

Report

# Building a global learning alliance on adaptive management

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## Acronyms

<b>A-COR</b>	Agreement or Contracting Officer's Representative in USAID
<b>ADS</b>	Automated Directives System
<b>CLA</b>	Collaborating, Learning and Adapting
<b>DFID</b>	UK Department for International Development
<b>GLAM</b>	Global Learning for Adaptive Management
<b>IDS</b>	Institute of Development Studies of the University of Sussex
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee
<b>MEL</b>	monitoring, evaluation and learning
<b>MEL4AM</b>	monitoring, evaluation and learning for adaptive management
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>OPM</b>	Oxford Policy Management
<b>SRO</b>	Senior Responsible Officers in DFID
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development

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# Executive summary

International development organisations face increasingly complex and interconnected challenges. There is growing evidence that addressing these challenges effectively requires more systemic, innovative and flexible responses, building on new analytical and practical ways of working. This has been termed ‘adaptive management’, central to which is the principle that more intelligent and dynamic use of evidence, information and data, integrated into innovative adaptive methods and approaches, can help to inform and underpin new kinds of development policies and programmes.

The UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have been prominent adopters of adaptive management ideas and approaches. For USAID, it has been mainstreamed within the core operating guidelines for USAID staff and contractors, alongside significant investment in platforms for learning, resource sharing and peer support. DFID has increasingly sought to support adaptive management through growing investments in specific projects, sectors and initiatives and through a programme of training and support led by the Evaluation Unit, Better Delivery and innovation teams.

At the heart of adaptive management is ensuring that evidence-informed decision-making becomes a routine part of programme delivery. This requires programmes to use a range of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) approaches more effectively. Currently, many established MEL practices – from weak monitoring to inconsistent learning to ineffective and poorly timed evaluations – fail to provide a basis for improved feedback loops that are the basis of adaptive management. Better use of MEL therefore presents a significant under-used opportunity to advance adaptive management, while responding to long-perceived needs to improve how MEL systems, processes and data feed into actual decision-making.

Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM) is a collaborative cross-organisational initiative that aims to respond to these opportunities and needs. It seeks to do so by strengthening operational practice across both DFID and USAID, and by working with their partners and other key development organisations. Specifically, GLAM will develop, test and scale new and adapted MEL approaches that can help to underpin effective adaptive interventions.

## Context and opportunity for GLAM

Across both DFID and USAID, and for a range of large development organisations, there is a common reflection that these approaches ‘make sense’ when working in complex environments, but that there are gaps in terms of how to put them into practice. Staff frequently identify challenges in ensuring adaptive management is delivered effectively and in ways that measurably improve programme quality and outcomes, as well as in delivering adaptive management amid wider institutional constraints.

Some typical operational challenges for adaptive management include:

- the need for better understanding of what evidence, quality and accountability really look like for adaptive management (what we call ‘adaptive rigour’)
- the need to better manage or overcome potential trade-offs, such as: balancing rapid feedback and the longer time horizons needed to affect long-standing social and economic problems; balancing reducing compliance and reporting burdens, while better aggregating learning across programmes and portfolios; and balancing the delivery of adaptive management with pressures for upwards accountability and reporting.

Several key factors can be critical in shaping the wider enabling environment too, which is key in shaping the potential for adaptive management and better use of MEL. These include the level of risk orientation and the role of senior leaders; the amount of time available for experimentation and reflection; staff capacity, skills, composition and retention; and procurement, contracting and implementing mechanisms.

## Our vision for a global learning alliance

Given the challenges identified, any global learning initiative needs a multi-faceted approach to how change can happen. Our vision for GLAM is therefore that, by 2021, it will be an active, globally networked learning alliance that promotes and supports ‘adaptive rigour’ by identifying which tools, skills, practices, relationships and

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incentives best harness the potential of MEL for adaptive decision-making. We will achieve this by focusing on three core areas.

### **1 Transformative technical assistance**

GLAM will offer transformative and relationship-based guidance and technical support to stakeholders across DFID, USAID and their partners on accessing, using and learning about a range of innovative methods and approaches for adaptive MEL. We will use an ‘accompaniment’ or ‘co-design’ model that puts programme managers and implementers at the centre, with a focus on building sustained relationships of support over time. Crucially, we will ensure that those providing support offer experience in a range of MEL models, different approaches to adaptive management, and in organisational change and learning – and include expertise from outside the ‘usual development suspects’.

### **2 World-class research, learning and evidence on adaptive rigour**

We will produce systematic evidence and learning on adaptive management and MEL, and how to implement it effectively. In addition, we will use evidence and learning to shape and support programme decision-making

*within* GLAM, informing stakeholder engagement and helping build learning communities across local, national and international levels. We will continue to improve conceptual clarity and strengthen the adaptive management evidence base by providing clearer definitions and standards for adaptive management, quality and rigour. We will act as a ‘critical friend’ to programme managers and implementers – evaluating what works, and what doesn’t. And we will focus on incentives – looking at what enables and inhibits more adaptive, context-appropriate engagement and why.

### **3 Convening and brokering a global alliance**

By establishing GLAM as a key ‘standard-setting’ initiative, we will highlight and support enablers and proactively influence inhibitors. We will cross-pollinate and disseminate ideas and practice for emerging communities of practice within and across DFID, USAID and their partners, as well as acting as an ‘honest broker’ between senior leadership and practitioners over the stumbling blocks for adaptive management. Finally, we will act as advocates for MEL for adaptive management (MEL4AM), using senior leaders in GLAM itself to continue to raise the profile of these approaches and of what ‘adaptive rigour’ means in practice.

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# 1 The need for a new global learning alliance

## 1.1 The context for GLAM

International development organisations face increasingly complex and interconnected challenges. There is growing evidence that addressing these challenges effectively requires more systemic, innovative and flexible responses, building on new analytical and practical ways of working. At the heart of this is the principle that new kinds of evidence, information and data and related methods and approaches can help to inform and underpin new kinds of development policies and programmes.

In the last few years, DFID and USAID have sought to capitalise on these challenges and opportunities through a range of initiatives. Policy-level changes such as DFID's Smart Rules and USAID Automated Directives System (ADS) 201 revisions are contributing to changes in how both organisations operate. At the same time, investments have been made to enhance how the organisations work at the practical level, through new methods, processes and guidance on helping staff develop and deliver interventions that are robust-yet-flexible.

This has led to a growing recognition that the processes, methods and tools employed by DFID and USAID and their partners need to be enhanced, to ensure staff are able to effectively use evidence, information and

data in adaptive programming approaches. Systematic approaches to learning are seen as vital for guiding and supporting DFID, USAID and their implementing partners to deliver relevant, appropriate and dynamic development interventions.

Against this context, DFID and USAID have launched a four-year collaborative cross-organisational initiative – Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM) (Box 1) – which is designed to develop and use MEL tools, systems and processes that bridge the gap between adaptation and rigour. GLAM seeks to strengthen operational practice across both organisations by developing, testing and scaling new and adapted approaches to MEL that can help to underpin effective adaptive interventions.

During the initiative's design phase, the GLAM consortium undertook a process of research, learning and engagement across DFID and USAID, which involved 86 interviews with agency staff, two workshops, and a range of small-scale consultations with leaders of initiatives in the adaptive management and MEL space. This report captures the main findings from this process and sets out the consortium's view on how to make a reality GLAM's vision of becoming a globally networked learning alliance that promotes adaptive rigour.

### **Box 1 The Global Learning for Adaptive Management initiative**

The Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM) initiative, funded by DFID and USAID, is a globally networked learning alliance that aims to actively identify, operationalise and promote rigorous evidence-based approaches to adaptive management.

Established to help catalyse the wider uptake of adaptive management principles and practices, the four-year initiative will provide tailored guidance and practical support to practitioners and policy-makers of adaptive management, generate quality evidence and learning about effective monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) for adaptive management (AM) (MEL4AM), and act as a catalyst, champion and convenor to change thinking and practice.

The GLAM initiative is implemented by a consortium, which is led by the Overseas Development Institute, with the Institute of Development Studies of the University of Sussex (IDS), Oxfam, International Rescue Committee (IRC), Oxford Policy Management (OPM), Social Impact and ThoughtWorks as core partners.

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## 1.2 The current state of MEL4AM

DFID and USAID have been prominent adopters of ‘adaptive management’ ideas. USAID has mainstreamed it within the core operating guidelines USAID staff and contractors follow, and invested in implementation platforms and portals for learning, resource sharing and peer support. DFID is increasingly supporting adaptive management approaches in sectors and through specific initiatives, and its Better Delivery team is providing training and support. Although staff within both organisations recognise that these approaches ‘make sense’ when working in complex environments, they face difficulties putting these ideas into practice.

Staff identified several challenges, namely ensuring that adaptive management is delivered routinely and effectively in ways that improve programme quality and outcomes, and delivering adaptive management in the face of wider institutional constraints (from contracting and procurement to upwards accountability and value-for-money pressures). The GLAM initiative will need to grapple with both aspects to achieve sustained improvements in practice. A core operational challenge is building staff and contractor understanding of how to deliver adaptive management effectively, and in ways that lead to improved results.

### 1.2.1 What tools, and how to choose

One stumbling block frequently identified is the multiplicity of potential approaches, tools and frameworks (GLAM identified over 100 across DFID and USAID alone), and understandable confusion about which to use, when and why. During interviews, staff struggled to identify good practice or to evaluate the perceived utility of specific tools and approaches. On the other hand, multiple people did talk about the *lack* of tools, and the need for new MEL systems and approaches for gathering, analysing and applying evidence. This suggests the need for better internal dissemination and support on the use of existing tools and guidance. As such, **developing new methods may be less of a need than the identification, selection and application** of the right balance of MEL approaches to support adaptive management.

A second issue is **the need for clarity on what adaptive management is, and where monitoring, learning and evaluation sit within it**. This was particularly evident in DFID, where in contrast to USAID, there is no set definition or set of guidance around adaptive

management. However, there are gaps in understanding across both organisations in terms of what adaptive management really looks like in practice – often expressed in terms of requests for more case studies and illustrations of practice on the ground.

### 1.2.2 Approaching different aspects of MEL

Alongside greater clarity and navigation of tools and frameworks, staff identified gaps in knowledge and challenges for how to approach different aspects of monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Specific to **monitoring**, staff identified challenges around what types of monitoring approaches can best support more ‘real-time’ monitoring and link in to ongoing decision-making. Some pointed to the need for quality, real-time monitoring data, and highlighted the usefulness of bedrock, basket, open-ended and process indicators.<sup>1</sup> However, most staff have limited experience with these types of approaches, and want to understand how they can be implemented so that they meet acceptable levels of quality and accountability. Particular gaps were identified in terms of understanding how to balance rapid feedback and consideration of the longer time horizons needed to affect long-standing social, political and economic problems too.

Specific to **learning**, existing adaptive programmes in both USAID and DFID tend to emphasise the importance of quarterly or biannual reflection cycles, where, within a safe space, staff engage in honest appraisal and critique of the theory of change. A key issue here is how these regular reviews feed into decision-making (or not), and whether there is real appetite for course correction or indeed stopping funding if elements are not on track. Again, staff members require more support and coaching to understand how to support these reflection cycles, and how to critically evaluate whether they are effective and can influence decision-making.

There were fewer specific examples of **evaluation** approaches that were perceived to be particularly well suited to adaptive programmes; many – adaptive trials, process tracing, qualitative comparative analysis, outcome harvesting<sup>2</sup> – require longer timeframes than the rapid feedback cycles that are core to adaptive management. Interviewees expressed the need for more attention to outputs, process evaluation, micro-testing prior to scale up, and smaller scale, more rapid and nimble evaluations. They saw value in embedded MEL advisors within projects/programmes, like a developmental evaluation approach.

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1 Bedrock indicators at the outcome level establish medium to long-term goalposts, while more flexible outputs identify intended changes (i.e. reduce barriers to service uptake), but do not pre-specify which barriers. Process indicators recognise the relational nature of adaptive management and offer a way to hold programmes accountable for learning and using evidence to change practices, not simply for delivering goods and services.

2 As listed in a forthcoming Centre of Excellence for Development Impact and Learning (CEDIL) paper on timely evaluation (Webster, J. et al., forthcoming).



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Across these three areas, what emerges are some real gaps in understanding how to apply adaptive management principles in practice, and how to ensure that monitoring, evaluation, and learning (which should sit at the heart of adaptive management) are delivered effectively – in ways that support these principles but also allow for accountability and scrutiny. In other words, **staff would like to better understand what rigour, quality and accountability really look like for adaptive management.** There are concerns – particularly from DFID staff – that adaptive management could be used to cover a lack of clarity on what to achieve and how, and a need to demonstrate that these principles can be delivered while still providing assurance for how public funds are used.

### 1.2.3 Challenges from the wider enabling environment

A number of other constraints, which reflect the wider enabling environment, were also identified for improving adaptive management through better MEL:

- **Efficiency and value for money – specifically how to balance the delivery of adaptive management with pressures for upwards accountability and reporting.** This is reflected in expectations to demonstrate particular definitions of efficiency, value for money and attribution, as well as review processes that are often built around a logframe (specifically for DFID) or performance monitoring that is focused on quantitative and output-oriented measures of ‘success’. These pressures are linked to the broader political contexts in both countries, atmospheres of heightened public scrutiny and common definitions of what ‘efficiency’ and ‘value for money’ mean. **There is an identified need to highlight how applying adaptive management can help to strengthen accountability and the value of money spent, and will require better defining what these core agendas look like too.**
- **Timeframes – specifically how to balance rapid feedback and consideration of the longer time horizons needed to affect long-standing social, political and economic problems.** Interviewees noted that evidence often comes too late to be useful for programmes, and that identifying what ‘good enough’ evidence is, to know if a programme or initiative is on the right track, is challenging, especially for complex social, political and economic trends. **There is an identified need to show what appropriate timeframes for review and adaptation are, and how to balance short ‘sprint’ cycles with longer term change processes.**

- **Scope and human resourcing – specifically how to balance requests to lighten (or at least not add to) compliance and reporting burdens,** and to better aggregate learning across programmes and portfolios. Staff commonly requested more focused, lighter or more streamlined MEL approaches, highlighting the time and resource constraints often faced, while also requesting the ability to better aggregate evidence and learning across programmes and portfolios (to build more macro understanding of how change does or doesn’t happen). Balancing these is possible and should be a core aim of adaptive management approaches. However, there are implications in terms of human and financial resourcing and skill sets. **There is an identified need to maintain rigour while also lightening the burden of reporting, and to better support cross programme and portfolio learning and aggregation.**

## 1.3 Improving MEL4AM: enablers and constraints

The landscaping review revealed that the prominent constraint for delivering adaptive management was not specific gaps in MEL tools and frameworks: rather, what staff lack is an understanding of the required skill sets to confidently deliver adaptive management, and use MEL effectively as part of that.

At the same time, most staff stressed the importance of considering the broader systems within which MEL and adaptive management operate. Across a range of factors we identified,<sup>3</sup> four categories of enablers and constraints emerged as most critical: leadership and culture; staff time for reflections; staff capacity and composition; and procurement and implementing mechanisms.

These enablers and constraints reinforce the need to look beyond a narrow set of MEL tools and models, and to understand how these interact with wider processes of contracting, procurement and implementing mechanisms, and also the underlying incentives and norms in an organisation. Attention needs to be paid to those ‘soft’ skills and behaviours staff need to deliver adaptive management effectively (i.e. not just as a new ‘tool’), and to engaging with senior management to support conducive working environments.

### Leadership and culture

Interviewees emphasised the importance of courageous leadership at headquarter, country and programme levels, among ministers, administrators, directors, civil servants,

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3 Our landscaping review identified all of the enabling conditions in USAID’s Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) framework as influential, to varying degrees of prominence: organisation’s culture (openness; relationships and networks based on trust; time, space and motivation for reflection, learning and iterative improvement); resource allocation (budgets including time; flexible implementing mechanisms including contracts; staff composition and skills); and to a lesser extent, business processes (knowledge management; institutional memory; transparent and autonomous decision-making). These sources also raised two other factors: the embeddedness of adaptive management and MEL4AM from the outset in the programme design, and the structure of the agency and the broader political environment in which it operates.

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foreign service officers, foreign service nationals and procurement staff in demonstrating an understanding of, valuing and practicing adaptive management. Where such leadership existed, staff felt they had a ‘safer space’ to apply MEL and adaptive management practices and to support learning.

Yet interviewees also expressed concern regarding perceived **risk-averse institutional environments**. This sentiment was expressed by staff at all levels, including those in senior roles to whom others were looking for leadership and support. The fear of being perceived as having failed, unwillingness to share experiences, perceptions of onerous risk mitigation procedures and compliance demands, as well as institutional inertia were all identified as constraining factors.

### **Staff time for reflection**

A related but distinct constraint is **staff time** to embed an adaptive management approach. With already overloaded schedules, the time investment needed frequent communication, developing and maintaining relationships, gathering information on an ongoing basis, and particularly time and space for reflection, is perceived to be challenging. Most adaptive management programmes require a more intensive management workload, which is rarely explicitly accounted for in the design and resourcing of programmes. Interviews and documents from both organisations emphasised the need to create – perhaps mandate – time for reflection as part of embedding a learning culture. These ‘pause and reflect’ windows would bring together staff across multiple positions and specialities, including programme and MEL.

### **Staff skills and composition**

The third prominent dimension was the recruitment, development, assessment and reward of **staff with particular attributes, mindsets and soft skills** conducive to adaptive management ways of working, including but

not limited to: curiosity and creativity, critical thinking, communicating and listening, identifying and facilitating local solutions, experience with change management, openness to risk, understanding of political economy, and comfort with uncertainty. Some individuals may be more suited to these skills than others, but everyone can learn aspects of them, given the right support and an enabling organisational culture that is supportive. Emphasis was placed in interviews on the need for face-to-face mentoring, coaching and central support and expertise.

### **Procurement and implementing mechanisms**

The implications of different **implementing and contracting mechanisms** are commonly identified as key potential barriers. Useful examples from adaptive programmes already underway included multi-year funding with flexibility within broad budget categories, master purchase agreements with pre-approved vendors, reserve funds for learning and adaptation, phased-in implementation, flexible and shock response capacity and the use of ‘sprints’ or regular reflection cycles. But interviewees also noted the limitations of rigid budgets with spend/burn rates, rules on financial forecasting, fiscal year spending constraints, procurement processes that reinforce hierarchical relationships between agreement and contracting officer representatives and implementing partners, and burdensome administrative hurdles to change logframes and theories of change, which can sometimes trigger flags to re-tender contracts. Moreover, previous programmes that were explicitly designed in an adaptive way have highlighted the importance of open, trusting relationships between donors and implementing organisations, which needs to be reinforced by the procurement and contracting model. Trusting relationships were seen to be facilitated by staff continuity, more permeable organisational boundaries, more frequent communication, and giving implementing partners greater autonomy (or ‘empowered accountability’).

# 2 Our vision of a global learning alliance

The vision for GLAM is that by 2021, it will be an active, globally networked learning alliance which can demonstrate adaptive rigour and promote greater uptake of adaptive management.

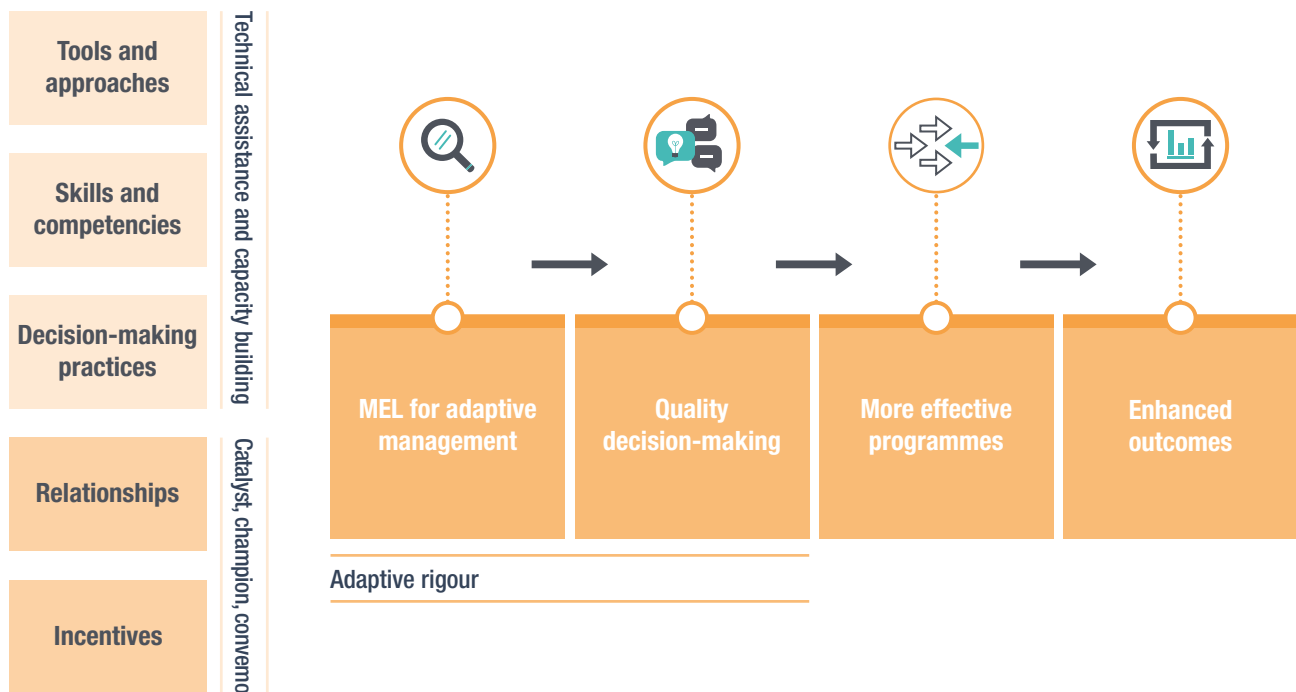
We aim to support better MEL for adaptive management, in order to promote better quality decision-making (i.e. through better and continual use of data and reflection). This should increase the effectiveness of overall programming – in line with experience in other sectors, including the private sector – and ultimately, lead to improvements in outcomes. The GLAM consortium envisages doing this by learning which tools, skills, practices, relationships and incentives best harness the potential of MEL for adaptive decision-making. This approach highlights the need for a systemic, multi-faceted approach to how change can happen as a result of adaptive rigour, and is set out in Figure 1. We aim to address the range of issues set out in the previous section, by taking a holistic approach that engages with

decision-making practices, relationships and incentives alongside tools and skill-building.

The ‘boundaries’ for GLAM are therefore set by the intersection between the ‘enablers’ (tools, approaches, skills, competencies, decision-making practices, relationships and incentives) and MEL for adaptive management, and the extent to which MEL results in quality decision-making. This enlarges the focus to include factors that enable or inhibit MEL to enable quality decision-making (however, factors beyond this would be considered out of scope in terms of what GLAM can influence).

In line with the previous section, many donor interventions currently struggle to be adaptive and smart about the complex contexts in which they operate. This links to challenges around knowing which tools and approaches are the right ones, the availability (or not) of necessary skills and competencies, and using and acting on data when available in decision-making processes.

**Figure 1 A systemic approach to change through MEL4AM**



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As such, activities to strengthen how adaptive management principles are applied, with a focus on effective adaptive MEL, need to reflect these three core challenges; if they can demonstrate what adaptive MEL (adaptive rigour) looks like in practice, enhance skills and capability building, and support decision-making to act on information provided, then overall effectiveness should increase.

Yet we know that gaps are not just about tools, skills and processes: organisations need supportive incentives and working cultures too. While our influence here is much more indirect, through some well-placed relationship building and convening, the consortium hopes that the GLAM initiative can reinforce positive incentives and highlight negative ones.

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# 3 How we will build a global learning alliance

We will focus on three core areas to deliver on our vision for change:

1. Transformative technical assistance to DFID, USAID and partners on MEL4AM
2. World-class research, learning and evidence on operationalising adaptive rigour in development and humanitarian work
3. Convening and brokering a global alliance on evidence-based adaptive management

## 3.1 Transformative technical assistance

### Lead organisations

OPM, Social Impact with ODI

### Objective

To enhance the practice and operationalisation of adaptive management through providing practical MEL4AM support, employing adaptive rigour with programme designers and implementers

Through practical guidance and technical support, we will engage with stakeholders across DFID, USAID and partners in accessing, using and learning about a range of innovative methods and approaches for MEL4AM, and documenting this experience to contribute to wider learning. Our approaches are informed by experience working with DFID and USAID on adaptive management, for example through ODI and DFID's LearnAdapt initiative.

As already underlined, the key barriers to MEL4AM are not the lack of tools or guidance, but risk-averse operating environments where fear of failure, lack of time and space for experimentation and reflection, and monitoring for upward accountability and reporting purposes limit the extent to which adaptive management can take place. People often lack understanding of which models and tools to apply when, face a lack of capacity to test and roll out innovative approaches, and need to overcome a lack of incentives for any data generated to feed into decision-making. Our accompaniment approach aims to overcome these constraints by

providing creative and robust technical advice and problem-solving, underpinned by sustained engagement and relationship building efforts with DFID, USAID and other key partners. Through such an approach, potential solutions can be co-created, and their implementation supported through tailored and ongoing coaching.

In the initiation stages of working with DFID, USAID and related partners, GLAM will seek to map out the full range of possible interventions and apply a systematic process to identify and prioritise specific investments. The selection criteria for support are set out in Box 2.

Drawing on work undertaken with other teams and units on the management of innovation in DFID and USAID, we will use a five-step technical advisory process that will help to move GLAM engagement from the initial stages of recognising a specific opportunity or problem for MEL4AM through to identifying and/or developing novel solutions.

### 3.1.1 The GLAM Technical Advisory Process

**Stage 1: recognition of a specific problem, challenge, or opportunity to be seized, in relation to the provision of MEL4AM in DFID and USAID, or with their partners or others.**

GLAM will identify a core short list of priority teams, projects and initiatives for support, incorporating inputs from those seeking support who will need to outline their needs and the rationale for GLAM engagement. The GLAM team will then manage demand for support, which may range from an initial light touch response or signposting to more relevant sources of support through to in-depth engagement.

**Stage 2: scanning/invention/selection of novel approaches or solutions that can address the problem or seize the opportunity.**

Once support has started, the GLAM team will:

- conduct an assessment to identify the level of 'readiness' for MEL4AM, establishing a shared understanding of the starting point and an indicative baseline to allow for tracking of GLAM contribution over time

## Box 2 Criteria for GLAM support

**MEL for adaptive management is articulated as part of the problem.** There is an identified need for learning and adaptive management as part of the problem/opportunity.

**Point of engagement.** Aim for a range of stages of programme/portfolio support to give us a full set of insights across delivery cycles (e.g. at least one at each key phase – design, contracting, implementation, evaluation).

**Structured and comparable support.** Aim for support to be in a limited number of sectors/countries/contexts and problem types to enable structured general learning, as well as similar levels of size and funding modality (e.g. 2–3 engagements of a similar financial size and modality).

**Authorising environment.** Evidence of support from managers and senior leaders such as endorsement by head of office/Mission; engagement of other senior leadership; enthusiasm of individual manager who has leadership buy-in. For each engagement, a donor lead (e.g. Senior Responsible Officers (DFID)/Agreement or Contracting Officer's Representative (USAID) or similar) must commit to certain level of time and engagement, and potential commitment of their own resources (relative to scale of engagement).

**Leveraging relationships and scale.** Evidence of co-interest from the other donors, within same country/sector; strong individual relationships or formal link with a GLAM headquarters counterpart unit/stakeholder; potential for intervention to be scaled more widely across the organisation in similar programmes and contexts.

**Commitment to transparency.** All participants need to be open to being subjects of research (with appropriate commercial and confidentiality protocols agreed upfront), and open to potential failures/challenges being made public in the spirit of learning.

**GLAM capacity.** The GLAM consortium needs to have sufficient capabilities (sector knowledge, context experience), and available capacity and resources to commit to support.

- scope the specific challenge or opportunity faced in more detail, including better understanding of the substantive challenge and the MEL-related opportunity or need (an initial set of potential challenges or opportunities are set out in the following section (section 3.1.2))
- scan for similar challenges or opportunities that have been addressed or capitalised on elsewhere, and what the relevant solutions, approaches or innovations might have been.

### Stage 3: Development of solutions, with a focus on co-design and mixed methods.

Following this process, we will determine a set of short-, medium- and longer-term engagements. These engagements will focus on the co-design and collaborative development of solutions to the specified challenge. The engagements are likely to be implemented over variable periods given the nature of the challenge and problem area (for example, some 'short short-term' support could be delivered within a calendar month or spread over several months, depending on the assignment and type of problem). Common aspects of engagements will include the following:

- mixed teams (AM and MEL) for specific advisory assignments wherever possible, including expertise from outside the 'usual development suspects' (Table 1)
- in-person engagement through country visits or time spent in the office with relevant teams to scope, co-

develop and co-design solutions with those who will be implementing them

- engagement with wider networks to capitalise on peer-to-peer learning.

### Stage 4: Implementation of the proposed MEL4AM approach

In this stage, GLAM will accompany the implementation process, supporting teams to implement developed solutions (illustrative examples of which are set out in section 3.1.2). We will focus on identifying appropriate MEL approaches or tools, either by advising on appropriate combination and selection of existing methods or developing new innovations. In the process, we will document and gather information and data on whether and how well the approach works, costs and benefits, and comparisons to existing solutions where feasible.

### Stage 5: Diffusion of successful MEL4AM approaches, leading to wider adoption outside the original setting, and relevant lessons and insights from the process

- While diffusion of lessons can happen throughout the process, successful approaches are likely to be those that have seen some degree of application and uptake. We will use the networks and platforms we engage with and convene to share learning, with a focus on peer and practitioner sharing.

- In addition, lessons from support in this workstream will be shared with senior leadership and other key stakeholders, to highlight practice on the ground and the enablers and inhibitors uncovered. We will carry out the end- line assessment at the end of each engagement, to identify what progress has been made, and aim to revisit this assessment at an appropriate time after support has ended.

### 3.1.2 GLAM menu of support

We will aim to use GLAM support to help address the most common *challenges* faced by DFID, USAID and partners in undertaking monitoring, evaluation and learning in adaptive management efforts, the majority of which are likely to be based at the programme or portfolio level (Table 1). However, we will also look for the potential to respond to *strategic opportunities* or moments for reform (Figure 2).

**Table 1 Key indicative challenges faced and how GLAM can help**

Challenge	GLAM engagement	This will involve working with...
Learning is stuck in individual programmes, not shared across portfolios or shared in ways that support broader monitoring for change.	Developing portfolio level theories of change and MEL model for macro level adaptations, involving close working with leadership teams to support strategy and diagnostics review, review of existing MEL models across the portfolio; and developing shared model for portfolio level learning.	Deputy country or mission directors; development objective team leads; project managers; office directors; thematic leads; advisers.
Funder is unclear about how to best incentivise adaptation as part of a new project.	Development of procurement requirements and terms of reference for a new adaptive programme (e.g. at pre-procurement stage) including developing appropriate guidelines, coaching and peer learning to engage with incentives and organisational expectations; Developing guidelines for how to evaluate a future adaptive programme; Working with implementers post-procurement to develop MEL4AM framework and processes in ways that can institutionalise double and triple loop learning.	DFID Senior Responsible Officers (SRO)/USAID Contracting Officer's Representative (COR); contracting officers; MEL personnel and teams.
Lack of progress against outcomes leads to need to revisit and revise theory of change to take into account adaptive approaches; or an adaptive programme is struggling to act on monitoring.	Refined theory of change and development of related monitoring and learning model; Assessment of single double, and triple loop learning parameters, through series of participatory sessions to develop adaptive theory of change, road testing with range of user groups, additional training and coaching where needed, follow up support to assess how new theory of change is being used, and capturing lessons learned to feed into future training and guidance.	Implementing partners, MEL providers, SRO or CORs.
Programme struggling to find the right balance between critical monitoring indicators, evaluation, and learning given resource constraints.	Rebalancing and prioritisation of MEL4AM parameters against resources and timing, Review of current Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plans (AMELP), reporting requirements, Theory of Change application of MEL4AM framework to identify and balance MEL solutions given resource constraints.	Implementing partners, MEL providers, SRO or CORs.



**Figure 2 Potential opportunities**

OPPORTUNITY	GLAM ENGAGEMENT COULD...
Taking adaptive MEL approaches in donor-financed programmes into recipient government MEL systems.	Identify lessons from MEL4AM relevant to routine government monitoring systems; review MEL4AM system with key stakeholders, identify elements that are transferable and scalable within government systems and procedures.
Develop new funding modality in a particular sector, to better enable adaptive interventions in complex settings.	Identify options for funding modalities and new fund design; work with funders and potential implementers to develop new approaches to funding, reporting, contracting based on adaptive management experience.
Provide training across a department/ portfolio/sector in adaptive management.	Develop tailored training modules, using active and participatory learning methods as much as possible.
Act as a learning partner to a number of adaptive programmes or help coordinate across existing MEL platforms.	Facilitate within and cross-platform learning, document and share key issues arising.

### 3.2 World-class research, learning and evidence on adaptive rigour

#### Lead organisations

ODI and IDS

#### Objective

To improve conceptual clarity and strengthen the evidence base on adaptive management, with a focus on understanding how information, data and knowledge can be best used and acted upon and what the right MEL methods, tools and frameworks for this might be (what we call ‘adaptive rigour’)

Key priority questions for our research, learning and evidence agenda include:

- **What are the information, data and knowledge and learning needs for decision-making in adaptive management?** Staff designing and managing adaptive management programmes need guidance on the kinds of inputs they need to make appropriate decisions, specifically the kinds of information and processes they need, when they need them, and why they need them.
- **What MEL4AM methods, tools and frameworks are most relevant to decision-making needs?** Staff at different levels of development organisations need help to understand which MEL4AM methods, tools and frameworks are most appropriate to support their decision-making in which contexts.
- **How do existing MEL approaches and processes need to be adapted and changed?** Staff need to better understand how established MEL practices – from

weak monitoring, inconsistent learning, and late-stage evaluation – might inhibit adaptive management, and how to shift towards different approaches. Especially relevant in both DFID and USAID is how to ensure adaptive management is consistent with value for money and accountability.

- **What aspects of the enabling environment need to be engaged and influenced to enable MEL4AM innovations to contribute to better programming?** Better understanding is needed of how leadership, culture and incentives can work in tandem to support evidence-based adaptive management in a sustained fashion. How can the authorising environment for adaptive management be widened at multiple levels?

We argue that adaptive rigour should underpin much of the response to the questions posed above. This means establishing clear standards for adaptive management and MEL as well as building consensus on new processes of accountability and transparency. Development organisations are – rightly – held to account for aid spending that is effective, but to be effective requires experimentation and adaptation. These things are sometimes seen to be in tension, and in the past, there has been poor articulation of how to do both. Adaptive rigour itself has multiple components:

- Adaptive management needs to demonstrate that it can deliver accountability and transparency, and that it can be implemented rigorously and support improved programme quality. But this has to go hand in hand with moving away from linear planning and measurement, and requires building further consensus on new or reformed processes for accountability and transparency.



- Too often, the focus for rigour is at final stage evaluations, but it needs to be brought in much earlier and more broadly in terms of rigour for monitoring and learning. We will apply our operational knowledge to work with staff and programmes to strengthen their ability to do more rigorous testing and iteration across programme and portfolio delivery.
- A systems perspective – change is not just about a new tool or technique but rather means changes in individual, team, organisational and cross-organisational capacities, behaviours, relationships and incentives. This is also at the heart of our approach to ‘adaptive rigour’.

Our framing of adaptive rigour builds on work by leading thinkers across our core and wider network, including on ‘inclusive rigour’ (Chambers, 2015), results-enabled adaptive leadership (Barder and Ramalingam, 2012), ‘taking responsibility for complexity’ (Jones, 2011), and ‘inclusivity, rigour and feasibility’ (van Hemelrijck and Guijt, 2016). It describes MEL tools, systems and processes that can bridge the gap between rigour that is linear and rigid, and adaptation that is weak, ineffective or poorly documented.

We have developed a set of emerging principles for adaptive rigour which will be tested, refined and improved through its work. These currently are:

- multidisciplinary, cross-stakeholder problem analysis and theory definition
- selection of appropriate portfolios of interventions representing different combinations of risks and impacts
- methodological choices based on responding to programme needs, allowing for pluralism, eclecticism, innovation and improvisation
- triangulation and integration across multiple data sources, perspectives and levels
- strengthened collective efforts in sensing and interpreting data to inform decision-making
- a strategic focus on adaptation, including development of scenarios for different kinds of adaptations, and regular strategic stress-testing
- a culture and mindset that encourages and rewards teams and individuals for being open, alert, inquisitive, responsive and honest.

We have a multi-pronged approach to deliver on this research and evidence agenda. First, we will better curate and structure existing resources – helping to provide a library or signposting to relevant resources already available. This responds to the demand to better navigate and make sense of what is already available. To do this, we will develop and maintain a library as well as a list of key experts within (and potentially outside) the GLAM consortium. In addition, we will develop a series of short, digestible summaries, that aggregate insights around

core sectors and problem areas. These will respond to perceived need for more tailored sector and problem knowledge sharing, and for more actionable guidance.

Second, to build the evidence base on MEL4AM, we will conduct comparative case studies to document and assess the use of MEL4AM in practice. This may involve light process tracing, realist evaluation approaches and qualitative comparative analysis to examine causal inference in absence of a traditional counterfactual. Given the limited evidence base on adaptive management and MEL4AM, this activity represents the majority of our efforts.

These case studies will support peer learning, as they will focus not just on ‘what happens’ but on why and how, responding to the strong appetite for more insights and practical illustrations of what it looks (and feels like) to deliver adaptive programmes. These case studies will be based on the operational support provided under GLAM, and a select number of additional learning partnerships that build on GLAM consortium members’ existing programmes.

Over time, GLAM will use the insights generated from these two areas to produce evidence reviews and analysis of some of the ‘burning issues’ identified for MEL4AM – including under what conditions can adaptive management be implemented, with what effects, and what does accountability and value for money look like in the context of adaptive management. These will aim to build on existing initiatives underway, and to support internal reform processes where opportunities arise.

### 3.3 Convening and brokering a global alliance

#### Lead organisations

IDS and ODI, with supportive roles across the consortium, including IRC, ThoughtWorks and Oxfam

#### Objective

To ensure that GLAM’s activities are undertaken in a way that maximises their impact and influence

GLAM aims to work as a cross-pollinator and disseminator of ideas and practice, within and across DFID, USAID and their partners, and in wider development and humanitarian policy communities. A key added value of GLAM will be its ability to act as a ‘bridge’ between operational experience and practice, and senior leaders in DFID, USAID and beyond, with a specific focus on making visible current incentives, enablers and inhibitors for MEL4AM. Finally, we will act as champions and advocates for MEL4AM, using senior leaders in GLAM itself to continue to raise the profile of these approaches and of what ‘adaptive rigour’ means in practice.

We will bring together key stakeholders through a programme of dedicated and related events and processes

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– for example, an annual GLAM event, running panels and workshops in other ongoing events, building peer learning around operational engagements and so on. Within the sector more widely, GLAM will seek to work as a global alliance and a ‘network of networks’, working as the glue to bring together the diverse initiatives and efforts in strengthening evidence-based adaptive management.

As a first step, we will further scope the best platform(s) for disseminating GLAM ideas, with a focus both on portals for sharing resources but also, crucially, on portals to support interaction, learning and networking between practitioners. There are already a number of existing platforms working on related areas, so our priority is to identify current gaps and possible options, rather than replicating what already exists.

Across these core areas of work, GLAM will itself aim to embody adaptive management. Our approach to our own management and learning will be based on the following principles:

- **enterprising and outcomes-focused**
- **people-centred** – prioritising interaction and solution-finding
- **collaborative** – sharing responsibilities for management, risks and learning and capitalising on our comparative advantage by prizing diversity in teams
- **trusting** – highly aligned, and loosely coupled, based on empowered accountability
- **transparent** – in both decisions and decision-making processes
- **learning-based and reflective**, aiming for continual improvement.

This final principle – of learning and self-reflection – will be a core part of GLAM’s approach. We will use an ongoing process of reflection or strategy testing, to review our own performance against our theory of change, and we will make this learning public on an ongoing basis.

### **Box 3 Learn more about the Global Learning for Adaptive Management initiative**

GLAM officially launches in the summer of 2018 and will run for four years. If you would like to know more, please visit: [www.odi.org/GLAM](http://www.odi.org/GLAM)

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