

How to evaluate partnership and whole of government approaches to development

Guidance note
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1. Introduction

This note provides guidance on how to define and evaluate the UK's partnership and whole-of-government approaches, and the range of levers (programmatically and non-programmatic) the UK employs, principally at the country level, for British High Commissions (BHCs) and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and other departments involved in international development. The note is designed to support those commissioning, designing and/or undertaking evaluations. It draws on methods and lessons from an evaluation conducted for the BHC in Tanzania which evaluated the UK's support to sustainable growth and investment.¹

2. Understanding partnership and whole of government approaches

The UK government is transforming its development model and moving to partnership and whole-of-government approaches, reflecting the changing needs of partners and declining ODA environment. This involves working across UK government and utilising a range of levers² (Box 1), going beyond conventional aid programmes and traditional aid spending departments (e.g., FCDO) to achieve the UK's international development objectives more coherently and effectively and providing better value for money. While the approach is not new (see the 2015 UK aid strategy³), the objective is to move from a donor model involved directly in service delivery to one based more on partnership, investment and indirect support.⁴ The UK government is doing this through four essential shifts, as outlined by Baroness Chapman, Minister of State for International Development in June 2025:⁵

- **Moving from donor to investor:** partnering with countries to unlock growth, jobs and trade through innovative finance and private sector investment.
- **Moving from service delivery to system support:** helping countries build their own education, health and economic systems, so they can thrive without aid.
- **Moving from grants to expertise:** leveraging UK strengths, like world-class universities, the City of London, the Met Office, HMRC, education, health and tech sectors.
- **Moving from international intervention to local provision:** working through local partners and civil society to deliver sustainable, locally led solutions.

This includes, for example, mobilising and/or leveraging other sources of finance, both private and public; using the UK's convening power and diplomacy to increase impact; and increased use of expertise to provide technical assistance to partner governments.

Box 1 provides more details on the UK's partnership and whole of government approaches and defines commonly used programmatically and non-programmatic levers and financial instruments, as well as relationships.

¹ Agulhas Applied Knowledge (forthcoming), British High Commission Tanzania: Sustainable Growth and Investment Partnerships Evaluation – Evaluation Report

² Sometimes alternatively referred to 'the UK using all its tools in the toolbox'

³ HMT and DFID (2015) UK aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest, [link](#)

⁴ Future of UK international aid: MPs launch inquiry amidst 40% budget cut. International Development Committee, 2 October 2025 [link](#)

⁵ Baroness Chapman letter to the International Development Committee, 12 June 2025, [link](#)

Box 1: UK partnership and whole of government approaches, including relationships, levers and financial instruments

The UK's recent shift in its international development model defines **partnerships** as long-term, equitable collaborations with partner countries that go beyond traditional aid. This approach emphasises mutual respect and shared objectives, moving away from donor-recipient relationships to work in ways that value local priorities and leadership. **Whole of government** approaches involve all UK government departments involved in UK international development. UK whole of government and partnership approaches include a mix of **levers** (e.g., diplomacy, influence, technical expertise, technical assistance, investment, financing, etc.) to address complex development challenges. UK partnerships in international development mean working collaboratively and inclusively with a wider range of actors to address development challenges, with a strong emphasis on local ownership, long-term results, and blending aid with investment and expertise. Underpinning these approaches are **relationships** between key actors, which contribute to the success of the UK's support.

- **Non-programmatic levers:**

- **Diplomacy:** Strategic use of dialogue, negotiation, soft power and influence to advance the UK's objectives, including national and development interests, and promote global values in partnerships with government, private sector, civil society and development partners.
- **Convening, networks, partnership and relationship facilitation:** Strategic use of the UK's diplomatic standing, networks and credibility to bring together diverse stakeholders to engage in dialogue, coordination or collective action on shared priorities (e.g., roundtables, dialogues, development partner coordination and stakeholder forums), including engagement of diaspora.
- **Communications:** The deliberate use of messaging, media, stakeholder engagement, and public diplomacy to promote the visibility, transparency, credibility, and influence of UK-funded development initiatives, both within partner countries and globally.
- **UK expertise:** Sharing knowledge, standards, approaches, etc. that are considered best practice or contextually relevant and originate from the UK. Delivered by HMG staff, investment expertise, commercial know-how, etc. (e.g., on trade policy, investment diagnostics and facilitation).

- **Programmatic levers:**

- **Technical assistance:** Provision of external support, often in the form of advice, research, knowledge generation, training, systems development or institutional strengthening. It includes technical expertise (e.g., diagnostics, feasibility studies, and research and analysis) and programme management expertise (e.g., monitoring, evaluation and learning and value for money).
- **Direct delivery:** Provision of goods or services directly to beneficiaries or government institutions through FCDO bilaterally managed programmes, FCDO centrally/HQ managed programmes, or multilateral financing.

- **Financial instruments:**

- **Leveraged private finance:** Commercial or philanthropic capital mobilised from private sector entities (e.g. banks, investors, companies and foundations) as a direct result of UK funding, risk-sharing instruments, facilitation, loans or technical assistance, including UK export finance (UKEF) or British International Investment (BII).
- **ODA grant finance:** Non-repayable financial support provided by the UK to partner governments, multilateral organisations, NGOs or private sector implementers to achieve development, humanitarian or climate objectives.
- **Leveraged public finance:** Facilitating funding from other public sector actors (e.g. partner governments, bilateral development partners and multilateral development banks) as a direct result of UK-supported interventions.

The evaluation of BHC Tanzania's support to sustainable growth and investment partnerships found UK partnership approaches worked best when government departments and partners joined forces (guided by joint strategies) – combining diplomatic, development and commercial levers – to achieve shared development objectives in partnership with the Tanzanian government and other relevant stakeholders (e.g., private sector) (Box 2). Success depended on building trusted relationships and aligning support with partner country priorities.

Box 2: Example of combining levers effectively in Tanzania

The following is an example from the recent evaluation of the BHC Tanzania's sustainable growth and investment partnerships.

- **What did the UK do and what were the outcomes?** For example, in Tanzania, the UK has provided long-standing support to Tanzania's tax reform, combining technical assistance and capacity-building. Recent support is shifting focus to influencing reforms through diplomacy, convening and studies and representing private sector concerns. The UK played a key role in driving momentum for evidence-based tax reform, contributing to a reduction in predatory tax practices and the establishment of the Presidential Tax Reform Commission. These efforts also coincided with improved tax collection performance (e.g. 2% tax to GDP ratio increase over the last decade), which is not attributable to the UK alone.
- **What combination of levers worked well or not so well?** A sequenced and layered approach – combining private sector diagnostics, UK technical expertise (e.g., from HMRC), and support from suppliers with established, trusted relationships with the Tanzanian government – along with escalation via UK-led diplomacy and coordination efforts (including facilitating a joint letter from development partners to the Commissioner General), built on decades of UK ODA support for tax reform, proved effective and led to improvements in tax administration practices. The UK's standing as a trusted partner among both international and domestic stakeholders played a key role in achieving positive results.

3. Evaluating partnerships and whole of government approaches

In this section, we outline ways of evaluating partnerships and whole-of-government approaches to capture the complex, non-linear nature of these approaches. To maintain focus, this guidance is for an evaluation of an economic development portfolio aimed at promoting investment, trade, and sustainable growth through diplomatic, development and commercial levers.

3.1 Define purpose, objectives, users and questions

As per any evaluation, it is important to set out the evaluation purpose, objectives, criteria and questions based on the needs of the primary users (i.e. HMG) during the design (inception) phase. Typically, the purpose of an evaluation is to provide both accountability and learning, with the relative focus on each depending on the needs of the users. The objectives of an evaluation depend on the needs of the primary user. Here we provide example objectives for evaluating partnership and whole-of-government approaches:

- To evaluate the UK's contribution to economic development in country X.
- To evaluate the role of partnership and whole of government approaches, including strengths and weaknesses
- To evaluate the contribution of different levers and financial instruments, individually and collectively, and what helped or hindered success
- To provide lessons on how best to maximise the benefit from a Government-Government or whole of government partnership approach in future

Drawing on a recent evaluation conducted for the BHC in Tanzania, in Table 1 we propose example questions (and associated criteria).

Table 1: Example evaluation questions

Focus	Evaluation questions	Evaluation criteria
Outcome-focused	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What change occurred? 	Effectiveness Impact
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What levers were used and to what extent were these coherently combined, layered and sequenced? What partnerships were formed? To what extent were these appropriate/relevant? To what extent did UK support align with partner country priorities? 	Relevance Coherence
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent did the levers individually or collectively contribute to change? To what extent did the partnerships and relationships formed contribute to change? Which levers and combinations were most effective and why? Which partnerships and relationships were most effective and why? What factors helped or hindered? How accurate were the underlying assumptions? How does this differ by outcome, context, etc.? Were there any unexpected outcomes or risks from the partnership and whole of government approach? What are the main lessons? 	Effectiveness
Process-focused	To what extent does the BHC country or relevant sector strategy reflect the partnership and whole of government approach?	Relevance Coherence
	How effective are the planning, coordination and delivery mechanisms in helping the BHC operationalise a partnership and whole of government approach and maximise its potential contribution to change? Are there any gaps or areas for improvement?	Effectiveness Efficiency
	What risks and unexpected challenges have emerged as a result of the partnership and whole of government approach?	Effectiveness Efficiency

3.2 Define the ecosystem to evaluate

During the evaluation design, it is critical to map out the ecosystem to evaluate, including the following steps:

1. Define and agree terminology for partnerships, whole of government, levers (programmatic and non-programmatic) and financial instruments, as well as relationships. Box 1 outlines the key levers and financial instruments identified and defined for the BHC Tanzania evaluation.
2. Review relevant strategies, plans, etc. and identify expected outcomes.
3. Select and agree priority outcomes of focus for the evaluation (for further iteration during the implementation phase).
4. Map out and agree levers, financial instruments, partnerships and relationships and associated budgets (where available) (Box 1 and Box 3). These will inform the data collection tools and evidence/analyses assessment frameworks mapped against the outcomes and evaluation questions.

Box 3: Mapping partnerships, relationships and levers

Methods such as social network analysis (SNA) or value network analysis (VNA) are useful analytical methods to visually map out partnerships and associated relationships between actors. VNA is particularly useful for characterising the strength of relationships and levers between the central actor (e.g., BHC) and its partners (nodes). VNA can be developed collaboratively and is much quicker and less-resource intensive than social network analysis.

During evaluation design, the evaluators can map key actors (e.g. circles) and identify and depict visually the known relationships and levers (lines between circles), producing an initial visual representation of the network. This stakeholder mapping should draw on existing political economy analysis and research as far as possible and knowledge of the local context, ideally from team members based in the country and BHC.

During the evaluation, the evaluators can then test the initial visual mapping, removing and/or adding key actors, and analysing evidence against the lines (relationships and levers). The evaluators can depict the type of lever by differentiated lines – for instance, using solid lines for formal/tangible levers (such as money) and dashed lines for more intangible levers (such as diplomacy or expertise) – and the strength of relationships by thickness of lines.

Dependent on the resources available and timeframes, the steps above will help define the scope of the evaluation and inform the data collection and analytical frameworks.

3.3 Select and design an appropriate evaluation methodology

The evaluation team should select the evaluation methodology based on what is the most appropriate to answer the evaluation questions, in consultation with the primary users. The BHC Tanzania evaluation demonstrated that combining outcome harvesting with process evaluation creates a useful hybrid approach to answering the evaluation questions:

- **Outcome harvesting** is particularly useful in identifying and investigating emergent, often unpredictable, outcomes. It allows for several rounds of evidence collection and analysis to substantiate outcomes and contributing factors, followed by contribution analysis to assess the UK’s contribution through levers, financial instruments and partnerships.
- **Process evaluation** examines how strategies, interventions and initiatives are implemented, focusing on operational structures, delivery mechanisms, and their influence on outcomes.

As the UK increasingly combines development, diplomatic, and commercial objectives, outcomes often emerge in unpredictable ways. Traditional theory-based evaluation approaches typically rely on predefined theories and outcomes (Figure 1), whereas outcome harvesting approaches enable evaluators to identify and analyse more emergent positive and negative outcomes, and the underlying pathways of change (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Traditional theory-based approaches

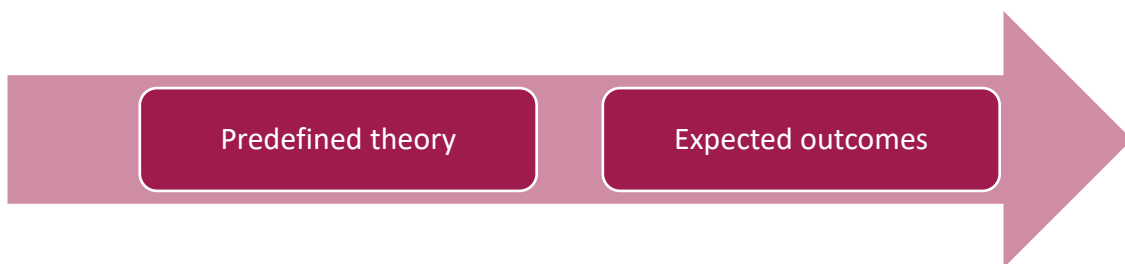


Figure 2: Outcome harvesting approach



Outcome harvesting is well-suited to:

- **Capturing change in complex, adaptive environments, where outcomes result from the work of multiple actors and levers (programmatic and non-programmatic), in contexts where there are a range of underlying enablers and barriers, and where outcomes are not always known or predictable.** It starts with identifying outcomes of interest, rather than specific theories and

assumptions. It then works backward to explore the various contributing factors (e.g., levers, partnerships, contextual factors) to a given outcome.

- **Situations where different and multiple levers and partnerships are engaged but without clear expectations of which lines of support will be most effective.** By looking for significant changes in general (top-down), rather than looking to prove a specific theory of change (bottom-up), outcome harvesting lends itself to the detection of undefined changes resulting from multiple lines of support.
- **Capturing unexpected or non-attributable results**, including unintended positive and negative outcomes. Traditional evaluations often rely on predefined theories and monitoring frameworks that often cannot capture the emergent nature of, for example, diplomatic work. The UK's growing reliance on influence, policy engagement and convening – compared to direct delivery – require evaluation approaches that can illuminate plausible contributions to reform rather than conclusively prove causation.
- **Assessing informal influence, soft power and convening in politically sensitive environments, or in shifting geopolitical or economic contexts.**
- **Supporting adaptive management, through real-time reflection and learning, and by collating a diversity of views.**
- **Assessing changes in data-poor environments** that are not captured by more traditional monitoring and reporting systems such as non-programmatic work (e.g., diplomacy).

3.4 Conducting an outcome harvest

Annex 1 provides details on how to conduct an evaluation using outcome harvesting. In summary:

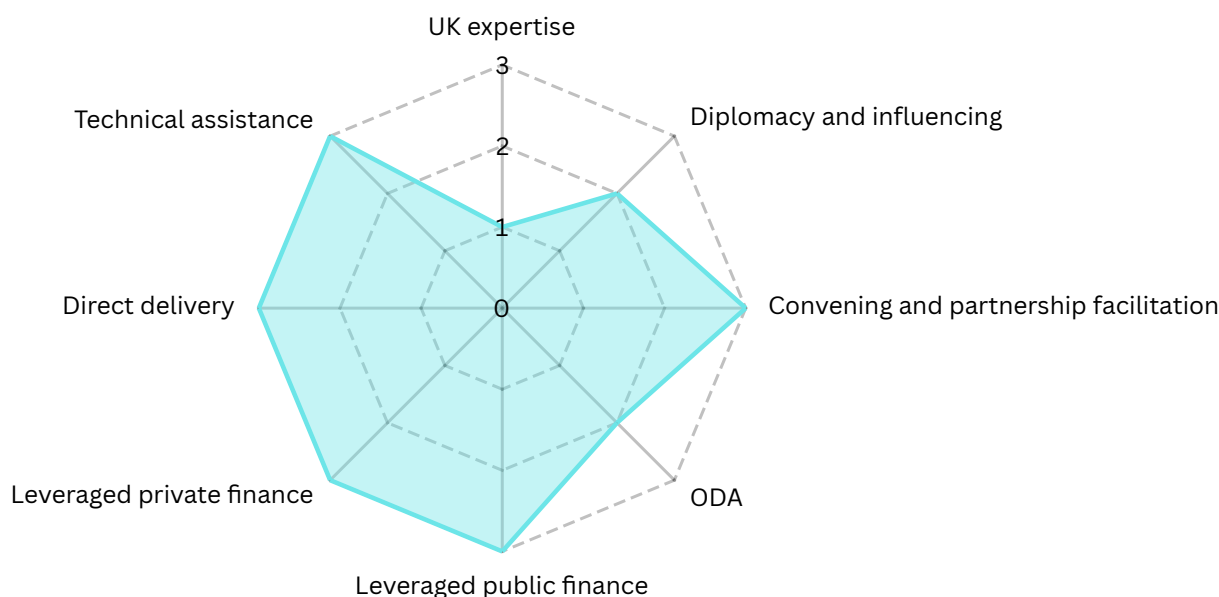
- In the first phase, through open-ended discussions with key informants, the evaluation team cast a wide net looking for information about outcomes related to the topic of interest, and then analyse the outcomes harvested. The evaluation team consults key stakeholders, typically through a workshop, to identify priority outcomes. These priority outcomes are then investigated in the main data collection and analyses phases.
- In the next phase, the team seeks to substantiate or refute prioritised outcomes, looking for new sources of evidence regarding an outcome's significance and collecting and analysing evidence on contributing factors (including levers, financial instruments, etc.). Subsequent rounds of data collection and analysis are then conducted, usually with different stakeholders, the extent to which depends on resources available. Detailed contribution analysis can also help develop the contribution story. Through multiple rounds of data collection, triangulation and analysis, outcomes and contributing factors are finally validated.

For the BHC Tanzania evaluation, the team analysed the strength of the different levers and instruments for each outcome⁶ and presented the scoring (0-3⁷) in radial diagrams (Figure 3) which aid visual comparison across outcomes. Each evaluation team member peer reviewed scoring of other team members and challenged scoring, where deemed necessary, reviewing the evidence/analyses assessment frameworks and original evidence (documents or interview transcripts) when needed.

Figure 3: Radial diagram

⁶ Using evidence assessment frameworks

⁷ We recommend increasing the range enabling more nuanced ratings



In the final draft of the evaluation, we replaced the radial diagrams with heat maps as it was easier to compare the scoring for the five different outcomes using heat maps. Figure 4 provides an example from the evaluation for tax reform, demonstrating the strength of each lever, scored from 0-3.

Figure 4: Heat map - tax reform in Tanzania

Lever	Score (0-3)
UK expertise	3
Convening and partnership facilitation	2
Diplomacy and influencing	3
Leveraged private finance	0
Technical assistance	3
Direct delivery	1
ODA	1
Leveraged public finance	0

3.5 Limitations and lessons

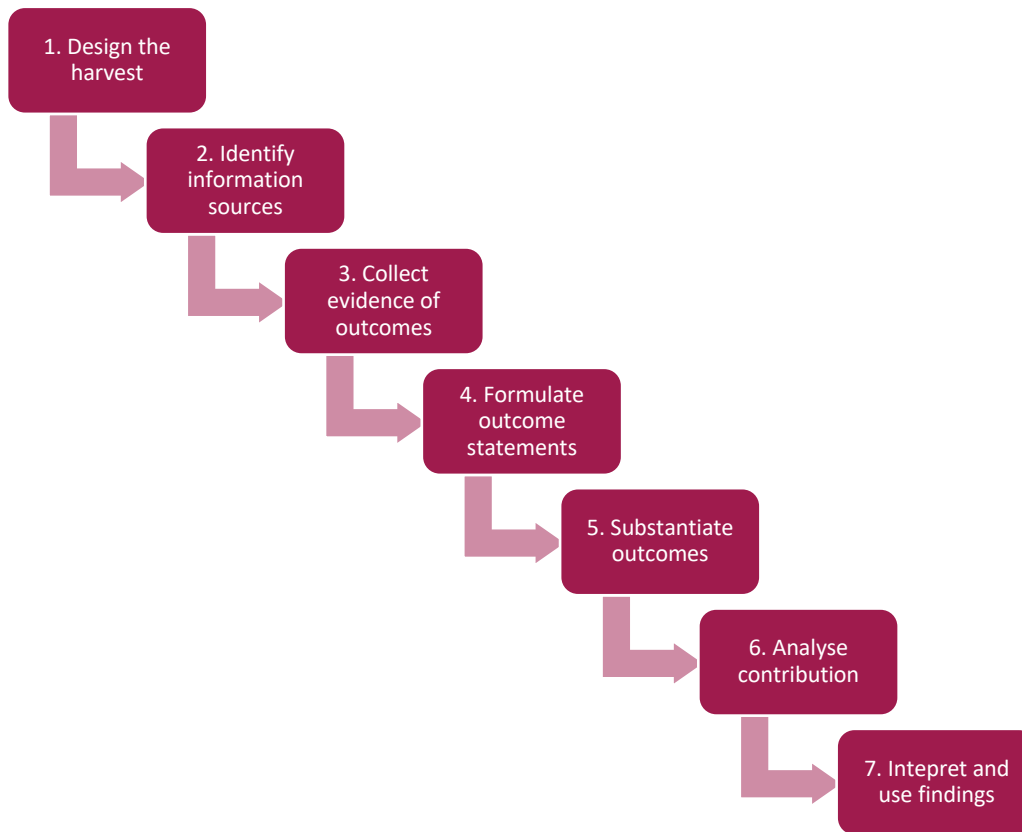
- **Lack of a counterfactual** makes it difficult to assess whether UK efforts (rather than other donor, private, or domestic actors) were decisive in delivering change. However, teams can attempt to mitigate this by asking interviewees what they think would have happened without UK support.
- Given the UK's growing reliance on influence, policy engagement and convening – rather than direct delivery – outcome harvesting can **illuminate plausible contributions to change**. However, it cannot conclusively prove that UK interventions **caused these outcomes**, particularly where **multiple stakeholders or external conditions** (e.g. political will, macroeconomic shifts) also played key roles. The evaluation can explore the plausibility of the UK contributing to different elements of change, for instance, whether the UK was the primary driver of a particular reform or helped speed up or/and improved the quality of reform.
- There is a high risk of **self-attribution, positive, and confirmation bias** as outcomes are usually recounted by those who contributed to them. Similarly, this may **reduce the novelty** of what is ultimately discovered.

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- **Resource intensive**, particularly during the analysis phase.
- Dependence on **stakeholder interest and engagement**.

Annex 1: How to conduct an outcome harvest

The following steps are usually undertaken.



1. Design the outcome harvest

Purpose: Define the scope and focus

Clarify the use: Who will use the findings, and for what?

Determine boundaries: What period, themes, geographies, actors?

→ Include both programmatic and non-programmatic levers: e.g., formal interventions vs. diplomacy, informal influence, convening.



Tip: Develop a matrix of intended and unintended, positive and negative outcomes. Add columns for different levers, partnerships and other enablers and barriers of the witnessed outcomes.

2. Identify information sources

Purpose: Ensure you capture both expected and emergent outcomes

Internal sources: Reports, strategies, meeting notes, staff insights

External sources: Partners, government officials, private sector actors, media

Key informants: Include actors involved and those indirectly affected



Tip: Include divergent perspectives (e.g., from those positively and negatively affected) to uncover less visible outcomes.

3. Collect evidence of outcomes

Purpose: Identify concrete changes in behaviour, policy, practice, relationships, or discourse. Assess harvested outcomes, related pathways and levers of change, the role of different partnerships, as well as other enablers and barriers, especially those posed by the evolving context.

Ask: “What changed, who changed, when, where, and how do you know?”

→ Capture both intended/unintended and positive/negative outcomes

→ Use interviews, focus groups, documents, and informal observations



Tip: Don't ask only “what did the project achieve?” Ask “what changed in the environment that might be linked to this actor's involvement?”

4. Formulate outcome statements

Purpose: Create concise, verifiable descriptions of each outcome

Each outcome statement should describe:

- The change (e.g., in policy, behaviour, norms)
- Who made the change (individuals, institutions)
- When and where the change occurred
- Why it matters



Tip: Use structured formats following the logic above.

5. Substantiate outcomes

Purpose: Validate claims with triangulated evidence, usually in a second phase of data collection with a new set of interviewees

- Cross-check with other stakeholders or documentation
- Seek independent confirmation/disconfirmation where possible (media, third-party reports)



Tip: Pay attention to disconfirming evidence to avoid confirmation bias.

6. Analyse contribution and levers

Purpose: Understand how various levers influenced outcomes

- Visualise relative role and importance of levers (e.g. spider/radar diagrams – see below) and map contribution pathways (e.g. theory of change pathways) What inputs, strategies, relationships, or contextual shifts enabled this outcome?
- Identify programmatic levers: funding, TA, capacity building
- Identify non-programmatic levers: reputation, informal diplomacy, timing, convening power
- Look for combinations of levers that enabled tipping points



Tip: Use causal mapping or contribution analysis frameworks to help explain plausible influence.

7. Interpret and use findings

Purpose: Feed learning back into strategy, policy, or programming

- Present patterns, clusters, or types of outcomes (e.g., non-programmatic vs. programmatic, ODA funded vs. non-ODA funded, different partners etc.)
- Distinguish outcomes by significance, equity and sustainability
- Provide recommendations for adaptive management



Tip: Share back findings with stakeholders for validation and use in decision-making.

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