



Zambia Accountability Programme (ZAP) & the Developmental Evaluation Approach













thought piece

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Overview



Reflective of the discourse on 'doing development differently' (DDD) emerging at the time, the Department for International Development (DFID) Zambia Accountability Programme (ZAP) was conceptualised as an adaptive and politically smart programme, whereby the lead service provider would have the opportunity to respond to and exploit changes in the local environment throughout the life of the programme.

The aim of ZAP is to strengthen supply and demand-led accountability mechanisms, specifically in relation to political processes and policy advocacy/influencing at the national level and education services at the local level.

Adaptive programming gives impetus to DDD as donors increasingly recognise that linear programme designs often disregard the complex and dynamic contexts and interconnectedness of development issues. It also allows programmes to work in a more locally-led and demand driven way, addressing issues and exploiting opportunities that arise instead of focussing on pre-determined areas of engagement, frequently identified by external actors. Thus, in a programme such as ZAP, greater attention needs to be given to the lead service provider's ability to integrate political awareness in the knowledge management architecture of programme implementation, to monitor progress and impact on an ongoing basis, and to learn and reflect on both needs and what is working or not, and, as a result, to adapt and adjust course.

Consequently, a complex adaptive programme, like ZAP, challenges the traditional role of the independent evaluation provider (IEP), as whilst typical evaluation designs usually assume a high level of programme predictability and control alongside stable strategies and processes, adaptive programmes deal with emergent outcomes and objectives, nonlinear theories of change, and evolving programme implementation activities and

partners. Instead of clarity on what the programme is working towards, and how, around which the evaluation is designed, the evaluation of adaptive programmes requires the need to 1) understand how and why the programme has adapted, 2) to consider if the evolution was appropriate, and 3) to evaluate if the results, defined during implementation, has been achieved. In some instances, like ZAP, the IEP is also required to support lesson learning to inform programme implementation and adaptation. These complex and dynamic conditions require a more flexible framework for evaluation.

As a result, WYG International, the IEP for ZAP, framed its evaluation design within the Developmental Evaluation (DE) approach¹. DE combines rigorous evaluation with a flexible and context specific approach, and undertakes evaluation throughout the programme life cycle rather than at set intervals. DE takes account of the exploratory

and learning orientation of the IEP's role and is particularly appropriate when programme initiatives and interventions, like ZAP, are not clearly defined from the offset and/or continue to evolve.

This paper shares the experience, learning and challenges of the IEP's utilisation of the DE approach for ZAP, to contribute to learning on the operationalisation of adaptive programmes – and their evaluation – in Zambia and beyond. It begins with an introduction of ZAP and a brief overview of DE. It goes on to describe how the DE approach was envisioned and subsequently implemented by the IEP, identifying what worked well and what did not work well and concludes with an analysis of learning and ongoing challenges

¹ See WYG (2016) Independent Evaluation Provider to the Zambia Accountability Programme – Inception Report, August 2016

“...complex and dynamic conditions require a more flexible framework for evaluation.”

Introduction

The DFID-funded Zambia Accountability Programme (ZAP)² is a five-year (2014 – 2019), £26.5 million³, programme that operates at national, sub-national and local levels across Zambia.

ZAP's intended impact [goal] is improved accountability and responsiveness – up and down⁴ – in the delivery of public goods and services. ZAP is overseen by the British Council as lead service provider and forms a key part of the DFID-Zambia governance portfolio.

ZAP brings together a wide range of activities across several focal areas (see Box 1 below) and, in total, has involved 22 implementing partners consisting of a combination of international, national and local non-governmental organisations.

Box 1: ZAP Focal Areas



ZAP was conceptualised as an adaptive programme⁵, where the lead service provider would respond to/ influence and exploit changes in the political environment and adapt the strategic and operational aspects of the programme accordingly.

Whilst notions underpinning adaptive programming (or DDD) is not new⁶, a renewed interest in adaptive management during the design of ZAP generated useful thinking and learning from other adaptive programming design and implementation experiences. As Donovan and Manuel point out:

*"Three key approaches [to adaptive programming] in particular have gained traction within the development community – the need for programmes to (1) work in a politically smart manner, (2) be problem driven, iterative and adaptive, and (3) to be demand led."*⁴

Integration of learning⁷ and adaptability mechanisms which aim to identify local needs, understand the political will to address these needs, and test as well as scale up or down possible solutions at every stage of the programme cycle was expected to be central to the implementation strategy of ZAP.

A key benefit of amalgamating a wide range of activities under ZAP⁸, is the opportunity to share learning and knowledge across the programme. In addition to the flow of information on local needs and the political context from outside the programme, there is also an expectation that learning would flow horizontally across programme components and between implementing partners.

1 See WYG (2016) Independent Evaluation Provider to the Zambia Accountability Programme – Inception Report, August 2016

2 <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-203816/>

3 In its third year of implementation the ZAP budget was decreased by DFID from £27.5m to £26.5m.

4 Up and down means across local, district and national levels.

5 DFID. (2013). Terms of Reference

6 The IEP are developing a separate learning paper that reflects on the design and implementation of ZAP.

7 That is, reacting to evidence to either maintain or adjust programme course.

8 DFID. (2015). Terms of Reference, Evaluation Service Provider: The Zambia Accountability Programme.

Consideration for IEP Design

A year into ZAP implementation, the IEP was contracted by DFID with the purpose of undertaking a theory-based evaluation framed within baseline, formative and summative studies that would both identify gaps in the evidence base and test the validity of the ZAP theory of change (ToC)⁸.

Given evaluation requirements to explore and test the validity of the ZAP ToC, an evaluation design that facilitates linking the contribution (to the extent possible) to outcomes achieved, enabling comment on the success, or otherwise, of ZAP's approach in different contexts, was required.

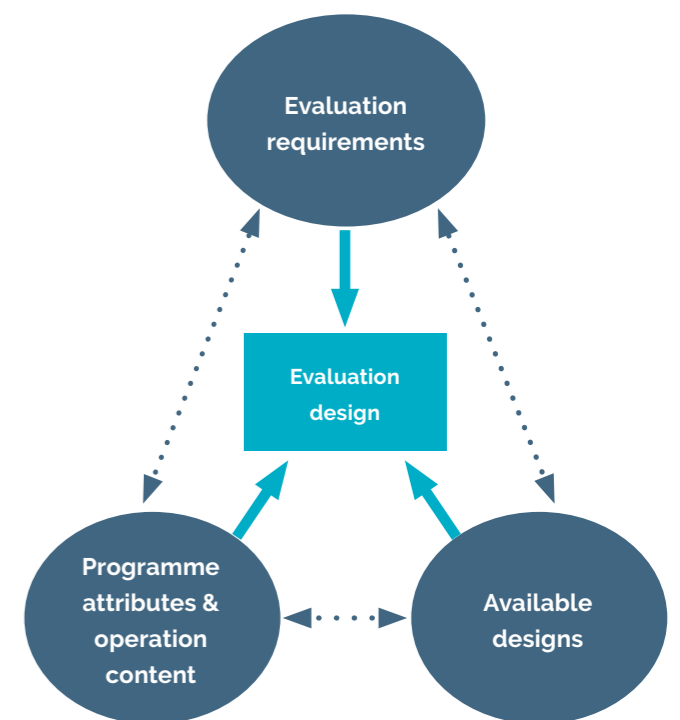
To do this, the IEP considered various options for delivering evaluation and learning when it assessed ZAP's evaluation requirements, aims and objectives. It also assessed ZAP's attributes and its operating context to consider which evaluation design options would be most applicable/ relevant (and the specific requirements of these)⁹ as well as the dimensions of programme complexity (see Figure 1). The dimensions of programme complexity that were considered in this process included:

- Multiple-diverse activities with dynamic, unpredictable lines of causation which create a web of multiple processes and multiple and overlapping routes to outcome and impact;
- Working 'indirectly' through agents – with grant making as the major vehicle of delivery, outputs would be delivered through multiple partners affecting the lead service provider's spheres of influence;
- Overlap with other interventions – ZAP is not operating in a vacuum, there are multiple actors, donors and development partners working to promote increased accountability in Zambia; and

- Recognising that sustainable institutional change can take 15 to 30 years¹⁰, the five-year duration of ZAP does not enable the evaluation to capture longer-term results and impact.

Both the constraints and requirements of complex programmes as well as practical, logistical and resource constraints of the IEP itself, influenced the choice of evaluation design.

Figure 1: Selecting the Evaluation Design¹⁰



Implementing DE for ZAP

The IEP considered various potential evaluation designs and determined that its contractual structure for a baseline, formative (mid-term) and summative evaluation approach did not fit with ZAP's complex and adaptive nature. Rather, in contrast to evaluations undertaken at discrete, fixed moments in time, the need for sustained engagement premised the rationale for a more adaptive framework, one that would accommodate ongoing programme development and adaptation and account for 'real world' complexity, constraints and challenges.

Acknowledging the evolving nature of ZAP, the IEP framed its theory-based evaluation design as developmental evaluation (DE). DE would enable the evaluation to respond to the challenges of operating in complex adaptive systems and at the heart of DE is a framework that provides learning to inform action. Moreover, DE is particularly appropriate when programme initiatives and interventions are not clearly defined from the start and/or continue to evolve. Pioneered by Patton^{viii}, DE can be defined as:

"Long-tern, partnering relationships between evaluators and those engaged in innovative initiatives and development. Developmental evaluation processes include asking evaluative questions and gathering information to provide feedback and support developmental decision-making and course corrections along the emergent path."^{viii}

Like formative and summative evaluations, DE is an evaluation approach which combines the rigour of evaluation (objective and evidence-based) with the role of development (flexible, change-orientated and imaginative) and is context-specific (with no single prescribed methodology). The difference in DE is that the evaluation accompanies the programme cycle, aiming to influence programme implementors to review what they do, so that learning happens simultaneously with implementation.

^{viii} DFID. (2015). Terms of Reference, Evaluation Service Provider: The Zambia Accountability Programme

In the case of ZAP, implementation of the DE approach required the IEP to:

- Work closely with the ZAP lead service provider as well as DFID rather than functioning as a remote reviewer;
- Provide ongoing evaluative data into ZAP decision-making processes to support purposeful changes to the programme, as opposed to purely undertaking periodic reviews.

These requirements shaped the way in which the IEP implemented DE and two key concepts formed the foundation for implementing the DE approach for ZAP:

1. A cyclical approach that provided ongoing evaluative data (see Figure 2 on page 6).

A learning framework, that centred on the ZAP ToC and the evaluation questions emanating from it, outlined the rationale for the focal area(s) that would be evaluated, the key lines of enquiry, and the evaluation methods that would be used. Evaluation data collection and analysis followed, after which a synthesis of the findings was presented in sense-making workshop(s) in order to inform decision making and, where necessary, programme adaptation.

2. A DE Group structure that met regularly.

The DE Group, a forum involving representatives from DFID, the lead service provider and the IEP met on a monthly basis to engage with the learning generated by the IEP, monitor actions as a result of the recommendations made and support programme management and decision-making processes.

These two key concepts were important for the IEP to remain relevant and responsive to the programmes' evaluation and learning needs as they formed the basis for continuous explanatory and reflexive communication. Moreover, the combination of the cyclical approach and DE structure allowed the IEP to remain up-to-date on how the programme was evolving and ensured that the focal areas selected for evaluation contributed to learning and decision-making processes.

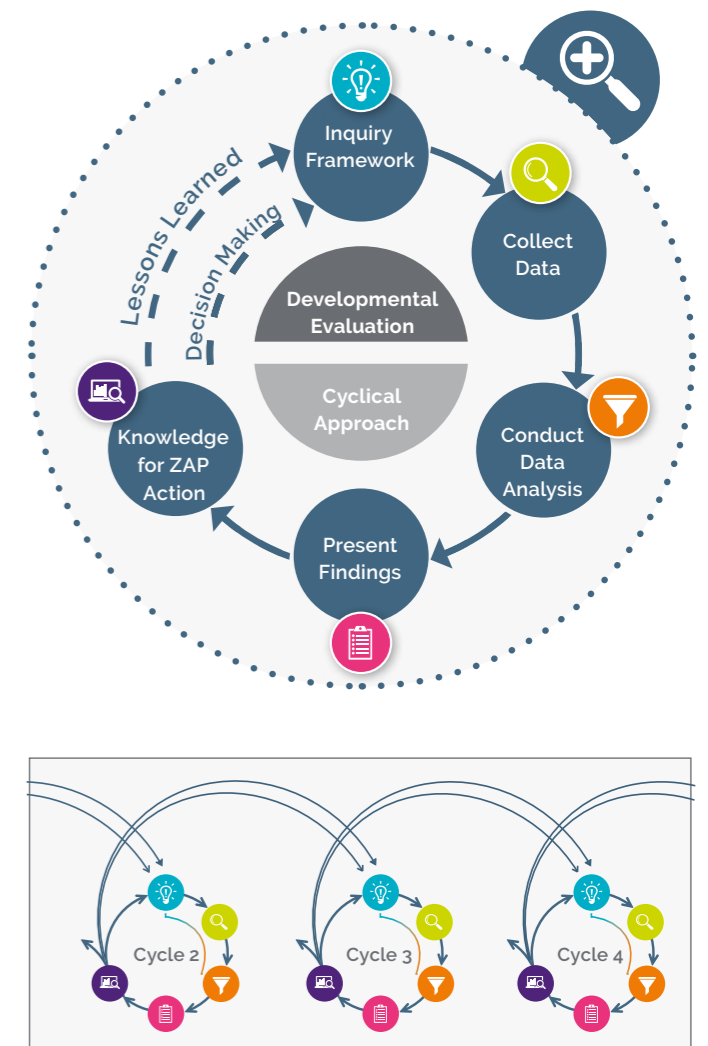
As with all evaluation designs, there are challenges and limitations. The IEP had identified three main limitations of DE. First, as a diverse and highly complex programme, considering the cumulative effects of all programme elements was not feasible within the confines of the available resources. As a result, on completion, the evaluation would not be able to offer conclusions on the impact of ZAP at programme-level. Instead the evaluation would consider the contribution to accountability – considering what works, for whom, where and why.

Second, whilst the DE approach is useful in shaping and refining ZAP programming on an ongoing basis, the highly context-specific focus of evaluative enquiry at different points would likely limit the generalisability of evaluation findings over time and space.

Third, the DE approach, which positioned the IEP much closer to the programme implementation team than in a traditional evaluation design, had the potential to impact the independence and credibility of the evaluation findings. To minimise this risk, the IEP:

- Was not positioned as an internal programme function (as text-book approaches to DE advocated) but remained external to ZAP;
- Engaged with DFID (and documented) the rationale for issue selection and the limitations associated with the evaluation data, analysis and conclusions; and
- Employed its own rigorous quality assurance processes to ensure objectivity was maintained.

Figure 2: ZAP and the DE Approach



The ZAP DE Experience

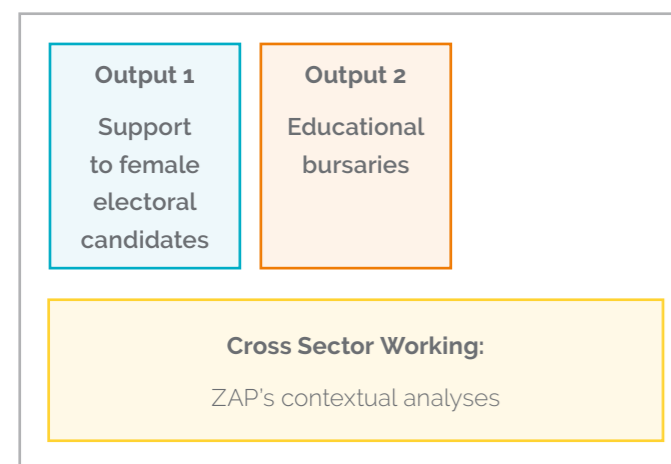
Over a period of 16 months of DE implementation, the IEP completed three cycles of investigation. Within each cycle three to four issues were selected for evaluation (by way of example, see Box 2 below for the evaluation focal areas selected in the first cycle).

DFID, the IEP and to a limited extent, the lead service provider, were involved in identifying the issues to be evaluated⁹.

A number of factors were considered when deciding which issues would be selected:

- The evidence base was considered weak or absent;
- The value of the programme activity was deemed significant; and
- A particular learning need was identified, such as, the extent to which cross-sector working was effective.

Box 2: Cycle 1 Evaluation Focal Areas



In total, over the implementation period, the IEP conducted nine distinct evaluation studies and two recurring studies¹⁰.

The studies were followed by sense-making workshops involving representatives from DFID, the lead service provider and the relevant ZAP implementing partners. These knowledge-sharing events communicated the

evaluation data analysis and findings, provided a platform for validation and identification of lessons learned and provided an opportunity to discuss recommendations for adapting the programme's strategies and interventions.

Both summative and detailed improvement-orientated reports were presented to DFID and the lead service provider, the former to provide quick feedback and enable easy dissemination, highlighting lessons learned and recommendations.

Acknowledging that reflective practice is an important aspect of the broader DE process, the IEP included a 'Reflection-on-action' review from the second cycle onwards, which explored what action had been taken in relation to the previous cycle's lessons learned and recommendations.

This was important to uphold accountability but also to understand how the lead service provider/implementation partners used evaluative data on an ongoing basis to improve what they did and how they did it. Furthermore, the reflection-on-action enabled the DE Group to identify to what extent learning had been internalised, applied and how systems and behaviour would need to change to enable greater ongoing learning and adaptation.

⁹ Whilst the IEP was employed by DFID as its external independent evaluation provider and not as the learning partner for the lead service provider, this process of identifying and documenting learning is on behalf of DFID.

¹⁰ A quality assurance review of the ZAP monitoring and evaluation system took place at both the second and third cycles of investigation.

Reflections on the DE Approach

The use of a DE approach as the framework for theory-based evaluation enabled the IEP to review a wide range of diverse activities, which rendered the evaluation of such a large and diverse programme manageable. The findings and recommendations from the different investigations generated useful information, though perhaps more so for DFID than the lead service provider or its implementing partners. This is further discussed when reflecting on what worked well and what did not.

What worked well?

The IEP's ability to adapt. As stated above, ZAP was designed as an adaptive programme, which requires agility in both organisational and programme processes and structures. In turn, and as a result of the DE approach, the independent evaluation also became an adaptive programme. For instance, the IEP had to continuously shift its role and resource allocation to address the evaluation requirements for each cycle. The decisions were informed by a number of factors, including, what DFID was interested to learn, what the lead service provider was currently implementing and/or what was ready to be evaluated. As a result, a total of 13 evaluation studies were completed over the 16-month period.

The frequency and breadth of DE evaluation studies.

By exploring several areas during each cycle, the IEP highlighted lessons learned and recommendations, which the lead service provider/DFID could react to

during implementation, correcting course and addressing needs or improving performance, where required. A number of the issues explored were also cross-cutting to the whole programme, which ensured that learning and recommendations applied across implementing partners. The combination of evaluation studies and regular DE Group meetings also supported DFID in a number of ways:

- Participating with ZAP lead service provider and implementing partners on making sense of evaluative data provided a direct link to reflections from implementing partners' experiences, that they perhaps would not have had otherwise;
- Understanding what results are being achieved and how;
- Taking stock of programme progress and being able to think-forward; and
- Reviewing the lead service provider's uptake and application of learning.

Active participation in the sense-making workshops.

Co-reviewing the evaluation findings, reflecting on lessons learned and recommendations during implementation afforded the wide range of ZAP implementing partners (22 in total) the opportunity to:

- Review the scale and efficiency of their programme activity;
- Engage in cross-learning between different implementation partners who don't normally work together otherwise;
- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems and tools; and
- Engage in reflective practice; reflect on lessons learned and consider necessary programme course adjustments.

Reflections on the DE Approach (continued)

What did not work well?

The slow response to learning. A key assumption underpinning the DE approach was that the lead service provider would actively engage with evaluation findings and would have the ability and capacity to reflect on and react to learning in a timely manner, adjusting activities in response, as the programme unfolded. However, the IEP's findings on actions and reactions to learning suggest otherwise: processes to promote dissemination and uptake of lessons and recommendations across ZAP, and as action to change what was done and how it was done in response to learning, were weak.

The challenges to internalise learning and adaptation could be as a result of a number of factors, such as:

- The evaluation topics were DFID/IEP-driven; there was little involvement of the lead service provider and its implementation partners in identifying learning needs;
- The six-monthly cycle was too long;
- The DE approach was too demanding and/or not useful for the lead service provider/selected implementation partners, devaluing the process of generating and reflecting on ongoing learning;
- Insufficient allocation of resources for its monitoring and evaluation function, the dependency on short term consultants and the high turnover of its staff meant that the lead service provider had insufficient resources to effectively react to learning;

- DFID's continuous changes to the direction of the programme and consequent changes to the logframe frustrated the lead service provider/implementation partners.
- The lead service provider adopted a very formal reporting approach, which is often incompatible with the informality of the DE approach;
- The lead service provider's lengthy turnaround time in providing feedback to the IEP's cyclical reports, meant that opportunities to explore real-time solutions were missed;
- Selectively disseminating IEP reports to its implementing partners meant that access to complete evaluative data, lessons and recommendations may have been prevented;
- Poor internal knowledge sharing systems; and
- Towards the end of the third year of ZAP implementation, the shift in DFID's and the lead service provider's perspective of ZAP as an adaptive programme to ZAP as mainly a grant programme.

Maintaining institutional knowledge. Acknowledging that change in programme staff is often inevitable, there should have been a greater emphasis on capturing and maintaining institutional knowledge (such as a database of learning generated, documenting the rationale for programme adaptation, hosting learning events etc.) and ensuring sufficient handover of learning. However, DFID and the lead service provider did not consider these a priority.

Reflection on EQUALS

A review by DFID's evaluation quality assurance and learning services (EQUALS) provider determined that its review of the DE approach could prove a challenge in terms of:

- Completeness – whilst the EQUALS process could focus its review on the individual cyclical evaluation outputs (the first level of learning), it did not address the second level of learning generated by the process of identifying focal areas to be evaluated, the management of the DE process and any reflection-on-action (the second level of learning).
- Workload – the resources required to review numerous evaluation outputs generated in each cycle.
- Relevance – certain aspects of its QA review template are not necessarily applicable to individual evaluation outputs.

The EQUALS process appears to be biased towards formative and summative evaluations.

What could be done differently?

Drawing on the IEP's experiences of using a DE approach for ZAP, the following could have been done differently:

1. The learning agenda and needs of DFID (including EQUALS), the lead service provider/implementing partners can be very different. An early intervention to understand the various learning needs and communication requirements would ensure that these are better integrated in the DE approach, increasing opportunities for learning uptake, application and compliance. This would require the independent evaluator to be appointed at the same time as the lead service provider, if not before.
2. Adaptive programming and DE are time-intensive processes; whilst both enable innovation, exploration and creative thinking, there are cost implications. It would be important to ensure that reporting and commercial requirements do not inhibit these.
3. The opportunity to review resource allocations, reporting requirements, and spending/value for money targets on an ongoing basis and having flexibility in procurement and contracting mechanisms could enable programmes to take the most appropriate actions in response to learning and/or changes in the political environment.
4. Consideration should be made for incentivising learning within the programme cycle. Initiatives such as programme-specific learning circles, or broader learning alliances (which would involve ZAP implementing partners, other DFID-funded programme leads and external stakeholders), learning uptake-linked financial incentives etc., could provide platforms for ongoing engagement with learning opportunities to reflect on the implications of these to programme adaptation.
5. Whilst recognising that implementing partners may not be engaged throughout the life of a programme, a greater involvement in the DE Group would assist in closing the 'learning loop' at the implementation level and enable involvement in identifying issues for evaluation that would meet programme learning needs.



Key Considerations for Future DE Practice

1. The learning agenda and needs of DFID (including EQUALS), the lead service provider/implementing partners can be very different. An early intervention to understand the various learning needs and communication requirements would ensure that these are better integrated in the DE approach, increasing opportunities for learning uptake, application and compliance. This would require the independent evaluator to be appointed at the same time as the lead service provider, if not before.
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5. Whilst recognising that implementing partners may not be engaged throughout the life of a programme, a greater involvement in the DE Group would assist in closing the 'learning loop' at the implementation level and enable involvement in identifying issues for evaluation that would meet programme learning needs.



Conclusion

Framing the ZAP evaluation design within the DE approach has had positive outcomes, both in terms of enabling robust investigation of a complex, large and diverse programme and providing value to DFID.

Whilst DE does involve a rethinking of the traditional donor, programme implementation service provider(s), and independent evaluation provider relationships, it could prove a viable evaluation approach for future complex, adaptive programmes.

i Wild, L., Booth D., and Valters C. (2017). Putting theory into practice – how DFID is doing development differently. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11332.pdf>

ii Donovan, E. and Manuel, C. (2017). Adaptive programming and Business Environment Reform – Lessons for DFID Zimbabwe. <http://businessenvironmentreform.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/BERF-Adaptive-Programming-and-Business-Environment-Reform-in-Zimbabwe.pdf>

iii ZAP emerged as the amalgamation of two DFID business cases: Institutions of Democratic Empowerment and Accountability and Citizen Service Engagement Programme with grant making as the major vehicle for programme delivery.

iv Adapted from Stern, E., Stame, N., Mayne, J., Forss, K., Davies, R. & Befani, B. (2012). DFID Working Paper 38. Broadening the range of designs and methods for impact evaluation. Department for International Development, London (UK).

v Stern, E., Stame, N., Mayne, J., Forss, K., Davies, R. & Befani, B. (2012). DFID Working Paper 38. Broadening the range of designs and methods for impact evaluation. Department for International Development, London (UK).

vi Pritchett, L., & de Weijer, F. (2011). Fragile States: Stuck in a Capability Trap? <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/9109>

vii Patton, M. Q. (2011). Developmental Evaluation. London: The Guildford Press

viii Dozois, E., Langlois, M., & Blanchet-Cohen, N. (2010). DE 201: Practitioner's guide to developmental evaluation. Victoria: McConnell Foundation and International Institute for Child Rights and Development. <http://www.mccconnellfoundation.ca/en/resources/publication/de-201-a-practitioner-s-guide-to-developmental-evaluation>.

ix Gamble, J. A. (2008). A Developmental Evaluation Primer. Montreal: JW McConnell Family Foundation

LIST OF ACRONYMS	
DE	Developmental Evaluation
DFID	Department for International Development
EQUALS	Evaluation Quality Assurance and Learning Service
IEP	Independent Evaluation Provider
ToC	Theory of Change
ZAP	Zambia Accountability Programme

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