This workshop brought together a small, informal group of development practitioners and researchers to explore how development partners can improve monitoring, evaluation and learning (ME&L) in programmes that are politically smart and locally-led. In past October Gallery workshops, participants have explored and advocated for interventions that achieve results by working with the grain of local politics, embracing complex political economy realities and utilising entrepreneurial, adaptive and iterative approaches. A set of case studies across a broad range of sectors and settings, and the factors that have contributed to their success are summarised here and in a recent ODI policy brief.

Development agencies are showing increasing interest in politically smart and locally-led approaches. However, there are questions as to whether their results and evidence agenda limits the flexibility and adaptability required to apply politically smart and locally-led approaches:

- Whereas politically smart and locally-led approaches embrace uncertainty and the complex and unpredictable nature of development processes, the results and evidence agenda often has a low tolerance for uncertainty;
- Whereas politically smart and locally-led approaches pay attention to unintended as well as intended results, and aim to capitalise on opportunities as and when they arise, the results and evidence agenda tends to focus on predetermined predictable results that are as quantifiable as possible; and
- Whereas politically smart and locally-led approaches often pursue multiple theories of change that are continually challenged and modified, the results and evidence agenda tends to require theories of change that are often linear and tightly adhered to throughout the programme cycle.

This workshop explored how development practitioners might best manage any trade-offs between these two agendas. How can we ensure that we measure and report results and hold ourselves to account, while simultaneously ensuring that we are always learning and that our engagement is flexible, iterative and locally led?

This workshop explored a range of programmes that have—to a great extent—managed this balancing act. In particular it considered:

- How to best use ME&L to enhance rather than constrain programme flexibility and adaptiveness;
- How to monitor and measure outcomes without over-specifying expected results ex-ante;
- How to apply an adaptive, ‘learning by doing approach’ while simultaneously delivering measurable results and being accountable to funders;
- How to monitor, evaluate and learn lessons about crucial but less tangible outcomes of interventions; and
• How the political economy incentives facing development agencies can support or constrain the use of these approaches more widely.

The workshop looked at eight case studies across a range of sectors and contexts. In particular it explored ME&L in:

• Governance programmes working on accountability and empowerment;
• Programmes supporting economic and social policy reform processes;
• Programmes working to strengthen the core of government; and
• Programmes that work on local level peace and reconciliation processes.

The October Gallery Political Economy Group is an informal gathering of researchers, consultants and other development professionals working on the political economy of development. The group provides a forum in which researchers and practitioners can share their experience, hone their expertise and critically reflect on the theory and practice of applied political economy. Workshops have been held periodically since 2009.

Accountability and Empowerment

This session explored ME&L in three programmes working to support accountability and empowerment: Nigeria’s State Accountability and Voice Initiative (SAVI), Burma/Myanmar’s Pyoe Pin Programme and the Vietnam Empowerment and Accountability Programme (VEAP).

All three programmes put political economy at the heart of their approaches. They use in-house political economy analysts to identify those areas of policy in which there is sufficient political space and common interests between different groups (civil society, government and private sector) to have a good chance of success. All three use innovative and iterative approaches to ME&L to ensure that the programmes are able to be adaptive and to capture both the intended and unintended consequences of their work.

The DFID-funded SAVI programme in Nigeria has been operating since 2008 and is now active in ten states. The programme aims to support more responsive state governance and more constructive engagement between government and citizens.

SAVI does not provide accountable grants, but instead facilitates partnerships between reform-minded actors in civil society, media and state houses of assembly. It provides these actors with individually tailored strategic advice, training and mentoring. This approach enables the skills, credibility, ambition and impact of these partnerships to ‘snowball’ over time, often delivering significant legislative and policy level changes as well as improved constructive engagement between citizens and state governments. SAVI is an adaptive and iterative programme; it has very few specific pre-planned results and is decentralised to the state level.

This approach to programming has led SAVI to develop a number of innovative ME&L strategies and tools including:

• Reporting: SAVI puts no reporting burden on its partners. SAVI staff take full responsibility for monitoring and reporting partners progress and achievements to DFID against the programme’s Results Framework. This frees up partners to be accountable to citizens and tailor their advocacy to locally shifting opportunity and momentum, rather than focusing on delivering and reporting against DFID requirements.

• Theory of change and logframe: SAVI’s theory of change is separate from but complementary to its results framework (logframe). The theory of change is simple
and intuitive and is utilised by partners as well as programme staff to track and support incremental progress toward achieving shared objectives (see box). The SAVI logframe has been regularly revised to reflect the changing realities of the programme and learning from experience; it has been revised (at least) 12 times since the programme’s inception.

- **Partnership Capacity Self-Assessment**: SAVI works with its partners to facilitate self-assessments of their capacities and behaviour changes. These self-assessments help SAVI and its partners track changes in capacity and behaviour (mapped against the stages of the Theory of change), enabling partners to learn and grow and SAVI to report overall progress to its funders.

- **Outcome mapping**: SAVI’s logframe includes an outcome indicator on the ‘number of demonstrable changes in policy and implementation by state government in response to public demand where there is evidence of attribution to SAVI’s approach’. This indicator does not specify in advance what changes the programme should bring about, but enables the programme to declare retrospectively specific outcomes where SAVI has contributed to bringing about the change. SAVI has developed an outcome mapping approach to harvest, document and evidence these stories of change. Such ME&L arrangements provide SAVI with considerable flexibility to pursue changing opportunities, while also requiring SAVI to provide a high level of evidence to back up its claims.

![Diagram of the SAVI theory of change](image)

The SAVI theory of change:

1. **Glass Half full** – building on existing momentum for change
2. **House** – partners getting their own house in order
3. **Triangle** – building working relationships between demand-side players
4. **Bridge** – building working relationships with State Government
5. **Wedge** – partners replicating successful approaches on other issues, sectors and states
6. **Explosion** – linking up and institutionalising the processes of citizen engagement to create a paradigm shift in governance

The Pyoe Pin Programme in Burma/Myanmar and the VEAP programme in Vietnam take similar approaches to ME&L.

The DFID, SIDA and DANIDA-funded **Pyoe Pin Programme** was initiated in 2006. Since then it has sought to support nascent civil society groups, by using salient ‘issues’ around which a broader range of stakeholders – including influential interest groups – might come together. These coalitions work to pursue tangible outcomes (e.g. improved rice marketing; legislative changes relating to HIV, fisheries or legal aid, improved quality of education). They also work to pursue less tangible outcomes that build social capital, with the longer term aspiration of building political capital and supporting democratic transition.

The DFID-funded **VEAP programme** takes a similar approach to Pyoe Pin by providing arms-length support to coalitions pursuing policy advocacy. The programme provides technical support to help strengthen and sustain coalitions and to help make them more effective in their advocacy activities. VEAP encourages coalition reflection as part of adaptive and flexible approach to coalition building and policy influencing.

Both programmes use political economy analysis to identify the focus and viability of issue-based coalitions for reform. Both Pyoe Pin and VEAP seek to bolster these coalitions through the provision of grants, technical support and capacity building to individual coalition
partners and the coalition as a whole. These issue-based programmes do not just work on the demand side of governance but often involve a broad range of actors from civil society, to government and the private sector.

Pyoe Pin and VEAP measure their results against both the quality of the reform coalitions and the effectiveness of those coalitions in achieving improvements in the quality of policy and practice. At the heart of Pyoe Pin and VEAP’s ME&L approach is a simple Qualitative Assessment Scorecard (QAS). The Scorecard is used by coalitions to reflect on their capacity and influence. The primary function of the QAS is for internal coalition learning, with some facilitation and constructive challenge by programme management. The scorecard is also used for external reporting and project accountability; the results of the Scorecards are aggregated and reported to the programme advisory committees and development partner staff.

Workshop participants explored a range of issues related to ME&L in these three governance programmes:

- **Process vs. changes in rules and policy:** All three programmes aim to measure results in terms of improvements to both governance processes (e.g. the quality of engagement between partners and each other and partners and government) and more tangible changes to policies, legislation and government action.

- **Assessing attribution:** A significant challenge for all three programmes is the ability to assess the degree to which their interventions are responsible for higher level change. How do you assess attribution when it comes to high level systemic changes that are shaped by a range of factors well outside the programme’s scope of work? All three programmes make use of repeated political economy analysis that allows them to understand these complex causal dynamics and establish a base-, mid- and end-line against which programme interventions and their contribution can be measured.

- **Picking up on unexpected results:** SAVI seeks to capture these through its retrospective reporting (outcome harvesting). There was some concern, however, that if not carefully managed this approach might risk an ex post logical fallacy in which the causes of changes are inaccurately attributed to programme interventions.

- **Different audiences:** Participants discussed the importance of balancing the need for providing predictable and quantifiable results to funding bodies with the need for more nuanced and internal monitoring needed for in-house programme decision making. Some argued that providing external funders with clear quantifiable results (or as one participant put it, using ‘give the dog a bone indicators’) gives politically smart and adaptive programmes greater operating space. Other participants, however, felt this trend towards dual reporting was worrying as it would discourage open debate on these issues and prevent much needed changes to donor mind-sets.

### Institutional and Policy Reforms

This session involved a discussion of ME&L in politically smart and adaptive programmes that focus on public policy reforms in Nigeria the Philippines.

**Propcom** is a DFID-funded Markets for the Poor (M4P) programme in Nigeria. After a series of false starts, Propcom was able to make a significant contribution to shifting Nigeria’s fertiliser policy in a more efficient and pro-poor direction. Starting in 2009 the programme was able to work with the Governor of Adamawa State in the Northeast of the country to open up the state to private fertiliser suppliers and increase the number of poor farmers getting subsidised fertiliser from government public supply points. Over the next few years, Propcom was able to help scale up this approach, among other things providing research results on the very poor targeting of fertiliser subsidies, which helped shift the national
discourse. Drawing on the success of this pilot programme, in 2010 President Goodluck Jonathan halted public procurement of fertiliser and launched a nationwide smart voucher subsidy trial. In 2014 the ban on public procurement remained, and the voucher system with private supply was active in all of Nigeria’s states.

Propcom’s hands-on and flexible ME&L approach contributed to its success. This approach included:

- **An in-house approach to ME&L**: after several years of underachievement, the programme team shifted from outsourcing its ME&L to a hands-on approach in which project staff engaged directly in monitoring and lesson learning. This approach helped staff gain a better understanding of programme dynamics and enabled them to be more adaptive and responsive in their approach.

- **Enhanced flexibility**: Propcom used its approach to ME&L to enhance its flexibility by starting engagement with partners with a ‘try to help’ approach, rather than selling a theory of change. It also used its shared monitoring as a basis for developing and deepening long-term relationships.

- **Measuring outcomes without over-stating results**: Rather than being too ambitious, Propcom at first set out to achieve modest outcomes (involving ‘narrow-band’ reforms and limited geographical scope). This helped to manage expectations and provided a platform to achieve much more.

- **Delivering measurable results while working behind the scenes**: Propcom shared a modest narrative of the changes it was working toward with DFID. However, it also kept DFID at a distance until the team was confident that the theory of change was delivering and that external interest would not undermine the effectiveness of their influencing strategy.

- **Use verbal reporting**: Propcom relied a great deal on oral evidence and monitoring methods, rather than written reports to capture change processes. This was both less burdensome to partners and provided better evidence of how and why changes were occurring.

Recent work by The Asia Foundation on economic reform in the Philippines provides another example of a politically smart and adaptive programme that has contributed to significant pro-poor policy reforms. This USAID- and then Australian Government-funded programme, works with a small team of local ‘development entrepreneurs’ to find technically sound, politically feasible approaches to delivering policy change. The team has worked with influential political, administrative and civil society actors (often behind the scenes) to build coalitions to shepherd reforms through Congress. The programme has contributed to substantial legal reforms including: the simplification of residential land titling process (leading to a 1400% increase in those holding title) and an excise tax on tobacco and alcohol used to finance health care subsidies for poorer families.

Programme staff developed and used a set of tools to ensure that their engagement was adaptive and effective. These doubled as ME&L tools for both internal monitoring and lesson learning and selective reporting to development partners. These included:

- Frequently updated in-house assessments of reform objectives assessed in terms of technical soundness and political feasibility;
- Frequently revised theories of change that reflected new openings and obstacles to change;
- Use of ‘measures that matter’ criteria to determine indicators;
- Regularly updated timelines that help to track what was done when and to what affect;
- Regular capacity checks on the reform team to ensure that they have the required skills and competencies to deliver; and
- Regularly updated stakeholder analysis and mapping.

These tools enabled the programme team to take a very adaptive and entrepreneurial approach to their interventions. They also allow them to develop and test clear but flexible hypotheses about the pathways to achieving programme objectives. This approach involves focusing on tangible reform outcomes rather than more abstract ‘good governance’ goals—although once achieved, the reforms often do have significant governance implications.

This session also briefly reflected on the Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (IMEP) in Nigeria. This programme provides cross-cutting ME&L for DFID Nigeria’s five state level programmes including SAVI and the State Partnership for Accountability, Responsiveness and Capability (SPARC) and programmes in state level health and education and public financial management. This ambitious initiative was intended to strengthen performance of each individual programme, as well as draw crosscutting lessons from all five initiatives.

Although promising on paper, IMEP’s role has been more constrained in practice, and it has mainly focussed on providing a service to DFID to provide annual programme reviews according to DFID’s standard methodology and conducting national survey work according to DFID terms of reference. A critical issue has been IMEP’s lack of independence from DFID, who determine the staffing and resourcing of each review, and in some cases has been unwilling to accept critical findings.

Other observations about the IMEP and Nigeria’s state level programmes included:
- The logframes for programmes like SAVI are kept intentionally loose and these programmes are usually allowed to set their own targets in discussion with DFID. This ensures the operational space needed to be adaptive, but runs the risk that targets are set too low;
- Programmes are strongly incentivised to ‘play the game’ and achieve a high score (i.e. an A+). This can reinforce a focus on telling a positive story and de-incentivises deeper lesson learning about what has not worked; and
- Given that these programmes are intended to be about experimentation and innovation, there could be greater focus on recording and understanding failures as well as successes—where strategies and coalitions have underperformed.

**Bottom up and top down change**

This session compared the ME&L approaches of three projects: one Peace Direct project working on community justice in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo; and two programmes (the ODI Budget Strengthening Initiative and the Africa Governance Initiative) working at the centre-of-government on budget processes and policy delivery. Although these programmes operate on very different issues and levels, all three face the challenge of conducting robust ME&L in a context where their working methods require considerable flexibility and adaptation.

The Peace Direct project (Baraza Justice) works with a local partner (FOCHI) to establish community courts. It has not been possible to establish a conventional monitoring and evaluation system based on survey based methods because of the low project budget and the high level of insecurity in the project area. Facing these constraints, the project has had to adapt its ME&L approach, and has experimented with a method known as “Most Significant Change”. This involves open ended interviews with project participants who are asked to respond to the question ‘in your opinion, describe the most significant change occurring over the past month, which has resulted from your involvement in this project?’
Once the stories have been collected, focus groups are convened to verify and challenge link of the change to the project.

Advantages of the methodology include:

- Stories of change are well suited to testing elements of the project’s theory of change.
- Stories of change reveal how the community views the project and can also highlight unexpected changes (in this case the strength of female empowerment in community justice and conflict resolution).
- In addition to providing evidence for ME&L, the approach provides an opportunity for community participation in the assessment of community justice and the effectiveness of the project.
- The method is relatively quick and low cost. The project estimates that the collection of 125 stories of change would take 3-4 weeks and cost under $2,000.

Disadvantages of the methodology include:

- There is a built in positive bias in the method, which tends to capture only positive examples of change.
- Stories of change may be anecdotal, and require further evidencing and research, in particular to identify reasons why the change took place.
- The approach is more suited to learning than providing quantitative measures suitable for a logframe.

The **Budget Strengthening Initiative (BSI)** is a DFID funded project, which must report its results within a conventional logframe format. Its high level indicators are defined rigidly and include measures of the quality of public financial management (PEFA type indicators). At output level, BSI’s indicators allow greater flexibility and include reports on the number of ‘significant institutional changes’ (which are not specified in advance but must be verified by an external evaluator) and evaluation scores for the quality of individual workstreams. The programme also captures stories of change in budgetary management and provides voluminous narrative reporting on the results of programme activities.

The **Africa Governance Initiative (AGI)** provides strategic and technical advice to a range of African governments. This support aims to build the capacity of partner governments so that they can deliver programmes that will change ordinary people’s lives for the better, from public services and rural development to infrastructure and job creation. AGI employs an adapted logframe format based on the five levels of its theory of change. This includes monitoring of programme results as well as preconditions for programme interventions (including access and trust). Targets and results are specified in advance, but updated annually to reflect changing assessments of project delivery progress. The project has developed dashboards to capture progress, risks and provide a regular ‘pulse-check’ of feedback from staff.

It was noted that all three examples discussed in the session have been able to design ME&L systems that are sufficiently flexible to enable the programmes to work in an adaptive and experimental way. Donor reporting requirements appear to have provided sufficient latitude to enable this flexibility. Common features of the three programmes include the use of stories of change, although none of the programmes has attempted to develop outcome mapping in a comprehensive way to identify the reasons why behavioural change took place and the role of particular stakeholders. A critical omission for both the Budget Strengthening Initiative and the Africa Governance Initiative is the limited role of government counterparts in ME&L, which would appear to limit the usefulness of ME&L as a joint learning tool. In contrast, the Peace Direct project has relied heavily on stakeholder participation in ME&L.
systems, which has helped to strengthen relationships with project partners, but may introduce positive bias into results reporting.

Conclusions and implications

For the final session of the workshop, participants broke into groups to reflect on crosscutting insights arising from the case studies and to identify ME&L implications for other programmes that aim to be politically smart and adaptive. Overall, participants felt that what was needed was not so much a range of new ME&L frameworks and tools, but more flexible and iterative use of existing ME&L frameworks and tools. The discussion revolved around the following themes:

Making better use of existing tools and approaches

Overall, workshop participants thought that existing ME&L frameworks and tools such as logframes, theories of change and standard monitoring and evaluation practices, often place limits on ‘doing development differently’. These tools often fail to capture the intangible and to track and adapt to complex and dynamic social and political change processes. The workshop, however, highlighted a number of ways in which these existing frameworks and tools can be adapted to be more flexible and insightful; how they can encourage deeper shared learning, help programmes respond swiftly to opportunities and constraints and enhance their ability to be politically astute and adaptive.

The case studies explored in the workshop showed how logframes can be used to structure thinking rather than as a mechanistic management devices. Programmes that are politically smart and adaptive either keep logframes loose to allow adequate room for manoeuvre, or define logframes more tightly, but revise them often— especially at the lower (output and below) levels.

The case studies also highlight the ways in which theories of change can play a more significant role in designing and delivering politically smart and adaptive programmes. A well-structured, shared and intuitive theory of change can complement a project logframe and provide evaluators and managers, as well as frontline implementers, with a regular means to review and revise their approaches. When shared with partner organisations and regularly revised, it can also provide a shared language and shared framework through which joint learning and strategising can take place. This can help strengthen teamwork and deepen partnerships and coalitions.

The case studies explored also show how ME&L can improve programme effectiveness if it is an on-going and in-house process; if it moves away from something done annually or bi-annually by external specialists to something that is continuously done throughout the programme cycle by programme staff (with external support if necessary). This iterative and project-owned approach to ME&L allows for greater awareness of programme performance and tighter feedback loops between monitoring and changing strategic and operational tacks.

The programmes explored in the workshop also shed light on the ways in which adaptive and innovative programmes can feed evidence and results to their funding bodies (donors), while simultaneously working to deliver less predictable, but often more significant results on the ground. These same programmes were also often good at ‘buffering’ staff and partners from donor demands. This involves managers acting as intermediaries between donors and frontline staff and partner organisations. It also entails freeing up frontline staff and partners from mechanistic reporting so that they have the time and operational space to be entrepreneurial.

Make more use of…

The day’s discussions touched upon a number of other tools and approaches which participants felt could support politically smart, locally-led development. These include:
• **Stories of change:** Stories of change can be a powerful tool for ME&L. They help to report on the unpredictable and capture the complexity of change processes. Stories of change can also provide donors and the general public with easily digestible case studies of how development assistance can make a tangible difference. Workshop participants, however, stressed the importance of not cherry picking stories; ensuring that they are systematically selected, carefully recorded, representative and are backed by other types of evidence.

• **Outcome mapping:** In the same vein, outcome mapping provides an insightful way to retroactively monitor and learn about how interventions deliver change. It provides a systematic means not only for reporting results but also for analysing how and why success was achieved so that programme staff can apply lessons to future interventions. The workshop found that although many programmes have begun to employ outcome mapping techniques, few have adopted the approach comprehensively.

• **Reporting failures:** There is a need for greater attention to and openness about reporting and analysing failures as well as successes. Understanding why and how interventions fail is as insightful as learning about success.

• **Political economy and stakeholder analysis:** Most of the programmes explored in the workshop employed political economy and stakeholder analysis to inform their strategies and theories of change accordingly. These tools enabled them to identify openings and risks, monitor changing contexts and track changes in the capacities, interests and relationships of agents relevant to the programme.

• **Piloting/small bets:** Many of the more successful interventions explored in the workshop began as pilots with limited resources and investment. These approaches were monitored internally and if results were being achieved, scaled up. Taking this ‘incubator’ approach to programming requires close attention to ME&L to enable managers to respond rapidly to evidence on results and risk.

• **The right people:** Most of the programmes explored in the workshop were able to draw on skilled, innovative and entrepreneurial team leaders and ME&L officers. ME&L teams were often comprised of experienced nationals and internationals, who were part of the programmes’ senior management teams.

**Think more about…**

• **Social and political network analysis:** As a more in-depth and dynamic version of stakeholder mapping, social and political network analysis has the potential to map out complex and multi-dimensional change processes. This can be a valuable tool for planning, reflection, monitoring and learning.

• **Imaginative use of governance indices:** Aggregated indices can provide a quantitative means to track qualitative changes in governance. More work, however, needs to be done to ensure that such indices meaningfully capture outcome level changes.

• **Measuring enduring relationships and trust:** Politically smart and adaptive programmes often rely on building trust and collective action to achieve results. There are, however, limited tools for measuring these crucial components of programming.

• **Sustainability and moving towards exit:** How can ME&L approaches explored here be mainstreamed into public policy processes in the countries in which we work? How can we support the creation of enabling environments for feeding information and evidence into a county’s public policy process?

The workshop concluded that a range of development programmes are learning to be more experimental and adaptive while at the same time developing innovative ME&L systems that enhance, rather than constrain programme flexibility. The programmes reviewed by the workshop provide an initial range of insightful case studies to explore as well as a range of
ME&L approaches, frameworks and tools that could be more widely adopted and improved upon. These examples, however, have been positively selected. To build on this initial analysis, workshop participants concurred that there was a need to dig deeper into these existing case studies as well as to explore a broader range of programmes for insights and practical tools that might allow us to track results over time and give us the operational space and evidence required for innovation and learning.
Participants

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sue Unsworth</td>
<td>Principal, The Policy Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Taylor Brown</td>
<td>Principal, theIDLgroup /GRM International</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Alex Duncan</td>
<td>Director, The Policy Practice</td>
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<td>4. William Kingsmill</td>
<td>Principal, The Policy Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. David Booth</td>
<td>Research Fellow, ODI</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Nigel Thornton</td>
<td>Director, Agulhas</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Marcus Cox</td>
<td>Director, Agulhas</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Gareth Williams</td>
<td>Director, The Policy Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Julian Hamilton-Peach</td>
<td>Independent Consultant</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Tom Gillhespy</td>
<td>Director, Strategic Partnerships, Peace Direct</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Carolyn Hayman</td>
<td>Chief Executive, Peace Direct</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Jeremy Holland</td>
<td>Associate, OPM</td>
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<td>13. Julian Barr</td>
<td>Chairman, ITAD</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Helen Derbyshire</td>
<td>ME&amp;L advisor, SAVI</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Stephen Fraser</td>
<td>Director, SAVI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Drew Koleros</td>
<td>Director of Research and M&amp;E, EDG /GRM International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Claudia Melim-McLeod</td>
<td>UNDP Oslo Governance Centre/ independent Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Marta Foresti</td>
<td>Director, Politics and Governance, ODI</td>
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<td>19. David Hudson</td>
<td>UCL and the Development Leadership Programme</td>
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<td>20. Sam Gibson</td>
<td>Principal, theIDLgroup /GRM International</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Alina Rocha Menocal</td>
<td>Development Leadership Programme /ODI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Jehanzeb Khan</td>
<td>Consultant, theIDLgroup /GRM International</td>
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<td>23. Katherine Peskett</td>
<td>Director, The Africa Governance Initiative</td>
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| Programme

Introduction

| 9:00 | Coffee on arrival |

Part 1: Introductions and setting the stage for the day

| 9:30 - 10:00 | Welcome, setting the stage, overview and aims of the day | Taylor Brown |

Part 2: Monitoring and learning for accountability and empowerment

| 10:00-11:15 | Chair: Gareth Williams |
| Monitoring adaptive and incremental change: the experience of SAVI Nigeria | Helen Derbyshire / Stephen Fraser |
| Lessons from accountability programmes in Burma and Vietnam | Jeremy Holland |

Part 3: Monitoring and learning for institutional and policy reform

| 11:15-12:30 | Chair: Marta Foresti |
| Monitoring for policy reform in the Philippines | David Booth |
| Monitoring changes to fertiliser subsidy policy and practice in Northern Nigeria | Julian Hamilton-Peach |

| 12:30-13:30 | Lunch |

Part 4: Monitoring and learning: bottom-up and top-down

| 13:30-14:45 | Chair: William Kingsmll |
| Local First: Measuring intangibles, Peace Direct | Carolyn Hayman / Tom Gillhespy |
| Monitoring and learning at the centre of government: the Africa Governance and Budget Strengthening Initiatives | Marcus Cox / Nigel Thornton / Katherine Peskett |

Part 5: Group work

| 14:45-16:00 | Taylor Brown to facilitate |
| Group work to draw lessons from case studies, to strengthen our existing toolkit, to identify gaps and to identify next steps |

Conclusions

| 16.00-16:30 | Concluding remarks | Alex Duncan |
| 16:30 | Close |