

Produced as part of:



# Adaptive Programming in Fragile, Conflict and Violence-Affected Settings

## What works and under what conditions?

*The Case of Institutions for Inclusive Development, Tanzania*

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## Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme (A4EA)

In a world shaped by rapid change, the Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research programme focuses on fragile, conflict and violence affected settings to ask how social and political action for empowerment and accountability emerges in these contexts, what pathways it takes, and what impacts it has.

A4EA is implemented by a consortium consisting of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the Accountability Research Center (ARC), the Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR), the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), Itad, Oxfam GB, and the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR). Research focuses on five countries: Egypt, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Pakistan. A4EA is funded by UK aid from the UK government. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official policies of our funder.

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## Executive Summary

*'If we had had to stick to the original plan, we would have shut by now.'* (Victoria Lihiru, I4ID's Democratic Governance & Strategic Partnerships Manager)

This case study forms part of a research project<sup>1</sup> to examine whether and how adaptive approaches can strengthen aid projects promoting empowerment and accountability in fragile, conflict and violence-affected settings (FCVAS). The research examines some of the assertions around the adaptive management approach and explores if and how adaptive approaches, including rapid learning and planning responses (*fast feedback loops* and *agile programming*) are particularly relevant and useful for E&A in FCVAS.

Each case study focuses on a large DfID governance project, in this case the Institutions for Inclusive Development (I4ID), a five-year initiative in Tanzania funded by UKAid (£10m) and IrishAid (£1.6m). I4ID is managed by Palladium, and involves a consortium including ODI, SNV, BBC Media Action and (initially) Global Partners Governance.

## Mechanisms of Adaptive Management

Adaptive Management involves a dynamic interaction between 3 elements: delivery, programming and governance.

Adaptive Delivery (AD): Frontline staff think on their feet, continuously navigating through ever-changing, turbulent conditions, many moving parts and players, ambiguity and uncertainty. They come up with best guesses on what to do next, then test and correct in a continuous engagement and learning process.

Adaptive Programming (AP) is a more conscious and structured process, usually in the hands of the senior management within the project office. It involves less frequent cycles of reflection, often bringing in critical allies to help question and challenge to identify new directions and opportunities.

Adaptive Governance (AG) normally resides with the officer(s) in the donor agency responsible for the project. They must manage upwards, coping with donors' inevitable pressures for results, reporting and shifting priorities, and manage downwards, ensuring that the project accounts for how it is spending donor money, but also retains the freedom of manoeuvre that lies at the heart of adaptive management.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.ids.ac.uk/programme-and-centre/action-for-empowerment-and-accountability-a4ea/>

Figure 1: Relationship between AD, AP and AG when things are going well.

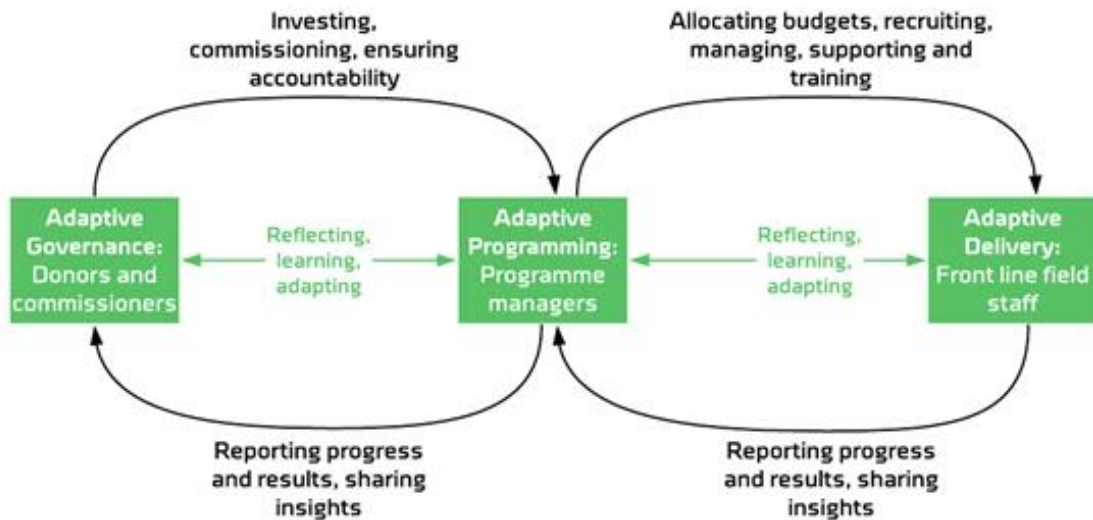
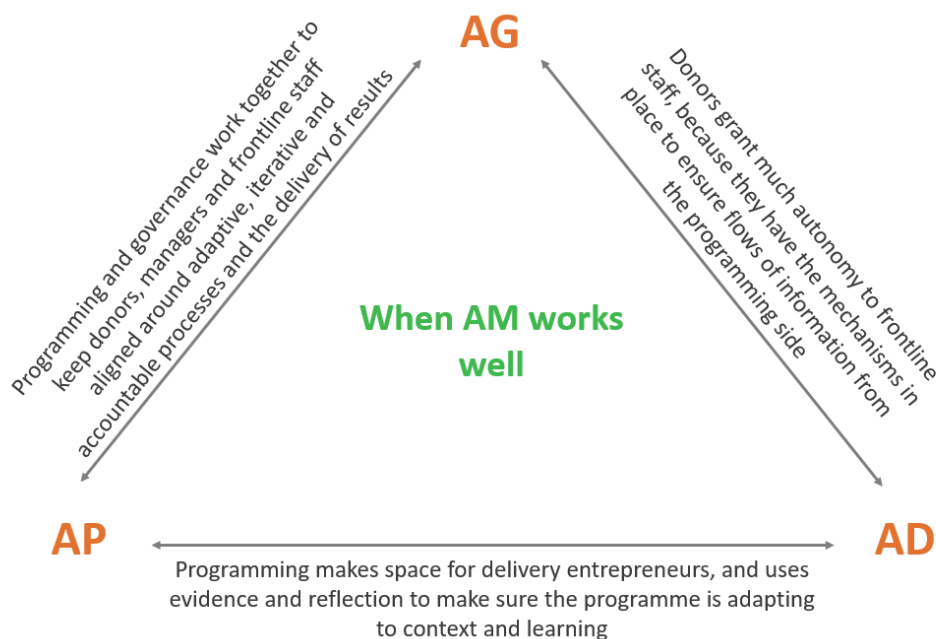


Figure 1 captures the relationship between AD, AP and AG when things are going well. In practice, it is constantly evolving and often fraught. Players in all three roles are under pressure and must face in two directions at once. The basic currency of adaptive management is trust between the various players and tiers evolved.

Figure 2: When adaptive approaches work well.



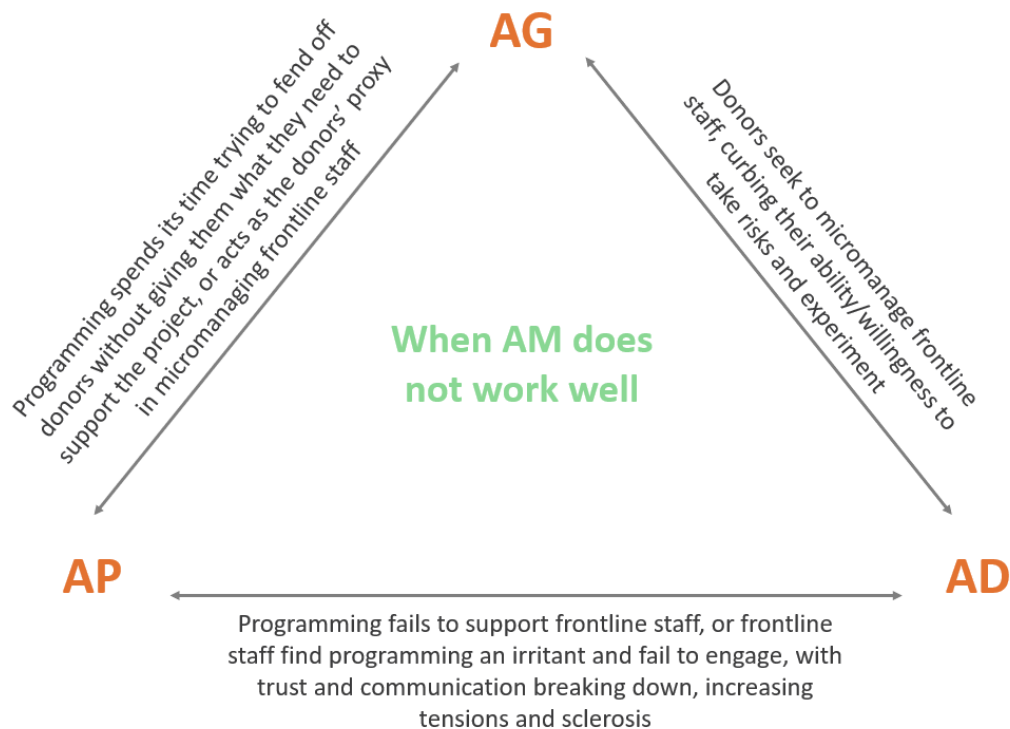
In its first two years, I4ID has seen an evolving dance between these three elements, including periods of both success and crisis, captured in the graphic below

### Example of initial success, enabled by trust:

An entrepreneurial and well-networked women’s rights activist in I4ID spotted a potential ‘quick win’: VAT on menstrual products. Exemption would reduce the wholesale price by 18% at a stroke, paving the way for increased demand. Left to get on with it, she worked with women’s organizations to win the support of women MPs and the Ministries of Health and Education, who agreed to take it to the real decision maker – the Ministry of Finance. The MoF checked how much it would cost, found it to

be small (due to the low levels of demand) and signed off. Now that the tax has been removed, I4ID is working with manufacturers and distributors to develop the market by tackling other obstacles, especially to access by low-income women.

**Figure 3: When adaptive approaches do not work well**



### Example of initial costs in the absence of trust:

In the first year of the programme, Palladium and early phase staff had to invest considerable time in developing an extensive Theory of Change. They felt frustrated by the focus on getting the thinking right without being able to start experimenting and testing the waters to identify options and alliances. Not only did this original approach of overthinking the strategy delay the start to the learning by doing that lies at the heart of AM, it also led to an overambitious ToC that had to be readjusted considerably as I4ID got to grips with the on-the-ground complexity. In the words of Sachin Gupta: 'The idea that you can predict your theory of change contradicts the need for purposive muddling to figure stuff out as you go and deepen understanding of the complexity.'

### The Magufuli Political Shock

Politics intervened soon after I4ID was conceived, overturning DFID's assumption that Tanzania was a relatively stable, predictable environment in which to experiment with adaptive management. In October 2015, just after the project was put out to tender, John Magufuli won the presidential elections. A strong authoritarian tendency in the new government soon became clear in a gradual, and seemingly inexorable, tightening of political and civic space.

For I4ID, the timing could hardly have been worse given its primary focus on inclusive institutions. A fledgling project was knocked sideways before it was even up and running. A major strategic rethink in January 2018 scaled back direct work on Democratic Governance in favour of a focus on issue-based work, in areas such as solid waste, menstrual health and disability education.

## National v International Identity

DFID increasingly implements AM through relatively large (£10-£100m) projects run in-country by private management contractors, with headquarters in OECD countries. On the plus side, contractors can build up a body of AM expertise, and learn between countries. They find it easier than more bureaucratic, process-heavy organizations, such as governments or large INGOs, to spot operational problems (e.g. under-performing staff) early on and deal with them swiftly, for example by bringing in new leadership when projects go off track.

On the negative side, they have shallow roots (if any) in-country, which can mean they lack the political antennae that are vital for adaptive management, or a commitment to grow those national roots beyond the lifetime of the project.

Contractors rely heavily on foreign consultants and experts. Over time, I4ID has seen a shift in staffing from foreign-dominated to largely Tanzanian staff, but the local/foreign balance of consultants has been much harder to shift.

Ongoing reliance on non-Tanzanians, while ensuring an influx of new ideas and cross-fertilization from other contexts, can detract from investing in a politically grounded perspective and a Tanzanian knowledge base that endures after the project ends in 2021.

## Partnership

Partnership with local organizations is an essential guarantor of impact, legitimacy and sustainability (local organizations will be around long after the programme has closed its doors). But Adaptive Management approaches appear to be a double-edged sword in terms of building long-term partnerships based on trust. On the one hand, AM approaches allow I4ID to be responsive to the shifts in local context and the emerging needs of local organizations for small grants, technical assistance etc. On the other hand, if the restlessness inherent in AM leads to a 'chop and change' approach between the programme and local partners, then it can be experienced as a lack of commitment by them, which can undermine trust. At the very least, it is important that Adaptively Managed programmes explain their decisions, and preferably include local partners in making them.

## Nailing down the USP

In the aid-rich context of Tanzania, what is the 'unique selling point' of I4ID's adaptive management approach? This question tugs at I4ID's senior leadership. Without a clear USP, why should Tanzanian organisations listen to or want to work with I4ID? And why would donors continue to invest so much in this way of working?

The USP for donors is perhaps the most straightforward – an experiment in a popular new way of doing governance programming, involving globally recognized (usually non-Tanzanian) heavyweights, that might unlock untapped development potential on novel topics.

The USP among Tanzanian institutions is more elusive, but includes:

**Agile money to catalyse local efforts:** AM projects can be sources of small, quick money in a sector where big, slow money is the norm – and since they are small, they are more likely to catalyse entrepreneurial ventures, rather than displace them with a 'doing for' approach

**Convening and brokering:** AM projects like I4ID often seek to convene/broker new cross-sectoral coalitions, needed for breaking through impasses, innovation and scaling up impact.

**Responsive Technical Assistance:** I4ID can rapidly identify and hire experts to provide evidence and guidance.

## Closing Spaces, Inclusion and Working with the Grain

I4ID's approach raises questions about the limits to 'working with the grain' of power when the political space is closing. At what point does working within the confines of formal power become incompatible with inclusion and/or development? When/how should AM approaches shift to working *against* the grain?

## Monitoring/Evaluation/ Learning and Outcomes

While it is too early for detailed insights into I4ID's outcomes, in the form of concrete benefits to Tanzanian citizens, two related questions will be important from a MEL perspective.

Given the constraining environment, might it be acceptable to simply keep spaces open or stop even worse things from happening? Donors rank achievements of key goals of the projects they fund, including in I4ID's case the goal of 'democratic engagement'. This might show as a lower ranking in the metric used to assess democratic engagement. Will such a lower ranking be acceptable to team leadership and donors, if the political space tightens further – even if that is what is most useful and feasible in such a context?

How to balance reporting and reflecting? AM needs reporting for three reasons: upward accountability, for team reflections, and for sharing learning. But there is a trade-off between creating a heavy upward reporting burden and encouraging the kind of (documented) reflection useful for 'learning by doing'. At I4ID, we were struck by the vast amounts of upward reporting of this very young project but noted that the balance between reflection and reporting was still evolving. Documentation for use by peers and not necessarily upwardly-focussed is also critical for explaining why subtle adaptations are needed, raising questions about the theory of change or action, and retrospectively spotting patterns of what works or not.

## Timing and Pressure for Results

Adaptive management must strike a tricky balance between allowing enough room to try, change and scale different approaches and being accountable to its donors for programme outcomes.

This pressure creates four potential unintended consequences. Firstly, it can exacerbate the operational default of contractors to reach for established, usually international, experts, rather than invest the time needed to nurture local capacity. Secondly, it can accentuate risk aversion, as the project shies away from the politically (increasingly) difficult towards a search for politically easier terrain, such as market strengthening. Thirdly, the need to show potential for impact can reduce staff appetite for risk. Finally, it requires balancing the 'quick wins' to build morale and momentum, and keeping the project focused on impact at scale.

## Conclusion

This study complements the other two papers in this series, on Pyoe Pin in Myanmar, and PERL in Nigeria, in three important ways. Firstly, it confirms, and further elaborates, the value of subdividing the broad concept of 'adaptive management' into its component parts – adaptive governance, programming and delivery.



Secondly, whereas Pyoe Pin and PERL are the result of over a decade of experimentation and learning, I4ID is still an infant. Seeing how it is finding its adaptive feet provides useful insights into what to expect in the initial months and years of future Adaptive Management projects.

Thirdly, it shows how a fledgling AM project responds to a serious political shock that forced it into a fundamental rethink of its approach. And how being allowed to be adaptive was essential to its survival and ability to deliver.

## Purpose of the Case Study

Fragile, conflict and violence-affected settings (FCVAS) are messy and ambiguous contexts in which to plan and implement development initiatives. This is particularly true when these interventions are designed to stimulate or support citizen empowerment and government accountability (E&A) – since there remains considerable uncertainty over which E&A interventions work, where and why<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, external actors are increasingly adopting an adaptive approach to E&A programming. This involves a *compass rather than map* approach, in which real-time political economy analysis, programme monitoring and evidence informed learning, are used in shorter-than-usual planning cycles to maintain strategic direction. Arguably, this both reduces risk and maximises opportunity.

This case study forms part of a research project to examine some of the assertions around the adaptive programming approach and to explore if and how adaptive approaches, including rapid learning and planning responses (*fast feedback loops* and *agile programming*) are particularly relevant and useful for E&A in FCVAS. Each case study focuses on a large DfID governance project, as identified from a desk review of relevant literature. According to this literature, the adaptive programming approach – because of the rapid learning involved - enables an evolutionary cycle of variation, selection and amplification of intervention experiments to trigger pathways of change that would otherwise not be achievable.

Within each case study, we examine the evidence of how this iterative process works and whether it leads (or is likely to lead) to enhanced development outcomes. We focus on the learning component of adaptive programming, firstly, to determine if and how the approach has enabled a better understanding of real-world opportunities and barriers and connected the programme’s evolving *theory of action* to a real-world *theory of change* to generate better development results. Secondly, we seek to determine if and how real-time political economy analysis and programme monitoring approaches, are dependent on *front-line workers*<sup>3</sup> and the extent to which they play a part in embedding local knowledge into programme decision making. To better understand both the barriers and the enablers to adaptive programming, we use the case studies to deepen our understanding of the sources of inertia and opposition (ideas, interests, institutions etc) to adaptive programming and to explain whether and why these approaches have been difficult to adopt and/or implement.

### Box 1: Some Adaptive Management terminology

Acknowledging uncertainty and complexity in development has led to an emphasis on rapid feedback loops to connect knowledge-gathering to learning and decision-making in order to facilitate adaptation to changing circumstances and enhanced understanding.

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<sup>2</sup> Itad, 2016, Macro Evaluation of DFID’s Policy Frame for Empowerment and Accountability. Empowerment and Accountability Annual Technical Report: What Works for Social Accountability. Final version, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> This term is used to describe a project employee who deals directly with beneficiaries or who is directly involved in delivering project activities.

An agile programme is one which is adaptive, iterative and highly sensitive to performance metrics throughout implementation. The shift to agile is based on the notion that it is not possible to design solutions to complex problems: they can only be solved by adaptation and iteration.

The authors distinguish between a theory of action and a theory of change. A theory of action sets out the strategy and tactics to be adopted for an intervention by a given organisation to explain how the intervention will achieve the outcomes expected.

A theory of change sets out a hypothesis for how change might happen in any given system<sup>4</sup>.

In practice however, many organizations elide the two, glossing rapidly over how the system is changing, to an 'it's all about us' focus on the intervention. This can easily lead to exaggerating the likely impact of a given programme, and a lack of awareness about the drivers of change/inertia within the system.

Each case study has been shaped by questions that examine how adaptive programming relates to the *context* in which programming occurs, the *mechanisms* through which programming is delivered and the *outcomes* achieved. Questions include:

- How do **contextual factors** suggest the need for, enable or constrain adaptive management?
- What are the **mechanisms and strategies** employed for adaptive management – what do they add and how do they work? In particular, how far has programme design enabled front-line workers to engage in regular analysis of power and political dynamics surrounding the programme and what kinds of learning, adaptation, issues and solutions do they lead to in practice?
- What is different about the **type and nature of outcomes** achieved by adaptive management vs non-adaptive? Do adaptive approaches enable external actors to achieve better E&A outcomes? What is the nature of the flexibility and adaptiveness that is needed in FCVAS and how far do donor practices support this?

When observations and conclusions of all case studies are synthesised, it is hoped that lessons will inform both explicitly adaptive and more traditional donor programming, by formulating suggestions which help shape programme design, contracting, real-time monitoring and learning and programme management arrangements.

The choice of Tanzania for this third case study is unusual, as Tanzania is not generally considered either fragile or conflict-affected. It was selected for three reasons: firstly, initial attempts to visit AM programmes in Pakistan and DRC came to nothing due to the difficulties of obtaining visas and other permissions within the tight timeline of the research and contextual difficulties such as elections, an issue to which we return in the synthesis paper about the three case studies. Secondly, Tanzania is illuminating as an example of what happens to an AM programme – and because of it – when political space suddenly starts to close, as it has done since President Magufuli's election in 2015. Third, I4ID provides valuable insights into the early years of an AM programme, whereas the Myanmar and Nigeria case studies involved programmes already over a decade old.

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<sup>4</sup> See D. Green, *Theories of Change for Promoting Empowerment and Accountability in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings*, IDS, 2017 and A. Christie and R. Burge, *The Role of External Actors in Supporting Social and Political Action towards Empowerment and Accountability with a Focus on Fragile, Conflict- and Violence-Affected Settings*

## 1 Introduction to Adaptive Management

Following a sustained critique of previous approaches to aid that were characterized as over-prescriptive and linear<sup>5</sup>, a series of networks and initiatives have in recent years explored ways of 'doing development differently'. Most discussion and experimentation has taken place in the field of governance and institutional reform, but discussions have spilled over into other sectors such as health and education.

While there are nuances and differences, the multiple threads, with names like 'Adaptive Management', 'Thinking and Working Politically', 'Doing Development Differently' and 'Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation' exhibit enough common ground for one practitioner to describe it as a 'second orthodoxy'<sup>6</sup>. This contrasts with a 'first orthodoxy' that tends to lock in inputs, outputs and outcomes from the start in a rigid design, as we" as charting a linear course towards a given 'solution'. By contrast, common features of the new orthodoxy are:

- Context is everything: political economy analysis is central, and not just at planning stage.
- Best fit, not best practice: aid programmes need to 'work with the grain' of local institutions, rather than import solutions from elsewhere.
- From blueprint to flexible, responsive, adaptive programming: Rather than conduct all analysis and design ex ante, aid programmes should accept that their initial design can only ever be a best guess and build in the capability to learn from experience and adapt accordingly.
- Real-time learning: this requires feedback loops being put in place that allow programmes to learn and adapt as they go, rather than simply evaluate at the end of the programme cycle.
- Long-term commitment: this kind of 'learning by doing' is ill suited to short programme cycles. Most success stories take a decade or more to show significant impact at scale.

We need to acknowledge our own biases. Both authors are predisposed to an interpretation of both development and adaptive management that privileges civil society, bottom up processes, participation and radical social change. This puts us at the opposite end of the spectrum from the version of adaptive management that stresses technical approaches to 'doing development differently', such as rapid feedback loops, flexible pivots, responsiveness to change, responsiveness to early signs of success/commitment, reading weak signals, systems understanding, complexity theory, portfolio approaches, prototyping and iteration, but are often naïve about the systems of power and politics within which these formulaic building blocks are expected to work. I4ID appears to be pursuing a form of adaptive management that is closer to this latter understanding, which helps explain some of our reflections.

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<sup>5</sup> See for Example Easterly, *White Man's Burden* (Oxford, OUP, 2007), Andrews, *Limits to Institutional Reform in Development* (Cambridge, CUP, 2013) or Levy, *Working with the Grain*, (Oxford, OUP, 2014)

<sup>6</sup> <https://abtassocgovernancesoapbox.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/abt-associates-working-paper-series-issue-no-1-final-010617.pdf>

## 2 An Introduction to I4ID and Why Context is King

*'We are not unique, but we are unusual, more agile, quicker, broader set of options' [Helen Barnes, Governance Advisor and I4ID Senior Responsible Officer, DFID]*

*'If we had had to stick to the original plan, we would have shut by now' (Victoria Lihiru, I4ID's Democratic Governance & Strategic Partnerships Manager)*

The Institutions for Inclusive Development (I4ID) programme's goal is to work with the Tanzanian government, representative institutions, civil society and the private sector to strengthen institutions in Tanzania to become more inclusive and accountable so that economic growth and services bring more benefits to poor and marginalized people.<sup>7</sup> I4ID is a five year project funded by UKAid (£10m) and IrishAid (£1.6m) and running until 2021.

I4ID was deliberately designed to test out new approaches to institutional reform. According to DFID's Nick Leader, DFID Tanzania Governance Team Leader, who was involved from the start:

*'We wanted a political governance-type programme. In 2014/15 a lot of these adaptive management ideas were current. It's easier for DFID to experiment in more stable contexts like Tanzania. The big shift was away from working on particular institutions to working on problems – identifying particular problems, then bringing together whoever is involved in solving it.'*

The winning consortium (described as 'fantastic' by Nick Leader), was led by Palladium, and included ODI, SNV, BBC Media Action and Global Partners Governance. One I4ID staff member describe its strengths as 'Palladium is good on funding and management; SNV is good on community facilitation; BBC Media Action is good on media issues; ODI on research.' We were struck by the absence of indigenous Tanzanian organizations in the winning bid, although SNV and BBC Media Action have long track records in the country. DfID was similarly struck by the absence of Tanzanians, although it focused more on individuals in the team than on organisations – a balance that has improved over time.

I4ID's initial Theory of Action is captured in figure 3, taken from Palladium's winning tender. It focused on two strands: (1) building democratic institutions and (2) active and informed citizens through a mixture of issue-based dialogue and capacity building. The two strands were intended to provide entry points and supporting activities to the main work, which was to be the engagement of stakeholders on collective action projects on specific development issues. An important element of the design is a belief that people tend not to mobilise around abstract concepts like democratic institutions or citizen interlocutors, but rather around real tangible issues like water, power, health, education. In theory, both strands have been integrated into the issue-specific workstreams. In practice, political changes and tightening constraints may well reduce what is achievable.

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<sup>7</sup> Sunflower Workstream Theory of Change, p.1, 14<sup>th</sup> July 2017

Figure 4: Initial I4ID Theory of Action

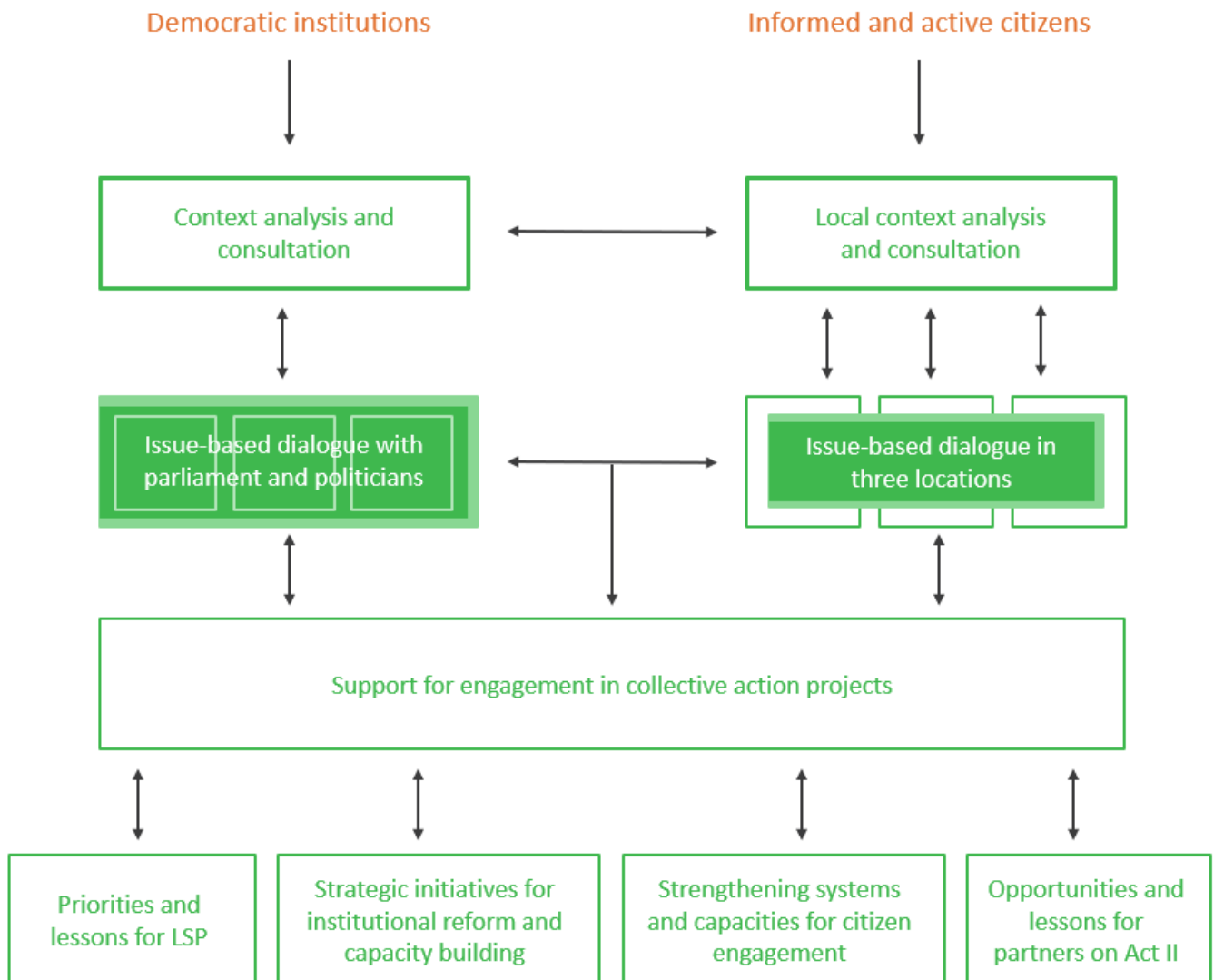
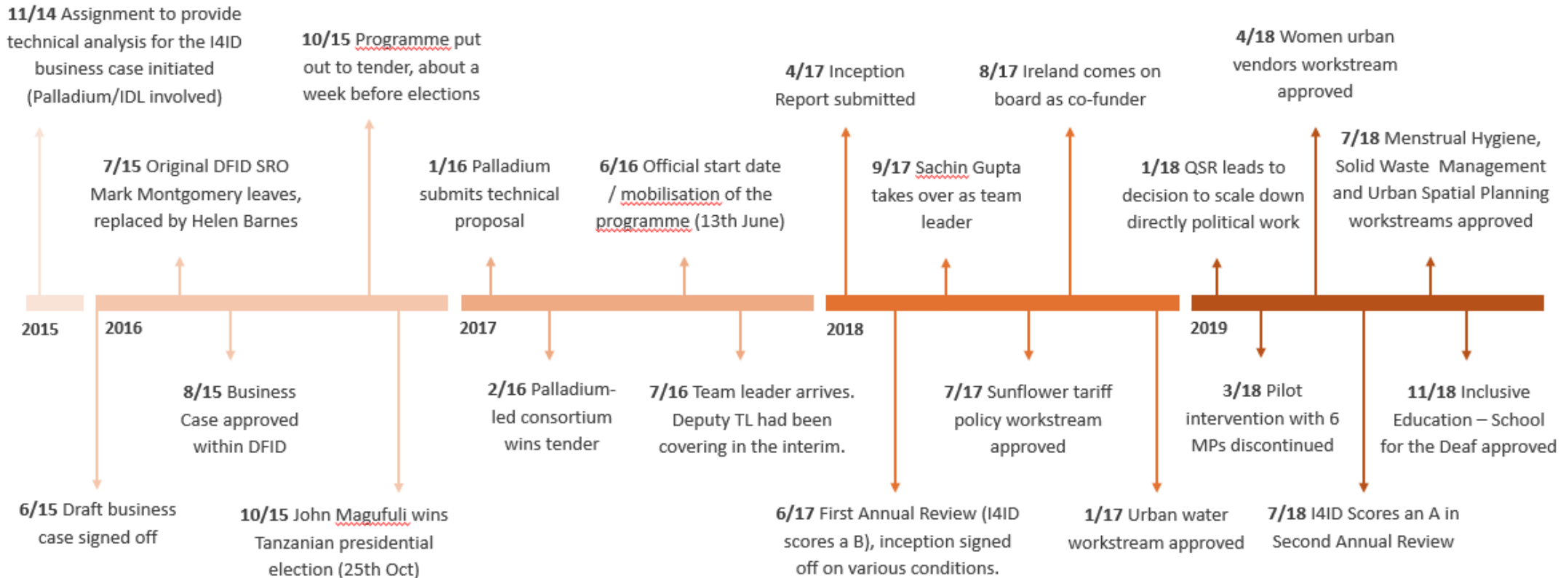


Figure 5: I4ID Programme Timeline



## The Magufuli Political Shock

Politics intervened soon after I4ID was conceived, overturning DFID's assumption that Tanzania was a relatively stable, predictable environment in which to experiment with adaptive management. In October 2015, just after the programme was put out to tender, John Magufuli won the presidential elections.

While the initial reaction was widespread excitement over his promises to crack down on corruption, a strong authoritarian streak in the new government soon became clear. It was not a single moment, like a military coup, but a gradual, and seemingly inexorable, tightening of political and civic space, enshrined both in presidential pronouncements and accompanying policy making and legislation. Over the following months, a crackdown on traditional and social media followed, along with: harassment of opponents; a de facto ban on public rallies and the end of public broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings; temporary bans on newspapers; arrests, court proceedings and tax investigations into prominent political and business leaders; and suspicious and unexplained disappearances, shootings and killings<sup>8</sup>. Tellingly, the Tanzanian government pulled out of the Open Government Partnership in June 2017.

I4ID's 2018 Annual Report captured the extent of the sea change in Tanzanian politics:

*'Tanzania in early 2015 was a dominant party settlement with a weak, corruption-prone bureaucracy, facing significant internal factional competition and opposition party challenge. An increasingly vocal and critical set of institutions across Parliament, civil society, the private sector, and the media demonstrated an increasing ability to comment, critique, and influence policy.*

*In early 2018, roughly half way through the first term of the Government, the context has changed significantly, and several trends are apparent... Taken together, these trends suggest that the President seeks to propel Tanzania more in the direction of operating as a technocratic, developmental state. Although this project is far from being consolidated, it does invite us to rethink I4ID's basic strategy.'*

For I4ID, the timing could hardly have been worse. A fledgling project, with foreign experts in DFID and Palladium largely in the driving seat, was knocked sideways before it was even up and running. Initially, most informed commentators advised that the talk of change was not going to last and Tanzanian politics would soon return to business as usual. Even when it became clear that this was not the case, 'Because [the change of rhetoric] was still conceptual and not practical, it was still hard to see how it would affect the programme. It took time to realise what was happening - only when we started to meet MPs and started to realise you couldn't/wouldn't go beyond certain parameters.' [Julie Adkins and Japhet Makongo, I4ID]

As an adaptive programme, the programme had license to experiment and test different approaches for building institutional capabilities for programmatic politics (which many considered ambitious in Tanzania, in any context). Early efforts to work directly with MPs and elected representatives were proving disappointing. Development partners advised against trying to work directly with election institutions. Hence, the programme decided to experiment with working on the 'demand side' of elections – to test models for how media channels might encourage more issue-based programmatic discussion through their election campaign coverage, with a focus on by-elections taking place in early 2018.

The aim was to test whether candidates, through their representatives, could be influenced by citizens to shift their campaign modality away from personality politics to a more policy based, issues-oriented campaign. The event was initially judged a great success by I4ID, with participation of both a wide range of citizens' groups and 12 political parties, resulting in considerable media coverage. However,

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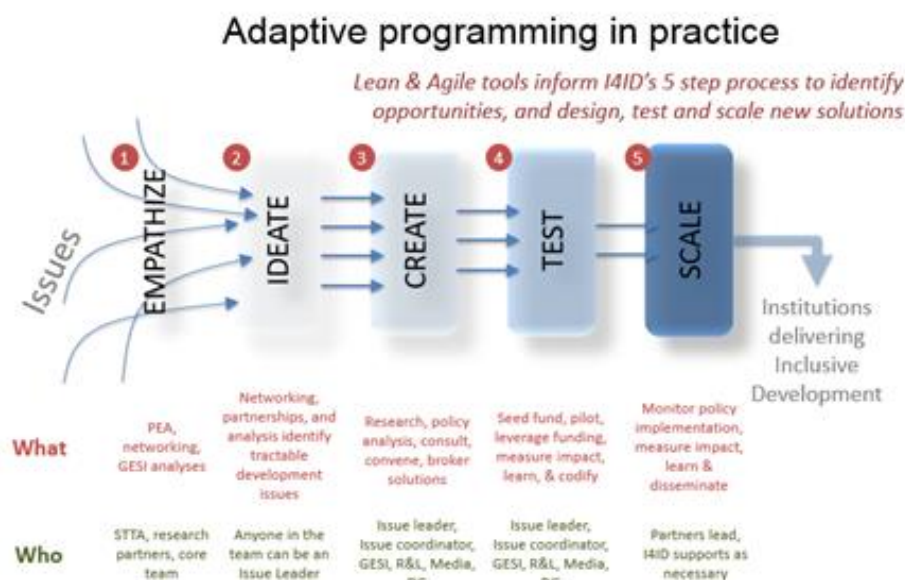
<sup>8</sup> The shooting of opposition MP Tundu Lissu is still without successful investigation or explanation.

in the aftermath, local sensitivities aroused by the media coverage demonstrated to the project that elections, already a hotly contested and sensitive political process in Tanzania, were probably going to be an inappropriate entry-point for experiments in this kind of adaptive programme.

That experience, and an unsuccessful attempt to build the capacity of a cross party selection of MPs, triggered a major strategic rethink at I4ID’s January 2018 ‘Quarterly Strategic Review’. Direct work on Democratic Governance was scaled back in favour of a core focus on development issue-based programmes. ‘Democratic governance’ became a shadow of the original prominent intention, to date consisting mainly of engaging different institutions in forming change coalitions around less contentious development topics such as solid waste, menstrual health and disability education. The rethink went further than that. The 2018 Annual Report concluded that ‘The energy provided by the current administration’s reformist zeal has created entry points for I4ID, but also pressure to demonstrate strong alignment with the government’s agenda.’ I4ID’s response to both closing space and a more dominant and reformist government was recognising the need to align more closely with the government’s agenda, while maintaining their approach to scouting for and responding rapidly to ‘points of entry’ for progressive change.

Since March 2018, I4ID has increased the proportion its portfolio devoted to service delivery reforms with explicit support from state institutions (going with the grain), and inclusive growth opportunities with markets and private sector actors — politically safer areas of operation given the state crackdown on political and civic institutions, and in line with the market systems<sup>9</sup> background of I4ID’s new team leader, Sachin Gupta, who took over in September 2017. This multi-stakeholder approach seeks to identify the bottlenecks and coordination failures that hold back market, policy and service development, and that can be eased by convening/brokering and/or judicious offers of technical assistance and research. In some of its workstreams, I4ID’s approach now resembles a lean/agile development model, as in this figure taken from a January 2018 introduction to the programme. In practice, an important ‘selection’ step sits between steps 2 and 3, to which we return in our discussion.

Figure 6: I4ID’s approach to adaptive programming



<sup>9</sup> For more on market systems approaches, see <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/how-do-we-encourage-innovation-in-markets-what-systems-thinking-can-add/>



I4ID team leader Sachin Gupta argues that the project has evolved from a simpler multi-stakeholder approach to a more nuanced systems approach:

‘We consciously adapted this to take a ‘systems approach’, as a distinct pivot away from the simpler multi-stakeholder approach originally conceived. This was partly in response to donor pressure to look beyond “policy reform” toward “policy implementation”, and hence a conception that what really makes a difference to development impact is the complex interplay of policy, formal and informal norms, central actors, supporting services, enabling environment... i.e. a complex system. A systems approach appreciates that existing forms and functions have arisen through complex, intersecting processes – rather than just different stakeholders set against each other. Hence our approach is based on multiple interventions, tackling multiple problems around the system, trying to find innovations that can solve for the multiple failures and dysfunctions that characterise a complex system challenge.’<sup>10</sup>

It is worth considering whether/how this differs from other approaches to Adaptive Management. Our impression during an admittedly brief visit to Dar es Salaam is that in its current early phase, I4ID is betting on initially adding value by tackling coordination failures and knowledge gaps, has a cautious approach to politics and power, and does not focus much (yet) on citizen engagement. We will return to this question later in the paper.

How well I4ID navigates future shocks and stresses will depend in large part on the evolving interaction between donors, contractors and Tanzanian staff. It is to these mechanisms – the nuts and bolts of Adaptive Management, that we now turn.

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<sup>10</sup> Sachin Gupta, pers. Comm. October 2018

### 3 Mechanisms of Adaptive Management

Adaptive Management involves a dynamic interaction between 3 elements: delivery, programming and governance.

Adaptive Delivery (AD) is a way of doing development differently in the day-to-day. Instead of Implementing *the Plan*, frontline staff think on their feet, continuously navigating through a fog of ever-changing conditions, many moving parts and players, ambiguity and uncertainty. They do this using networks, curiosity, evidence, emotional intelligence and instinct (noticing the frown on the face of the minister and changing tack in mid conversation) in a powerful blend of on-the-spot learning, thinking and decision-making. In this way, frontline workers come up with best guesses on what to do next, then test and correct in a continuous engagement and learning process. Adaptive delivery is often highly collegial: checking with others, mentoring, making sure they're not off piste or getting it totally wrong. It happens in weekly meetings, in chats with colleagues, sharing insights, advice, media summaries and other intel.

Adaptive Programming (AP) is a more conscious and deliberate process, usually in the hands of the senior management within the programme office and informed by frontline staff and the patterns that they are spotting/emerging from AD. In terms of adaptation, it involves less frequent cycles of reflection on in-situ strategy: how the broader programme is doing, and the context is evolving. Adaptive programming is often informed by commissioning expert analysis and bringing in critical friends to help question and challenge, in order to identify new directions and opportunities. Adaptive programming is sometimes needed to counter the inertia that can build up in adaptive delivery processes – the result of staff making extensive investments in building knowledge and networks that can easily create a desire to 'stay in the game', even if the context has moved on - a temptation that can only be overcome if strong adaptive programming shapes the nature of adaptive delivery.

Adaptive Governance (AG) normally resides with the donor, in particular the officer(s) in the donor agency responsible for funding the programme, following its progress. To support performance, they must manage upwards, coping with the inevitable pressures for results, reporting and shifting priorities that swirl around any donor agency (nationally and in HQ), and manage downwards, ensuring that the programme accounts for how it is spending donor money, but also retains the freedom of manoeuvre that lies at the heart of AM approaches. This includes putting in place conditions that create space for flexibility and adaptation (see below under MEL).

Figure 7: The relationship between Adaptive Delivery, Adaptive Programming & Adaptive Governance

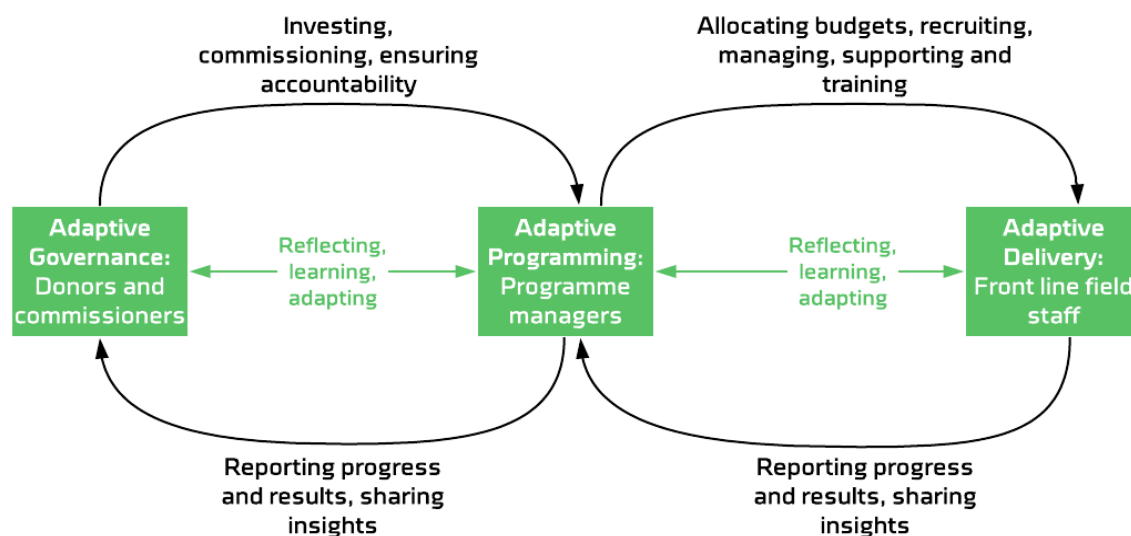
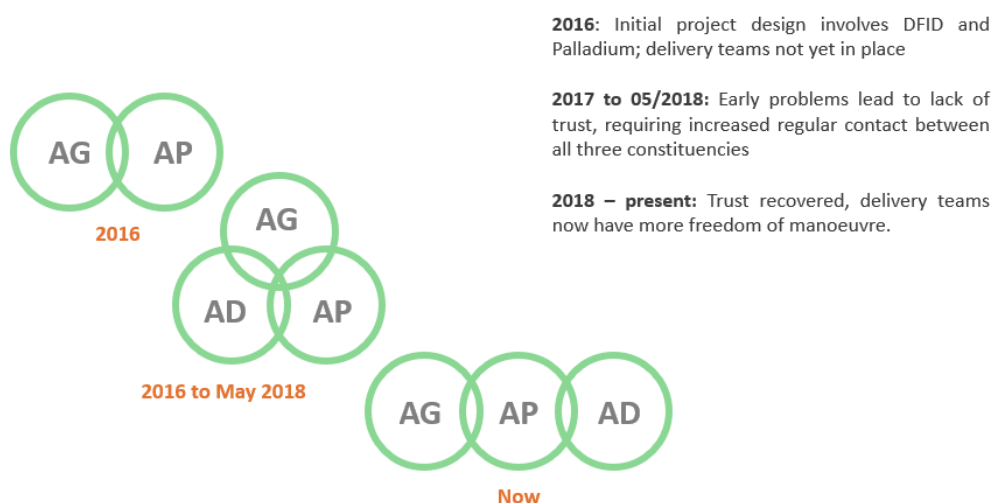


Figure 6 captures the relationships between AD, AP and AG when things are going well in international aid projects. In practice, they are constantly evolving, and can often be fraught. The basic currency of adaptive management is trust between the various players and tiers evolved. Players in all three roles are under pressure and face in two directions at once: Delivery means both being accountable and sensitive to partners and communities on the ground, and responsive to programming bosses in the office; Programming means working with donor expectations, systems and needs while shielding staff so they can do the work without excessive oversight or interference from the top; Governance requires keeping the various tiers of the donor agency hierarchy onside, while also doing some shielding – of the programme from the exigencies of donor processes. Managing these competing needs is seldom easy or comfortable. It must evolve as the work and relationships gather momentum.

In its first two years, I4ID has seen an evolving dance between these three elements, captured in the graphic below, working through some of these challenges along the way. In its initial phase, before many Tanzanian staff were brought on board, the main dynamic was between governance and programming, prior to front-line staff being hired and active. The 9-month inception phase up to March 2017 entailed analysis, reflection and design and some limited activity. The original ToRs required that the project had begun piloting at least two initiatives before the end of the inception period. This was one of the main reasons the project scored its B. The lengthy design focus was experienced by some of the team members as problematic (see ‘Timing’ discussion, below).

As the programme took root, national staff were brought in and two circles became three, as Adaptive Delivery became possible and started to pick up speed. Nevertheless, the project scored a ‘B’ in its first report for not making enough headway (had not initiated pilots, had not established a convincing Theory of Change etc). Projects that score two Bs in a row are under enormous pressure to shut down, so Palladium and I4ID felt under pressure to pick up the pace of delivery. While this score was about project performance, of which contractor performance is only one part, it did lead to more scrutiny by DFID of the evidence that the contractor (Palladium) was doing what it could to turn it around. Poor performance and the B score eroded trust between donors and the programme and led to a situation in which the donors took a more hands-on role. Hence, the second phase looks like the second Venn diagram, with donors interacting directly with staff, as well as with management. In the words of DFID’s Helen Barnes: ‘we started meeting the project team on a weekly basis, because nothing was moving. Palladium HQ was also getting more involved.’

**Figure 8:**



AP = Adaptive programming  
 AD = Adaptive delivery  
 AG = Adaptive governance

A new team leader, a concerted effort to establish new ways of working that fitted the changing context, 'taking the plunge' by getting stuck into activities, and the first signs of results on the ground, all helped rebuild trust and move the programme increasingly towards the third diagram. Currently, programme leadership is increasingly clear about how to engage with donors in ways that do not undermine constructive dynamics, and which conversations can best happen at which levels. This allows frontline staff to develop their work with fewer direct pressures from DFID. New rules of engagement are being negotiated as results are starting to show. According to Helen Barnes, this is still work in progress: 'now we get more of a sense of what is happening and have been able to shift to monthly meetings. Next we are trying to work out how to come out of involvement in the detail.' There is a dilemma here for the team leader and SRO – putting frontline staff into discussions with donors gives the granularity of experience and can help build relationships and trust. However, when this has been attempted, some donor staff have shown impatience, asking for rapid summaries rather than in-depth discussions. How can the delivery process best interact with the governance process – and should it?

Our interviews and discussions shed further light into the dynamics of these three interacting elements.

**Adaptive Governance:** Large bilateral donors are not monoliths but are themselves complex systems full of internal alliances and pressures. The key figure in the Adaptive Management chain is the person responsible for the programme, known in DFID as SROs (Senior Responsible Owners). Here is DFID SRO Helen Barnes on some of the pressures she faces: 'DFID internal systems mean that I have to be able to answer at any point of any day what my project is doing. Otherwise, people think I'm not doing my job.'. Her investment in DfID Tanzania colleagues is to foster understanding of and interaction with the project and is more salient than dealing with requests from HQ in the UK Hence the importance of knowledge about what is happening and trust that good stuff is happening. If the SRO trusts that the programme is on track and working well – and can tell a good story about it, she can work at arm's length and rely on the I4ID senior management to keep her up to date. As soon as that trust is dented, she will feel the need to be better informed which means spending more time with senior leadership and frontline staff, both to get the programme back on track, and to know in detail what is/isn't happening, so she can be accountable within DFID. Helen Barnes is keenly aware of the potential contradictions this creates for adaptive management: how to distinguish between purposive and effective experimentation, and ineffectiveness and lethargy.

Endemic high staff turnover in donors exacerbates the sense of volatility and uncertainty of risky, novelty programmes such as I4ID. A recent change in the rules by the new DfID Country Director means that since early 2018, DFID's senior Leadership Team in Tanzania now must approve any new I4ID workstream, in part based on whether it is aligned with DFID's programme priorities in the country. The time-consuming transition towards theme-constrained new requirements has not hampered I4ID in terms of approval: all proposed workstreams are going forward. While there are significant challenges to alignment, some potential advantages can include additional technical and other resources, potential for sustainability and scale-up, heightened awareness and interest across the office. So far, I4ID retains considerable space for its work.

The newly tightened focus on alignment of issue priorities with DFID's country strategy has added to the work burden and tensions for the SRO. This poses problems for I4ID in terms of their freedom to be agile when selecting palatable, emerging issues. Rather than only knowing about 'governance' under which I4ID technically falls, each new area of issue-based work brings with it new colleagues that the SRO must keep informed and convinced, and an ever-expanding portfolio of priorities to stay on top of. For example, with disability education emerging as an area for engagement, the SRO needs

to keep more people informed and must insulate I4ID from them, exacerbating the pressure on I4ID to provide detailed information on each step of each new issue.

The point here is that keeping donors on board is essential – they hold open the space for working adaptively. This requires updating them enough on progress towards relevant results to maintain trust and confidence. Doing this has meant negotiating a level of engagement and documentation that is not too excessive. The current compromise includes: an issues dashboard and a more concise approach to the bi-annual report.

**Adaptive Governance – Adaptive Programming:** The interaction between the SRO and the I4ID team leader and senior management is central. Helen Barnes again: ‘Sachin and I are building a double buffer. We need each other and fight each other all the time – the relationship is crucial. I say, ‘I need this’ and he says ‘I can’t give you that, but how about this?’ He needs to understand my situation. He protects staff from me, but also helps me manage upwards.’ This kind of effective working relationship creates the space for adaptive work – working together to resolve internal challenges in practical ways that meet everyone’s needs, while challenging each other.

The interaction is partly driven by the different interests in the AM ‘supply chain’. According to DFID’s Nick Leader: ‘We’re constantly pushing Palladium back up the outcome chain. We push them towards outcomes – if you do your job right, you can achieve these things. It has to be more than just ‘we are doing XYZ’ [outputs, rather than outcomes].’

I4ID’s team leader, Sachin Gupta, accepts the need to ‘feed the beast’ – keeping DfID well-informed, fulfilling its (changing) protocols, and above all showing progress towards results as soon as possible. There is an ongoing challenge in knowing who needs what information and how to document efficiently and appropriately. He worried about the opportunity costs and expressed frustration about early phase contradictions between what DFID demands and then uses: ‘The culture of DfID with reviewing documents is to respond with a lengthy stream of consciousness from multiple members of staff providing comments, for example around the draft inception report, with endless questions of varying significance that tie up staff time and stop them developing the programme. ... they demand more and more details and when you share those details, they say, ‘please summarize it, I only have 20 minutes for the meeting.’ This is a considerable burden for the team leader, multiple updates with multiple DfID people, a pattern DfID and I4ID are actively working on reducing.

**Adaptive Governance-Adaptive Delivery:** Because of poor performance in the first 12 months of I4ID, the adaptive governance and delivery functions have been interacting more directly than would ideally be the case. Governance staff from the donors have been attending I4ID’s two day ‘Quarterly Strategic Reflections’ in order both to get a clearer picture of what is happening and support the development of the programme. Unfortunately, Tanzanian staff experience the questioning from donors in these meetings as something akin to interrogation and disapproval, and see the QSRs as a trial, rather than an opportunity. In response, staff have even set up a parallel set of meetings, known as PRRPs (Participation Review, Reflection and Planning) where they can have the kind of open discussion that they do not feel is possible at the QSRs. From the point of view of adaptive delivery, the lack of safe space to share the ups and downs of work in progress – and brainstorm about new opportunities no matter how unusual - risks replacing staff’s need to read and respond to the ‘frown on the face of the minister’, with the less productive need to read ‘the frown on the face of the DFID official.’

The relationship between Governance and Delivery prompted divergent views. Put crudely: is the job of the donor in an AM programme to get the right organizations in place and ensure that governance, reporting etc are sufficiently robust to keep the money flowing, but otherwise to stay out of the way of frontline staff, because they do not know the context as well and are simply too powerful (as

sources of jobs and budgets) to be mere participants? Or can donor staff contribute beyond funding, for example by giving direct recognition to the work of local staff, spreading positive messages through their networks, including national governments, or bringing in their knowledge of similar programming in other contexts, or their judgement and networks as development professionals? If frontline delivery staff are failing to perform, should donors be involved in resolving the problem, or should that be left to the contractor? We heard both sides of the argument and, perhaps unsurprisingly, a more positive take from DFID staff than from frontline workers.

**Adaptive Programming-Adaptive Delivery:** The internal ‘dance’ between more strategic programming and more day-to-day delivery is an essential aspect of adaptive management. In the early months of I4ID, delivery came a distant third to the interaction of governance and programming. Now, however, as workstreams are being developed, and staff are brought on board, delivery of activities is starting to pick up speed.

A good example of what the early days of success can look like comes from some recent work on Menstrual Management with the win on removing VAT on menstrual products, translating into an 18% price reduction on some products, for example. Other substantive results include: (1) Increased protection and support for the domestic sunflower sector through import tariffs; (2) Tanzania Food and Drugs Authority (TFDA) approval for retail distribution of re-usable menstrual cups (Oct 2018) and (3) The Ministry of Education’s formal adoption of Tanzania Sign Language as the sole language of instruction (Oct 2018).

### **Box 3: Adaptive Management meets Menstrual Products**

Only a small fraction of Tanzanian women uses improved menstrual products like sanitary pads. The remaining 80% are reported to be using a variety of materials from cloth rags, ugali, soil, cow dung, to corn cobs. Reusable cloth rags are mostly used, but due to cultural sensitivities, poor management of them has been linked to increased cases of discomfort, fungus, UTIs, and other related diseases.

The key figure for I4ID is Mwanahamisi Singano (universally known as Mishy). Before joining I4ID, she’d been active in the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP – Tanzania’s largest women’s/feminist movement). On International Women’s Day this year, Mishy was facilitating a TGNP event, after which they got into a conversation about MHM.

TGNP wanted to lobby for free sanitary pads in schools (girls miss classes because of the lack of facilities). The trouble was that the politics were all wrong - an opposition MP had already proposed the idea and been rejected. Mishy and TGNP had allies in government (feminists, old school friends etc) who wanted to move forward, but needed a different angle to distinguish their demands from those of the opposition.

They needed a quick win to gain some momentum and profile and found it in VAT – Tanzania’s equivalent of the tampon tax. Exemption would reduce the wholesale price by 18% at a stroke, paving the way for increased demand. Mishy worked with TGNP to coordinate the lobbying – they got the support of women MPs and the Ministries of Health and Education, who agreed to take it to the real decision maker – the Ministry of Finance. The MoF checked how much it would cost, found it to be fairly small (due to the low levels of demand) and signed off. Voila – quick win!

They had some momentum, what next? I4ID was looking for a niche – something not already being done by other actors working on the infrastructure and educational aspects of menstrual health. I4ID reckoned the big gap was sorting out the market. Could they pull together the various manufacturers and distributors to work together to boost access and lobby for policy change?

Which is how we ended up sitting in on a meeting of 8 manufacturers at the I4ID office. ‘Human Cherish’, ‘Relief Pad’, ‘Glory Pads’, ‘Elea Pads’ and ‘Lunette Menstrual Cups’, among others, were more accustomed to being in competition with each other, but Mishy had brought them together essentially to try and persuade them to set up a business association.

Mishy winds up the meeting, and in the last 15 minutes goes around the table, getting the companies to sign up to a joint marketing effort. She says I4ID could find and pay a consultant to design a joint marketing plan, and the reps jump at the idea – research and technical assistance are I4ID’s second main tool, along with convening/brokering.

Summarizing a combination of key features involved in the adaptive delivery side of AM:

- Well-networked local activists and ‘development entrepreneurs’, with good facilitation skills
- Agile money that can stump up small amounts quickly for a meeting hall on International Women’s Day, or a quick bit of market research
- Quick wins to get momentum publicly and with key stakeholders
- A systems approach to spotting drivers and blockers of change

It may be easier to do this kind of work on ‘new’ issues – menstruation is hardly new, but it has previously been a taboo in public policy. That means that positions are not entrenched, and institutions and opinions are more malleable and (dare I say it?) amenable to evidence.

Taken from [a post on the From Poverty to Power blog](#), 15<sup>th</sup> August 2018

Delivery has been affected from many directions, of which two emerged as key: the decision to drop local coordinators and the Magufuli shock. The initial proposal anticipated employing many local coordinators – arguably the real frontline staff – outside the capital. However, this plan was dropped. Sachin Gupta feels the original proposal was unrealistic and reflected an important trade-off: hiring local coordinators as staff, embedded in-situ, but isolated from strategy development in the central office versus working with locally situated partner organisations through a smaller centralised team in Dar es Salaam. He chose the latter.

Operating constraints existed pre-Magufuli of course, but since his election there has been increased centralization of decision making in government, and greater difficulty in getting permits/approvals to conduct and disseminate research. This has slowed down the project’s ability to move quickly and widely. Furthermore, the level of fear both within government and civil society means that the appetite for taking risks and ruffling feathers is significantly lower. As with other AM programmes, recruiting the right kind of staff – development entrepreneurs – is also proving a challenge: aid-oriented workers accustomed to the ‘first orthodoxy’ of linear logframes and target-driven project implementation are poorly suited to AM approaches. I4ID is increasingly looking outside the aid sector to bring in the requisite competencies. This suggests that adaptive programmes need to think realistically about how to be nimble and agile, given both operating constraints (see above) and regulatory constraints.

Figures 8 and 9 summarise the dynamics between the three domains of AM – what happens when AM works well, and what happens when tensions and problems arise.





How Tanzanian is I4ID? Even if it was originally forged in the back offices of DFID and Palladium, could it then acquire Tanzanian-ness over time? How essential is this to achieving its goals through AM? These topics were one of the dominant themes in discussions with staff and others during our brief visit. Initially, the project was designed around the inclusion of numerous foreign ‘experts’ in the winning bid. One of DfID’s points of feedback on the bid was insufficient Tanzanian staff. Over time, there has been a shift in staffing from foreign-dominated to largely Tanzanian staff. The balance of consultants has been much stickier, and still has a preponderance of non-Tanzanians. Whether this is down to bias or skills shortages or competency gaps in Tanzania is an open question, depending on who you ask. Within the team, Tanzanian staff were less convinced about the default to ‘foreign expert’, while foreign staff saw no other option in most cases.

Whatever the explanation, we came away concerned. Ongoing reliance on non-Tanzanian expertise without a clear and speedy transition strategy has several disadvantages that affect adaptive programming and delivery:

- foreigners are unlikely to have the granular understanding (the ‘antennae’) that becomes increasingly necessary as the programme deepens its engagement, affecting not only what is strategically selected and when (programming) but also how the dance of change evolves day-to-day (delivery). For example, foreigners are more likely to make small but critical blunders because of their lack of sufficient ‘antennae’, e.g. knowing when to (or not to) interrupt a regional commissioner’s half hour introductory speech; how dress code sends a message on how important the meetings and therefore relationship is; which political actor can engage in humorous banter and which one should be cajoled with religious phrases.
- whether it proves able to recognize, support and build the skills of local staff may well decide whether I4ID leaves a legacy, after the project ends in 2021 – and legacy is critical if the long-term evolutionary nature of AM is to deliver the scale/nature of potential impacts that its proponents claim are possible. Will five years be enough, or will further phases be needed to have a sustained impact (as has been the case for the other comparable DFID-funded AM projects in Myanmar and Nigeria studied in this research project)?
- foreigners are increasingly constrained in Tanzania’s closing political space (see below) possibly affecting the legitimacy of I4ID and its ability to have impact at scale.
- foreigners are relatively expensive, chewing up resources that could be committed to scaling up in-country work to enable AM (more experiments, larger scope, more issues, strengthening capacity).

But international consultants clearly offer some potential advantages too, from which I4ID has benefited:

- They may have technical or area specific expertise that is not available in country (e.g. on solid waste management).
- They can bring in cross country experiences, networks and insights (e.g. on menstrual product marketing).
- They can provide capacity building and mentoring by working with local consultants and team members (e.g. around gender equity and social inclusion, GESI).

Reality is a good deal more complex than a simple ‘Tanzanian v foreigner’ binary. Returning Diaspora, ‘localized’ foreign-born staff with decades in the country, foreigners who may be based outside Tanzania, but have deep roots in and knowledge of the country context through past research – all

have different strengths and weaknesses in what they have to offer adaptive management approaches.

Moreover, even if the kind of expertise you are looking for is held by a handful of people in country, they are often in very senior and responsible jobs, for whom short term work has little appeal. For example, the German aid agency GIZ have been working in the water sector in Tanzania for 20 years and is able to hire very senior Tanzanians on long term contracts. They are unlikely to be willing to swap such jobs for an adaptive programme trying small bets.

This debate also raises important questions over what counts as 'expertise'. The political antennae to spot a new opportunity and 'dance with the system' are skills often not recognized as 'expertise', which instead is accorded to more technical skills. That means that local staff with political smarts are not seen as 'experts', which then allows the argument to continue that international technical consultants are 'experts', whereas local staff/partners are there to have their capacity strengthened by those experts. AM requires both kinds of expertise, and it is difficult to see an argument for why one should have more status than the other. While leadership takes pride in equally weighting and valuing both foreign and local counterparts, the I4ID national staff we spoke with do not feel their expertise is on an equal footing with that of foreign expertise.

Putting AM into practice requires combining finer grained and rapidly evolving analysis and long-term commitment and national legitimacy with the ability to deploy issue-specific specialists quickly and on an experimental basis. The lack of a Tanzanian organization in the I4ID consortium may well have inhibited its ability to respond quickly and adeptly to the Magufuli shock. Instead, I4ID has built a large and flexible pool of Tanzanian consultants. Although this could in theory produce a greater degree of flexibility than employing a fixed group of Tanzanians in the programme, whether that is true in practice depends on the level of influence and respect enjoyed by the consultants within the wider programme. The risk is that, as is the case for most of aid, consultants often lack clout in decision-making relative to permanent staff.

A final issue that has been thrown into sharper relief by the Magufuli shock is legitimacy. All foreign aid programmes wrestle with this, but none more so than governance programmes seeking to strengthen the policies and institutions of the host country to become more inclusive and accountable. What ensures such work isn't (wrongfully) construed as undue foreign interference? Any influencing programme dependent on foreign funds and expertise, like I4ID, is particularly vulnerable to such accusations, which in a time of closing political space, can become a source of acute vulnerability. I4ID has responded by flying under the radar for longer and focusing on less-politicised issues (see 'The Elusive USP' below).

So, what drives this foreign-expert dominated model? In part the contractor model.

### The Contractor Model

The emerging implementation model of AM in DFID is for relatively large (£10-£100m) programmes to be run in-country by private management contractors, such as Palladium, based in OECD countries.

This has strengths and weaknesses in terms of AM. On the plus side, contractors can build up a body of AM expertise, and achieve cross-learning between countries. They find it easier to be agile, for example in replacing under-performing personnel, compared to more bureaucratic, process-heavy organizations such as governments or INGOs. They spot problems early on in terms of management and donor relations, and can deal with them swiftly, for example by bringing in new leadership when programmes go off track. They understand how donors work, and what donors need to see in order to build the all-important trust relationships that underpin AM.

Contracts are used when a service is needed: donors seek a ‘service provider’, develops a client relationship with them, and the provider delivers a specified service. Funding of (I)NGOs is different – or should be. It is linked to their mandate, as much as to what they can deliver.

On the negative side, they have shallow roots (if any) in country, which, when combined with the recruiting tendency discussed above, can mean they lack the political antennae that are such a vital part of Adaptive Management, or a commitment to grow those national roots beyond the lifetime of the project.

This is not to say that local organizations are automatically more adaptive, skilled, legitimate or politically palatable. CSOs and others steeped in the bureaucratic traditions of the logframe and the ‘roll out’ of pre-agreed plans are unlikely to be any more agile (and may be even less so).

## Partnership

What impact do Adaptive Management approaches have on the ability of aid implementers to build strong partnerships with local organizations? Our discussions in Tanzania suggest it can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, AM approaches allow I4ID to be responsive to the shifts in local context and the emerging needs of local organizations for small grants, technical assistance etc. On the other hand, if the restlessness inherent in AM leads to a ‘chop and change’ approach between the programme and local partners, then it can be experienced as a lack of commitment by them, which can undermine trust. At the very least, it is important that Adaptively Managed programmes explain their decisions, and preferably include local partners in making them.

According to Sachin Gupta: ‘Because we are being adaptive, we have struggled to make long term ‘friendships’ with local organisations – even when we have had the opportunity to do so after the bid had been won – but rather our penchant for chopping and changing and adapting has made local organisations wary of us... We still haven’t found a way to make adaptive approaches work for local organisations, and are now working much harder (e.g. dropping small grants to help small organisations, being more flexible with our funding, investing more coordination support) . . . but that is something we should be honest about and say we didn’t do well so far – mainly because we are trying to be so adaptive.’<sup>11</sup>

## The Elusive USP

*‘You’re trying to describe a llama to someone who has never seen one.’ Julie Adkins, I4ID*

Tanzania already has a lot of aid, and a lot of aid donors, so what is special about I4ID’s adaptive management approach – does this constitute its ‘unique selling point’?

Firstly, who is doing the buying of what I4ID has to offer - an AM approach to inclusive development? The USP in the eyes of donors is likely to be different from that in the eyes of Tanzanian government, or Tanzanian civil society organisations. The USP for donors is perhaps the simplest – an experiment in a popular new way of doing governance programming, with some of its most experienced practitioners (Palladium) and best-known intellectual heavyweights (ODI) in the consortium. However, the llama problem still besets governance staff in donors trying to convince their non-governance peers, managers and political masters.

The USP among Tanzanian institutions is more elusive, and is shaped both by the sector in question and the shifting political context:

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<sup>11</sup> Sachin Gupta, pers comm

**Agile money:** I4ID is a source of small, quick money in a sector where big, slow money is the norm. This enables I4ID to respond quickly to new opportunities and build relationships with potential partners. But there are risks attached: Tanzania has a long history of aid dependence, with a ‘carpe per diem’ culture of sitting fees. The money is very small so far, disproportionate to the issues and expectations of results. Sachin Gupta is keen to downplay the agile money option, to avoid I4ID becoming seen as a ‘cash cow’ at the expense of a nimbler role as facilitator. Managing expectations so that it is seen as, at best, a ‘cash chicken’, is important. Staff appear to have varying understandings of the cash chicken potential, referring regularly in conversations to the ‘cash off the table’ principle being a real obstacle to their efforts to generate local interest in I4ID’s work.

**Convening and brokering:** AM programmes like I4ID often seek to convene/broker new coalitions, e.g. of private sector actors that lack the resources or vision to do it themselves, or on new issues where interest groups with fixed positions have yet to emerge. This relies on understanding the range and incentives of the universe of stakeholders on any given issue, and on their willingness to allow I4ID to bring them together. So far, this willingness seems stronger in the private sector (e.g. work on solid waste management or menstrual products - see boxes) than with state actors. Convening in the state sector has been further undermined by the Magufuli shock, which has led to further questioning of the legitimacy of foreign aid actors wishing to influence state policies and practices, increased risk aversion within government, and decreased appetite for innovation. Moreover, the government’s crackdown on sources of opposition has reduced the number of potential Tanzanian partners, who may also be more reluctant to be ‘convened and brokered’ by initiatives like I4ID, for fear of being branded as the tools of foreigners.

#### **Box 4: Can Adaptive Management help clear Tanzania’s rubbish mountains?**

Waste collectors in Tanzania’s capital, Dar Es Salaam, must plough their way through a mound of bureaucratic and practical obstacles. The government provides waste collectors with little subsidy or help with fee collection. Many residents fail to pay refuse collection charges because their service has got so bad, and the only legal dumpsite is dangerous and out of control, a long way from the city.

The resulting accumulation of rubbish and illegal dumping sites is not only ugly and smelly, but dangerous: Soil and water contamination affects public health and marine life, while the build-up of rubbish in waterways contributes to devastating and deadly flooding every year.

How can a relatively small AM programme like I4ID make a dent on Dar’s rubbish mountain?

To find out, we visited three venues that gave us a sense of the range of Dar’s Solid Waste Management (SWM) challenges and how AM approaches can help resolve them. First, we meet [GreenWaste Pro](#), a modern company collecting rubbish in some of the richer parts of Dar – their 450 employees serve an estimated one million people.

The system, where residents can pay, works by companies winning a licence to manage a whole Ward, to collect fees set by government (50p per family per month), collect their garbage, and keep the streets clean.

The main barrier to Greenwaste’s expansion is non-payment, so they’re trying some tech innovation. Next week, they are attaching small plaques with RFID chips to the front doors of some of their customers, so they can monitor their payments. The politically smart bit was getting the municipal government to agree to having its logo on them – that means residents won’t touch them. In exchange, the government is hoping the data from the chips can help it with tax collection, among other things.

I4ID's contribution is paying for the 5,000 RFID tags for an initial pilot (the company has its own bright young techie who developed the idea – no need for tech help there), brokering a relationship with University of Dar es Salaam Data Lab who helped with the open source mapping tool and an army of students to go door to door installing the tags and gathering information, and a plan to broker conversations with other waste companies to advocate for much needed reforms.

Then it's off to a giant dusty packing shed, where Allen Kimambo, a classically hyperactive and driven entrepreneur, has set up [Zaidi](#), a company that recycles cardboard. Now he wants to move into 'white paper' as well. Here I4ID is paying for the initial wage bill and some technical support – Allen is loudly appreciative of the technical advice he's had from a recycler-cum-consultant, who I4ID is hiring to advise both Zaidi and Greenwaste.

Less than five per cent of the city's wards are served by formally regulated companies, mainly in the richer and commercial parts of Dar.

SWM in Dar's poorer quarters is left to each neighbourhood to manage, where leaders at the lowest tier of government, the *mtaa*, are responsible for finding a fix. Some leaders take it seriously and can source decent service providers, although rubbish collectors often struggle to provide a good service and still break even, while others do deals with their cronies, allowing them to collect some fees while leaving waste uncollected or dumping it in fields and rivers.

Our final visit is to the 'Cashpoint' company in a poor area of Dar called Manzese. The 'office' is actually Jenny and Kyalo Mbatha's front room, one of ten households in a busy compound with lines of washing drying over stagnant, evil-looking puddles.

Back in 2008, Jenny decided to give up the kiosk and go into the waste management business, but found hardly anyone paid their monthly fees. Since then it has been an endless struggle to collect enough fees to make the collection viable, complicated by the additional obligation to keep the ward clean – so you can't punish non-fee-payers' by leaving their rubbish on the street.

Jenny's fame has spread, and she now has contracts for 5 mtaas – about 3000 people. I4ID is supporting her to expand by experimenting with an approach she piloted in her first mtaa – embedding the service charge in a Pay As You Go pre-paid bright green rubbish bag. In the past, Cashpoint has managed to change the culture of payment and get fee payment rates up to 70% in 6 months, then stop using the green bags (they're expensive) and get people to keep paying.

What's interesting is that Jenny and Kyalo have already thought of and/or tried every idea we come up with for improving fee collection (and we have at least 2 PhDs in the room). Collective peer pressure, a la microfinance; punish defaulters with delayed collection; a premium service for good payers; name and shame.

Which really got us thinking about I4ID's 'USP' – unique selling point. Just for comparison, the much larger World Bank concluded a few years ago that the institutional breakdowns behind Dar's rubbish mountain were just too complex and messy for them to get anywhere. Can an adaptive management approach designed precisely to navigate such messiness do any better?

Too early to say. I4ID's current offer seems to be a combination of technical assistance/research, convening and brokering conversations between players who don't normally meet, and small pots of quick money to try things out, unblock processes and build relationships.

*Taken from a post on the From Poverty to Power blog, 16<sup>th</sup> August 2018*

**Technical Assistance:** I4ID is able rapidly to identify and hire experts to provide evidence and guidance on a range of issues. This has enabled it to forge good partnerships with organizations like the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF), which acts as a kind of parastatal thinktank for the Tanzanian government. Experience from other closed political spaces such as Vietnam suggests that such thinktanks act as a vital and trusted path for feeding evidence and ideas into policy-making processes.

**Unlocking Market Potential:** In practice, a combination of the reaction to the Magufuli shock and the closing down of spaces for influencing the state, the pressure for quick results, and the personal experience of the new Team Leader seems for now to have pushed I4ID towards a politically-informed market systems approach that focuses on essential services (water, education, solid waste management, menstrual health), in which it uses a combination of agile funding, technical assistance and convening and brokering to address coordination and other market failures, with the aim of generating greater economic dynamism. Sachin Gupta believes the political shock has led to an interesting and innovative response: 'I see it as a systems approach – borrowed from market systems - but applied more widely to integrated state-community-market systems.'

Sachin Gupta sees this emerging focus as the best response to the shock: 'has I4ID given up on governance too easily? My considered reaction is that I think our scale presumption is an important factor in this – the investment of almost £12m of taxpayer's money demands an ambition for transformational scale impact – hence I do think it's right that we look for silver bullets, rather than small isolated approaches (unless we see a good route to scale from those smaller grounded approaches). I don't think we can do transformational governance work in the current context without risking getting locked up, passports confiscated, or risking our (and DFID's) overall license to operate.'

**Cautious branding.** Being political in Tanzania means thinking carefully on whose radar I4ID should be. Our questions about Tanzanian identity and legacy led to discussions on why branding matters and for who. Team leadership is intentionally low key, preferring no high public profile and flying under the radar. In part this is due to the need to deflect attention from I4ID as a foreign aid project, in part because there is little to show so far. Now that issues are selected, initial activities started and low-level results harvested, a more public profile can be created.

**The Adaptive Management Toolbox:** I4ID's repertoire of techniques includes funding research and technical assistance, convening and brokering across different networks, and hiring people with political antennae. If anything, the impact of closing civic and political space has made it tend towards the conservative in its choice of approaches. Yet there is a strong case that if space is shrinking, the range of tools should become broader and more experimental to compensate. This could include: Working with a wider range of stakeholders (e.g. religious leaders, or cultural figures) could resuscitate the benefits of broad alliances and multi-stakeholder approaches that have been limited by closing political space.

**Multiple parallel experiments and cross-learning:** The focus on single option pilots makes learning slower and reduces potential innovation. Why not run multiple parallel experiments and rapidly select the most promising ones? Solid Waste Management is potentially such a process. Similarly, we have seen no sign of exchanges between Tanzanian staff and partners and people and organizations working on similar issues in other countries, whether in East Africa or beyond. That would seem to be a valuable alternative way of accessing ideas and knowledge, rather than relying purely on fly-in experts.

Positive Deviance: Positive Deviance seeks to identify, learn from and spread outliers that already occur in any given system. In this case, for example, particularly inclusive parts of local or national government or the private sector. AM is currently characterized by its problem focus – for example in the approach known as Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation, which spends considerable time drilling down into ‘the problem’ before moving on to devise and test possible solutions. Why not try SDIA - Success-Driven Iterative Adaptation? Many aid programmes, including I4ID, pursue a form of ad hoc positive deviance, in the sense that they look for promising initiatives or individuals and then back them. But proper PD is a more systematic approach, intentionally identifying positive outliers and trying to understand what determines their success, and how it can spread.<sup>12</sup>

## Closing Spaces, Inclusion and Working with the Grain

The I4ID programme is drawn broadly, by AM standards, and the turbulence of its early years has challenged two terms in its name – institutions and inclusion. Clarity on both are essential for AM – institutions and inclusion shape both the theory of action and level of aspiration.

What does I4ID understand as **institutions**? Although there are differences in the approaches adopted in I4ID’s different workstreams, overall, what we saw during our brief visit was the primacy of the state in I4ID’s mental – and operational – map, as the stakeholder to influence and also stay friends with. After that comes the private sector/markets and to a lesser extent, some interest in social norms and academia (seen as a particularly promising institution, given the President’s fondness for fellow academics). Closing political space has sharply reduced I4ID’s ability and appetite to work with political parties and activist CSOs, while others (e.g. religious leaders, unions, professional associations) appear to be entirely off I4ID’s radar.

The few CSOs we talked to during our stay regard this as over-cautious – they think there is still space for a more pluralist approach, and that the current crackdown may be reversed. Discussions with the team did suggest an awareness of a broader understanding of institutions, though it was not always clear what level of ambition each issue area was aiming for. When asked what our initial discussions had triggered for Sachin Gupta, he replied ‘it’s a reminder to return to the question of ‘what is the systemic change that we should be working towards?’, the highest-level outcome’.

This suggests a potential trade off: working with an increasingly reactionary grain may ensure survival and license to operate, but can easily do so at the cost of a programme reducing its commitment to wider societal transformation.

‘**Inclusive**’ is a much used (and abused) word in development – what does I4ID mean by it? In particular, does inclusive refer to *process* (involving marginalized groups and their leaders in governance discussions) or *outcome* (poor people benefit from the result of reforms supported by the programme) or both? While aiming for both, I4ID appears to favour an outcome-oriented version of inclusion. The issues I4ID works on focus on specific groups (see GESI section below): people with disability, deaf children, waste pickers, women street vendors, out-of-school girls (MHM), and untenured informal residents.

This discussion is crystallized in I4ID’s focus on ‘points of entry’ for it to engage in new work areas. These, more often than not, boil down to identifying statements from the president or senior politicians or officials that can open up political space to work on a particular issue (e.g. a ministry asking for analysis on a tariff issue, or the president publicly supporting urban street vendors in his home town). I4ID seems to be largely supporting work within ‘invited’ rather than ‘created’ spaces.<sup>13</sup> This may well be a sensible adaptation to closing political space, but working with the grain rather

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<sup>12</sup> The Power of Positive Deviance, R. Pascale, J. Sternin and M. Sternin, Harvard Business Press, 2010

<sup>13</sup> See the Power Cube site, <https://www.powercube.net/>

than seeking to challenge or transform the grain can risk diluting the commitment to inclusion in the change process. Going with the grain can mean accepting the priorities and processes of powerholders, but can also create a chance of transforming the grain in the long term, by bringing citizens into the decision-making spaces. If AM is offered as at least as good as – and in this kind of context – better than ‘first orthodoxy’ efforts, then making clear and closely monitoring who is/is not benefiting and in what way will be essential.

## Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI)

There is one senior (foreign) GESI advisor and Mwanahamisi Singano (aka Mishy), the national GESI coordinator, who plays three roles within her half-time post:

- Support team ethos (having right policies/attitudes/gender pay gap)
- Support all work streams – from conception to implementation and monitoring
- Lead on incubating specific issues, for example currently on urban vendors and menstrual products (both to be handed over after incubation).

The GESI focus shows up in Adaptive Delivery during team meetings, where Mishy probes others to keep their work stream on track for inclusive impact by asking three simple impact questions:

1. Are we transforming people’s lives?
2. Can we support maximum benefit of what they do?
3. Can we protect them from what is happening?

‘Transforming people’s lives’ is a broad term. GESI categories include women, very poor people, youth, elders on some issues, disabled people, with the group focus chosen according to the issue. For example, if it is access to land, young people are more likely to be excluded than older people – so efforts are needed to embed young people’s perspectives and needs in any land-related work. Per issue, an analysis is undertaken to identify which GESI groups relate to each of the three GESI impact questions (see above) and the power dynamics that need tackling to include excluded groups. The end goal will shape the degree and nature of participation of different prioritised groups.

Mishy supports colleagues on a case-by-case, as people’s understanding of gender and social equity issues varies. Sometimes GESI is a last-minute input but in principle the issue coordinator is expected to start thinking about GESI outcomes from the start as it is explicit in the Issue Appraisal Forms and involve the foreign expert and Mishy in the thinking process. GESI is tracked with six-monthly health checks, based on various milestones. A ‘Do No Harm’ principle applies: even if a work stream is not proactively promoting gender, it must demonstrate that it does not have negative impacts on gender relations, dynamics or opportunities.

When it comes to gender, the GESI lens is used to look at issues with a gender focus on the power dynamics between women and men or with a focus on women only, such as with the menstrual health workstream. Donors’ influence on which of these two forms is pursued has led to shifts in issue focus. In order to bring Irish funding into the programme, Palladium agreed to at least one gender-focused issue given Irish Aid’s focus on women and girls in its Tanzania strategy. Irish Aid’s investment allowed the project to increase its investment in GESI within the I4ID team. The workstream with Urban Women Vendors were initially presented as a gender issue and illustrates possible alignment tensions as described above: “Women urban vendors was interesting. The initial idea was a gender focus, but then we did a PEA for 6 months, talked to all the relevant stakeholders in Mwanza. When we showed the result to Irish Aid they said ‘where’s the gender gone?!’”(Mishy interview).

Based on its analysis, I4ID had selected work with women and men vendors alike, whereas Irish Aid wanted that work stream focused on women, with the donor holding firm.



There is another inherent tension between the GESI ambition and AM principle of ‘going with the grain’, when that grain is hostile to gender equity and inclusion. In the current context, whereas gender rights were gaining ground under the former President, there is a new conservatism (such as the ban on pregnant schoolgirls and the crackdown on promoting family planning) that will influence what is possible or needed as far as the state is concerned. With the state pulling towards conservative values around inclusion, adaptive programming and delivery will need to tread a fine line if it is to maintain a focus on gender equity.

The evolution of I4ID raises questions about the limits to ‘working with the grain’ of power when the political space is closing. At what point does working with the grain become incompatible with inclusion and/or development? When/how should AM institutions shift to working *against* the grain? How can it use a portfolio approach across its various workstreams to achieve a balance between ‘with the grain’ work with fewer political risks, and a few more risky ‘against the grain’ activities? There are no easy answers, but I4ID’s vulnerability in terms of its foreign identity, and the pressure for results that show system change within a relatively short life span, seems to have pushed it towards seeking lower risk options in response to the political shocks it has lived through, even when doing so entails a dilution of the initial ambition.

## Monitoring/Evaluation/Learning and Outcomes

It is too early for a detailed discussion of I4ID’s outcomes, in the form of concrete benefits to Tanzanian citizens. This discussion therefore considers the emerging contours of outcomes and challenges in I4ID’s search for demonstrable outcomes (see Box 5), starting with its approach to monitoring, evaluation and learning from its work.

### Box 5. I4ID’s results framework

Outcome 1: Government, civil society and the private sector collectively put into practice institutional arrangements that promote the common interest

Outcome 2: Key democratic institutions have more capacity, and are more accountable and inclusive

Output 3: Stakeholders are facilitated to coordinate better and work collectively on policy and institutional reforms

Output 4: Democratic governance stakeholders and citizens meaningfully contribute to identifying and resolving constraints to inclusive development

Output 5: I4ID and its partners successfully implement effective principles of adaptive programmes.

## Target tension: the intention and reality of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) strategy

The strategy’s guiding principles are AM-friendly: flexible, enabling, participatory, and impact-oriented (I4ID MEL Strategy, 2018). We are not in a position to comment on whether MEL in this form is being effectively implemented yet or not; during our short visit we did not see MEL in action outside our limited interaction with some of the I4ID team. The balance between the three output areas is dynamic, with more initial focus on Output 3 – getting the ways of working adaptively in place, and moving towards Output 1. It is excellent that the project is explicit about wanting to demonstrate adaptation in its delivery: “creating the culture and space for adaptation to occur” and “is responsive to changes in the context and emerging opportunities.”

The emergent results framework appears sensible: “After only the first year of implementation for the programme, still much is being learned about what is realistically achievable in terms of political and citizen engagement, particularly within the changing political environment and operating context. This is partly envisaged in the design of the Results Framework, which allows for adaptation and revision, and has deliberately postponed the setting of targets for certain Outcomes and Outputs until implementation is more advanced.” (Annual Report 2018) To this end, as part of reflection and to inform revisions to the Results Framework, I4ID reported results against Output 1, demonstrating good adaptive delivery.

Presumably reflecting high levels of trust at the design stage – and in line with the logic of AM - I4ID has a considerable period of grace when it comes to targets; none have been set for any of the outcome or output areas and they will only be agreed at the mid-point in Year 3.

For Output 1 on stakeholder facilitation, work streams are the ‘unit of performance’ with numbers agreed in 2017-18 to encourage a quicker pace of progress, with a set number expected: two ‘low intensity or active’ work streams and eight work streams to have been explored. For the two active workstreams, there were also agreed essential deliverables (core work), of which 90% should be achieved and stretch deliverables (more ambitious targets), of which 30% should be achieved. In 2018, as the pace with workstreams has picked up, essential deliverables were dropped as they were putting pressure on the project to follow specific pathways. Expected performance levels for 2018-19 were mutually agreed. It saw an interesting evolution to a numerical range and a menu of options: “Confirmed delivery of between 10 and 12 Outputs (out of a possible 31...) will constitute an A; 13 or more will constitute an A+.” (I4ID Results Forecast 2018-19, October 2018). This framing for performance allows for flexibility both quantitatively and thematically and offers a stretch goal for the A+ rating. Such agreements are reviewed monthly to track progress and identify emerging priority actions.

Output 2 works similar to Output 1 but focuses on political engagement and inclusion/voice. This is more difficult to pin down as it involves spotting ‘behaviours that are consistent with more inclusive decision-making, planning or policy process’.

Output 3 on I4ID’s growth as an AM programme is tracked using a rubric, with five levels for each of the two indicators: creating culture and space for adaptation and responsive to changing context. The levels range from ‘not at all effective’ to ‘extremely effective’ with clear descriptions of what should be observed for all five levels. Level 5 marks the stretch goal in terms of I4ID’s own ways of working, with I4ID setting target levels per year – aiming for Level 4 by Year 3.

Notwithstanding the relatively target-free space, the project was alarmed at receiving a B in the first period. The relief of the subsequent award in April 2018 of an ‘A’ grade highlights the importance of this donor reporting system that seeks to keep the bar high– even if it is unclear in advance how much progress can be made on any given issue.

Two related questions are important for AM in general when it comes to MEL:

1. What is good enough – and is it only about process? Donors rank achievements of key outcomes, such as for I4ID, ‘democratic engagement’. Given the constraining environment, might it be acceptable for AM programmes to simply keep open spaces or stop even worse things from happening? This could show as a lower ranking in the metric used to assess, for example, democratic engagement. Will a lower performance be acceptable to team

leadership and donors, if the political space tightens further? More importantly, how many citizens should be benefiting from each issue for it to be deemed ‘a success’?

There is a real tension around a target-light backdrop that keeps pressure off an AM process and the real world need for people to benefit from a programme focusing on ‘inclusive development’. The Issue Appraisal Forms (IAF) developed after Sachin Gupta started as team leader are an early-stage accountability option; they offer a sense of the direction of travel and give an indication of possible numbers of potential beneficiaries. However, they do not require precision about what success will look like. Sachin Gupta summarises: “the original approach requiring a TOC was ... overblown and over-ambitious about what you can predict at an early stage. The idea that you can predict your theory of change contradicts the need for purposive muddling to figure stuff out as you go and deepen understanding of the complexity.” The IAFs were developed together to be agile and yet accountability-aware. DfID wanted “some idea of our ‘north star’ - what we thought we could achieve, rather than a structured ‘theory of change’ ... so when we started articulating potential outcomes quite simply in the IAF they preferred that.” An early indication of progress occurs through monthly updates and dashboard visibility across all approved and pre-approval workstreams. The detailed IAF document is only submitted at the point of approval, during update meetings that are otherwise light touch on approved workstreams. These happen every three months.

2. How to balance reporting and reflecting? An AM programme needs reporting for three reasons: upward accountability, team reflections, and sharing learning with others. But there is a trade-off between creating a heavy upward reporting burden and encouraging the kind of (documented) reflection useful for ‘learning by doing’. At I4ID, we were struck by the vast amounts of upward reporting of this very young project but noted that the balance between reflection and this purpose for reporting was still evolving. Documentation, for use by peers and not necessarily upward-focus, is critical to support decision making by, for example, explaining why subtle adaptations were needed, raising questions about the theory of change or tactics, and retrospectively spotting patterns of what works or not and why. The recent review of various monitoring tools highlighted the reporting burden being generated. The team leader has been instrumental in meeting upward reporting needs by reusing existing working documents. The art will lie in focusing on the dialogue around any reporting and using it to trigger course-corrective action.

## I4ID’s Theory of Action

I4ID was never formally an Empowerment and Accountability programme (the topic of the wider research programme of which this paper is part). However, the original programme ‘Theory of Change’ (for reasons explained above, we would refer to it as a Theory of Action) explicitly focuses on democratic governance and citizenship. As far as we know, these two pillars still hold. In practice, ‘democratic governance’ has become evidence of behaviours by political and civil society stakeholders to be more inclusive in their decision-making planning or policy processes (I4ID Results Framework Oct 2018); in practice it has been about coalition building and collective action to identify and resolve constraints to inclusive development. Given the early days of the programme, we saw initial *outputs* – convening around new business collaboration (menstrual health), research on and support to small-scale solid waste management, scoping of urban planning needs through the university. It is still too early to talk of concrete *outcomes* for citizens, still less of wider systemic change (although both of these need to be kept squarely in I4ID’s crosshairs, of course – of which the project is mindful).

This de facto reformulation could suggest *any* collective action and coalition good enough. The focus of change is still, however, intended to be ‘behaviour that is consistent with more inclusive decision-making, planning or policy process’ of democratic institutions involved in the programme. Such institutions can include media, parliament, civil society but also electoral campaigning, policy processes and citizen engagement, key bureaucrats, political appointees, ministries and major associations (I4ID Indicator Reference Sheets, October 2018). To this end, examples of observable behaviours are documented through outcome harvesting to generate a chain of evidence about changes towards this outcome.

## Timing and Pressure for Results

It is early days for I4ID. Despite flexibility around what the outcomes will be, the pressure is on to show both progress towards results and concrete results. The emerging results have been important to demonstrate the workstreams’ potential. One tangible result, team members say, is the very survival of the programme in an adverse context.

The timing of I4ID’s birth could hardly have been unluckier. While the programme was still being designed by DFID and Palladium, a political shock was unfolding that invalidated some of I4ID’s founding assumptions. The focus on design of the inception phase, based on further studies and conversations, rather than beginning actual programming, compounded the problem – staff and DfID felt more early piloting could have produced more immediate and useful feedback, including insights into just how much the political space had shrunk.

That said, the shock has also in some ways been a validation of AM: in the words of Victoria Lihiru, I4ID’s Democratic Governance & Strategic Partnerships Manager: ‘If we had had to stick to the original plan, we would have shut by now’.

The difficulties of repurposing a governance programme that was still a fledgling has been exacerbated by the pressure for early results. Compared to I4ID, the early days of DFID’s adaptive management programmes in Myanmar and Nigeria enjoyed a longer period of relatively small budget, below-the-radar experimentation to shape their teams and refine their cultures and ways of working. Often, real results only emerged in the second phases of projects like SAVI and Pyoe Pin. In contrast, I4ID is expected to show results within its five-year timeframe (which is currently a hard time horizon - no-one spoke to us about subsequent phases), which means that as soon as the inception period was over, pressure started to mount.

According to Harry Jones of Palladium: ‘One of the downsides of [AM’s success within the aid sector] is that people think it is easy to do, so funders then layer on tough processes. SAVI had 8 years and didn’t have to deliver any significant changes. I4ID has 5 years from zero to in theory delivering changes on issues AND democratic institutions.’ The risks of AM on steroids – all the difficulties (and opportunities) *plus* the challenge of inclusive development and in a compressed timeframe of 5 years - are significant. This short timeframe goes against the ‘second orthodoxy’ feature of long-term commitment and results, asking of AM what it was not set up to do.

Sachin Gupta takes a different, and trenchant view: ‘Having worked on too many programmes in the past that drifted along, claiming “it’s all very difficult”, “the government is being very slow”, I think the increased accountability is actually a good thing. No programme should work for 8 years and not have to deliver anything – or at least show it is developing potential and proving its theory of change.’ Differences exist about this pressure for (progress towards) results. Helen Barnes, DFID’s senior responsible officer (SRO) for the programme, argues that the donors have deliberately dropped targets altogether apart from holding I4ID to two ‘high intensity work streams’ and eight ‘low intensity work streams, all initially unspecified. Being ‘target-free’ has not let the programme off the hook.

There is much pressure to show evidence of progress – arguably rightly so after a lethargic start. AM must strike a tricky balance between enough room to try, change, scale and being accountable for smart and bold impact at scale.

This pressure – whether intended or experienced as results or progress towards results – creates four potential unintended consequences that the programme is trying to manage with some delicacy and with varying degrees of success. Firstly, it can exacerbate the operational default of Palladium to reach for established, usually international, experts, rather than invest the time needed to nurture local capacity to become the programme’s ‘critical antennae’. Secondly, it can accentuate risk aversion, as the programme shied away from the politically (increasingly) difficult towards a search for politically easier terrain, such as market strengthening. Thirdly, the need to show (potential for impact) can reduce staff appetite for risk and focusing on those issues where impact is feasible, and it is unclear if there is the time to ‘learn by failing’. Several staff did share the hesitation they felt – when in the room with donors– at putting forward more risky ideas that might be shot down.

Finally, it requires balancing the quick wins needed to catch up for lost time that both build morale and momentum, and keeping the project focused on impact at scale and the donors happy. This search for ‘low hanging fruit’ makes sense and is a standard part of many influencing strategies. But if it becomes an over-riding priority, it can displace a search for more profound, systemic change, and can lead to taking too much credit for victories, which can alienate and undermine local partnerships – and thus damage a crucial aspect of long-term Adaptive Management strategies.

I4ID was allowed a long leash in these initial years in terms of issue selection – with much discussion as to whether this is working as an approach. Issues selected for donor approval tend to reflect the expertise and networks of specific staff members – market systems, menstrual products, disability and education, sunflower seeds being clear examples. AM needs networks and expertise so laying an important foundation for progress. However, this feature of the approved workstreams is different from starting with a blank sheet of paper and using different criteria to select priority issues, e.g. based on scale of impact. Time will tell whether this matters.

Yet there is a marked lack of consensus on its workstreams. For each issue (except MHM), we heard at least one person seriously doubt its merits – whether frontline staff, team leadership or donors. For example, one donor doubted the wisdom of focusing on solid waste management: “it is a blinder that I4ID has put on themselves not seeing the vested interests in SWM – it’s not just a coordination problem. You only get that if you’re integrated, and Tanzanian. SWM is a cartel and there will be a real fight.” Doubts were also expressed to us about the disability education work, the urban planning work and sunflower work. Such pervasive disquiet sits uneasily alongside the conviction needed to invest a substantial amount in an issue. In-depth knowledge is needed to get to the level of details that matter - networks, issue knowledge, legislation. Will doubts prevail over the long-term view - and if so, whose doubts count most: donor, leadership, or frontline staff?

## The MEL Toolbox and Learning Culture

I4ID has been actively experimenting with a range of tracking and learning tools that guide AD<sup>14</sup>. A recent review of the tools (source: undated/untitled mimeo review of 5 tools, I4ID) noted that several were cumbersome and only effective if consistently applied. Processes have been repurposed in response to feedback and learning what does/doesn’t work. The focus of weekly all-staff meetings now alternates between updates/ reviews, and proposals for work on new issues. When staff found Quarterly Reviews an ordeal, rather than a place to share doubts and failures, another meeting was added, the Participatory Reflection and Review Meeting, so that frank conversations could be had by the team without the donors.

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<sup>14</sup> Notably contact lists, weekly update, routine monitoring, issue appraisals, principles-focused monitoring.

The MEL strategy makes explicit both outward-facing and inward-facing learning strategies. Externally there is a strong focus on how the external world (in-country and foreign) can learn about AM from I4ID: “to help them understand how to work in a problem-driven, politically smart way” (I4ID Learning Agenda) and focused “lessons on the significance of institutions, coalitions and collective action for achieving change” (ibid) for sector and issue audiences anywhere.

The priority for sharing a long overdue I4ID political analysis is external in the form of a single “updated PEA overview, to be published as an ODI working paper, including the assessment of the political settlement, and implications (broadly) for promoting inclusive development in Tanzania” (I4ID Learning Strategy Aug 2018). But does this emphasis on external learning squeeze out internal learning? Political analysis by the team takes place daily, weekly, monthly. The challenge is of course to manage both. How can I4ID maximise the learning that occurs in a daily ‘PEA’ dynamic of a politically savvy team with the more static form of a single PEA paper written by ODI?

One absence noted by the I4ID team is donor learning - to what extent has DfID learned from an overly extended inception period and the downsides for results - or focusing the full team energy on ‘the ToC agony and asking for ever-more details. If AM is to work well, then the organisations involved in the adaptive governance part need to actively learn as much as frontline staff (AD) and team leadership (AP).

## Conclusion

This study complements the other two papers in this series, on Pyoe Pin in Myanmar, and PERL in Nigeria, in three important ways: firstly, it confirms, and further elaborates, the value of subdividing the broad concept of ‘adaptive management’ into its component parts – adaptive governance, programming and delivery. Doing so creates a way of better understanding the dynamics and interactions between donors, managers and frontline staff that go into creating (or frustrating) efforts to manage adaptively. This short foray into a young programme focused on adaptive governance due to the limited lifespan and the limited time to immerse ourselves into the daily ins and outs of adaptive programming and delivery. Any future review should take more time to look at the approaches and tactics that bring I4ID to life: how different frontline staff do their problem analysis, how they spot opportunities and work with team members and stakeholders to create pathways of influence, how they bat back daily obstacles and grab sudden opportunities, and how they manage both to delicately work ‘with the grain’ and push against it.

Secondly, whereas Pyoe Pin and PERL are the result of over a decade of experimentation and learning, I4ID is still an infant, and something of a test tube baby at that. Seeing how it copes and struggles provides useful insights into what can be expected in the initial months and years of an Adaptive Management programme.

Thirdly, it shows how a fledgling AM programme responds to a serious political shock that forced it to rethink its approach, which would probably have been impossible in a more rigidly designed programme.

The way I4ID responded to that shock was shaped by its initial design. In our view, one feature damaged its ability to respond creatively to an extremely difficult situation – the lack of deep Tanzanian roots in terms of staff or analysis. Absent the shock, it might have been able to develop such roots. Unfortunately, the premature shock meant that it did not have that luxury, and the result was a response that was more chaotic and more cautious than might otherwise have been the case. One significant question raised by this study is a question mark over the widely accepted idea of ‘working with the grain’. When the grain is becoming increasingly excluding and unjust, at what point

should a programme committed to inclusive development switch to working *against* the grain, and how can it go about doing so?

Finally, the I4ID case raises questions about what might happen when a new approach becomes codified and, to some extent, a new orthodoxy. Codification can slide into standardization, with a blueprint created outside the context of political time and place and the loss of some of the features most likely to make the approach effective in the first place. Our conclusion is that the Adaptive Management 'movement' needs to beware such a step and recover the full features of the approach. It needs to return to a greater emphasis on localizing programme design and leadership in the local context.

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