
12 Learning, decision-making and interpreting results

Interpreting the assessment results is important for learning and decision-making to promote transformational change for climate and sustainable development goals. This chapter provides information on how to understand the assessment results, and apply insights gained at different stages of planning and implementation in the policy cycle.

Checklist of key recommendations

- Describe insights gained from the assessment, and how results are used in revising objectives, and in design, planning and implementation of ongoing or future policies

12.1 Understanding assessment results

Learning from results is an integral part of an assessment exercise. It is important that users understand both the benefits and the limitations of transformational change assessment to make the best use of the results.

The assessment that has been described in this document is to a large extent qualitative and based on expert judgment. This is not a shortcoming but a simple reality to be kept in mind. It does mean, however, that the assessment is limited by the extent of human knowledge about complex interacting systems and their processes. Users should seek to be realistic about these types of predictions and not be deterred by the fact that the outcome may not be exactly what was expected. It is better to be approximately right than exactly wrong.

Ex-ante assessment for transformational change, in particular, involves high uncertainty, given the unpredictable way in which complex systems evolve over the long term. Uncertainty increases when the objective is to deviate from established pathways. This uncertainty limits the degree to which users can rely solely on established methods of predicting future development based on past experiences of trends and drivers. Ascertaining what triggers the deviation and what magnitude of change can be expected is highly speculative. This is one reason why

this methodology focuses on the transparency of reporting of assumptions and choices made.

Much flexibility is provided at each step of the assessment framework, because the methodology is applicable to a wide variety of policies. Different choices made during the assessment limit the comparability of results between different assessments.

Despite these limitations, the assessment results can greatly aid in prioritizing policies, modifying existing interventions to enhance their transformational potential, and shortlisting actions for financial support. Depending on the objective of the assessment, users will want to look deeper at some aspects of the results of the assessment described in this methodology. Also, depending on the case, disaggregated and singular results (e.g. the assessment of high upfront investment costs as a barrier to achieving impact on the “entrepreneurs” characteristic) can be more helpful than aggregated and numerical results (e.g. a numerical score at the category level stating that the expected impact of a policy for technology change is 3).

12.2 Applying results

As outlined above, the assessment of transformational impact is not an exact science but a learning exercise that can provide valuable insights and support decision-making. How to use different types of results from the assessment (e.g. at a more or less aggregate level) depends strongly on:

- the objective of the assessment
- the status of the policy in the implementation cycle.

It is a *key recommendation* to describe insights gained from the assessment, and how results are used in revising objectives, and in design, planning and implementation of ongoing or future policies.

The assessment will be carried out either by the entity (or entities) that is planning and implementing

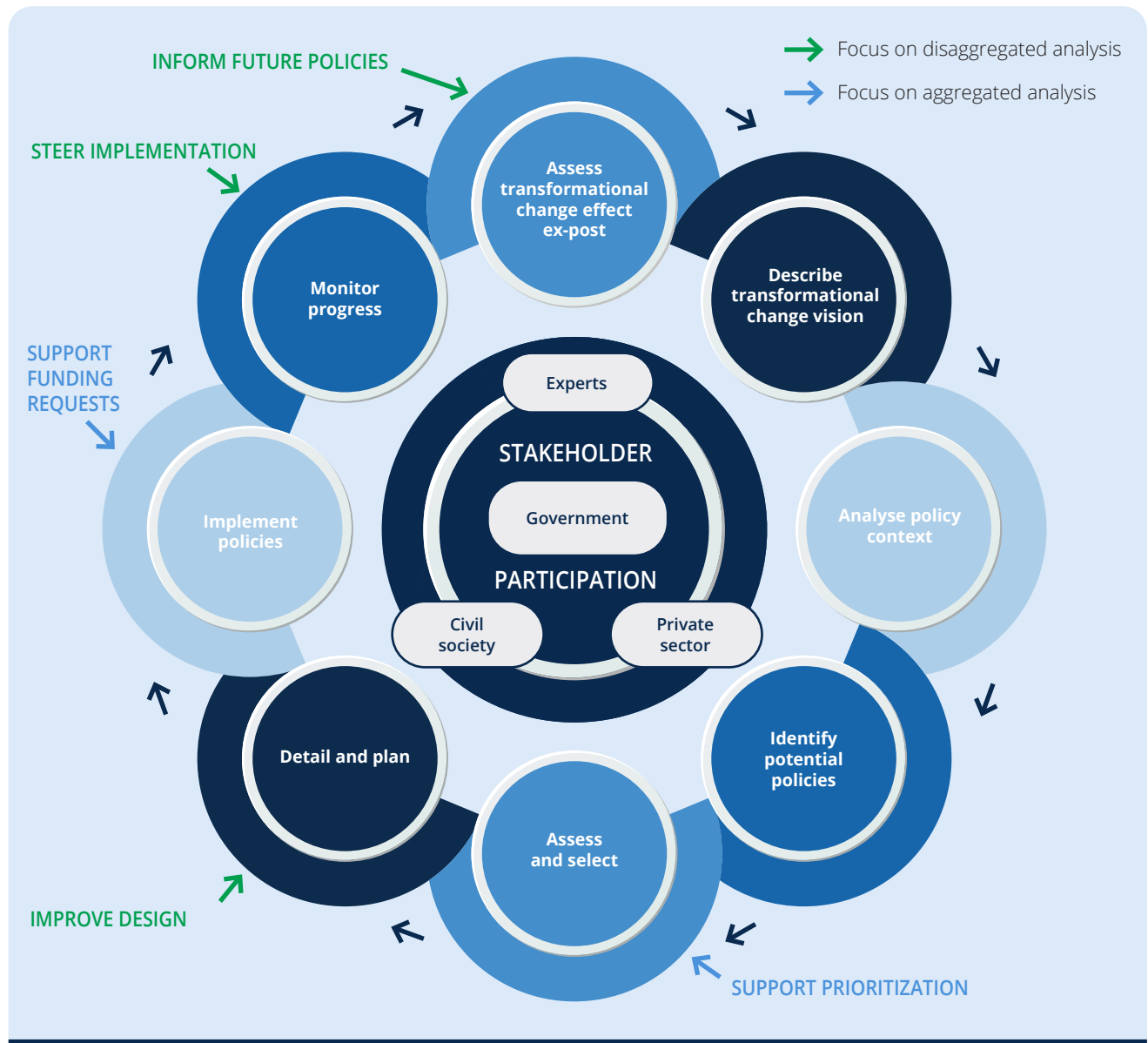
the policy (or commissioned by this entity) or by an independent user who is not responsible for policy implementation. Independent users could be research organizations, private consultants or civil society groups. The objectives of assessing a policy at the various stages of implementation may differ between these two groups. The usefulness of more or less aggregate results for independent assessments will strongly depend on the objective of the assessment. The following discussion therefore concentrates on the usefulness of results for those

entities planning and implementing the assessed measures.

Figure 12.1 illustrates when aggregated results (e.g. at category level) versus disaggregated results (e.g. at characteristic level) are useful to consider in the policy implementation cycle. See Chapter 6 (Figure 6.2) for an illustration of the levels (characteristic, category and type) for assessment of transformational impact.

FIGURE 12.1

Usefulness of transformational change assessment at different stages of policy planning and implementation



12.2.1 Support prioritization and inform policy design options

An aggregated result describes the extent of transformation expected or achieved by the policy, as well as how likely it is that the impact can be achieved. This enables comparison and prioritization of policy options early in the implementation cycle. However, users should exercise great caution in comparing results, and ensure that the methodology applied and choices made to assess various policies do not render the results incomparable. Further, transformational change assessment is likely to be one among many factors (e.g. resources needed, effects on stakeholders, sustainable development benefits) considered in decision-making.

Disaggregated results are more useful to support the design of policies. The greater level of detail can indicate areas of weakness and whether barriers are adequately addressed in policy design.

12.2.2 Support funding requests to attract finance

Both aggregated and disaggregated results can support funding requests to potential donors and make the case for the proposed intervention. It is

important to note, however, that individual donor organizations may have different definitions and criteria for transformational change from the one used in this methodology document. At the same time, there is sufficient flexibility in the methodology to enable users to use the results for various purposes.

12.2.3 Steer implementation and inform future policies

Detailed results from assessments conducted during policy implementation help users understand whether the policy is on track, modify the course of the policy as needed (instead of ending potentially transformative policies too soon) and address new barriers or barriers that may have been overlooked in the design stage. Disaggregated information from ex-post assessment can also inform the design of future policies, including informing updates of NDCs or long-term strategies and plans, by providing valuable insights into what worked and reasons for not achieving the desired impact. Ex-post assessment can thus contribute significantly to future planning. [Box 12.1](#) provides a case study example on how applying the ICAT *Transformational Change Methodology* can contribute to learning and improved policy design.

BOX 12.1

Learning from transformational impact assessment in Mexico

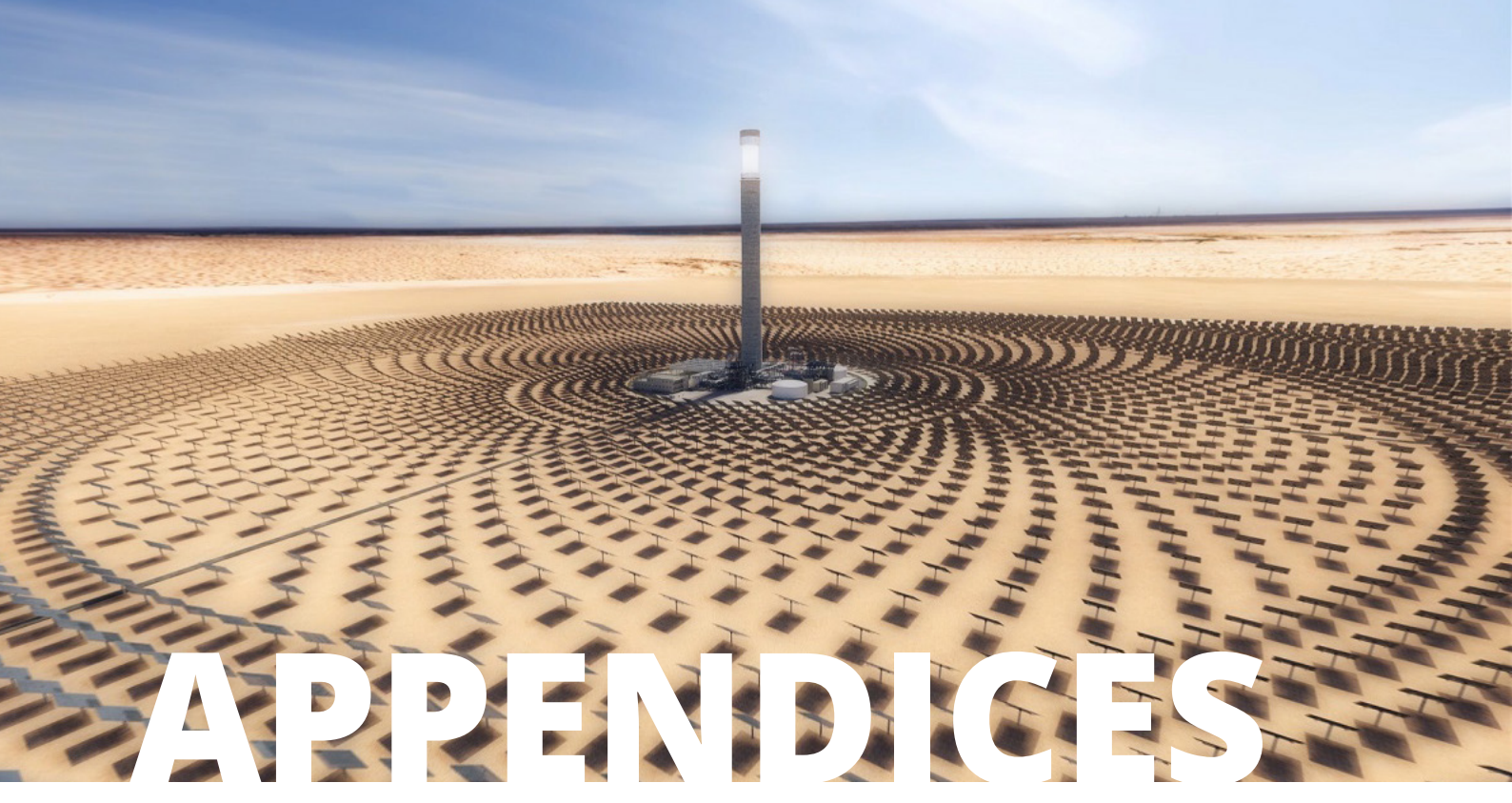
In Mexico, the Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda, a national NGO, is coordinating the implementation of the nationally appropriate mitigation action (NAMA) of “Subnational Mitigation Actions for the Regeneration of Landscapes”. The NAMA involves state-led actions for the regeneration of forests and the implementation of planned grazing in 12 states.

The initial decision of the Grupo Ecológico to apply the ICAT *Transformational Change Methodology* was prompted by its interest in submitting a funding proposal to an international donor that prioritizes the funding of NAMAs that catalyse transformational change towards sustainable low-emission development. With limited prior experience with the theory and literature of transformational change, the Grupo Ecológico found the process of evaluating the potential for transformational change using the ICAT guidance document to be a learning experience. It helped to improve the design of the NAMA and articulate more clearly the expected transformational impacts of the NAMA to potential supporters and donors.

Concrete examples of resulting improvements to NAMA design included:

- a specific objective was added focusing on regeneration issues in government programmes, technical support, incentives and finance mechanisms for the target sectors
- formation of a critical mass of public official decision makers, NGOs, educators, technicians and producers committed to regenerative management
- incorporation of a public awareness campaign in key cities
- a new integrated landscape management orientation for the NAMA, with greater emphasis on intersectoral coordination and the clustering of interventions geographically in high-priority landscapes.

This new orientation resulted in the current name of the NAMA.



APPENDICES