# Transforming research organisations via monitoring, evaluation and learning: how can we evaluate our own work?

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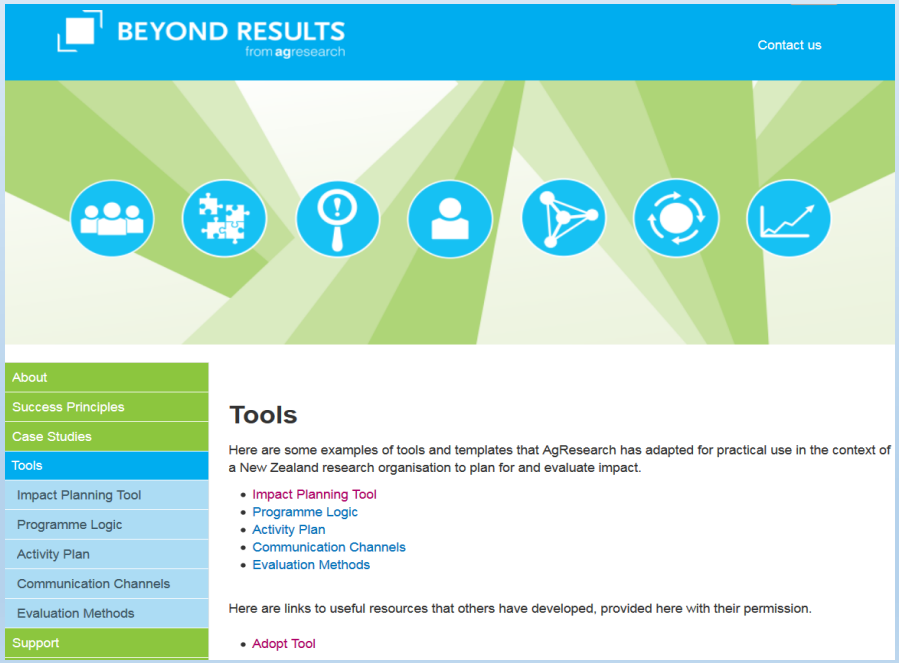
# Building a culture of impact thinking and practice within our organisations



# Building a culture of impact thinking and practice within our organisations

- Collecting **evidence along the way**
- **Enhancing our understanding** of how and why impacts were achieved (or not)
- Increasing **reflection** (amongst scientists/ project-level) and at management levels
- Addressing **organisational barriers/incentives**

*Achieving meaningful, wide-scale, lasting impact from science*

# Monitoring, evaluation and learning

What are the benefits?

Is it worth the effort?

How do we know?

## .. Scientists can be a sceptical bunch!

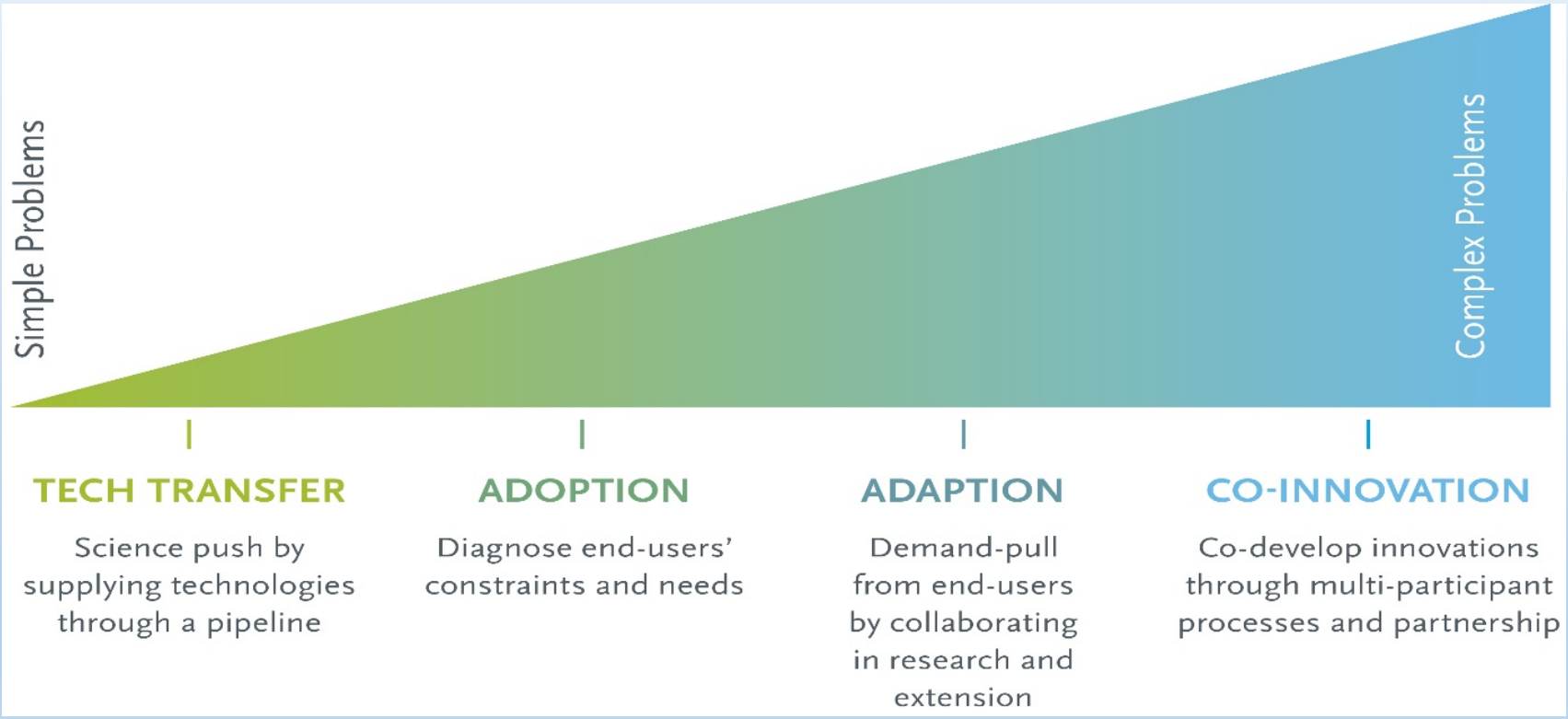
"It is very hard at the moment to see that recording information related to M&E is adding more value - we are under pressure to do research first." (Senior scientist)

## .. But others are on board

"**Our stakeholders need to know what we have achieved**. We need to be able to show them our relevance and be specific about it.

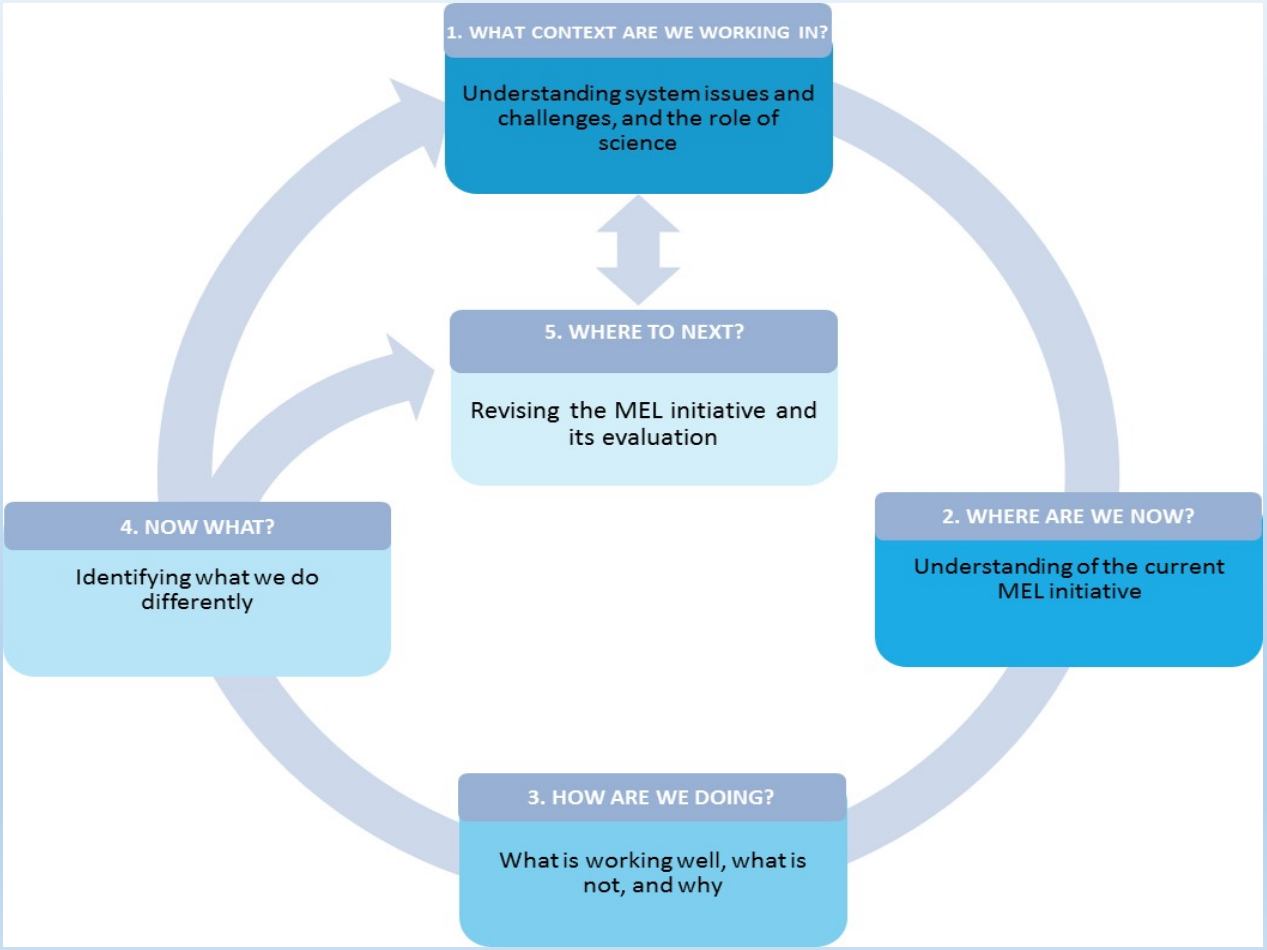
[We have] got to commit to make the change and **capture impacts as they happen and this is the method for doing it.**" (A different senior scientist)

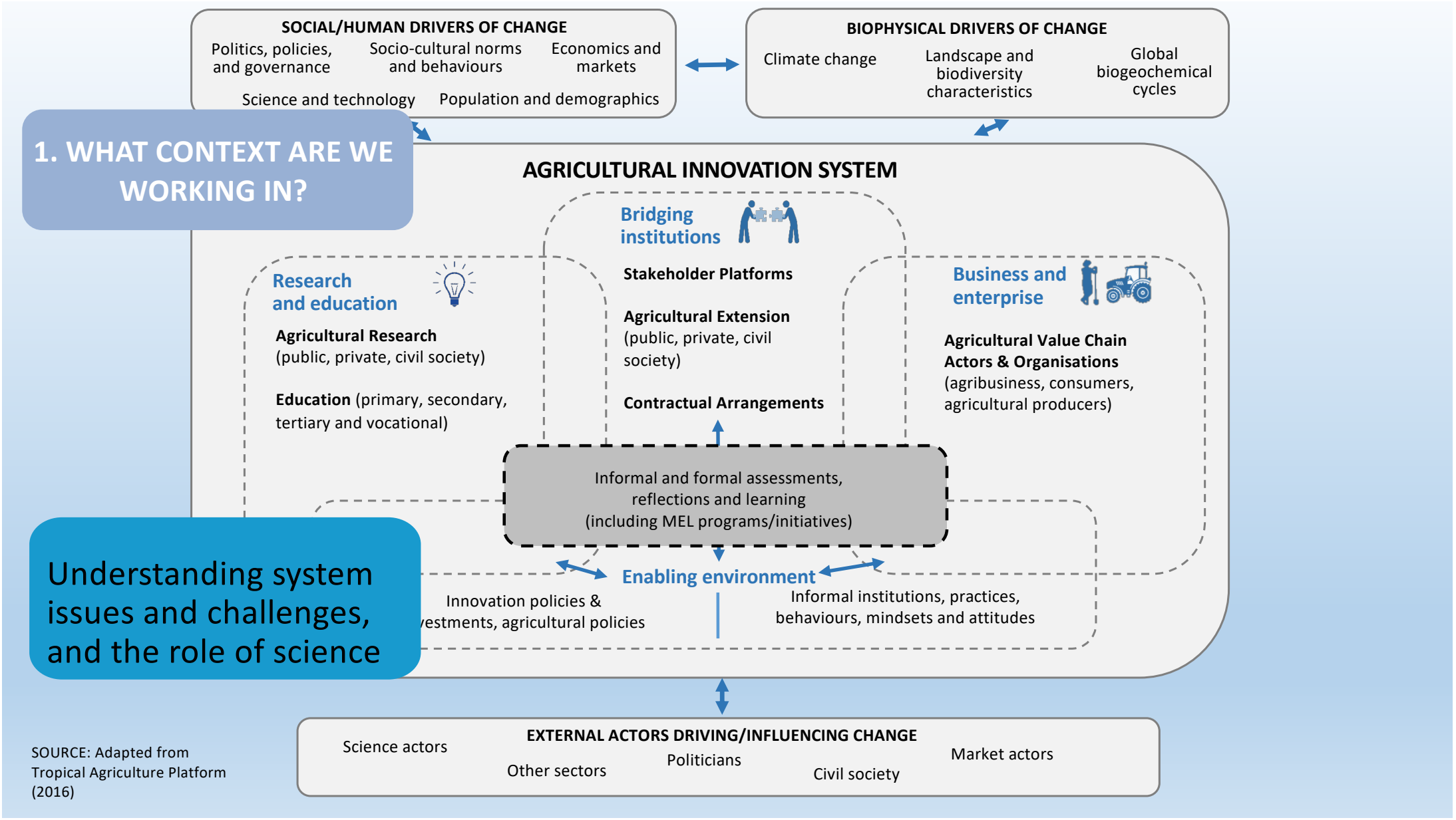
# Tackling the spectrum of MEL required




Source: www.beyondresults.co.nz. Adapted from: *Klerkx et al., (2012) In: Farming Systems Research into the 21st Century 457-483; NZ Ministry for Primary Industries Extension Framework.*

# We've set ourselves the challenge: MEL of MEL!





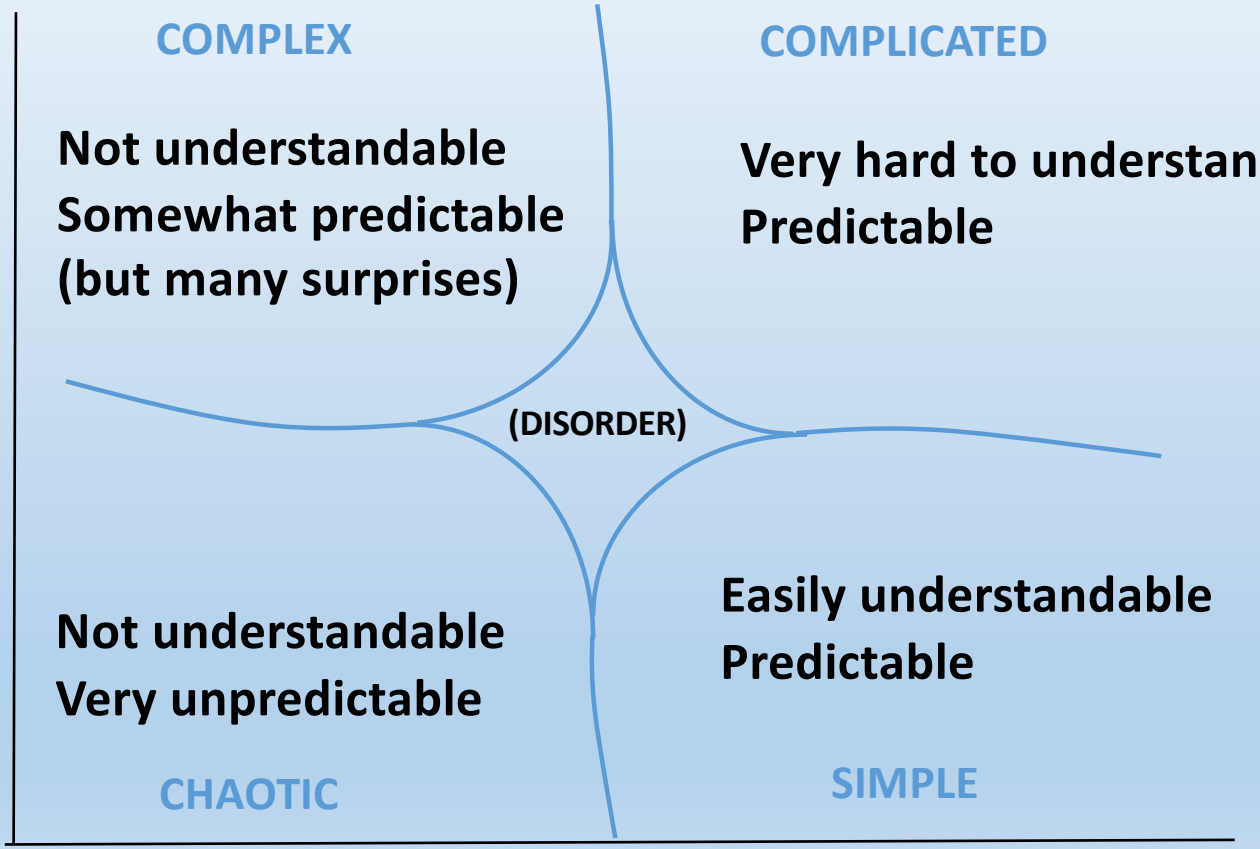

SOURCE: Adapted from Tropical Agriculture Platform (2016)

## 1. WHAT CONTEXT ARE WE WORKING IN?

How challenging are these problems?

What are the changes needed to address different challenges?

What role does research play?




Cynefin Framework (Snowden & Boone, 2007)

## 2. WHERE ARE WE NOW?

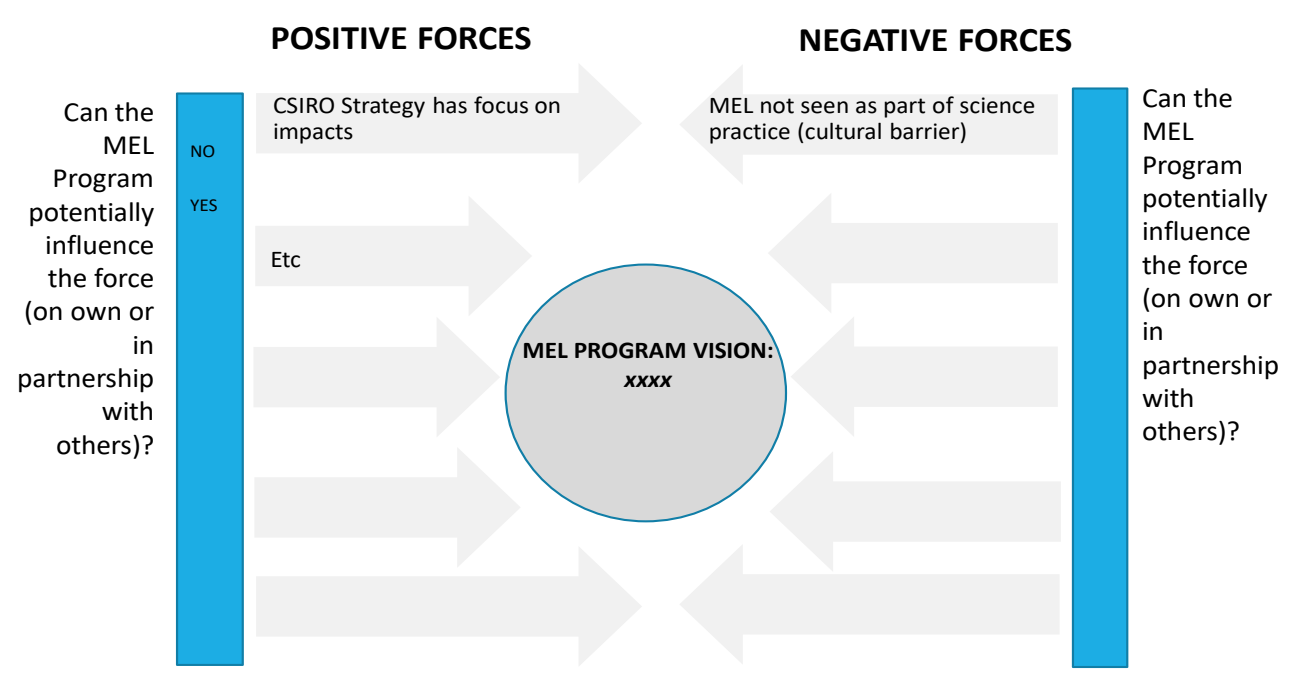
Understanding the current MEL initiative

What is being done? (activities/ products)

Why is it being done (rationale; gaps; needs)?

What is going to change?

Positive and negative forces?



**3. HOW ARE WE DOING?**

What is working well, what is not and why?

# Individual interview questions for participants involved in MEL initiative

*"The work I do is impact focused – so hasn't been a culture shock – it's reinforced how hard it is to monitor these things; and the resources required to do proper M&E."*

*" … it's making me realise this is a specialised field and a discipline in itself… a conclusion from that is – how reasonable is it to expect scientists who were employed with specialist skills to turn into M&E specialists"*

*"Learning by doing has been good – having to write an impact story on a page (with evidence) has been a good process – it's been a tangible cause to stop and think and do…"*

**4. NOW WHAT?**

Identifying what we do differently

# Collective reflection on outputs of phases 1-3

| Reflection/sense-making questions<br>*Questions can be asked at each of phases 1-3 and themed* |
|---|
| In general, we noticed…? |
| What were we surprised by….? |
| Are there any gaps/recommendations we need to make? |
| What should we do differently, at different scales (organisation to project)? |
| What assumptions do we have about what we were hoping to achieve? |
| What do we know now that we didn't know when we started? E.g. new science/knowledge/methodologies etc. |

Adapted from Guijt and Oakden (2016)

## 5. WHERE TO NEXT?

Revising the MEL initiative and its evaluation

Drawing on the insights from phases one to three and utilising the reflection from phase 4, this phase is about collaboratively revisiting or developing the MEL initiative's *theory of change*.

Does the framework resonate?

Have you seen other frameworks for assessing whole of MEL initiatives?

How do we manage more transformational bodies of work?

# Thank you

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Thank you to our colleagues and respective organisations involved in this on-going collaboration