

Strengthening Accountability and Performance in Multisectoral Initiatives

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1. Concept Note Rationale

Cross-ministerial initiatives – programs that draw on services housed under government agencies with separate mandates – are crucial for the attainment of many development goals. Due to their multi-sectoral nature, such cross-cutting programs require a strong system that is able to coordinate, monitor and manage multi-agency partnerships, otherwise they risk a loss of ownership, strategy or accountability resulting in ineffective use of resources. This concept paper outlines one approach to mitigating those risks. After providing an overview of the common challenges facing cross-cutting programs in general, this paper then draws on Instiglio’s public sector experience to explore **how a delivery accelerator comprised of a performance management system, a centralized delivery unit and a performance-based incentive structure** presents a possible solution, and what such an accelerator could entail for a multi-agency early childhood development (ECD) initiative. It concludes with a brief outline of an approach that could be used to design and implement an effective system.

1.1 Problem Statement

Cross-sectoral government-led initiatives are critical but complex as they require an integrated approach that draws on multiple areas of specialization, requiring strong coordination between ministries. Early Childhood Development initiatives are an example of a type of multi-agency program that yield high returns on investment, but require a high degree of collaboration, information sharing and alignment between the health, education and social protection sectors, among others. Other examples include programs addressing nutrition, gender equality, criminal justice, WASH or climate change. In addition to the common fiscal, legislative and political challenges facing public sector delivery, these multi-agency programs are hampered by a number of other system pain points related to their complex nature. Increasing the effectiveness of these initiatives through addressing the challenges laid out below is therefore a crucial priority for the public sector to maximize its outcomes.

A lack of efficient frameworks and structures for coordination and decision-making: Cross-sectoral coordination often experiences the challenge of not having a shared definition of ‘success’ that encompasses all perspectives. There may furthermore be no clarity around the specific roles and responsibilities of each of the parties involved, resulting in coordination breakdowns or a sense of perceived territorial encroachment. Decision-making and approval processes involving multiple projects partners at the national level, in addition to between the national and local levels, are also often convoluted and inefficient, causing significant programmatic delays. This was found, for instance, in an ECD intervention in Pakistan, where weak planning and lack of a structured coordination framework between the national and local government led to delays in program implementation¹. A clear framework for coordination would be even more important for programs in which partner-ministries operate with varying levels of decentralization.

An absence of accountability mechanisms: Accountability mechanisms are often weak in multi-sectoral interventions as the lead institution, usually a line ministry, may not have the authority to hold stakeholders, particularly other ministries, accountable. Added to this challenge is the ease at which responsibility during collective action can be displaced onto joint-stakeholders, further complicating the enforcement of accountability. Different stakeholders often have differing organizational and disciplinary cultures between and within sectors, making it difficult to assess each sector’s contribution and commitment to the intervention².

¹Zaidi, Shehla, Shandana Khan Mohmand, Noorya Hayat, Andres Mejia Acosta, and Zulfiqar A. Bhutta. "[Nutrition policy in the post-devolution context in Pakistan: an analysis of provincial opportunities and barriers.](#)" *IDS Bulletin* 44, no. 3 (2013): 86-93.

²Rasanathan, Kumanan, Sara Bennett, Vincent Atkins, Robert Beschel, Gabriel Carrasquilla, Jodi Charles, Rajib Dasgupta et al. "[Governing multisectoral action for health in low-and middle-income countries.](#)" *PLoS Medicine* 14, no. 4 (2017): e1002285.



Lack of relevant and timely data for improved coordination and decision-making at all levels: Timely and quality-assured data is particularly crucial for decision-making in multi-agency interventions, characterized by nonlinear hierarchies, bureaucratic approval processes, competing priorities and a lack of cross-ministerial programmatic visibility. Data is also crucial during the design of a program to understand baseline capacities of service delivery units and how they map onto each other. This is significantly easier for a program housed entirely under one ministry, for instance education, compared to a program that has service units from different ministries intersecting in new or untested ways. Multi-sectoral programs also frequently suffer from a lack of centralized data management systems; a lack of uniform understanding of theory of change, resulting in no consensus on key performance indicators and metrics, and a general lack of willingness to share information. Where quality data does exist, there is often a lack of performance management technical capacity, preventing the data from being used effectively. According to a UNICEF report on cross-sector collaboration to eradicate female genital mutilation in Africa, stakeholders were found to be insufficiently informed about what their partners were doing. Monitoring and evaluation systems, as well as data capturing tools, were also found to be weak, making it difficult to collect information and track progress.³

As a result, data crucial for strategic and programmatic decision-making is often fragmented, unreliable, unintelligible or unavailable when needed most. This restricts the ability of decision-makers to make vital course-corrections and impedes the monitoring of performance or enforcement of accountability.

Mismatch in stakeholder incentives and a subsequent disparity in priorities: Agencies involved in a cross-sector intervention often have competing agendas and priorities, creating challenges for keeping all parties sufficiently motivated. This is a particular challenge in a low-resource context, or where focus may be on budget implementation as opposed to performance management, or where leadership is not sufficiently bought-in to an intervention. A mapping exercise conducted by WHO on best practices of intersectoral action for health and well-being, for example, found significant challenges posed by conflicting interests, power imbalances, insufficient political buy-in and competition for resources⁴. This lack of motivation to change the status quo in order to align strategies and goals – characteristic across all levels of government – is often underpinned by a lack of sufficiently motivating incentives. Incentives, both financial and non-monetary, could encourage an alignment of priorities, yet they are relatively uncommon and when they do exist, often lack the performance management system required for effective monitoring and implementation.

As explored in this concept note, these challenges could be addressed by setting up a **delivery accelerator comprised of a performance management system, a centralized delivery unity and a performance-based incentive structure**. The performance management system would have two main goals: i) the generation of timely insights that feed into strategic and operational decision-making and ii) the allocation of responsibility for program performance to specific government agents with the intention of strengthening both up- and downward accountability. Combined, these features would enable the centralized delivery unit or lead institutions to motivate participating stakeholders to work toward the maximization of outcomes by introducing performance-based incentives or strategically reallocating resources based on performance.

1.2 Opportunity

Addressing the challenges outlined in the preceding section is crucial both for the maximization of outcomes in cross-sectoral initiatives, and for the groundwork it lays for improved cross-ministerial collaboration more broadly by fostering the development of a performance-based culture at the very center of government planning and implementation. A report on multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholders nutrition-based initiatives in 6 countries, for example, found an average participation of 14 ministries per country in such programs.⁵ The impact that a pilot targeting this type of intervention could have on beneficiaries, ministries and on a systemic level presents a compelling opportunity and should be a strategic priority for national governments, in addition to public-sector focused programs seeking large-scale, government-owned transformation.

³UNICEF, "[Multi-sectoral approaches to addressing harmful practices in Eastern and Southern Africa](#)"

⁴World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe, "[Multisectoral and intersectoral action for improved health and well-being for all: mapping of the WHO European Region](#)"

⁵MQSUN+ Report, "[From national vision to local implementation: multisector collaboration for improved nutrition at the subnational level, 2020](#)."



2. The Delivery Accelerator

2.1 Overview

An effective delivery accelerator for a multi-agency program would comprise three key components, outlined in more detail below:

- i) an information system that collects and processes relevant, well-time data and generates real-time insights,
- ii) a centralized delivery unit with the capacity to successfully transform performance insights into improved practices and,
- iii) a performance management culture empowered by an effective system of incentives that keep partners accountable and driving toward the same impact.

2.2 Components of an Effective Delivery Accelerator

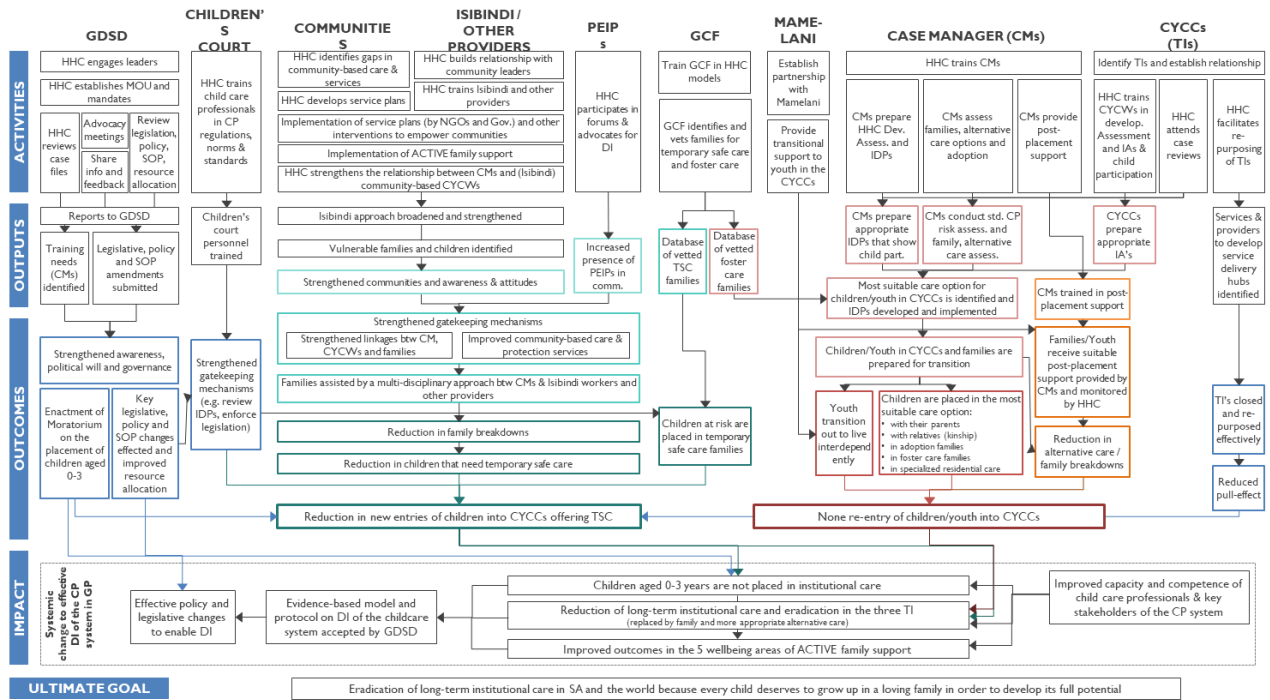
Component 1: Management Information System

The goal of a management information system (MIS) for a multi-agency program would be to close the data gaps and challenges outlined in the problem statement in order to strengthen both decision-making and transparency. At a minimum, a system would be able to efficiently capture relevant, timely and reliable data, and then generate insightful reports in a digestible format that decision makers at different levels can use to increase the impact or efficiency of their programs and to hold their counterparts accountable. In the context of performance management, the following steps would be used to create the MIS:

Step 1: Theory of Change and selection of Performance Indicators. The emphasis in performance management is not on collecting a broad range of data; it is rather on collecting the right data that can drive an understanding of whether and how the program is achieving its results. For this to be achieved, a Theory of Change is first created that details the key inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes that drive impact – in addition to critical assumptions and external factors on which achievement of the strategic goal depends. These causal pathways are then mapped onto the role of each participating stakeholder to clearly define how the responsibilities of each party contribute to each level of outcome and the ways in which they intersect with each other. This mapping exercise, as illustrated in the process diagram below⁶, establishes the crucial foundation of both coordination and accountability that is often found lacking in cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder interventions. Once that is defined, indicators related to each causal pathway can then be selected, with an emphasis on those corresponding to key programmatic inflection points.

Theory of Change from a performance management system Instiglio designed for Hope and Homes for Children, South Africa

⁶Instiglio (2017), *Performance Management System for Hope and Homes for Children, South Africa*. Hope and Homes for Children is an organization that aims to eradicate institutional care of children globally, and replace it with quality alternative care and other support services that prevent children from becoming at risk in the first instance.

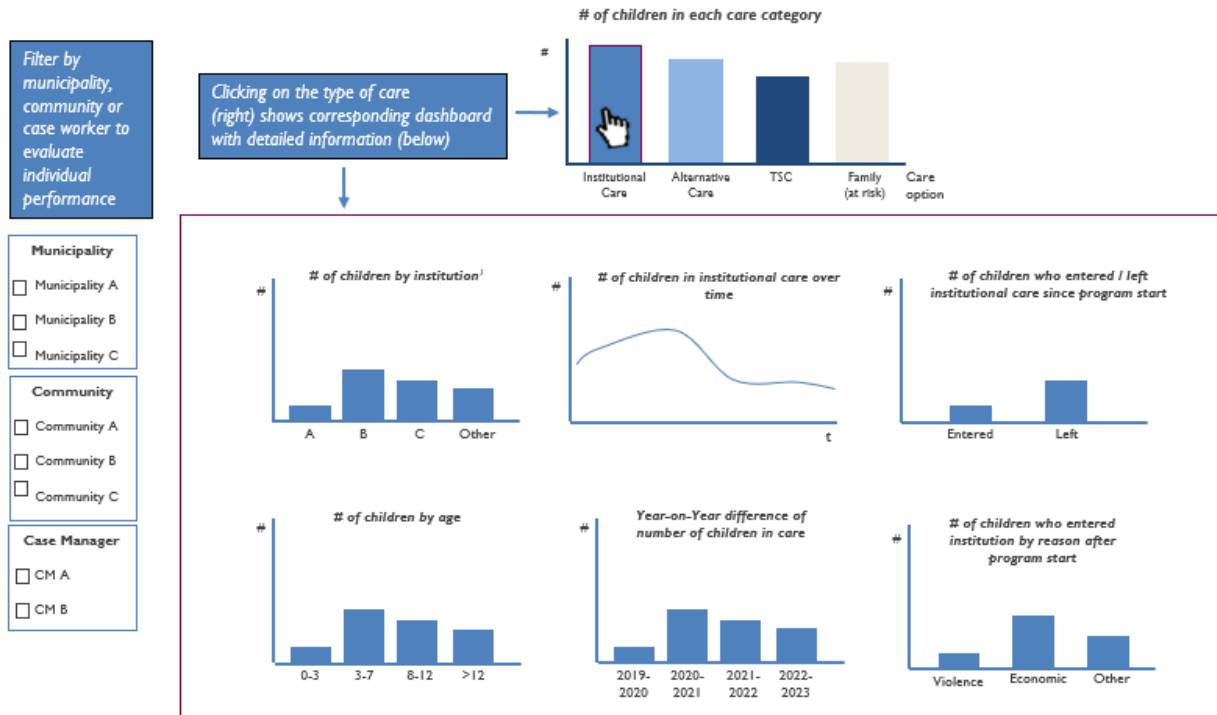


Over the past decade, Instiglio has developed rigorous frameworks to guide the prioritization of performance indicators to ensure performance management does not become overly burdensome for operators. Generally two types of indicators are selected: (i) performance indicators that measure activities, outputs, and outcomes that are relevant for achieving the desired impact, within the service provider's control and where there is less certainty about performance and, (ii) indicators of external factors, such as individual or village-level characteristics, that contextualize performance indicators and provide a more nuanced understanding of factors that influence results (e.g., demographics, socioeconomic factors) or areas where results are lacking behind (e.g., district).

Step 2: Building of data collection tools and MIS architecture. The focus of this step is on defining the data collection and measurement strategy for the performance indicators and then using that strategy to build the information system and corresponding data collection tools. A priority is to ensure that a lean system is designed that leverages as much existing data and IT infrastructure as possible.

Step 3: Performance insights and decision-making. The final step of the system design is the creation of tailored dashboards to ensure decision-makers at various levels of the program obtain timely and relevant information to drive greater impact. Anticipating what various decision makers want to analyze further and producing this in the correct format and frequency is particularly challenging in complex multi-sectoral initiatives, where several factors and actors influence results and there may be a large heterogeneity across varying contexts. It can be helpful to develop guidelines for the use of dashboards alongside protocols for how the insights derived from them should be used to decide on course corrective actions.

Dashboard design from a performance management system Instiglio designed for Hope and Homes for Children, South Africa



These three steps conclude the design of the MIS. The system, however, is only as strong as the capacity and willingness to use it. As such, it is crucial to ensure that a central coordinating team, or delivery unit, is established with the performance management culture, authority and skills to execute on the insights derived from the system and drive the maximization of outcomes at the national, regional and local levels.

Component 2: Centralized Delivery Unit within the Ministry of Finance or President’s office

An effective performance management system requires a centralized delivery team with the skills to use the MIS and the mandate to coordinate operations across the national and subnational levels. As the principal oversight and coordination body, the delivery unit would need to know how to operate the performance management system; select the most relevant performance indicators for every stage of an intervention, iterating as needed; collect and verify the evidence; isolate key insights; use the insights to hold partners accountable, motivate and course-correct, and act as champions for the performance-based culture within the larger ecosystem of the intervention.

Component 3: A performance-based incentive system

Evidence, insights and capacities are crucial for understanding which elements of an intervention need to change and improve policy effectiveness. However, alone they may not be enough to motivate the change to take place. As explored in the problem statement, motivation across line ministries and at subnational levels to focus on certain outcomes, utilize evidence and information or experiment with improved forms of service delivery is often limited by weak accountability structures and a lack of incentives.

Central delivery units often lack the mechanisms and rules to enforce their ‘challenger’ role and are often stuck with weak tools of soft persuasion, over-reliance on political champions and their allies, or are outright absent from mechanisms to control and grow the value that line ministries contribute. They need to be given more power and influence to make progress.

This can be addressed by equipping the delivery unit with an ‘outcomes funds’ that allows them to condition some funding to line ministries or other actors to the achievement of results. The outcomes fund is essentially a pot of money that would allow the delivery unit to design an incentive structure that ties rewards to results.



Incentives can help address poor stakeholder coordination, motivation, and accountability in a number of ways. First, tying rewards to performance can motivate and enable actors to deviate from the status quo by, for example, providing key government officials with a strong justification to advance reforms without relying on their political capital. Continuous measurement of results during implementation, as required for incentive-based systems, creates visibility around performance, which strengthens accountability encourages collective problem-solving. By putting some funding at risk, incentives create pressures for leaders to regularly integrate evidence in decisions. It also provides a feedback loop, and, by providing some flexibility on how to use the funding, creates opportunities for learning and adaptation which contributes to creating a performance culture.

Incentives can also help to strengthen downward accountability. By providing financial incentives tied to beneficiaries' assessment of local government performance, communities have a formal tool to hold them accountable as governments would need to demonstrate responsiveness to their needs in order to secure the incentive. As such, incentives can trigger a mindset-shift that can put communities at the center of decision-making, embedding a performance-based culture even further within government programming.

Paying for results requires upfront alignment on meaningful and measurable outcomes, based on an understanding of where interests, pain points, targets and decision-making frameworks converge or deviate for actors at all different levels. This emphasis on outcomes places results in the center of strategic planning in a way that drives collective action more systematically by encouraging stakeholders to allocate areas of responsibility according to what will maximize impact.

Depending on an intervention's implementation arrangements and bottlenecks, incentives can be introduced at multiple levels of government actors, as well as with non-state actors. They can take the form of financial incentives, for instance tying bonuses or funding disbursements to the achievement of outcomes, or non-financial, such as tying the achievement of results to reputational recognition or praise. In the case of a multi-tiered intersectoral ECD initiative, for example, an effective incentive strategy could include the following for each level of stakeholder:

- **Central government level:** Performance-based budgeting at national or subnational government levels combined with financial incentives (e.g., performance bonuses, increased/reduced budget allocations in subsequent years, softened disincentives like cuts based on budget execution levels),
- **Subnational government:** Performance-based transfers that link subnational government's access to and size of (future) fiscal transfers to their performance in pre-determined areas.
- **Non-state actors:** Special top-up funds that are disbursed upon verified results, for instance, the Big Lottery Fund⁷ and Life Chances Fund⁸, in England, support national or local governments commission outcome-based contracts by providing 'top-ups' to pay for outcomes: either new contracts or scaling-up existing contracts. Procurement reforms that integrate results-based payments into all public funding streams that are being executed through third-party providers,
- **Frontline service delivery units:** Conditional grants for frontline service delivery units (e.g., health facilities, school committees, utilities)

⁷ The Cabinet Office & The Big Lottery fund (2013), Commissioning Better Outcomes Guide
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/261051/CBO_guide.pdf

⁸ Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (2020), Life Chances Fund FAQs
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876934/LCF_FAQs_FINAL_DRAFT.pdf



3. Delivery Accelerator for ECD: A Blueprint Implementation Plan

This section provides a brief example of an implementation plan that could be used to pilot a delivery accelerator in the context of a multiyear national early childhood development initiative. Although the details of a system would depend on the specifics of an intervention, the general approach and key activities are largely subject-agnostic. This implementation plan therefore serves as a high-level blueprint for what an approach could entail.

Phase	Key Activities
1. Research & Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Diagnostic: Identify key delivery failures and underlying root causes: look at policy and regulatory environment, funding and budgeting, country’s ECD environment and infrastructure, implementation arrangements - including decentralization, existing coordination mechanisms, and outsourcing - , technical capacity and autonomy of key actors, incentive and accountability environment, existing data environment ● Strategy: Recommendation on PM system, incentives, central delivery unit, improved governance and coordination mechanisms based on findings. If needed, identify an IT partner.
2. Strategy Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Performance Management System Design: Develop theory of change and identify key components to measure; define indicators, data parameters and measurement requirements; design data collection instruments and analysis protocols; advice on specific requirements of IT infrastructure; design management dashboards; operationalize the delivery unit and decide on its placement, role and responsibilities, staffing and technical capacity and governance structure. ● Design of performance-based incentive strategy: Mapping interests and priorities of key stakeholders, seeking areas of alignment and difference; assessing existing incentive systems; determining appropriateness of different incentive schemes (financial and non-financial); design of incentive instruments; alignment with regulatory environment; design of performance metrics, verification, payment structure. ● Structuring of Delivery Unit: assessing staffing composition and placement within government; defining roles and responsibilities; reviewing reporting structures and protocols; preparation for capacity building
3. Operationalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● System stress-testing: Pilot the performance management system to test the suitability and effectiveness of indicators, protocols and outputs as needed. ● Capacity building: Provide training to the delivery unit and key stakeholders on system operations; performance based culture and the practice of performance management, including clarifying roles and responsibilities; strengthening data analysis skills; conducting performance diagnoses and corrective-measure implementation; development of guidelines & SOPs. ● Launch of incentive strategy: Leading stakeholder working sessions to decide on contract design and operationalize payment structures and verification protocols
4. Accompaniment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● System fine tuning: Support the team in fine tuning the system during the first phase of implementation. Specifically, providing support to the delivery unit during i) the first data collection (baseline data); ii) the data management (data entry, cleaning & aggregation, transformation) and iii) data analysis of baseline data. ● Reinforce the capacity-building process: Production of the first performance report, support the service providers in drawing insights from the data, and in course correcting based on evidence. ● Low-touch technical backstopping during the rest of the implementation: Provision of ad-hoc performance management support to trouble-shoot system issues, refine the performance indicators.