

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS
SCHOOL OF COMMERCE



**Project Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
Practice for Adaptive Project Management:**

*The Case of the Ethiopian People In Need - The Girls Education
Project in Ethiopia.*

Project Work - For the Partial Fulfilment of MA in Project Management

Advisor: Bahran Asrat (Dr.)

Prepared By : Tarik Bekele

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

June , 2020

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this project work is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any university, and that all source of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Declared by: Name: Tariku Bekele

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Confirmed by Advisor:

Name: Dr. Bahran Asrat

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Place and date of submission: _____

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS
SCHOOL OF COMMERCE
GRADUATE PROGRAM IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

This is to certify that this project work prepared by **Tariku Bekele** , entitled: **Project Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Practice for Adaptive Project Management: *The Case of the Ethiopian People In Need - The Girls Education Project in Ethiopia*** ; submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Project Management (MBA) Degree complies with the regulation of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Approved by the Examining Committee:

Internal Examiner -- Dr. Atsede T **Signature** _____ **Date** _____

External Examiner -- Dr. Chandra Venkata **Signature** _____ **Date** _____

Advisor -- Dr. Bahran Asrat **Signature** _____ **Date** _____

Acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude goes to my advisor Dr. Bahran Asrat for his relentless guidance and support to undertaking this project work; which would have been impossible without his kind and constructive comments. I would like also to pass my appreciation for the People in Need for allowing assess the MEL system of the project. I am indebted to all key informants who gave me their precious time for the skype interviews made at the time of COVID-19 while fighting with their children at home. Friends and families who have been supportive during the course works will also share my heartfelt thankfulness.

Contents

- Abstract.....vii
- Chapter 1 1
 - 1. Introduction..... 1
 - 1.1. Background of the Study..... 1
 - 1.2. Background of the Organization 2
 - 1.3. Problem Statement..... 3
 - 1.4. Basic Research Questions..... 4
 - 1.5. Objectives of the Study..... 5
 - 1.5.1. Major objective..... 5
 - 1.5.1.1. Specific objectives 5
 - 1.6. Significance of the Study 5
 - 1.7. Scope of the Study 6
 - 1.8. Potential limitations of the study 6
 - 1.9. Organization of the Study 6
 - 1.10. Definition of terms..... 7
 - 1.10.1. Adaptive management /Adaptive program / Adaptive approaches 7
 - 1.10.2. Monitoring Evaluation and Learning for Adaptive Management (MEL4AM)..... 7
 - 1.10.3. Complexity in Development and Humanitarian interventions..... 7
- Chapter 2 – Literature Review 8
 - 2. Introduction..... 8
 - 2.1. Theoretical Framework 8
 - 2.1.1. Project Landscape 8
 - 2.1.1.1. Traditional projects (TPM)..... 9
 - 2.1.1.2. Agile projects (APM)..... 9
 - 2.1.2. Adaptive Management in Development..... 9
 - 2.1.3. Characteristics of Adaptive Management..... 10
 - 2.1.4. Major Type of Adaptations 10
 - 2.1.5. Monitoring and Evaluation System..... 11
 - 2.1.6. Purpose of ME system 11
 - 2.1.7. The Need for System Change at the Face of Complexity 11
 - 2.1.8. Monitoring Evaluation and Learning for Adaptive Management 12
 - 2.1.8.1. Learning and Reflection..... 12
 - 2.1.8.2. Context Monitoring 13
 - 2.1.8.3. Evaluations..... 13
 - 2.2. Empirical Review 14

2.2.1.	How can we integrate MEL4AM in the Project Cycle	14
2.2.2.	What attributes to look on assessing MEL4AM ?	14
2.2.2.1.	Planning and flexibility.....	14
2.2.2.2.	Monitoring /implementation considerations	15
2.2.2.3.	Mechanisms of Learning to Adapt.....	16
2.2.2.4.	MEL4AM Capacities and incentives as enablers	17
2.2.3.	Conceptual Framework.....	18
Chapter 3 Research Methodology		19
3.	Introduction.....	19
3.1.	Research Design.....	19
3.2.	Description Of Study Variables	19
3.3.	Target Population	19
3.4.	Sampling.....	20
3.5.	Data Collection.....	20
3.5.1.	Primary data.....	20
3.5.2.	Secondary data	20
3.6.	Data analysis	20
3.7.	Reliability	21
3.8.	Validity.....	21
3.9.	Ethical considerations	21
Chapter 4 : Data Analysis and Discussion		22
4.	Introduction.....	22
4.1.	Understanding on Adaptive Project Management.....	22
4.2.	The Planning Process of the Project.....	22
4.2.1.	How the Adaptive Elements Included in the Project.....	23
4.2.2.	Donor Guidance and Adaptive MEL in Planning.....	23
4.2.3.	Types of Adaptations Introduced by the Donor	23
4.2.4.	Are This Iterations Implied in the MEL Documents?	24
4.2.5.	Other elements of Planning Flexibly in the Project.....	25
4.2.5.1.	Inception Period (Special Condition)	25
4.2.5.2.	More Understanding on Problem Context	25
4.2.5.3.	MEL Strategy (Planning for Learning Cohorts).....	25
4.2.5.4.	A Helpful Tool in Setting and Refining Indicators – IndiKit	26
4.3.	Monitoring and evaluation Features	26
4.3.1.	Attendance Tracking Database.....	26
4.3.2.	Project Tracker	27

4.3.3.	Evaluation Design for Adaption.....	27
4.3.4.	Beneficiary Satisfaction Tracking.....	28
4.4.	Learning Mechanisms to Foster Adaptation.....	28
4.4.1.	Planned Learning Products.....	28
4.4.2.	Other platform to support Learning.....	28
4.5.	Capacities and Incentives for Adaptive MEL.....	29
4.5.1.	Supportive Policies and guidelines for Adaptive MEL.....	29
4.5.2.	Human resource capacity.....	29
4.5.3.	Donor Action :Lesson From COVID -Adaption.....	29
4.5.4.	MEL Budget.....	30
Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations.....		31
5.	Introduction.....	31
5.1.	Summary of Findings.....	31
5.1.1.	Planning Process and MEL for adaptive management.....	31
5.1.2.	Monitoring and Evaluation.....	31
5.1.3.	Learning and adaption.....	32
5.1.4.	Capacities and incentives.....	32
5.2.	Conclusions.....	33
5.3.	Recommendations.....	33
References.....		35
Annex 1 : Interview Guide Questions.....		37

List of Tables and Figures

[Table 1 – Planning flexibility and features to consider](#)

[Table 2 – Monitoring/implementation elements and features to consider](#)

[Table 3 – MEL capacities and incentives as enablers](#)

[Figure 1- Project landscape](#)

[Figure 2 – Conceptual Framework](#)

Acronyms

APM – agile project management

DFID- United Kingdom Department for International Development

M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation

MEL – Monitoring evaluation and learning

MEL4AM -Monitoring Evaluation Learning for Adaptive Management

iNGO – international NGO

PMEL – Project Monitoring Evaluation and Learning

TOC – Theory of change

TPM -Traditional project management

PIN – People in Need

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

Abstract

In this decade there is a notable recognition to the complexity of development and humanitarian project contexts. This identification has initiated major funding institution to promote adaptive management of project and programmes. The shift from the traditional approach of project management has also called the monitoring evaluation and learning (MEL) practice to be fit for adaptive approach. But evidences in this regard show, the shift from current accountability and compliance focused system to learning and reflection focused MEL has remained a major gap. Even though there is no need for design of new tools and methods , adopting MEL tools to fit for a particular adaptive project is an eminent challenge. There is also a literature gap in documenting practical aspects of what has worked/what not , particularly in the context of our country and education projects. Hence, this project work has endeavoured to document lessons on MEL practices of an adaptively managed education project implemented in Ethiopia, by iNGO called People in Need. Gathering primary data from in depth interview and secondary data from desk review of relevant documents ,the current MEL system of the project had been assessed. The evidence thereof revealed : evolutionary planning with technical and strategic adaption plans, and mechanism that foster learning for adaptation were found to be in place; though setting clear milestones to trigger adaptations is lacking in the MEL plans. Robust monitoring tool such as :attendance tracking and project activity tracking mechanisms, with clear responsibility structures, were also found designed to foster adaptive MEL; but their timely application and the missed focus on tracking learning for adaption has been noted as the key gap. Many learning platforms are also found to be in place but they need to be again geared towards fostering adaptations. Staff and organization capacity were also found as major vacuum that needs to be tackled for the organization to practice adaptive rigor. Further studies , with wide perspective , that attest the practice of MEL4AM in other organizations and project has been with has been recommended to make the lesson drawn herewith more concrete. As the project management in development organizations is expected to make major shift in adaptive management, policy makers are also recommended to take proactive training plans to produce the skills and competence required for managing adaptive projects in general and MEL in particular.

Key Words : Adaptive management ; adaptive management for monitoring evaluation and learning , complexity in development and hamartian work .

Chapter 1

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Project management scholars have started questioning the traditional approach and claim that it is unfit for contemporary projects that are filled with complexity, uncertainty and risk. They also attest that most (up to 70%) of the project today are not fit with traditional, linear project-management life cycle; and 65% are doomed to fail as upshot of such management (Wysocki 2010). Looking at the project landscape from goal and solution dimensions, projects that have clear goal but uncertain solution fall under the adaptive landscape. In adaptive project management the solutions are discerned through structured learning and discovery (ibid). Monitoring and evaluation, thus play a central role in informing the decision making for adaptation. The forward looking and flexible nature of adaptation also implies that there is a need to make the monitoring and evaluation arrangements different from the conventional approaches (Hermans et al. 2017).

In recent years there is increasing trend towards recognition and understanding on the most of development and humanitarian interventions to be complex problems; which also make the solutions uncertain and risky (Bond 2016). Funding institutions have also taken this notion, and started promoting adaptive management for complex projects that are operated with limited understanding of problem context. But the departure, from the traditional project management approach, has not been easy as the effective practice of adaptive management of project/ programs is yet at its learning stage (Hernandez et al. 2019). One of the core challenges that adaptive rigor is the difficulty in design of functional monitoring and evaluation systems, in addition to the topic being less researched as yet (Hermans et al. 2017).

Monitoring and evaluation systems can take different name (M&E framework, M&E approach) in different organizations; but they play vital role in defining, selecting, collecting, analyzing and utilizing information for variety of purpose in the life of project and programs. (INTRAC 2009). Consequently the existence of fit for purpose M&E system is among the critical factor for project success (Tengan et al. 2018). Even though there is a shared understanding on the presence of common features of an MEL system; there is also

recommendation for customizing the system and practice to fit for specific situation of organizations , program and projects (Bakewell et. al. 2003).

In the traditional project management, the Monitoring & Evaluation systems (MEL systems) are mainly dedicated to compliance and accountability. Whereas the core of the adaptive management is continuous learning and reflection as enabler of iterative decisions (Wiosksy 2013). Though some organizations have started calling their M&E systems as MEL , adding learning component , practice and researches show the emphasis given to generate and use learning is less evident(see Zvoushe and Gideon 2013).The culture of overlooking learning in the development organizations and the innovative technical shift required by MEL systems to fit for adaptive management is not easy. It is argued that different types of adaptations are enabled by different MEL approaches and tools. Which implies that the need to make MEL system project specific based on assumptions , risk and complexity the major challenge (USAID 2018)

The development and humanitarian world also seem to be learning to address the balance between the inherent learning and accountability that is required by Monitoring ,Evaluation and Learning systems for adaptive management(MEL4AM). Apart from the continued research in the area, with the initiative of the pioneer funding institutions (DFID and USAID) have established a global alliance that shares lessons and advocates what is named Monitoring Evaluation and Learning for Adaptive Management (MEL4AM)(see Wild &Ramalingam 2019) . This can also be mentioned as a continued appetite for more practical evidences from the new projects in order to learn what is working and what not.

1.2. Background of the Organization

The People in Need (PIN) is iNGO established in 1992 to engage in humanitarian and development work ;currently operates in 25 countries. The organization has country office in Ethiopia which works in relief, education, WASH and sustainable livelihoods& environment, and social protection thematic areas since 2003.

The organization is currently implementing a five years(2018 -2023) girls education project funded by DFID. The project is implemented in Gedo Zone of SNNPPR. The donor has introduced adaptive management of the project, and its complete uptake by implementers is yet to be investigated.

This project work therefore has endeavored to document learnings on the MEL practices of this project. As the MEL practice for adaptive management is considered to be underdeveloped gap; by documenting the lessons in this project ; this study aims to contribute in filling the knowledge gap in the area. Besides, it is also believed to contribute for the improvement of the ongoing project and systems of the organization in adaptive rigor.

1.3. Problem Statement

The traditional project management approach is fit for defining known solutions at context of well-known problems. But for complex contexts where problems are less likely to be fully grasped at a time , the solution can not be defined and agreed a head of time. The imbedded risk and uncertainty is therefore mitigated by adapting iteratively.(Wysocki 2013).

In recent decades the failure of many development and humanitarian interventions is getting associated with the application of traditional project management. Many authors argue that if not all many development and humanitarian intervention are operated in complex situations, which makes their operation filled with uncertainty and risk. This aspect has started to call for development and humanitarian interventions to practice adaptive project management that is also known by alternative names: adaptive programming or approach (seed Bond 2016). One of such notable movements has started after the promulgation of what is known as “Doing Development Differently” manifesto by development personalities and institutions in 2014.

¹The manifesto advocates for iterative programming that centers continuous learning and adaptation in development and humanitarian work ;and calls departure from the blueprint approach that fixes the solutions a head expecting a defined result as if all is clearly known for sure.

Since this movement, pioneer institutions with the likes of DFID have started funding and promoting adaptive management of projects. Though the appetite for taking up seems well going , and theoretical aspects seems to be well developed ; several challenges also exist in the ground as to effectively practice adaptive management of projects(Wild & Ramalingam 2018).

One of the most recognized gap in advancing the effective application of adaptive management of project is the gap in Monitoring Evaluation and Learning(MEL) practices . These MEL practices are characterized by: weak monitoring, inconsistent learning,

¹ The manifesto of Doing Development Differently can be found at <http://buildingstatecapability.com/the-ddd-manifesto/>

ineffective and poorly timed evaluations that fail to provide basis for improved feedback loops that are the basis of adaptive management (Wild and Ramalingam, 2018). In agreement with this Booth et. al (2018) also states that the MEL for adaptive project/program management to be underdeveloped art.

The study by OXFAM (2018) also implicated the lack of literature that illustrates how of including adaptive management to PMEL cycle and tried to develop new theory base and strategies for PMEL. Which also shows need to make further learnings and scrutiny across different projects and contexts. Achieving successful learning and reflection from existing MEL systems is also the major challenge for many development organizations and the transition to structured and deliberate creation of real-time learning reflection mechanisms is still a gap (Pasanan & Barnnet 2019).

As M&E practitioner this researcher also believes the learning aspect of MEL is neglected and underdeveloped practice among development actors in our county. In the current project to be investigated, working as M&E expert ,it was obvious to notice the challenge in making MEL practices shift to practically support adaptive management. As far as the knowledge of the researcher is concerned there is also a gap in documented lessons on MEL for adaptive management, particularly for education projects. Therefore, this project work has endeavoured to learn from MEL practices, by taking the case of the project implemented by the Ethiopian People in Need (PIN).

1.4. Basic Research Questions

This project work focusing on the Girls education project that has been implemented by People In Need (an international NGO operating in Ethiopia) from of 2018 to 2023. The study tried to answer the following questions:

- Is the existing MEL system and practice of the project/organization well aligned with adaptive management of projects?
- What are the major MEL tools and methods that are designed (adopted) to foster learning and improve feedback loops for iterative adaptation in the project?
- How adaptive MEL practice addressed in planning , monitoring and evaluation process of the project ?
- Are there some enabling conditions to improve the current practice, how can we create enabling environment if not?

1.5. Objectives of the Study

1.5.1. Major objective

The major objective of this project work were : to assess the current MEL practice in the girls education project of the organization in focus to draw lessons on its fitness for adaptive management.

1.5.1.1. Specific objectives

This project work had endeavoured to:

1. Draw lessons on how the MEL system and practice of the project is aligned the requirement of adaptive management.
2. Assess methods that are designed (adopted) to foster learning and improve feedback loops for iterative adaptation in the project.
3. Identify planning , monitoring and evaluation process and approaches that are inline with adaptive management and assess the gaps.
4. Identify enabling conditions to improve the current MEL practice

1.6. Significance of the Study

This project work is believed to have contributed in providing documented MEL process and approaches that have worked well to support adaptive management of an education project . It also helped to assert how the MEL tools and approaches alone are not enough conditions to enable adaptive rigor , unless the organizational enabling conditions and deliberate adaptive management culture is not systematized. As one of the pioneer works on MEL practices of an adaptive project , the lesson documented here are also believed to the basis for better design MEL system of similar projects in the future. The assessed project , which is under implementation , may also benefit from the recommendations made herewith by further making improvement on its current practice. Overall, development organizations that are yet in the culture of traditional project implementation, will also benefit from such work to rethink their approaches; particularly the value of learning , reflection , context monitoring and enabling culture that is required of them to practice adaptive management. Lastly but not least, other MEL practitioners and scholars will also build up from this work and get motivated to further research to add on the knowledge base on MEL for adaptive management.

1.7. Scope of the Study

This study has been limited on the assessing the MEL practices of project implemented towards adaptive rigor by the People In Need Ethiopia country office.

1.8. Potential limitations of the study

Not for the limitation of time and other resources this project work would have addressed the case of the same organization other country offices and head quarter context . For the same reason leaving the cases of other consortium members that are implementing the project and other organization context in the country has been potential limitation of the study. In addition to this the researchers position in the organization could also be seen as potential limitation as opposed to looking the situation from external perspective.

1.9. Organization of the Study

The report of this project work is organized into five chapters. Chapter One consists of the background of the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, limitations, , and conceptual definition of terms used , and organization of the study. The chapter highlights how the development project management is shifting towards the practice of adaptive project management and need for intentional design of MEL system to support it rigor. The problems that are challenging this transition and gap in the knowledge base has also been highlighted.

Chapter two looks at available literature done on adaptive management. The theoretical review presented the particulars of the change in monitoring and evaluation systems , while making a shift from the traditional to adaptive project management. The types of adaptive management ,features of MEL4AM and issues related with learning based MEL were elaborated from the available literature. The empirical review section has also tried to build the particular attributes to look in to while assessing a MEL system fitness for adaptive rigor. Based on this notion a conceptual framework was designed to answer the research questions on four themes to look at: planning , monitoring and evaluation , learning and enabling conditions.

Chapter three constitutes the research methodology, summarized research design, target population, sample size and sampling procedure, research instrument, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques and ethical considerations in research.

Chapter four presents the analysis and discussion of the findings on planning , monitoring , evaluation , learning and enabling environment themes . The practices in the project assessed and the gaps thereof were highlighted under the themes mentioned above. Finally chapter five presents summary of findings, with conclusion and recommendations.

1.10. Definition of terms

1.10.1. Adaptive management /Adaptive program / Adaptive approaches

The definition of adaptive management used in this project work is adopted from INTRAC (2108); it is seen as a broad approach that is deliberately created to serve complexity. It therefore has been described to involve : regular processes for the collection and analysis of information (learning) from start to the end of the project life cycle.

1.10.2. Monitoring Evaluation and Learning for Adaptive Management (MEL4AM)

Tailored packages of approaches, methods and tools, staff capacities and attributes, relationships and incentive systems that incorporate these principles.(Ramalingam et. al. 2019)

1.10.3. Complexity in Development and Humanitarian interventions.

For this project work the term complexity refers to situations where project /programs that are :innovative/new areas of work ; operations in new geographical areas; involving multiple organizations such as consortiums of multiple countries of operation ; focused on sectors such as governance or mobilization rather than sectors such as health or water and sanitation where cause and effect can more easily be predicted; include significant elements of policy influencing and/or capacity development, rather than straightforward service delivery; or operate in highly uncertain environments such as those found after natural or man-made disasters.(see INTRAC 2018)

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2. Introduction

This chapter presents the review of relevant literature and tried to build the theoretical , empirical and conceptual background for the intended study. The meanings of traditional management as by distinguishing it from traditional approach are elaborated. The system shift from traditional M&E to adaptive MEL has also been emphasized with review of relevant literature. Finally, the quality attributes of adaptive MEL have been identified and will be used as basis of assessing the existing practice intended by this project work.

2.1. Theoretical Framework

2.1.1. Project Landscape

In order to have a clear notion of adaptive mage men it is important to understand the project landscape that mandate different type of management. Using simple and intuitive models (Wysocki 2013) defined project land scape around two characteristics: goal and solution. With conception that every project must have a goal and a solution. Yet again he chose simple and intuitive metrics to quantify these characteristics: clear and complete or not clear and incomplete. Two values for each characteristic generate the four quadrant matrix.. Based on these the traditional falls in quadrant 1 ,agile quadrant 2 ,extreme quadrant 3 and emertexe in quadrant 4. As the remaining two are not the focus of this project work , some features of the traditional and agile projects are discussed below.

Figure 1- Project landscape adopted from (Wysocki 2013)

		Solution	
		Clear	Not Clear
Goal	Not	Emertxe Projects (Q4)	Extreme Projects (Q3)
	Clear	Traditional Projects (Q1)	Agile Projects (Q2)

2.1.1.1. Traditional projects (TPM)

Projects that fall into the TPM quadrant are familiar to the organization. The client has clearly specified the goal, and the project team has defined how they will reach that goal. Little change is expected. The limiting factor in the TPM plan-driven approaches is that they are change-intolerant. They are focused on delivering according to time and budget constraints, and rely more on compliance to plan than on delivering business value. TPM quadrant has several identifying and distinguishing characteristics such as: low complexity, few scope change Requests, low Risk, experienced and skilled project teams.(see ibid)

2.1.1.2. Agile projects (APM)

As the solutions of these projects are not well known , the only approaches that make sense are those that enable us to discover an acceptable solution by doing the project. Whereas TPM projects were plan-driven, APM projects are change-driven. TPM projects are change intolerant and changes give rise to wasted time and resources due to the need to revise plans. APM projects cannot succeed without change. The solution will be discovered only if the client and the development team meaningfully collaborate in an open and honest environment. As the models of the Agile project management are more focused to software development , the need for coming up with adaptive framework to manage other projects in the same landscape. Therefore adaptive project management could be seen as a variant of APM which are appropriate for addressing projects with clear goals but the problem or solution is less known(Wysocki 2010).

2.1.2.Adaptive Management in Development

The notion of aid industry and development is different and unique from other project -driven industries (Crawford & Bryce 2003).Therefore it will also be important to look the distinguishing feathers of the adaptive management with sense of humanitarian and development works.

Adaptive management in the context of humanitarian and development is understood as a broad approach designed to support programs/projects in complex or uncertain environments; with intrinsic regular processes for the collection and analysis of information. This is then used to make changes to a program throughout its lifetime, which means that the program does not have to be designed in its entirety at the start (seen INTRACT 2019). The approach should not also be viewed as single method or a set of tools. Rather it is an approach which can encompass many different processes and initiatives that include: participatory approaches

to planning and design, organizational learning, research, beneficiary feedback mechanisms, and a variety of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) methodologies designed to deal with complexity. (ibid)

But it should be made clear that any flexibility, adjustments, revisions and corrections to changing circumstances in the traditional approach should not be confused with adaptive management (Booth et al. 2018).

USAID (2018) also defines it as an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context. It is assert that the change is not meant for goals , rather the path being used to achieve the goals in response to changes.

2.1.3.Characteristics of Adaptive Management

One of the pioneer works that is still used to guide adaptive management in the context of civil society organizations , has distinguished its major characteristics. These are : strong emphasis to learning and feedback to inform changes ; flexibility in implementation , budges , and result frameworks; decision making is delegated to team close the intervention ; problems that are identified agreed by the local community will get prime focus ; considers problems as they are viewed from the perspective of the viewer (power sensitive approach); and finally accountability focuses on progress towards agreed high level results and on learning, rather than on pre-defined implementation plans and milestones. (Seen Bond 2016)

2.1.4.Major Type of Adaptations

From the definitions made above it is clear that adaptive management is all about course correction , without making change to goal of the project(see USAID 2018). BOND (2016) has introduced two major types of adaptations or course corrections .These are : tactical /strategic ; and adaptations through sequential testing or multiple experiments. Tactical adaptations (single loop learning) is all about making minor changes to activities base on findings of routine monitoring and feedback sessions. Strategic adaptation(which is also called double loop learning) and it requires deeper and comprehensive data collection and analysis to answer where or not the right thing is being done .

Where as in sequential adaptation process of trying one approach, and altering it or trying a different approach in response to learning and feedback. The other alternative is to conduct multiple experiments simultaneously to learn if one or combination of them best works , while stopping the others(see ibid).

2.1.5. Monitoring and Evaluation System

Different organizations use different terminologies such as M&E approach, M&E framework but in this study the M&E system is understood as defined by (Semester 2009) “*a series of policies, practices and processes that enables the coherent and effective collection, analysis and use of monitoring and evaluation information*”. Most organizations have written description of the their system in the form of M&E plan or M&E strategy specifying the why , what and how of M&E tasks need to be done by staff at different levels of the organization , program or projects (INTRAC 2019)

2.1.6. Purpose of ME system

The prime focus of ME system may be seen in two broad categories: ME system for accountability and MEL system for learning. **M&E for accountability** commonly focuses on upward accountability to government or the funding agency. M&E is often an obligation to demonstrate that contracted work has been conducted in compliance with agreed standards or to report on results vis-à-vis plans. While **M&E for learning** requires continuous and conscious involvement of evaluators and stakeholders in collaborative learning, allowing stakeholders to share their views, perspectives and ideas, without fear of negative (see INTRAC 2018). This is what seems preferred by adaptive approach but the challenge remains in keeping the balance between the accountability and learning spectrum.

2.1.7. The Need for System Change at the Face of Complexity

Many authors agree that the organisational and cultural aspect of learning requirement is quite a challenge in the practice of adaptive management. (Ramalingam et. al 2019, Bond 2016). With respect to organization, the shift from long propagated and compliance focused MEL system that gives less space for learning is a major challenge(Hernandez 2017). In other way installing learning mechanisms is not an easy task as it might be expensive and time taking process for many development organizing and translating the learning for improvement is

another hurdle(INTRAC 2018).The competence of the staff to use and properly benefit from the real time monitoring tools , approaches that are essential for effective MEL is also another challenge for continuous learning to happen. (Wild & Raminglam 2018).

The need for designing fit for purpose MEL system seems to have got a wide acceptance, specifically for adaptive projects that are implemented in different contexts(see USAID 2018).But the basis for the design should be based on the understanding of the distinction of MEL requirements and emphasis changes in moving from traditional to adaptive approach. This will be addressed below.

2.1.8. Monitoring Evaluation and Learning for Adaptive Management

2.1.8.1. Learning and Reflection

One of the major issues with the shift to adaptive management is the shift to making learning and reflection central and a major success factor for identify what is working and what needs to be adapted on time at the face of uncertain and complex operation environment. These means, organizations have to shift the monitoring, evaluation and learning practices that they adopted to suit for traditional approach for several decades. As a development practitioner one can observe the greater emphasis given for accountability and compliance by the monitoring evaluation systems of many civil society organizations. In such systems learning occurs either at the end (with evaluations) to be used for next programming or neglected as it is usually seen as time consuming and cumbersome for the staff.

To make learning central for adaptive management ,opportunities to learn and reflect should be designed in the MEL system. Project reviews, partner meetings, and after-action reviews could be in place , the sources for learning during these sessions may also be varied, including monitoring data and evaluation findings, as well as research, assessments, and knowledge gained from experience(see USAID 2018).

2.1.8.2. Context Monitoring

In the traditional approach monitoring is dedicated for tracking process, activities and out puts that are agreed as blue print in the commonly applied inflexible tools, with the likes of log frame and result framework. Therefore, the major task of monitoring here is to assess compliance with the agreed standards and present the findings for managerial decision to minor corrections and adjustments.

Unlike the traditional approach that has fixed the output/outcome/results at the beginning; in adaptive approach the planning process evolves as more and more is known about the situation , and is a continuous process that makes course correction to initial plans that were made based on existing assumptions. Therefore monitoring occurs at the face of : indicators, M&E tools , and methods that get refined with iterations (see INTRACT 2018). Monitoring for adaptive approach play a watchman role looking at implementation and contexts; creating feedback loops that enable adaption by not only following up activities but also creating understanding on progress against interim outcomes (CARE 2020).

Therefore adaptive management requires to understand that projects and activities are affected by the change in the context. Context monitoring helps sense of the larger environment surrounding projects and activities. MEL plans needs to reflect this fact but determining what elements of the environment, or context, are most valuable to monitor could be a challenge if sufficient resource are not allocated for it. One can use the the process of defining assumptions, risks, and triggering events during development of logic models can be an initial entry point for identifying the most critical elements for context monitoring (see USAID 2018)

2.1.8.3. Evaluations

In the traditional approach , evaluation is means for justifying the results and impacts of the intervention against the baseline, and to generate learning that is usually meant for future programming. The frequency and purpose of evaluation also changes in adaptive sense, where it will be conducted throughout the program and is designed to enhance performance. Learning is also seen the crucial and integral part of adaptive projects/Programs (INTRAC 2018)

2.2. Empirical Review

The section will focus on introducing the quality attributes of MEL4AM data and system ; strategies for mainstreaming MEL in the project cycle and recommended tools /methods based on the latest literature that tried to build framework for adaptive rigor..

2.2.1. How can we integrate MEL4AM in the Project Cycle

Based on the detailed review of literature the pioneer work on this regard (OXFAM 2018) tried to recommend three strategies that are in line with the attributes and elements recommend by other literature below. This three strategies : planning for flexibility , developing locally owned M&E , creating enabling environment will be used as basis building on other attributes to look at. Strategies are inline with the theoretical base of the adaptive approach discussed above that advocates for evolutionary planning and continued learning. Below this three strategies will be discussed in association with other latest works in the area.

2.2.2. What attributes to look on assessing MEL4AM ?

Ramalingam et al. (2019) states one has to look at from planning , implementation and adaption point of view , which can also be integrated with planning , M&E and learning elements recommend by (OXFAM 2018).

2.2.2.1.Planning and flexibility

The above works have been adopted to see the following elements in the planning aspect of MEL4AM. This might require tools and approaches that help to understand the problem and the context better for understanding the complexity of the situation . For example diagnostic tools and approaches such as applied political economic analysis (APE) , theory of change (TOC) , scenario planning , and logical frame works need to be treated and prepared with understanding of the flexibility and would be changes with in iterations. (see the table below that summarizes the features to look at as adopted from OXFAM (2018) and Ramalingam et al 2019)

Table 1 – Planning flexibility and features to consider

MEL4AM quality	Key considerations
Planning with flexibility	To understand the core problem: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does problem analysis take account of and analyse the pace and nature of change? ✓ Does problem analysis recognise what is known/unknown about how the problem and the wider system operates, and the key relationships, behaviours and incentives within it?
	To understand the programmatic context: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ What kinds of theories of change have been employed in the past, and with what implications for current programme? Is the necessary contextual information available in a timely fashion? ✓ How can this be incorporated into ongoing monitoring and learning efforts?
	To design appropriate portfolio of interventions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does the reporting and monitoring plan focus on testing assumptions? ✓ Are there mechanisms and triggers for regularly revisiting design principles and approaches? ✓ Have different adaptation scenarios been considered around core assumptions? ✓ Does the chosen combination of MEL methods and tools support all of the above?
	Tools and approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Is the theory of change and log frame are adaptive and are implied clearly? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Using broadly-defined indicators and leaving room for adjustments. ✓ Flexible financial frameworks (negotiations with donors for flexibility,) ✓ Spaces for piloting different mechanisms ✓ Look how applied political economic analysis, theory of change, situation planning are practiced

2.2.2.2. Monitoring /implementation considerations

Monitoring to serve adaption it should be robust , coherent, streamlined but comprehensive; it also requires monitoring systems which go beyond implementation monitoring and look at aspects of context and outcomes (CARE 2020).One of the old evaluation tools that is adapted for the use in MEL4AM is outcome mapping(Ramalingam et al . 2019) . The study conducted by OXFAM (2018) also documented the practical applicability of participatory monitoring approaches and real-time data collection methods to support the approach. Table 2 below show adopted features from the three noted literature.

Table 2 – Monitoring/implementation elements and features to consider

MEL4AM quality	Key considerations
Implement /Monitor	<p>To ensure targeted collection of data and evidence on outputs and outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Is data collection grounded in testing assumptions? ✓ Is there use of data/perspectives from end-users/target beneficiaries? ✓ Is the data verified and triangulated, and if so, how?
	<p>To support ongoing operational decision-making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are the processes by which data and evidence are expected to be used in decision-making transparent and accessible? ✓ Does decision-making involve collective processes of synthesis, interpretation and sensemaking? ✓ Are decision-makers able to establish a regular and overall picture of the benefits, costs, strengths and weakness of the intervention?
	<p>To enable assessment of scope for novel or innovative approaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Does the system involve real-time methods, including new technologies if appropriate? ✓ Do decision-makers have scope to adapt the MEL approach based on its utility and value?
	<p>Tools and approaches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Outcome mapping (to capture progress towards outcomes; often applied in a participatory manner. ✓ Collecting and using real-time data ✓ Promoting bottom-up decision making and data collection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Soliciting community feedback and devolving decision making to local staff and partners

2.2.2.3.Mechanisms of Learning to Adapt.

All the literature reviewed so far seem to deem the vital importance of learning for adaptive management, therefore it should also get a prime emphasis in developing intentional MEL system for adaptive management . One of the enabling factors for learning is giving spaces for reflection, at all project levels (CARE 2020) . Establishing such learning events require both formal and informal means that include: peer to peer exchanges , facilitated learning events , in person visits , thematic reflection and working groups ;it is also essential to have systems(software based) to capture and support learning (OXFAM 2018) .

Making the learning is not enough unless there are mechanisms for making technical and strategic adaptations utilizing the information. One of the key features to look in the MEL system is therefore adaptations in response to evidence-based needs and opportunities ; and

availability of information on the process by which programme plans, theories and designs can be reformed(Ramalingam et al. 2019).

2.2.2.4.MEL4AM Capacities and incentives as enablers

The Key enablers for any system development is buy-in from senior leadership of an organization which could also be reflected in various incentives. These include supportive policies , guidelines and philosophies to foster the learning , reflection , risk taking cultures (see INTRAC 2010). Adaptive projects also requires significant budgets for monitoring, evaluation and learning, as a result of the considerable investment of time and resource in MEL and analysis need to be dedicated from funders and host organizations (CARE 2019).

The capacities also include building the human and infrastructure of the organization to shoulder and support the demanded learning and reflection culture. The mindset shift to adaptive rigor will inevitably change how the: HR evaluates performance, finance budgets and controls, procurement makes contracts, failure and risk taking is treated by senior management; as these all should operate with flexibility unlike the trend in traditional approach. Some features that help to see these attributes has been adopted from Ramalingam et al. (2019) in the 3 table below.

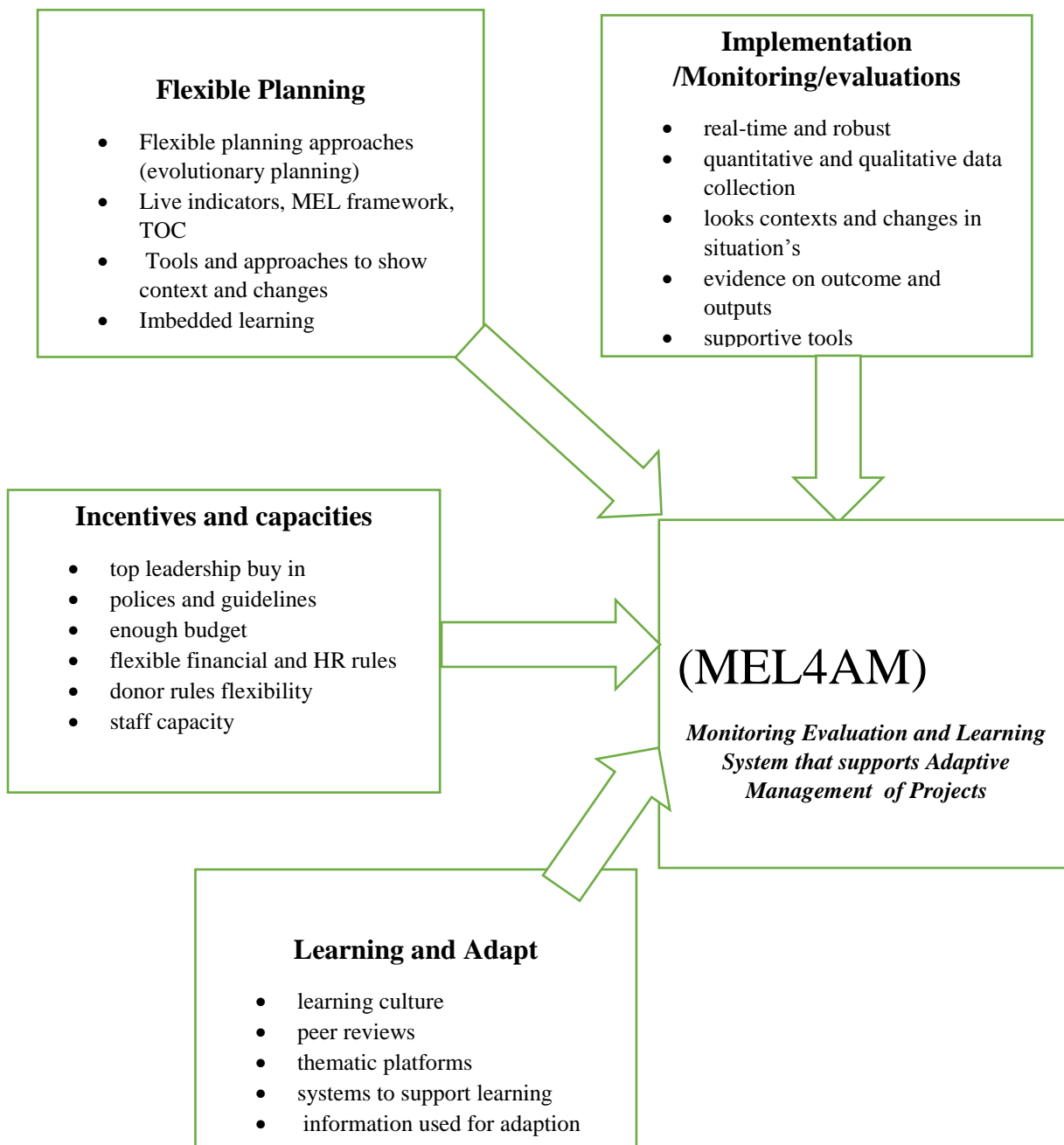
Table 3 – MEL capacities and incentives as enablers

MEL4AM	Key considerations
Capacities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Do senior leaders and managers foster an enabling working environment and shared mindsets around adaptive change? ✓ Are there safe spaces to recognise uncertainty, identify early failures/what is not working, and to ensure that action is taken to address it? ✓ Is MEL4AM clearly positioned as an internal team function? ✓ Is value placed on, and investments made in, staff capacities of curiosity and creativity, critical thinking, openness to risk, comfort with uncertainty? Does recruitment, reward, training promotion systems enable these attributes and behaviours?
Incentive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Are reporting and accountability mechanisms aligned with MEL4AM processes? ✓ Do they incentivise learning and adaptations? ✓ Are contracts, financial and human resource arrangements supportive of the need for adaptations through the implementation process?

2.2.3. Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework has been designed based the summarized attributes and features analyzed in the empirical review. Based on the studies reviewed, MEL4AM could be seen from four features. These are: flexibility in planning; robust monitoring/implementation tools and methodologies; conducive learning atmosphere and mechanisms; and organizations environment with capacity and incentives to foster MEL4AM. Some of the key attributes that have been used to assess the existing MEL system are also presented in the figure below. Therefore, these features and attributes will be used to asses the existing MEL system and address questions raised in this project work.

Figure 2 – Conceptual Framework



Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3. Introduction

This chapter sketches how the project work has been conducted. It elaborates the research design, target population, sampling strategy, data collection tools and techniques employed in this case study.

3.1. Research Design

This project work employed a descriptive research design. Descriptive research design is used to describe an event or phenomena as it exists at present, which makes it fit to assess the existing MEL system of the organization concerned. Case study was the strategy of the project work, where the how, what and the why of the system has been triangulated (Saunders et al. 2009). Therefore, current MEL system of an education project implemented by iNGO country office in Ethiopia had been assessed by collecting qualitative data from in depth interview and desk review of secondary documents.

3.2. Description Of Study Variables

On the effort of assessing the existing MEL practice and its fitness to adaptive rigor the following set of variables have been identified and were the basis for assessment with their detailed attributes. These are: flexibility elements in planning; implementation and monitoring tools and methodologies that support reflection and real-time learning about results, contexts and changes; availability of learning platforms and their utilization; and finally the capacities and incentives in the organization that promote MEL4AM.

3.3. Target Population

Target population were defined by accessibility of elements, period, geographical limitations and topic of interest and this makes the entire group of people the research study (Sekaran & Bougie 2010). As the study focuses on assessing PIN country office education project the target population will be defined based on the topic of interest. Therefore the target population for this project work had been 17: 2 management, 1 program, 7 project (3 project managers and 4 field officers), 2 M&E, 3 support departments and 2 advisors directly supporting the project from the head quarter.

3.4. Sampling

Purposive sampling has been employed to select key informants for this case study. Therefore, 1 from the management, 3 project coordinators, 2 M&E staff, 1 education program coordinator, and 1 from each support department (Finance and HR heads), and 2 advisors were planned to be interviewed. Out of these samples 7 individuals were found and interviewed using the interview guide. In addition to this an experienced expert in the M&E field who has advised many NGOs for several years has been asked to reflect on the findings and consolidate recommendations from an international practice perspective.

3.5. Data Collection

3.5.1. Primary data

Qualitative data has been mainly collected from the 8 key informants selected from the organization and an expert in the area. Directed by the interview guide, in-depth interviews had been conducted.

3.5.2. Secondary data

Desk review of secondary documents were reviewed to triangulate the findings from the in-depth interview. Where appropriate, the findings of the desk review were also presented as stand-alone findings. The major documents reviewed include: M&E policies, guidelines, platforms, terms of references, knowledge sharing platforms and databases. In addition documents related with the project such as: Project proposal, MEL strategy, MEL framework, theory of change document, tools such as Log frame, result framework, indicators tracking tables and other tools and software designed particularly for the project; and guidelines provided by the donor have been explored.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak that forced to move some of the staff out of the country; Skype had been used to conduct the interview.

3.6. Data analysis

The records of the in-depth interview had been transcribed, and later coded based on the four thematic areas: Planning, monitoring and evaluation, learning for adaptation and enabling conditions. As these were the major categories in the conceptual framework latter the analysis was made against these themes and effort was made to answer the question raised.

The review of the secondary document was also used to triangulate the analysis of the findings on from the interview. As some of the findings from the desk review , with the likes of budget and frequency information, were presented as stand alone findings if they were found to augment the theme and attributes assessed.

3.7. Reliability

To insure the reliability of the interview guide it was adopted from similar research collected and with some customization it was verified by an expert in the area. Even though the interviewer is also a MEL staff in the organization, as most the staff who are interviewed here with have no line management relationship (no one managed by him). This will reduce the participation biased. As the researcher is also new to the organization, the bias that would have occurred in analysing and interpreting the result is expected to be minimum.

3.8. Validity

Care was given to insure internal validity of the project work by controlling the process of the interview from being affected by morality and historical perspective of the key informants. Considering the proper representation of all views in the organization that are associated with the project , it is believed that the findings have external validity and the lessons can be replicated to other programs in the organization , other country offices , or other organizations that have similar projects and set up.

3.9. Ethical considerations

The purpose and usability the project work had been communicated to relevant structures in the organization , and data and information shared during the interview was handled with ethical standards practiced to handle research and any other information in the organization. The findings and recommendations from this project work apart from the usability deemed here , it will be shard and managed by the rules and regulations of the host organization.

Chapter 4 : Data Analysis and Discussion

4. Introduction

4.1. Understanding on Adaptive Project Management

Interviewees were asked to describe adaptive management. Most agreed that this is new concept to them and their understanding is closely associated with the notion of revision and flexibility in traditional project management. Few who had participated in the planning process from the scratch and who were involved in the donor round table discussion sessions had described it as; means for working under complexity where the goal is clear and solution is not well known.

A follow up questions has also indicated that some of the project staff interviewed were hired after the project was developed ,and due to high turn over the staff that seem to have got the knowledge on this new concept have left before the knowledge is captured and retained in the organization.

Those respondents who were not confident of understanding the concept also attested that this concept was not the part of their induction session after employment, neither they had any training related with it even though they have been working on the project for over a year.

4.2. The Planning Process of the Project

To get understanding of the planning process and flexibility elements required for adaptive management documents that were shared by the donor such as: grant recipient had book; monitoring evaluation and learning guide ;due diligence guidelines ; financial guideline, guideline for setting and measuring intermediate outcome were reviewed. Documents that were produced in this project: first grant proposal and theory of change; revised proposal and theory of change ; MEL strategy ; MEL framework ; log frame ; indicator tracking table ; assessments conducted during the project ; and major correspondence with the donor and documented comments on live documents were assessed to look in to how adaptive MEL is enshrined in the process.

Replies from key informants has also been used to triangulate what is observed in the document and vice versa.

4.2.1. How the Adaptive Elements Included in the Project.

According to those interviewees who were in the planning state of the project state that the adaptive elements of the project has started at the planning stage. But it was not from the very understanding of the need to have adaptive management for the context in which the project is implemented , rather it is a totally donor driven process that were introduced through guidelines and briefing sessions from the donor.

4.2.2. Donor Guidance and Adaptive MEL in Planning

One of the key informants state that the adaptive MEL elements of the project mainly emanated from the MEL guidance and grant recipient guide. The first proposal development process used to involve only the narrative proposal and theory of change which used to contain broadly defined indicators and intervention strategies based what was known at that time. At this stage of the development the context of the problem was understood somehow from the gender mapping conducted in the target area. After winning the grant , the donor has provided the guidelines mentioned and briefing for the planning team was provided , and it has also been presented at the project kick off workshop.

The MEL guideline reviewed also clearly states that the project is going to be implemented in complex situation where the targeted girls are living in highly volatile area (conflict and internal displacement) which makes grasping the problem context at the start difficult. The document therefore, explicitly states that the project that the donor funds in this round of funding is managed by adaptive management. The guide offers menu option in some elements to give flexibility to the implementing organization and becomes prescriptive in some elements of adaptations.

4.2.3. Types of Adaptations Introduced by the Donor

The MEL guideline mentioned above specifies two types of adaptation. One of them happens every six month and it is meant to review any changes affecting outputs of the implementation. This can happen after two consecutive quarter repots and adaptations are triggered by the results of internal monitoring and learning. The second type can happen one year after the baseline or follows any external evaluation. The scope of this annual adaptation extends to reviewing intermediate outcomes, which means strategies may be revisited if the context changes. The implementing partner can trigger the review and adaptation meetings

based on the learning made, or otherwise the portfolio management team may also trigger it based on the reported situations. The guideline also declares that higher level outcomes are immune from adaption and are not meant to change.

Even though the document doesn't specify this explicitly, based on BOND 2016 classification one can see that the first category falls in to technical adaptions and the second in to strategic adaption.

The grant manual also specifies that the donor is willing to entertain up to 10% budget movement flexibilities that will be just notified during the quarter reporting and maximum of two budget revisions that align with technical adaptations.

4.2.4. Are This Iterations Implied in the MEL Documents?

The desk review of secondary data revealed that two types of adaptation were implied to happen during the life of the project. These were technical and strategic . As stated in the donor guide ,the technical adaptations were meant to make changes at activity level. The guideline states such adaptations could result from findings of the internal monitoring or learnings made. Theoretically technical adaptions could happen biannually , which show implies the project could make up to 9 such iterations.

Based on the same secondary source reviewed, strategic adaptions in the project follow external evaluations and could happen annually. The scope has also been stated to cover up the level of intermediate outcome leaving higher level outcome to be unchanged. Considering the life time of the up to 3 strategic iterations .

The key informants were asked as to how this are reflected in the planning tools , but they indicated that this were not consider in designing the MEL framework , the log frame and indicator tracking table development. One of the major adaptions that was mentioned to affected the project so far is the adaption for COVID -19 impact of the project. Few of the respondents mentioned that adaptation so far (including the up coming mid term adaption that caught most project staff with surprise) are donor initiated.

Further review of the MEL framework, the MEL strategy, log frame showed that this opportunities for adaption are not explicitly included with proper triggering indicators.

4.2.5. Other elements of Planning Flexibly in the Project.

4.2.5.1. Inception Period (Special Condition)

As mentioned above the first round of planning had only broadly defined narrative and theory of change. As some of the key informants mentioned it is the eight months inception period that helped them to understand the context more and make the refined planning. Some of the process that happened in the inception process with the context of flexible planning for adaptive management, as identified by key informants and with review of secondary document will be discussed below.

4.2.5.2. More Understanding on Problem Context

In the project design phase the organization has made gender mapping assessment to understand the socioeconomic assessment that helped to understand the overall situation of the project. The community mapping exercise (in depth assessment) was conducted. Project progress reports reviewed showed that the first plan was done by considering little know how of the context but the assessment has revealed both the magnitude and intensity of the problem. This has added clarity as to what strategies and refined interventions are needed. The key informants also agreed that it is this report that helped them to refine activities, strategies, and indicators. Therefore, this has been the starting point for developing/polishing: MEL strategy, MEL framework, and Log frame.

4.2.5.3. MEL Strategy (Planning for Learning Cohorts)

The MEL strategy reviewed has included adaptation and learning mechanism by planning for learning cohorts. This implies that not all beneficiaries are addressed at a time, rather in sequences of learning cohorts. The key informants also indicated that this is an interesting element of adaption that will make improvement in strategies by learning from preceding group of girls. In this regard up to four cohorts have been planned where by the first three will have their own baseline and end line evaluations. When this study was conducted a baseline survey on the first cohorts have undertaken. One of the key informants also iterated that , the findings could be triggering points for the next adaption ; unlike simple bench marks in the traditional project management.

4.2.5.4. A Helpful Tool in Setting and Refining Indicators – IndiKit

As one of the senior Key informants rehearse, forced with the challenge of setting indicators for development and humanitarian interventions; PIN has developed a platform for sharing and populating indicators by implementers world wide. This platform called Indi KIT has helped the MEL and project team to have menu and guidance on use of smart indicators while in the planning phase of the project. As one of the challenges in MEL work, the availability of this kit with ownership of the organization has been agreed by many key informants to provide good opportunity for frequent adaptive exercises that the project is going to do in the future.

4.3. Monitoring and evaluation Features

The MEL guide of the donor states, that monitoring should be robust and should be done in the sense of keeping track of progress and in order to learn about which aspects of project implementation and management are working well and which aspects would benefit from adaptation or adjustment to improve their quality. In this regard the MEL framework is expected to answer show the what, who, how often, how of the monitoring strategy. In this regard, with the review of the MEL framework as guiding document the existing tools and approaches for monitoring have been assessed and its practical application has been triangulated with information provided by the key informants. Therefore, are the monitoring systems ready and geared to adaptive management will be the main issue of the scrutiny below.

4.3.1. Attendance Tracking Database

This is one of the most often mentioned helpful tool that helps to track the basic data about the targeted girls, their attendance record and performance result. This platform has a mobile and web based database version. The mobile version will help field level data to be entered in real time and subsequent data quality checks and further analysis by higher level staff(MEL staff).

As key most of the key informants mentioned the database has not yet been usable due to the delays in development and quality of data that used to be tracked by manual system. Thus to date this important monitoring tool that is most often mentioned in the MEL framework is not in place to provide informed decision it should provide.

4.3.2. Project Tracker

This tool has been reviewed as to how it is used in the past 7 quarter reports and its utilization for adaptation. The review of these past reports showed that this tool is used to track about the activities planned throughout the quarter. This tracker is stored in a shared folder to get updated by those who have the mandate to do so. This spreadsheet tool has a list of activities for the quarter, indicators, targets, status of accomplishment, narrative of progress and most importantly the impact of incomplete activities. The last element is mentioned as a key trigger for adaptation, in case where the activity can not be done due or completed.

In addition the tracker has also a project risk log that is used to track the risk description, the mitigation strategy, owner and rating for risk level. An M&E expert who was a key informant believes that this culture is key in that it adds accountability with mitigation and probable adaptation.

As most of the key informants indicated, apart from being a communication tool between the donor and the implementing organization, this tracker is also being efficiently used to monitor the project by a platform in the project that is known as the project management unit (PMU). This platform convenes every month to assess the progress of activities. But on review of the terms of reference and minutes of reports by the platform, agenda about adaptation or linking it with the iteration cycles indicated above was not observed.

4.3.3. Evaluation Design for Adaptation

Evaluation in adaptive management is known to have more frequency than in traditional management as it is done throughout the program (INTRAC 2018). Desk review of secondary documents also showed that 5 evaluation points have been identified to show output level changes by taking cross-sectional data from the learning cohorts designed above. The staggered baseline, midline evaluation design along with the kick-off and graduating of cohorts has been noted as suitable for informing strategic adaptations planned. But the observation so far shows that there was a lengthy process of producing a baseline report, and this made the information unavailable for adaptations so far.

4.3.4. Beneficiary Satisfaction Tracking

The M&E unit head who is leading this action , on key informant session , has explained that the organization had compliant response mechanisms that used to be practiced in other projects. In this project apart from the usual mechanisms (hotline, suggestion box) , it has also included community action group to provide safe space for gathering and relaying satisfaction and complaint. Appropriate tracking and response mechanisms are in place , but follow up questions as to its utilization in adaptation has not been well addressed.

4.4. Learning Mechanisms to Foster Adaptation

The majority of the interviewees recognize that this project has a lot of learning platforms unlike any other project in the organization before. They have sighted: consortium coordination platform , project implementation unit , and peer to peer review platform. Thematic working groups for teaching and learning, M&E and safeguarding were also mentioned to function for the past one year in the project.

Desk review of has also been made to assess the relevance , frequency and composition of the learning platforms for adaption. Terms of refences , reports of learning platforms so far conducted implicated that their application for adaption to be less evident. But the deliberate design of such platforms could be considered as testimony for encouraging emphasis given to learning and good culture towards reflection.

4.4.1. Planned Learning Products

The MEL framework infers the production and dissemination of regular flash report, bulletins and lessons during the project implementation. The seven quarter reports have also been observed to track learning made in the project. Key informants, in addition ,agreed with such planning but the production of learning on and for adaption were not documented and shared so far. Some have associated it with lack of project dedicated communication specialist that is trained in tracking lessons as whole and adaptations in particular.

4.4.2. Other platform to support Learning

The M&E team interviewed have noted the emphasis the organization for learning and knowledge management. Notable of this is the Knowledge and Learning Department (KLD) in the head quarter , which is also mandated to give support to country offices. Therefore, they iterated that this project could get rich experience on tracking learning from the international office. Some have also recommended the inclusion of such department in the country office

M&E unit to give better emphasis for learning. In general, the key informants agreed that learning culture is not new to the organization and recommended on the best use of this structure for the benefit of this project that requires it more.

4.5. Capacities and Incentives for Adaptive MEL

4.5.1. Supportive Policies and guidelines for Adaptive MEL

Almost all of the interviewed staff agreed that there are no policies and guidelines developed by the organization. Till now it is the donor that guides the process of design and implementation of this adaptive management. One of the problems also mentioned is the detachment to the project thematic units such as the MEL from the main structure of the organization. Currently to facilitate the consortium nature of the project, the MEL structure of the project is somewhat detached from the main M&E unit of the organization. This was mentioned as one of the reasons for making the concept to be so detached from the rest of the team.

4.5.2. Human resource capacity

As most of the key informants agreed the organizational human capacity towards adaptive management and adaptive MEL is nascent and this could be an obstacle for taking the learning from this project to other programs. The serious lack of capacity in this regard has been noted as an Achilles heel to the project and further endeavors.

4.5.3. Donor Action :Lesson From COVID -Adaption

Interviewees were also asked if any of the donor action is that is promoting or against the adaptive management and MEL. Respondents who were involved in the COVID-19 adaptation has mentioned an extended process of approval from the donor side to approve adaptation plans agreed. This will make activities to halt till agreements are reached and renewed ones are signed. If this is the case for other adaptation process, it might display a negative sense towards requesting adaptations for the fear of wasting time and unnecessary halts.

4.5.4. MEL Budget

Having sufficient budget in MEL is one of the key indicators for good MEL system . Though there is no consensus on the percentage of annual organization budget , based on studies on many organizations Hernandez (2017) state that average budget for MEL has been between 5-7% of the annual budget. But the distribution also matters for example , an expert interviewed for this project work stated that new systems require more investment on system / infrastructure and human capacity development.

Based on the summary of budget dedicated for MEL in the project , it was noted that the budget dedicated is close the minimum average. i.e 5% . But further scrutiny on the budget showed that training and capacity building was given much lower emphasis. Learning and documentation budget is not included , while there are several learning platforms that may generate and require budget for facilitation and documentation. But the dedication of budget for the development of software based database has been noted as encouraging move that contribute for building sustainable system that fosters robust monitoring.

Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

5. Introduction

This chapter gives the major summary of the findings, conclusion, and recommendations made for different targets.

5.1. Summary of Findings

5.1.1. Planning Process and MEL for adaptive management

The planning process has been found to be flexible .Plans are done in evolutionary process considering the level of understanding towards problem context. Studies and assessments, inception phases for context analysis and further refinement of indicators and development of MEL frameworks have been noted to be inline with adaptive rigor.

Even though they are more of donor driven ,well planned technical and strategic adaptation elements and iterations were found to be key elements of the project . Though this was not found supported with clearly placed milestones or indicators that would have triggered learning and adaptation plans.

The donor is supportive of the adaptive management and there are good reference materials to support the planning and implementation process. Though this has not been owned and adopted by the organization to guide the project or for further programming.

The planning process that has included the idea of learning cohorts by dividing the targets to groups that will be reached one after the other. This has approach was found to be key adaptive element that enshrined learning , improvement and strategic adaptation. The availability of software platforms, as helpful MEL tool, to polish indicators development has also been mentioned as good back up for cascading MEL role in the evolutionary process of planning towards adaptive management.

5.1.2. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring tools such as attendance tracking software and project tracker were found to be robust tools designed to support to support MEL4AM. But the late development and the ground level problems in feeding the data to the tracker has not made the application useful yet. The application and design of the activity tracker that also shows the prevailing risks in the project has been identified as useful tool for adaptive management . Monitoring the tracker by monthly project implementation unit was seen as helpful for making the monitoring

robust , though the platform has not yet set agenda on need for adaption in line with the scheduled iterations.

A clear shift from the traditional project management sense of evaluation has been also been found well embed in the project. This has been reflected both in the frequency and schedule of evaluation that goes in line with strategic iterations planned.

5.1.3. Learning and adaption

Several learning platforms were found to be emended in the project implementation, and majority of them are functional with defined terms of reference. But it has also been found that these platforms :schedules of meeting , agenda setting and decision level are not related with adaption that may happen every six moth at activity level and annual at intermediate output stage. Lesson sharing in the form of learning products was found to be less emphasized and not well budgeted.

The organization has also good opportunity in its head quarter, knowledge and learning department, that can best advice on shaping and innovating learning for adaption.

5.1.4. Capacities and incentives

Organizational policy documents, guidelines , working manuals and similar strategies that guide the senior management and support departments to foster learning , risk taking , and working in uncertain environment to adapt are not in place . The existing education project functions as semiautonomous structure , detached from the rest of the team structurally . This has made knowledge sharing and retention difficult at the face of high staff turn over. The staff capacity to support MEL4AM was also found to be very low and not yet supported by training and capacity building.

Thought the MEL budget has included the development of new monitoring system , which will strengthen the MEL system as a whole , budget in capacity building ,learning , and documentation were found to be low.

The over all support of the donor in adaptive management is encouraging in providing flexible planning and budgeting , but the approval process witnessed so far was found to be lengthy. It might affect the motivation for adaption if repeatedly occurs.

5.2. Conclusions

This project work has endeavored to assess how the current MEL system of the girls education project implemented by People in Need(PIN) in Ethiopia is inline with adaptive management ; identify tool and approaches practiced ; and see the enabling conditions in the organization ; and pin point the major gaps for further improvement.

Therefor it can be concluded that the application of flexible planning approaches ; learning and adaptation plan; design of robust monitoring tools ; application of several learning platforms ; multiple evaluation design that tracks changes along the cohorts were found to inline with the what has been recommended by the contemporary literature in MEL4AM.

But the major gaps in capacity of the staff ; lack of owning of adaptive management in organization polices , manuals and overall culture that still makes the approach donor driven ; proper unitization of learning platforms to brainstorm on technical and strategic adaptations ; delays in practicality of monitoring tools are critical gaps in making MEL4AM fit for purpose. The current trend of looking the girls education project as stand alone team , being detached from the main country team, also makes the organizing to lose the learning advantage for further programming.

Enabling conditions such as flexibility from the donor and supportive tool(indikit , KLD) needs to be tapped well for best practice of MEL in adaptive management.

5.3. Recommendations

The project management team needs to :

- Revise the MEL framework to include milestones and triggers to indicate technical and strategic adaptations.
- Negotiate with the donor to include trainings for all project team on adaptive management and adaptive MEL.
- Revisit the working groups and learning platforms working modalities to have planned discussion and reflection session on the need for adaptation, and this should go inline with adaptation and review schedules of the donor.
- Keep adaption on the table : new staff induction , in planning , monitoring ,evaluation and learning process.

Recommended Organization level action:

- Revisit the policies, strategies, and working manuals to reflect and support adaptive culture, working in uncertainty and risk taking.
- Develop organizational manuals, frameworks that guide further programming and application of adaptive management and MEL for adaptive management.
- Work on how to benefit from international platforms for adaptive management.

Recommendation for the donor :

- Reduce the time taken for approving adaptations
- Engage more on enhancing capacities of partners on adaptive management.

Further Research

- One of the limitations of this project work is the focus on one organization, even though the girls education project is implemented by other organizations in the country. Therefore it is advisable to make a comprehensive study that uses mixed methods of data collection to better understand how MEL for adaptive management is practiced in the country.
- Most donors are also promoting a consortium set up to implement projects, where having good MEL4AM at organization level might not be enough. Therefore looking at the practice of MEL4AM at consortium project operation will be another challenge that requires further scrutiny.
- Further research is also recommended on how adaptive management practice and MEL practice could be aligned with strict compliance rules of government signatories that are yet monitoring and appraising projects with rigid tools that are meant for traditional approaches.

Policy Makers

Policy makers and planners in the country should be ready to produce trained people in the area of adaptive management and adaptive MEL in particular. Training institutions and universities are also recommended to design short term and long term trainings to meet the demand for trained personnel and managers in the field of adaptive management.

References

- Bakewell, O.; Adams, J. & Pratt, B. ,2003 , ‘Sharpening the Development Process: A practical guide to monitoring and evaluation’ ,INTRAC, UK. , viewed Aril 2020 ,from www.intrac.org
- Bond, M., 2016 , ‘Adaptive management: *What it means for CSOs*’, viewed April 2020, from www.intrac.org
- Booth, D., Balfe, K., Gallagher, R., Kilcullen, G., O’Boyle, S. and Tiernan, A. ,2018, ‘Learning to make a difference’, Overseas Development Institute Research Report, viewed April 2020 , form [www. Odi. Org](http://www.Odi.Org)
- CARE ,2020 ,’ Listen carefully, Tread lightly, Adapt quickly: Approaching Adaptive Management: Examples from our Somalia Education Programming’ , viewed April 10, 2020 ,from www.care.org
- Crawford, P. & Bryce,. P. , ‘Project monitoring and evaluation: a method for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of aid project implementation’ , *International Journal of Project Management* 21 (2003) 363–373
- Hermans, M. , Haasnoot, M. , Maat,J., H. Kwakkel,H., 2017, ‘Designing monitoring arrangements for collaborative learning about adaptation pathways’ ,*Environmental Science & Policy* 69 ,29–38
- Hernandez ,C.,2017, ‘Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Practices of : Local Governments and Local Governments Associations’ , CIB Working Group ,viewed April 10 2020 from , www.cib-uclg.org
- Hernandez, K., Ramalingam, B. and Wild, L. ,2019, ‘Towards evidence-informed adaptive Management: a roadmap for development and humanitarian organisations’ , Overseas Development Institute Working Paper, viewed April 2020 , from www.odi.org
- INTRAC , 2009, ‘Developing M&E Systems for Complex Organisations’ , viewed April 10 2020, retrieved from <https://interact.org>
- INTRAC , 2018, ‘Adaptive Management’ , viewed April 2020, from <https://interact.org>
- INTRAC ,2019,.’M&E SYSTEMS’ , viewed April 2020, from <https://interact.org>
- OXFAM ,2018, ‘Managing to Adapt :Analysing adaptive management for planning monitoring, evaluation, and learning’ , Oxfam Research report , viewed April 19 2020, available at www.Oxfam.org.

Psnanen ,T. & Barnett , I. ,2019, ‘Supporting Adaptive Management: Monitoring and evaluation tools and approaches’, Working Paper , Viewed April 2020, *from www. Odi.org*

Ramalingam, B., Wild, L. & Buffardi, A. ,2019, ‘Making adaptive rigour work: principles and practices for strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning for adaptive management’, Overseas Development Institute Briefing Paper , viewed April 2020, *from www.odi.org*

Saunders, M. Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. ,2009, *Research Method for Business Students* , 5th ed, pp. 136-150 , Pearson Education, Inc.

Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. ,2010, *Research Methods for Business. A skill-building approach* , 5th ed., Haddington John Wiley & Sons.

Simister, N. ,2009, ‘Developing M&E Systems for Complex Organisations: A methodology’, retrieved on April 2020, *from www.intrac.org*

Tengan, C., Aigbavboa, C., & Thwala, D. ,2018, ‘Conceptual Description of the Key Determinants of Effective Monitoring and Evaluation System’ research gate , viewed on April 2020, from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326042773>

USAID , 2018, ‘Adaptive Management :Discussion note’ , viewed May 10 2020 , *from www.usaidlearninglab.org*

Wild, L. and Ramalingam, R. ,2018, ‘Building a global learning alliance on adaptive management. London’, viewed on April 2020 , form www.odi.org/publications/11167-building-global-learning-alliance-adaptive-management

Wysocki, R. K. ,2013, *Effective Project Management: Traditional, Agile, Extreme. In Effective Project Management: Traditional, Agile, Extreme* ,7th ed., pp. 340–341,. USA , Indianapolis, Indiana: John Wiley & Sons, Inc

Wysocki, R. K. ,2010, *Adaptive Project Framework : Managing Complexity at the Face of Uncertainty*’, 7th ed., pp. 1–47, USA ,Pearson Education, Inc.

Zvoushe ,H. & Gideon,Z.,2013, ‘Utilisation of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems by Development Agencies: The Case of the UNDP in Zimbabwe’, *American International Journal of Contemporary Research Vol. 3 No. 3*

Annex 1 : Interview Guide Questions

I am conducting this interview to assess the whether or not our MEL system is fit for adaptive management , the findings are primarily intended to be presented for the partial fulfilment of my MA in project management. Besides it can also be used to improve our practice in the project and beyond . Thank you for your time and cooperation..

I. Introductory question

How would you define adaptive programming?

II. Context for adaptive programming/project design

Programme design and implementation

Can you give an example of tools or practices that, in your experience, make a the project (your programme) adaptive?

1. Was this element of adaptive management designed, or did it emerge during project implementation?
2. What are the factors that enabled/constrained the adoption of this element?
3. Could this element be used in other programmes? Under which circumstances?

Technology/tools

Are there any specific technologies, management information systems, or specific management tools that contribute (positively or negatively) to the flexibility of a this project ?

1. How does this technology affect the ability to adapt the this project ?
2. What are the problems that you face in using this technology?
3. What are the outcomes of using this technology?
4. Are the tools that have been used in other projects used differently here ? You may reflect on the application of TOC, Logframe , Result framework so far?

Leadership and culture

To what extent does team culture or project leadership contribute to the flexibility of the programme?

1. Do you see policies , procedures and manuals used in organization that are promote adaptive management of the project ?
2. How do staff members participate in decision making processes? Which members of staff are involved? Which are not?

3. How does management encourage participation and reporting of failure, or create space for reflection?
4. To what extent are learning abilities and soft skills considered in recruitment processes?

Use of evidence for adaptive programming

How do you use evidence/feedback to make changes in an ongoing project? Can you give an example?

1. How was the evidence produced and communicated?
2. Were there any obstacles in making changes following the feedback? Which ones?
3. What are the outcomes derived from this change?

Donors' role

In your experience, what is the role of the donors in fostering or limiting the flexibility and adaptability of a programme?

1. Are there any specific approaches that, in your experience, donors use to facilitate adaptability?
2. Does your donor(s) make any contractual requests that you feel limit the project's adaptability?

Learning platforms and culture

1. Are there well established mechanisms for learning in the project , what are they ?
2. How is learning supported by any system or software , what is it ?

Capacities

1. Do you think the project staff is well aware of the on adaptive rigor
2. What were the capacity building mechanisms so far ?
3. Do you think you have enough budget for MEL work ?

Monitoring practices.

1. How is the monitoring practice in this project different from other projects ?
2. What are new tools and practices used so far ?
3. Do you think they are effective for adaptive management of the project?

If you have any other recommendations?

Thank You