



Designing an Adaptive Monitoring Framework: Principles and Good Practice

SIAP SIAGA's Head of Knowledge, Performance and Learning, Denika Blacklock, discusses the process of developing and learning from the implementation of an adaptive monitoring, evaluation and learning framework in development programs.

The SIAP SIAGA program – the Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Disaster Risk Management – has been an opportunity to leverage the investments in disaster management institutions and capacity in Indonesia since 2007 and focus on supporting improvement in the disaster management system as the sector shifts to reflect emerging challenges including climate change and public health crises.

Systems change programs are not new to Indonesia, but neither are they common, with few experiences and good practices in monitoring and evaluation to draw on. Moreover, the need to use an adaptive management approach in order to facilitate systems change programming has added an additional level of complexity to the design of the monitoring, evaluation and learning framework (MEL) for the program.

The design of the SIAP SIAGA MEL framework was a journey that was both adaptive and instructive in itself. While the program may be working within a highly complex system the MEL framework needed to be simple and clear in order to adapt over the life of the program. As a result, SIAP SIAGA has learned that there are four key principles for an effective MEL framework for adaptive systems focused programs:

1. **Measurement needs to be outcome focused.** As a program adapts to changing priorities based on emerging results and changes in context (the epitome of non-linear pathways), pre-conceived outputs and targets will continually change, making analysis at output level difficult, and often distracting from the outcomes we are trying to achieve. What does not (or

is very unlikely to) change over time are the outcomes your program is working towards.

The implication is that traditional approaches to monitoring (measuring outputs and then assessing contribution to outcomes) will not work, or at minimum add unhelpful complexity. A good rule is to focus all measurement at the outcome level – this is especially important for systems change programs. Use outputs to organise activities but focus monitoring and analysis on the results of activities (and how they create change over time) to provide evidence at the outcome level. Use your Theory of Change (ToC) to deconstruct the variables of what change looks like for your program vis a vis the program's intended outcomes, and design indicators (and targets if necessary) using those variables. As program implementation progresses, reevaluate what change might look like based on the changes you are observing, and update indicators as necessary.

2. **Measurement tools need to primarily accommodate reflection and inquiry.** To really understand change and

About SIAP SIAGA

SIAP SIAGA is a five-year partnership program between the Governments of Indonesia and Australia. The program aims to improve the management of disasters and increase community resilience in Indonesia and in the Indo-Pacific Region. Our approach is measured, reflective and forward-leaning which helps us to deliver the best results for DFAT and Indonesia's communities.

progress, measurement tools need to be participatory (i.e.: a collective responsibility, not just among the MEL team), and to create space for reflection and case selection as evidence. However, the extent of, and modality for this, will need to be in line with available resources, particularly time and budget.

For SIAP SIAGA, it took time to test out different tools/approaches to determine what worked best for the team and the program – there is no standard adaptive MEL template to draw on. The program went through phases of being too rigid or over complicating the process and then finally drilling down to focus on what was needed most: accountability and tracking change.

The program does this from two angles: 1) collaborative measurement through monthly activity reports (accountability) and quarterly reflection reports (tracking outcome indicator evidence); and 2) Real Time Evaluation and Learning both internally and externally (with partners). The program uses Quarterly Catch Ups for internal RTE based on the program's Evaluation Questions and organises semi-annual Partner Reflection Workshops to reflect on program results, challenges, and emerging opportunities. These processes provide significant evidence regarding the progress of the program toward its outcomes, while simultaneously providing space to adapt the program at the activity level based on inputs from partners, creating space to pursue emerging pathways for change or adapting to changing socio-political contexts.

3. **Track emergent change.** With systems change programs, predetermined targets can quickly become irrelevant and create unnecessary challenges for both program and monitoring teams. We have an idea of what may change over time based on our TOC (the theory part of the change), but we cannot be sure as change is emergent. As measurement is outcome focused, evidence is collected at activity level over time, and initial results will influence how the next series of activities will be implemented and so forth. That is to say as we refine our theory we need to change our pathways. This is the reason that target setting can be detrimental – if the project is pursuing a specific predetermined target, it is less likely to follow a path to change that is sustainable for the context.

Measurement and evaluation tools need to be able to track emergent change – change that you may have predicted and change that you may not have. For

example, using measurement tools that focus on reflection, SIAP SIAGA has been able to capture predicted change (clarity in roles and responsibilities of government actors has led to more space for coordination) as well as unpredicted change (clarity has led to an increase in understanding of roles, which has had a direct impact on the capacity of government officials to carry out their responsibilities). The program was then able to build on these organic capacity improvements, rather than support capacity building activities that would otherwise have been unnecessary or ineffective.

4. **A clear chain of evidence is essential.** In fact, SIAP SIAGA is more rigorous in detailing evidence than in a traditional program since evidence comes in many forms: changes in policies and regulations, as well as observations of changing mindsets documented in meeting minutes; feedback from partners; shifts in activities based on results; requests from partners which signify increasing ownership/buy-in; documentation of a shift away from business as usual processes; discussions between government actors (horizontally and vertically) which are a result of the program's facilitation and technical support.

SIAP SIAGA's outcome indicators are a reflection of how the program initially described the 'change we want to see' vis-a-vis our Theory of Change pathways and program outcomes and are largely qualitative in nature. This means that both stringent criteria for documenting evidence of change, and clear analysis of how that change contributes to the program's outcomes are necessary to ensure the robustness of analysis as well as credibility in the eyes of the program's partners.

Designing an adaptive MEL framework has been a challenging task but over time the team has learned what works and what does not as well as what is necessary and what is not. What works and is necessary for the SIAP SIAGA program will differ from that of other programs, which means that there are no hard and firm 'rules' regarding adaptive MEL, only key principles to guide the design and implementation of adaptive MEL frameworks, as well as good practices to draw on as the details of that framework are agreed and the framework is adapted over time. SIAP SIAGA is only three years into its systems change-adaptive management approach to implementation, with more to learn and share.