



**BOLD
THINKERS
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REAL-WORLD
IMPACT**

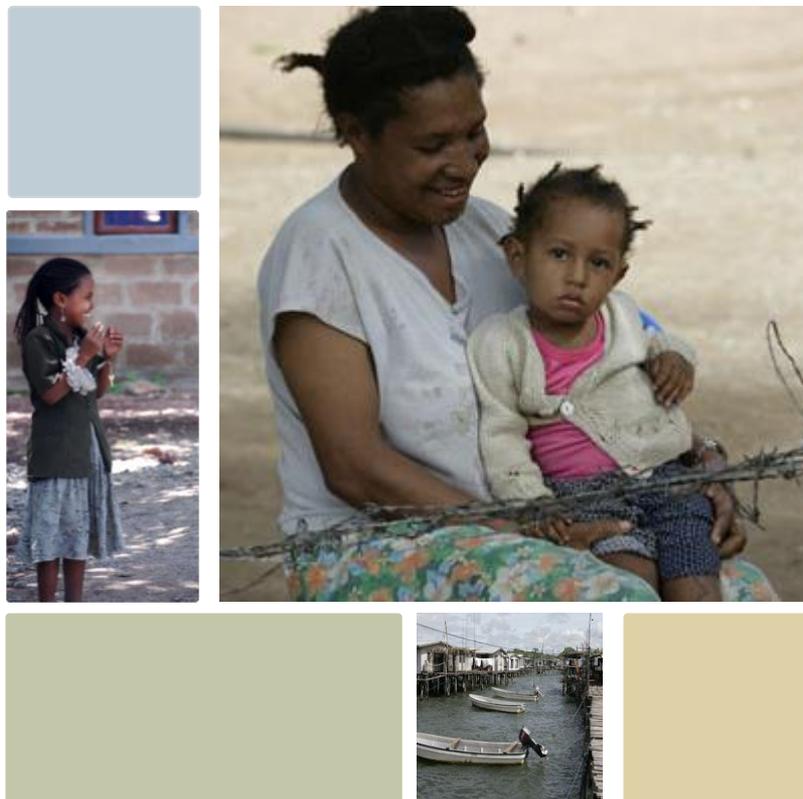
MEL for Complex Programs in Complex Contexts: three facility case studies

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ANU



Outline



- Research topic**
- Relevance and scope**
- Method and Limitations**
- Discussion (data analysis)**
- Key findings**
- Conclusions**

Research topic



- Based on Abt's unique experience to date, what does it take to develop MELFs (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Frameworks) for large, multi-sector facilities?**
- How and why did this experience deviate from international MEL theory and practice?**

Relevance to Literature



Two-fold

- 1. *MEL theory & practice*: most MEL issued guidance suited for programs working in ‘simple’ change contexts**
- 2. *Thinking and Working Politically theory and practice*: good on MEL for complex change contexts, but largely drawn from single sector, single modality case studies**

Research scope (case studies)



Three case studies

- **All high-profile, high-value multi-sector facilities managed by Abt and funded by DFAT**
- **PNG Governance Partnership; KOMPAK in Indonesia; ATLPHD in Timor Leste.**
- **Combined value of over A\$500m over four years, representing approx. 20% of Australia's bilateral aid budget to these countries.**

At a glance:

	KOMPAK	PHD / ATLPHD	Governance Partnership
Timeline	Commenced January 2015. End (anticipated) June 2022.	Commenced June 2016	Commenced December 2015. End (phase 1) November 2020
Geographic scope	seven provinces, across 26 districts.	NA	national, sub-national (up to 12 provinces and districts) and community levels, including the Autonomous Region of Bougainville
Value	AUD 177 million over 7.5 years	AUD 120 million over five years	AUD 450 million over five years
Sectoral focus	Local level service delivery, governance and economic development - governance	Human development (health, water and sanitation, education, nutrition, gender equality, disability and social protection)	Governance including community development decentralisation, economic growth and reform, public sector leadership, gender and inclusion.

Method



- 1. Key document review**
- 2. Semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis**
 - 6 interviews, 3 MEL teams
- 3. Triangulation and ‘sense-checking’**
 - 5 of 6 program responses and 7 from the executive

Limitations



- ❑ **Small sample size (Abt only manages three facilities in the Indo-Pacific)**
- ❑ **Focus on facility-wide MELFs (not project or activity level MEL)**
- ❑ **Focus on MELF design and conceptualization (and less so on implementation)**

Common Donor expectations



Donors reviewed	Common features
DFAT USAID OECD-DAC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="504 501 1483 546">1. Accountability is primary focus for MEL efforts<li data-bbox="504 591 1628 694">2. MEL is based off an investment design and associated project logic<li data-bbox="504 738 1638 841">3. MEL approaches reflect a simple, linear change model (input → goal) vs emergent strategies<li data-bbox="504 885 1634 988">4. Performance indicators key mechanism for measuring performance<li data-bbox="504 1032 1373 1078">5. Baselines preferred for tracking progress<li data-bbox="504 1122 1373 1168">6. Generally an <i>ex post</i> focus for evaluation

Discussion (i) PNG Governance Partnership



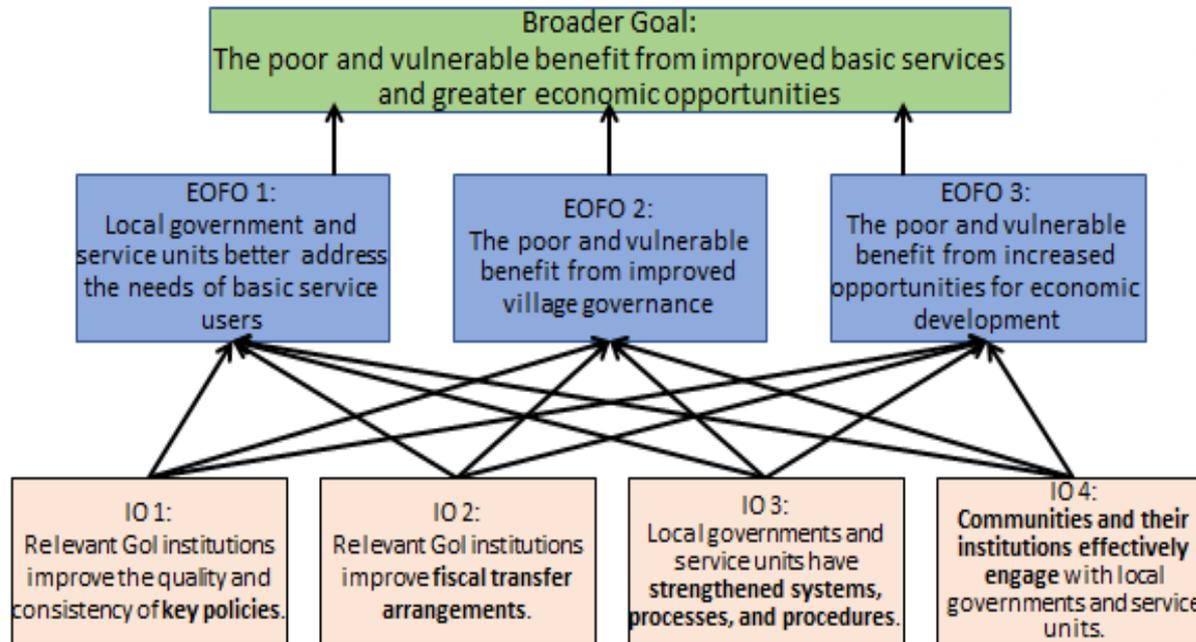
Critical gender & inclusion issues mainstreamed across all outcome areas



Knowledge, learning & communication mainstreamed across all outcome areas

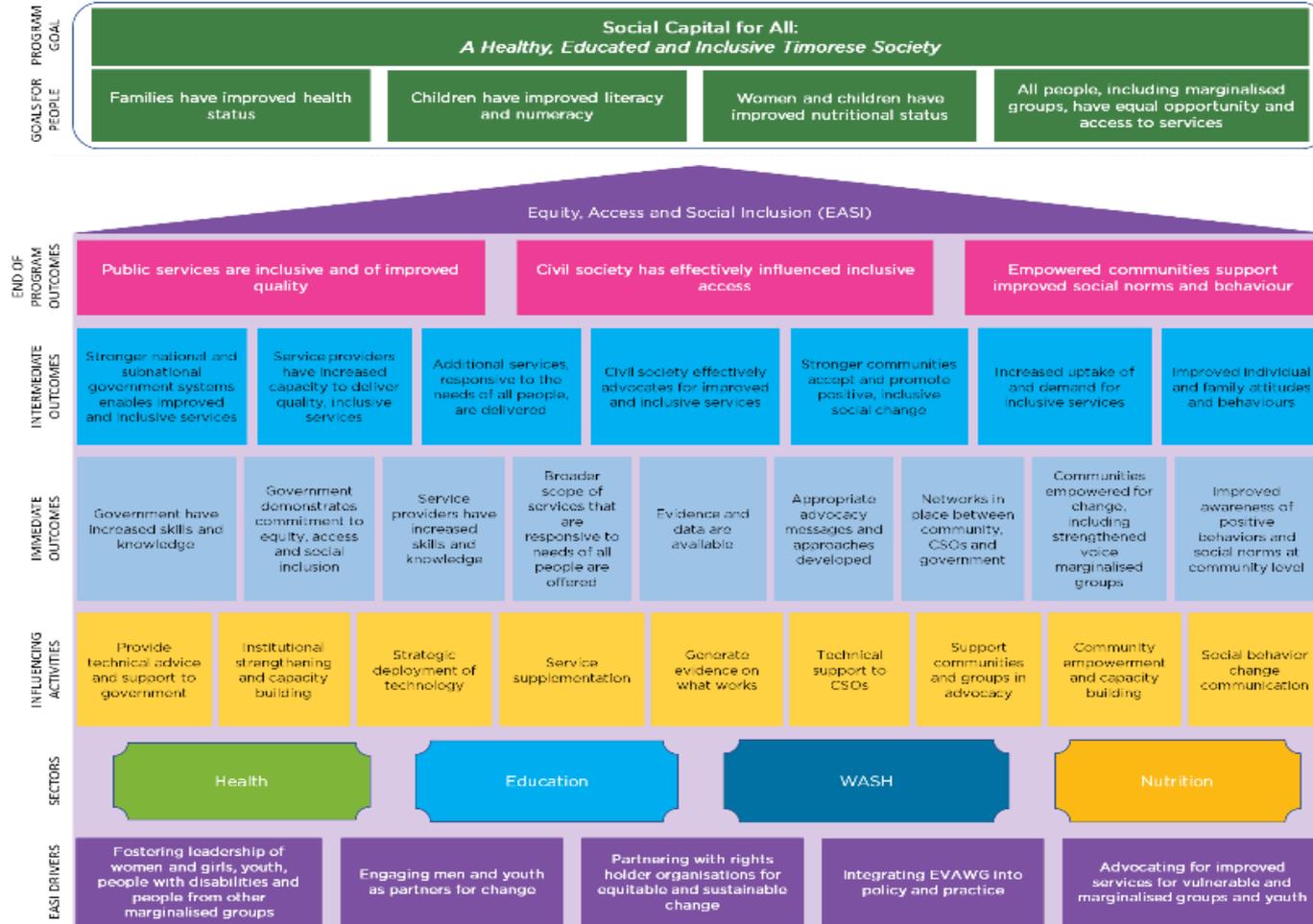
December 2018

Discussion (ii) KOMPAK Indonesia



Dated 2018

Discussion (iii) ATLPHD Timor Leste



PRINCIPLES

- No one left behind
- Rights-based approach
- Partnership with government and community
- Coordination with development actors

Key findings (i) Strategy



Issue	Findings
(i) strategic intent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● One of the most challenging objectives - to clarify the Facility's strategic intent, macro theory-of-change and an agreed strategic plan which would guide the development of the MELF● Related to this: distinguishing between Theories of Change and Theories of Action, and ensuring the former is given sufficient attention in 'M' and 'L'.
(ii) purpose of MELF	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Expectations of MELFs were far more complicated than anticipated.● MELFs had to serve multiple purposes - accountability, public diplomacy/ communication, evaluation and internal learning.

Key findings (ii) MEL Structure



Issue	Findings
(iii) program logics and theories of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nested frameworks and aggregation of results generally do not suit Facilities - mixed methods are required.• Have to 'measure' both development impact of Facility and the validity of the modality itself
(iv) indicators and defining 'success'	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The higher up the program hierarchy we went - the harder it became to understand and measure change• Relatively good at setting and tracking output level change - but much harder to understand and set indicators at the outcome and goal level?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Success is hard to measure (i.e. complex institutional change)○ Attribution impossible at outcome level but contribution possible
(v) baselines and data quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Traditional approaches to baselining and quantitative regression analysis very hard to apply to constantly changing portfolio• Qualitative, mixed methods (e.g. strategy testing) combined with external review/ verification much easier to apply at Facility-wide level• The quality of the country's own data institutions and capacity impacts ability to set baselines and undertake contribution analysis

Key findings (iii) MEL Implementation



Issue	Findings
(vi) learning, reflection and program adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The second most challenging objective - to actually use information, learning and MELF data to change/ adapt programming (budgets, activities etc) in real time• MELF teams and systems usually separate to implementation• Incentives meant output level reporting often trumped program learning, reflection and adaptation activities - at least in the early stages of implementation
(vii) resourcing and legacy investments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very difficult to find staff who are both technically strong on MEL and understand adaptive programming• Tendency to rely on international experts which reduces capacity in-house• Donor's move away from aid specialist to policy generalist skills• Funding for MEL activities generally not programmed for at design and often lower priority come implementation

Conclusions



- ❑ Found seven areas where deviation from more ‘traditionally’ designed and implemented MELF was required.
- ❑ Overall take-away: traditional forms of MEL do not lend themselves to the facility model (complex projects working in complex change contexts)
- ❑ If we are serious about transforming how complex programs and complex change are measured – the start with the logic of the project framework itself, not MEL methods

Contact



Thank you

Hard copies of our paper and other Abt publications are available at the front lectern. Online version available in March on *Governance Soapbox* website.

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The Governance Soapbox website



<https://abtassocgovernancesoapbox.wordpress.com/working-paper-series/>

Governance Soapbox

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Working Paper Series

Governance Working Paper Series – Issue 5: "Capacity Development and State Building: Reflections and Lessons", Graham Teskey.

This paper, the fifth in Abt Associates' *Governance Working Paper Series*, examines two critical questions: where and how can external actors be useful in the process of state-building and capacity development, and what is the relationship (if any) between them? The paper is relevant to Abt Associates' experience of implementing three large Australian Government-funded facilities in Timor Leste, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. In each case, Abt Associates works closely with local counterparts as well as the Australian Government to tackle the most critical governance challenges each country is facing. From this experience, we know that the process of 'building' is one which must – first and foremost – be led by a *highly* diverse and inclusive. However, there are helpful ways in



Graham Teskey, Principle Technical Lead
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This blog is a frank and fearless forum for all things 'governance' maintained by Graham Teskey, Lavinia Tyrrel and Tara David. It is a place for practitioners and theorists to share experiences and debate the complex and murky world that is 'governance' and development. It

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