



# LearnAdapt: a synthesis of our work on adaptive programming with DFID/FCDO (2017–2020)

Ed Laws, Jamie Pett, Emma Proud and Alina Rocha Menocal

March 2021

## Key takeaways from LearnAdapt

- Development is not linear or straightforward, but rather complex, uncertain and context-specific. This calls for international development actors to work differently, in ways that are based on deliberate experimentation, learning and adaptation, to inform decisions and drive effective development.
- Although it might go by different names, adaptive programming has been used in a variety of areas and fields in both the public and private sectors. Development practitioners have much to learn from and contribute to these different approaches and experiences.
- Trust and relationship-building across all relevant stakeholders are among the most critical enabling factors for adaptive management. They are essential to give partners the space, autonomy and authority needed to try, test, reflect, iterate and feed back at the frontline of implementation, and to give donors the confidence that decisions are being made on the basis of evidence and learning to improve effectiveness.
- There is an urgent need to rethink how accountability requirements, results frameworks, value for money considerations, performance markers, procurement and contracting mechanisms and other processes are understood and applied so that they are better aligned with and can support adaptive management more effectively.
- The role of senior managers leading adaptive programmes from the donor side should be to create a space for experimentation and learning. Funders should hold their partners accountable for learning and how it feeds into effective programming, rather than for delivering on predetermined targets.
- While formal guidance is important, leadership, champions, institutional incentives, a supportive management culture and appropriate mindsets are essential to encourage adaptive ways of working.
- Adaptive management is resource-intensive. It requires skill, commitment, time for building trust and investments in learning. It is a journey, not an immediate destination – so it calls for patience, open-mindedness and a more nuanced approach to risk.

---

## Introduction

This short note summarises key messages from the United Kingdom's LearnAdapt programme – a three-year collaboration between Better Delivery and Emerging Policy, Innovation, Capability (EPIC) Departments of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO; formerly the Department for International Development, DFID), ODI, Brink, Feedback Labs and the Centre for Public Impact (CPI). The programme, which ran from April 2017 to November 2020, worked closely with DFID/FCDO to create systems and processes and nurture an environment that enabled adaptive programming for greater development effectiveness.

Over the past three years, LearnAdapt has worked closely with FCDO, at the centre and in country offices, to help create a firmer foundation for adaptive programming. As part of this, the programme produced original research on a range of topics (Sharp et al., 2019; Buell et al., 2020; Pett 2020a; Laws and Valters, 2021; Sharp, 2021); convened stakeholders from across the donor, implementer and NGO sectors; organised a series of workshops on specific issues (ODI, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c); helped build an internal community of practice within DFID/FCDO; worked in an advisory capacity with selected country offices; researched and wrote up short case studies and lessons on adaptive DFID/FCDO programmes, and produced a comprehensive set of guidance notes and 'top-tips' for DFID/FCDO staff on designing, managing and delivering adaptive programmes. Much of the guidance has responded to specific challenges and barriers to adaptive programming which had been reported by DFID/FCDO staff and implementing partners, that LearnAdapt documented in granular detail at the outset of the programme. A full list of LearnAdapt outputs and events is included in Box 1 at the end of this briefing note.

It is also worth highlighting that flexibility and adaptation are ways of responding to uncertainty and complexity, and LearnAdapt had to practise these principles itself as it adjusted to turbulence in the wider political environment, both in the UK and globally. That includes the Brexit negotiations and the redeployment of key

DFID/FCDO counterparts as part of Operation Yellowhammer; the Covid-19 pandemic; and the merger of DFID with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). These have all called for course corrections, creative thinking and learning and experimentation on the part of LearnAdapt, to ensure that the programme stayed relevant and effective. For example, the guidance notes, originally prepared for DFID, were quickly repurposed to speak to the new operating environment in FCDO. With much of the world facing restrictions on mobility in 2020, the project pivoted to online engagement and workshops on relevant topics, such as physically distanced adaptive management (Proud, 2020a).

After providing an overview of the context in which LearnAdapt came about within DFID, this note synthesises key messages emerging from across the different workstreams and activities across the programme under four headings, corresponding to areas in the programming cycle which LearnAdapt recognised were important for the effective application of adaptive management: deciding whether and how to take an adaptive approach; designing an adaptive programme; delivering an adaptive programme; and building an enabling environment. By way of conclusion, the note provides some questions and reflections on what's next for adaptive management within FCDO, especially within the context of a rapidly changing environment.

## Context: why LearnAdapt?

Much of the work produced under LearnAdapt responded to a recognised need within DFID for clearer instruction on the 'nuts and bolts' of adaptive programming. In 2014, the newly introduced DFID 'Smart Rules' (FCDO, 2020) recognised that some programmes needed to work in more flexible and adaptive ways in order to make progress on complex development problems, and space was cleared for this by streamlining and simplifying the organisation's corporate requirements, among other significant reforms. In the following years, the language of adaptation appeared in high-level strategy documents, with the 2016 Bilateral Development Review committing the organisation to 'a culture

---

of learning and adaptive programming’ (DFID, 2016: 46).

These were important steps within DFID/FCDO that created a more permissive institutional environment and design space. As the global conversation on adaptive management continued to evolve, along with associated agendas such as ‘thinking and working politically’<sup>1</sup> and ‘doing development differently’ (Wild and Booth, 2016), a growing number of case studies emerged of programmes that had adopted these approaches and had seen good results (Dasandi et al., 2019). Many of these were designed and funded by DFID/FCDO. These studies contributed to a growing consensus in the development community that, in highly complex situations, interventions are more likely to make a positive difference if they adopt adaptive principles and methods.

Nevertheless, within DFID/FCDO, these programmes were still seen as exceptions to the norm. Many senior staff remained cautious about adopting what they regarded as a risky and unproven approach. And when it came to programme design and decision-making, practitioners, for the most part, had to rely on a combination of a few well-known studies, folk knowledge and their wits. There was little in the way of systematic guidance and institutionalised support for adaptive ways of working.

Advocates within DFID/FCDO acknowledged that the organisation needed to build a different set of skills to occupy the adaptive space with confidence, with an expanded toolbox and a clearer sense of how to work more effectively in these ways. This was complemented by new strategic thinking in the organisation, which reinforced that, in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the major challenges are often complex in nature, involve addressing key institutional constraints, and require working in more agile, politically smart and adaptive ways.

Staff from ODI supported these efforts within DFID throughout 2016 through an accountable grant. This involved providing hands-on advice to DFID staff in a wide range of departments; undertaking country visits to exchange learning

and document programming experiences; and holding training sessions and seminars on adaptive programming at professional development conferences of various DFID cadres. The results of this engagement were documented in a flagship ODI report which outlined a number of priority areas for strengthening the uptake and effectiveness of adaptive programming in DFID (Wild et al., 2017). These included building institutional buy-in and support from senior staff; outlining a more strategic approach to delivery and results; and introducing clearer guidance on how to do adaptive programming well. In 2017, DFID approved a more substantial investment to supplement its own capacity in these areas. This became LearnAdapt.

## Lessons from LearnAdapt: four considerations for adaptive programming

### 1. Deciding whether and how to take an adaptive approach

**Flexibility and adaptation are not the same. To decide whether and how to take an adaptive approach, interrogate the nature of the problem and the change being sought.**

A key set of objectives for LearnAdapt was to deepen and sharpen the understanding of adaptation in DFID/FCDO, to distinguish it clearly from flexibility, and to help programme designers and team leaders understand when adapting is a necessary and feasible approach.

Flexibility to shift resources or change priorities is something that all programmes need, to some degree, but not all programmes need to be adaptive. An adaptive approach is necessary for programmes operating on complex challenges and in uncertain contexts. In these situations, outcomes cannot be met by rolling out tried and tested interventions. Instead, teams need to deliberately test and experiment to find out what works. This conceptual distinction runs throughout LearnAdapt’s work, and is conveyed succinctly in the guidance note

---

1 See <https://twpcommunity.org/>.

---

on ‘When should I consider flexibility and/or adaptation in programming’?

**All adaptive approaches involve testing and learning about what works and applying that learning to the programme, but there are different ways of doing this, depending on the problem, context and funding model.**

For example, working adaptively to build state capability likely involves different tools than working adaptively on health systems strengthening. The kind of approach needed depends partly on whether your programme is trying to improve an existing solution, or innovate to find a new one, and on whether the problem is well understood, or inherently complex and uncertain. In practice, a good adaptive programme will often combine elements of different approaches and learning strategies, including drawing from the private sector. More detail is provided in the LearnAdapt guidance on types of adaptive approaches.

## 2. Designing an adaptive programme

**Look outside the development sector for lessons on adaptive ways of working.**

To shape thinking on programme design and practice, LearnAdapt drew on principles and approaches from sectors outside international development, including software development, product and service design and technology start-ups, and from other bureaucracies in the UK and globally. Among other lessons, LearnAdapt research found that private sector adaptive approaches – such as agile, lean startup and human-centred design – can be especially helpful for experimenting quickly to find creative solutions to complex development challenges (Pett, 2020a).

**Complex problems require flexible systems to support testing, learning and adaptation**

Tackling complex challenges means interacting with unpredictable systems of political, organisational and individual behaviours and incentives. This calls for different ways of working: being more adaptive, collaborative and decentralised, and emphasising learning, autonomy and trust. LearnAdapt investigated how DFID/

FCDO can design and manage programmes to address complex development challenges without creating excessively complicated programmes and structures in response. This culminated in a briefing paper that argued for paying closer attention to delivery options in programme design; encouraging programme designers to articulate how ambition matches resources and consider ‘good enough’ design; reducing the burden of compliance by cultivating partner autonomy and reassessing results and value-for-money requirements; and planning and prioritising management resources across a portfolio of programmes (Sharp et al., 2019). The implications of these principles for FCDO’s systems and processes were further developed as part of the LearnAdapt guidance series. Many of these insights and reflections around systems, mechanisms and processes that are needed to enable adaptive programming were also highlighted in an internal roundtable organised at FCDO in November 2020.

## 3. Delivering an adaptive programme

**Think creatively about results.**

DFID/FCDO’s results system tended to bias reporting towards short-term, attributable, quantitative programme results. This is reinforced by the programme annual review format, which holds implementers to account for incremental progress against targets decided at the start of a programme. LearnAdapt helped to think about alternative approaches, based on the principle that the results framework for an adaptive programme should do more than measure delivery of outputs for accountability purposes. If adaptive programmes are tackling systemic or institutional problems, a narrow results story is inappropriate and programmes need to invest in methods (such as outcome mapping) which capture their contribution to higher-level change processes. Results measurement also needs to support a process and culture of testing, learning and adaptation. As part of producing guidance notes on results frameworks and on annual reviews, LearnAdapt developed three concepts that help articulate this – use of *actionable learning* in the programme, whether the programme is contributing to *meaningful change*, and whether it is *fit for purpose*. The CPI case studies conducted

---

across multiple levels of DFID/FCDO in 2020 found that adaptive programmes avoided the perverse incentives of achieving predefined results by creating accountability for learning (Warren and Lowe, 2021).

#### **Understand what value means for your programme.**

Following an ICAI review in 2018, LearnAdapt looked at DFID's approach to measuring and managing value for money (VfM), to recommend ways in which the approach could be reformed to better respond to complexity and adaptation (ICAI, 2018). The resulting research and guidance found that, while the standard VFM framework – balancing economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity – is still relevant for adaptive programmes, the way concepts are defined and measured need to be adjusted to capture the value of testing, learning and adapting. FCDO should also move away from seeing quantitative cost–benefit evidence as the gold standard for demonstrating VfM. In the absence of these shifts, VfM can lead to analysis and practice that is out of step with how change happens in complex systems (Laws and Valters, 2021).

#### **Be responsive to those who are meant to benefit from your adaptive programme.**

In 2019, Feedback Labs led a stocktake of DFID's constituent engagement and practice. This work culminated in a new Smart Guide on Beneficiary Engagement building on this. LearnAdapt research underscored how constituent engagement and adaptive management are important and complementary tools for implementing responsive and effective development programmes (Buell et al., 2020). Together, they can be a powerful combination: input from constituent engagement can be a key source of information and evidence that meaningfully informs programme design and adaptation, and closing the feedback loop in this way increases the quality of future engagement. LearnAdapt research on adaptive bureaucracies outside the development sector also has found a common emphasis on incorporating citizen feedback into policy design and building mechanisms to learn from this information. Beyond providing a key source of information for potential programme adaptations,

constituent engagement also helps to build trust with stakeholders, align expectations and promote accountability.

#### **Recognise that portfolio management is critical for achieving impact.**

No programme exists in isolation, and it is important to understand where adaptive programmes fit in the departmental and thematic portfolio, as well as initiatives by partner countries and other development and diplomatic actors. LearnAdapt's advisory work with DFID/FCDO offices in Myanmar and Nepal focused on creating greater clarity around portfolio-level objectives and results monitoring, and the contribution of adaptive programming to broader goals or 'big changes'. In Nepal, LearnAdapt catalysed a strategy process which allowed the office to shift focus and respond to new realities as the government moved to a federal model. DFID Nepal identified which 'big changes' the portfolio would contribute to as part of a 10-year strategy by considering their importance (to addressing the underlying causes of poverty, lack of voice and conflict), momentum (what forces are, or could, drive change within this context and the likelihood this will be sustained) and UK influence (it must be realistic and plausible that the UK can make a difference).

Lessons from this engagement contributed to the LearnAdapt guidance on adaptation and experimentation in a portfolio. This note outlines how good adaptive portfolio management relies on (1) understanding portfolio objectives; (2) understanding whether and how programmes complement and interact with each other to achieve those objectives; and (3) reaching a balance of adaptive and more traditional ways of working, considering risks, returns and resources.

## **4. Building an enabling environment**

**In addition to having good tools and guidance for designing and delivering adaptive programmes, systems change within government bureaucracies and aid organisations requires fundamental shifts in mindsets, behaviours and power balances.**

In LearnAdapt's first year, ODI hosted workshops on organisational culture for adaptation, the

---

donor–implementer relationship and value for money for adaptive programmes (ODI, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c). In its second year, LearnAdapt increased its engagement with DFID HQ in the development and sharing of lessons and tips on adaptive programming, helped by buy-in from a member of DFID’s senior management. An ‘Open Studio Week’ in November 2018 aimed to raise the profile and ‘normalise’ adaptive ways of working through panel discussions with exemplar programmes, drop-in clinics to support those in the programme design phase; and guest lectures and panel discussions including high-profile external guests. We used a similar format for Lean Impact week in January 2019. With Ann Mei Chang, we explored how lean impact could apply to programme design and procurement.

### **Building coalitions of the brave.**

An important part of LearnAdapt has been to build coalitions of people working in an adaptive way to role model and show what’s possible within existing constraints. To get there, LearnAdapt helped create an internal Adaptive Network to share lessons and connect ‘pockets’ of adaptive good practice and interest in the organisation. A regular newsletter was sent out, discussions encouraged on online platforms and virtual events held to share experiences.

Of course, DFID was not an implementing organisation, so another important part of LearnAdapt was to signal to practitioners that there was an enabling environment for being adaptive.

To signal DFID’s intent and openness, LearnAdapt held a series of interactive online events, each one bringing together over 100 development practitioners from around the world. This included an event hosted by Apolitical on ‘How to be adaptive in government’ featuring Lea Simpson and Rowan Conway from the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose (Apolitical, 2020; see also Simpson, 2020).

As the Covid-19 pandemic struck, in its final six months LearnAdapt ran a series of seminars on topics tailored to the crisis: listening to the voices of constituents; adapting to short-term demands while meeting long-term goals; learning from adaptive approaches from other sectors; and keeping an adaptive mindset (Pett, 2020b; 2020c; 2020d; Proud, 2020b).

As insights from these different conversations helped to highlight, in 2020 it has become clearer than ever that aid programmes operate in conditions of uncertainty and complexity. Covid-19 underscored the importance of flexible and responsive programming, and having a clear understanding of where and how genuinely adaptive approaches add value. For some programmes, the pandemic has meant that remote staff can play the role of ‘critical friend’ without taking over decision-making, thereby strengthening local leadership. Technology has enabled digital data collection and more diverse participation in meetings, but it can also amplify existing exclusion.

Several conversations came back to the importance of adaptive mindsets. Uncertain, stressful times make an adaptive mindset more valuable, but they can trigger a strong emotional response in the wrong direction. As workshop participants shared based on their respective experiences, this can be addressed by anticipating this reaction in oneself and others, and by providing partners and other relevant stakeholders some more assurance, connection and sense of progress.

Creating and maintaining, space, rhythms and roles for reflection within programmes and portfolios of work can give a sense of direction and increase the likelihood that adaptation is purposeful for long-term goals.

### **Recognising the importance of trust.**

Adaptive programming involves learning through honest reflection, not only on achievements and progress but also on setbacks and challenges, and empowering delivery teams to take risks and experiment. As such, a crucial finding that has emerged through the work of LearnAdapt is that trust – both between FCDO colleagues and with partners and other relevant stakeholders – is fundamental to success. When trust has been built across relevant stakeholders, including FCDO and partners, teams on the ground tend to have more autonomy – and with it the ability to adapt to opportunities. Building trust, however, requires time and investment in relationship-building, developing a shared understanding of purpose and demonstrating a robust approach to generating evidence to inform

---

decisions. Programme governance has a role to play in this: for example, some programmes have found that it is helpful to have an FCDO secondee appointed to the implementing team. We illustrate this point in the guidance note on implementer relationships (ODI, 2018b). LearnAdapt research has also found that FCDO and implementers learning together, informal meetings, joint work-planning sessions, and ‘away days’ can be used to create safe spaces to recognise uncertainty and identify challenges.

## What's next: questions and ideas

At the time of writing, the UK is at an important juncture in how it conceives of its development and foreign policy priorities. Many things remain in flux, with the merger of DFID and the FCO into the FCDO; an Integrated Review of foreign policy, defence, security and international development; and a spending review, while the UK aid budget has also seen considerable reductions. In addition, ways of working have had to adjust significantly in response to Covid-19 as aid projects need to be managed from a distance. Within the international development sector more broadly, in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement, searching questions about power relations embedded at the heart of our understanding and practice of development have come to the fore.

Against this backdrop, the need for development assistance to work differently so that it can be more effective and have greater impact remains as urgent as ever. Through the work of LearnAdapt over the past three years, as well as other initiatives in this space over the past two decades, DFID/FCDO has made purposeful and committed efforts to foster systems, processes, cultures and mindsets that enable and support adaptive programming. FCDO is well-positioned to capitalise on this investment and, building on the lessons, insights and principles that have emerged from LearnAdapt (as well as other programmes), develop the foundations for a foreign affairs and development ministry that is fit to address the complex challenges that lie ahead.

There are a number of opportunities and challenges stemming from changes to aid delivery announced in late November 2020:

- A clear focus on complex global challenges highlights just how essential it is to continue to support and nurture adaptive ways of working.
- Removing total operating cost limits and strengthening in-house capability could mean more internal resources for the initial exploration stage of programmes so that FCDO can better understand problems before moving to procurement. It could also mean adequate staff time can be given to management and relationship-building in adaptive programmes.
- Reduced reliance on very large contracts with delivery agents could be a good thing if it leads to smaller, more nimble programmes and more local ownership.
- Treating bilateral programmes as the default is a positive shift if it means delegating authority to the country level and increasing local ownership.
- FCDO can share its adaptive expertise across government and take on a greater role in the coherence and coordination of official development assistance spending across government.
- However, continued reliance on New Public Management in the programme management process (e.g. increased use of key performance indicators despite evidence that this does not work) will make it more difficult for adaptive programmes to reach their potential – and may limit the effectiveness of UK aid.

Based on the LearnAdapt experience, a critical consideration for FCDO is how it can spread capacity and responsibility for the adaptive agenda. As a first step, we recommend that FCDO share and socialise the guidance developed through LearnAdapt across the FCDO network, including trusted partners and stakeholders. Advisory capacity to support and enable adaptive ways of working should be distributed across countries. For country offices where there is leadership buy-in, FCDO can give sustained support to thinking at the portfolio level and encourage whole teams of adaptive champions. To help implementing partners to embrace adaptive programming principles and practice and signal continued commitment, not only on paper but also in practice, FCDO

could share why adaptive programming is so important, what it has learnt in recent years and what its expectations are, including an honest assessment of opportunities and risks along the way, not only within FCDO but also with other actors in the international development community who are grappling with similar questions and challenges. A future research

agenda could involve unpacking what we mean by adaptive mindsets and culture, exploring the ethics of adaptive management (e.g. sustaining trust with local partners when projects run by expatriates only commit to short timeframes and small bets) and building the evidence base that adaptive programming leads to better development outcomes.

## **Box 1 LearnAdapt outputs and activities**

### **Research**

- ‘How can DFID better manage complexity in development programming?’
  - Briefing paper (Sharp et al., 2019)
  - Blog post: ‘How to manage complexity: four lessons for DFID’s new Secretary of State’ (LearnAdapt, 2019)
- *Adaptive bureaucracies? Enabling adaptation in public bureaucracies*
  - Working paper (Sharp, 2021)
  - How to be adaptive in government: video (Apolitical, 2020) and follow-up blog (Simpson, 2020)
  - Blog post: ‘Four things to read on adaptive bureaucracies’ (Sharp, 2020)
  - Blog post: ‘Principles for managing in complexity’ (Proud, 2020c)
  - Working adaptively in government – Options Paper (and executive summary)
  - CPI case studies – MUVA and GPI (forthcoming)
  - Public event: Building bureaucracies that adapt to complexity (ODI, 2020)
- *Navigating adaptive approaches: a guide for the uncertain*
  - Working paper (Pett, 2020a)
  - Blog post: ‘Four ways development practitioners can borrow from private sector adaptive approaches’ (Pett, 2020e)
  - Workshop video (Pett, 2020c)
- *Linking constituent engagement and adaptive management: lessons from practitioners*
  - Working paper (Buell et al., 2020)
  - Blog post: ‘Asking for feedback: how to ensure information makes its way into decision-making’ (Buell, 2020)
  - Workshop video (Pett, 2020d)
- *Value for money and adaptive programming: approaches, measures and management*
  - Working paper (Laws and Valters, 2021)

### **Workshops**

- Organisational culture for learning and adaptation (with video) (ODI, 2018a)
- Managing the donor-implementer relationship (ODI, 2018b)
- Value for money and adaptive management (ODI, 2018c)
- Physically distanced adaptive management (Proud, 2020a)
- Managing uncertainty when your brain doesn’t like it (Proud, 2020b)
- The long and short of it: staying relevant and meeting long-term goals (Pett, 2020b)



---

## **Box 1 LearnAdapt outputs and activities (continued)**

### **Adaptive programming guidance notes<sup>i</sup>**

- Adaptive programming guidance note series
  - When should I consider flexibility and/or adaptation in programming?
  - Types of adaptive approach to programming
  - Adaptation and experimentation within a programme portfolio
  - Understanding and influencing changes in a system
  - How do I design an adaptive programme?
  - Concept notes
  - Business cases
  - Results frameworks
  - Value for Money
  - How do I write Terms of Reference for adaptive working?
  - How do I use an Inception Phase to support an adaptive approach?
  - What governance mechanisms are suitable for adaptive programmes?
  - Annual reviews
  - Implementer relationships
  - Beneficiary engagement
  - How do I lead an adaptive programme as an SRO?
- Cross-cutting
  - What is adaptive management?
  - Top tips: how to design and manage adaptive programmes
  - Learning from adaptive programmes: 10 lessons and 10 case studies
  - Beneficiary engagement smart guide
  - Things to try cards x 16 including ‘A behavioural lens’, ‘Hiring entrepreneurial teams’, ‘Immersion’ and ‘Strategy testing’

### **Other resources**

- LearnAdapt at ODI: [www.odi.org/projects/2933-learnadapt-innovation-and-adaptation-dfid](http://www.odi.org/projects/2933-learnadapt-innovation-and-adaptation-dfid)
- LearnAdapt on Medium: <https://medium.com/learnadapt>
- LearnAdapt on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/learnadapt>
- Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM): [www.odi.org/projects/2918-global-learning-adaptive-management-initiative-glam](http://www.odi.org/projects/2918-global-learning-adaptive-management-initiative-glam)
- Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) at USAID: <https://usaidlearninglab.org/cla-toolkit>

<sup>i</sup> Internal FCDO documents.

---

## References

- Apolitical (2020) 'How to be adaptive in government'. Online workshop. London: Apolitical (<https://apolitical.co/adaptive-government/>).
- Buell, S. (2020) 'Asking for feedback: how to ensure information makes its way into decision-making'. ODI blog, 5 November ([www.odi.org/blogs/17526-asking-feedback-how-ensure-information-makes-its-way-decision-making](http://www.odi.org/blogs/17526-asking-feedback-how-ensure-information-makes-its-way-decision-making)).
- Buell, S., Campbell, M and Pett, J (2020). 'Linking constituent engagement and adaptive management: lessons from practitioners'. London: ODI ([www.odi.org/publications/17480-linking-constituent-engagement-and-adaptive-management-lessons-practitioners](http://www.odi.org/publications/17480-linking-constituent-engagement-and-adaptive-management-lessons-practitioners)).
- Dasandi, N., Laws, E., Marquette, H. and Robinson, M. (2019). 'What does the evidence tell us about "thinking and working politically" in development assistance?' *Politics and Governance* 7(2): 155–168 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i2.1904>).
- DFID – Department for International Development (UK) (2016) *Rising to the challenge of ending poverty: the Bilateral Development Review 2016*. London: DFID ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/rising-to-the-challenge-of-ending-poverty-the-bilateral-development-review-2016](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rising-to-the-challenge-of-ending-poverty-the-bilateral-development-review-2016)).
- FCDO – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (UK) (2020) 'Smart rules: better programme delivery'. London: FCDO ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-smart-rules-better-programme-delivery](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-smart-rules-better-programme-delivery)).
- ICAI – Independent Commission on Aid Impact (2018) 'DFID's approach to value for money in programme and portfolio management'. London: ICAI (<https://icai.independent.gov.uk/report/value-for-money/>).
- Laws, E. and Valters, C. (2021) *Value for money and adaptive programming: approaches, measures and management*. ODI working paper 572. London: ODI ([www.odi.org/publications/17914-value-money-and-adaptive-programming-approaches-measures-and-management](http://www.odi.org/publications/17914-value-money-and-adaptive-programming-approaches-measures-and-management)).
- LearnAdapt (2019) 'How to manage complexity: four lessons for DFID's new Secretary of State'. Medium, 3 May (<https://medium.com/learnadapt/how-to-manage-complexity-four-lessons-for-dfids-new-secretary-of-state-b1bdf06b513c>).
- ODI (2018a) '#AdaptDev workshop: organisational culture for learning and adaptation'. Workshop, 24 May, ODI, London ([www.odi.org/events/4557-adaptdev-workshop-organisational-culture-learning-and-adaptation](http://www.odi.org/events/4557-adaptdev-workshop-organisational-culture-learning-and-adaptation)).
- ODI (2018b) '#AdaptDev workshop 2: managing the donor-implementer relationship'. Workshop, 16 July, ODI, London ([www.odi.org/events/4594-adaptdev-workshop-2-managing-donor-implementer-relationship](http://www.odi.org/events/4594-adaptdev-workshop-2-managing-donor-implementer-relationship)).
- ODI (2018c) '#AdaptDev workshop 3: value for money and adaptive management'. Workshop, 16 November, ODI, London ([www.odi.org/events/4603-adaptdev-workshop-3-value-money-and-adaptive-management](http://www.odi.org/events/4603-adaptdev-workshop-3-value-money-and-adaptive-management)).
- ODI (2020) 'Building bureaucracies that adapt to complexity'. Webinar, 30 November ([www.odi.org/events/17562-building-bureaucracies-that-adapt-to-complexity](http://www.odi.org/events/17562-building-bureaucracies-that-adapt-to-complexity)).
- Pett, J. (2020a). 'Navigating adaptive approaches for development programmes: a guide for the uncertain'. ODI working paper 589. London: ODI ([www.odi.org/publications/17367-navigating-adaptive-approaches-development-programmes-guide-uncertain](http://www.odi.org/publications/17367-navigating-adaptive-approaches-development-programmes-guide-uncertain)).
- Pett, J. (2020b) 'The long and short of it: responding to immediate needs while pursuing long-term goals'. Medium, 7 September (<https://medium.com/learnadapt/the-long-and-short-of-it-responding-to-immediate-needs-while-pursuing-long-term-goals-b8c4471857b1>).

- 
- Pett, J. (2020c) 'Discussing adaptive approaches for development programmes'. Medium, 2 November (<https://medium.com/learnadapt/discussing-adaptive-approaches-for-development-programmes-858ceb2cce32>).
- Pett, J. (2020d) 'Listening, learning and adapting'. Medium, 19 November (<https://medium.com/learnadapt/listening-learning-and-adapting-2031ea262c1b>).
- Pett, J. (2020e) 'Four ways development practitioners can borrow from private sector adaptive approaches'. Medium, 28 September (<https://medium.com/learnadapt/four-ways-development-practitioners-can-borrow-from-private-sector-adaptive-approaches-e5af0689ca78>).
- Proud, E. (2020a) 'Physically distanced adaptive management: opportunities and challenges for local leadership'. Medium, 6 July (<https://medium.com/learnadapt/physically-distanced-adaptive-management-58f1aa672d45>).
- Proud, E. (2020b) 'Managing uncertainty when your brain doesn't like it'. Medium, 13 July (<https://medium.com/learnadapt/managing-uncertainty-when-your-brain-doesnt-like-it-9f220ffe1252>).
- Proud, E. (2020c) 'Principles for managing in complexity'. Medium, 30 November (<https://medium.com/learnadapt/principles-for-managing-in-complexity-dae9a056b9d>).
- Sharp, S. (2020) 'Four things to read on adaptive bureaucracies'. Medium, 11 February (<https://medium.com/learnadapt/four-things-to-read-on-adaptive-bureaucracies-81bb27321205>).
- Sharp, S. (2021) *Adaptive bureaucracies? Enabling adaptation in public bureaucracies*. ODI working paper 604. London: ODI ([www.odi.org/publications/18009-adaptive-bureaucracies](http://www.odi.org/publications/18009-adaptive-bureaucracies)).
- Sharp, S., Valters, C. and Whitty, B. (2019) 'How DFID can better manage complexity in development programming'. London: ODI ([www.odi.org/publications/11315-how-dfid-can-better-manage-complexity-development-programming](http://www.odi.org/publications/11315-how-dfid-can-better-manage-complexity-development-programming)).
- Simpson, L. (2020) 'How to be adaptive – lessons from 3 years at DFID'. Apolitical, 30 March ([https://apolitical.co/en/solution\\_article/how-to-be-adaptive-lessons-from-3-years-at-dfid](https://apolitical.co/en/solution_article/how-to-be-adaptive-lessons-from-3-years-at-dfid)).
- Warren, S. and Lowe, T. (2021) 'How adaptive management is changing international development'. CPI – Center for Public Impact blog, 12 March ([www.centreforpublicimpact.org/insights/how-adaptive-management-is-changing-international-development](http://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/insights/how-adaptive-management-is-changing-international-development)).
- Wild, L. and Booth, D. (2016) 'Doing Development Differently: two years on, what have we done?'. London: ODI ([www.odi.org/publications/10631-doing-development-differently-two-years-what-have-we-done](http://www.odi.org/publications/10631-doing-development-differently-two-years-what-have-we-done)).
- Wild, L., Booth, D. and Valters, C. (2017) *Putting theory into practice: How DFID is doing development differently*. London: ODI ([www.odi.org/publications/10729-putting-theory-practice-how-dfid-doing-development-differently](http://www.odi.org/publications/10729-putting-theory-practice-how-dfid-doing-development-differently)).



This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.



**Evidence.  
Ideas.  
Change.**

**ODI**  
203 Blackfriars Road  
London SE1 8NJ

+44 (0)20 7922 0300  
info@odi.org

odi.org  
odi.org/facebook  
odi.org/twitter

**ODI is an independent, global think tank, working for a sustainable and peaceful world in which every person thrives.** We harness the power of evidence and ideas through research and partnership to confront challenges, develop solutions, and create change.

Readers are encouraged to reproduce material for their own publications, as long as they are not being sold commercially. ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication. For online use, we ask readers to link to the original resource on the ODI website. The views presented in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of ODI or our partners.

This work is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0.