Volume 3: Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning in Complex Adaptive Environments

Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement (SACE) Program in Nigeria
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Summary

This volume is the last in a series of papers about systems approaches in complex environments, which includes the use of the collective impact model to address large-scale social problems, and the application of participant-driven MEL techniques across 17 networks of civil society organizations. It is based on the experiences of Root Change and Chemonics, two development partners working on a USAID civic engagement project in Nigeria (2013-2018), as well as hundreds of civil society organization partners. This is the final paper in the series and aims to highlight how the adaptation of participatory monitoring, evaluation, and learning techniques (e.g., most significant change, outcome mapping, and outcome harvesting) evolved and ultimately empowered cluster members. The first paper in the series presented a brief introduction to systems approaches in advocacy settings, the SACE theory of change, and the scope of Root Change's work as technical lead on capacity building and measurement. The second volume aims to address the innovative use of the advocacy strategy matrix, adapted from work by the [Center for Evaluation Innovation,](#) for collective impact and the [Collective Impact Model](#), an approach that engages multiple players in working together to solve complex social problems.

Partners

Since 1975, [Chemonics](#) has worked in more than 150 countries to help clients, partners and beneficiaries take on the world's toughest challenges. Their global network of more than 5,000 specialists share an unwavering resolve to work better, driven by a conviction that the world must be better. Chemonics embraces project management as a discipline, not an afterthought, so their clients get maximum impact for minimum risk. They are one of the world's leading partners in international development, with a mission to promote meaningful change around the world to help people live healthier, more productive, and more independent lives.

[Root Change](#) is an internationally recognized NGO that works with civil society organizations in over 14 countries to develop and test practical methods for local systems development, systematic feedback, learning, and agile performance management to support locally driven development. Root Change designs products, technologies and interactive experiences that help people discover their own solutions and has helped over 200 local and international organizations test, pilot and launch local solutions. Root Change is the creator of Pando, an online tool with real-time mapping capability for promoting systems level change, and the pioneers behind Capacity 2.0, a growing international movement to rethink what constitutes effective development practice.

Context

In an effort to distill lessons learned and highlights from its work on a USAID-funded project in Nigeria, Root Change and Chemonics are publishing a three-part series on their experience with capacity building and measurement in democratic reform efforts. The [Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement (SACE)](#) project in Nigeria worked to build a stronger, more resilient, and more nimble civil society by strengthening the capacities of civil society actors to form common agendas, coordinate strategies, share outcome measurements, and share knowledge.

I. "Right-fit" systems for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

In setting out to design and facilitate an emergent approach to collaborative advocacy, the SACE project required adaptations to traditional monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) frameworks. This adaptation was required on two key levels: both to support clusters' unique learning and development over the course of the project and to capture the evidence and stories needed for management of the SACE program. As we developed the tools and processes to meet these two objectives, the same tool often supported the learning and evaluative purposes of the program[1]. Considering the evolution of both aforementioned aspects, the high-level lessons from SACE's MEL approach highlight the importance of flexible and locally responsive MEL strategies.

Traditional project designs often ignore the reality of the learning cycle that characterizes complex, flexible development projects. Given this reality, the MEL framework for the SACE project evolved as the project unfolded over the course of the five years. The evolution of this mixed method framework grew from Root Change's experimental approaches to localizing MEL, which begin as concepts and grounding principles and develop into tools and processes clusters actively used to navigate complexity.[2]

Simultaneously satisfying the data needs of USAID, the clusters and our own learning agenda involved a combination of strategies for data collection and analysis, as well as using the same cluster activity and outcome data for different monitoring, evaluative, and learning purposes. MEL to support and understand the SACE clusters focused on finding the "right-fit evidence[3]" to ensure all stakeholders, including cluster members and SACE, had the right data to make informed decisions and understand clusters' complex work. In this case, the "right-fit**s**" evolved as the context and demands of the project changed and as clusters matured and grew more confident in their collaboration.

Rather than fixating on methodological "purity," SACE adapted several different techniques while maintaining a commitment to the production of data that was credible and actionable. Over the course of the SACE program, the suite of methods that comprised the right fit for supporting and evaluating strategy alignment consisted of:

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[1] Thus throughout this volume, the advocacy strategy matrix, outcome mapping, and outcome harvesting methods relied on the same data and tools. The differences, to be outlined later in this volume, could roughly be distinguished as supporting the different objectives of monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

[2] See Volume 1 for more discussion of complexity and complex adaptive systems.

[3] Ben Tan. 2018. Prioritizing the learning agenda: the CART Principles, Innovations for Poverty Action.

1. *Outcome mapping*: The concept of outcome mapping set the philosophical stage for the SACE TOC and largely informed our MEL approaches for understanding program and cluster outcomes. In using behavior change as the bar for determining outcomes, the approach strongly aligns with the advocacy strategy matrix[4]. The cluster concept was also supported by outcome mapping's idea of "boundary partners", or those actors beyond the direct influence of the program who are affected or targeted by program participants. Lastly, looking at cluster activities as contributions to the issue rather than attributing change to activities helped make sense of the complexity of cluster strategies and reduced competitiveness among organizations.

2. *Outcome harvesting:* We introduced outcome harvesting as a qualitative evaluative approach in the 2015 annual learning summit. Anchors and cluster members reported the outcomes they had witnessed since the beginning of the SACE program. These stories were then shared among clusters and presented with evidence of the stories and the outcomes reported. Both the stories and evidence were peer evaluated by other clusters for their validity and significance.

> *"There is a growing call for 'right-fit' systems which are clear about the different purposes of monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and more strategic about the collection and use of data to meet these different purposes."*
> – Chris Roche and Linda Kelly, [Monitoring and Evaluation for Adaptive Programming](#)

3. *Most Significant Change:* This outcome harvesting approach used a most significant change (MSC) technique to harvest stories of the most significant outcomes from cluster members. Cluster members were asked to share only the most significant outcomes they had witnessed in their advocacy issue. The reported stories were then scored for validity and significance and winnowed to the most significant outcomes of a cluster for dissemination and analysis.

Over the course of the SACE program we also used capacity assessments and network analysis as MEL approaches to monitor cluster member capacity changes and relationship building in clusters' networks[5]. This volume will focus particularly on the project's experience of most significant change and outcome harvesting, with selected techniques from outcome

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[4] See Volume 2 for more discussion on the advocacy strategy matrix and its use in the SACE program.
[5] See Volume 1 for more details, and also *System Analysis for Civic Engagement and Advocacy Initiatives: A legacy product of the SACE program brought to you by Root Change*

mapping. The combination of these techniques emerged as a multi-purpose MEL approach that provided outcomes data to USAID at regular intervals, served as a mechanism to help people understand their organizations' individual work as contributions to overarching cluster goals, and provided a rich source of data for summative evaluation.

For programs seeking to address complex and political environments, the various stakeholders, interactions and unplanned elements mean that traditional M&E – based essentially on tracking cause and effect – does not work. Practitioners who persist in applying traditional approaches end up either with long lists of indicators and questions (trying desperately to cover the whole story) or very high-level or generic measures, which provide no basis for informed decisions about why and how to adapt.

Programs seeking to work adaptively should utilise multiple data collection and analysis methods to illuminate the different aspects of the work. The aim is to provide useful information about how a program is operating, what contributions are being made to change, and the impact and relevance of this contribution. Often that means different systems for assessing program activities and program contributions to change and additional assessment about context – how that might also be changing, and the implications for the program.

This more comprehensive approach is not fully captured by a logframe or performance framework, nor can it be contained to the M&E team alone. It should be part of the fabric of the program itself. It requires thought and considerable engagement with the program implementers and others who can identify the critical factors to be tracked. The M&E therefore has to be comprehensible and accessible. Simplifying processes, language and data collection was a common strategy. This included using telephone apps or Facebook to collect real time data from front line staff, and avoiding the often alienating language of M&E, instead using local or plain English language.

- Chris Roche and Linda Kelly, [Monitoring and Evaluation for Adaptive Programming](#)

II.   SACE TOC and MEL for Emerging Clusters

Organized Nigerian civil society serves as a source of pressure on parties and leaders for better governance, improved performance, and attention to citizens' rights, entitlements, and public needs. SACE was designed as an initiative to strengthen civil society organizations' approaches and perspectives to navigate and influence the complex systems they work to change. Because of the complexity built into, and expected from, the SACE project, relationship and network development were central to the success of the initiative.[6]

To help organizations challenge their assumptions and develop new ways of working, the SACE project introduced the concept of organizational clusters working around a clearly defined thematic issue-area, with a shared vision for change, and 'anchored' by an organization that supported collaboration and collective impact. This approach operated with two underlying premises: that no single organization can create large-scale, lasting social change alone, and that an anchor organization serving as a catalyst, convener, and broker would enable cluster members to add value to the issue most effectively. Cluster are comprised of diverse actors, including civil society organizations, business, media, unions, and community groups. Through working in clusters, organizations came to recognize and value the unique combinations of skills, services, and influence each organization brings to the group. Clusters collaborated around problem-solving using the tools introduced by Chemonics and Root Change, which were adapted to the needs and context of the clusters.

Because of the complexity built into and expected from the SACE project, a number of variables were important to monitor. Relationship building and exchange was monitoring using indicators drawn from organizational network analysis. Organizational capacity to confidently adapt and work systemically was measured in an annual capacity change assessment. But these measures only capture the level of SACE outputs, the direct changes on participating organizations and their close collaborators. Root Change and Chemonics were committed to generating evidence that not only validated the programmatic approach but that ultimately showed clustered advocacy approaches can produce concrete policy and population changes.

The techniques of most significant change, outcome mapping, and outcome harvesting generally provide change agents with central roles in project, but they are not always expected to drive the process. The SACE program prioritized clusters as the heart and first intended beneficiaries of the MEL process, and once they received coaching in how to apply the MEL techniques, they adapted the processes to their own work without externally-imposed priorities. Clusters used the advocacy strategy matrices to plan and monitor activities in cluster reviews, and clusters regularly pivoted and refined strategies based on

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[6] See Volume 1 for a discussion of complexity and complex systems.

the outcomes reported in that process.[7] The annual learning summits served as an opportunity to discuss their progress with peers and program officers in a low-stakes environment that facilitated relationship-building and capacity-building, while also generating evidence for mid-course project corrections and summative evaluation.

In this way, the MEL in the SACE project evolved to both assess *and* improve the capacity of cluster members participating in the project. When local development actors take the lead in their own project review and engage confidently with international development actors, they can make progress toward more enduring, constituent-centered results. Participating organizations developed the skills to think critically about what constitutes strong evidence and worthwhile strategy while they contribute to a shared SACE learning agenda.

III.   Outcome Mapping, Most Significant Change, and Outcoming Harvesting for MEL in Complex Advocacy Initiatives

Complex systems are dynamic, unpredictable and non-linear. In simpler terms, working in the real world involves a lot of moving parts and unexpected turns of events. Due to this uncertainty, programs attempting to work effectively in complex conditions defy the traditional inputs and outputs modeled in log-frames. Rather activities and outcomes emerge through interactions with each other and the environments the program works within. The objective of MEL in these conditions is necessarily focused on making sense of and understanding what happened in the program rather than chasing attribution of outcomes to program interventions.

As a result, the SACE project incorporated several qualitative evaluation techniques into its MEL approach to satisfy its donor-driven evaluative needs, the needs of the organizations involved, and the program's capacity building goals. None of the evaluative techniques stand alone in the project; they are interconnected and feed into each other. Because the concern was to provide credible, actionable data for the project, there was an overriding concern that data collection was feasible, and resulting data was useful, rather than that data adhered to standards of methodological purity. The evaluation techniques selected for the project are considered flexible to the needs of context, without sacrificing their explanatory or learning power.

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[7] For more discussion on the uses of the advocacy strategy matrix to address collective impact conditions, see Volume 2.

A.   Outcome Mapping

Outcome Mapping is a participatory methodology that seeks to identify and assess changes in the behavior of people, groups, and organizations with which a project works directly.[8] Outcome mapping is not concerned with proving causality or attribution, but instead attempts to show logical linkages between outcomes and activities. In helping understand these links, outcome mapping uses three general phases: [9]

Figure 1: Three concepts form the core of outcome mapping (taken from Outcome Mapping. Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs)

Behavioral change: Outcomes are defined as changes in the behavior, relationships, activities, or actions of the people, groups, and organizations with whom a project works directly. These outcomes can be logically linked to project activities, although they are not necessarily directly caused by them.

Boundary partners: Those individuals, groups, and organizations with whom the project interacts directly and with whom the project anticipates opportunities for influence.

Contributions: A project is not claiming the achievement of development impacts; rather, the focus is on its contributions to outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, enhance the possibility of development impacts – but the relationship is not necessarily a direct one of cause and effect.

Design. The first stage is intended to help a project establish consensus on the changes it aims to help bring about, and to plan the strategies it will use.

Monitoring. This stage provides a framework for the ongoing monitoring of the project's actions and the boundary partners' progress toward the achievement of outcomes. Monitoring is based largely on self-assessment.

Evaluation. The final stage is dedicated to developing a descriptive plan of a proposed evaluation.

Although outcome mapping was designed as a planning technique, its monitoring phase can be employed as an empowered record-keeping process. Three types of records can be kept,

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[8] Earl, Carden, Smutylo. 2001. *Outcome Mapping. Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs.* International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada.
[9] https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/outcome_mapping

and it is largely up to the project leaders or donor organization to decide which of the three (or all three) types of records should be reported back on.

- *Performance journal:* a record of the project's progress with regard to the organizational practices, which explains how actors are operating together to fulfil their mission. It is based on the idea that supporting change in boundary partners requires that cluster members are able to change and adapt as well, i.e., not only by being efficient and effective (operational capacities) but also by being relevant (adaptive capacities).
- *Strategy journal*: a record of actions taken in terms of the strategy map (or tactics grid) along with results of such actions. The strategy journal is kept up to date continuously but may be required to be submitted to the donor at intervals.
- *Outcome journal*: record of any events that related directly or indirectly to progress (the expect-to-see, like-to-see and love-to-see items)[10].

B.   Outcome Harvesting

Outcome harvesting is a participatory learning/evaluation method that aims to identify, formulate, verify, and make sense of outcomes.[11] Through group-based discussion, specific questions are posed that serve to answer the following questions:

- What happened?
- Who did it (or contributed to it)?
- How do we know this? Is there corroborating evidence?
- Why is this important? What do we do with what we found out?

Figure 2: Main actors in outcome harvesting

Change agent: Individual or organization that influences an outcome.

Harvest user: The individual(s) who require the findings of an outcome harvest to make decisions or take action. This may be one or more people within the change agent organization(s) or third parties such as a donor.

Harvester: Person responsible for managing the outcome harvest, often an evaluator (external or internal).

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[10] In the SACE program, the advocacy strategy matrix performed the role of all three records.
[11] Wilson-Grau, R & Britt, H. (May 2012). *Outcome Harvesting*. Ford Foundation.

Figure 3: Summary of steps in outcome harvesting (in an ideal environment)

1. Design the Outcome Harvest: Harvest users and harvesters identify useable questions to guide the harvest. Both users and harvesters agree on what information is to be collected and included in the outcome description as well as on the changes in the social actors and how the change agent influenced them.

2. Gather data and draft outcome descriptions: Harvesters glean information about changes that have occurred in social actors and how the change agent contributed to these changes. Information about outcomes may be found in documents or collected through interviews, surveys, and other sources. The harvesters write preliminary outcome descriptions with questions for review and clarification by the change agent.

3. Engage change agents in formulating outcome descriptions: Harvesters engage directly with change agents to review the draft outcome descriptions, identify and formulate additional outcomes, and classify all outcomes. Change agents often consult with well-informed individuals (inside or outside their organization) who can provide information about outcomes.

4. Substantiate: Harvesters obtain the views of independent individuals knowledgeable about the outcome(s) and how they were achieved; this validates and enhances the credibility of the findings.

5. Analyze and interpret: Harvesters organize outcome descriptions through a database in order to make sense of them, analyze and interpret the data, and provide evidence-based answers to the useable harvesting questions.

6. Support use of findings: Drawing on the evidence-based, actionable answers to the useable questions, harvesters propose points for discussion to harvest users, including how the users might make use of findings. The harvesters also wrap up their contribution by accompanying or facilitating the discussion amongst harvest users.

-Ricardo Wilson-Grau and Heather Britt, [Outcome Harvesting](#) (2013)

Defying traditional evaluative approaches which attempt to measure an intervention's impact, outcome harvest inverts the question to work background from what has changed to determine how a program may have contributed. Outcome harvesting was an ideal match for SACE's approach to supporting complex change. In both lacking and rejecting perfect understanding of causes and effects in the complex environment of Nigerian civil society and government, the SACE program embraced unintended outcomes and surprising contributions.

In making the outcome harvesting process participatory through cluster outcome review, this process also supported cluster communication and strategy alignment, both core conditions for Collective Impact. Clusters developed the skills to interrogate their own outcomes and think critically about the significant of their contributions. Outcome harvesting engaged the clusters in managing their own evaluative process and accelerated learning through events and cluster meetings.

C.   Most Significant Change

The Most Significant Change (MSC) approach is a form of participatory MEL that involves generating and analyzing personal accounts of change and deciding which of these accounts is the most significant – and why. There are three basic steps in using MSC:[12]

1. Deciding the types of stories that should be collected (stories about *what* - for example, about changes in practices or outcomes or empowerment)
2. Collecting the stories and determining which stories are the most significant
3. Sharing the stories and discussion of values with stakeholders and contributors so that learning happens about what is valued.

MSC is not just about collecting and reporting stories but about having processes to learn from these stories – in particular, to learn about the similarities and differences in what different groups and individuals value. In reporting, documenting, and analyzing their own stories of significant change, organizations came to their own conclusions and identified their own patterns. MSC in SACE was primarily used to collect and winnow stories of complex policy outcomes for analysis through outcome mapping. In the suite of MEL techniques described in this volume, MSC supported both the evaluative and learning components.

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[12] Davies, R. and Dart, J. (2005) *The 'Most Significant Change' Technique - A Guide to Its Use*, Funded by CARE International, United Kingdom, Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, Australia, Learning to Learn, Government of South Australia, Oxfam, New Zealand, Christian Aid, United Kingdom, Exchange, United Kingdom, Ibis, Denmark, Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke (MS), Denmark, Lutheran World Relief, United States of America.

IV. Innovating and Implementing Participatory MEL

A. Starting with the Story: Most Significant Change in Relational Capacities

The genesis for the introduction of outcome harvesting in the SACE Nigeria program was a most significant change protocol that was used to capture changes in the relational capacities of cluster organizations. Traditional understandings of organizational capacity assume that internal systems and management practices contribute to an organization's "capacity." However, how well an organization represents the communities it serves, prioritizes making connections, leverages resources to learn and share knowledge within its network, and adapts to its ever-changing environment are under-appreciated "higher order" capacities that contribute to an organization's ability to achieve impact in its work. Chemonics and Root Change recognized the importance of changing the processes surrounding organizational relations, e.g., "the way of doing things," as the core of their systems approach. These new relationships, opportunities, and possibilities often contribute to outcomes, but not necessarily outcomes that are anticipated by the funder or program. Changes in relational practice, i.e. how people and organizations relate to each other, can lead to new "rules of the game" that enhance change mechanisms and the institutions that they are trying to influence.

Table 1: STAR drivers/change types

Change Type	Definition
1. Adaptive Voice and Accountability Strategy and Tactics	A change in how an organization works with others to ensure all stakeholders have a shared vision, a common understanding of the advocacy issue, and a joint approach for adapting strategy and tactics to achieve priority advocacy goals.
2. Stakeholder Engagement	A change in how an organization engages with a diverse set of current and new partners through regular and open communication, trust building, recognizing member achievements, and motivating others to develop clear and complimentary roles and responsibilities.
3. Monitoring and Evaluation	A change in how an organization works with others to build agreement on how success will be measured and reported, and how common indicators of success are used for both learning and improvement.
4. Member and Partner Development	A change in how an organization ensures members/partners are developing the necessary skills to lead and/or effectively participate in joint activities by finding appropriate training

|	opportunities and connecting them with capacity development coaches and technical consultants.
5. Knowledge Exchange	A change in how an organization develops mechanisms for identifying, capturing, cataloging, validating and disseminating knowledge and expertise from partners and other outside actors to support its work.
6. Alliance Building	A change in how an organization brokers or strengthens ties between many different types of actors, both current and new, in order to expand voice and initiatives.
7. Innovation & Experimentation	A change in how an organization seeks out new ways of accomplishing voice and accountability initiatives and how they rally Cluster Members to test and share the results of these new approaches.
8. Public Awareness	A change in how an organization seeks out new ways to improve public awareness, discourse and citizen support for key democratic governance issues (such as transparency, accountability, and good governance).

An initial survey was conducted by all anchor organizations and select cluster members to determine the degree to which their capacity to work in a cluster model and advance targeted advocacy goals had improved. Stories of change were captured at later cluster gatherings, where colleagues and peers provided feedback to strengthen stories. This cluster sharing process continued throughout the duration of the project. As the scope of the MEL practicies evolved beyond the parameters of relational capacities, these change types became less of a focus during cluster data collection and discussion. However, they continued to be used for the coding process that led to analysis and interpretation.[13]

B.   Introducing the Advocacy Strategy Matrix: Multi-Faceted Tool for Outcome Mapping

Root Change and Chemonics systematized clusters' MSC-inspired thinking with the introduction of the advocacy strategy matrix, in an effort to help organize the range of outcomes and activities clusters were reporting. The matrix was adapted from the advocacy strategy framework originally proposed by the Center for Evaluation Innovation, which provides a heuristic for considering theories of change that moves beyond the standard log-frame model. The framework is intended to help advocacy practitioners think about the theories of change that underlie public policy advocacy strategies. The tool provides a simple matrix organized around two main dimensions: the target audiences (x-axis) and the desired changes (y-axis) expected of those audiences.

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[13] See the Analysis section in this volume.

Figure 4: Advocacy strategy framework, adapted by SACE into the advocacy strategy matrix[14]
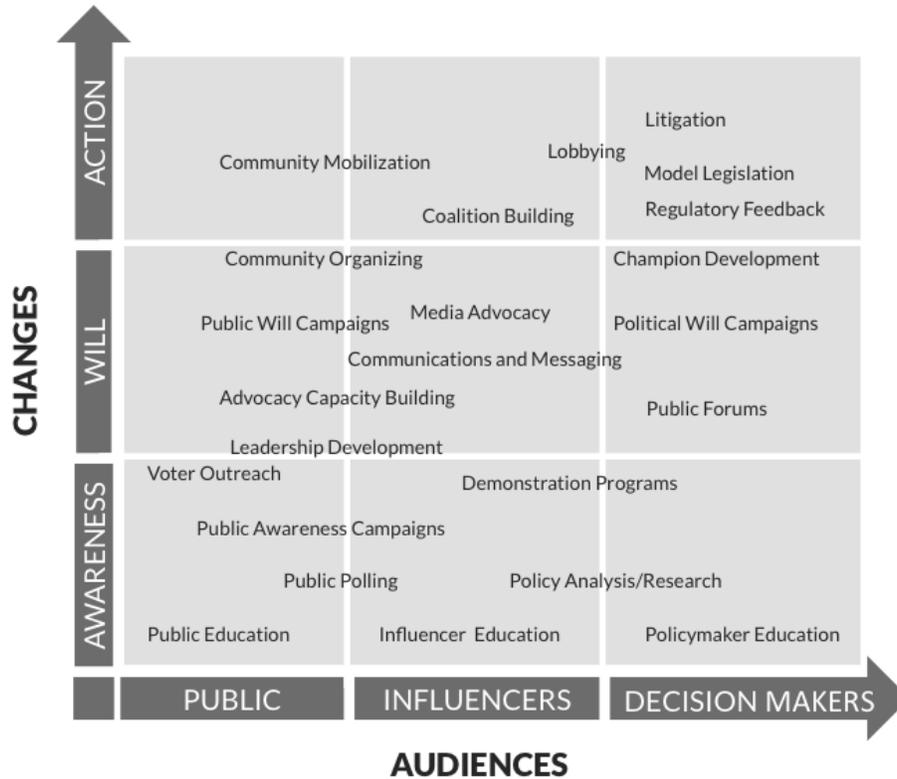
The advocacy strategy *matrix* was introduced to clusters as a tool to help map cluster members' diverse *activities* targeting different audiences, regions, and outcomes, and not just serve to inform the theory of change. In SACE, an additional column was also added to capture cluster-focused capacity building activities. The matrix was first introduced at the second annual learning summit that took place 2.5 years into the project, and became the tool clusters routinely used to review their strategies and tactics in as close to real time as possible. The matrix helped clusters identify gaps in their advocacy strategies and pointed to areas where clusters needed to diversify membership or seek allies to complement existing priorities. The tool captured a snapshot of cluster activities at a given point in time and allowed clusters and anchors to monitor the evolution of their advocacy issues over time. It not only functions as a visual representation of the record-keeping phase employed in outcome mapping but expands its functionality by allowing change agents to *see* the linkages among organizational change, strategies, and outcomes within the appropriate parts of the matrix.

The advocacy strategy matrix functioned as both a measurement tool and a capacity development tool for SACE. As a measurement tool, it was adapted into an outcome tracker.

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[14] Coffman, J. & Beer, T. 2015. The Advocacy Strategy Framework: A tool for articulating an advocacy theory of change: Center for Evaluation Innovation.

Stories reported weekly by SACE on the tactics and achievements of clusters were added to this tracker throughout the project. This allowed SACE to monitor on a regular basis how each cluster was progressing towards their advocacy goals. By visualizing reported stories along the framework SACE was able to track over the life of the project how clusters moved from awareness, to commitment, to action and how their individual and collective activities lead to interim outcomes that supported their specific advocacy objectives. The tracker monitored the links between activities and tactics used by the cluster and the reported interim outcomes.

C.   Reflect, Identify, Formulate, and Substantiate: Cluster Members as Harvesters

Outcome harvesting in the SACE project was conducted at annual learning summits.[15] At this convening, clusters were asked to place all of their reported outcomes on a grid with two axes: contribution and impact.[16] The grids were displayed at the front of the room for discussion. This was followed by a peer review in plenary, and subsequently clusters agreed to some adjustments in the how they ranked impact and contribution for each of their outcomes.

Figure 5: Instructions for categorizing outcomes by contribution and impact

> **Task**: Work in your cluster to categorize your outcomes.
> 1. Write out an outcome.
> 2. Consider contribution: what activities did I do to get there, who else was working on this?
> 3. Consider impact: what does this outcome mean for those I'm trying to help? How many people is my outcome reaching? Is there additional work that I need to do to on this outcome.
> 4. Post the outcome on the grid.

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[15] Any regularly scheduled events that bring large groups together can be used to complete this outcome harvesting work.

[16] See later in this section for the contribution scale and impact scale, with rubrics.

Figure 6: Photo of policy outcome matrix

Following the discussion on contribution and impact, each cluster was asked to choose their most significant outcome based on the previous work and discussion. Each cluster then created a *journey map* for this outcome and presented it to another clusters, as well as project managers. These discussions were recorded using video and audio equipment, and later transcribed for sharing across clusters.

Figure 7: Creating a journey map of a significant outcome

Task: Work in your cluster to create a journey map. On the map, you should depict the full story of a significant outcome, and the journey your cluster took throughout the SACE project.

- Pick your most significant outcome (only 1) and place it on your journey map under the relevant year. Encircle it in the shape of a sun.
- When did the idea for this effort first begin? Identify the start-up activities and the subsequent activities that led to your outcome. Be sure to place the activities in the appropriate year and sequence. Mark them by placing a box around the description.
- Include any important activities that you have done since that outcome, if applicable.
- At what points in your journey did you break new ground? Describe them on your journey map, and mark each with a diamond.
- At what points in your journey did you encounter challenges or setbacks? Describe them on your journey map, and mark each with an exclamation point.
- At what points did you pivot or change your cluster strategy? Why? Describe them on your journey map, and mark each with a triangle.
- At what points were SACE tools important to your work in achieving this outcome? Which tool was it? Describe them on your journey map, and mark each with a star.
- Take a step back and look at your journey from beginning to present. What was the cluster mood at different points along the journey? Mark these points with emoji faces (happy face, sad face, neutral, other emotion).
- Describe what's next for your cluster in support of this outcome. Put this work in a cloud bubble.
- Feel free to add supporting narrative on additional flip charts when needed, making sure to mark where they correspond in your journey.

Figure 8: Example of a SACE cluster journey map for the Accountability in Resource Management of NDIs
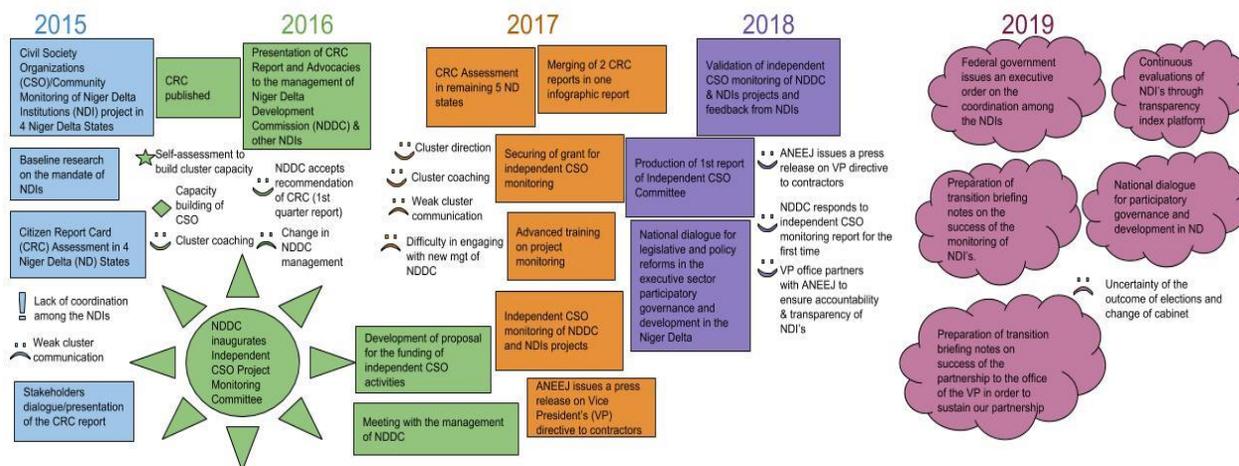
The purpose of the journey map and explanatory discussion was to have clusters dive into change stories for a better understanding of contribution (which cluster members did what..). This process also led to better explanations of the reasons for strategy pivots, understanding how the cluster was doing in terms of communication and transparency through the journey, and identification of the most important and supportive SACE methodologies.

This modified outcome harvesting process is conducted at each annual learning summit throughout the course of the project. At the second summit, another MSC process was conducted, but with the advocacy strategy matrix serving as a visual "mapping' of outcomes as they connected to advocacy activities and cluster changes.

1.   Independent substantiation process

In the traditional model of outcome harvesting, substantiation is driven by external evaluators, rather than change agents. But in reality, some contexts require a more substantive basis for the evaluation of outcomes. Instead of sacrificing the participatory nature of MEL that puts change agents at the heart of the evaluation process, an additional step could be added to strengthen conclusions around contribution and impact.

An independent panel of experts can provide a reliability check and refinement of the conclusions on how much the project contributed to outcomes, and whether outcomes were sustainable and transformational in nature.[17] The panel should be composed of local experts who are knowledgeable about policy change and civil society advocacy and who are well-versed in all, or some, of the cluster issue areas. Program staff may also participate as an

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[17] In research parlance, this would be considered a form of inter-rater reliability.

option for clarification of project activities. The panel would use the same inputs to the process that change agents employed, including self-assessment results, journey maps, advocacy strategy matrices, and recorded stories, in addition to regular project monitoring reports.

Table 2: Sample criteria for evaluating the outcomes and activities

The plausibility of a relationship between the reported outcome and cluster activities:	*How plausible is it that cluster activities actually led to or contributed to the reported outcomes?*
The plausibility that the activities conducted were <u>the only ones</u> that could have contributed to the reported outcome:	*How plausible is it that the strategies and tactics taken by the cluster were the ones that led the reported change? Are there alternative or rival explanations that could explain this reported outcome?*
The importance or significance of the change within this specific issue area:	*To what extent has this change had a positive impact on the advocacy issue the cluster is targeting? Does the change address root causes of the issue, and are the changes sustainable?*

Panels would be expected to provide brief explanations (2-5 sentences) describing their rationale for the scoring of each change story.

- **Contribution**. Explanations should include examples of the evidence used to formulate an opinion on plausibility for a connection between outcomes and cluster activities, alternative explanations that the panel thinks are plausible, and evidence of why cluster activities may or may not better explain the outcome than the alternative explanation(s).

Figure 9: Contribution scale for evaluating outcomes

1 None	2 Minimal	3 Moderate	4A Substantial Sole	4B Substantial Shared

1- None	There is little evidence that the cluster contributed to this outcome.
2- Minimal	The cluster's contribution to this outcome was minimal. Alternatively, the evidence for the contribution may be extremely weak.
3- Moderate	The cluster's contribution can be clearly traced to the outcome, but it wasn't a defining reason for the outcome, i.e., there are other contributions/events beyond the cluster that likely caused the outcome.
4A- Substantial – Sole contribution	The cluster's contribution to the outcome was a defining reason for the achievement of the outcome, and it is likely that the contribution was the only reason for this achievement.
4B- Substantial – Shared contribution	The cluster's contribution to the outcome was a defining reason for the achievement of the outcome, and it is likely that the contribution was shared among other actors in the system beyond the cluster.

- **Impact.** Explanations should include examples of the status of the issue before the cluster started working with the SACE program, root causes of the issue and whether or not they were addressed, evidence of the importance or impact of the change on this advocacy issue, and evidence of why the change is or is not sustainable.

Figure 10: Impact scale for evaluating outcomes

| 1 Not noteworthy | 2 Potential for impact | 3 Notable signs of impact | 4 Disruptive but unstable impact | 5 Transform- ational and lasting change |
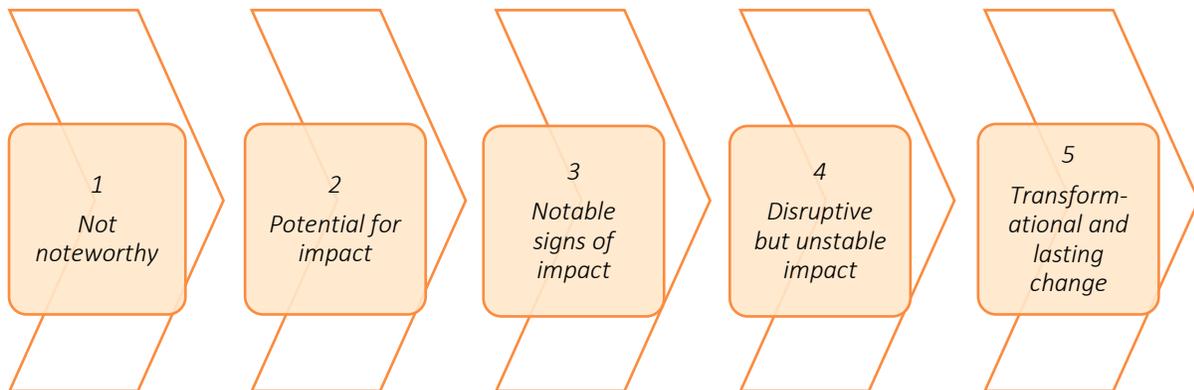
1- Not Noteworthy	The change does not represent notable progress on the cluster issue, does not address systemic root causes, and/or is not likely to be durable or lasting
2- Potential for Impact	The change represents notable progress on the cluster issue, but does not sufficiently address the systemic root causes that would make this change lasting
3- Notable Signs of Impact	The change represents notable progress on the cluster issue and addresses *some* of the systemic root causes that would make this change lasting. The longevity of the change is somewhat uncertain.
4- Disruptive but unstable impact	The change is extremely disruptive to the status quo and addresses the issue on a deeper level (e.g., root causes of the issue), but the circumstances are too fluid to be labelled transformational and lasting.
5- Transformational and Lasting Change	The change represents notable progress on the cluster issue and addresses many of the systemic root causes necessary for lasting change

D.   Analyze and Interpret

The analysis stage of evaluation focused on commonalities across clusters, pattern identification, and types and levels of change. The process was performed by a small evaluation team, and involved a review of outcomes, change stories, journey maps, advocacy strategy matrices, project monitoring reports, as well as interviews and surveys of project officers and advisors. Outcomes and activities were also coded as the project progressed, using terms that were familiar to change agents and had been refined during implementation of the various MEL techniques, and during capacity building exercises.[18]

1.   Commonalities and Discordances

Given the self-assessment scores and the panel review scores, evaluators examined the differences in both final scores and reasoning behind those scores to identify commonalities and discordances. The aim was to identify the degree to which clusters shared common standards (or not) across their spheres of work, and to explain any differences in the values ascribed to outcomes by cluster members that conflict with the view of panel review members.

Figure 11: Key questions to identify patterns

2.   Patterns

Evaluators also looked for patterns in the data about the types of changes that occurred and their relationship to outcomes. This process involved asking questions about the strength of evidence for cluster contributions, the presence of alternative explanations that might better correspond with outcomes, and which strategies and tactics lead to certain outcomes. The goal was to generate analysis that would help to refine future implementation of the collective impact model.

- For what types of changes was it most plausible that clusters' activities contributed?
- For what types of changes were there no rival explanations?
- Which changes were examples of transformational and lasting change? What was the context of the issue area in these cases?
- What other activities, strategies or actions outside of the SACE program were offered as rival explanations? How did these fit into cluster activities?
- What strategies and tactics led to the highest scored outcomes? Were diverse strategies more effective than redundant strategies? What does this tell us about future implementation of a similar CI approach?

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[18] See the Annexes for coding categories.

3.   Levels of change

Substantiated outcomes were also mapped onto stages in the SACE theory of change. Evaluators looked for instances of cluster changes, system changes, and impact, and tried to identify patterns in timing, or relationships between outcomes and strategies/activities across clusters.

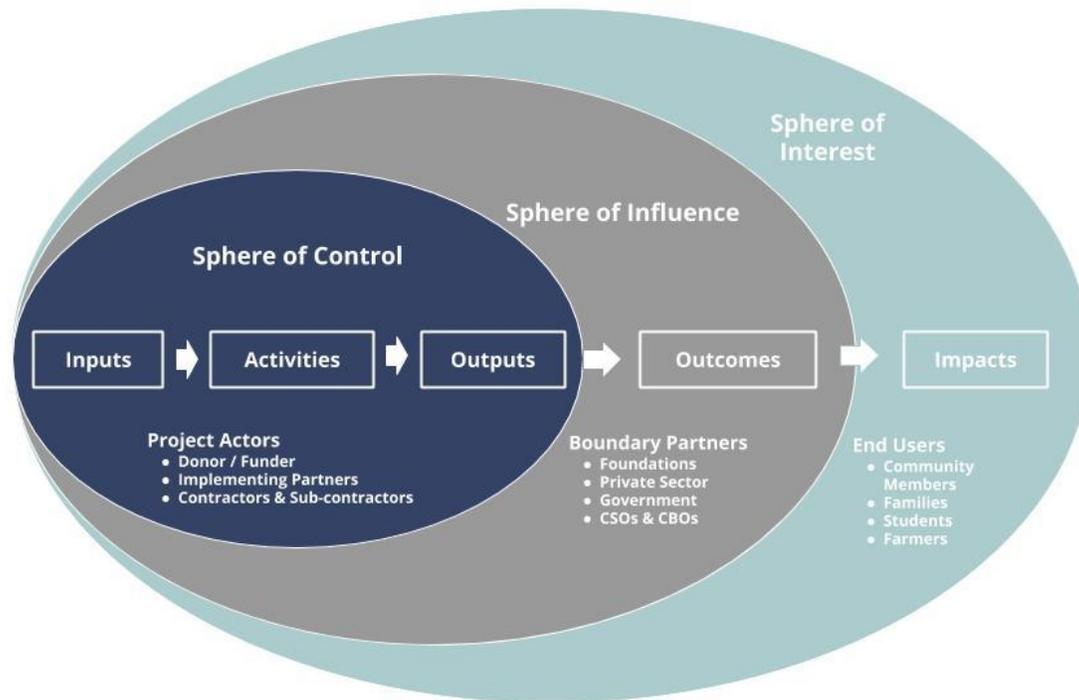*Figure 12: SACE Theory of Change and Project Results Framework*

Figure13: Levels of changes in the SACE project[19]

Cluster changes	System changes	Population changes/Impact
Changes happening within the project sphere of control. In a Collective Impact model, the sphere of control includes many more organizations and actors than is typical in a more traditional project model, as it includes the backbone organization and partner organizations participating in the initiative.	Changes happening within the project sphere of influence. The sphere of influence goes beyond organizations directly involved in the project, into boundary partners and stakeholders who have interest in and ability to influence the issue on which the initiative is focused.	Changes happening within the sphere of interest. The sphere of interest includes the ultimate target population or beneficiaries of the initiative. Another way of looking at impact is to ask...whose lives will be improved if the initiative is successful and how?

4.   Relationships with Other Factors

Analysis of outcome harvesting data can also be used in conjunction with various other types of data. The SACE project collected data on the networks clusters built and was able to compare outcome harvesting data to social network analysis results from each cluster.[20]

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[19] Adapted from the framework used by ORS Impact and Spark Policy Institute. 2018. When Collective Impact Has an Impact: A cross-site study of 25 collective impact initiatives.

[20] For more on this work, see Root Change's paper titled *System Analysis for Civic Engagement and Advocacy Initiatives.*

V. Challenges with Participatory MEL in an Adaptive Environment

A. Scope of Outcome Harvesting May Be Sacrificed for Increased Participation and Empowerment

Because of the intensive time and effort required to generate change stories for all outcomes, and the amount of data that this comprehensive application would have generated, the SACE project team decided to limit outcome harvesting to 1 or 2 major outcomes for each annual gathering and major cluster review meetings. The burden of producing change stories and journey maps for all outcomes in a large-scale participant-driven process was simply too onerous to expect from clusters on a monthly or weekly basis, especially since their main priorities were advancing advocacy strategies for their cluster goals, and not gathering data on those outcomes.

One of the drawbacks of limiting outcome harvesting to one or two major changes per review session is that negative outcomes or more surprising outcomes often are not included. A cluster member may inadvertently contribute to changes that significantly detract from, undermine, or obstruct a desirable result. When self-reporting, clusters were less likely to recall, track, document, and report these negative outcomes. There is also the risk that non-action on the part of social actors may not be recognized as an outcome. Influencing a social actor not to take action – that is, preventing something undesirable from happening – can be a significant outcome, but is often awkward to formulate as a change.

B. Summative Evaluation May Be Limited, or Require Significant Forensics-Style Investigation of Outcomes

Because clusters didn't produce change stories for all outcomes, there was often little evidence connecting activities with outcomes recorded outside the outcome harvesting process. Analysis of outcomes was therefore limited to six clusters for which information was generally more available, but did require considerable attention to collecting evidence of outcomes and activities by the evaluation team.

C. Division of Labor/Location Creates Challenges for Implementation

Similar to many international development projects, there was a division of labor between the technical design team in the United States (Root Change) and the implementing team on the ground in Nigeria (Chemonics). While not limiting partnership to location allows for a

greater breadth of ideas to consider, it does present challenges with adaptive settings. The amount of time required to implement a change of course or a new technique is complicated by the need to bring partners together both in communications and though in-person convenings. Flexibility in programming is paramount to ensuring that the best possible decisions are made in the best interest of the project, even if it means that innovation in practice is delayed or implemented slightly different than envisioned.

D.   Balancing Donor and Project Demands Requires Resourcefulness and Commitment to Innovation

MEL in the SACE project can be characterized as evolving from a developmental evaluation standpoint.[21] Developmental Evaluation facilitates real-time, or close to real-time, feedback to program staff, facilitating a continuous development loop. Though the main focus of developmental evaluation is on adaptive learning rather than accountability to an external authority, it does not prevent recognition of donor reporting requirements or desire for summative evaluation of outcomes. Evaluation team members are committed to situational responsiveness, flexibility, and innovation that serves the project, while also keeping an eye on the need for methodological rigor and analysis, and making adjustments accordingly.

1.   Creating a Policy Tracker

Once clusters started to regularize the advocacy strategy matrix, it became clear that many cluster members were having difficulty in differentiating between inputs, outputs and outcomes. SACE launched the Policy Tracker as a way to focus clusters on policy level outcome change. The tracker identifies multiple stages in the policy development/adoption cycle. This helped clusters track progress and take a more critical view about reporting and describing policy outcomes.

2.   Designing and Leading an Advocacy Windows of Opportunity Workshop and a Political Economy Analysis Workshop for Cluster Members

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Initial results from the advocacy strategy matrix identified that the strategies and tactics across clusters closely resembled one another. In many cases, they included scheduled (or unscheduled) meetings with influencers during which time cluster members would deliver a letter or petition. Collectively, SACE program participants and the project implementation team observed that clusters were not acting and thinking politically, or leveraging windows

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[21] https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/developmental_evaluation

of opportunity to promote their issues/change agendas. These two workshops were developed to address these weaknesses, and both were well received.

3.   Investing in Advocacy Innovations

Most clusters struggled with the "innovation capacity driver" or its sister metric, the innovation change type. It became clear that the advocacy strategy matrix wasn't necessarily a driver of new ideas or an innovation generator. Together with workshops on windows of opportunity and political economy analysis, the matrix helped cluster members to think and act politically together as a cluster of organizations, which engendered greater success accessing influencers and directly engaging decision makers. But this process did not translate into "new models" or experimental innovations. As a result, SACE created a small grants program for innovations in advocacy. The grants were open to both cluster members and others not previously working under SACE.[22]

VI. What did Participatory MEL Reveal in SACE Nigeria?

While the participatory MEL that the SACE project implemented was not focused solely on summative evaluation, it did provide a rich source of data for analysis and interpretation. The policy tracker introduced in the middle of the project provided a glimpse of the policy change capability of the SACE systems approach: 63 policy outcomes were reported by clusters. Examples include:

- Inclusive education policy on verge of ascent in FCT (Abuja);
- Akwa Ibom State Youth Development Fund (AKYDF) Bill passed;
- Primary Healthcare Under One Roof (PHCUOR) passed in Kaduna and Katsina states

There were also cluster and system changes that emerged from the final analysis:

- Cross-cluster collaboration had increased near the end of the project, such as the Quality of Health Services cluster working with Open Budgeting of Health Services cluster.
- There was an increase in systems thinking mentality, e.g., awareness of and collaboration with others.
- Clusters adopted SACE tools and procedures across their non-SACE work, e.g., the CISLAC cluster now uses the advocacy strategy matrix in all their work.

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[22] An example of one of the products from these grants can be found here:
https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/09/your-excellency-game-app-debuts-in-nigeria/

- There was increased formation of relationships/partnerships with new and diverse actors that clusters reported they would not have otherwise thought to work with.
- There was increased involvement of non-traditional actors in legislation drafting and legislative advocacy. This included women, farmers, youth, and persons with disabilities.
- Clusters took on new leadership and influential roles, e.g., female leaders on the Ministry of Agriculture board, CSOs on project monitoring committees for Niger Delta Institutions.

VII. Final thoughts

The range and evolution of the "right fit" for the SACE program illustrates the inherent complexity of acknowledging complexity. To adequately capture the breadth and depth of clusters' activities and contributions to their advocacy issue SACE employed innovative methods to intentionally address each element of MEL. The suite of tools and approaches for monitoring collective impact may seem daunting initially and must be introduced gradually and as needed. Organizations hoping to work with these approaches should avoid barraging program participants with yet another set of tools. Rather, MEL tools in collective impact should help cluster members and anchors better make sense of their complex environments and respond to demands arising from cluster work.

The successes of SACE's MEL approaches also highlight the importance of allowing for local emergence to find the right fit. The development of the SACE MEL suite arose through the combined work and shared learning of SACE participants, the SACE team, and Root Change. All perspectives were necessary to understand the diverse and sometimes competing priorities. Program officers and evaluators most likely don't fully grasp their context at the outset of a program; maintaining rigid evaluative frameworks from start to finish of a program handicaps program adaptation and disincentivizes learning.

SACE also shows the downside of "methodological purity" and adherence to tools: tools and methods always work differently in the real world than they do conceptually. In introducing general concepts and tool drafts, Root Change provided the raw material for the SACE team and the cluster members to customize to their context and needs. MEL approaches, particularly those in systems oriented programs, should intentionally support each element with the expectation that the learning will ultimately be the most impactful.

VIII. Glossary of Terms

AKYDF	Akwa Ibom Youth Development Fund
ALS	Annual learning summit
ASM	Advocacy strategy matrix
CBO	Community-based organization
CEI	Center for Evaluation Innovation
CI	Collective Impact
CENSOJ	Centre for Social Justice
CISLAC	Civil Society and Legislative Action Centre
CSO	Civil society organization
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
HERFON	Health Reform Foundation
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
JONAPWD	Joint Association for People with Disabilities
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
MSC	Most significant change
NDI	Niger Delta Institutions
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OH	Outcome harvesting
OM	Outcome mapping
PDIA	Problem-driven iterative adaptation
PEA	Political economy analysis
PHCUOR	Primary Healthcare Under One Roof
SACE	Strengthening Advocacy and Civic Engagement Program
SSIR	Stanford Social Innovation Review
STAR	System for Transformation and Results
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WARDC	Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre

Annex

Annex A: Activity Categories for Coding Process

Strategy or Tactic	Definition
Advocacy / Cluster Capacity Building	Using financial support, training, coaching, or mentoring to increase the ability of organizations, citizen groups, or cluster actors to lead, adapt, manage, and technically implement an advocacy strategy.
Alliance Building	Unifying voices by bringing together individuals, groups, or organizations that agree on a particular issue or goal
Champion Development	Recruiting high-profile individuals to adopt an issue and publically advocate for it.
Cluster Consensus	Unifying advocacy voices to bring together individuals, organizations within a cluster to agree on a particular issue, goal or strategy.
Cluster Collaboration	Cluster actors coordinating their work and acting together.
Communications & Messaging	Transmitting information to target audiences to influence how an issue is presented, discussed, or perceived.
Community Mobilization	Creating or building a community-based groundswell of support for an issue or position.
Community Organizing	Working with people in communities to develop the capacity to advocate on their own behalf.
Demonstration Programs	Implementing a policy proposal on a small scale in one or several sits to show how it can work.
Influencer Education	Telling people who are influential in the policy area about an issue or position, and about its broad or impassioned support.
Leadership Development	Increasing the capacity (through training, coaching, and mentoring) of individuals to lead others to take action in support of an issue or position.
Model Legislation	Developing a specific policy solution (and proposed policy language) for the issue or problem being addressed.

Media Advocacy	Pitching to or including in activities the print, broadcast, or electronic media to get visibility for an issue with specific audiences
Policy Analysis and Research	Systematically investigating an issue or problem to better define it or identify possible solutions
Policymaker Education	Telling policymakers and candidates about an issue or position, and about its broad or impassioned support.
Political Will Campaign	Communications (in-person meetings, media, social media, etc.) to increase the willingness of policy makers to act in support of an issue or policy proposal.
Public Awareness Campaigns	Communications with the public that increase recognition that a problem exists or familiarity with the policy proposal.
Public Education	Telling the public (or segments of the public) about an issue or position, and about is road or impassioned support.
Public Forums	Group gatherings and discussions that are open to the public and help to make an advocacy case on an issue.
Public Will Campaign	Communications (in-person, media, social media, etc.) to increase the willingness of a target audience (non-policymakers) to act in support or an issue or policy proposal.
Regulatory Feedback	Providing information and existing policy rules and regulations to policymakers or others who have the authority to act on the issue and put change in motion

Annex B: Outcome Categories for Coding Process

Outcome	Definition
Changed Attitudes or Beliefs	Target audiences' feelings or affect about the issue or policy proposal.
Increased Cluster / Stakeholder Collaboration	Cluster actors or new stakeholders and influencers coordinating their work and acting together.
Increased Cluster Commitment	Willingness of new cluster members to act in support of an issue or policy proposal.
Increased Advocacy Capacity	The ability of an organization, coalition, or citizen group to lead, adapt, manage, and technically implement an advocacy strategy.
Increased Knowledge	Audience recognition that a problem exists or familiarity with a policy proposal.
Increased or Improved Media Coverage	Quantity and/or quality of coverage generated in print, broadcast, or electronic media.
Increased Political Will or Commitment	Willingness of policymakers to act in support of an issue or policy proposal.
Increased Public Will or Commitment	Willingness of a (non-policymaker) target audience to act in support of an issue or policy proposal.
New Political Champions	High-profile individuals who adopt an issue and publicly advocate for it.
Stronger Cluster Relationships	Mutually beneficial relationships with other cluster members who support or participate in an advocacy strategy.
Successful Mobilization of Public Voices	Increase in the number of individuals who can be counted on for sustained advocacy or action on an issue.