



WESNET
The Women's Services Network



Background information on AWAVA's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework

For people developing proposals in response to the Call for Proposals for a consultant to assist with developing a MELF for AWAVA

22 August 2019

Progress on a MELF so far

In May 2019, a draft scoping paper was presented to the face-to-face meeting of AWAVA's Advisory Group. This paper was broadly welcomed and some feedback given (not yet incorporated). An abridged version of the draft scoping paper is provided below. The Advisory Group endorsed the staff team's plan to engage a consultant to assist with the MELF. The MELF project was written into the 2019-20 AWAVA work plan, with the first stage being the engagement of a consultant by the end of September and the project to be completed by the end of June 2020.

Draft scoping paper

Developing a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MELF) for AWAVA

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About this paper

This paper proposes some options and possible next steps for developing a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MELF) for AWAVA.

Why do we need a MELF?

Informal feedback, evaluations of specific activities and previous point-in-time evaluations of AWAVA in the context of the National Women's Alliances more broadly indicate that AWAVA is making a useful contribution to ending VAW. Reporting on our funding to Office for Women likewise affirms that the financial support provided by the Commonwealth is being used appropriately for relevant activities based on our annual work planning. However, we do not have a systematic AWAVA-driven model for articulating and tracking the way our activities contribute towards our goals. In our three-year plan (2017-2020) developed as part of our grant application to Office for Women, we committed to developing a monitoring and evaluation framework.

AWAVA and its activities represent a substantial commitment of time and resources from Alliance members, staff and our broader network. AWAVA occupies a key position within the policy/advocacy landscape in relation to violence against women. We need to be able to check and reflect on our activities and the impact they are having, making adjustments where needed, to make sure that we are using our position and resources for the best impact. This checking and reflecting needs to be undertaken in a way that is strength-based, conducted for our own purposes and not

driven by compliance imperatives or “deficit thinking”. At the same time, it should provide important documentation and evidence of our positive impact which can be used to communicate about AWAVA with funders and others.

Scoping for ‘an evaluation’ or developing a MELF framework?

‘An evaluation’ is a point-in-time reflection on the successes, failures, challenges, constraints and enabling factors of an organisation or program. Examples are the reviews undertaken of the Alliances model, including separate Alliance-specific sections, in 2011, 2012 and 2016. Reviews are useful to provide funders and others with an assessment of the Alliance’s progress, but they do not embed a process of checking on progress and learning within the Alliance’s activities.

A Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (MELF) describes the concepts underpinning an organisation’s or program’s assessment of their own progress, and establishes some systems, tools, common terms and/or templates/forms for this to happen in a more ongoing way.

The process of developing a MELF would involve members, staff and the contract manager developing a shared understanding of how our activities work towards achieving our goals.

It has previously been recommended by IWDA in their 2011 review of the Alliances that Alliances develop theories of change to provide a shared basis for structured self-monitoring of progress. It is this structured self-monitoring that the MELF would be intended to achieve.

Recommendation: AWAVA should develop a MELF including a ‘theory of change’ approach rather than just commission a discrete evaluation/review. A beginning draft theory of change is provided at Appendix A [not reproduced here but will be provided to the consultant once appointed].

Recommendation: We should engage an external consultant (paid and/or pro bono) to assist with developing a MELF as well as final reports that include material we can use in explaining our contribution/value to funders and others.

AWAVA’s activities

To create a MELF, we need to understand both our goals and our activities. AWAVA’s main activities are in the areas of:

- policy advocacy
- network and alliance building/maintenance
- information-sharing (both within our networks and publicly)

These are not necessarily the only activities we could engage in, and there is scope to reflect on and change our activities, but these are the ones that are currently embedded in our practices and planning.

While network creation/maintenance and information-sharing are part of how we conduct policy advocacy, they are also activities of value in themselves, in that they create the preconditions for social change – which occurs not only through policy reform but also through ‘horizontal’ learning and change within civil society and communities. As such they need to be articulated distinctly in the MELF. If we only consider our outcomes in terms of policy changes (or preservation), and neglect these other outcomes, we may underestimate our impact and also lose opportunities for learning.

Recommendation: The MELF needs to incorporate network and alliance building/maintenance and information-sharing both as steps within policy/advocacy and as activities with value in themselves.

Challenges of conducting monitoring and evaluation of policy advocacy

Policy has been described as ‘a chaos of purposes and accidents’ (Clay and Shaeffer 1984, quoted in ODI 2014). Influencing policy is not straightforward, and it is notoriously difficult to ascribe causality to any given policy change, or to attribute a change to particular actors in a fair and realistic way. Most of the experts who have considered monitoring and evaluation of policy advocacy describe this in terms of complexity. As ODI explains:

“Most policy and advocacy programmes have multiple objectives which may change at short notice, where it is not always possible to plan interventions in advance, where multiple inter-related interventions are necessary, and where cause- and-effect relationships are unpredictable.

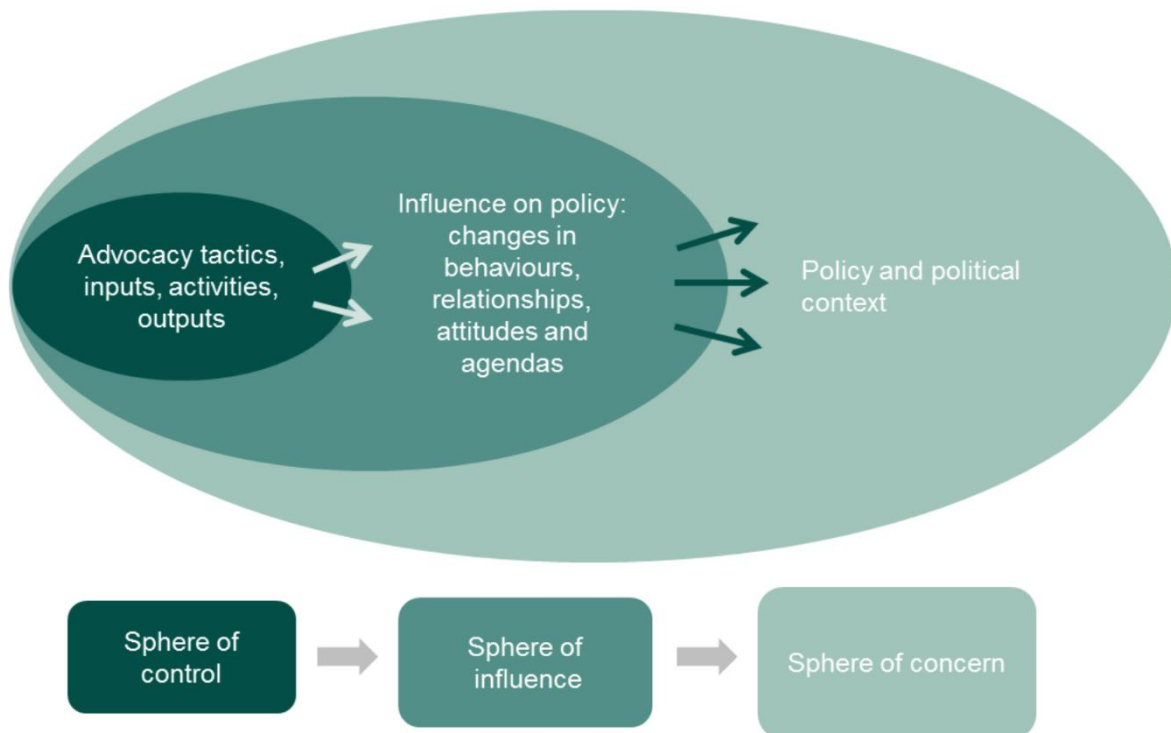
Planning, monitoring and evaluating approaches that require strict adherence to a predefined plan will not work well in these contexts, and neither will those that require standardised implementation approaches or heavy top-down governance. Suitable approaches pay attention to context; start with a testable theory (Reisman et al., 2007); are built on principles of learning, adaptation and reflection (Guthrie et al., 2005); provide real-time feedback (Coffman, 2007); and identify different levels of outcomes, including early or interim outcomes rather than just the ‘big win’ (ibid).” (p7)¹

Conceptualising our work: spheres of control

One way to deal with the complexity of our work is to conceptualise what we have control over in relation to what we are trying to influence, and through this process begin to think about what we can realistically hope to monitor along the way. The model of spheres of control is useful for this:

¹ Monitoring and evaluating policy influence and advocacy, <https://www.odi.org/publications/8265-monitoring-and-evaluation-policy-influence-and-advocacy>

Figure 1: The three spheres of control and their relationship to policy influence



Source: ODI (2014).

What should be the features of an AWAVA MELF

- Realistic – about our capacity and limitations of our role
- Achievable – in terms of implementing the MELF
- Open – gathering and integrating feedback/views from members & others
- Transparent – aware of / explicit about the MELF's limitations (e.g. re causality)
- Reflective – able to address failures and problems in a constructive way
- Other features?

Possible elements of an AWAVA MELF

1. **A model/diagram of our theory of change** developed collaboratively with the Advisory Group, including consideration from both 'ends':
 - working backwards - from ultimate goal via mechanisms of influence to specific activities; and
 - forwards - what are our activities now and what are they intending to achieve (realistic approach)

See attached Appendix A – draft theory of change. [not reproduced here but will be provided to the consultant once appointed] This needs to be developed much further, potentially in these areas:

- **In order to assess if AWAVA’s activities are having the impacts they are intended to, we need to understand more about the mechanisms** E.g. how exactly can we expect that our advocacy to bureaucrats would lead to intersectional feminist approaches being normalised? Answering these questions may need to bring in other theories about policy change, e.g. policies change by the individuals involved being socialised into different perspectives by exposure/communication; policies change because politicians make decisions based on their perceptions of public pressure/opinion.
- **To understand our work in more detail, we may need to create different theories of change for our different areas of work.** An example of this approach is Amnesty International’s Theories of Change, which has a different diagram for different sub-goals, e.g. reclaiming online rights and freedoms; human rights education etc.² We could do the same for e.g. the role of specialist women’s services; access to justice and accountability; primary prevention.
- We may need to **consider our ‘niche’ or distinctive contribution in the context of all the full range of activities that are needed to achieve our goals.** For example, in the draft, the full range of work involved in ‘primary prevention’ is collapsed into a brief reference to the broader Our Watch framework because our contribution is mainly limited to supporting information-sharing, networks and communities of practice among practitioners in the primary prevention area. Another example is media advocacy, which is an important part of policy change as well as social change generally, but is not a major part of our work. Having the full picture of the range of activities required, within which our activities are a sub-set, could help for planning.

2. Agreed indicators of effectiveness

Once we have addressed the considerations above (and others), we can proceed to develop indicators and tools to assess our effectiveness in working towards our goals.

These indicators could range from the ‘sphere of control’ to the ‘sphere of influence’ and potentially encompass the ‘sphere of concern’, acknowledging that evaluating impact within the ‘sphere of concern’ is challenging - i.e. how we can assess AWAVA’s contribution to the overall goal of ending violence against women. These are some ideas about indicators we could use:

- Process (eg management of functions, work being done in the right areas; adherence to our work plan)
- Intermediate goals (e.g. evidence of our language and concepts being used; feedback from stakeholders / members)

² <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL1031652016ENGLISH.PDF>

- Structural goals (major shifts in the way policy is conducted in the area of VAW; funding; governance; coordination; embedding practices of challenging sexism and other forms of oppression)
- Ultimate goals (evidence that VAW is being prevented and victims/survivors are receiving full support for recovery) – however, the problems of attribution and causation become challenging here.

3. Tools we could use to measure our work against the indicators above:

Process

- Work planning and reporting;
- Policies and procedures / delegations
- Checking adherence to our Working Methods

Intermediate goals

- Feedback – stakeholder surveys?
- Log – to record evidence of our language and concepts being used
- Story-telling techniques focused on specific outcome/issue (to unpack contribution)
- Workshops at Face-to-Face to discuss and record progress
- External evaluation
- Other ideas?

Structural goals

- Environmental / policy scans against our policy positions in specific areas
- Story-telling techniques focused on specific outcome/issue (to unpack contribution)
- Contribution analysis / outcome assessment
- Our Watch's Counting on change framework³

Ultimate goals

- Official stats: Personal Safety Survey, National Community Attitudes Survey, AIHW reports
- Contribution analysis / outcome assessment

Recommendation:

The AWAVA Advisory Group work together to define the elements we would like to see included in a MELF, and refine this scoping paper and theory of change diagram accordingly.

³ https://www.ourwatch.org.au/getmedia/8c6df8f7-5d01-4e32-9e6a-a8bff04f0673/OurWatch_GuideToMonitoring_A3Summary_horizontal.pdf.aspx