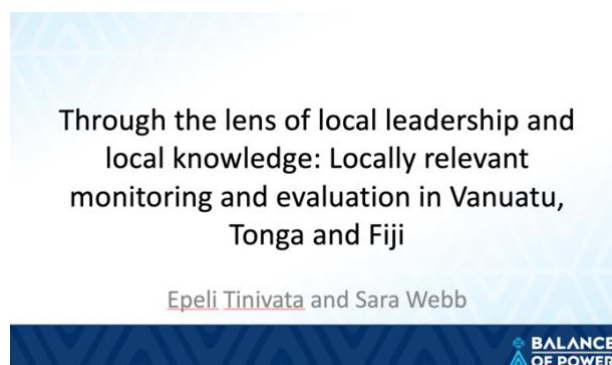


Through the lens of local leadership and local knowledge: Locally relevant monitoring and evaluation in Vanuatu, Tonga and Fiji

Presentation to the Australian Evaluation Society International Conference

Meanjin/Brisbane, 28 September 2023



Greetings and Bula vinaka

I am Epeli Tinivata, the monitoring, evaluation and learning coordinator for Balance of Power, based in Suva, Fiji

This is Sara Webb, our monitoring, evaluation and learning support.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge traditional custodians of the land of Brisbane – the traditional country of the Jagera and Turrball peoples. Thank you for the resources that have paved the way for development outside Australia, especially your Pacific island neighbours.

BOP is multi-country, locally led program that supports Pacific island governments achieve their objectives of inclusive leadership. BOP works in Fiji, Tonga and Vanuatu and is funded by the Australian Government.

Women are significantly under-represented in politics across the Pacific, including in these three countries. This has barely changed in many years.

- In Vanuatu, there is only 1 woman in Parliament out of 52, and she was just elected in last year's election –after 16 years of zero women in Parliament.
- In Fiji 6 women were elected last year, out of 55 seats- and this is a drop from 11, from the previous years.
- In Tonga, there is only one elected woman member of parliament, out of 17 elected representatives.

BOP is building upon the lessons learned from the Pacific context on what works and what doesn't in improving gender equality. BOP provides strategic support to local actors working to increase women's voice and agency in leadership and decision making, particularly in the political sphere.

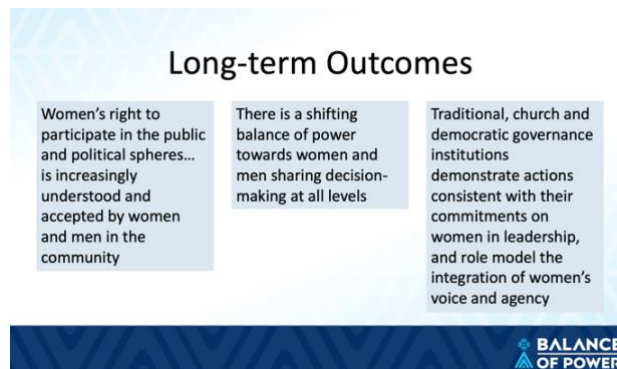
BOP has a 10 year timeframe with our first phase from 2019 – 2024.

BOP is locally led, with 2 Co-Executive Directors (one is ni-Vanuatu and one Fijian), plus a Country Manager in each country, a Communications and Research coordinator, MEL coordinator and 3 support staff. Two of these Country Managers are men. Having men in

this role is unusual, but it is enabling BOP to enter spaces and have conversations that are often difficult for gender programs.

The Program’s overarching goal is: **Women are increasingly culturally, socially and politically accepted, and act as legitimate political leaders and decision makers across the Pacific region.**

We recognise that this is a very long-term complex goal – and because of this, BOP continually uses ‘adaptive management’, and ‘Thinking and Working Politically’ to find entry points and influence opportunities, that provide platforms for BOP to engage in, and help shift social norms around women as leaders.

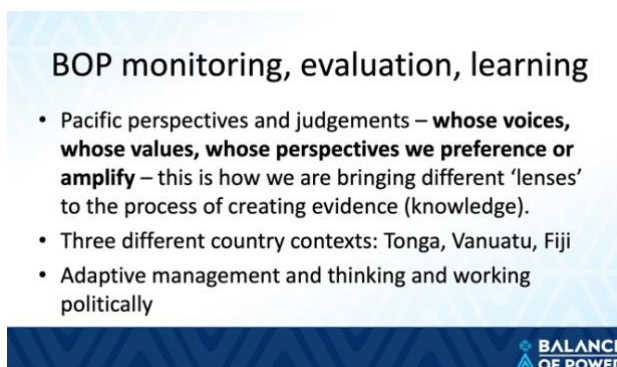


BOP has 3 Long-term Outcomes.

1. Women’s rights to participate in the public and political spheres is increasingly understood by men and women in communities
2. There is shift in balance of power towards women and men sharing decision making at all levels
3. Traditional, church and democratic governance institutions demonstrate actions consistent on women in leadership and role model the integration of women’s voice and agency

Also - late last year the MEL team facilitated a process for the whole team to create a set of Intermediate Outcomes. These build from our original theory of change and define the ‘steps along the way’ in more detail, based on the experience and lessons of the first 3 years.

Evaluation context



In this presentation we are sharing how we approach monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) within BOP. We hope this will show BOP’s contribution to the wider work of

redefining how we can do MEL in ways which support locally-led development. We also have an eye on the wider conversation about decolonising international development, and evaluation.

Many factors have shaped the way we have created the MEL system.

1. BOP MEL values Pacific perspectives and judgements, mindful of whose voices, whose values, whose perspectives we preference or amplify – this is how we are bringing different ‘lenses’ to the process of creating evidence (knowledge).
 - a. For example, we put value on the observations and analysis of our team, who are the local experts and know intimately the specific context and the constant decision-making they do as they navigate their avenues for influence- and we wrap this up with structure and facilitation through the MEL system
2. We are working within three quite different country contexts – so what we do in MEL has to consider anything that needs to adjust the perspectives (the ‘lenses’) for each of these.
3. working within the requirements of DFAT and its performance system; the Australian government funds BOP and provides part of the authorising environment for our work. *So MEL has to straddle the conventional expectations from donors and development partners (in this case, DFAT) as well as other ways of seeing, knowing, and working. Including how we define what ‘effectiveness’ actually means.*
4. Several evaluation methods have influenced our system, and support the adaptive management and thinking and working politically approaches which underpin the implementation of the program.

MEL for BOP draws on key elements of **developmental evaluation**, working to embed evaluation thinking throughout the entire program, supported by the MEL team playing the role of the ‘critical friend’.

To quote, developmental evaluation means: “evaluation processes, including asking evaluative questions and applying evaluation logic, to support program, product, staff and/or organisational development. What is specifically relevant about developmental evaluation, is that the evaluator is part of the team, supporting members to work together to conceptualise, design and test new approaches in a long-term, on-going process of continuous improvement, adaptation and intentional change.”¹

- a. Developmental evaluation brings evaluation resources and expertise to support social innovation and adaptive management²: it is designed to support exactly the type of work BOP is doing, which requires adaptive management and frequent reflection and review³.
- b. It’s a really important complement to the value we are placing on internal knowledge and perspectives
- c. As one of our BOP country managers recently said to the MEL team – MEL needs to help him answer the question “is my work crap?”

¹ https://evaluationcanada.ca/distribution/20090601_quinn_patton_michael_a.pdf

² Patton, M.Q. 2011. Developmental evaluation: applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use. Guildford Press, NY.

³ Adaptive management suits projects which are innovative, working in circumstances of uncertainty and emergence to achieve systems change.

Linked to this is our focus on MEL enabling **adaptive rigour** which emphasises the need to have a documented, transparent trail of intentions, decisions and actions, and to support the program to make adaptive decisions and practices which are strongly evidence-based, open, and accountable⁴.

We have also drawn on elements of **outcome harvesting** and similar approaches, reflecting the fact that, for BOP, ‘objectives and the paths to achieve them are largely unpredictable’⁵

We work with **stories and narrative methods** which are similar to approaches such as Narrative Assessment⁶, to build up the ‘plausible story’ of BOP progress. These are especially meaningful when it comes to the sort of work BOP does – seeking to shift mindsets, social norms, and perspectives i.e. advocacy and influence work in various forms.

Toby Lowe from the Centre for Public Impact recently noted “almost all useful social change is achieved as part of a complex system”, and therefore “your actions are part of a web of relationships, most of which are beyond your control, many of which are beyond your influence, and a few of which will be completely invisible”⁷.

This echoes much of what we have been hearing and talking about throughout this conference, and it strongly resonates for BOP.

This is why in BOP MEL we also emphasise the importance of capturing and considering *who we work with*, and *how we work*, just as much as what we do and what changes (outcomes) we might be seeing. It speaks to the importance of our MEL system capturing what we call the *BOP ways of working*, and to the crucial role that coalitions play in complex work such as ours.

In fact, one key feature of the refinement of our vision for BOP at the end of last year (and the creation of our intermediate outcomes), was to elevate the prominence of this part of BOP’s work. So now we can equally make this more prominent in our MEL, and our reporting. For BOP, this helps us shift the lens so that the focus is not solely on the conventional notion of ‘outcomes’ – which will often be difficult to link to BOP’s contributions – to also include process. And our processes – our ways of working and with whom – are at least as important as the outcomes which MEL is also focused on.

BOP MEL System



⁴ Ramalingam,B, Wild,L, and Buffardi,A.L. ‘Making adaptive rigour work’. Overseas Development Institute (April 2019)

⁵ Ricardo Wilson Grau and Heather Britt – Outcome Harvesting Guide

⁶ <https://hivos.org/assets/2021/09/Narrative-Assessment.pdf>

⁷ Toby Lowe, Explode on Impact, Medium, June 2023

The BOP MEL approach has been developed – and is still developing –in collaboration with the rest of the BOP team, always with the aim of creating tools and processes which are meaningful and useful for adaptive management, while also supporting overall learning and accountability requirements.

And we also note that our MEL system is very lean. We talk about our ‘MEL team’ but it’s essentially just Epeli, working across three countries, with part-time support from me. This is like the whole BOP team in fact: for example, the ‘Tonga team’ is one person, the Fiji team has only just been fully established and it’s really only 1.5 people, and in Vanuatu we have 2.

We want to share a few features of our system before we talk in more detail about a specific activity. This isn’t the entirety of our MEL system, as we are so time limited, but just a couple of particular tools we’ve developed which reflect the considerations we have been talking about.

- **Debrief conversations**
 - These are held with the BOP team – they are verbal, narrative, and facilitated by the MEL team, to capture real time analysis of progress in our context of complexity and uncertainty. They are designed to capture the threads of connections and influences and responses to BOP work, as they emerge.
 - These were especially important in our first couple of years: new program, with borders closed, still working out what we were doing and how we were all working together, so we used a set of quite broad reflective questions which helped sharpen program vision. Now they are more deliberately outcomes-focused debriefs.
- **Reflection and Planning workshops (RAPs)** – twice a year for 3-5 days for the entire team – very important for multi country program, enabling collective sense-making processes, learning and collaborative reflection. Blessedly face-to-face after 2.5 years of zoom and RAPs are vastly richer and more productive as a result.
- **Documentation of team reflections and observations**, facilitated by MEL sometimes, using tools and templates designed for BOP.
- **Bellwether interviews** – this is an interesting method from Harvard Family Project⁸, useful for gathering evidence that is not directly linked to the activities of BOP, and which is also useful for our ongoing PEA


We also have a really valuable integrated research program within BOP, which is creating some ground-breaking new knowledge, but which also complements the MEL – e.g. a research collaboration with the USP Students Association looking at young people’s attitudes to leadership, and a current Vanuatu voter motivations study which is in partnership with the Department of Women’s Affairs.

⁸ <https://archive.globalfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/advocacy-and-policy-change/evaluating-an-issue-s-position-on-the-policy-agenda-the-bellwether-methodology>

Tru the Lens, Vanuatu

Tru the Lens, Vanuatu

- Men, women, and young people who view the films have a more open mind to women in a range of leadership roles
- There is a growing group of men in the media (film-makers, editors, journalists, presenters) with more positive attitudes to women's leadership, and more positive approaches to presenting women in the media
- Influential individuals are speaking out in support of women leaders, especially the women profiled in the films



To help illustrate what we are talking about we want to showcase one particular activity in Vanuatu. It is one of the largest activities within BOP - coincidentally called *Tru the Lens* (in Bislama). Tru the Lens is a 10-part documentary film series showcasing the leadership journey of women in different leadership roles, and women from all provinces of Vanuatu.

There are 3 main intended outcomes for Tru the Lens:

1. Men, women, and young people who view the films have a more open-mind to women in a range of leadership roles.
2. There is a growing group of men in the media (film-makers, editors, journalists, presenters) with more positive attitudes to women's leadership, and more positive approaches to presenting women leaders in the media.
3. Influential individuals are speaking out in support of women leaders, and women's leadership, especially the women profiled in TTL films.

Tru the Lens, Vanuatu



<https://www.youtube.com/@boplocallyled>



So far 4 films have been launched – 5th film will be launched in October – several more films are also currently in production. The films that are already out profile:

- First two ni-Vanuatu women pilots for Air Vanuatu
- First women president of a men's Premier League Football club
- CEO of Vanuatu Tourism office
- Principal of a bilingual primary and secondary school in the far North of Vanuatu in Torba Province
- The woman owner of Tanna Evergreen Resort And Tours in the south of Vanuatu, a very patriarchal area

Some key features of Tru the Lens

- 1) BOP intentionally engages **male film-makers**.
 - *Why?* It is a deliberate effort to influence the 'male lens' – the men who shape how women leaders are represented in the media

- BOP ensures film makers are given quite a lot of freedom and agency to create the films as they see fit. But at the same time – the CM ensures they understand the vision and purpose of Tru the Lens.
- 2) The film launches are a key part of the TTL. They are much more than just an event in that BOP takes a very strategic and intentional approach to these launches. This means careful decisions about *when* the launches are, *where* they are, *who* speaks at the launches, and *how* the launch events are structured (music events and activities etc.) – these are all important elements of the launches and are a core part of the influencing strategy. In all these launches - BOP is always supporting our partners and stakeholders to be at the forefront of these launches, with BOP in a background, supporting role.
- 3) The films are also screened in other forums, such as at schools/universities, church or community groups, or within other BOP activities such as Adaptive and Inclusive Leadership workshops, for government agencies, churches and other private organisations.
- 4) Films are also publicly available on YouTube.

MEL for Tru the Lens

MEL for Tru the Lens covers all the elements of the activity that I have just described.

We use a range of tools for this, including:

1. Audience Feedback
 - we use short ‘face to face’ polls at launches
 - Questionnaires at any BOP screenings
 - And we are creating an online feedback survey for YouTube – public feedback
2. We document the BOP team reflections and observations after launches and screenings using a Progress Logs tool that we created – the MEL team often facilitates this process.
3. Targeted interviews with groups and individuals, such as the film makers, influential individuals
4. We also monitor the media and social media responses to the films and film launches

In addition, the MEL team works with the Vanuatu team to do periodic evaluations of progress towards outcomes.

Tru the Lens so far

Sara and I have just been in Vanuatu working with the team to do an internal mid-term review of *Tru the Lens* that I just mentioned.

It is designed to support the Vanuatu team to learn and adapt as the program continues. This enabled us to have deeper conversation with stakeholders from a range of perspectives on the film series, as well as extended reflective conversations with the Vanuatu team.

We are also working with the Vanuatu team, to document the *journey* to the film launches – because it’s becoming clear how strategically important these are. We are now in the midst of our analysis, putting together the new data we collected, alongside the data we’ve been accumulating since the series began.

While we haven’t finished that analysis yes, early insights are suggesting that:

- There is good evidence that the process of making the films is influencing the film makers and this is feeding into other content-creation work they are doing. Hopefully this means that a ripple effect will continue – and we'll keep watching for this – well beyond the BOP work.
- There is also some evidence of how the launch events are reaching important, influential people and organisations, including some which are not often engaged with gender equality programs (e.g. Anglican Diocese of Banks and Torres in the far north of Vanuatu, and the Tafea provincial government in the south)
- There is also evidence that the films are powerfully reaching the people who view the films, particularly the women and girls. But we also know we need more data in this area, from a wider audiences, including from more men and boys.

Closing comments



So, in closing – MEL on Balance of Power is a work-in-progress. Just as we are experimenting and learning about how to shift the social norms around women as leaders in Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga – we are also continuing test and learn about what MEL is meaningful and useful in each context where we work.

It's part of our overall commitment to localisation and decolonisation which is personal as well as professional for everyone on the BOP team

Thank you for listening and we are happy to take questions, or to hear if you have any experiences you would like to share.