



## Untangling the Noodles: Social Accountability Praxis in Tanzania



Florencia Guerzovich, Yeukai Mukorombindo, Elsie Eyakuze  
June 2017  
Final version

## Help Wanted



Policy Forum is “a network of 74 Tanzanian civil society organizations established in 2003.”  
The Policy Forum began implementing Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) activities in their 2008-2010 Strategy. In 2016, Policy Forum embarked in a revision of its Theory of Change. It has committed to developing a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Strategy that will *“clearly and indisputably describe its key contributions by drawing causal links between activities and impact at the policy and local levels from SAM interventions.”*

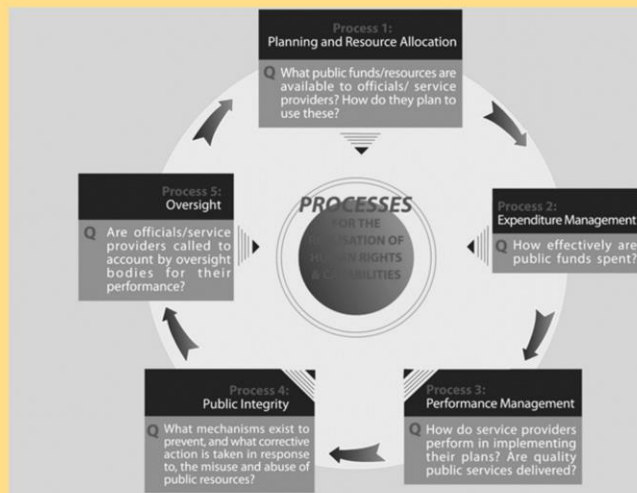


The Public Service Accountability Monitor (PSAM) has supported Policy Forum in the implementation of SAM.  
It is supporting the revision of Policy Forum's MEL Strategy, as part of a process to improve MEL in a broader community of SAM practitioners in Southern Africa.

More information about Policy Forum, including the networks' strategy documents, can be found on their website: [www.policyforum-tz.org](http://www.policyforum-tz.org)

Policy Forum's revision of its Social Accountability Monitoring strategy was informed by an external review that challenged the network to improve its monitoring to demonstrate impact. As such Policy Forum sought ways in which to learn from the experience and improve its practices, especially those of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning.

## A shared premise about the Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) Approach



**PUBLIC RESOURCE MANAGEMENT** is a **SYSTEM** to which **SAM** can be **APPLIED**. **SAM** can contribute to service delivery results.

What makes learning about SAM a challenge?

# How We Prepared to Address the Challenge: Focus Areas

Why and how the practice of SAM varies (or not) in our different contexts/organizations

MEL Challenge



Reflection to inform the future

Trace SAM journeys and strategically capture and reflect on practice in different contexts/organizations

Practice in organizations and the community is not well integrated with the learning conversation & practice

MEL Challenge



Reflection to inform the future

Develop an approach to help build new MEL capacities for the community

Disconnects: tacit knowledge about practice and results held by a colleagues and partners on the ground and the communities' efforts

MEL Challenge



Reflection to inform the future

Improve feedback loops



**What PSAM support for Policy Forum isn't:** A process to design a MEL system, an academic exercise or a new evaluation of its work.

## A 1-week collective reflection to



Think about Change: When, Where and How do we assume change happens? - Delving into our role in Tanzania OR What Are We Cooking?



Reflect on Practice: Disentangling the 'Spaghetti' of SAM to understand the ingredients and what MEL is useful for the spaghetti maker?



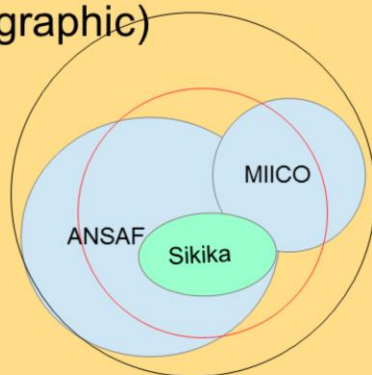
Put It All Together: MEL food for thought. How do we get better at learning about Spaghetti and Spaghetti Making?



What is that we are cooking?

## Thinking about Change to think about MEL

(placeholder for a  
Theory of Change  
graphic)



We started with a Theory of Change (TOC) clinic. We reflected on:

- ✓ our assumptions about how change happens,
- ✓ the role of each organization in change-making
- ✓ what specific theories of change tell about the role of other partners.

And realized that describing clearly and indisputably these organizations' contributions by drawing causal links between activities and impact at the policy and local levels from SAM interventions requires a collective narrative. Yet nobody factors into anybody else's ToC!





What is that we are cooking?

## Rethinking the Challenge

SAM work is neither simple nor linear. It is unlike the theories of change diagrams . Partners are trying to manage cooking up a good bowl of... “spaghetti”.



What MEL is useful for the spaghetti maker?





What MEL is useful for the spaghetti maker?

You only get good at pasta-making by



The MEL Workshop was an exercise in disentangling the many ingredients (practices) that go into making SAM work more successfully with each iteration.





What MEL is useful for the spaghetti maker?

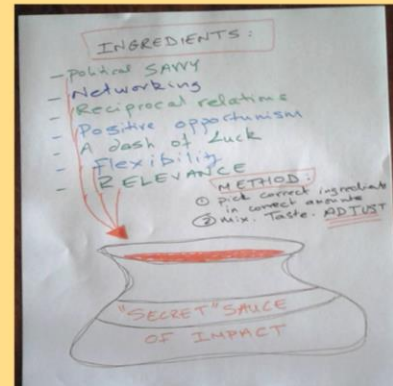
## Small “p”olitics, or How To Make Decent Pasta

SAM is more than just technical work. In the workshop day-to-day political savvy and embeddedness were marked as key ingredients in the “secret sauce” that lubricates SAM work and makes challenging impacts feasible.

Building relationships is critical to help understand when and how they have been able to get the ingredients and cook-up successes.

- It starts with their relationship and ability to lever the resources of others as they practice SAM.
- It includes the relationship with public officials
- Also the relationships with donors and others

These networks help SAM practitioners to be positive opportunists when opportunities arise, because they are well-placed to take them (or avoid challenges / risks)





What MEL is useful for the spaghetti maker?

## Good Pasta Means Exchanging Ingredients: Anecdotes in day-to-day SAM

"We presented the SAM report to the community before we had it signed off by the LGA. This caused some problems"- Workshop Participant

- ✓ Get invited by local government to do SAM
- ✓ Conduct SAM exercise
- ✓ Present the findings
- ✓ ....Ooops, did we forget to give the LGA time to sign off on the report??

In Exchange for a much sought-after Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Policy Forum was able to lend the AG's Office its competence to develop learning materials for the public across a number of issues of civic interest

Can't get the latest sector review report from the Government offices? Ask a Donor Friend to source you a copy.

If the skill and activities for navigating small "p"olitics every day, including building & leveraging the right relationships, why aren't we MELing about them?



What MEL is useful for the spaghetti maker?

## Good Pasta Making requires Situational Awareness.

**No SAM during election years.**

**Obviously.**

This is Africa.

### ***Get Intimate With Your Locations:***

Prior to engaging in SAM work in a District, Sikika carries out an extensive social and political analysis to understand the attitude of local leadership, the profile of the local community and what to avoid to make sure its interventions go well.



What MEL is useful for the spaghetti maker?

**Good Pasta Means there can be some  
“ouch...”, but flavor needs to be balanced**

**The consensus amongst practitioners was that constructive engagement with the public sectors yields better results than confrontational ones for their strategies and organizations.**

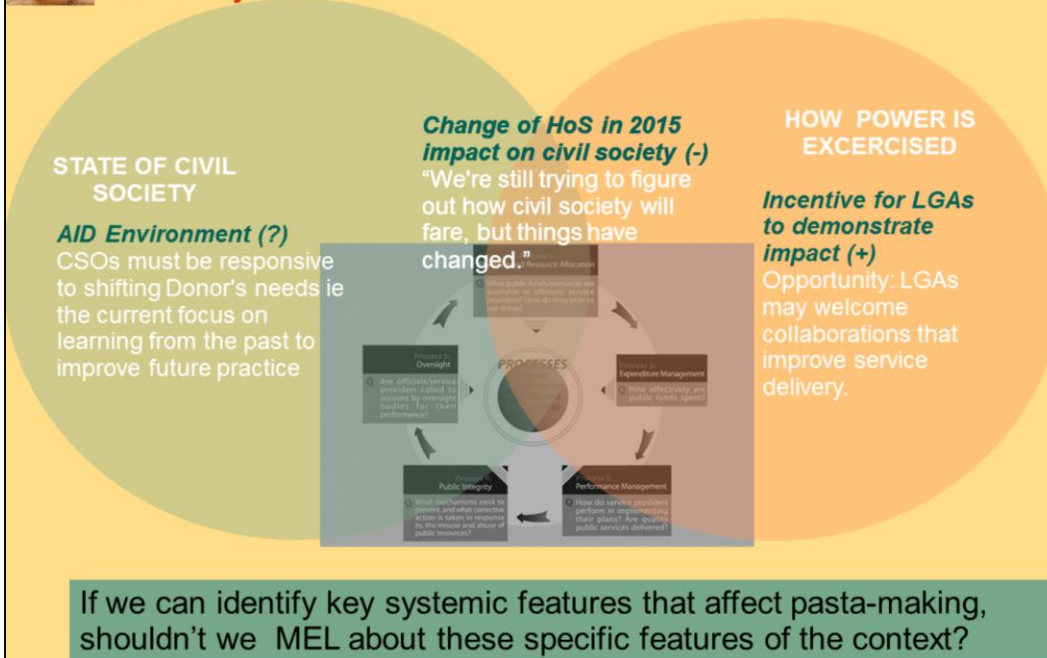


(Adversarial Advocacy) puts a strain on our relationship with the government, so we save it for very serious issues .... After that we have to spend some time mending the relationships again.”- workshop participant  
Media is like chili pepper, , its use has to be very judicious. The right amount is key, too much makes everything terrible.



What MEL is useful for the spaghetti maker?

## Why? Public resource management interacts with other system







What MEL is useful for the spaghetti maker?

## How are SAM practitioners getting support for cooking: 1 Pathway



Training is a key activity in the implementation of SAM's strategies.

We often associate training to conveying technical know-how to strengthen the cadre of SAM implementers. We MEL about technical competences of trainees.

In Policy Forum and its partners' SAM journeys, the main reason for inviting a person to a training often is not to increase those technical competences for implementation. The goal can be to establish a collaborative relationship with a government official. Partaking in a joint state-society training can help the latter understand what it would take to nudge responsiveness (the tips for getting the sauce right).

Training, as other tactics, can add different forms of value for a SAM strategy. So why aren't we MELing about these functions?



What MEL is useful for the spaghetti maker?

## What We Learned Together

Insights from the experience of making pasta are many more!

However, as one participant summed up:

***“Our MEL looks like A but in fact we are doing B!”***



MEL food for thought



## MEL food for thought

If we are honest, there are many organizational reasons why MEL hasn't been fit for improving practice



The new list of MEL ingredients may need to consider ways of addressing those factors, too



## MEL food for thought

# Fresh MEL Insights, in no particular order

1	What do your MEL clients need from your MEL to do their job? If there are competing needs, are you sure about that one-size fits all approach to MEL? It depends
2	What are your questions? Focus on those first, then ask are the tools of MEL aligned with what you want to answer and what will target audiences do with those answers?
3	What are the main purposes of MEL? If a key function of MEL is to inform practice, how do we ensure the MEL system reflects and captures key aspects of doing SAM in practice in ways that are relevant and user-friendly for your target audience?
4	How do we link partner reflections, events, training focused on MEL to practical issues partners' care about, so that they add value to the group? Or how are you going to support use?
5	How do we ensure that MEL framework reflects expectations about what is possible (even when what is possible changes over time)?
6	Does your MEL have the resources to deliver on your expectations?
7	The "secret sauce" seems to really be relationships. How do you incorporate it as part of MEL? Are there other specific causal pathways/ "secret sauce" that we assume lead to impact PF should focus on?
8	How to design a MEL strategy which considers systemic awareness, but also prioritization and focus by the group of partners or individuals within the system?
9	To tell the story of PF's contribution to impact or the contribution of other partners, MEL needs to be integrated (overlap with partners). What is the minimum viable integration? Is everyone clear and an owner of this MEL framework?
10	Integration of MEL between different organizations is often political and organizational. How are you navigating the politics of this relationship? Who will manage your MEL and how? Do MEL officers have the backing and the resources to pull it off?
11	Think about variables and indicators functionally. For instance, if the function of training is building relationships, not just technical competences, why are you only measuring technical competences?
12	How do we incorporate into MEL priority variables which speak to, unpack and reflect key systemic interactions?





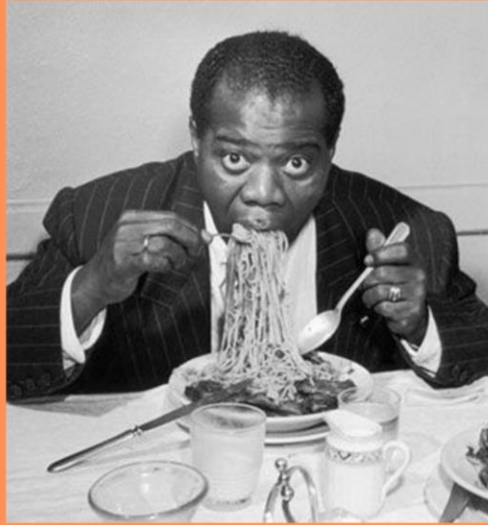
## One last provocation



In the current funding environment, it can pay-off to be open about SAM and MEL course-correction – but it takes courage, resources etc.



Fin.



## Annex: Methodology

For this project we used an inductive-deductive methodology adjusted to the resources available for data collection and analysis.

We used a participatory reflection workshop as our main data collection process to accommodate Policy Forum's request to engage 3 of its partners, MIICO, ANSAF and SIKIKA in a 5 days process.

We traced and documented processes over time highlighting PF and its partners' application, iteration, and adaptation of the PSAM framework, highlighting the interactions and effects of key variables in a context, taking into account a theoretical framework that we improved over time.

We also conducted quick but extensive political economy analysis of areas and organizational relationships of interest.

The lessons emerged from capturing, analyzing organization's reflections on why and how they took on the PSAM approach and what it has accomplished and triangulating information from other stakeholders and documentation .

We also invited public sector individuals who work with the member organizations to provide their perspective during our reflections.