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The Strategy Testing Workbook

Politically-smart Adaptive Programming in Complex Environments

The Asia Foundation

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For The Asia Foundation Program Teams and Partners

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WHO IS THIS FOR?

This guide is for The Asia Foundation (TAF) program teams and partners.

This includes anyone who is interested in practicing Strategy Testing systematically, either on a program in which it features as a core design element, or on one in which it makes sense for the program to have an Adaptive Management system. It is also for TAF partners: where they are interested; where they might find it useful; and where our collective efforts – and program outcomes – would benefit from TAF teams and partners practicing it together.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The guide begins with a section on what we at TAF have learned about practicing Strategy Testing, highlighting things that we didn't know when we started out. Some of these lessons may seem obvious, but others may strike you as less so. In any case, we believe that, when taken together, they provide a useful reminder of some of the pitfalls that arise in efforts to practice Adaptive Management. Moreover, they help to remind us that there are multiple layers to doing Strategy Testing effectively as a system instead of reducing it to its component parts and applying them mechanistically. Thus these lessons are useful to read now and to revisit later.

The guide then comprises three more sections:

- **Part 1**, the Design Stage, involves constructing the system and making sure everyone is on board;
- **Part 2**, the Inception Phase (start-up phase), helps the implementing team to make the leap from the ideal initially set out in the design stage to the grounding, support, and frameworks that the team will need to implement Strategy Testing in a meaningful and impactful way. We've found that the gap between design and implementation is very often the cause of an ineffective 'all talk and no walk' approach to Adaptive Management. And finally;
- **Part 3** covers Program Implementation – the practices, knowledge, and culture needed for the feedback loop that underpins Strategy Testing.

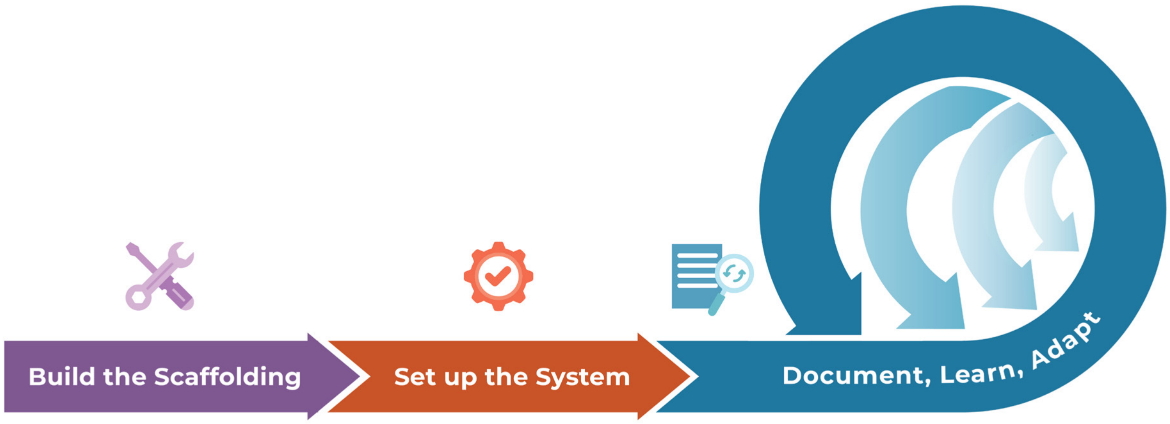
Depending on where you are in your program cycle, you may find all sections useful, or you may choose to dip in and out of the sections that you find pertinent.

The guide can be used for individual or group learning, or it can be used directly to inform Reflection Sessions (see Section 3) through the questions we raise or the activities herein.

NEW TO ADAPTIVE PROGRAMMING?

There are lots of resources out there that explain the who, what and why of adaptive programming in development. If you are new to the topic, *A Practical Introduction to Adaptive Management* by Jane Pruden and Mark Lonsdale is an excellent resource.

WHY DO WE USE STRATEGY TESTING?



Strategy Testing is a technique that TAF employs for the adaptive management of international development programs, both to improve the effectiveness of programming approaches and to achieve stronger and more enduring results. The Foundation is a proponent of the Adaptive Management movement, a loosely linked community that includes major donors, scholarly observers of international development, civil society organizations (CSOs) and others. Within TAF, Adaptive Management expands upon the traditional project cycle by having the program team draw on Strategy Testing techniques and tools, document their application, and reflect on insights about emerging patterns and players. Strategy Testing involves making strategic adjustments to program implementation based on the actual performance – the testing – of program strategies as they are being implemented. In addition to involving TAF program teams and partners, the approach involves what we call 'Critical Friends'. These may be outside experts or TAF staff who are not part of the immediate program team. In all cases, Critical Friends should be familiar enough with the program to be able to ask hard questions that can help a team identify new directions, inform its reflections, and alter its strategy.[1]

[1] *Christie, A. and Green, D. 2019. "The Case for an Adaptive Approach to Empowerment and Accountability Programming in Fragile Settings: Synthesis report". Action for empowerment and accountability research programme.* https://www.itad.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/A4EA_Adaptive_Management_Synthesis_Paper-1.pdf

As a practice, Adaptive Management builds on the experience of precursor reflective practices applied in development programs, particularly those with strong participatory approaches and those that questioned the validity of rigid, pre-ordained planning and design.[2] In other words, Adaptive Management aims to counter the weaknesses of tightly pre-designed projects. Intended to unfold in a linear progression toward meeting predictable pre-defined goals, such project designs rarely accord with the realities of a fluid program environment and prove unhelpful when working through complex problems, such as governance reforms.

THE LINGO

Political Economy Analysis (PEA): An interdisciplinary form of analysis, underpinned by a series of concepts and tools, that investigates the power dynamics and distribution of resources across different groups in society with a view to identifying entry points for strategic engagement that can contribute to politically feasible developmental change.

MEL Plan: A working-level Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning plan that outlines how the progress and impact of the program will be monitored during implementation, and how learning and improvements will be incorporated into the program itself.

Program Theory of Change (pTOC): A program-level Theory of Change that outlines the change process the program intends to contribute to and the overarching outcomes that will be achieved over the course of its lifetime.

Timeline: A tool for tracking relevant changes in the context and/or in key stakeholder relations that are relevant to the program's intended outcomes.

Partnership Agreement (or 'Ways of Working'): A non-legally binding agreement negotiated between different parties to a program that outlines the principles and practices according to which the parties agree to work together on a program.

Working-level Theory of Change (wTOC): A sub-program or working-level Theory of Change provides the rationale and intended outcomes. One (or more) wTOC involves the translation of the higher-level pTOC to activity level, with a clear link between the wTOCs and the overarching pTOC.

Monitoring Data: The information collected through systematic and ongoing observations or measurements to track the status, progress, or performance of a program.

[2] *See for example, Laurence Salman, L. (1989). Listen to the People: Participant-Observer Evaluation of Development Projects (World Bank). London: Oxford University Press.*

THE LINGO

After Action Review (AAR): A structured process that involves analyzing and evaluating the outcomes and experiences of a specific activity after it has been completed, in order to learn from both successes and failures, identify areas for improvement, and apply lessons learned to future endeavors.

Workplan: A detailed schedule that delineates the specific tasks, activities, milestones, and timelines associated with implementing a program.

Entry Point: Given what the program team knows and understands about the local political economy, there may be opportunities to engage on a particular reform area on which there is momentum for change and/or to support particular stakeholders to do so. Those opportunities constitute 'entry points' for the program.

Reflection Session: A designated time during which the program team, as individuals or groups, engage in undisturbed discussion and analysis about progress, issues and challenges in program implementation. Participants are encouraged to explore their thoughts, feelings, and insights related to the previous period of program implementation, with the goal of gaining a deeper understanding and extracting meaningful lessons.

Critical Friend: An individual who is sufficiently familiar with a program to be able to ask informed and hard questions. He or she has the trust of the program team and is thereby able to nudge the team out of their comfort zone during periods of reflection.

Implementing partners: Organizations or individuals who are directly engaged in implementing the program.

WHAT IS STRATEGY TESTING?

Strategy Testing is TAF's approach to Adaptive Management.

Strategy Testing provides a set of tools and practices that comprise a system for learning that equips program teams to adjust baseline program strategies according to insights drawn from intervening events and changes. The system also helps program teams to recognize and seize unexpected opportunities as they arise, and to face the challenging task of knowing when to give up on things that are not working. Moreover, by ensuring that the Political Economy Analysis (PEA) is integral, the system provides teams with a forum to analyze the incentives of program stakeholders.

For example, TAF governance teams are encouraged to consider how and with whom they might provide support to achieve policy goals by focusing not on a normative rationale (i.e., it's the right thing to do), but on interests and incentives (i.e., how is it in someone's interest to do this differently?). Accordingly, Strategy Testing can help governance teams and others find ways to demonstrate that it may lie in the collective interest of state and non-state actors and stakeholders to collaborate to achieve a desired outcome; the teams and others can also identify obstacles that stand in the way of doing so.

In contrast to traditional approaches to program planning that sometimes define outcomes and budgets for the duration of a three- to five-year program cycle, Strategy Testing sets up tight feedback loops of around three to six months, and focuses on identifying the best pathway to reach the goal in light of intervening events and what the team is learning. TAF's Strategy Testing system is designed to support program teams so that they can be clear on their starting strategy for reaching a defined goal, capture individual reflections on changes in the program context on a regular basis, consider data, and use the understanding and learning resulting from these and other reflections to regularly test and, if need be, adapt a strategy.

THE EVOLUTION OF STRATEGY TESTING IN TAF

The Asia Foundation (TAF) was an early thought leader in the Adaptive Management movement, having trialed several ways of working differently in the 1990s.[3] Over the span of a decade, TAF established a structured approach to the practice of thinking and working politically, and experimented with adaptive programming. Doing so enabled TAF program teams to create a structured space for critical reflection on what was working, what was not, and how to improve implementation for programs to achieve desired impacts.

Baptized "Strategy Testing", this form of Adaptive Management was developed and rolled out across a sub-set of TAF projects. The tools and approaches described in this guide were developed as a way to manage and support a set of adaptive programs under a Strategic Partnership between TAF and the Australian government.

Since then, TAF country offices, program teams, and Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) staff have used Strategy Testing to further improve program effectiveness through a better understanding of the precise nature of development problems, how political interests impact on the problems, what pathways could best lead towards solutions, and how the program team can contribute to the process.

[3] *One such way was later baptized 'Development Entrepreneurship' and has served as the basis of the Foundation's Coalitions for Change program. Faustino, J. and Booth, D. (2014). Development entrepreneurship: How donors and leaders can foster institutional change. The Asia Foundation and Overseas Development Institute, San Francisco.*

BEFORE YOU START!

THESE ARE SOME THINGS WE'VE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

In over a decade of trialing Strategy Testing on a variety of TAF programs, we've learned a lot. These nine lessons are useful to keep in mind and to return to if you are using the Strategy Testing system:

1. Political economy is an integral component, not an add-on.

Adaptive Management has meaning only when it is grounded in the program teams' knowledge of the political economy of the sector in which a program operates – understanding the stakeholders, the power they wield, the changes they resist and/or the incentives that motivate them, and the formal and informal institutions that constrain and facilitate their behavior: This combination of factors is what a program adapts to. We would even say that there is no Adaptive Management without political economy. Indeed, where Adaptive Management is not clearly linked to a context and its political economy, development practice risks becoming depoliticized, which renders the approach a technocratic exercise of little value to the goal of fostering desired results and outcomes. In contrast, by tracking changes in power relations and distributions among program stakeholders, the program team can feed changes in the political economy into the Reflection Sessions and inform them by doing so. This in turn can help teams identify hurdles – such as vested interests – that must be overcome for a reform to occur or a program to succeed. Moreover, when TAF team members reflect in a participatory way that involves a diverse group of partners, outside experts, and other stakeholders – particularly otherwise marginalized groups – they can also contribute to shifting unequal power relations within the world of development programming.

DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT IS MEANT BY "THE POLITICAL ECONOMY"? DO YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE IN POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS?

You can revisit the definition provided above and discuss it with your colleagues. If you are unsure, you might want to read up so you are clear on the implications of the term. That way it won't turn into jargon but will be useful to you. There are lots of resources available online.

2. If donors aren't fully on board, it can be hard, if not impossible.

Although many of the Foundation's major bilateral (government) donors – Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, and the European Union – have all, in one way or another, officially endorsed the idea that development programs should be adaptive – if not necessarily practice Adaptive Management – this endorsement does not always filter down to the level of a TAF program team's immediate counterpart at an embassy. Some of the Foundation's most successful Adaptive Management program teams have worked with donors that have had individual champions, rather than an institution-wide embrace of the approach and its full implications for program design, implementation, and operations. While those champions have been great to work with, teams have sometimes encountered difficulties in maintaining program momentum when a champion moves on to another post.

Moreover, most donor systems don't fully accommodate the requirements of Adaptive Management in their systems. While it is often mentioned in strategies and program designs, much of the rest of donors' operational engines – including procurement processes, work planning, contracting, and reporting – remain unaccommodating. Strategy Testing requires either reductions in or alternatives to many parts of the program cycle, beyond the baseline risk and accountability mechanisms. In addition, Adaptive Management approaches sometimes require more – not less – engagement from donors, something that most donors have yet to fully embrace and accommodate in their own resourcing, particularly in embassies. This may mean that program teams have a hard time making Adaptive Management meaningful and that, in order to do so, discussions need to be had with the donor agency on whether alternative practices can be accommodated.

3. A system and culture, not just a toolkit.

Our look at how the Strategy Testing system has been used by TAF program teams over the past decade shows that it is too easily reduced to one or more of its tools, such as Reflection Sessions. Teams should bear in mind that Adaptive Management's use of Strategy Testing is intended to be a holistic *programming approach* that requires that the tools be used in concert, underpinned by principles of collaboration, mutual respect, and partnership. On its own, a Reflection Session is of little value unless there is a working Theory of Change (TOC) and Timeline, together with relevant Monitoring Data on which to reflect, and an agenda that enables a Critical Friend to pose objective and even hard questions. Reflection also requires follow-ups and necessary adjustments to avoid using it simply as a justification to continue on the current path. The force of habit is strong: for example, sometimes Reflection Sessions – which should involve team members, partners, and stakeholders asking themselves hard questions about what they are achieving – can turn into donor-update meetings where the session loses its critical value. This means that everyone with a key role in the program – TAF and partners – should be aware of the different parts of the system and know how each is intended to complement the other, before commencing an Adaptive Management program.

ADAPTIVE ATTRIBUTES?

Several TAF teams have identified and developed the individual and team attributes needed to enable a culture of adaptation.

For individuals, these include:

- *Humility:* a willingness to listen, be challenged, admit mistakes, and share credit
- *Resilience:* an ability to persevere with limited resources
- *Autonomy:* the will to be self-directed
- *Confidence:* a belief in one's ability to overcome problems

For teams, these include:

- *Leadership* that is shared, not concentrated
- *Mutual trust* between members
- Shared *focus and goals*
- Open and respectful *communications*
- An *environment* that enables honest conversations with candor

DOES YOUR TEAM ENVIRONMENT LEND ITSELF TO BEING ADAPTIVE? IF SO, WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS? IF NOT, WHAT MIGHT NEED TO CHANGE?

Strategy Testing also needs to be a collaborative process that brings everyone along functionally, not just formally. It requires a team culture of trust, candor, and constructive criticism, with team members willing to acknowledge outright failure, or accept that certain key assumptions did not apply. To look objectively at the success or failure of an activity or intervention, individuals need to willingly distance themselves from the activities they designed and manage. This principle of Adaptive Management, called "not falling in love with your ideas", is central to fostering a culture in which the team can look critically at what is working and what is not. In particular, it is important that Reflection Sessions serve as much more than a top-down conversation in which course changes are prescribed by senior staff. Similarly, team members need to do more than just fill in the Timeline when a meeting occurs; they also need to add an analysis of the tone of the meeting or note a key piece of information that came out of it. Program managers often find it difficult to ensure that the hard questions are asked in a Reflection Session, even with a strong team culture and a Critical Friend present. When form eclipses function, team members only appear to be adapting their program and it becomes harder for them to see the purpose and benefits of Strategy Testing.

4. Give equal weight to outcomes and entry points.

In several cases, TAF teams found that weak Theories of Change (TOC) result in a kind of 'anything goes' version of program implementation. Working with an ill-defined or illogical TOC can fritter away limited resources, and consequently risk achieving no meaningful outcomes. In some less successful cases, program teams have set up and practiced regular Reflection Sessions without a solid TOC upon which to reflect. In other under-performing cases, the original TOC in the program-design documents was solid, but overly complicated. In such cases, having failed to fully understand the TOC to which they had committed, team members were unable to reflect on their progress by the measure of the TOC.

It is difficult to find a balance between a TOC logic that does justice to the complexity of the program context and that is straightforward enough to be workable for the team and partners in regular Reflection Sessions. Finding this balance is no mean feat, one that all TAF offices and program teams continue to work on. For program teams, the challenge is to maintain a line of sight to desired program outcomes, and to use desired outcomes to benchmark what has been achieved as implementation progresses. Often, program teams prove highly attuned to entry points and thus able to identify immediate opportunities for engagement in the policy and stakeholder environment, with a gut feeling about what engagement will achieve in the medium to long term. Simultaneously holding a vision of near- and long-term outcomes involves finding ways to articulate those gut feelings: it calls for linking entry points with outcomes, particularly short- to medium-term outcomes, and is one way of connecting the immediate and actionable with the longer-term change in a way that keeps everyone on the same page

HOW COMFORTABLE ARE YOU WITH YOUR PROGRAM'S THEORY OF CHANGE? COULD YOU EXPLAIN IT TO YOUR NEIGHBOR?

5. Collecting the right evidence is not easy.[4]

Several TAF offices have used and adapted the Timeline tool [see below] over the past decade. Their experiences illustrate how difficult it can be, when program teams are in the thick of it, to collect the most useful data for a robust discussion at a later date. For example, teams were initially encouraged to capture important contextual 'events' relevant to the program along with program events such as achievements, roadblocks, or key challenges, and to record program decisions in a simple table in a Word document. A look back at some of the early Timelines shows that program teams found it much easier to collect data on program achievements and much harder to identify relevant contextual events, particularly those likely to impact long-term outcomes rather than near-term activities.

[4] *The challenge of collecting the right evidence at the right time is one that is well-recognized in the field of Adaptive Management. See, for instance, https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12655.pdf and https://www.betterevaluation.org/tools-resources/overview-monitoring-evaluation-for-adaptive-management-working-paper-1*

To be clear on the kind of data that needs to be collected, teams need to spend time unpacking an ‘event’. Contextual events – such as elections or changes in policies or laws – are one type of event that may have ramifications for the program. The other type of event that impacts the program we may call a program event – that is, an event the team is involved in or driving, such as meetings, workshops, training sessions or conferences. Commonly, teams collect simple data on the latter type, noting that an event occurred, listing who attended, and so forth. *An analysis of both of these types of ‘events’ is at the heart of the Strategy Testing exercise.* Teams need to undertake a qualitative analysis of these events in terms of what the events mean for the program and what changes they lead to.

6. A complement to Monitoring and Evaluation, not a replacement.

Several program teams found it challenging to optimize the relationship and interaction between their Strategy Testing approach and their Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems. These challenges often arose when there was a lack of clarity over the difference between these two functions. However, when well-aligned, MEL systems can not only inform Strategy Testing, but can also fulfill donor reporting requirements and enable evaluation of the program’s overall impact.

The MEL system should prioritize collecting and analyzing data that tracks progress toward program outcomes, provides ample evidence to credibly test the Program Theory of Change (pToC) and the Working-level Theory(s) of Change (wToC), and records any other requisite data for donor reporting. When designing the MEL system, it is important to note that MEL for adaptive programs must allow for flexibility. Whereas traditional MEL approaches monitor progress toward a predetermined set of intended outputs and outcomes, an adaptive MEL system must account for changes in program strategy and track progress toward intended outcomes aligned with the TOC. The MEL system can help determine if progress is on track or reaching its intended outcomes and enable course correction if it is not. Subsequently, if the program adapts, so too must the MEL system. Keep in mind that changes to the MEL system must be well-documented and limited to those elements of the program design that have changed. Consistent monitoring is an important component for informing Reflection Sessions and donor reporting.

It is also important to note that the data collected through the program team's involvement in Strategy Testing is only one part of the information needed to enable monitoring, evaluation, and especially learning. For learning to take place among teams and program stakeholders and *to be acted upon*, several other things also need to occur, such as developing a robust MEL system that enables program teams to benefit from data and analysis generated through more traditional MEL approaches. For example, an After Action Review involves the team analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of an activity, such as a program event, whether a workshop, stakeholder meeting or consultation, immediately after it occurs. Contextual events captured and analyzed in the Timeline are also important, as is capturing evidence of an immediate impact on an outcome in the After Action Review, Policy Tracker and/or Observation tool.

That said, evidence that the TOC is or is not holding tends not to come from these tools, particularly for programs that are broader than policy reform. Some program teams that tried to use the Timeline tool as their primary or sole data source for program monitoring discovered that it was insufficiently robust or objective for the broader task of monitoring implementation progress. Rather, such evidence needs to come from the broader MEL system as a complement to the Strategy Testing process. Moreover, the Timeline tool, Policy Tracker, and other tools support data collection, whereas Reflection Sessions offer the opportunity to analyze and apply data to inform decision making. No matter the tools used, ultimately the effectiveness of both the MEL and Strategy Testing systems depends on a program teams' consistent collection, analysis, and use of data generated throughout the program.

Some program teams also had a hard time finding MEL staff who could develop a joint monitoring system capable of collecting the data needed by the team for real-time decision making along with tracking certain key indicators and measures needed for progress monitoring and reporting to donors. In the best cases, dedicated MEL staff served on the program team so that program data informed both strategic decision making and enabled program monitoring. This suggests that Strategy Testing needs to be a team exercise, often led by MEL staff, and that the MEL system set up to support it should reflect the specific Adaptive Management needs of the program.

7. An opportunity to make inclusion meaningful.

Strategy Testing is an opportunity for the program team to ensure that programs are taking care to address gender, ethnicity, ability, and class inequalities throughout all dimensions of programming, from team composition, through partner identification and engagement, to TOC formulation and system set up, including research, data collection, and reflection. Each Reflection Session should allow for specific consideration of how and where efforts toward inclusion and diversity are having meaningful effects and where improvements can be made in programming. Indeed, in TAF's experience adaptive programs can excel in their inclusion practices, particularly where the inclusion of marginalized voices is an intentional part of the process and written into the agenda of Reflection Sessions for consideration. This doesn't necessarily mean the membership of the Reflection Sessions themselves needs to change. Who is in the room for the reflection depends on a whole range of factors that relate to ensuring the conversation can be frank and honest.

8. Strategy testing is time and resource intensive.

The Strategy Testing approach is by nature resource-intensive compared with so-called 'traditional programming', particularly where it comes to the level of stakeholder engagement and relationship management. In addition to an initial pTOC, Strategy Testing involves the continuous design of wTOCs for activity-level or short-term Workplans that emerge on the fly; like the pTOC, these wTOCs also require careful capture of monitoring and reflection data. These efforts require consultation and collaboration. It also involves ensuring that team members bring the necessary analytical skills and political economy orientations, and that they are on the same page among themselves and with the donor and implementing partners. Furthermore, it requires additional time for planning, implementing, and following up on Reflection Sessions. That said, the adjustments that are made through Strategy Testing to make the program more effective, including dropping areas of work that are failing, also make it more efficient. Moreover, putting a Strategy Testing system in place is likely to be less resource intensive than some of the other preparations that go into large projects and facilities.

9. Don't forget Operations!

TAF Operations staff are commonly left out of conversations on Adaptive Management. This is unfortunate, because operations systems need to be adjusted, particularly around contracting and budget flexibility, if they are to enable a Strategy Testing system to fulfil its promise. For example, building the right team often requires preexisting relationships and networks that are difficult to identify using an open, competitive procurement process. If contract clauses with donors and other partners fail to provide budget flexibility, adaptation is simply theoretical. This is not to suggest that compliance requirements around fraud, anti-terrorism and safeguarding should not be maintained, but including operations staff in the process allows for more robust conversations around risk management and ensures the maintenance of a healthy balance between flexibility and accountability.

FROM DRAWING BOARDS TO DASHBOARDS – THE TAF CFC TEAM IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Foundation's Coalitions for Change (CfC) program supports Philippine leaders in civil society, academia, government, and the private sector who pursue policy reforms to improve the lives of Filipinos. Funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the project has a unique management structure that sees The Asia Foundation and DFAT as partners who jointly decide what reforms to pursue, using a set of program management tools that build trust and enable responsiveness and agility. Critical among these is a program management dashboard that summarizes the program-level and workstream- level TOCs, and other tools such as the Timelines that capture changing contexts, learnings, and reflections over time; findings from Reflection Sessions, and high-level recommendations from internal and external advisors.

Unique among Foundation's program tools, CfC's dashboard is accessible to the donor and its critical friends. This level of transparency ensures that both the Foundation and DFAT know the various reforms being pursued, paused, or stopped. Using the dashboard allows the CfC teams to update and act quickly when opportunities arise or strategies have shifted. The dashboard is a demonstration of how an adaptive program uses tools that are fit-for-purpose, flexible, and collaborative.

Working with its local partners, CfC's approach has contributed to milestone policy reforms that contribute to increasing the quality of life for citizens across the Philippines. Reforms introduced include improved land titling, improved transportation systems, enhanced response to gender-based violence through the national emergency hotline, and tax reform measures that contribute funds to universal health care.

ACTIVITY 1 APPLYING STRATEGY TESTING

You're considering applying Strategy Testing on your program. Get together with your team, line management, and/or other partners. Read and discuss the lessons outlined above.

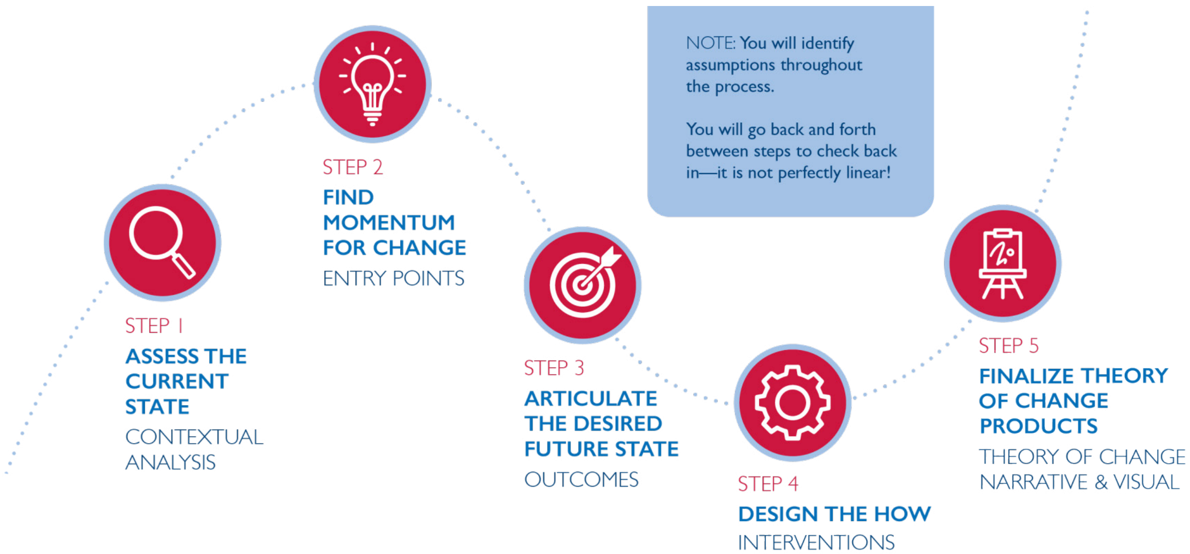
- Which lessons resonate with you and why?
- Which one do you think your team needs to bear in mind the most as you start implementing the program?
- Is your donor likely to be open to applying Strategy Testing? How might you approach the donor on this, including a discussion on resourcing it?
- Are there any other things your team will need to consider, such as do you already have the skill sets mentioned or will they need to be built?

Consider returning to these lessons and your reflection on them as you progress with applying Strategy Testing to your program.

THE DESIGN STAGE

DEVELOPING THEORIES OF CHANGE

(i.e., the 'strategy' that will be tested)



Steps for developing a TOC from the Social Impact/USAID Theory of Change Workbook (2022)

It is impossible to implement Strategy Testing without good Theories of Change (TOCs) for the overall long-term program (pTOC) and near- or intermediate-term individual workstreams (wTOC). A TOC is an idea or hypothesis about the future and how change might be brought about. It requires thinking through and articulating plausible pathways to change - the causal links that explain how and why a change process will happen in a particular context (If/then..., because...). In whatever form a TOC takes, it needs to be a living document, that is, one that can be altered according to actual experience. To ensure such modifiability, it is helpful to think of a TOC as both a process and a product.

As a process, TOC development should involve a range of people, including program team members, MEL staff, partners, donors, and external stakeholders. It should be developed in a way that encourages these people to share ideas of how change happens, what opportunities and challenges there may be, and to speak with candor about risks and assumptions.

As a product, a TOC should include a clear and detailed description or narrative of the hypothesis. It may be stated in a simple text document, or include a diagram that shows the causal links and pathways. At the minimum, a good initial TOC should have:

- A problem or issue statement based on a contextual analysis.
- A description of the desired outcome, or a goal statement, set within a specific time period.
- A description of how the program will support a shift from the problem state to the changed state. The description could include:
  - » Strategies (the approaches you will use).
  - » Anticipated results, outputs, or outcomes in the short, medium, or long term.
- Assumptions and/or anticipated risks that may shape the ability of the program to support progress toward the desired outcome.

HOW A PROGRAM-LEVEL TOC IS DEVELOPED AND INTERACTS WITH WORKING-LEVEL TOCs

Let's say there is a policy reform program whose overarching outcome is to support policy reforms that aim for greater inclusion of persons with disability (PwD). This program will inspire a pTOC. To develop it, the program team undertakes an initial contextual analysis and identifies four potential entry points: 1. The government is interested in developing a National Disability Strategy; 2. The Ministry of Health wants to work out how to make health centers accessible; 3. Several local governments are working with civil society on addressing social prejudices in local communities; and 4. The Journalists' Association is interested in improving media coverage of PWD.

The team creating the overarching pTOC will need to work out whether and to what extent these four directions would add up to making a significant difference to PwD's overall inclusion in society. If the team establishes that each direction has a real potential for making a difference, then the team would embrace each of the four workstreams. Each workstream would have its own wTOC and outcome/goal, and the team would work out how team members will proceed on each wTOC in the next three to six months and set out that strategy in a Workplan.

ACTIVITY 2 ADAPTING THE THEORY OF CHANGE

Can you change your original Theory of Change? Many people think you can't change the original TOC in a program design, but if you're practicing adaptive programming and responding to changes in the context, then the original theory may no longer hold and might need to be overhauled.

- Have you adapted a TOC during program implementation before? Share stories of challenges and opportunities with your colleagues.
- What issues might arise on your program if you want to change the original TOC? What opportunities might occur if you do?

The TAF program team adapts the initial pTOC as the program progresses – it is essentially the strategy that is being tested and the heart of the approach. As noted in the introduction, the program team adjusts the pTOC in response to intervening events and unanticipated changes or opportunities that arise over the course of implementation, thereby progressively increasing the likelihood of either the goal being reached successfully or positioning the team to better judge the unlikelihood and react accordingly. The pTOC will be supported by wTOCs that are developed and tested during program implementation. All TOCs should be developed by and serve the TAF team and partners. A pTOC should not be so complicated that it just gets shelved at the start of the program, or is seen as solely the domain of MEL staff, although the inclusion of MEL staff is essential in the process.

TAF NEPAL SUBNATIONAL GOVERNANCE PROGRAM pTOC AND wTOC

Program-level Theory of Change (pTOC)

GOAL
Promote an enabling environment for a stable, effective, and inclusive sub-national government in Nepal that addresses health and economic security of all, including women and marginalized groups.

OUTCOME 1
Strengthened mechanisms and systems for enhancing intergovernmental relations and dispute resolution across the three tiers of government

- **IR 1.1** Strengthened formal and informal mechanisms for dispute resolution across the three tiers of government
- **IR 1.2** Increased clarity on roles and functions across three tiers of governments
- **IR 1.3** Increased citizens' engagements with subnational governments on issues of accountability

OUTCOME 2
Selected local governments have more inclusive and evidence-based policies and plans toward improved access to public health services

- **IR 2.1** Strengthened Health Management Committees in partner municipalities
- **IR 2.2** Citizens, including women and marginalized communities, have better access to and are better able to participate in selected local government's health policy and planning processes

OUTCOME 3
Selected subnational governments (provincial and local governments) formulate and implement inclusive and evidence-based economic policies and plans

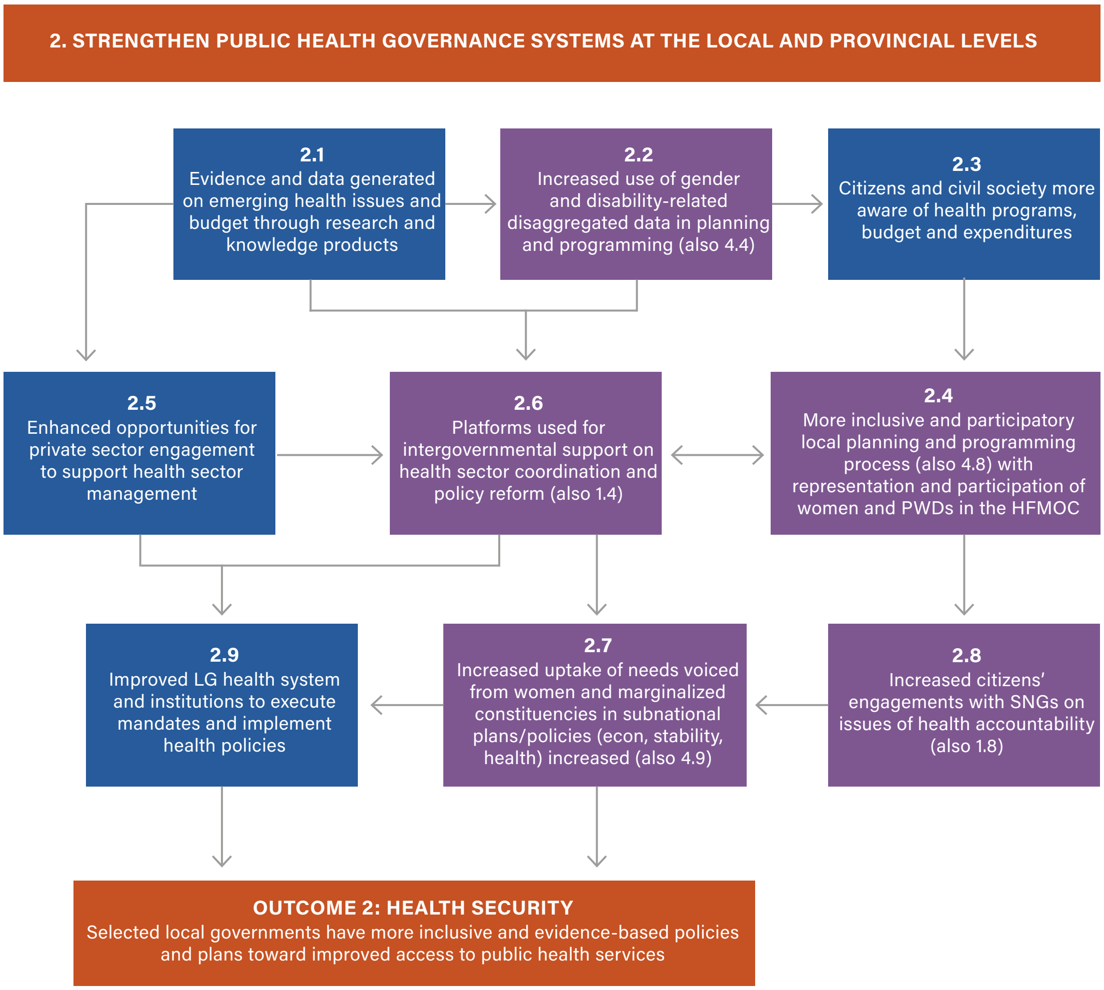
- **IR 3.1** SNGs systems and procedures strengthened in an annual budget cycle process
- **IR 3.2** More transparent and responsive Public Finance Management at SNGs
- **IR 3.3** Selected subnational governments are better able to secure more sources of financing

OUTCOME 4
Subnational policies, programs, and service delivery are inclusive, equitable, and respond to the needs of women and marginalized constituencies

- **IR 4.1** Strengthened diversity, equity, and inclusion at the institutional governance level
- **IR 4.2** Increased gender-responsive budgeting and planning for services that target women, marginalized constituencies, and people with disability
- **IR 4.3** Representatives and officials (people with power) begin to share power with those who have relatively less power at the partner municipality level

TAF NEPAL SUBNATIONAL GOVERNANCE PROGRAM pTOC AND wTOC

Working-level Theory of Change (wTOC) for Outcome 2



It is interesting to note the difference in the structure. The pTOC is far more linear whereas the wTOC breaks down the results into more understandable things that are expected to change. It is not linear and there are even two-way arrows that demonstrate the relationships are far from one directional, like the pTOC suggests. This is for several reasons. The pTOC is often used as a communication tool, which needs to be understood by many stakeholders, while the wTOC is based largely on the actual contextual realities, experience, PEA and it drills down on the causes of the higher-level problems.

GOVERNANCE AND PARTNERSHIPS

Program Governance: The governance structures of a program that deploys Adaptive Management should provide an enabling environment for the program team to adapt, absorb, succeed or fail, learn, further modify, and move on. The program team should provide the same enabling environment for sub-contracted partners. This involves establishing essential trusted relations between team members and partners, as well as a system that accommodates changes in personnel among donor agencies and implementing partners as implementation progresses. TAF teams have found several useful methods for embedding the principles of adaptation into program governance, including three of particular importance:

1. **Establish an effective governance mechanism:** A Steering Committee (or other governance mechanism) will enable the program to be adaptive and accountable – not always the easiest balance to strike. The membership of such a committee is an opportunity to ensure that, in addition to the donor, a diversity of voices have representation in program decision-making. It is important that all committee members have a solid understanding of what the program is trying to achieve and the adaptive way in which it is working so that the committee facilitates rather than impedes the work of the program team.

2. **Agree on partnership principles and 'Ways of Working':** At the beginning of a new program, it can be helpful for those involved in program oversight (the members of a steering committee or other governance mechanism) to establish an agreement on how they will collaborate for the duration of the program. Parties to such an agreement might include the donor agency, the primary implementing partners, and partner government representatives. A Partnership Agreement or 'Ways of Working' can be helpful to get all parties on the same page when negotiated early in the process. An independent third party, such as a partnership broker, may guide the negotiations. Partnership Agreements articulate guiding principles, values, and communication guidelines beyond those stated in the contract or the grant. They should also set out each of the key partners' differing contributions and responsibilities. The Partnership Agreement then sits alongside, and enhances, the program contract or grant.

BUILDING STRONG MULTISTAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS

Some TAF offices, such as in India and Nepal, have found it useful to develop a Partnership (or Collaboration) Agreement with partners, including donors, civil society, and government. These agreements draw on an approach taken by the United Kingdom-based *Partnership Brokers Association*, which supports engaging a third party to workshop and develop an agreement. Parties agree on principles that will guide their joint work, roles, and responsibilities based on their contributions to the partnership. They also agree on their accountabilities and mechanisms for communications and grievance or dispute resolution. When set up at the beginning of a program, such agreements can be very useful in building trust, managing staff changeover, mitigating risk, and addressing issues like micromanagement.

To help programs to be adaptive, a Partnership Agreement can be used to articulate a program's governance arrangements more fully and to enshrine a shared commitment to the approach among all parties. A formalized Agreement is also an excellent risk management tool, as it provides a framework for difficult conversations and a method for overcoming misunderstandings, which are arguably more likely on an adaptive program that often changes course.

3. **Establish the timeframe and format for future Reflection Sessions.** TAF program teams have many ways of engaging government and non-governmental stakeholders in program governance during quarterly progress Reflection Sessions. Program teams should aim to design governance mechanisms that bring these stakeholders together with implementing partners and donor agencies.

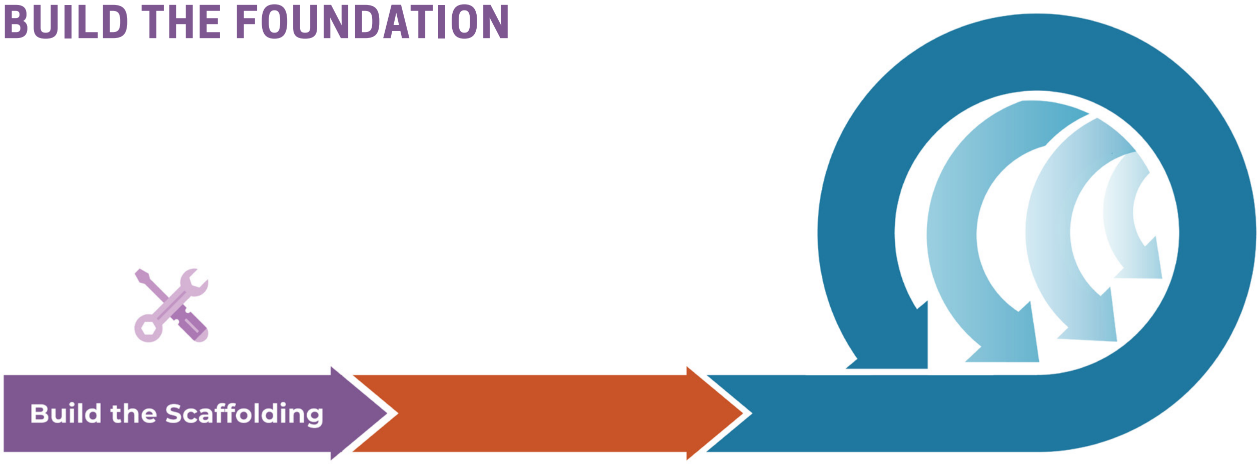
OVERCOMING THE EVIDENCE CHALLENGE – THE TAF SNGP TEAM IN NEPAL

In Nepal, the Foundation's Subnational Governance Program (SNGP) team has practiced Adaptive Management since 2019, under the leadership of the Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning Director. The issue of subnational governance in Nepal is inherently complex because the country's federal structure was introduced only recently with the 2015 constitution; multiple unresolved issues and overlapping roles and functions remain across the new three-tiered administrative structure. The TAF SNGP team supports the Government of Nepal in its efforts to clarify roles and responsibilities between different government levels and administrative agencies. The SNGP team works across all three levels of government in seven provinces in partnership with around 40 implementing local civil society organizations, think tanks, and other organizations.

ACTIVITY 3 THE MAKING OF A STRONG PARTNERSHIP

Whether or not you have a formal Partnership Agreement, most implementation partnerships are built on shared principles, even if the principles are implicit, such as equity or mutual respect may be. In working with your program partners, what are the key principles that you feel enable strong partnerships?

BUILD THE FOUNDATION



- PEA informs design
- pTOC articulates outcomes
- MEL system in place
- Local team empowered

In the TAF program team's experience, an Adaptive Management program design needs a strong foundation constructed from a robust contextual analysis and strategic cornerstone. Rather than a full-fledged and thoroughly planned design document, a strategic scaffold lays out some criteria and analyses that provide guardrails for the program to be used as it is implemented and communicated. The foundation provides the team with parameters within which they can adapt TOCs and Workplans, and the tools used at each stage. Program teams may add to or adapt these tools, or develop their own; these can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A regularly updated **Political Economy Analysis (PEA)** that focusses on changes in formal and informal institutions and the ways various stakeholders interact with them. It can be a text document, a PowerPoint presentation, or any format the team finds helpful to return to and update at regular intervals.

- A **program-level Theory of Change (pTOC)** that is developed with the team with input from partners and donors. The pTOC needs to be sufficiently abstract to accommodate likely future workstreams or 'reform tracks', such as the sectoral areas the program may start to explore, and sufficiently grounded in relevant context to be meaningful.

- A **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Plan** that supports an Adaptive Management approach and Strategy Testing system to ensure that both upstream progress reporting and program learning are included. A robust MEL system should enable the program team to collect and analyze data to meaningfully adapt the program as necessary. For example, it is important that the MEL Plan includes indicators closely tied to the pTOC and wTOCs so that data and evidence to support decision-making on whether the TOC is working are available during Reflection Sessions.

HOW MUCH IS PRE-PROGRAMMED FOR A 12 MONTH PERIOD? IS THERE ROOM FOR ADAPTATION? WHAT WOULD YOUR WORKPLAN LOOK LIKE IF YOUR PROGRAM WAS ENTIRELY ADAPTIVE?

Have a look at your Workplan as it currently stands. A Strategy Testing system may make a traditional month-by-month Annual Workplan redundant because work will not be planned out on a 12-month basis, but rather three to six months in advance. Since contextual and internal events or workshops and stakeholder meetings and consultations may not be scheduled so far in advance in an adaptive program, its Workplan will look quite different. While an Adaptive Management-style Workplan may not include detailed descriptions of planned activities, it can still be robust by describing clear stop/go points. These should be discussed by the program team and agreed with the donor.

WORKING ON CHILDCARE REFORM – THE TAF MTRP TEAM IN MALAYSIA

In 2019, the Foundation began working closely with Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through the Malaysia-Thailand Reform Partnership (MTRP) to develop a flexible program to support critical policy reforms in both countries. At the time, the operating environment in Malaysia was highly uncertain. The country had seen three different prime ministers in three years and government priorities had changed rapidly each time a new minister was sworn in. This created anxiety among bureaucrats hesitant to initiate or support any new policy direction.

Strategy Testing allowed the TAF MTRP program team in Malaysia to make the case to DFAT to shift the focus of the program from the federal to state government level while the team maintained engagement with relevant federal civil servants to inform them of progress. The focus of the program shifted to a collaboration with the Malaysian National News Agency (BERNAMA) on a bottom-up public relations campaign to promote the benefits of improving childcare policies in order to encourage women's workforce entry and retention. Through working with BERNAMA and other partners, the Foundation has contributed to federal and state governments' heightened commitment to childcare services, resulting in the Malaysian government setting out a 2022 policy statement that mandated childcare centers in all government offices and 2023 state legislation on child development.

THE INCEPTION PHASE

CREATING THE RIGHT TEAM ENVIRONMENT

TAF offices have found that effort is needed to create the right team environment, one founded on candor, trust, and honesty; one where teams are comfortable conversing about failures as much as successes. Efforts are also needed to develop the ability to lead and guide others with self-awareness (or what is known as 'conscious leadership'). Without the right team environment, Reflection Sessions prove insufficiently robust to address weaknesses in program implementation and Critical Friends remain uncritical. As DT Global[5] recently argued in an excellent guidance note: "Creating the right culture for adaptive management is key to success. In essence this is about individuals, empowerment and trust." The note goes on to suggest that: "Trust between client and implementer involves openness and learning together, predicated on the client's commitment to either working adaptively in partnership with the program or providing autonomy, space and time for the program to deliver adaptively. Similarly, trust and openness between an implementer and partner sub-grantees or sub-contractors is required, predicated on mutual commitment to adaptive management." To this we would add that trust across those different levels can only be established and maintained when team members and partners are open to discussing, and occasionally challenging, the differential power relations embedded in hierarchies within program teams, as well as between teams, partners, and stakeholders.

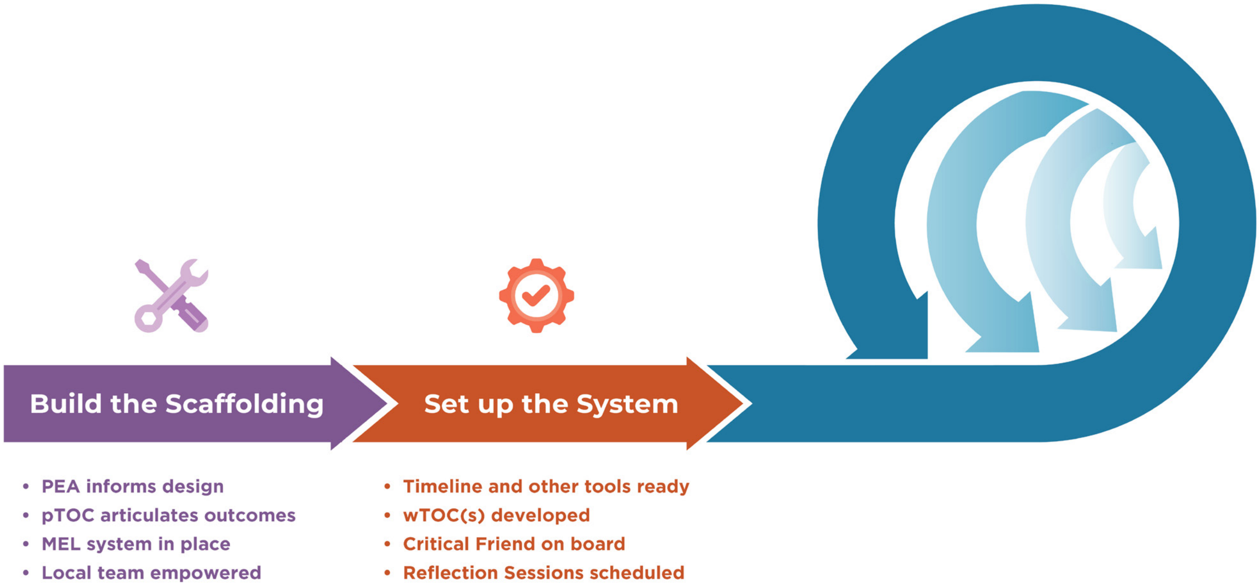
IDENTIFYING A CRITICAL FRIEND

A Critical Friend is extremely helpful and many of the Foundation's Adaptive Management programs utilize the support of one during Reflection Sessions.

[5] https://dt-global.com/assets/files/dt-global-guidance-note-introduction-to-adaptive-management.pdf

A Critical Friend needs to be sufficiently involved in the program to absorb its details, while remaining sufficiently outside it to maintain the objectivity needed to challenge the team's assumptions and interpretations. For example, in the Coalitions for Change program in the Philippines, this role is played by what is known as the Partnership Strategic Panel (PSP), whose members are familiar with the country's context and offer strategic feedback but are independent of the program. These 'critical friends' enable robust contestation and provide higher-level technical guidance to the program, whilst remaining pragmatic and unhindered by internal dynamics.

SETTING UP THE SYSTEM



The key features of the Strategy Testing system are the TOC, a variety of data collection systems and plans for regular reflection on the data, with the combination used by a team that understands each tool and the overall purpose of the system. In addition, there are a variety of other tools that TAF teams use to collect data and to analyze the situation and progress, including Timelines, Policy Trackers, Observation Tool, and so forth. As noted above, regardless of which additional tools a team chooses to use it is important that team members and partners understand how they fit together and relate to the MEL system and avoid duplicate efforts.

ACTIVITY 4 IDENTIFYING THE CRITICAL FRIEND

Does your program currently have a Critical Friend? If not, who might you approach to play that role? What kinds of questions do you think they might usefully ask?

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

DEVELOPING wTOCs

As an Adaptive Management program gets started, there are likely to be several different areas or lines of work and the possibility that others will come online further down the track. Some may build upon previous related work, while others may be entirely new. Each will have its own outcome. Accordingly, it is important that each line of work has its own wTOC, one devised by the program team, supported by MEL staff, and fully understood by team members and partners. While the overarching pTOC is useful for program communications and MEL strategies, program teams also need shorter-term, action-oriented wTOCs to shape immediate Workplans. Conceptually, these wTOCs nest under the pTOC and should have a direct logical link to it. Each wTOC should articulate the assumed causal pathways through which near-term and intermediate goals will be reached and the strategies program teams will use to achieve the goals.

WORKING THEORY OF CHANGE

Since a wTOC should be amended regularly, it can be documented in a simple Word document table. The TAF team in Malaysia uses one that looks like this:

Country	
Initiative Title	
Start Date	
Version of the wTOC	#
Date of this Version	
Problem Statement	
Ultimate Outcome	
Analysis of Key Dynamics	
Strategies & Intervention	
Intermediate Outcomes	*#Linked to pTOC*

COLLECTING REAL-TIME DATA

What events or actions are happening that are relevant to the program?

TAF teams have developed several tools to help them collect the kind of real-time data they need to be able to analyze and reflect upon at the time or in a Reflection Session, and to enable the program to respond to. Real-time data might require an immediate response or it may be sufficient for the team to record it for future reflection. This means that Reflection Sessions are built around data: there is something to reflect upon, at regular intervals, and some kind of data, even if it is anecdotal, drives the discussion.

The Timeline

Several TAF teams collect data on a daily or, at minimum, a weekly basis in a Timeline by using a Word document or an online dashboard. The Timeline is the place in which to record all snippets of information that arise during meetings, consultations, and other program events so that useful information can be recorded rather than lost. The key to using a Timeline tool is to capture not only what happened, but the implications an activity has or may have for the program. The Timeline can serve as a process tracing tool that provides chronological data for analysis of a program's progress and contribution to an outcome.

TAF teams find it useful to record in a Timeline:

- Significant contextual events such as changes in the economic or political environment like elections or bureaucratic restructuring.
- Outcomes of key stakeholder engagements, such as meetings with government and non-government stakeholders or other consultations, particularly regular ones.
- Other intel. Shorthand for 'intelligence', intel includes any other bits of information that will likely have a bearing on program activities and/or objectives that that the team picks up from conversations with partners and other stakeholders.

A Timeline can look like this:

DATE	SHORT DESCRIPTION[6]	RELEVANCE OR IMPLICATIONS	REFERENCES
01.01.24	What is the minimum amount of information necessary to understand this event?	What does this mean for our existing long or short-term goals? Is this an opportunity? What does it mean for our stakeholders?	Links to any relevant documents (such as meeting Minutes)

In some instances where a TAF program team hosts complex policy dialogue with multiple partners, the teams have found it necessary to develop additional tools to capture and analyze the information and dynamics in the room in a way that goes beyond the Timeline. TAF's Nepal office, for instance, has a Policy Action Observation Tool that gives teams a rubric and series of guiding questions with which to assess the level and quality of participation of different individuals involved in policy dialogue as the dialogue is taking place. In other words, the Timeline serves as a good basis for everyday data collection, but sometimes other tools are needed. What is important is that teams develop the discipline of interpreting, analyzing, and capturing their thoughts in a tool like the Timeline for future reference.

THE RIGHT INFORMATION IN THE RIGHT PLACE

While it may sound obvious, over time, program teams have realized that they facilitate Adaptive Management if they use technology to make it easy to access and update their various strategic documentations. In this way, Timeline tools have evolved to be much more closely linked to contextual and program events and nested wTOCs, which facilitates frequent reflections on the links between them. TAF teams have experimented with several different apps and dashboards to facilitate daily and weekly feedback loops. Teams should decide what form the tool should take to best meet their needs and capture the most useful information, adapting the tool over time to make sure it is fit for purpose. The Timeline tool should not simply become an additional reporting burden, and senior staff should regularly check in with the whole team to make sure that the tool is useful and that everyone understands its purpose.

[6] *The description here is not, for example, the minutes of a meeting, which should be saved elsewhere and linked to in the References section.*

ACTIVITY 5 CREATING A TIMELINE

Get together with your team and set up a Timeline document for your program. Have a go at using it for a week. At the end of the week, reconvene and ask yourselves:

- How easy or difficult was it to integrate data collection into your everyday work?
- What kinds of information did you collect? Did you all collect the same kind or different kinds?
- What do you think of the quality of the information collected? Has an analysis been included? Could the quality or analysis be stronger?
- Would this document be useful to you as a team to continue collecting Timeline data?

LEARNING AND CHANGING COURSE

What are the implications of our data on our next steps?

Recognizing that program teams cannot adapt unless they pause and reflect on their progress, the Strategy Testing approach provides sufficient time for regular, facilitated, and structured reflection.

Learning is the hard but essential part – that's why time is needed! This time is found in Reflection Sessions – periodic, structured breaks from day-to-day program implementation that allow the team to step back and think about what it has learned and consider whether the pTOC, wTOCs, and implementation strategies are still valid in light of new information, insights, and changes in the local context, as per data collected in the Timeline. It is important to schedule Reflection Sessions into the calendars of the program team, partners, and outside expert or Critical Friend as much in advance as possible, at a time that works for everyone, so that as many key people as possible can attend. After each Reflection Session, the team can decide whether and how the TOCs and/or the implementation strategies need to change in order to reach the desired outcome or, more rarely, if the outcome requires reconsideration.

The frequency and duration of Reflection Sessions varies. As a rule, most teams that practice Strategy Testing find it best to dedicate approximately one day every three or four months to reflection, unless a major contextual or program event impacts the program in the interim. In that case, it is best to convene immediately. Session participants may vary, but at a minimum usually include the entire program team, including operations staff.

As noted earlier, it is useful to include a Critical Friend in Reflection Sessions, someone who understands the program and its operating environment, but is not involved in day-to-day program implementation. While it is important to note current program achievements in each Reflection Session, the focus should move beyond those to address the more difficult questions of what context changes and events need to be considered, what is not working, and whether assumptions still hold.

DOCUMENTING DECISION-MAKING

Document, document, document! It is very important that someone writes up Reflection Session conclusions and decisions, including their rationales, for accountability purposes, institutional memory, and for current and future communication with partners and others involved in the program. Depending on contractual arrangements, the program team can act on some decisions unilaterally, while other decisions will need donor agreement before action may be taken. A well-documented rationale allows the team to be prepared for possible course-change discussions with the donor. Reflection Sessions may also result in the team or partners proposing alterations to the pTOC or wTOC. That is a welcome measure, because TOCs should be working documents that the program team amends throughout implementation, at times in collaboration with the donor or others involved in program governance.

ACTIVITY 6 REFLECTING ON YOUR TOC

Practice having a mini-Reflection Session.

- Reflect together on your TOC. Does it still encapsulate your goals, strategies, and direction? If so, why? If not, why not? What are the assumptions it is based on? Do they still hold?
- What was the most significant contextual event that happened in the last six months of relevance to the program? How did it affect the program?
- Were there new opportunities? How did you respond to those?
- Is there anywhere on the program where you are stuck? Why? What might help you get unstuck?
- Which lessons resonate with you and why?

After you've finished, discuss whether and how the reflection was useful.

CHANGING THE WORKPLAN

Adaptive Management programs tend to have some workstreams that are fairly locked-in for long periods, and other streams that are more adaptable, preventing the need to constantly modify the entire program. As a result, Reflection Sessions may only apply to parts of an overall program workstream, with those parts revised after the session. At the end of each Reflection Session, a date should be set for the next session, and relevant changes, revisions, additions of new activities, and so forth should be recorded in the Timeline after the Reflection Session.

WORKING WITH BANKS ON FINANCIAL SERVICES FOR WOMEN – THE TAF WBC TEAM IN MONGOLIA

In 2016, The Asia Foundation launched a Women's Business Center (WBC) in Mongolia, the first of its kind in the country, to support aspiring women entrepreneurs in starting up and growing their businesses. The Foundation used a common change pathway model for women's economic empowerment programs; the model focuses on building individual women's entrepreneurial capacities. Accordingly, the WBC project supported dozens of women in developing and launching their business ideas. In 2020, the Foundation, with support from Global Affairs Canada, built on this experience by setting up a new women's economic empowerment project and practicing Strategy Testing on it. Through a series of critical Reflection Sessions, the team recognized that the earlier WBC model was not addressing any of the very significant structural constraints to women's economic empowerment in Mongolia, such as the lack of access to start-up loans and other financing, an exclusion shaped by broader patriarchal social norms and values.

The Strategy Testing system helped the team pivot away from the sole focus on capacity development to working directly with financial institutions. The team succeeded in encouraging the banks to launch several new products tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs and to pilot systemic credit-access solutions, such as a modified credit-ratings scale and loan-guarantee requirements. The TAF WBC program team continues to use Strategy Testing to track progress and to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of program approaches, aiming to address key constraints to women's economic empowerment.

CLOSING OUT

As a program is coming to the end of its cycle and future sustainability is increasingly in focus, Strategy Testing reflections are an excellent way of posing difficult questions around what will or won't be the legacy of the program. Reflections are also a useful way of ensuring that all who are involved in the program are mindful of the importance of a smooth transition to its conclusion, one that ensures the collaboration ends on a positive note and that relationships of trust are maintained.

Use this final stage as an opportunity to document not only what has been learned from the program, but what you have learned from using the Strategy Testing system. A final Reflection Session can be effective for capturing that learning: Did you use it for the entire program? Did you find it useful? What challenges did you face? Did you adapt it and if so, why?

ACTIVITY 7 SHARING INSIGHTS

So, you've read through this Strategy Testing guide and have maybe done some of the activities. Which two or three main points struck you the most? Note them down and discuss them with your team and colleagues.

Decide if you will you take up Strategy Testing or elements of the approach on this or a future program.

The Asia Foundation