

Monitoring, evaluation and learning to build better climate services

A framework for inclusion, accountability and iterative improvement in Tandem

SEI report
February 2021

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Cover photo: A busy market in Lusaka, Zambia © Bettina Koelle / Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre

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Acknowledgements

This brief was developed through the SEI Initiative on Climate Services and has been funded by Sida core support to the Stockholm Environment Institute. We are grateful to Annemarieke de Bruin for reviewing this brief, Agus Nugroho for ensuring quality, Karen Brandon and Marion Davis for editorial support, and Richard Clay for the layout.

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Key Messages

- Monitoring, evaluation and learning are integral to the ethos of co-design and co-production in Tandem, an SEI framework to foster collaboration among climate information providers, users and intermediaries to develop sustainable climate services that truly meet users' needs.
 - The principles of outcome mapping provide a solid foundation for monitoring, evaluation and learning systems within Tandem, as they take a systems approach, account for complexity and focus on outcomes among different stakeholders.
 - Effective learning and iterative improvement will not result from haphazard processes and systems; they require intentional design at the outset, including clear identification of stakeholders and the project's sphere of influence, a strong theory of change and regular follow-up.
 - It is important to identify the desired outcomes in each stakeholder group as well as markers of progress to support monitoring and evaluation. Two valuable tools for information-gathering are the collection of "most significant change" stories, and "harvesting" outcome information from documents, interviews and other sources. These tools can provide a richer perspective on outcomes, including what participants value most, and unexpected impacts.
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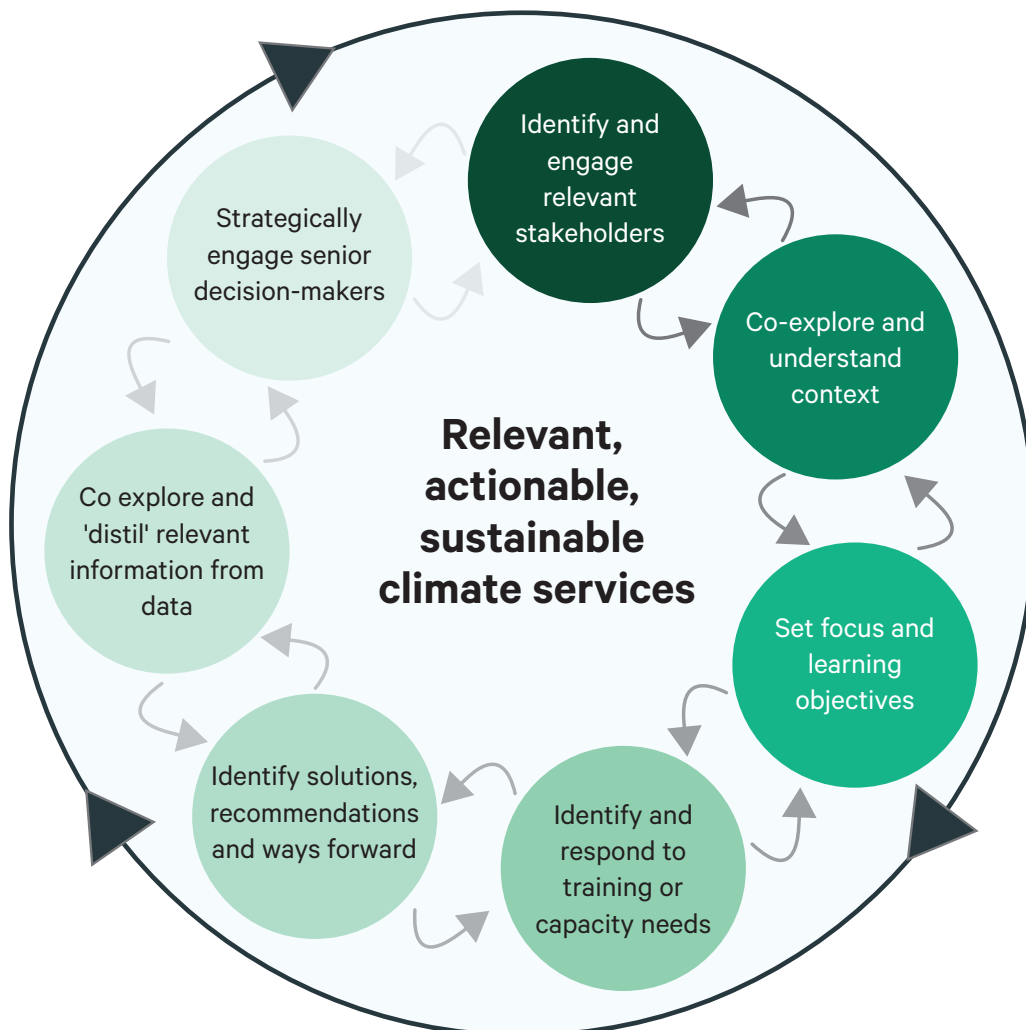


Porters ferrying goods to communities in the Indian Sundarans © ALBERT SALAMANCA / SEI

The Tandem framework is a holistic approach developed by SEI to enable scientists, users of climate information and intermediaries to co-design climate services, tailoring them to specific contexts so that they can most effectively support climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (Daniels et al. 2020). The framework aims to facilitate not just meaningful participation by stakeholders, but true collaboration, along with constant learning and iterative improvement. This discussion brief focuses on monitoring, evaluation and learning as key components of Tandem and offers guidance on how to integrate them to produce ever-more useful knowledge and thus maximise the benefits of the Tandem framework for co-designing climate services.

The Tandem framework guides **providers** and **intermediaries** of climate services through seven iterative steps (Figure 1) to engage with the intended **users** to produce relevant and actionable information and sustainable climate services that meet the users' planning and decision-making needs. The resulting process is designed to build trust, capacity and shared understanding among providers, intermediaries and users, and to facilitate extended collaboration. An active **monitoring, evaluation and learning** (MEL) process is thus integral to the ethos of co-design and co-production in Tandem.

Figure 1. Steps for the co-creation of climate services in Tandem



Adapted from Daniels et al. 2020, p.11

Tandem’s approach reflects key elements of effective climate services identified by Clark et al. (2016):

- Listening to both **existing and potential users** of climate information;
- Understanding **local innovation processes** and their roles in shaping local ideas and concepts;
- **Tailoring knowledge** to fit the demand, available technologies and context-specific situation, taking into account formal and informal practices that can lead to the creation of usable knowledge.

Each of those elements requires close attention. In identifying users, for example, it is important to think both of those who may use climate information for decision-making, and those who may be affected by such decisions. It also matters why potential users might want to have that information – their underlying needs and expectations of change. This is where it is crucial to understand local innovation processes, as they may affect different users’ ability to use the information and/or influence relevant decisions. Climate services can then be tailored to users’ priorities and challenges to make them as useful as possible. A final, critical step that is particularly relevant to MEL is to understand how users will measure the success or impact of potential solutions informed by the climate services.

Building on the principles of outcome mapping

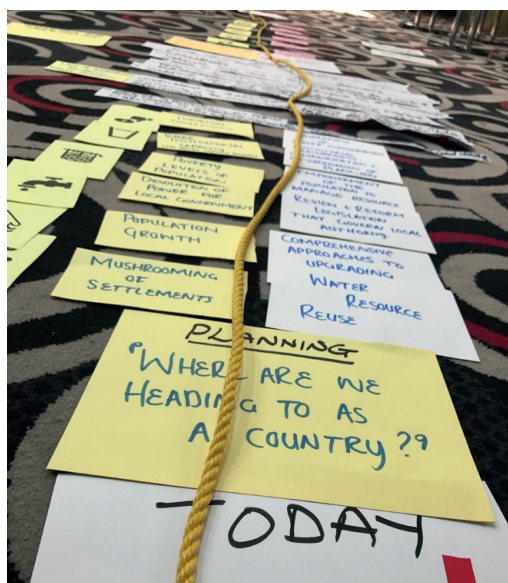
Outcome mapping, an approach to monitoring and evaluation popularised by Earl et al. (2001), provides a strong foundation for MEL in the application of Tandem. Outcome mapping has gained wide acceptance, with a growing community of practice; for example, it was used to assess the impacts of the UK’s Research Excellence Framework (Tilley et al. 2018). Its advantages include a systems approach, awareness of complexity and, as its name implies, a focus on outcomes.

Outcome mapping is actor-centred and focuses on “changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities, or actions of the people, groups, and organizations with whom a program works directly” (Earl et al. 2001, p.1). It is flexible and non-linear, emphasising continuous learning (Jones and Hearn 2009). It is also participatory and aims to ensure accountability. It works best when the goals are to build partnerships and capacity, the problems are complex, a deeper understanding of social factors is critical, and there is a desire to foster reflection and dialogue.

The focus on behaviour change means that in monitoring and evaluating a project or programme, the question of interest is not whether it directly contributed to specific development impacts, as those impacts are seen as potentially resulting from myriad interventions and the efforts of several actors over a long time but on outcomes on the behaviour of the boundary partners. That said, behaviour changes can, of course, lead to development impacts over time.

Intentional design

As shown in Figure 1, Tandem is not linear, and its elements are iterative, so an MEL framework needs to be able to capture incremental, emergent or unanticipated outcomes while maintaining its focus on the expected main outcome(s). As Tandem is “purposeful” in terms of its design (Daniels et al. 2020), its MEL framework should also be intentionally designed. In outcome mapping, a “classic” intentional design is composed of the following steps: (1) vision, (2) mission, (3) boundary partners, (4) outcome challenges, (5) progress markers, (6) strategy maps and (7) organisational practices (Earl et al. 2001).



Outputs from a visioning exercise held at a Learning Lab in Lusaka, Zambia, as part of the FRACTAL project.

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Below we dive deeper into three elements: boundary partners, outcome challenges and progress markers. Those elements can be used to develop the “theory of change” of a planned climate service that is co-designed using Tandem.

Boundary partners

Boundary partners are “individuals, groups, and organizations with whom the program interacts directly and with whom the program anticipates opportunities for influence” (Earl et al. 2001, p.1). Some of the stakeholders (such as decision-makers, climate service providers, intermediaries, users and beneficiaries) could be boundary partners, depending on the design of the project.

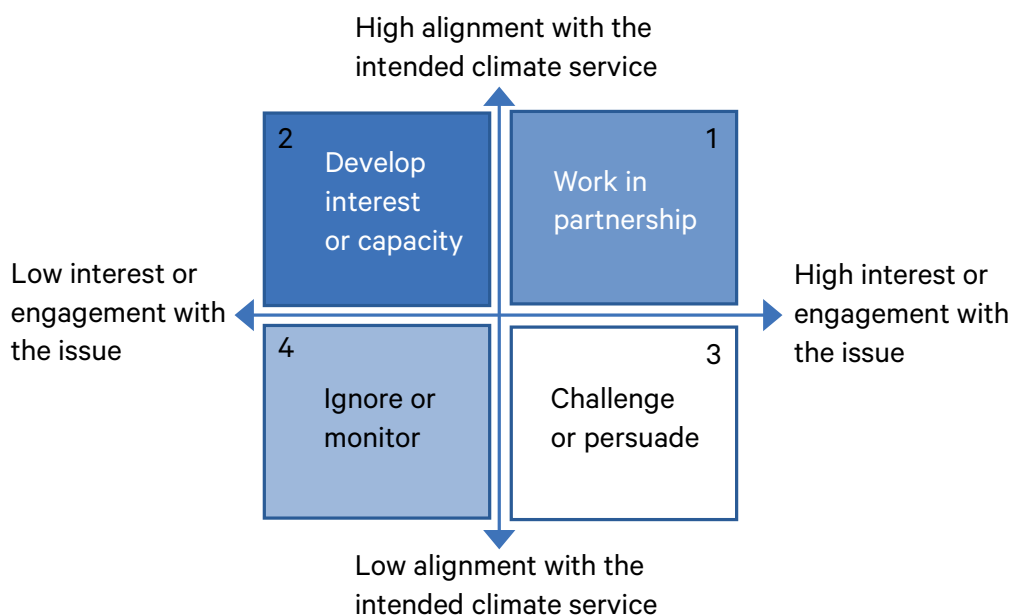
Outcome challenges

An outcome challenge is a statement on how the behaviour, relationships, activities or actions of a particular stakeholder or stakeholder groups will change through a successful interaction with the project (Earl et al. 2001). Notably, the acquisition of new knowledge and/or capacities can itself lead to changes in behaviour (Schrader and Lawless 2004).

Outcome challenges are usually formulated as intentions, such as: “The climate services intend to lead [the stakeholder] to [description of expected change in behaviour in the active present tense]”. An outcome challenge has to be formulated for each type of user or stakeholder identified in the “identify and engage relevant stakeholders” step of Tandem (though the process need not start at that step). Multiple stakeholder groups exist in the climate service “value chain”, each with different roles in influencing the design, use and interpretation of climate information. Each also has a role in supporting (or not supporting) any change processes desired by the users. Therefore, it is important to consider the needs and influences of those stakeholders as well, including decision-makers, providers, intermediaries and beneficiaries.

A useful tool for that purpose is the “alignment, interest, and influence” matrix (Tilley et al. 2018; Young et al. 2014). As shown in Figure 2, the matrix has four quadrants: those with high alignment with the intended climate service and high interest or engagement in the issue (Q1); those with high alignment with the intended climate service but low interest or engagement in the issue (Q2); those with low alignment with the intended climate service but high interest or engagement in the issue (Q3); and those with low alignment with the intended climate service and low interest or engagement in the issue (Q4). If the stakeholders are in Q1, one works in partnership with them.

Figure 2. “Alignment, interest, and influence” matrix as applied in the context of climate services





During a climate field school, agricultural extension officers speak with staff from the Indonesian Met Bureau about weather and climate issues in Bali. © ALBERT SALAMANCA / SEI

If they are in Q2, one works to develop their interest or capacity. If they are in Q3, one works to challenge or persuade them. If they are in Q4, one may ignore or simply monitor them in case their interest, alignment or influence changes (Young et al. 2014). Knowing the alignments, interests and influence of various stakeholders will help the project team choose its boundary partners and determine how others may be engaged as strategic partners in developing the climate service.

Progress markers

Once the outcome challenge of a proposed programme or climate service are formulated, the next step is to work with the corresponding boundary partners to define markers of progress. The markers are formulated in a graduated manner to reflect the expected emergence of outcomes. They represent the logic in the theory of change. They start with simple progress (would expect to see), which are immediate results of project activities. Then they evolve into higher-order outcomes, or would like to see, as a project deepens its interventions. Finally, if a project is successful, the stakeholder would have achieved transformative outcomes, so the markers here are what a project would love to see the stakeholder doing when such outcomes are achieved (Earl et al. 2001).

For instance, how local communities are empowered through the use of climate services could be indicated by their attendance in climate field schools (would expect to see), active application of the knowledge gained in their farms (would like to see), and continuous engagement with climate service providers and extension officers to guide the production of more crops (would love to see).

Table 1 provides a more detailed example of how this MEL system has been used in a climate service project that applied Tandem, Future Resilience for African CiTies and Lands (FRACTAL). Initiated in June 2015 with funding provided by UK Department for International Development (DfID) and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) through the Future Climate for Africa programme, FRACTAL was a four-year project coordinated by the Climate System Analysis Group at the University of Cape Town. Its aim was to advance scientific knowledge about regional climate responses to human activities (such as burning fossil fuels and changing land surface cover) and work with decision-makers to integrate this scientific knowledge into climate-sensitive decisions at the city-regional scale, particularly decisions relating to water, energy and food in the 5–40-year time frame.

The stated goals of FRACTAL's monitoring, evaluation and learning framework were to:

- Instil and maintain a hunger for learning among project partners and other knowledge holders associated with the FRACTAL project;
- Create stimulating spaces that allow reflection and documentation of iterative learning in the process;
- Use learning, reflection and evaluation to improve project activities; and
- Ensure a sound process of participatory monitoring and evaluation of the project to produce robust evidence.

Guided by this framework, SEI researchers working on FRACTAL in the city of Windhoek, in Namibia, defined its boundary partners, outcome challenge, how progress would be monitored, and the MEL timeframe, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Illustrative example of the Intentional design of FRACTAL, using the principles and elements of outcome mapping

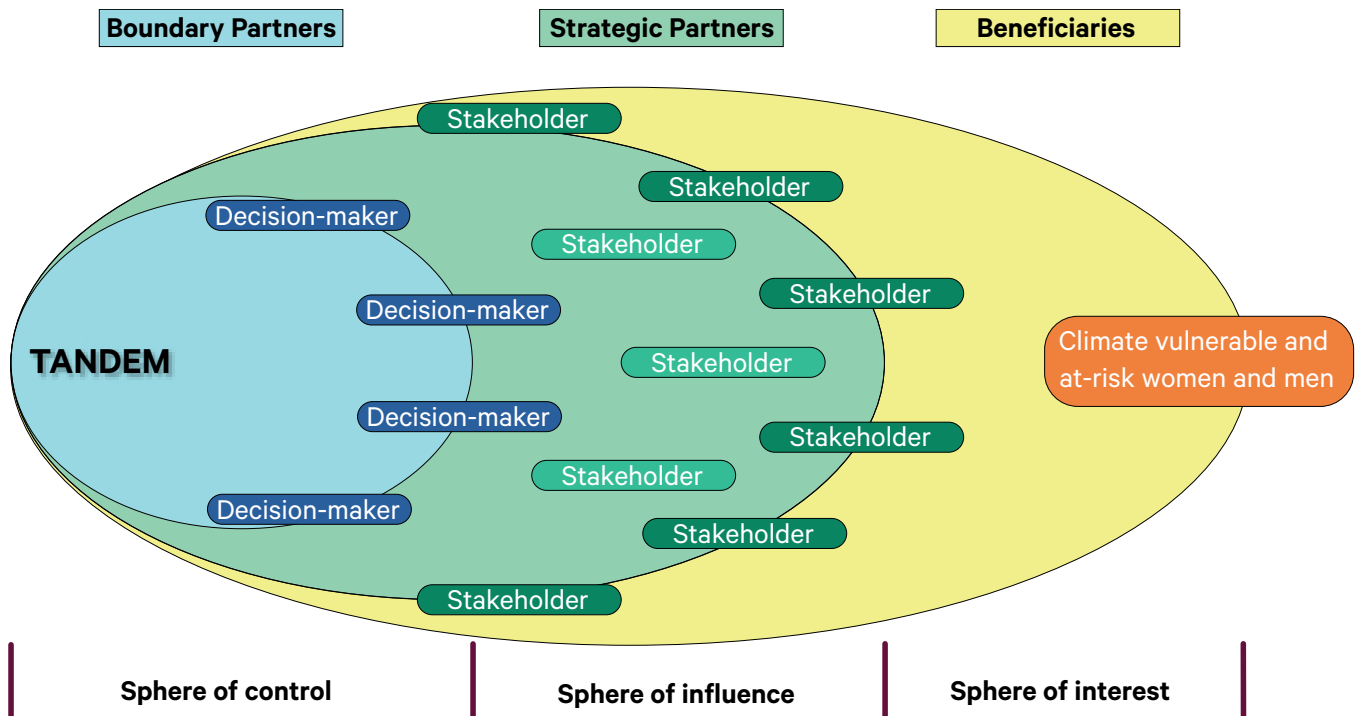
Boundary partner	Outcome challenge	Progress markers	Source of Information and Timelines
City of Windhoek Department of Water, Infrastructure and Technical Services	FRACTAL intends to see department representatives increase their knowledge and awareness of the institutional arrangements and capacities needed for integrating climate information and planning climate action.	<p>Expect to see: At least one capacity development action included in the CCSAP; higher number of people who reference institutional capacities as important</p> <p>Like to see: Capacity development actions integrated across CCSAP; higher number of people across departments who reference institutional capacities as important</p> <p>Love to see: Implementation of institutional capacity strengthening actions; increased response level in CaDD survey; application of CaDD periodically</p>	<p>Review of CCSAP document (Dec 2018)</p> <p>Interviews with CCSAP representatives; review of CCSAP actions; CaDD survey (May 2019)</p>
City of Windhoek CCSAP representatives	FRACTAL intends to see city managers who are more confident in discussing climate change, climate impacts and articulating climate information needs for decision-making.	<p>Expect to see: Increased number of references to climate change in internal and external newsletters (e.g. the City News, The Aloe)</p> <p>Like to see: Increased requests for climate information (narratives, data, support from external partners etc.); increased appearance of climate change on city division/department meeting agendas</p>	<p>Review of city newsletters (ongoing until May 2019)</p> <p>Interviews with CCSAP representatives and FRACTAL core team (May 2019)</p> <p>Review of meeting agendas (May 2019)</p>
Core FRACTAL city teams (city and university focal points, embedded researchers)	FRACTAL intends to see city teams who have increased capacity to facilitate dialogue on climate change between providers and users and who gain increased knowledge and awareness of a) climate information types and formats and b) decision support methods and approaches for integrating climate information into decision-making.	<p>Expect to see: Increased number of sessions on climate information and decision-making facilitated by city team</p> <p>Like to see: Increased number of city-based events and dialogues on climate change</p> <p>Love to see: Increased number of tools and approaches shared by the city team to colleagues and peers in the city and to other stakeholders</p>	<p>Review of engagements (until May 2019)</p> <p>Interviews with city representatives and other stakeholders (from learning interviews - up to May/June 2019)</p>
Windhoek CEO and Strategic Executives; Mayor and Councillors	FRACTAL intends to see senior decision makers and officials gain increased knowledge and awareness of climate change so that climate is recognised in decision-making and openly discussed leading to the promotion and encouragement of climate actions.	<p>Expect to see: Climate change discussed in council and executive meetings; increased number of external communications referring to climate change</p> <p>Like to see: Climate change tabled as a regular agenda item in council and executive meetings</p> <p>Love to see: Increased senior-level support for CCA champions and actions within city processes</p>	<p>Review of council/executive meeting agendas (May 2019)</p> <p>Interviews with city representatives (May 2019)</p>
Providers and intermediaries	FRACTAL intends to see providers and intermediaries recognise that engagement and interaction with decision-makers is critical and develop, practise and employ effective co-exploration and co-production techniques. Through this process, their capacity to engage with users to co-explore climate information is increased.	<p>Expect to see: Increased number of participatory sessions with decision-makers facilitated by providers and intermediaries</p> <p>Like to see: Development of guiding principles for co-exploration / co-production and use of these principles</p> <p>Love to see: Increased confidence of providers and intermediaries to engage and collaborate with city decision-makers</p>	<p>Review of engagements (until May 2019)</p> <p>Review of transdisciplinary co-production paper</p> <p>Interviews with providers and intermediaries (from learning interviews - up to May/June 2019)</p>

Notes: CCSAP = Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan; CaDD = Climate Capacity Diagnosis and Development; Cocotrans = Research frontiers related to distillation, receptivity, co-exploration, co-production and transdisciplinarity.

A climate service sphere of influence

The elements of outcome mapping are expressions of a systemic understanding of interventions using the notion of “sphere of influence”. Understanding the project’s or programme’s sphere of influence offers an awareness of boundaries of the system within which it operates and the “critical factors, actors, and dynamics” that will contribute to or hinder the achievement of its goals (cf. Hollander et al. 2020, p.5). Understanding the sphere of influence helps ensure that the project design is realistic – that it is actually positioned to influence the actors or processes that it intends to influence. Figure 2 illustrates a sphere of influence in the context of Tandem.

Figure 2. Articulating the sphere of influence of Tandem or any climate service



In Tandem, the sphere of influence refers to a point in the chain of outcomes (from inputs to impacts) in which the project or climate service could play a role in enabling behavioural change. Tandem is geared to responding to the needs of the beneficiaries – direct users and other people who are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and whose adaptive capacity the climate service aims to enhance. That broad set of stakeholders is what might be called the “sphere of interest” of any development- and/or adaptation-oriented climate service. However, only a much narrower set of boundary partners are directly involved in the process, which can entail the creation and provision of information (e.g. climate bulletins and forecasts), or can build capacities to enable people to better use this information. This is the project’s “sphere of control”. The sphere of influence is the broader range of stakeholders and their networks who can be reached and influenced through the work.

Tools to collect information

There are several tools that can be used to collect information for monitoring, evaluation and learning that aligns with the principles of Tandem, including reflection workshops and outcome journals. Two are particularly appropriate and are discussed in more detail below: the “most significant change” approach and outcome harvesting.

Using the Most Significant Change Technique

The “most significant change” approach is a story-based technique to facilitate dialogue and help improve the programme by focusing the work in directions that are explicitly valued by participants, and away from less valued directions (Dart and Davies 2003, p.137). Designated groups of stakeholders are asked to identify the most significant programme outcomes and then “deliberate on the value of these outcomes in a systematic and transparent manner”. The approach has multiple steps, including defining the domains of change and the time frame to examine, collecting stories and selecting the most significant, feeding back the results to participants, quantifying and analysing the results, among others (Davies and Dart 2005).

The format of a “most significant change” question might be:

Looking back over the last [reporting period], what do you think was the most significant change in [mission/outcome] in [place] resulting from your participation in the activities of the [climate service]?

Outcome harvesting

Outcome harvesting draws on reports, personal interviews and other sources to glean information about how a given project or climate service contributed to outcomes (Wilson-Grau and Britt 2012). Those outcomes “can be positive or negative, intended or unintended, but the connection between the initiative and the outcomes should be verifiable” (ibid., p. 1).

Outcome harvesting is considered a “complexity-aware monitoring approach” by the U.S. Agency for International Development (Britt and Patsalides 2013) and has been used to evaluate complex multi-stakeholder programmes of the World Bank (The World Bank 2014) and Oxfam NOVIB (Majot et al. 2010). It was also used by the Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET) to collect stories of change of its Phase 3 programming (SUMERNET Secretariat 2018a; 2018b).



Stakeholders of a local government unit in Central Philippines discuss their concerns on development and industrialisation © ALBERT SALAMANCA / SEI

Using MEL in Tandem to support adaptive management

The nature of climate change – including a large element of uncertainty – means that adaptation strategies need to be flexible and able to shift with changing conditions. Adaptation is also a relatively new field, and there is still a great deal to be learned about the best solutions to emerging problems. This means that to be most effective, climate services must support adaptive management (Armitage, Marschke, et al. 2008; Armitage and Marschke 2013; Armitage, Plummer, et al. 2008; Tompkins and Adger 2004). A robust MEL framework in Tandem can facilitate adaptive management, especially if learning is built into interventions and the insights are reflected back into the implementation. The iterative nature of Tandem facilitates learning and feedback, with the MEL framework serving to monitor progress towards the ultimate goal(s), refine the climate service to better achieve the most valued outcomes, adapt to changing circumstances, and identify and address unexpected impacts.

In this brief, we have described principles, approaches and tools for monitoring, evaluation and learning consistent with the ethos of Tandem. In order for the Tandem framework to be most effective, it is crucial to have intentional design, early on, built around a strong theory of change, and with regular monitoring and learning events. This means that boundary partners need to be identified, and outcome challenges and progress markers defined, as close to the outset as possible. Then the project should plan how and when to monitor, as well as how those insights will feed into project implementation.

Flexibility is also key. Learning will not have tangible impacts on the implementation of the project if the design is rigid and unchanging. Room for recalibration should be afforded at each iteration to respond to new and unanticipated outcomes. Standard protocols of collecting outcomes and stories of change should be built in a climate service's MEL. To best support learning, monitoring and evaluation must be well integrated and designed, never just an afterthought. It is also crucial to monitor what matters – that is, actual markers of progress towards the desired outcomes, not only data that funders may want to see.



Children in Lusaka, Zambia © BETTINA KOELLE, RED CROSS RED CRESCENT CLIMATE CENTRE

“Most significant change” stories and outcome harvesting are recommended for monitoring especially if progress indicators have not been developed prior to implementation. It is also easier to communicate key narratives of change if the stories and outcomes are documented. The development of evaluation questions should be straightforward if the project's theory of change or intentional design is well laid out.

For all these intentions to materialise, an open, inclusive and respectful dialogue is necessary. Tandem aims to refocus climate services towards long-term sustainability by enabling the provision and management of climate services to fit the needs of climate-vulnerable and at-risk communities. The approaches and tools described in this brief can directly contribute to that aim by ensuring that climate services have strong and effective monitoring, evaluation and learning components.

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