



Guidance Note:

Adaptive Management

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

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Table of Content:

Preface.....	3
Reading Guidance.....	4
1. The Short Version of Adaptive Management: A Response to the Complexity, Uncertainties and Politics of Development.....	5
2. Key Principles of Adaptive Management	7
2.1 Strategic Level Portfolio Perspective.....	7
2.2 Start Where the Politics, Partners and Partnerships Are	8
2.3 Focus on Tangible Results.....	10
2.4 Explicit Focus on Learning	11
2.5 Recognise Dilemmas.....	12
3. Adaptive Management in the Programme Cycle	13
3.1 Strategic Framework Management.....	13
Context Dynamics and Scenarios	14
Strategic Directions	14
Partners and Alliances	15
Programme Adaptation Approach	16
3.2 Project Programming.....	17
Specific Context & Actors – Everyday Politics and Practicalities.....	17
Theory of Change.....	19
Objectives, Results, Indicators.....	19
Partners and Partnerships	20
Adaptation Approach	21
3.3 Implementation.....	22
Partnership Relations Management.....	23
Monitoring and Learning	24
4 More Help and Guidance.....	28
Annex 1: Adaptive Aid Management – Origins and Perspectives	29
Annex 2: Annotated Bibliography	33

Preface

By Trine Thygesen –

In 2019 and 2020, to increase an already strong performance, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs embarked on a series of adjustments of our development cooperation under the “Doing Development Differently” project, with the two objectives:

- 1) Ensuring larger coherence and synergies between various Danish development aid instruments to reinforce a more holistic approach to Danish development cooperation. The holistic approach also calls for stronger linkages between embassies and headquarter.
- 2) Applying an adaptive approach focusing on results, continuous learning and decision-making, and local ownership in development cooperation.

Influenced by a wealth of good practices, research and emerging international consensus, we will continue to optimize the impact of Danish Development Cooperation by addressing development challenges in a more holistic manner. Recognizing increasing instability and constant changes in countries where we work, we will apply adaptive management approaches to be able to constantly respond to changes and new information. Even in more stable contexts, circumstances changes and may affect our programmes in an unpredictable way. Adaptive management will, however, not be applied across the board. As this note describes, it will be mostly relevant in complicated and complex settings such as fragility or good governance programs.

The guidance is not a stepwise, prescriptive manual. Adaptive management cannot be done by following one-step after another and ticking the boxes. Like in a soccer game, the next pass must be decided based on a snapshot of the actual situation – not by asking the coach or consulting a manual. In addition, like in soccer, a deep understanding of the game, of opponents and teammates, and of your own abilities, will determine what you do in the next moment.

Practising adaptive management is a slower process than playing soccer. There is time to consult, listen, discuss and, most importantly, learn. The purpose of this note is to help in these processes. It is an invitation to think about principles, processes, partners and products - and apply that thinking creatively and flexibly when it is time to make the next move or pass.

The adaptive approach is about fostering a supportive and conducive environment to experimentation and learning, including providing incentives to work adaptively and embrace uncertainty. As reflected in various DAC peer reviews, Denmark already has a solid starting point for applying adaptive management in our development portfolio. The note also provides links to practical entry point in our “Aid Management Guidelines” to reinforce the practical aspects.

Mistakes in development work is not a problem – not learning from them is. And with this in mind, we hope to inspire our partners, staff and the broader development community.

The note was prepared by Evaluation, Learning and Quality Department, Danida, and Nils Boesen a/s, Process & Change Consultancy.

Reading Guidance

This note explains what *adaptive aid management* is; why and when it should be considered; and how it should be applied. The note is intended for Danida staff, country partners and others working with Danish development assistance. It covers all Danish development support channels and modalities, including bilateral country assistance, assistance to and through civil society, the private sector and to and through multilateral organisations.

The guidance note should not be read as a recipe or blue-print manual – bearing the soccer methapor of the preface in mind. The aim is to achieve a good fit and balance between what we want, what we know and what is feasible in the widely different and ever-changing contexts in which we work.

Many of the principles and practices recommended in this guidance are relevant for all aid management. They are included because they are of especially important for adaptive management.

Formal requirements and rules governing Danish aid management are available in Danida's [Aid Management Guidelines](#). These include rules for e.g. approval of changes in approved projects, their objectives, outputs and budgets. This framework of rules allows considerable adaptability.

This guide has three chapters. Chapter 1 provides an executive overview of what adaptive management is. Chapter 2 goes deeper into five key operational principles of adaptive management. Chapter 3 details the main tenets of adaptive management processes during the programming cycle. It starts with strategic portfolio planning, looks at programming of individual projects and finally to their implementation phase.

Annex 1 provides details on the origins of adaptive management, and annex 2 includes reference to further literature.

Suggestions to and questions about this version of the note are warmly welcomed and should be directed to adaptivemanagement@um.dk. The note was prepared by the Evaluation, Learning and Quality Department (ELK) in the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

1. The Short Version of Adaptive Management: A Response to the Complexity, Uncertainties and Politics of Development

Response to complexity and uncertainty: Adaptive aid management is a response to the complexity, uncertainty, politics and risks associated with development and development assistance. It encourages implementing partners to adapt when the context changes or new knowledge of what works becomes available. Adaptive management aims at continuous alignment to evolving learning, enabling seizing opportunities for change. Should conditions or partnerships deteriorate, it enables rapid action to minimize losses and identify alternatives.

Deliberate effort: Adaptive aid management is a deliberate effort, and not a belated correction of poor planning. Adaptive management acknowledges that a “right way” to a goal often cannot and should not be precisely defined up front. Instead, it must be identified based on deliberately identified lessons as implementation unfolds and contexts change.

...is an intentional effort to ensure timely adaptations based on robust evidence

Locally led, politically smart problem-solving: Adaptive management assumes that change is best led from within, embedded in the local context of social, institutional and political factors and actors. While practices from elsewhere may inspire, locally adapted solutions are more likely to last. Managers and staff involved in implementation need to follow and understand “everyday politics” and how risks evolve.

...focuses on tangible results throughout the programme cycle

Goals and result-oriented all the way: Adaptive management has a persistent focus on tangible results throughout the programme cycle. Special focus is on the often-missing middle of concrete outcomes that are expected to materialize between lofty impact goals and the direct outputs from project activities.

Deepen partnerships and collaboration: Adaptive aid management builds on trust and transparency between partners, fostered through longer term collaboration. While partnerships may eventually run out of energy or relevance, adaptive management aims at fostering lasting coalitions for change.

This can often be with multiple partner platforms (public, private, civil society, academia), and with support and collaboration from multiple development agencies.

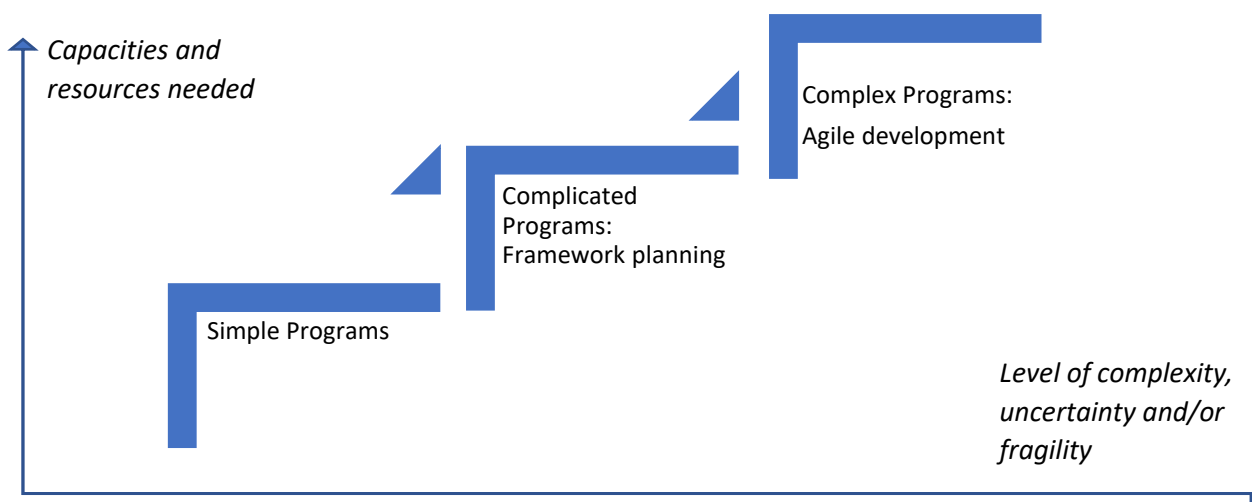
Short feedback loops and learning: Adaptive management includes frequent reflection and learning, and accountability for this learning. The learning is based on systematic monitoring that harvests broad output, outcome and context evidence.

Danida will accompany, nudge, and assist partners and ensure that learning is translated to decisions...

Danida in a nudging role: Since Danida does not implement the development interventions; it is primarily Danida’s cooperation partners that will apply adaptive management. Danida will encourage partners to apply adaptive management whenever relevant and accompany, nudge and assist partners so that learning translates to decisions about the course of a development project.

Several ways, with different resource implications: Danida sees adaptive management as an approach, rather than a specific method. It requires capacities and resources both from partners and Danida – and the more complex and dynamic the setting is, the more resources are required. Figure 1 illustrates three non-exclusive ways of addressing adaptation.

Figure 1: Adaptive Management Approaches and Resource Implications



- *Simple Programs* - “This approach comes closest to traditional ex-ante planning, with full or nearly full specification of the goals, strategy, plans, results and indicators that the engagement will pursue. It is based on assumptions of relative stability and simplicity. It assumes that the programming phase has embedded robust knowledge in the design so that it can, most likely, stand the test of time. Adaptation would be possible but not necessarily expected.
- *Complicated Programs - Framework planning*: Framework planning will have fewer details and rougher budgets, deliberately “under-designing” a project. Budgets, activities, outputs and even intermediate outcomes would be gradually specified over time informed by evidence on actual progress. Adaptation is thus a foreseen and planned process.
- *Complex Programs - “Agile development”*: Mutual understanding of goals, experimental approaches and learning strategies is in focus during programming. Final approaches and outputs/outcomes will be shaped by deliberate, short-cycled innovation and experimentation. Once a testing cycle is successfully completed, upscaling would be based on the best option, and the adaptive approach may well move towards simple programs or framework planning. (“Guidelines for Strategic Framework for Programs and Projects”, p.11)

Acknowledgement of dilemmas: Adaptive management will not work if ambitions, context and resources are poorly aligned. It does not always fit the legal, budgetary and procurement instruments used in international cooperation and in public sector management. If perceived to be driven by Danish concerns it may disenfranchise partners who may well prefer predictable expectations. Partners may not, in their own systems, rapidly modify results, budgets or staffing. Deeper partnerships, closer collaboration and investments in learning and monitoring demand new competencies and significant resources. Acknowledging the dilemmas and applying adaptive aid management selectively is an important part of the collaborative learning culture on which the approach is premised.

Not new ...: The ideas behind adaptive management are not new. Many ideas have been staples in Danish aid management for decades. Over the last decades adaptive management has attracted international attention under headings such as Drivers of Change, Doing Development Differently, Thinking and Working

Politically, and Problem-Driven Iterative Approaches. Annex 1 offers a brief account of the origins of adaptive management, with additional references in Annex 2.

Three Key Questions: Context, theory, capacity...

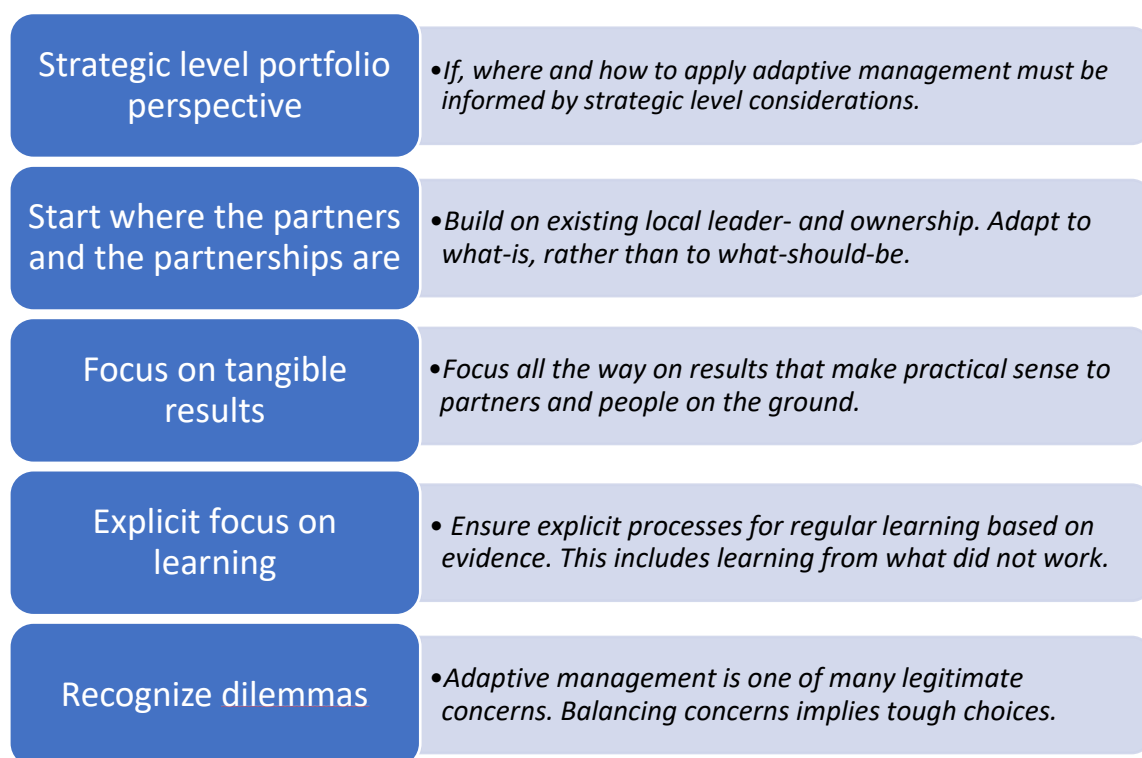
- How complex and uncertain is the context, and how are changes likely to affect the endeavours we aim to support?
- How certain are we and our partners that the theory of change and intervention logic for the programme or project will prove valid, and how sure are we that we will know before it is too late?
- What is the capacity of our partners to manage adaptively, and what is our capacity to support them as needed?

The answers to these questions determine the adaptive management approach that fits best (see figure 1).

2. Key Principles of Adaptive Management

Five operational principles: This section discusses five key operational principles guiding the application of adaptive aid management. It expands on the executive overview in section 1.

Figure 2: Five operational principles of adaptive management



2.1 Strategic Level Portfolio Perspective

Varying opportunities for adaptation: The relevance of adaptive management is shaped by the strategic framework that governs a Danida portfolio or a programme. This can be at country level, through the

country task forces, regionally, thematically, with a multilateral organisation or a group of these¹. The coherence and complementarity of the programme will allow adaptations cutting across individual projects. The degree of adaptability that should be built into the strategic framework and for individual projects depends on:

- *Volatility, complexity and uncertainty* of the social, political and institutional context in the country, around the theme or around the organisation(s). The higher the complexity and inherent risks, the more adaptive management is likely to be relevant at programme level. The more difficult and demanding it will also be. Downscaling ambitions or identifying complementary lower-complexity engagements may be necessary to achieve a portfolio where the sum of risks and challenges matches the capabilities and resources to manage the risks adaptively.
- *Importance and urgency*: Some projects may be critical in a short-term perspective, e.g. in fragile settings or in crises situations where adaptive management is particularly relevant. They may warrant a greater share of adaptive management resources, even if other relevant but less urgent engagements would also benefit.
- *Progress likelihood across the portfolio*. Adaptive management implies readiness to change both speed and focus of implementation processes. This may result in slower disbursement. Ensuring that not all engagements are subject to the same risks of delays is important to maintain an overall flow of implementation in line with commitments made.

Case 1: An Adaptive Country Strategic Framework in Kenya

The Strategic Framework for Danish cooperation with Kenya was approved in Spring 2020 with a deliberate adaptive intention: “The bilateral development cooperation engagements will be designed to use a relatively adaptive and iterative approach for the implementation, both through ensuring as much flexibility as possible to change approaches along the way and by regular reviews of the portfolio. Adaptation will involve portfolio-level adjustments, such as adding/removing engagements, adjusting engagements objectives/outcomes, adjusting budget allocations, and/or adding resources such as technical assistance, reviews, studies, or other as well as overall dialogue with partners. An annual light, overall portfolio review will be undertaken by the Kenya Task Force, led by the Embassy in Nairobi”

Source: Denmark – Kenya, Strategic Framework 2021-2025

2.2 Start Where the Politics, Partners and Partnerships Are

The dynamics of partners and partnerships are key: Danida is funding programmes that are negotiated with partners and where the underlying projects are implemented by partners. These can be individual partners, group of partners or “partners of partners” (e.g. when multilateral organisations or multi-actor platforms with Danish funding delegate implementation to their partners). Understanding the dynamics of partners, partnerships and partner-relations in the context in which they operate has always been at the core of aid management, and is even more crucial in adaptive aid management.²

- *Build on local leadership*: Critical change and reforms cannot be imposed from the outside. It can be supported and nudged by development agencies but must be locally led. Local leadership is crucial

¹ In general, the degree of adaptive management should be considered in the identification phase based on preparatory analyses, see “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects”, chapter 3.

² Cf. considerations regarding choice of implementing partners and modalities of support, “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects”, section 4.2.

to ensure relevance, impact and sustainability of results. The more development cooperation aims at playing a catalytical or even transformative role, the more important is local leadership.

- *Trust based on realism about partners and partnerships:* Starting from where partners and partnerships are means avoiding brazen assumptions about political and managerial commitment and capabilities. Unrealistic assumptions often lead to poor, overoptimistic planning. Or, subsequently, that development partners impose implementation support measures that undermine local leadership rather than nurturing it. Adaptive management builds on knowledge of who partners are, not on who they should ideally be.
- *Partners and partnerships are not free choices:* Selecting partners rarely starts from scratch. The previous history of development cooperation relations matters, as well as broader political

Case 2: Building on local leadership in Nepal – outside the box

The Economic Policy Incubator is a response to chronic deficiencies in Nepal's economic policy processes. It is distinguished by being led by a well-known and widely respected team of senior Nepali economists, and by a smart working method. The method rests on targeting policy problems that are both important and tractable, in the sense that powerful stakeholders or a potential coalition wish to see them resolved; making 'small bets' on a range of such problems; and revisiting strategies and assumptions at regular intervals to revise, scale up or abandon approaches. The team applies a toolkit including brokering, convening and technical assistance. Research evidence is brought to bear in response to problem definition and demand, rather than generated in advance in expectation of policy uptake.

Within a few months of completing its inception phase, EPI contributed to a significant breakthrough in fast-tracking legislation on special economic zones (SEZs). It went on to facilitate important amendments to other Acts critical to the investment climate in Nepal. These results were the product of a learning process that led the team first to abandon an initial 'bet' on improving the bureaucratic procedures for the entry of new businesses and then to discover ways of addressing the political concerns that were holding up the passage of key laws in parliament.

EPI has been able to apply the principles of problem-driven adaptive working or 'development entrepreneurship' in a relatively uncompromising way, among others because of an exemplary approach to reconciling adaptive working with rigorous and transparent reporting to the funder. It has had an approach to programme monitoring and reporting that sets out quantitative indicators of performance against a 'menu' of desirable outcomes and against outputs that constitute the typical steps in an agreed form of problem-driven adaptive practice.

The programme has been extended to 2022, and challenges ahead include:

- staying focused on problems that stakeholders are motivated to solve;
- maintaining a range of tactical options with respect to entry points and coalitions;
- combining high-grade technical advice with formal and informal brokering, convening and persuasion
- resist the pressure to provide increasing amounts of conventional technical assistance

The effectiveness of EPI depends crucially on the team's not being part of the civil service and subject to its rules and informal norms – but still well-connected and fully embedded in the local context.

Booth, D, 2018: Incubating policy for economic transformation Lessons from Nepal. London, ODI

concerns. Development is a long-haul venture, demanding stamina also in difficult times – but partnerships should eventually end if they are without continued relevance and effectiveness.

Adaptive management implies paying close attention to partnerships, giving a strong foundation for decisions on how to invest in them – or, as a last resort, leaving them.

- *Limited partner and Danida capabilities and resources:* The capabilities and resources of partners to implement development projects as well as to build and maintain productive partnership relations are limited. So are Danida's capabilities and resources to gauge context developments, collaborate, supervise and nudge partners and partnerships during preparation and implementation. Adding the demands of adaptive management to partners and Danida may overstretch capacities of both and should be carefully discussed in the partnerships.

2.3 Focus on Tangible Results

Shifting the attention to meaningful results in the implementation phase: Adaptive management shifts the main attention to results from the preparatory to the implementation phase. Upfront agreement on goals, objectives, strategies and expected result areas is primarily a vehicle for partners' follow-up, learning and adaptation during implementation, and not a performance contract between Danida and the partner. Put shortly, the important part is not which results are put on paper, but which results the partners will be able to deliver and achieve with the support of Danida (see also "Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects", chapter 5).

- *Results-focus to improve results:* Adaptive management seeks to avoid that the focus on results and results-matrices only is driven by concerns of compliance and the need for approval by higher level authorities.
- *Get to goals and results from locally relevant problem solving.* Adaptive management looks for feasible locally-led problem solving approaches. These approaches and the associated goals are derived from reflection on past experiences and on actual conditions. They may be enriched by experience from elsewhere, but the local perceptions are the starting point, not a ostensible international best practice. Deliberate experimentation to identify what works or not should be included when relevant.
- *Results that matter.* Common pitfalls in results-based management include identifying distant and broad impact- and outcome-level goals, and outputs at nearly activity level which by themselves are only marginally contributing to the desired outcomes. Pushing impact and outcomes "down" and outputs "up" enable shorter term learning about whether the problem-solving approach work – or whether it should be adapted. See more details in section 3.2.
- *Clarity on goals, clarity on strategy, and emerging clarity on results:* At programme level, goals can conveniently be high-level and e.g. tagged for their contribution to specific Sustainable Development Goals. At project level, impact goals should be more specific to be operationally meaningful. The initial adaptive strategy should be clear – whether it is based on upfront detailed planning with few expected adaptations, or, at the other extreme, a full iterative experimental approach quickly testing alternative pathways (see figure 1). The expected *types* of results and indicators would normally be specified, underpinning and underpinned by the Theory of Change (see section 3.2). The right timing for full specification of targets and indicators depends on the adaptation strategy.
- *Adaptation by design and procedures:* In principle, all levels of agreed results – from impact to direct outputs – may need adaptation or change. This could be because of context changes, gained experiences, or flawed initial design. Adaptation should be by ex-ante approved mechanisms. The higher the results-level to be changed, the higher the authority level approving the change for both partners and Danida. The AMGs contain the relevant procedures for Danish actors.

2.4 Explicit Focus on Learning

Planned and visible learning: Adaptive management implies monitoring with explicit and frequent collection of lessons, asking for operational or strategic implications of the lessons and ensuring swift follow-up.³ Learning moves from something supposed to happen to something planned for, with visible results.

- *Monitoring for the sake of learning and decision-making.* Monitoring must lead to more than reports read by few and acted upon by fewer. Adaptive management includes explicit processes to collect and reflect on lessons. How far towards planned results a programme has moved is of little interest without the accompanying questions of “why?” and “what then?”. Learning from what has not worked is part of the learning focus. *Right-time learning.* Monitoring at project level is a daily task for managers and front-line staff, also when observations are not recorded. Collecting lessons at this level should be part of the management culture and include regular reflection/learning sessions. When and how to involve others or report to them (e.g. Danida staff and other non-

Case 3: The Democratic Governance Facility in Uganda – Adaptation in Progress

The Democratic Governance Facility II (DGF II) is a seven donors joint endeavour covering five years (2018-22), with a budget of approximately 100 million Euro. Building on learnings from the previous phase (2011-18), the development partners have explicitly taken an adaptive management approach, with references to e.g. frequent political economy analyses, problem-driven iterative approaches, being “politically smart” and doing development differently with emphasis on framework planning, experimentation, learning and continuous adaptation, including gradual specification of results within broad outcome-areas.

The DGF supports multiple implementing partners from civil society and government. The support is facilitated by a Facility Management Unit. The FMU is the fund manager and learning manager, but is also expected to deliver technical assistance to partners and stakeholders and acts as a convenor.

At the strategic level, the DGF has proven useful informing the development partners on the wider political development in Uganda and thereby also serving for design and adaptation of other engagements. The DGF also ensures an informed and strategic dialogue between the development partners and the government on critical governance issues, though this feature is less strong as authoritarian traits grow stronger.

Operationally, the change towards a fully adaptive approach has not been without challenges. Lifting the gaze from workplans, budgets and activities to the evolving everyday politics, and adapting to these, is new to many and easily beyond comfort zones and competencies. The FMU and the implementing partners are used to be keenly aware of ‘what the donors want them to do’ – and may approach adaptive management as the latest instruction, rather than assuming the active ownership of change on which it is premised. The reality of widespread corruption also creates delicate balances between the impulses to install rigorous controls, and the need to maintain a space for autonomous adaptations by partners.

An upcoming mid-term review in autumn 2020 will assess how the adaptive approach has played out in practice.

Source: DGF programme document, staff interviews.

managerial stakeholders) should not only be defined by schedule, but also by the needs for adaptation-decisions.

³ See various mechanisms envisaged in “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects”, chapter 5 ranging from recurrent monitoring and dialogue with partners to annual stocktaking and various forms of reviews and evaluations.

- *Right-level learning.* Particularly in the early phases of a project, attention is often concentrated on activities – getting staff on board, procure and contract, set-up offices and procedures etc. The attention easily remains here. Adaptive management requires lifting the sight and looking systematically at evidence about what happens beyond the programmes’ own organisational boundaries, and onwards to the horizon of the futures.
- *Accountability for learning.* Managers and staff in all positions – in the projects, in country or partner authorities, and in Danida – must ask for and document lessons learned.⁴ They should be held accountable for this learning and whether it has been followed up by timely decision-making. Adaptive management requires a broad and active learning-culture, beyond staying tuned to the whims of daily operations.

2.5 Recognise Dilemmas

Dilemmas will not go away: Appropriate adaptive aid management is not the only legitimate concern for Danida and partners. Dilemmas and difficult balancing acts should be openly recognised. Not all interests and concerns can be accommodated. Dilemmas will vary over time and settings, but some fundamentals are likely to be found across programmes and projects.

- *Clash in politically governed systems between different sets of legitimate objectives.* Adaptive management would often proudly insist that “principled muddling through” or “strategic incrementalism” are the best courses, and that muddled and incremental results are the best to aim for. Taxpayers and politicians may wish more unambiguous messages and expect standardized results and expeditiously spent aid funds.
- *Public versus private sector culture:* Adaptive management advocates short and quick decision cycles. It hails space for local decision-making and action, and a short way to expedient high-level management decisions when required. It also promotes innovation practices such as fast-paced proto-typing. It encourages calculated, but sometimes higher risk-taking. For many public sector institutions this is both against formal procedures and basic instincts embedded in decades or centuries of experience. Finding and communicating about the middle-grounds and opportunities is not easy, and culture in institutions does not change by saying it should.
- *Fostering an “authorizing environment” while keeping fiduciary risks low:* In many partner settings petty and grand corruption is a real risk and pervasive part of daily and public life, greasing wheels that may be rusty by design. Different sorts of measures to control and lower fiduciary risks may run counter to the vision of partners being authorized to lead and decide and e.g. modify budgets etc. Finding the middle ground may be difficult and may require extensive dialogue with partners.⁵
- *Resources versus ambitions.* The success of adaptive management rests on people that can understand and act in complex settings where stakes may be high, and where politics and power may trump rules and reason. Adaptive programmes need people, not least locally anchored, with the right soft skills to facilitate, influence and manage relationships with stakeholders. They need empathetic, reflective people who also have the entrepreneurial, risk-taking appetite and drive to seize opportunities and try out new ideas. Such people are in short supply everywhere.

⁴ Cf. the Danida accountability architecture with a strategy for enhancing learning as part of Annual Portfolio Performance Report and SKS dialogue, “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects”, section 5.3.2.

⁵ See recommended Danida approach to prevent anti-corruption, “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects”, section 5.3.3

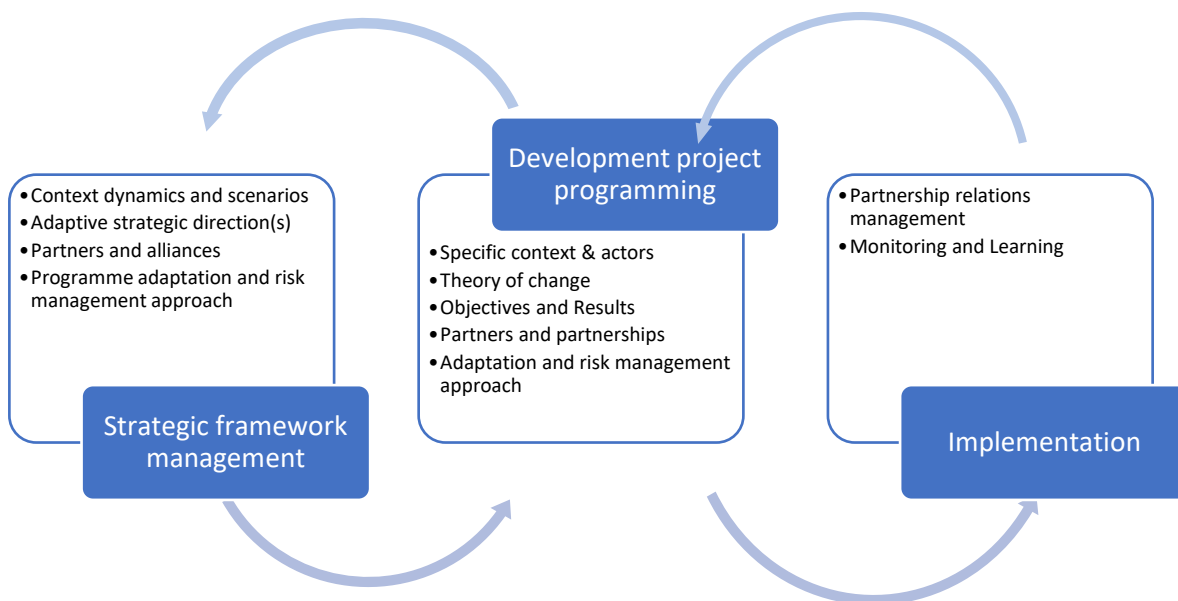
Five Key Questions

- Is the programme robust across projects, can it be adapted to possible future scenarios?
- Are our partners authorized to lead and adapt, are we able to accompany at the right distance?
- Will we and our partners see meaningful results fairly soon, and see if they do not materialize?
- Is there a plan ensuring learning at the right level and time for the right people?
- Have we discussed dilemmas and trade-offs with our partners upfront?

3. Adaptive Management in the Programme Cycle

Operational implications in all stages: Adaptive management has operational implications in all stages of programming and implementation. This is discussed in this section, which expands on the notions and principles discussed in the previous sections. Figure 2 illustrates the three main stages in the Danish aid management life cycle (see also “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects” chapter 3, 4 and 5).

Figure 2: The Adaptive Management Life Cycle - The interplay between adaptive strategic management, adaptive programming and adaptive implementation



3.1 Strategic Framework Management

Consider adaptive management in all strategies: Danida’s strategic framework and programme management takes place at country level, regionally, in relations to themes, organisations (such as major NGOs and multilateral organisations) and clusters of organisations (such as the UN System). Adaptive management principles will have different degrees of relevance depending on the type of support and the partner. The principles are especially important to consider in the following areas:

Context Dynamics and Scenarios

Sudden crises prompt adaptation at strategy level: If broader international cooperation is under pressure, then the likelihood of sudden changes calling for rapid adaptations of Danish aid portfolios may increase. International crises - such as the migrant crisis in 2015 and the Covid-19 crisis starting in 2020 - demonstrate the need for adapting both comprehensively and quickly, across virtually all portfolios. The ability to do so should be built into strategies and agreements so that adaptations can be as smooth as possible, also in crises times.⁶

Trends may reach tipping points: Longer-term trends – e.g. the declining role of some multilateral development agencies and the rise of new development actors, or relative shifts in funding patterns from core to earmarking - may prompt other actors, with whom Denmark often aligns, to install different modalities, calling for adaptations of Danish policies and strategies. This is unlikely to follow the formal calendars of strategic planning and commitment cycles, pointing to the need for including explicit and potentially wide-ranging adaptation mechanisms in all partnerships.

Country-level assessments determine the requisite adaptation approach: At country level, a well-informed assessment of the political, social, institutional, and economic context will shape how firmly choices about the programme composition can and should be made.

Consider scenario analysis and investment portfolio management approaches: Using scenario analysis (and linked scenario planning) may help identifying various future pathways which are similar in likelihood. This would support adopting a more thorough adaptive approach at strategic level, including more intense monitoring and partner dialogue. Principles and practices well known from investment portfolio management – balancing risks and returns, as well as adapting or rebalancing the portfolio regularly – can be applied at the programme management level.

Get to conclusions with operative significance: Context and political analysis must reach explicit operative conclusions about the appropriate level of adaptive management at programme level that Danida and partners will aim at.

Strategic Directions

Strategic directions set the course, but not the route and speed: Denmark has its own value- and interest-based priorities when it comes to the higher-level goals for development cooperation with countries/regions, with organisations or systems of organisations, or on themes. The goals may link to aspects of Sustainable Development Goals and also link to Danish interests beyond the development cooperation sphere. These priorities define the top level of programme results (impact level). The strategic directions derived from the top level would also help the identification of second level results. This would typically be outcome effects for citizens using new or expanded services or acting in more strongly enabling environments, e.g. better health resulting from better water supply, or more start-ups resulting from greater ease of doing business. It is not necessarily possible or convenient to detail how far and fast it will be possible to move, or what the best route to the goals at these levels may be, when strategies are condensed into documents and approved.

Setting targets up-front has drawbacks: Traditional results-based management would imply setting targets (and indicators) at the impact and strategy levels also under uncertainty and volatility. Arguably, setting targets improve dedication and transparency since failure to achieve targets would be measurable. Learning would also in principle be more specific: what was faulty in the context analysis and/or design at

⁶ To consider in the formulation phase, “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects”, section 4.2.

strategic level since targets were not achieved? On the other hand, pre-defined “hard” targets at the highest level may overlook that Danish aid is only contributing to outcomes and impact, and often as a minor contribution. Targets frozen in an approved document may also invite “teaching to the test”, pretension, sloppy reporting or avoidance behaviour, and monitoring starting from the document rather than from what happened. Defining results may be a result of compliance rather than serious dialogue internally or with partners.

The litmus test on strategies is whether they are used: The most important indicator that a strategy is actually a strategy is that managers at all levels use them to guide daily operations and adaptations, and to discuss lessons learned and ways forward, including through modifications of the strategies. If strategies are shelved once written and approved, they are unlikely to contribute to qualified adaptive management.

Partners and Alliances

Adaptiveness depends on partnerships and alliances: Denmark is a small donor in what is often a crowded field. The result of our work is therefore often dependent on our ability and willingness to enter into strategic partnerships (as we do with e.g. multilateral organisations and governments in partner countries) and alliances with other development partners (which we may join to influence multilateral organisations or developments at country/sector level). The degree of feasible and desirable adaptiveness of our strategic frameworks will therefore also depend on the nature and strength of partnerships and alliances, and on our investment of resources in these.⁷

Adaptive management is already on the agenda of multilaterals: Several multilateral organisations are also working with the concept adaptability. The ongoing discussion of changes in the EU’s external action set-up aims at making development cooperation holistic, adaptable and strategy- rather than instrument-driven (see Case 4 below). UN organisations and IFIs are adopting innovation approaches, forming accelerator labs and experimenting, among others with support from Denmark. Denmark can keep the issue of adaptive management on the table in multi-actor partnerships, forums, and alliances, joining forces with those bilateral agencies that have spearheaded experimentation with adaptive approaches. Joint reflection on opportunities for and challenges to appropriate adaptive aid management should be raised in EU Joint Programming forums and other joint forums in countries, and, as relevant, in partnerships formed for governing bodies of multilateral institutions.

Earmarked contributions offer opportunities to consider adaptive management: When Denmark channels earmarked funds to or through multilateral organisations, or when Danish representatives assume responsibilities for funds delegated from other donors (e.g. the European Commission), there should be a full assessment of the opportunities for and relevance of adaptive management of the engagements, not least focusing on opportunities for joint monitoring and learning. Consistently bringing this perspective into the substantive dialogue around joint engagements with multilateral partners will signal that Denmark is serious about exploring adaptive aid management. Getting the specific experiences on the ground to the negotiations in governing bodies and with the organisations at headquarters level is likely to be the most effective way of influencing the broader performance of the multilateral partners.

⁷ To be considered in the project/programme management set-up, “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects”, section 5.2.2.

Already in 2016 the Commission's report to the Parliament and the Council on external action asked for greater adaptability: "Greater flexibility in the use of aid delivery approaches and procedures is needed to adapt to changing environments. One size does not fit all contexts. The intervention approach must vary to reflect the diversity between and within regions. Whilst budget support is an important aid modality in EU cooperation, a mix of delivery methods can also be needed to better respond to differentiated and specific needs of each context ...EU cooperation needs the mechanisms to be able to adjust to changes on the ground more rapidly. This is particularly true for fragile states and/or rapidly changing political and socio-economic contexts..... "

This agenda is being pursued in the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) which should also offer opportunities for shaping more coherent and adaptive EU responses at country level.

Source: 2016 Annual Report on the implementation of the European Union's instruments for financing external actions in 2015

Programme Adaptation Approach

Adaptation options must be built into legal agreements: Context, strategic directions, partnerships and alliances are key factors when deciding the level of appropriate adaptation at programme level. Bilateral agreements with a partner country may allow wider scope for adaptations of timeframes, budgets, strategic directions and engagement (see "Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects" section 5.2.1). Core contributions to multilateral organisations are by definition handled by the organisations, and not by Denmark. However, there should still be adaptation options build into the commitments made for core contributions, allowing e.g. adjustment of funding levels in the last years of the commitment period, eventually also subject to the achievement of specific performance indicators.

Adaptation options is a major part of the risk management approach: Looking beyond core funding to multilaterals, the specific adaptation modalities and decision-making mechanisms at programme level include⁸:

- how strategic directions and possible targets/indicators at this level can be modified,
- how new projects can be added, and others terminated,
- how unallocated and contingency funds are governed at programme or project level,
- how funds can be shifted between and within projects,
- how new partners are taken on board or old partnerships ended, and
- how impact, outcome and output targets can be changed at project level.

These adaptation modalities, together with the programme level monitoring and learning plans, is a major part of the risk management approach at programme level. It may be supplemented by processes for managing fiduciary and other risks at programme level.

Learning at programme level looks at wider context and coherence: Monitoring and learning at programme level is providing the evidence and reflection that enables purposeful adaptation of the programme. While building on monitoring and learning at project level, it will add crosscutting attention to wider context and systemic factors that may affect, positively or negatively, the relevance of the entire programme. It will also consider the coherence and synergies between projects.

⁸ See also recommendations and formal requirements for adjusting projects and programmes, "Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects", section 5.4.

Adaptive programme risk management is a key performance goal for Danida: The strategic framework should describe the adaptation and risk management approach, and the monitoring and learning activities underpinning the risk management. This approach and these activities would be part of the performance goals for Danida – the results measuring how well Danida is doing its job. Accountability for adaptability and learning should be explicit and verifiable, and the focus on lessons learned, and possible programme adaptations, will be at the centre of the supervision duties of the higher-level authorities of Danida that supervise programme managers.⁹

3.2 Project Programming

The guidance below is additional: Danida's Aid Management Guidelines (AMG) with annexes specify the analytical and procedural requirements for identification and programming of Danish supported development projects (see <https://amg.um.dk/en/programmes-and-projects/january-2018-guidelines-for-programmes-and-projects/>). The guidance below is additional and focuses on adaptive aid management. It does not replace the AMG. It is assumed that partners are fully involved in the formulation process, also if Danida manages the preparation of documents needed in the Danish appropriation process. The guidance is therefore aimed at both Danida staff and partners.

Specific Context & Actors – Everyday Politics and Practicalities

Simple, complicated or complex setting: The context analysis provides specific background that justifies the chosen level of and approach to adaptation. It should conclude on likely scenarios in which the project will unfold, assessing whether the context is likely to remain relatively stable or not. It should also gauge whether the forces and actors at play are likely to be:

- *Relatively simple and likely to be stable.* This would indicate that a project would not need extensive adaptive features. Do note that assumptions about simplicity often turn out to be wrong in development cooperation contexts, especially if the desired project objectives implies reform or more transformative change.
- *Complicated.* This means that there are many factors, actors and issues, but that most of them are likely to be predictable. Still, it may be difficult to foresee likely pathways, and a more thorough adaptive approach may be called for.
- *Complex.* In complex situations, there are various stakeholders that shape their actions based on what other stakeholders do, and/or change in factors that trigger unpredictable responses from others. Complex situations are inherently dynamic in unpredictable ways, and always call for an adaptive approach.

Other labels than those suggested above (simple, complicated, complex) may be used. The context analysis should also assess the likelihood of possible different scenarios, and the robustness of the context analysis itself.

Getting politics, institutions and social fabric right: The political, institutional and social analyses are likely to be the most important, since the complexity and volatility levels of the situation would tend to be gauged based on these analyses. That does not necessarily call for comprehensive ex-ante analysis, and much less for long descriptions. Looking at historical experiences and triangulating recent assessments of key informants may be sufficient to design the adaptability of the project.

⁹ As reflected in the Danida accountability architecture, "Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects", section 5.3.2.

Keeping the balance between naivety and cynicism: Key challenges when analysing and understanding the power and political issues at operational level (“everyday politics”) include understanding the balance of formal and informal interest and power resources of the concrete actors at play. It also includes balancing the day-to-day picture of moving actors and apparent opportunities in a specific area with the bigger structural drivers of and constraints to development. Finding the equilibrium between conjunctural optimism and structural pessimism is notoriously difficult. New leaders promising fresh air; popular revolts demanding freedom and democracy; a middle class apparently growing stronger; or mobile payment systems spreading may lead to excessive optimism. Conversely, deep-seated patrimonial power systems linked to limited market economy penetration in e.g. agricultural supply/commodity chains and land property regimes; and coercive state-citizen relations with civil bargaining power vis-à-vis elites fractured and suppressed may lead to permanent pessimism, even if progress also happens despite the odds.

Case 5: Working with the Grain: Enhancing Accountability of Gatekeepers in Somalia

Since the mid-1990s, self-established gatekeepers have emerged within the internal displacement crisis in Mogadishu, Somalia. They have controlled access to Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) settlements in Mogadishu and have provided services, security and shelter. In return, they receive payment in obscure and unaccountable manners, having earned the nickname from locals as “black cats” for what has been seen as exploitative and sometimes oppressive functions.

The DFID-funded Implementation and Analysis in Action of Accountability Programme (IAAAP) sought to identify driving factors that could enhance the accountability of the gatekeepers, both upwards to the government and downwards to the IDPs. The gatekeepers had been considered impossible to engage with without compromising the authority of the state and the security of the IDPs. This assessment has been challenged through the programme, which has sought to improve the accountability of gatekeepers through training of selected gatekeepers, increased transparency, and a formal certification process recognising settlements (and gatekeepers) that are making efforts to adhere to the rights and protection needs of IDPs. At the same time, the project team engaged in action research, joint learning and reflection as integral part of implementation, and adapted the programme approach along the way.

The programme embraced the idea of a “hybrid political order” as a realistic alternative, whereby formal and informal – or Western and traditional – power structures merge and create a more effective and more legitimate order than either can do on their own.

Experience so far shows that creating real change through an engagement with local power structures is possible, but not an easy or fast exercise. It must be based on a thorough understanding of the specific political economy, on realistic expectations, and on a pragmatic approach, all of which should be reflected in the project design. Changing and formalising informal power structures cannot be pursued without full acceptance and buy-in from the formal power structures. The goal is a truly hybrid order in which both parts are convinced, hard as it is, that they can coexist and in fact complement each other.

Source: TANA Consultants, Copenhagen.

Be aware of normative bias and own agendas everywhere: Adaptive management requires that Danida staff and partners ask the right questions about the context, and that they do not accept superficial or normatively biased answers. Those having the possible answers are likely to be stakeholders fully embedded in the local context, as politicians, civil servants, researchers, media professionals, activists. They will have their agendas and biases too – adding to the challenge of working sensibly with power and politics at all levels.

Theory of Change

Focus on the broader dynamics: In an adaptive approach, the focus of the Theory of Change is less on what Danida (or other development partners) will contribute to, and more on describing the broader dynamics and causal interplays that are expected to lead to positive change. This is consistent with the focus on local leadership and local context dynamics inherent in adaptive aid management. The focus of the Theory of Change is thus not only or mainly on the contribution that Danida will make, but on the story of the combined efforts of the partner, Danida and other actors, in the wider context that these combined efforts take place in.

More than a Logical Framework Matrix: The Theory of Change is thus not “just” the narrative accompanying an action framework that Danida supports (such as the Logical Framework Approach or a results matrix). It is a convincing theory and story of why it is possible to achieve changes (effects) desired by those involved and in charge, and the likely key factors of relative success or failure – including a reflection of the likely support to and resistance to the desired pathway of change. Additionally, but as the last element, the Theory of Change will explain the role of Danish and other support in this wider picture, including the risks for the entire process and for the Danish assistance. The Theory of Change transforms the insights from the context analysis to a prediction – more or less certain – about the endogenous change process, and the support to this process by e.g. Danida.

A comprehensive description: A Theory of Change is essentially a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. It is focused in particular on mapping out or “filling in” what has been described as the “missing middle” between what a program or change initiative does (its activities or interventions) and how these lead to desired goals being achieved. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then works back from these to identify all the conditions (outcomes) that must be in place (and how these related to one another causally) for the goals to occur.

Through this approach the precise link between activities and the achievement of the long-term goals are more fully understood, including the complexity and uncertainty related to the Theory. This leads to better linking of activities to the achievement of longer-term goals that goes beyond the identification of project outputs.¹⁰

Objectives, Results, Indicators

Appropriate results frameworks must be identified during preparation. It is part of the preparation of projects that result frameworks and indicators are identified at all levels, in close collaboration with and preferably lead by the partners. How specific and detailed they are identified depends on the adaptive approach most suitable. Projects may be “over-” or “under-programmed” no matter which degree of adaptability that is sought, and there is no simple checklist that can answer whether the appropriate level of detail has been found. The results framework is likely to be appropriate when all results-elements make practical sense – e.g. they are tangible, understandable, relevant and they make managerial sense. As important, they should cover the “missing middle” referred to above, so that immediate outcomes will materialize in a relatively short time.¹¹

Detail the process for specification if it is not done upfront: Adaptation options can in some cases conveniently be kept open by defining (types of) results (e.g. access to reproductive health services, leading

¹⁰ For more details on the place of theory of change in the Danida MEAL system see “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects”, section 5.3.2.

¹¹ To be considered in the formulation phase, “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects”, chapter 4.

to lower maternal mortality and/or infant mortality, or to a lower birth rate) but keeping targets or indicators undefined during programming (which exact mix of services to be provided, and the effects of these on e.g. mortality and/or birth rate) – and then adding detail later as experience or experimentation allow for this. In this case the process for later specification should both be detailed and justified. Alternatively, results, targets and indicators can be specified upfront – in which case there should be a clear description of how to modify them and under whose authority. While changes in higher level outcomes and impact targets should be possible, it would require authorisation from highest level officials to move away from agreed intervention areas such as sexual and reproductive health rights or climate change mitigation. The AMG includes an overview of the procedures in Danida.

Who owns the results?: Adaptive management stresses the ownership to the results by the local partners that will lead implementation. This ownership implies among other that the results – including outcomes – are perceived as locally relevant problem solving. Perceptions of problems vary among stakeholders, and often between domestic and external actors. They also vary over time – a major problem of today may be perceived as secondary tomorrow. A project is likely to be doomed if partners lose interest in and ownership of the agreed results.

Filling the missing middle: Impact- and outcome-level results may often be quite abstract (e.g. “increased income from agriculture”, or, as outcome, “effective application of sustainable agricultural practices by farmers”). Then outputs may be identified at nearly activity level, or even phrased as “completed activities” (e.g. “farmers visited by extension workers”) which may have left no lasting trace anywhere and which by themselves are therefore not contributing to the desired outcomes (note that such “activity-counting” that disregards the effect of the activity is common practice all over the world, including in Denmark). Pushing impact and outcomes “down” (e.g. “uptake of drip irrigation techniques”) and activities and outputs “up” (e.g. “more farmers demand extension visits about drip irrigation”) enable shorter term learning about whether the problem-solving approach work – or whether it should be adapted. An often-productive way to close the gap between outputs and outcomes is to look for outputs at the level of the *actual effective use of a service provided* by e.g. the public or a private provider and to look for outcomes as the *effect of this use for the citizen/target group* (immediate outcome): Training/education/teaching should thus at least have learning (skills, knowledge, attitudes relevant for drip irrigation) as output – and not “just” that farmers participated in an event, and application of this knowledge (e.g. correct application of drip irrigation) as immediate outcome. Both output and outcome would be measurable within a relative short period of time.

Partners and Partnerships

Ownership is the most critical partnership factor: In the programming phase, sufficient ownership of the right partners to the project eventually agreed upon is critical. Ownership includes:

- commitment for the long haul,
- enthusiasm for the strategy and expected results
- visible prioritization vis-à-vis other options,
- investment of political capital for domestic audiences,
- power, capacity and leadership resources.

Stimulating and assessing ownership is the most difficult aspect: Gauging and stimulating the partners’ ownership in the programming phase while safeguarding legitimate Danish and technical concerns is the single most difficult aspect of adaptive (and non-adaptive, for that matter) programming. The dialogue in the programming phase is easily driven by Danida’s timetables and needs rather than the partners’, and facilitation and analytical resources are most often contracted by Danida. Dialogue may easily become a

negotiation about terms and conditions on size and distribution of budgets; on management, governance and timetables - rather than a joint exploration of opportunities to produce measurable effects for citizens.

Adaptive management does not mean avoiding conflicts: The promise of adaptive management during implementation may help creating space for the legitimate concerns about the uncertainties and complexities ahead that all involved in the programming phase may have. However, adaptive management should not be adopted to postpone solving conflicts that will, left buried, risk jeopardize the achievement of results later. Creating a space that enables addressing disagreements and conflicts appropriately is important for good adaptive programming.

Partner commitment to adaptive management is not a given: In theory, adaptive management sounds nearly as a self-evidently sensible proposal. In practice, it is not. Despite many years of discourse about local ownership, participation and genuine partnerships, partners may well have experiences with development partners where the partners' concerns or views are overruled by donors' appetite for control and belief in own expertise. Adaptive management may be perceived as "another thing donors want us to do", and it may be poorly suited to existing planning and budgeting procedures. It is therefore important that time and resources are reserved to have the necessary dialogue with partners about whether and how adaptive management can be introduced so that it is a benefit, and not a hassle.

Adaptation Approach

Three non-exclusive variants of adaptive management: The programming phase should explicitly identify and agree on the basic approach to adaptive management to be pursued in the project. This guidance note has outlined three main variants, and argued that they can be combined.¹² The three approaches are:

- *Simple programs.*¹³: This approach comes closest to traditional ex-ante planning, with full or nearly full specification of the goals, strategy, plans, results and indicators that the engagement will pursue. It would also seek to identify risks upfront. It is based on assumptions of relative stability and simplicity. It assumes that the programming phase has embedded robust knowledge in the design so that it can, most likely, stand the test of time. Adaptation would be possible but not necessarily expected. Procedures for adaptation – monitoring, preparation of change proposals and approval of these – would be described in full detail. The approach is akin to traditional approaches to contract management in e.g. construction, where ostensibly full specifications are prepared in tender documents and bids, and the variation claims negotiated during implementation as they arrive¹³.
- *Framework planning:* Framework planning will have fewer details and rougher budgets, including contingency or only loosely assigned funds that will be gradually specified and adjusted over time informed by evidence on actual progress. Adaptation is thus a foreseen and planned process, while still seeking to move within a direction with some level of specification. It can be compared to walking in a direction following a not fully calibrated compass, but without a clear or detailed map for the journey.
- *"Agile development":* With this approach, collaboration and interactions are in focus during programming, with less or little emphasis on preparing a detailed plan. Mutual understanding of goals, experimental approaches and learning strategies is important. Yet, the final results will be shaped by deliberate, short-cycled innovation and development approaches such as proto-typing

¹² To be considered from the identification phase based on preparatory analyses, see "Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects", chapter 3.

¹³ In complex construction endeavours it is becoming normal to adopt "collaborative contract management" which incentivize contractor and builder advisers to adopt collaborative approaches, sharing risks and avoiding protracted "claim wars".

or approaches akin to agile software development¹⁴ which will gradually develop, test, revise and rebuild elements in working modules rather than waiting to construct the big system. This is akin to starting the travel recognising that the compass is poorly calibrated initially and that there is no clear direction to the goal, and then test various paths before choosing which one appears most promising. Noteworthy, once a testing cycle is completed, upscaling would be based on the best option, and the adaptive approach may well move fully or partially towards simple programs or framework planning.

Good enough fit, no best practice: There is no best practice among the three approaches outlined above – that depends on the type of goals and projects, the context and the actors. More unknowns and more volatility will point towards the more explicitly adaptive approaches. Investment projects - roads, bridges, water supply – will, at a certain point, be locked to specific solutions, also if flexible contract management approaches are applied.

3.3 Implementation

A long chain of implementation roles: Implementation or execution of Danish supported projects is governed by agreements that will specify the role of the grant signatories, including Danida and e.g. a partner government, an NGO or a multilateral organisation. The ultimate owners of the engagement are central or local government entities, civil society organisations, or semi-autonomous public entities (universities, research centres) in partner countries, or regional organisations. Intermediary implementation roles may be performed by contracted private sector entities (consultancy companies, contractors, technical assistance), national or international civil society organisations or multilateral organisations. Figure 4 illustrates the chain of possible implementing partnerships and relations that adaptive management will relate to (see “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects chapter 5).

Partnerships and learning in focus during implementation: The multiple implementation roles indicate the potential complexity of managing the partnership relations of development interventions. It is also difficult to make information and learning flow between the different levels and the actors at different levels. Partnership relations management as well as monitoring and learning are the core elements of adaptive management in the implementation phase.

Figure 4: Governors, Intermediaries and Engagement Owners

¹⁴ See www.agilemanifesto.org



Partnership Relations Management

The formal roles of partners...: The partnership relations are described in the project documentation and therefore formally agreed upon before approval. The documents would describe who performs which tasks, who should report to whom and when, who has which authorities, rights, and obligations.¹⁵

..and the messy realities: How the partnership relations develop may be a different matter. Governors may well be perceived to be exercising a steering role that enters the domain of management and undermines local leadership. Intermediaries may be perceived to be the extended arm of the funding agency by the project owners. Governors may feel excluded because they perceive that intermediaries act as gatekeepers of information and exchanges with the engagement owners. In any such system that mixes hierarchy and autonomy information will be filtered and tailored. Actors have different concerns, interests and resources to invest. Personal and informal relations – shaped by levels of trust, shared world perspectives, empathy and history – are likely to matter more than the formal stipulations of the project documents.

Three aims of relations management: Therefore, partnership relations management – akin to customer relation and investor relation management in the corporate world – is the key determinant for successful adaptive aid management at engagement level. It should combine three aims that are not easily reconcilable:

- Firstly, that the local engagement owners (and in some cases locally embedded intermediaries such as a think-tank acting with a mandate from local owners) can lead in an authorising environment that encourages them to experiment, learn and adapt.
- Secondly, that Danida – or intermediaries authorised to act on Danida’s behalf – can nudge, and if necessary, facilitate the local problem-solving and learning while avoiding undermining leader- and ownership.
- And, thirdly, that Danida (and other governors) are sufficiently and relevantly informed about implementation and learning results (and spending levels...) so that they can adopt corrective measures if things go wrong. They must also be able to manage the entire programme and report to their organisational and political constituencies, including communicating “stories” of interest to constituencies.

¹⁵ See formal requirements and recommendations regarding agreements, management set-up and partners dialogue, “Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects”, chapter 5.

Many different approaches tried and abandoned: This difficult balancing act between relative autonomy, accompaniment, steering and control involving various sovereign entities is not new, and many different approaches to it have been tried (and abandoned again) in the history of development cooperation (from donor-executed projects to nominally domestic poverty reduction strategies; to general or sector budget support and often unspecified models of “partnerships”). Pursuing adaptive management will again focus attention to the challenges and dilemmas of relations management between partners and in multi-actor partnerships. Being open about the dilemmas and enabling a joint reflection about how best to establish and maintain productive relations is the best promise for adaptive management practices. Pretensions about all being equal and all having the same interest in a common good are unlikely be helpful beyond occasional celebratory speeches.

Case 6: Using Monitoring & Evaluation Consultants to Enhance Capacity

Several Danish embassies have contracted consultants to perform monitoring, evaluation and learning facilitation functions in relation to engagements. A recent assessment of these efforts concluded among others:

- M&E consultancies are generally seen as a second-best solution in a situation where the embassies themselves do not have the staff needed. The contracts are generally not seen as providing satisfactory value for money in spite of very heavy inputs of time and effort by the embassies to manage them.
- Signing an M&E contract shifts part of the work load related to M&E from the embassy’s desk officers to its management team. Thereby, the time and attention available at this level becomes the single most critical factor on the side of the embassy in determining the performance and effectiveness of the contract and more generally the quality of the embassy’s M&E.
- To reduce the likely bottleneck implied in this, mainly two elements are essential: The working relationship with the consultancy company and team leader - which the embassy has very limited possibility of dealing with proactively - and the level of complexity/simplicity of the ToR – which the embassy is the one to determine. The simpler, the better for all parties involved.
- Regardless of the level of simplicity or complexity, specifying and distinguishing the tasks required from the consultants and the roles of these in respect of each of the tasks will facilitate the work of everybody and reduce the burden of management. Clarity is paramount. Even so, however, active and persistent briefing, discussion, clarification, and explanation with regard to all parties is needed: The embassy staff, the consultants, the partners, possible technical advisers in the DEs and implementing companies, possibly relevant government representatives. Close monitoring of the M&E team is equally a must.

Danida, 2019: M&E consultancy contracts – note on lessons learnt

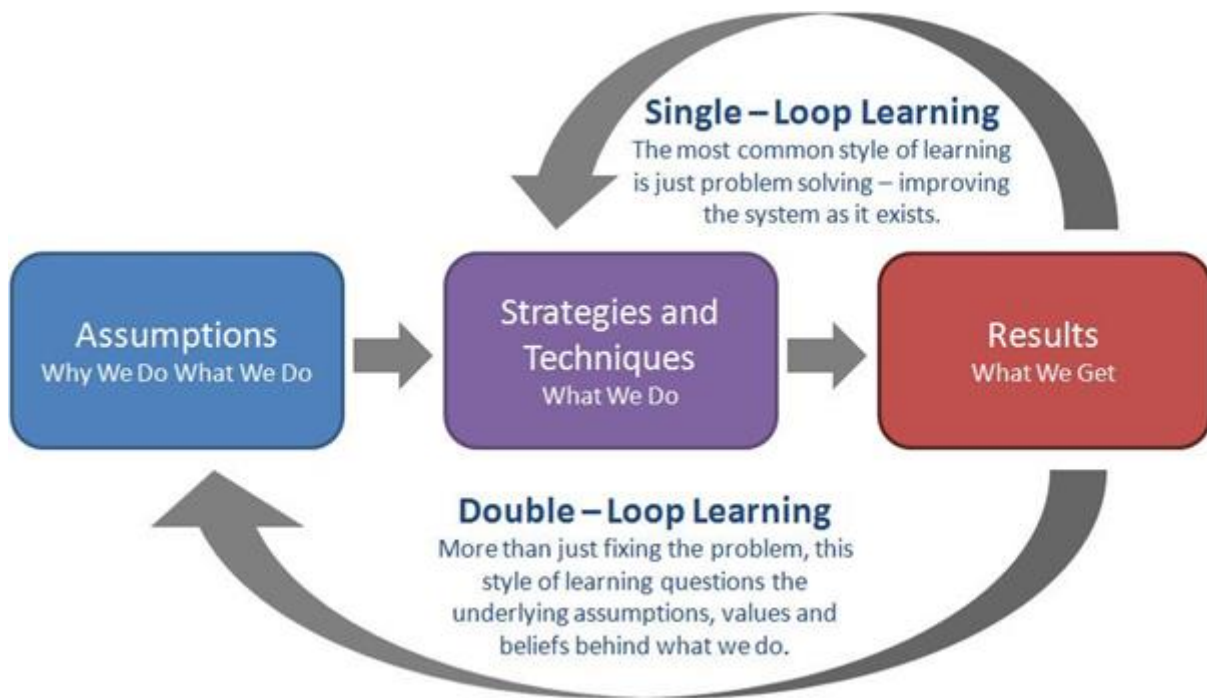
Monitoring and Learning

Beyond monitoring as an activity: Monitoring is an activity, by itself leading nowhere. It may result in “tick-the-box”-action – monitoring done, monitoring report read, no red flags observed, no action taken, case closed. A pig does not get fatter by being weighed.

Beyond monitoring as compliance: Adaptive management breaks with a compliance approach to monitoring by insisting that the output of monitoring will be that stakeholders are aware of the evidence (by reading or through participation in an event), and that the immediate outcome of gathering evidence must be the learning of the stakeholders (as a result of some explicit, and most conveniently joint, learning process), with the wider outcome that the future course of actions is adapted as necessary, based on the learning results.

Beyond casual learning: The concept of double-loop learning, illustrated in figure 5 below, applies to adaptive management practices. It expands the single-loop cycle of acting-adjusting-acting by adding systematic reflection and interpretation that looks beyond the immediate course of events and questions context variables, assumptions (including basic assumptions), theories, such as the theory of change phrased for a development engagement, and e.g. partner relations as discussed above.

Figure 5: Double loop learning for adaptive management



Key points to consider for learning-focused monitoring are summarised below.

- *Harvest evidence beyond what you are looking for.* While traditional logical framework approaches will focus on monitoring what is planned for – planned activities, outputs, outcomes, identified assumptions and risk – the learning oriented approach will look more broadly at the Theory of Change and beyond what the project has done in more narrow terms (and, in particular, beyond the part of the endeavour which is funded by Danida). It will do that horizontally – looking to harvest evidence of other relevant activities, outputs, outcomes, context, stakeholder and risk developments – and vertically, looking for correlations and possible causal effects, as much from those factors outside the boundaries of the project as from those within. In particular, the learning approach to monitoring will as quickly as possible try to identify immediate effects for citizens or beneficiaries: if an output is that 200 traditional midwives know how to use an app on the mobile phone to guide them in their work, the project owners would immediately look for evidence of effects for women giving birth, drawing on other information and systematic causal inference to link these to the training, which might include contribution analysis, process tracing or a comparison group if appropriate.
- *Aim at right-time learning.* The key monitoring and learning responsibilities are with the project owners and possible intermediaries. It should be built as largely continuous processes integrated in

management, aiming at producing relevant learning at the right time (as opposed to strictly real time). The role of governors as Danida would be to ensure that learning take place and is fed into decision-making. Danida's own legitimate needs for learning and monitoring should build on the day-to-day activities of executing partners, and not replacing it. Mid-term reviews should be seen in this light and focus on "monitoring the monitoring and learning".

- *Plan explicit learning processes, collect lessons.* The learning approach to monitoring is not new in theory, but it demands a break with most current practices where monitoring results in reports and may come at times where stakeholders are unable to distil the learning and act on it. Learning processes should be planned and documented.¹⁶ They need not imply long workshops. Reflection exchanges among a group of stakeholders for a couple of hours or so may, with practice, be

Case 6: Seizing the Opportunity – Scaling up Human Rights Education in Myanmar

Throughout the protracted military rule in Myanmar education on Human Rights was prohibited. After the 2015 elections that brought in a civilian – military power sharing government, it became possible. Since 2017, Denmark has supported the introduction of Human Rights Education in two law departments in Myanmar.

Up to the mid-term review in 2019, advisors supporting the university partners noted that progress has been faster than expected. Other components in the rule of law and human rights programme had not advanced as foreseen, so there were also additional funds available. Based on positive experiences from the human rights education programme, the university partners approached the national Board of Legal Studies suggesting that the human rights law curriculum be strengthened and further contextualised to Myanmar for enhancing teaching of law students across 23 law departments in the country. The mid-term review endorsed the upscaling.

Human Rights Law is now a compulsory course for all law students in Myanmar, and annually more than 4000 law graduates are trained in international human rights law.

The original programme document did not mention adaptive management, or that upscaling was the goal after a pilot phase. But so the story unfolded anyway, based on the evidence.

Source: Interview with programme advisor

sufficient to identify whether there are lessons demanding more systematic scrutiny and more comprehensive adaptive decisions.

- *Incentivize learning, be demanding, and follow-up.* Installing a learning culture requires not only a commitment in principle, but specific actions where managers and leaders move away from asking staff or partners only about what they have done and achieved, but also what they have learned and what the implications of this learning would be. It is the task of the governors of development engagements – and those higher in the hierarchies – to install this culture, leading by example and ensuring feed-back and prompt decision-making when warranted.

The opportunity for adaptive aid management is shaped at strategic level and made operational in the programming phase of development engagements. It is performed in the implementation phase with focus on partnerships and learning from evidence. It is not the new panacea that will respond to all well-known challenges of development and development cooperation – both because it is not new and because it is not a standard solution for all seasons. It is full of limitations and dilemmas and invites everybody to think

¹⁶ Cf recommended planning of specific learning events, "Guidelines for Country Strategic Frameworks, Programmes & Projects", section 5.3.1.

harder and better about what may work or not, and to talk more openly about it with partners, colleagues and managers.

That is maybe a humble ambition, but humility and a corresponding willingness to learn and adapt are appropriate starting points when it comes to development and development cooperation.

4 More Help and Guidance

Annex 1 and 2 below details the origins of adaptive aid management and offer a selected, annotated bibliography.

The Learning and Quality Department is eager engage in dialogue with colleagues that have questions or operational challenges on which they want sparring. Enquiries and suggestions are warmly welcomed at adaptivemanagement@um.dk.

Annex 1: Adaptive Aid Management – Origins and Perspectives

This annex offers a brief account of the origins of adaptive management: why it has spurred broad interest, and where it is coming from. It also highlights some of the challenges ahead for the broader adoption of the approach. In annex 2, an annotated bibliography includes key texts that further detail what adaptive management is.

Adaptive aid management is a response to the perceived disappointing results of international development cooperation. Aid has had a much less transformative impact than often claimed or hoped for.

These shortcomings of aid have been recognised since the 80-ies, but the analysis of the causes for this has changed. Initially, development assistance was modelled over the thinking behind the Marshall reconstruction aid to Europe after World War II – capital and technology would allow Europeans to get their economies back on feet. That worked quite well, Europe had the required institutions and capabilities to make good of the assistance.

In the same vein, early development assistance focused on capital investments in the form of projects, with associated “technology transfer” mediated by expert advisors. This worked quite well in some countries in Asia, but not in e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa, where neither supply chains, markets or institutions were able to foster conducive environments for fast-tracking industrialisation or welfare services.

The project modality – and the development engineering mindset behind it – came under fire. The focus shifted to the importance of policies, famously in the period of structural adjustment policies that sought to address steadily increasing fiscal deficits and mounting debts. But structural adjustment policies were often imposed from the outside with little sensitivity to the local political context and situation. Politics – as opposed to policies developed by technocrats that thought they knew better – remained in the dark, also because politics were squarely beyond the mandate of the International Financial Institutions.

In the same period, practitioners and researchers showed increasing interests in more flexible and participative approaches, leaning on mainstream political science approaches that questioned the self-image of Western societies as driven by rational deliberation, sound planning, adherence to rules and universal norms for good governance.¹⁷

In the last decade up to the new millennium, the shortcomings of projects and attempts to impose economic policies led to the move towards sector-wide approaches and later general budget support. The assumption was that if partner countries (with a little help from donors...) developed more comprehensive policies, strategies and plans for sectors and, famously, for Poverty Reduction, then the fragmentation caused by multiple projects and partners could be overcome, and international support could be closely aligned to the national efforts and institutions. The strategies, it was assumed, would be sufficiently owned by both national elites and broader constituencies to be effectively implemented. The Paris-agreement in 2005 was the apex of this international consensus about how development cooperation should be pursued.

The assumptions behind it did again not prove valid, and they were already cracking. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers were often parallel policy statements made to please donors; sector working groups became in many cases endless meetings that kept donor agencies busily occupied. National institutions did

¹⁷ The most famous expression of this – muddling through – was coined by Lindblom in 1959. He observed that in practice, reforms and change were rarely linear nor meticulously planned, and then suggested that muddling through should be the preferred approach. See Lindblom, C. 1959. *The science of “muddling through.”* Public Administration Review 19(2), pp. 79–88.

not develop into effective bureaucracies driven by democratically elected enlightened politicians, by budgets and by results. Instead, the “real” and messy politics continued to develop and shape what happened, often behind Potemkin façades of apparent democracy, rule of law and anti-corruption policies.

Attention also began to concentrate on the issue of fragile states and situations, where both projects and prescriptive and conditionality-heavy approaches fared even worse, and where demands for a Weberian well-ordered, democratic state visibly clashed with the logic of patrimonial and predatory regime-types. More broadly, researchers and practitioners began to see the course of development in many states as a result of still incipient state formation processes that were building on economic, power and social class structures with little if any resemblance to the structures of Western liberal democracies.

Increasingly, both donors and researchers recognised that the problem resided less in aid modalities, and more in the unruly and messy contexts and state formation processes which donors failed to understand or accept. The notion of complexity – and with it, attention to structural factors, institutions, politics, stakeholders and interests – became the new buzzword for what had to be understood and influenced. Increasingly, the understanding focused less on narrower aid effectiveness – and more on the development processes themselves, and how donors could facilitate and nudge these processes to better outcomes.

DFID’s Drivers of Change approach¹⁸ (from 2004), SIDA’s Power Analysis¹⁹ and Danida’s approach to capacity development from 2004²⁰ all embraced the idea that politics and power were central to development outcomes – and that the outcomes that donors should seek to support should be “good enough”²¹, rather than the ideal replicas of Western institutions and liberal democracies that were (and for some still are?) the tacit goals.

This development – over some 20 years - happened in parallel to the rise (and later partial fall), in Western public administration of New Public Management, with its focus on management by results, “contractualisation” of relations between different actors and incessant monitoring and reporting of performance. The development community eagerly and easily adopted the results-discourse, because the classic Logical Framework Approach already was a management-by-objectives instrument. However, the results-agenda sat uncomfortably between two persistent realities of official development aid: Firstly, that aid is delivered by public sector organisations who by incentives, tradition and culture value control, predictability and upwards accountability higher than experimentation, risk-taking and trust in partners. Avoiding one failure may be perceived as better than achieving ten successes.

Secondly, results did not – and do not – come as planned, especially not moving from completion of activities to the outcomes that aid should be all about. Aid bureaucracies have coped with this in different manners: some have introduced even more rigid results planning and reporting, including experimenting with payments-for-results²². They have also assigned strong accountability monitoring of individuals responsible for particular engagements. Others have engaged in pragmatic, but sometimes also evasive behaviour: not really being sharp when formulating results (“making the targets so broad that they are hard to miss”), or not reporting precisely (or only long after engagements have ended). Neither rigidity nor pragmatism have, apparently, yet proven to deliver better results.

¹⁸ See the reference in the annotated bibliography below.

¹⁹ The approach is from 2003, the latest guide is from 2013, see

https://www.sida.se/contentassets/83f0232c5404440082c9762ba3107d55/power-analysis-a-practical-guide_3704.pdf

²⁰ See <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/between-naivety-and-cynicism-a-pragmatic-approach-to-donor-support-for-public-sector-capacity-development/>

²¹ Grindle, M., 2007. *Good Enough Governance Revisited*. Development Policy Review, 2007, 25

http://courses.washington.edu/pbaf531/Grindle_GoodEnoughGovRevisited.pdf

²² Clift, P., 2017: *Review Of Payment By Results In DFID: Establishing The Evidence Base*. University of East Anglia, UK

Adaptive management is, then, perceived as a possible response to several challenges:

- The messy and changing context in which many development interventions take place, full of politics and power issues that outsiders may observe and appreciate, but which are hard to influence from the outside.
- The shortcomings of normative, “best practice” approaches that assume that tested models from elsewhere, with a bit of tweaking, will work. This is not a plea for reinventing everything, but it is a recognition that reform and change, also in what could be mistaken as less political areas such as health or education, are full of institutional and political path dependencies that makes it impossible to transfer approaches. Any change has, as a minimum, to be acquired – it cannot be transferred.
- The challenges with results-, implementation and budget-framework processes and rules that make it difficult and lengthy to introduce adaptations to changes in the context, or to an emerging better understanding of what works.
- Conditions of ongoing uncertainty where conditions can change rapidly and where it is not possible to get sufficient information to inform planning in the traditional way.

Adaptive management has been called a “searchers” versus a “planners” approach to development²³, substituting the roadmap with a compass, seeking the best course considering the changing wind and waves rather than following established paths.

It is, however, still only a tentative answer to the shortcomings of other approaches. There is, eventually, the possibility that the trouble with development assistance is a trouble with development itself: Aid tries to speed up development processes, not least pertaining to the spheres of politics, institutions and governance, which may not be amenable to much acceleration. As the former Chief Economist of the World Bank, Paul Romer, wrote on Twitter in 2015: “Gordon Brown was right to say “In establishing the rule of law, the first 5 centuries are always the hardest.””²⁴

The success of adaptive management – noting that its basic elements have been high on the agenda for more than 15 years – therefore depends on the yardstick with which it should be measured. That said, there is little hard evidence beyond the anecdotal that adaptive management works – the apparent success stories are told by the proponents²⁵, while there is less focus on the failures where the approach has not led to sustainable results.

Adaptive management may make intuitive sense for many seasoned development professionals and diplomats – but in practice it is also likely to meet “structural challenges” linked to the incentives and politics of development assistance. These challenges include:

- *The risk of mainstreaming the approach.* It may become locked as a new orthodoxy with associated rigidities, and the risk that it has to be applied also in situations where there is neither the need nor the capacities to do so. In the terms of adaptive management, it risks becoming isomorphic mimicry – a pretension in words and writings, rather than a different practice.
- *The search for visible and significant impact by donors.* Adaptive management may often imply explicitly giving up ambitions about grand attributions of results and impact, instead aiming for modest contributions to what is essentially the processes of others. This may not be easy to sell to taxpayers and politicians.

²³ Easterly, W, 2006: *The White Man’s Burden*, Penguin Press, New York

²⁴ <https://twitter.com/paulmromer/status/618912232064294912?lang=en>

²⁵ Dasandi, N, Laws, E., Marquette, H., Robinson, M., 2019: *What Does the Evidence Tell Us about ‘Thinking and Working Politically’ in Development Assistance?* Politics and Governance, Volume 7, Issue 2

- *The resources required to promote and perform adaptive management.* Adaptive management may be seen as a shift of attention and resources from upstream preparation of engagements to downstream monitoring of and learning from implementation. This is unlikely to be the reality – adaptive management demands presence, analysis, dialogue and relations management both upstream and downstream. While this type of work could rightly be seen as part of aid delivery, many agencies will have to manage it with the limited administrative funds at their disposal.
- *The risks of losing sight of goals.* Adaptive management operates by keeping sight on good enough goals and on the (shifting, if necessary) strategies to get there. This is akin to warfare – but like in warfare there is the risk that protracted fighting makes the combatants forget what the war is about. The adaptive approach may get lost in tactics and processes.
- *Keeping an eye on the risks of misuse of funds.* Creating genuine space for local leadership and ownership may compromise the management of fiduciary risks (misuse of funds, corruption etc.). Finding appropriate steering, accountability and control regimes that do not undermine mutual trust, ownership and adaptability may be a daunting challenge, where donor concerns are likely to prevail.

These challenges are not limited to adaptive aid management only, but they are likely to be strongly felt. If they are not recognised and discussed openly, then adaptive management may end up being another short-lived fad. If the challenges – including others not mentioned here – are accepted to be part and parcel of the complexity of development assistance, then we may learn to do better by applying the approach when relevant. And, indeed, adapt the approach, so that it not only fits the complexities of the developmental settings where we work, but also the multiple complexities of our own settings.

Annex 2: Annotated Bibliography

The bibliography below is unfair to the wealth of writings about adaptive management and associated subjects. It is kept short with the hope that readers will venture into exploring some of the full texts on their own.

Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., and Woolcock, M. 2017: *Building State Capability - Evidence, Analysis, Action*. Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/building-state-capability-evidence-analysis-action>

The trio behind this book shaped the Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) approach in 2012, and this book expands on the ideas and practices behind it. The key notions in the approach include capability traps that block progress, and isomorphic mimicry that describes situations where actors deliberately countries set-up the façade of e.g. democratic governance, elections, transparent public financial management or the rule of law – without actually wanting it to or making it work. To break the traps and slowly get beyond mimicry, the PDIA advocates to focus on tractable problems (rather than imported solution), and apply iterative experimentation in an authorizing environment.

Booth, D. 2015. *Thinking and working politically*. GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack No. 13. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/10106.pdf>

This reading guide briefly explains the rationale of thinking and working politically (TWP). David Booth has been one of the key movers behind both TWP and DDD. The note also include references to a few key texts on the subject.

Christie, A., Green, D. 2019: *The Case for an Adaptive Approach to Empowerment and Accountability Programming in Fragile Settings*. Itad and Oxfam in association with IDS, produced as part of the Action for Empowerment and Accountability Research Programme (A4EA). Available at: <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/14556>

Focusing on fragile settings, the report highlight the strengths of adaptive approaches when they respond to the political context and the technical intervention in tandem; get the people right; use money as a catalyst; and build and maintain relationships. In practice it has proven difficult for donors to fully recognising the value of local knowledge; and there is a risk that the language of adaptive management spread faster than the practice. The report also warns against the “toolkit temptation”, noting the risk that codifying an approach based on emotional intelligence, relationships and trust may end up with a tick box /checklist approach that surrenders its essence in the interest of replicability.

USAIDLearn, 2017: FACT SHEET Collaborating, Learning and Adapting at USAID. Washington. Available at https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/110117_usaid_fact_sheets_final.pdf

USAID is promoting a Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) approach (see <https://usaidlearninglab.org/>) that incorporates many of the tenets of adaptive management. It is more highly structured and prescriptive than the approaches of other agencies, and USAID missions and teams are more strongly in the driver’s seat. The how-to-note on monitoring, evaluation and learning (<https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/how-note-project-monitoring,-evaluation,-and-learning-plan>) is highly complex and directed at USAID staff and project teams, who are expected to perform the monitoring. The CLA is thus a very “check-listed” and “toolboxed” approach to adaptive management.

DFID, 2004: *Drivers of Change Public Information Note*. London. Available at: <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/public-information-note-drivers-of-change/>

DFID was, together with Sweden, one of the first major donors to put interests and power – and therefore politics – openly on the development agenda. The Drivers of Change approach requested an analysis of the assumptions behind interventions regarding a.o. political will, seeing the prospects for change determined by the interplay of structural, institutional and agency factors.

IOB, 2019: *Less Pretention, More Realism - An evaluation of the Reconstruction Programme (2012 - 2015), the Strategic Partnerships in Chronic Crises Programme (2014 - 2016) and the Addressing Root Causes Tender Process*. IOB Evaluation no. 428, The Hague. Available at: <https://english.iob-evaluatie.nl/publications/evaluations/2019/07/01/428-%E2%80%93-iob-%E2%80%93-an-evaluation-of-the-reconstruction-programme-2012-2015-the-strategic-partnerships-chronic-crises-programme-2014-2016-and-the-addressing-root-causes-tender-process>

This recent evaluation of Dutch assistance in fragile settings shows that despite grand ambitions, the impact of the programmes has been limited. The evaluation concludes that there was too wide a gap between the overall policy objectives of promoting security and the rule of law and the grim realities on the ground facing the implementing partners; the latter had to cope with limited possibilities for outreach and limited staff capacity, resources and time. Tender procedures also created barriers for effective implementation. Altogether, these challenges resulted in fragmentation and created ‘paper realities’: unintentionally spurious reported-on-paper ‘facts’. This was a far cry from the participatory approaches which were expected to foster synergy across activities on the ground.

The report advocates a much adaptive management approach, and unravel the structural hindrances that were integral to the design of these programmes and that precluded a longer-term impact. It contains lessons and recommendations that have a wider bearing on formulating programmes for addressing the root causes of conflict and migration, and is therefore highly relevant for adaptive management approaches in fragile settings.

Pasanen, T., Barnett, I., 2019: *Supporting adaptive management. Monitoring and evaluation tools and approaches*. ODI, London. Available at: <https://www.odi.org/publications/16511-supporting-adaptive-management-monitoring-and-evaluation-tools-and-approaches>

This working paper introduces a set of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools and approaches, discussing their potential usefulness in supporting adaptive management in development and humanitarian programmes. The majority of these tools have been used in international development for many years. However, adaptive management brings additional challenges for monitoring and evaluating programmes, as they require intentional M&E design from the start that is oriented towards both learning and accountability. The tools and approaches introduced in this paper have potential to support learning and adaptation, although in various ways and at different stages of a programme.

Ramalingam, B., Wild, L., Buffardi, A.L., 2019: *Making adaptive rigour work. Principles and practices for strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning for adaptive management*. ODI, London. Available at: <https://www.odi.org/publications/11311-making-adaptive-rigour-work-principles-and-practices-strengthening-mel-adaptive-management>

The paper argues that core development and humanitarian challenges are complex, and require processes of testing, learning and iteration to find solutions – adaptive management offers one approach for this. Yet large bureaucracies and development organisations can have low tolerance for experimentation and learning, and adaptive management can be viewed as an excuse for ‘making things up as you go along’. The authors argue that adaptive programmes can be accountable, rigorous and high quality in how they use evidence – but this requires rethinking some key assumptions about how they are practised. This paper sets

out three key elements of an 'adaptive rigour' approach: Strengthening the quality of monitoring, evaluation and learning data and systems; ensuring appropriate investment in monitoring, evaluation and learning across the programme cycle; strengthening capacities and incentives to ensure the effective use of evidence and learning as part of decision-making, leading ultimately to improved effectiveness.

Valters, C., 2014: *Theories of Change in International Development: Communication, Learning, or Accountability?* Justice and Security Research Programme, International Development Department, London School of Economics, and Asia Foundation.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291833177_Theories_of_Change_in_International_Development_Communication_Learning_or_Accountability

This report looks at how the Asia Foundation used the Theory of Change approach in three ways: to communicate, to learn and to be held accountable, which each exist in some tension with each other. Creating Theories of Change was often found to be a helpful process by programme staff, since it provided a greater freedom to explain and analyse programme interventions. However, the introduction of the approach also had some troubling effects, for example, by creating top-down accounts of change which spoke more to donor interests than to the ground realities of people affected by these interventions. Ultimately, this paper argues that while a Theory of Change approach can create space for critical reflection, this requires a much broader commitment to learning from individuals, organisations, and the development sector itself.

Wild, L., Booth, D., Cummings, C., Foresti, M.; Wales, J. 2015: *Adapting development Improving services to the poor*. ODI, London. Available at: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9437.pdf>

This report from 2015 is one of the first which brings the strands of working and thinking politically, and doing development differently, together under the heading of adaptive management. It advocates three key elements of adaptive management: Working in problem-driven and politically informed ways; being adaptive and entrepreneurial; and supporting change that reflects local realities and is locally led. The report offers a clear overview of the key messages of adaptive management.

Wild, L, Booth, D; Valters, C. 2017. *Putting theory into practice: how DFID is doing development differently*. ODI, London. Available at: <https://www.odi.org/publications/10729-putting-theory-practice-how-dfid-doing-development-differently>

This ODI report looks at DFID's experience with Doing Development Differently (DDD) up to 2017, and also includes the original DDD manifesto. The report gives an easily read and brief overview of DDD, and highlight that while DFID programmes have found it relatively easy to design flexible, responsive forms of support, they have found it harder to commit upfront to experimentation and 'learning by doing' as a core method of work. While there are a few good examples of facilitation of locally-led change, this also remains a challenging dimension.