



Resources to Strengthen Adaptive Management for Livelihoods Programming in Emergency Settings

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Adaptive management (AM) acknowledges that there is often uncertainty around the best approach for addressing livelihoods challenges. Market systems and emergency contexts (in which markets operate) are constantly changing; adaptive management allows a program to adjust in response to those changes. However, humanitarian organizations have not embraced adaptive approaches as readily as the development sector, often due to the belief that the need for change is a failure of the initial needs assessment or not a reflection of good practice (*ALNAP*, p32). This brief focuses on how existing tools can be used for livelihoods and markets work in emergencies and complements Brief 1 in the series. While these tools can be used for adaptive management across many sectors, the guidance here focuses on how they can be used for livelihoods and markets applications in emergencies.

*Adaptive Management:
An intentional approach
to making decisions and
adjustments in response
to new information and
changes in context.*

USAID ADS 201.6, 2018



AM is characterized by building in opportunities for structured and collective reflection, ongoing and real-time learning, course correction, and decision-making designed to improve effectiveness. While desired outcomes may be fixed—determined by immediate needs, donor preferences, or other elements beyond the control of the organization—the pathway to reaching those livelihoods outcomes is not, even when using “tried and tested” approaches. For example, to improve food security, many agencies provide seeds and tools after a crisis, but if a team found that appropriate seeds were available in the market, they may pivot towards seed fairs or vouchers, which have been shown to be equally—if not more—effective ([SPARC](#), p19). AM allows programs to adjust more quickly to changing contexts, new information or actors, and can test new theories about ways of working.

Managing adaptively is about having the internal systems to accept, work with, and learn from change, and using this learning to be more effective ([Obrecht and Bourne](#), p45). [SPARC’s recent review of evidence](#) found that “To make a difference for livelihoods...management must be adaptive. That requires not only flexible funding but also flexible procedures – with monitoring and learning.” Using this approach allows humanitarian actors to have “robust decision-making in the face of uncertainty, with an aim to reducing uncertainty over time” ([Picon and Wild](#), p2) so that they can embrace change, particularly market changes, as an opportunity.

A literature review done by [IDEAL](#) revealed three specific challenges to adaptive management in a humanitarian context: 1) the need for more decentralized decision-making, 2) the need for data to support adaptation, and 3) a lack of flexible funding. Brief 1 in this series provides deeper discussion on these three challenges. To support the practical steps needed to address these challenges, this brief provides a variety of resources; specifically focused on:

- Increasing Team Capacity
- Building Strategies that Adapt
- Addressing Operational Challenges (procurement, finance)
- Supporting Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
- Improving Partnerships



Below you will find a summary of each tool as well as guidance on who in a team might be best placed to use the tool, where it fits in market and livelihood programming, and the level of difficulty for the targeted team member to use it (the tool's complexity).

TOOLS REVIEW

Updated March 2022

INCREASING TEAM CAPACITY (TEAM CULTURE, STAFF STRUCTURE, LEADERSHIP SUPPORT)				
RESOURCE (W/ HYPERLINK)	SUMMARY	POSSIBLE USES	EASE OF USE	WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL?
AdaptScan	Provides tools, templates, and facilitation notes for workshop in which an ongoing market or livelihoods project can incorporate AM	Building culture of adaptation, developing plan for tracking change processes, supporting shared vision for change	Easy	Program Team
ADAPT Self-Assessment Tool	Provides a process and tool for self-assessment on AM using a guided questionnaire	Use immediately after a market assessment to ensure AM is built into response design	Easy	Program Team, Leadership, M&E staff
Five Traits of Highly Adaptive Leadership Teams	Defines team and leadership practices for making teams more adaptive	Team leadership should reflect on these traits and incorporate suggested actions. Exhibit 1 could be used as part of team building day	Easy	Team leadership
Six Simple Rules for Managing Complexity without Getting Complicated	Book and video clips that provide leadership guidance on how to manage the complex team dynamics created in teams during adaptive processes	Useful for building a staff structure and team culture that supports adaptive management and manages changes in the market system	Easy	Team leadership
Guide to Hiring Adaptive Employees	A tool to increase the likelihood of selecting staff members skilled in adaptive management	Useful when writing job descriptions, before interviewing, when doing annual reviews, when thinking about team mix	Easy	Those involved in the recruitment process, particularly HR and program leadership

BUILDING STRATEGIES THAT ADAPT (THEORIES OF CHANGE, RESULTS CHAINS, LOGFRAMES)				
RESOURCE (W/ HYPERLINK)	SUMMARY	POSSIBLE USES	EASE OF USE	WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL?
Knowing When to Adapt: Decision Tree	This very simple tool guides you through the decision-making process on how and when to make adaptations and program changes	Excellent starting point. May be used alongside a market assessment or reflection point—good for those who are uncertain of how to begin	Easy	Program Team, Leadership, M&E staff, Operations staff
Market Systems Development in Fragile and Conflict-affected Situations: Lessons for Donors and Implementers	Recommendations for MSD programming in fragile contexts and explanation of difference between humanitarian approaches and MSD	Use recommendations to shape strategies and Theories of Change, as well as to design monitoring approaches	Easy	Program Team, Leadership, M&E staff, Operations staff, donors
USAID Discussion Note: Adaptive Management	Explores AM as one of the four core principles of the Program Cycle. Includes promising practices and practical approaches on how to operationalize adaptive management at each phase of the Program Cycle	Project design and planning, identifying flexible contracting mechanisms, appropriate MEL tools, and creating enabling conditions (all are needed for deeper market systems work)	Easy/ Medium	Project and MEL staff implementing USAID programs
Making Adaptive Rigor Work: Principles and practices for strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning for adaptive management	Guidance on how to establish MEL processes across an adaptive program cycle (see especially Table 2)	Incorporating flexibility into MEL systems and processes (to help capture market systems change), ensuring data supports decision-making	Easy/ Medium	Leadership and MEL staff



BUILDING STRATEGIES THAT ADAPT (THEORIES OF CHANGE, RESULTS CHAINS, LOGFRAMES)				
RESOURCE (W/ HYPERLINK)	SUMMARY	POSSIBLE USES	EASE OF USE	WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL?
<u>Strategy Testing: An Innovative Approach to Monitoring Highly Flexible Aid Programs</u>	Section 3.2 provides steps and templates that would be useful during reflection exercises and when adapting Theories of Change	Practical steps for incorporating AM, including developing “adaptive management plans”, revising ToCs and other strategic documents	Easy	Project and MEL staff
<u>Theory of Change Review as an Adaptive Management Tool</u>	This Lab Note outlines the steps and actions required to review and re-align a Theory of Change using a process that promotes Adaptive Management	Designing ToCs that capture market system change, planning ‘pause-and-reflect meetings’, revision of existing ToCs	Easy	Project and MEL staff
<u>Adaptive Management Tool: Concept Notes System</u>	Provides an example from a market systems program of an approach to ensure inclusive program design	Adaptive activity planning, particularly over time. Helps to ensure adaptations stay in line with high-level goals	Easy/ Medium	Project and MEL staff

ADDRESSING OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES (OPERATIONS & FINANCE, WORKFLOW & DECISION-MAKING)				
RESOURCE (W/ HYPERLINK)	SUMMARY	POSSIBLE USES	EASE OF USE	WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL?
<u>Incorporating CLA in the Procurement Process</u>	Provides resources and advice on using AM to design a procurement process. Designed for USAID mission staff, useful to any procurement team working under USAID rules	During design of procurement processes to allow for flexibility and innovation with partners who are market actors	Medium/ Hard	Procurement officers and Team Leadership, especially when implementing USAID programs
<u>Fit for Business: Modifying Internal Procurement Process to Suit Adaptive MSD Programs</u>	Identifies key principles for modifying internal procurement processes to allow for adaptation in markets programming	Useful for reflecting on which internal systems may need to change to increase the use of market systems approaches	Easy	Procurement officers and Team Leadership
<u>Using Contracts for Adaptive Programming</u>	Not a tool, but provides useful principles for contracting in ways that support adaptive programming	Use to encourage discussion on the best contracting mechanisms to be used for specific livelihood and market activities	Medium/ Hard	Contracting Officers and Team Leadership
<u>Incorporating CLA in Solicitations</u>	Provides guidance on how to develop solicitations that support adaptive approaches, including sample language	Useful when developing solicitations for sub-grantees or responding to USAID calls for market and livelihoods activities	Easy/ Medium	Procurement officers and Team Leadership
<u>Decisive Structures: Procurement Format Options for MSD Programmes and Their Different Implications</u>	Provides specific guidance for issues at the heart of MSD procurement, discussing different options for procurement	Use to decide on approach to procurement most appropriate to your livelihoods or markets program	Easy	Procurement officers and Program Leadership

SUPPORTING MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (CONTEXT, DATA & KNOWLEDGE MGMT, LEARNING APPROACH)				
RESOURCE (W/ HYPERLINK)	SUMMARY	POSSIBLE USES	EASE OF USE	WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL?
<u>Supporting Adaptive Management: Monitoring and evaluation tools and approaches</u>	An overview of tested MEL tools useful when using adaptive approaches	Use as guidance to select most appropriate tools for livelihoods and markets program design and monitoring	Easy	Project and MEL staff
<u>Monitoring Evaluation and Learning for Fragile States and Peacebuilding Programs: Practical Tools for Improving Program Performance and Results</u>	Guidance and tools for use in complex environments, including indicator development and 24 MEL tools. Designed for peacebuilding, but relevant to all adaptive programming, including work on livelihoods and markets	Useful at multiple points in the program cycle: planning, implementation monitoring, results monitoring, evaluation	Easy/ Medium	Project and MEL staff



SUPPORTING MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING (CONTEXT, DATA & KNOWLEDGE MGMT, LEARNING APPROACH)				
RESOURCE (W/ HYPERLINK)	SUMMARY	POSSIBLE USES	EASE OF USE	WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL?
<u>Putting Learning at the Centre: Adaptive Development Programming in Practice</u>	Makes a clear case for putting learning at the center of adaptive programming. Annex 2 and 3 provide program design tips and an adaptive logframe example	Identifying barriers to AM to be addressed internally, improving strategic documents such as program logframes	Medium	Project and MEL staff
<u>Causal Link Monitoring Brief</u>	CLM integrates design and monitoring to support AM. This brief provides 7 clear steps for using CLM and guidance on complexity-aware monitoring	Use early on, immediately after market mapping to think through which market actors and activities are likely to produce the desired impact, and then build MEL processes around that logic	Medium	Project and MEL staff
<u>Building capability by delivering results: Putting Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) principles into practice</u>	Provides action steps (see Figure 1) for using PDIA to address complex tasks where the solution is not known at the beginning	Use to support local solutions to market barriers and build reflection into program implementation	Medium	Project and MEL staff
<u>Utilization-Focused Evaluation Checklist and guidance</u>	Begins with the premise that evaluations should be designed with careful consideration of how they will be used. This resource is a comprehensive checklist for undertaking a utilization-focused evaluation	Use to develop mid-term and final evaluations that contribute to data driven decision-making	Hard	Experienced Evaluators

IMPROVING PARTNERSHIPS (IMPLEMENTATION PARTNERS, DONOR RELATIONSHIPS, RESOURCE & BUDGETING)				
RESOURCE (W/ HYPERLINK)	SUMMARY	POSSIBLE USES	EASE OF USE	WHO SHOULD USE THIS TOOL?
<u>Follow the Rabbit: Systemic Design Field Guide</u>	This workshop template and guide goes through systemic project design, with tools and exercises for planning, workshops, and evaluation	Help the team and partners to begin thinking about market systems approaches, get everyone on same page re: implementation issues and challenges; basis of workshop	Medium/ Easy for an experienced facilitator	Program team, local partners (incl market actors)
<u>Participatory Market System Development (PMSD) Roadmap</u>	A toolkit designed for participatory mapping of market systems. Clear concise tips, checklists, and action points. Includes facilitator guides and training materials	Use to help partners find their areas of complementarity, leverage points, and track changes in the system	Easy	Program team, partners, and market actor
<u>CLA Toolkit: Engaging Stakeholders</u>	This section of the Toolkit provides numerous resources for building relationships with donors, implementers, local government, and others	Planning stakeholder consultations, mapping collaboration efforts, co-creation workshops	Easy/ Medium	Program team
<u>How to! Develop Strong Partnership Agreements</u>	Provides guidance and examples on developing a partnership agreement with private sector partners	Use to develop the outline of a partnership agreement and ensure that it is suitable for partnerships with market actors	Easy	Program Team and Operations teams
<u>Deepening the Relationship: A Stage-by-Stage Guide to Strengthening Partnerships between Donors and Implementers in MSD Programmes</u>	Aims to help donors and implementers reconcile their necessary but sometimes conflicting needs	Use to strengthen donor-implementer relationships and ensure the smooth running of market systems programs	Easy/ Medium	Program Team and Operations teams



ABOUT SCALE

SCALE (Strengthening Capacity in Agriculture, Livelihoods, and Environment) is an initiative funded by USAID's Office of Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) and implemented by Mercy Corps in collaboration with Save the Children. SCALE aims to enhance the impact, sustainability and scalability of BHA-funded agriculture, natural resource management, and off-farm livelihood activities in emergency and development contexts.

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