Institutions for Inclusive Development (I4ID) LEARNING TOOL

Rapid Experimentation Process Map

April 2021

Institutions for Inclusive Development (I4ID) was a £11.6 million adaptive governance programme funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and IrishAid until 2020. The programme aimed to 'work with government, representative institutions, civil society and the private sector to strengthen institutions in Tanzania to become more inclusive and accountable so that economic growth and services bring more benefits to women, youth, and poor and vulnerable people'.

I4ID focused on a wide variety of issues, including inclusive education for deaf students, solid waste management in the municipalities around Dar es Salaam, regional investment facilitation, urban spatial development and access to affordable menstrual health products, among others.

Drawing on systems change, design thinking and problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA), I4ID embraced a process of rapid experimentation to explore issues and identify opportunities for impact. Rapid experimentation is a process of explicit hypothesis testing to finding solutions that fit within the context at hand.

Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) stresses that reform activities should:

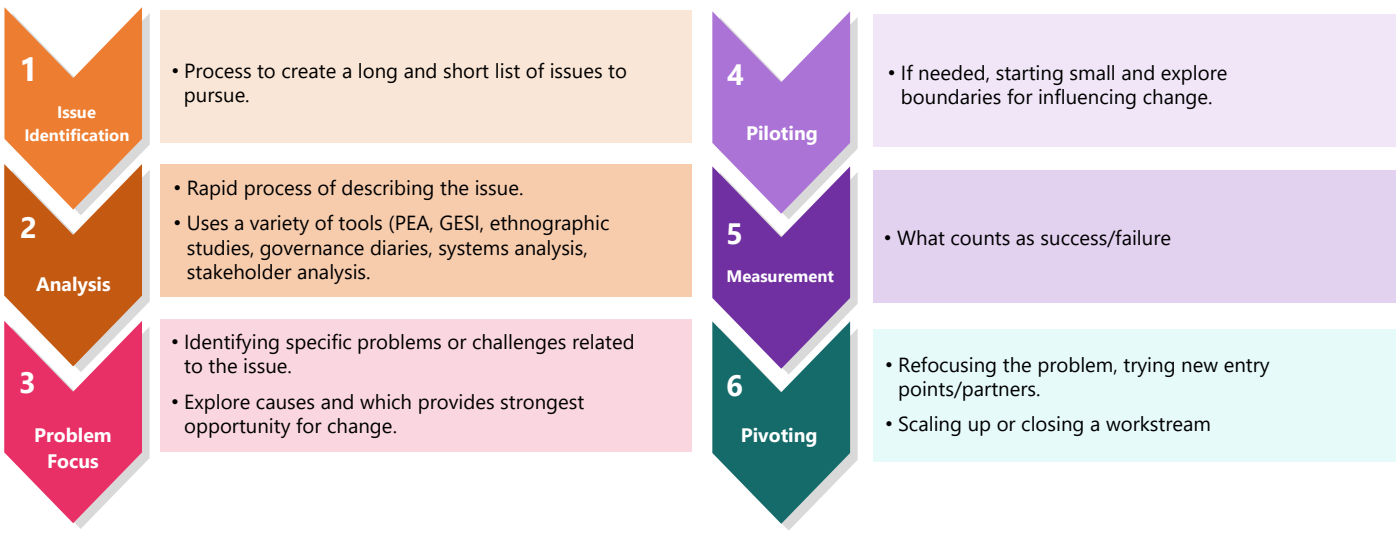
1. Aim to solve particular problems in particular local contexts via...
2. The creation of an 'authorizing environment' for decision-making that encourages experimentation and 'positive deviance', which gives rise to...
3. Active, ongoing and experiential (and experimental) learning and the iterative feedback of lessons into new solutions, doing so by...
4. Engaging broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate and relevant – that is, are politically supportable and practically implementable.

Andrews, et al (2012)

INTRODUCTION INTO THIS TOOL

This document provides guidance for implementers and donors on navigating the process of rapid experimentation in a programme working on a range of issues.

The diagram below represents the six stages of rapid experimentation, loosely followed by most I4ID workstreams:



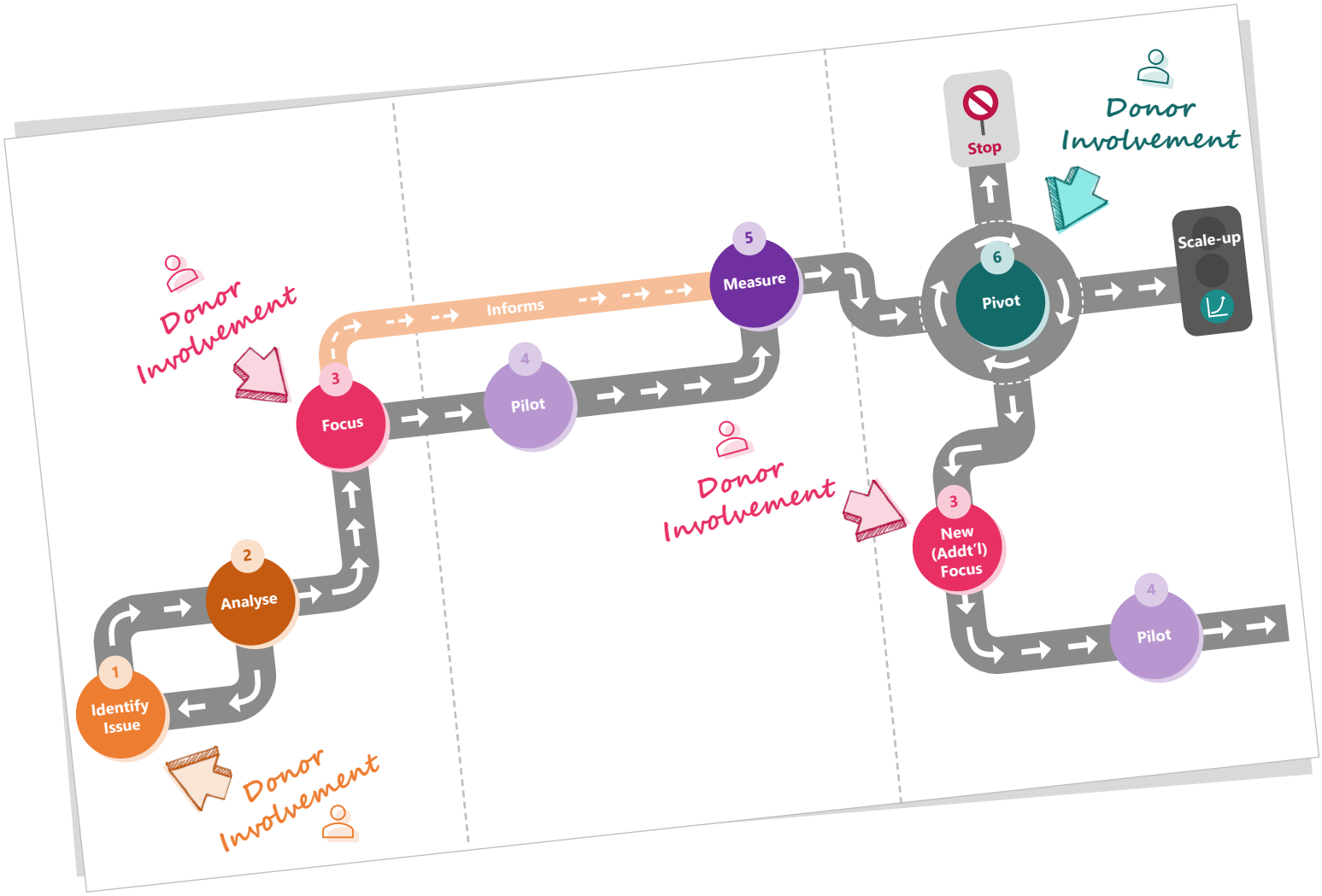
Rapid Experimentation is a journey, not a cycle.

This map shows the process of rapid experimentation, laying out three key moments for donor involvement (Issue Identification, Focus and Pivot) and providing tips for implementers at each step of the way.

Rapid experimentation starts with issue identification (bottom left). In I4ID, programme staff kept their ears to the ground, looking for issues that fit the programme's criteria:

- Potential for inclusive development impact
- Demand-led by partners who have sufficient interest and influence to effect meaningful systemic change
- Amenable to small, feasible, 6–12-month tests prior to further investment
- Potential for scale or replication
- I4ID additionality – support is unlikely to be provided by other development actors

Where possible, look for an issue that is already receiving a high level of political attention, as it is more likely to have the 'authorizing environment' that allows for experimentation, in the first place. (Kelsall et al., 2021)



STAGES 1-3

STAGES 4-5

STAGE 6

Guidance on Focus

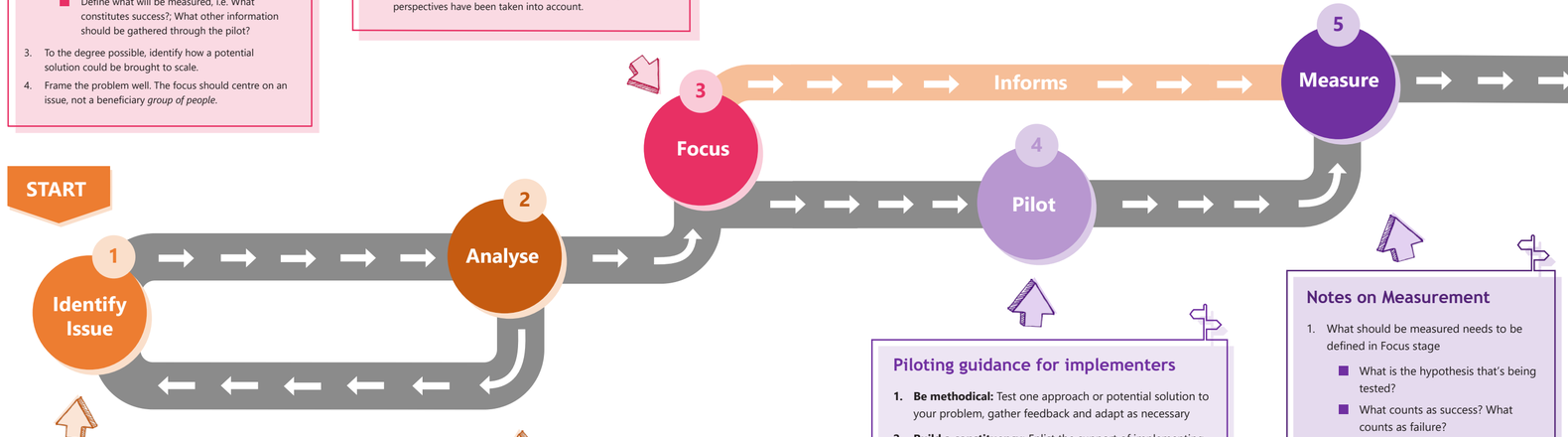
1. "Focusing on prevailing problems … ensures that problems are locally defined, not externally determined, and puts the onus on performance, not compliance." *(Andrews, et al., 2012)*
2. Purpose is to solidify the problem focus and develop a hypothesis that can be tested in a pilot.
   - Useful frameworks include: Results chains and Search frames.
   - Define what will be measured, i.e. What constitutes success?; What other information should be gathered through the pilot?
3. To the degree possible, identify how a potential solution could be brought to scale.
4. Frame the problem well. The focus should centre on an issue, not a beneficiary *group of people*.

Donor role in Focus

1. Help to refine and redefine the problem or issue, actively joining the decision process, rather than waiting to be provided the result at a later stage.
2. Ensure that you understand and agree with the direction of the pilot.
3. Ask for a presentation of initial research and findings to help make decisions.
4. What's vital: Agreeing a hypothesis, ensuring a range of perspectives have been taken into account.

Description of what happens in piloting and measuring stages

1. this is not just for tinkering with nifty ideas – it's about how to get to good models
2. this is purposive muddling – or helping others muddle (innovate)
3. this is where the vast majority of the learning happens (not in Analyse)
4. this involves making clear assumptions that are tested, along with an explicit hypothesis, during the pilot



Donor role in Issue Identification

1. This is the key first step in figuring out what issues can be considered for interventions.
2. Ensure two levels of alignment:
   - **Programme-level:** Alignment with programme objectives.
   - **Portfolio-level:** Strategic alignment with donor's wider portfolio.
3. Be sure the programme is getting ideas on issues to pursue from a diverse range of sources, informants and stakeholders.
   - Not just asking their favourite/'go-to' people.
   - The programme needs to set up a wide network of contacts to do this.
   - Needs a clear set of criteria for deciding which issues go on a shortlist.
4. Being involved at this stage helps ensure a common view of the goals and purpose of the programme from the start of each new activity.

Guidance on Analysis

1. Aim for a 'good enough' analysis, recognizing that the programme will learn much more through piloting than through analysing alone.
2. Keep it light and as informal as possible, using a variety of research methods (e.g. light-touch political economy and systems analysis) and a wide range of informants.
3. GESI needs to be meaningfully included in ALL analyses (i.e., it's not an option to exclude considerations of how power influences who does what, when, where and with whom).
4. Analyse with existing staff where possible, bring in specialists only when necessary. This is an important opportunity to bring learning into the team and expand the team's professional networks.
5. Sometimes analysis leads to discovering new issues that are worth additional analysis, but this stage should never take more than one or two months – move as quickly as possible to piloting.

Piloting guidance for implementers

1. **Be methodical:** Test one approach or potential solution to your problem, gather feedback and adapt as necessary
2. **Build a constituency:** Enlist the support of implementing agencies and non-state actors, and – especially if you anticipate or encounter organised opposition – high-level political actors
3. **Pay attention to politics:** At regular intervals, review your progress using light-touch political analysis tools, perhaps with more in-depth analysis at critical junctures
4. **Use the money:** be prepared to provide funds for pilots, small-scale infrastructure, technical assistance and core funding that makes experimentation possible
5. **Stay flexible:** it's often not possible to anticipate all eventualities with a local partner. Keep partnership contracts loose and open to change as needed. Remember that almost all actors are more risk averse than development implementers and be prepared to buy down risk by subsidizing partner innovations
6. **Daisy chain:** consider piloting by using a series of small bets to "innovate, prototype, pilot and innovate," allowing for quicker pivots and more focus as a pilot moves forward. I4ID called this 'daisy chaining'

Notes on Measurement

1. What should be measured needs to be defined in Focus stage
   - What is the hypothesis that's being tested?
   - What counts as success? What counts as failure?
   - What are key questions about the model being tested, contributing to the programme's overall learning agenda?
2. Results need to be measured in a robust manner, even when lower-level results are changing.
3. Ask: Is there a logical connection between these results and programme outcomes?

Guidance on Stopping, Scaling up and/or Pivoting to New Problem Focus

Following a pilot there are 3 options: Stop, Scale Up, Pivot to New Problem Focus

Stop – you decide there's no significant opportunity there. This happened on I4ID several times (and could have happened more – it's a hard decision to make).

Donor role in Pivot decision

3 perspectives:

1. **Technical:** Question the rationale and evidence base for pivoting. How confident is the team that team that scaled support will be impactful? What specific evidence supports the argument? How clear is the pathway to scale?
2. **VfM:** Value for money is a strong consideration here – is the impact at scale worth the investment?
3. **Reputational:** Are there reputational risks involved in stopping after the pilot? How are they being managed?

Scale Up – you have demonstrated that scale up is likely to create a sustained impact, with a clear exit strategy, so you put resources into promoting the adoption of a given business model, product or service innovation. Scale up almost never happens without more programme support, so be prepared to offer it.

New Problem Focus – your learning during the pilot convinces you that a better opportunity for impact lies nearby. Skip issue identification because you've already done this (all you need is a revised problem focus, supported by learning from the pilot).

Donor role in (new) Focus

1. This builds on the learning from the pilot, not starting at Issue ID again (it's under the same issue). While implementing the pilot, the team learned about additional lines of intervention that will complement the ongoing Scale-Up and make it more impactful and/or sustainable
2. Important questions for donors to ask at this stage:
   - Why is this additional focus needed?
   - What is the likely impact?
   - How vital is this to achieving significant impact?
   - How does it fit with the programme's strategic objectives?
   - Does the programme anticipate adding more focuses in the future?

Combination: Could do both **Scale Up** and **New Problem Focus** at the same time. When both Scale Up is promising and the programme has identified a need for a New Problem Focus and Pilot – this is common and should be expected as a dynamic programme rolls onward.

TOP TIPS

1. **Experiment** is a purposeful process of validating or falsifying an explicit hypothesis
   - Not business as normal (cannot be assumed) and not a cycle
   - To do it well, you need an explicit hypothesis. Results chains and search frames provide useful frameworks for structuring hypotheses that can then be tested through piloting

2. **Donors** can add the greatest value at:
   - Issue Identification
   - Problem focus
   - Pivoting

   Otherwise, donors need to give implementers the space to experiment

3. **Implementers** need to make sure they're providing useful updates to donors.
   - Good updates to donors refer back to the explicit hypothesis and report on the pilot's progress against the envisioned pathway, providing details about specific programme activities and partners. They also update the donor on any schedule changes related to the pilot's timing, especially the point at which the programme will reach a Pivot decision.
   - Donors need to feel confident the experiments are moving in a productive direction in order to give implementers the space to do it well.

4. **Problem Focus –** it's important to get this right
   - Focus on a problem and its causes, not a beneficiary group of people, and preserve the space to further refine the problem focus after piloting.
   - I4ID erred in its problem focus with Urban Women Vendors (that's a beneficiary population, not an issue) and wasted months of its time trying to justify that, instead of focusing on deeper problems that underlie informal urban retail and gender issues in many Tanzanian cities.

5. **Daisy chain funding –** keep in mind that one pilot could include several iterative rounds of funding, as partners dive deeper into a model and hit benchmarks along the way. But ensure that piloting still ends within a reasonable period of time and that donor counterparts are kept updated.

6. **Just use the money –** it's important not to be wasteful, not to botch incentives, not to create dependency, but realistically partners aren't going to do much without additional resources. Balance prudence with the need to match the pace of your partners.
   - Being too hesitant to fund means slowing the pace of experiment.