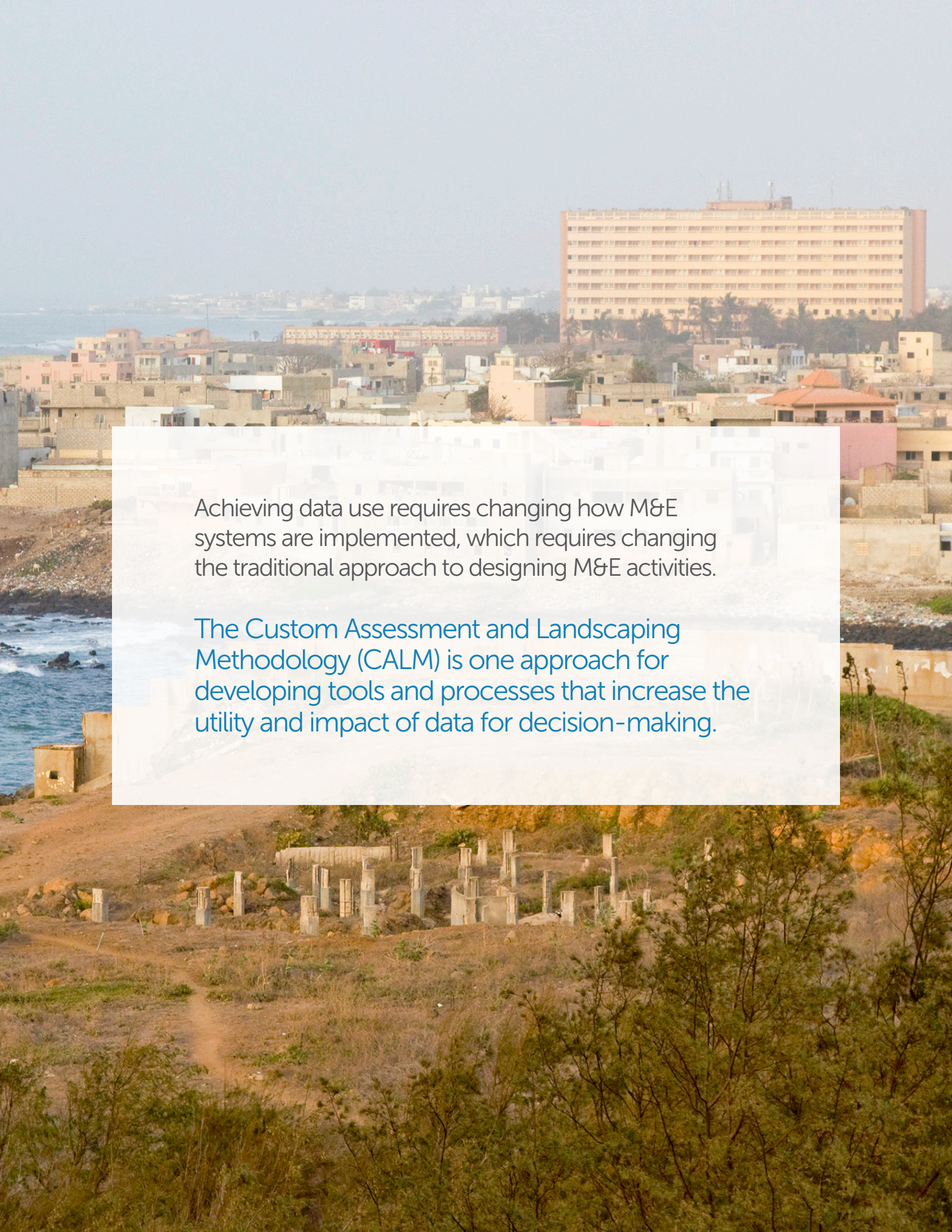

The Custom Assessment and Landscaping Methodology

Balancing Accountability and Learning
in M&E Systems

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Achieving data use requires changing how M&E systems are implemented, which requires changing the traditional approach to designing M&E activities.

The Custom Assessment and Landscaping Methodology (CALM) is one approach for developing tools and processes that increase the utility and impact of data for decision-making.

Investments in M&E systems suffer from high levels of inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and redundancy. In the United States, United Kingdom, and New Zealand, an estimated 60-80% of public-sector technology projects experience significant disruptions or problems of some kind.¹ In Tanzania, over 120 health-sector platforms have been implemented by a host of different government agencies and partners.²

Why is there such a high rate of failure? In part, because M&E systems are often designed based on what data must be reported for accountability purposes, not what data is used to maximize learning. While accountability is critical for development programming, accountability at the expense of learning undermines the potential for gains in efficiency and effectiveness over time.

Accountability-focused M&E systems prioritize counting inputs and outputs, such as financial spend and number of beneficiaries. Accountability can help prevent mismanagement, and supports programmatic cohesion. However, too much focus on accountability risks creating an M&E system focused more on reporting than data use.

Learning-focused M&E systems prioritize long-term outcomes, such as educational achievements of children. Learning can strengthen programmatic efficiency and effectiveness, by encouraging innovation and use of evidence. However, too much focus on learning risks creating an M&E system without the rigor needed to detect fraud or inefficient delivery.

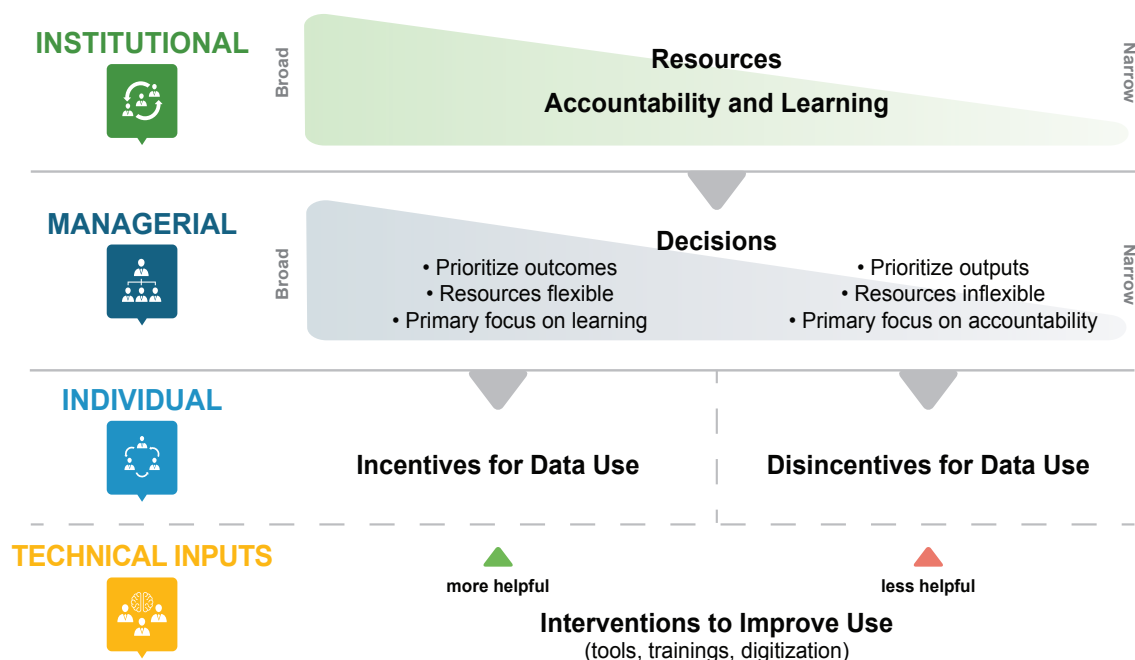
In order for data to be useful and used – and for programming to meet its policy objectives – **agencies and organizations must find the proper balance between accountability and learning.**

Achieving this balance requires understanding the relationship between decision space and data use; and identifying what tools or processes can facilitate both accountability and learning objectives.

1. (PricewaterhouseCoopers AG, 2017).

2. (Government of Tanzania and PATH, 2016).

Mapping Decision Space



Each “level” of decision space has different levers for accountability and learning. Assessing these levers, and their current (im)balances, will determine what types of tools or process interventions are most needed.³

In order to design systems for a balanced decision space that fosters data use, Development Gateway created the Custom Assessment and Landscaping Methodology (CALM). CALM provides resources for identifying accountability and learning priorities for government and development agencies; and a structure for recognizing the processes, stakeholders, and data needed to make those decisions.

3. (Stout, S. et. al., 2018).

In what follows, case studies from Development Gateway's work with the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Government of Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Water Development (MoAIWD) provide an overview of how implementing CALM supports the design of more balanced M&E data systems.

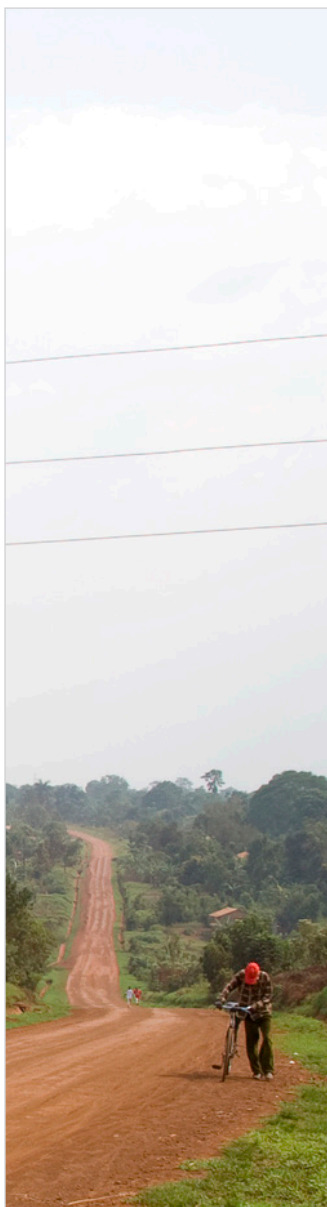
Operationally, Development Gateway's CALM approach includes:

1. Document review of budgets, reports, and strategies to assess policies and resources
2. Results and programmatic data review to assess frequency, standardization, availability, and appropriateness of data (dis)aggregation
3. Interviews with agency staff and external partners to explore decision-making processes, de facto policy implementation, and related data needs
4. Technical assessment of existing systems for data collection, reporting, sharing, and use
5. Implementation recommendations on tools, processes, and/or strategic objectives to support institutional priorities



CASE STUDY:

The United Kingdom's Department for International Development



Context

A clear, organization-wide M&E system and learning strategy existed at DFID. However, there was a need for more streamlined processes and priorities, and expanded staff capabilities, to increase organizational learning.⁴

Methodology

From May 2017–November 2018, Development Gateway engaged with DFID through the Results Data Initiative. The purpose of this engagement was to support DFID in increasing the usefulness and use of its internal data and platforms. Using CALM, Development Gateway conducted a landscape analysis of priority decisions, data, and tools, to identify barriers to more effective data use across DFID sector policy teams, country offices, and senior leadership.

Through the CALM approach, Development Gateway sought to understand DFID staff data needs before identifying tools, processes, or capacities needed to increase learning and support decision-making.

4. (Independent Commission for Aid Impact, April 2014).

CASE STUDY: The United Kingdom's Department for International Development cont.

Results

The CALM diagnostic identified challenges within DFID related to:

- the purpose-fit of existing tools for country office, policy advisor, and senior management audiences;
- staff awareness of how to use existing data and analytical tools; and
- the ability to triangulate data needed for portfolio-level decision-making.

Based on this set of needs, Development Gateway worked with DFID to:

- design a suite of information products (i.e. dashboards/ reports) to be rolled out across country office and sector teams;
- update DFID's Data Roadmap for strategic investment in data for internal decisions, external transparency, and development statistics;
- identify a core set of high priority decisions (i.e. resource allocation, program design, program adaptation) and the processes, data, and evidence that underpin each decision type; and
- document case studies of "data use cases" to be shared across DFID and with external partners.

Through partnership with Development Gateway and the use of CALM, DFID are taking steps to improve investment in – and use of – data in agency planning and decision-making.

Looking forward, DFID are exploring how to align future data and dashboard investments with findings from the data landscaping study, as well as DFID's data roadmap.

This includes a focus on:

- **Mapping activities** in the data roadmap to what was found in the data landscaping study
- Determining the best way to **disseminate and communicate dashboards and data tools**, including the dashboards developed during our engagement and beyond
- Driving conversations on **how DFID users access needed information**, including geospatial data

CASE STUDY:

Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Water Development



Context

Priority results areas for the agriculture sector were articulated in the Government of Malawi's M&E framework. However, no system for measuring progress against these goals existed, limiting the Government's ability to evaluate policy effectiveness.

Methodology

From May 2017–November 2018, Development Gateway engaged with the Government of Malawi's MoAIWD through the Results Data Initiative. The purpose of this engagement was to support the design of a framework for a National Agriculture Management Information System (NAMIS). Using the CALM approach, Development Gateway conducted a landscape analysis of priority decisions, data and tools, and barriers to more effective data use across the agriculture sector.

Through the CALM approach, Development Gateway sought to understand sector stakeholder needs before identifying needed tools, processes, or capacities to facilitate accountability and learning.

CASE STUDY: Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Water Development cont.

Results


The CALM diagnostic identified opportunities and challenges in the Malawi agricultural sector related to agriculture data quality, sharing, management, and use. Importantly, the diagnostic gathered insights from agriculture sector stakeholders across government, private sector, non-governmental, and development partner stakeholders, from national to extension planning area levels.

Based on a common set of needs identified through the landscape analysis, Development Gateway worked with MoAIWD to:

- develop a list of system modules to support decision-making needs across the agriculture sector;
- develop user journeys to ensure each NAMIS module responds directly to specific decision-making needs; and
- create a data ecosystem map to guide a phased implementation approach.

Through the use of CALM, the Government of Malawi now has an M&E framework for a needs-based system spanning government and non-government agriculture stakeholders.

As a result of this partnership, the Government of Malawi and Development Gateway are using the recommendations to co-create technical and user requirements for the first NAMIS module.



For both new and established M&E systems, CALM provides a decision space-sensitive framework for assessing user needs and developing interventions to balance accountability and learning. By first understanding agency priorities and user needs, the levers of technology, capacity, and strategy can be better implemented to inform organizational learning and decision-making.

The aim of the Results Data Initiative is to increase the use of data and evidence in development policy making. The Results Data Initiative is supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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