Strategy Testing in TAF
Myanmar Programming

Jane Sail, MEL Officer
What is it?

- Developed by The Asia Foundation and supported through our partnership with DFAT

- Developed to track complex programs through an adaptive ‘searching’ process

- It’s a technique aiming to help program teams approach their work with a more flexible, critical and adaptive mindset
Why do we use it?

Relevant for programs working in political contexts where:

- The ultimate kind of desired change is known, but the exact pathways to achieving it are tricky to determine at the onset
- An unpredictable political context requires constant reorientation in terms of entry points and strategy
- Cumulative learnings over time lead to deeper understandings of context that challenge early assumptions

For such programs that change and react to the context and external events, traditional M&E tools are limiting
Use in TAF Myanmar programming

Myanmar Strategic Support Program (MSSP) – funded by DFAT, DFID, and Swiss Development Cooperation

Change Objectives: Government reform for improved service delivery

- Strategic support to subnational governments to strengthen public financial management
- Strategic support to government and civil society to improve social accountability
- Strategic support to municipal authorities to improve urban governance
Things change!
How it works – the theory

Theories of change

Adjust and record

Program Timeline

Review and assess

Quarterly sessions

Maintained by the team to record:

- Major external events
- Changes in the political context
- Key decisions
- Accomplishments
- Roadblocks
- Normal activities
How it works - the reality

- It’s not always easy to get the most out of a session
- It takes practice
- A lot needs to happen before and around the session itself
What makes it work?

- When team leaders really believe and understand the iterative approach – this isn’t always the case!

- Recognizing that being critical and questioning needs to be practiced and nurtured within each team’s culture
Impact on programming

Identified a problem = revenue generation

Identified a priority reform = business licensing

Realized through ST that this wasn’t feasible

Went back to the drawing board

Identified a new reform priority = property tax

Led to a massive programmatic shift
Value of Strategy Testing

“
The value of strategy testing is that takes out the element of a single decision maker – we all make decisions together and share accountability. We collectively agree to try something and if it fails, we don’t get to blame a single person and this makes people feel safe to experiment.
”

- MSSP Municipal Reform Team Lead
Innovations in MEL

Problem

- Teams forgot to update the program timeline.
- Information was lost.
- Strategy testing sessions unfocused.

Solution

- Developed a program timeline app with TAF’s GIS team.
- Works as a mobile app and as a desktop interface.
- Teams can record activities and events while in the field.
Title: DAO Horizontal Learning Workshop

Project: 31901 MSSP 1.2

Start Date: 21 May 2018

State/Region: Shan

Township: Taunggyi

Event Type: Briefing

Explanation: Bring together all Shan townships to share learnings on waste management techniques and citizen engagement app.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-component:</th>
<th>Sub-component 1.2: Strategic Support</th>
<th>new item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macro-Theory of Change:</td>
<td>Strategic Support for DAOs: By strengthening Development Affairs Organizations capacity for policy development and PFM, as well as improving relationships with local civil society, DAOs will be better able to generate and manage local revenues and social service provision at the township level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reform Team:</td>
<td>Reform Team 3 Reform 3.b</td>
<td>new item</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory of Change:</td>
<td>By catalyzing DAOs to generate and utilize evidence to solve locally-identified problems in Myanmar’s property tax system, DAO’s tax administration and revenue generating capacity will improve.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity:</td>
<td>Activity 3.b.1.1: Identify the magnitude...</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Benefits to date...

▪ Teams better at capturing their field activities – more accurate data
▪ More aware of the theories of change, outputs and outcomes they’re working toward
▪ Better for strategy testing sessions – can look at timeline and assess changes against timeline
▪ Easier to compile numbers for reports – dataset generation allows for graphs and infographics
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