to develop a performance assessment framework (PAF). This was designed to be used as a resource by country programs to help them think about results monitoring for governance projects and programs. In addition the PAF is intended to encourage the testing of common assumptions, and ongoing performance tracking and program improvement in governance work.

The team developing the PAF saw this as an opportunity to develop a useful and meaningful framework that tackles some of the complexities of governance work. At the same time they recognised the dangers of producing something that limited the possible measures of effective governance and thereby "works against sophisticated governance assistance" (Carothers & de Gramont, 2011: 2).

By engaging country program staff the team developed a set of fundamental areas that would need to be tracked across all governance programs. These included: contextual analysis; flexibility and responsiveness; investment in relationships; commitment to long-term approaches; promotion of local ownership; support of local leadership processes; involvement of partners in performance assessment; and mainstreaming of these across sectoral activities.

In addition they proposed a 'basket approach' to measures and indicators, which includes a mix of quantitative indicators, qualitative markers and evaluative questions, as well as mix of short, medium and long term measures, including progress/interim indicators. It is intended that country programs 'mix and match' and tailor performance questions and indicators to their contexts.

(AusAID, 2012a)

One way to test how well development programs are able to function in a political context is to check that the programs include the appropriate strategies and resources to support these features. Further, that program implementation staff either have, or are being supported to develop, the skills and capacities required to manage these features. For example AusAID's new approach to performance assessment of its governance programs (see Box 8) assesses these programs against several 'fundamentals', which are considered essential as a basis for effective governance work.

### Monitoring and analysis that is timely and responsive

As noted above, 'working politically' requires the ability to quickly utilise opportunities for change, particularly when there are 'tipping points' or 'critical junctures' where particular interventions could make a significant difference. Programs need to be flexible, adaptive, and able to readily test their continuing relevance to the political and social environment in which they operate. Useful monitoring in a context like this needs to be nimble and focused upon the actions at hand.

#### Box 9: 'On the Balcony' - PLP 'Reflection & Refocus' process

The PLP 'Reflection & Refocus' (R&R) process was established to create a regular six-monthly space for staff to reflect on their work and adapt their priorities for the next period. Whilst the team acknowledge that engagement is key to building relationships and 'real time' learning, from the time to time one needs to reserve a slot on 'the balcony' in order to take a step back from the frenetic action 'on the dance floor'.

The R&R process aims to create a safe space for 'courageous conversations'. The repertoire includes inviting 'critical friends' to provide input, imitating BBC's 'Hard Talk' interviews with senior managers, and exploring creative ways of analysing the program. This requires the discipline to plan for and protect the time necessary in busy people's schedules, as well as the leadership to ensure that it remains a priority as other demands emerge.

(Pacific Leadership Program, 2012)

At the same time it is important that monitoring and evaluation continues in a systematic way, enabling programs to collect the regular data they need for reporting and communicating with stakeholders.

The experience of workshop participants indicated that regular program-wide analysis was a critical feature in enabling this balance between systematic data collection and a flexible approach to program management. For example, PLP brings its whole-of-program personnel together every six months to consider the monitoring information collected over that time as well as to challenge and critically analyse the progress of the program (see box 9).

A regular analysis and reflection process, such as this, can enable a program to further develop its theory of change based on the evidence collected over the previous period, justifying their next steps and future direction.

A regular program commitment to reflect on past progress and outcomes, and to diagnose and assess future directions enables a program to flexibly manage, systematically document, and maintain understanding about changes to program rationale and direction.

### Resourcing effective communication

Many of the programs undertaken by the organisations represented at the DLP workshops are complex, 'messy' and difficult to communicate to stakeholders and external audiences. There are a number of challenges for identifying and communicating achievements for these kinds of programs, including:

- The nature of successes in this arena means that programs are rarely able to present short, sharp, quantifiable outcomes.
- Programs often do not wish to 'claim' the successes of others, especially where doing so might undermine local individuals and networks. As such, there is often a political requirement to keep successes 'under the radar' to safeguard long-term achievements.

On the other hand the communication of achievements can often be important, not least to members of the local networks and coalitions involved, and their supporters, as the evidence communicated can help to mobilise further action and broaden the coalitions for change. As such, investment in social media of some kind, in order to share stories of achievement between members of the networks or coalitions can prove valuable. Most of the programs represented at the DLP workshops use a mix of open and closed social media spaces to share these kinds of stories. If M&E and associated research is

going to meet the demands of multiple stakeholders and actually lead to program and policy adaptation, then the effective communication of what are often complex processes needs to be a central consideration.

#### Box 10: Leadership PNG, Alumni Achievements Communications and Social Media

The achievements of Leadership PNG's alumni are now being shared through the *Toktok Leadership* newsletter and other forms of social media. This includes using:

- **Facebook:** The Leadership PNG facebook page is a way of exchanging ideas about the promotion of leadership in PNG. It was created in the recognition of the idea that "You'll get a quicker response from posting a message on Facebook than sending out an email" (Leadership PNG, 2012).
- **Linked-In:** This targets the online working community and professionals, and allows alumni to network amongst and with professionals in their field, group, or sector. LPNG has an existing group on Linked-In where Alumni can set up their profiles and join this group.
- **A Google discussion mailing list:** This is used as more of a 'Distribution List', an efficient way of sending email to large groups of people.
- **A Leadership PNG Domain & Website ([www.leadershippng.org](http://www.leadershippng.org)):** This is currently under construction and which will become the 'face' of Leadership PNG to the rest of the world and a resource site for material on Leadership in Papua New Guinea.

(Leadership PNG, 2012)

From the perspective of a funding organisation, supporting partners and networks to 'tell their own story' can not only provide some concrete and verifiable examples of achievements, but can also allow the primary actors to determine which of these they chose to make public. In this sense the process can simultaneously strengthen domestic actors in their ability to promote change and provide donors or NGOs with some of the evidence of change that they need to satisfy their constituents.

#### Integrating and resourcing M&E (and related research and communication)

The workshop participants whose organisations had been implementing their programs for some time recognised that they had usually under-invested in adequate monitoring and evaluation activities. Furthermore, they noted that M&E still

tended to remain something of an administrative 'add-on' rather than being embedded into all stages of program planning and development.

Acknowledging this tendency, it is clear that there is a challenge for organisations to build the skills and capacity of staff and allies to both 'work politically' and to undertake appropriate monitoring of quality and outcomes of the work. Ideally, understanding program progress and the relationship between outcomes and program strategy would become the responsibility of all staff. A recent study by AusAID of its engagement in policy dialogue (see box 11) has concluded that this requires not only an investment in staff, but also that those staff are given the space, time and incentives to think and act in these ways.

#### Box 11: AusAID Policy Dialogue Evaluation

This study by the Office of Development Effectiveness sought to identify the internal and external factors that make policy dialogue successful in the contexts in which AusAID works, and to provide operational lessons for the agency and its staff.

They key findings are:

1. The key factors that support policy dialogue are predictable, manageable and replicable. AusAID's ability to be an effective policy dialogue partner is dependent on:
  - expressing the values the agency has about policy dialogue in its norms, standards, and ways of working,
  - supporting staff to 'think and work politically' and embedding policy dialogue into aid management,
  - making sure policy dialogue is properly resourced through staff time and complementary funding,
  - ensuring AusAID has staff with the right skills and capabilities to be credible dialogue partners.
2. The review found that whilst there are cases where policy dialogue is being done well, more needs to be done to ensure that these success factors are in place to systematically support good policy dialogue across the organisation. Key areas for improvement are enhancing staff skills and attributes, and developing better understandings of counterparts' priorities and positions (political analysis).

(AusAID, 2012a)

In addition, given the complex, non-linear nature of the change processes involved, in a number of cases more of a research-oriented approach to tracking and explaining change over time may be required. This is particularly the case when programs have the potential to influence policy, either by testing pilot activities or by developing more robust theory. This may require partnerships with research institutes or universities, and/or hiring research staff to broker these relationships.

Separating out some of the longer term research or evaluation work from the more immediate monitoring can ensure that attention is given to in-depth data collection over time. In addition it means that hard-pressed program staff are not overwhelmed by expectations.

## 04

## Conclusion & Areas for Further Exploration

Clearly, building appropriate monitoring and evaluation frameworks for politically informed and focused development work is more challenging than assessing simple technical approaches to development change. Equally clear, however, is that whilst it may be challenging, it is also intrinsic to the good management and implementation of such programs. The DLP workshops concluded that monitoring and evaluation of 'working politically' was both feasible and necessary in order to build the evidence base for the value of such approaches.

Many questions and areas of further exploration remain following the workshops. Three areas emerged as critically important.

1. Despite the start that has been made in this area by DLP, there is certainly space for more **development of meta-theories of change, which would build the evidence base that could encourage greater donor investment in political approaches to change.** In turn, further development of meta-theories would enable individual programs to focus on more detailed assessment of their own outcomes rather than having to develop a new in-depth rationale for each and every intervention.
2. All of the programs that were involved in this exercise understand that the formation and function of networks and coalitions is a critical component of their work. The capacity of these alliances to create and seize political opportunities for developmental change lies at the heart of these initiatives. **The capacity to read and respond to changing circumstances is therefore a key success factor in increasing the probability of progressive change, and there is a clear recognition that more needs to be done to assess progress in this area.**
3. A final, strong message that emerged from these workshops was **the importance of being engaged in a broader debate about the results and value for money agenda, as currently pursued by some donors.** It is clear that programs that are 'working politically' do not lend themselves to simple cause-and-effect analysis and neatly attributable results. It will therefore be important to argue for the space within and between agencies, to trial appropriate approaches and methods that are tailored to these types of programs.

These workshops provided valuable opportunities to share ideas and experiences about the challenges of M&E for programs involved in 'messy' partnerships, and non-linear change. The participants expressed a strong desire to continue sharing innovations and lessons and to potentially expand the group to include others. DLP will work towards creating a hub to facilitate this kind of exchange in both the private and public areas of the DLP forum, for more information visit the DLP website ([www.dlprog.org](http://www.dlprog.org)).

## 05

## Key Findings

1. M&E Frameworks need to be able to **analyse the technical and political, formal and informal** aspects of a program's work.
2. M&E processes need to **assess changes in gender and power relations**, which are necessarily sought by programs of this type. Distinguishing between changes in visible, hidden and invisible power can be helpful. How development agencies have managed their own power in these programs can be an important element for M&E processes to explore.
3. Information and evidence may take time to emerge; the full impact and outcomes of 'working politically' may not be evident until after a program has come to an end. **Intermediate outcomes can and should still be tracked, even though they will usually be hard to predict.**
4. **A mixture of methods is required to meet the various different objectives – learning, program improvement, accountability, etc. – of monitoring and evaluation**, and to ensure more robust findings.
5. **A theory of change can be useful**, not only to help a program plan strategically and understand what factors are important to track or measure, but also in **providing a tool to help explain and communicate the aims and rationales of complex programs.**
6. Organisations working towards long-term change can also usefully **identify short- and medium-term results or markers of change.** These can (a) provide useful evidence for donor-accountability, and (b) help to understand the causes and processes of longer-term change.
7. When assessing significant long-term social change it is rarely possible to draw simple causal links between program inputs and eventual outcomes. **It is more realistic to think about a program's contribution to change rather than direct attribution.** Rather than asking 'did it work?', one should ask 'did it make a difference?'
8. **It is important to 'get the basics right'**, for example, capturing relevant base-line data, numbers of people, organizations or coalitions involved, tracking the use of publications, tracking changing relationships, etc. in order for the case for a contribution to eventual outcomes to be made.
9. **A common challenge is to assess the counterfactual** – what would have happened without the program? Recent studies suggest that **theory-based monitoring and evaluation methods such as case studies, direct observation, process tracing and participatory methods can be credible alternatives to experimental, control-based approaches**, particularly for program involving a small number of units of analysis.
10. Another important approach to assessing programs that are 'working politically' is to **build from current 'good practice'**. For example, several features have been identified in effective social change programs, including (a) a **solid basis of political and social analysis**, (b) investment in the **emergence of local developmental leaders and coalitions**, (c) having the **flexibility to act quickly** when critical junctures or opportunities arise, (d) supporting **locally-led processes and development solutions**, and (e) working for **change over the longer term.** This is not the same as uncritical and inappropriate use of 'best practice' from elsewhere.
11. **Monitoring and evaluation should be timely and responsive.** Programs need to be flexible, adaptive and able to readily test their continuing relevance to the political and social context. M&E in this kind of context needs to work on

two levels: maintaining consistency in collecting regular data for reporting and communicating to stakeholders, but also having the ability to shift focus quickly should a program need to adapt to the changing context.

approaches and methods that are required.

12. Many programs that are 'working politically' are complex, 'messy', difficult to explain, or politically sensitive. In this case, **investment in communication resources and tools is of critical importance, both to provide evidence of progress or contribution to funders and key stakeholders, but also to communicate stories of achievement to the individuals, groups or organisations affected by or involved in the program.** A mixture of open and closed social media spaces are useful to share these stories in a 'safe' environment.
13. **There is a clear challenge for organisations to build the skills and capacity of staff and partners, and to provide them with the necessary space and incentives to undertake appropriate monitoring and evaluation.** Many programs still tend to under-invest in monitoring and evaluation activities, or view M&E as an administrative requirement, or 'add-on', that is performed at the end of a project.
14. Programs working with complex non-linear change processes may need to **take a more research-oriented approach to M&E, or indeed complement M&E with long-term research.** This could involve forming partnerships with research institutes or universities.
15. It can be useful to **separate out the day-to-day reporting and monitoring demands of donors or other stakeholders from the more important program learning and improvement-oriented aspects of M&E,** in order to provide space for both within high-pressure program environments.
16. **Building appropriate M&E frameworks for programs that 'work politically' may be more challenging than for more technical development programs, or programs where the causal chain is simpler, but it is both possible and necessary.**
17. Agencies that are intervening in messy, non-linear change processes should **engage in the broader debate around results and value for money,** and push for the space to trial new



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