

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Methodology
Evidence, Learning and Decision Support for Complex Policy and Development Systems
A practical, politically informed and learning-centered approach to strengthening implementation, accountability, and decision-making
policy/strategy group

Strengthening leadership, governance and evidence-informed decision-making across complex systems
Global Advisory and Learning Practice
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1. Executive Summary

Development and policy programmes today operate in increasingly complex environments shaped by shifting political priorities, institutional constraints, resource limitations, stakeholder dynamics, and evolving implementation realities. Governments, development partners, philanthropies, and implementing organizations are under pressure to demonstrate results while responding to changing contexts and emerging challenges.

In this environment, organizations need more than reporting systems. They need evidence that helps them understand what is working, what is not, why it matters, and what actions are needed to improve implementation and achieve results.

At policy/strategy group (p/s), we view Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) as a strategic tool for strengthening implementation, accountability, learning, and decision-making. While accountability remains important, we believe MEL should also help organizations adapt, respond to complexity, and make informed decisions throughout the implementation cycle.

Many conventional MEL approaches focus primarily on compliance, reporting, and performance measurement. While valuable, these approaches often provide limited insight into the political, institutional, and operational factors that influence programme performance. They can generate large volumes of data without creating the learning, adaptation, and decision support needed to improve implementation and sustain results.

The p/s MEL approach addresses this gap. We combine rigorous evidence generation with adaptive learning, political economy analysis, systems thinking, and practical implementation support. Our focus is not only on measuring change, but on understanding how change happens, what influences implementation, where bottlenecks emerge, and how programmes can adapt in response.

What distinguishes p/s is our ability to connect evidence to action. We do not approach MEL as a standalone technical function. We work with partners to design evidence and learning systems that are

practical, decision-oriented, and responsive to context. Our approach recognizes that programme success depends not only on technical design, but also on leadership, governance, institutions, stakeholder incentives, financing realities, and implementation capacity.

We support governments, development partners, global initiatives, and implementing organizations across sectors including health systems, women's, children's and adolescents' health (WCAH), domestic resource mobilisation (DRM), agrifood systems, climate resilience, governance, and youth systems. Our work spans MEL system design, evaluations, adaptive learning, evidence use, political economy-informed analysis, data systems, and institutional strengthening.

Partners working with p/s gain more than technical MEL support. They gain a strategic partner that helps translate evidence into implementation improvements, stronger learning, better decisions, and more effective reform processes. This results in stronger accountability, improved programme performance, greater visibility of risks and opportunities, and more responsive approaches to managing change in complex environments.

This methodology outlines how p/s approaches MEL in practice, the principles that guide our work, the services we provide, and the ways we support partners to strengthen implementation, learning, accountability, and long-term results.

2. Why MEL Needs to Evolve

Programmes today operate in increasingly dynamic and complex environments. Governments, development partners, philanthropies, and implementing organizations are expected to deliver measurable results while navigating shifting political priorities, financial constraints, institutional limitations, stakeholder interests, and evolving implementation realities.

Many MEL systems were originally designed to meet reporting, compliance, and accountability requirements. While these functions remain important, they are often insufficient for understanding the factors that drive programme performance and influence change. Decision-makers increasingly need evidence that helps them understand not only whether results are being achieved, but also why progress is occurring, what barriers exist, and what adjustments may be required.

At the same time, organizations frequently collect large amounts of data without translating it into actionable insights. Reporting cycles can become disconnected from implementation realities, limiting opportunities for learning, adaptation, and timely decision-making. As a result, evidence often serves accountability needs without fully supporting programme improvement.

The nature of development and policy work has also changed. Many programmes now operate within complex systems where outcomes are influenced by institutions, governance arrangements, stakeholder incentives, leadership, financing realities, and political dynamics. In these environments, linear

approaches to performance measurement often struggle to capture how change occurs, how reforms progress, or how implementation challenges affect results.

At p/s, we believe MEL must evolve alongside the environments in which programmes operate. Effective MEL should not only demonstrate accountability, but also strengthen implementation, support learning and adaptation, improve evidence use, and inform strategic decision-making. It should help organizations understand how change happens, identify emerging risks and opportunities, and respond to evolving contexts.

Our approach combines rigorous evidence generation with adaptive learning, political economy analysis, systems thinking, and practical implementation support. By connecting evidence to implementation realities, stakeholder dynamics, and decision-making processes, we help partners move beyond measurement to strengthen delivery, support reform, and improve results.

This methodology sets out how p/s approaches MEL in practice, bringing together evidence, learning, implementation support, and decision-making to help partners navigate complexity and achieve sustainable impact.

3. Why p/s

Evidence that Works in the Real World

Many organizations can develop indicators, produce reports, or conduct evaluations. Fewer can help partners use evidence to navigate complex implementation challenges, reform processes, and changing political environments. At p/s, this is where we focus.

We believe evidence is most valuable when it helps organizations strengthen implementation, adapt to changing circumstances, and make better decisions. Our approach combines technical MEL expertise with policy insight, political economy analysis, systems thinking, and practical implementation support to generate evidence that is rigorous, actionable, and closely aligned to how change happens in practice.

Rather than treating MEL as a standalone technical function, we position it as a strategic tool for strengthening implementation, supporting reform, and improving decision-making in complex policy and development environments.

What Makes p/s Different

- 1) **Politically Informed MEL:** Programmes and reforms do not succeed or fail on technical design alone. Outcomes are shaped by leadership, institutional incentives, political priorities, stakeholder relationships, financing realities, and implementation dynamics. We integrate political economy analysis into MEL to help partners understand the broader factors influencing programme performance and reform progress.

This enables a deeper understanding of opportunities, constraints, risks, and pathways for change.

Our work helps partners examine:

- Stakeholder incentives and power dynamics
- Institutional opportunities and constraints
- Reform feasibility and implementation realities
- Risks, resistance, and opportunities for change

- 2) **A Learning-to-Action Orientation:** Too often, MEL produces reports that are technically sound but rarely used. At p/s, we focus on helping partners move from evidence generation to evidence use.

We design learning systems that support reflection, adaptation, and decision-making throughout implementation. Our aim is to ensure that evidence informs action, rather than becoming an end in itself.

We help partners answer practical questions such as:

- What is working and why?
- What is not working?
- What should change?
- What decisions need to be made now?

- 3) **Strong Implementation Grounding:** We believe MEL should remain closely connected to implementation. Many systems become overly technical, disconnected from delivery realities, or burdensome for programme teams.

We design MEL systems that are:

- Fit for purpose
- Feasible to implement
- Useful for programme teams and decision-makers
- Responsive to changing contexts

Our work connects evidence directly to programme delivery, implementation improvement, and operational decision-making.

- 4) **Systems and Complexity Awareness:** Many development and policy challenges are complex, non-linear, and constantly evolving. Whether supporting health systems strengthening, financing reforms, governance initiatives, or climate resilience programmes, change rarely occurs in predictable ways.

p/s applies systems thinking and complexity-aware MEL approaches to help partners:

- Understand how change happens across systems
- Identify bottlenecks and unintended consequences

- Adapt strategies as contexts evolve
- Track contribution in complex environments

5) **A Leadership and Governance Lens:** One of p/s' distinctive strengths is our understanding of leadership, governance, and reform processes. We recognize that evidence alone rarely drives change. Leadership commitment, institutional ownership, accountability, and effective coordination all influence whether reforms succeed.

Our MEL approaches therefore pay close attention to:

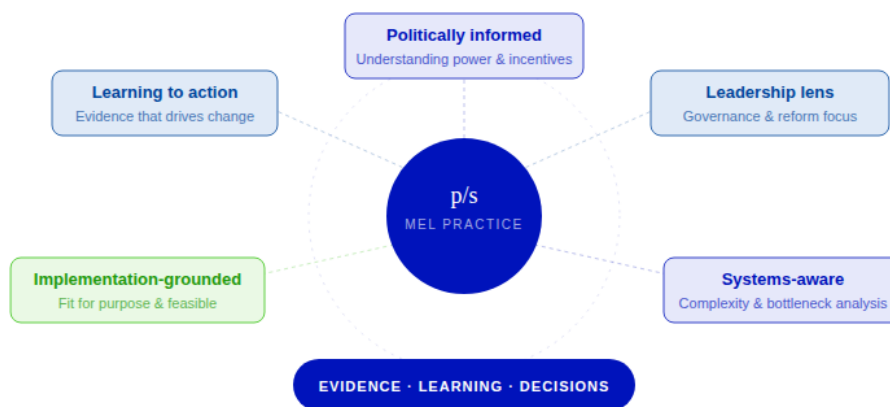
- Leadership engagement and accountability
- Governance and decision-making processes
- Institutional coordination and implementation pathways
- Policy uptake and reform momentum

What Clients Gain from Working with p/s

Partners work with p/s when they need MEL that goes beyond measurement. Our clients benefit from approaches that:

- ✓ Generate credible and decision-oriented evidence
- ✓ Strengthen implementation and adaptive learning
- ✓ Reflect political and institutional realities
- ✓ Support complex reforms and systems change
- ✓ Translate learning into practical action

What makes our MEL approach distinctive



4. Practice Philosophy

Our Approach to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

At p/s, we view Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) as a practical tool for strengthening implementation, accountability, learning, and decision-making. Our focus is not only on generating evidence, but on ensuring that evidence is useful, timely, and applied in ways that improve programme performance, support policy implementation, and contribute to long-term outcomes.

We believe MEL is most valuable when it is closely connected to the realities of implementation. Effective MEL should help organizations understand what is working, what is changing, why it matters, and what actions are needed to strengthen results. It should support not only accountability, but also learning, adaptation, and continuous improvement.

Our approach combines rigorous evidence generation with adaptive learning, political economy awareness, systems thinking, and implementation support. We recognize that programmes operate within complex environments shaped by institutions, leadership, stakeholder dynamics, incentives, and changing contexts. As a result, understanding performance requires more than measuring outputs and outcomes; it requires understanding how change happens and what influences implementation.

We do not believe there is a single MEL model that works in every context. Effective approaches must be tailored to programme objectives, institutional realities, implementation capacity, and decision-making needs. Our role is to design practical and context-responsive MEL systems that generate credible evidence while remaining useful to those responsible for delivering results.

At its best, MEL should help partners answer not only whether change occurred, but also why it occurred, for whom, under what conditions, and what should happen next. By connecting evidence to learning, adaptation, and decision-making, we help organizations use MEL as a strategic tool for navigating complexity and strengthening implementation.

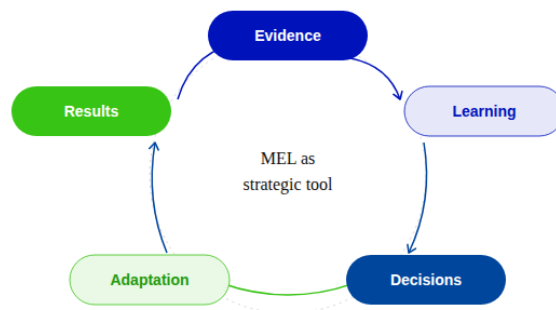
Core Principles Guiding Our MEL Practice

Our MEL practice is guided by six core principles that shape how we design, deliver, and apply evidence in support of implementation and decision-making.

- a) **Decision-Oriented:** We design MEL systems to support real-world decisions. Evidence should help programme teams, governments, and partners understand progress, identify bottlenecks, assess risks, and make informed adjustments throughout implementation.
- b) **Learning-Centered:** We view learning as a continuous process rather than a one-off activity. We create structured opportunities for reflection, adaptation, and course correction so that evidence informs action in real time.

- c) **Politically Informed:** Programmes operate within political and institutional systems that shape what is possible. We integrate political economy awareness into MEL design to better understand incentives, stakeholder dynamics, and implementation realities.
- d) **Context-Responsive:** No two programmes operate in the same environment. We adapt our approaches to country context, programme complexity, institutional capacity, and the information needs of decision-makers.
- e) **Utilization-Focused:** We prioritize evidence that is practical and actionable. Data collection and analysis should serve a clear purpose and contribute meaningfully to programme improvement, accountability, and strategic decision-making.
- f) **Equity-Aware:** We design MEL approaches that intentionally consider equity, inclusion, gender, youth, and vulnerability to ensure evidence reflects diverse perspectives and supports more inclusive outcomes.

A circular model connecting evidence to results



5. How We Support Partners

p/s supports governments, development partners, global initiatives, and

implementing organizations to strengthen implementation, improve learning, and make better decisions through practical, context-responsive MEL support.

Our work is organized across six interconnected areas of support. While each can be delivered as a standalone service, they are often combined to provide integrated support tailored to programme needs, institutional context, and implementation realities.

MEL System Design

Strong implementation begins with strong systems. We design practical, fit-for-purpose MEL systems that balance accountability, learning, and decision-making.

Our focus is on building systems that balance accountability requirements with learning and adaptive decision-making.

Areas of support include:

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- Theory of Change Development and Refinement – Designing clear and realistic pathways of change, including assumptions, risks, and contribution pathways.
- Results Frameworks and Measurement Structures – Developing log frames, results chains, and performance frameworks aligned to programme objectives.
- Indicator Development and Measurement Approaches – Designing meaningful indicators that are measurable, useful, and contextually relevant.
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plans – Establishing clear approaches for data collection, analysis, reporting, and accountability.
- Learning Agendas and Priority Questions – Helping partners identify what they most need to learn and how evidence can inform implementation.

Our aim is to create MEL systems that are technically sound, practical to implement, and useful for decision-makers.

Evaluations and Strategic Assessments

We deliver evaluations that generate credible evidence while helping partners understand implementation realities, performance drivers, and opportunities for improvement.

Areas of support include:

- Baseline, midline, and endline evaluations
- Process and implementation evaluations
- Learning evaluations
- Rapid reviews and strategic evidence assessments
- Organizational MEL reviews
- Gender-responsive and equity-focused evaluations

Across all assignments, our emphasis is on producing evidence that is not only rigorous, but genuinely useful.

Adaptive Learning and Evidence Use

We help organizations translate evidence into action by embedding learning, reflection, and adaptation throughout implementation.

Areas of support include:

- Learning and reflection systems
- Learning workshops and sense-making processes
- Pause-and-reflect approaches
- Evidence uptake and utilization strategies

- Decision support for programme adaptation

Our focus is to ensure evidence becomes a tool for action rather than an end in itself.

Policy and Political Economy-Informed MEL

We integrate political economy analysis, systems thinking, and implementation realities into MEL design and delivery to help partners understand the factors that influence change.

Areas of support include:

- Stakeholder Mapping and Influence Analysis – Understanding actors, incentives, power, and relationships.
- Political Economy Analysis (PEA) – Examining institutional and political factors shaping implementation and reform.
- Systems Mapping – Understanding interactions across institutions, financing, governance, and implementation systems.
- Policy and Reform Tracking – Monitoring progress, implementation momentum, and shifts in political commitment.
- Implementation Bottleneck Analysis – Identifying operational, political, institutional, and coordination barriers affecting delivery.

This enables partners to move beyond technical monitoring and better understand the realities influencing change.

Data, Evidence and Knowledge Systems

We strengthen the systems organizations use to generate, manage, communicate, and apply evidence.

Areas of support include:

- Data Systems and Reporting Workflows – Improving how organizations collect, manage, and report evidence.
- Performance Dashboards and Data Visualization – Making information easier to interpret and use for decision-making.
- Data Quality and Assurance Systems – Strengthening reliability, consistency, and confidence in programme data.
- Evidence Communication and Visualization – Translating technical findings into clear, accessible formats for different audiences.
- Knowledge Products and Learning Outputs – Producing briefs, reports, insights, and evidence products that support learning and influence.

Our objective is to make evidence more accessible, more useful, and easier to act on.

Capacity Strengthening and Systems Support

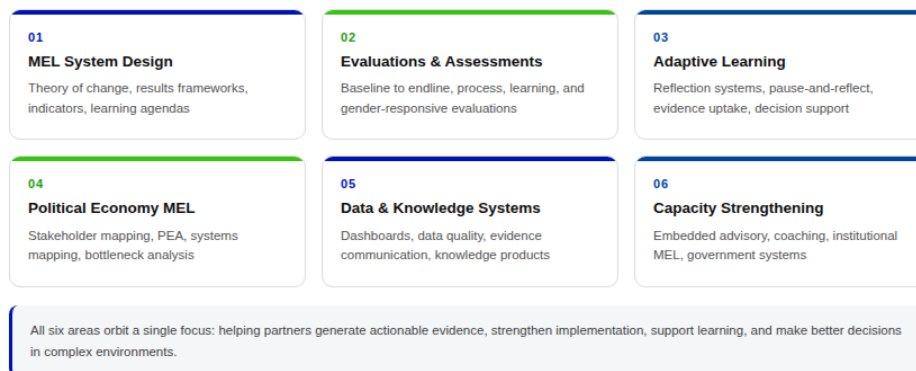
We help build the institutional capabilities required to sustain effective MEL and evidence-informed decision-making over time.

Areas of support include:

- Embedded Technical Advisory Support – Providing hands-on guidance during programme implementation.
- Coaching and Mentorship – Strengthening technical capability through ongoing accompaniment and problem-solving support.
- Institutional MEL Strengthening – Supporting organizations to improve MEL governance, structures, and performance systems.
- Government Systems Support – Working with ministries and institutions to strengthen evidence systems and decision-making processes.
- Learning and Capability Development – Building practical MEL capability tailored to organizational priorities and context.

Across all areas of support, our focus remains the same: helping partners generate actionable evidence, strengthen implementation, support learning, and make better decisions in complex policy and development environments.

Six interconnected areas of support



6. How We Work

At p/s, our MEL work is guided by a set of practical

methodological approaches that ensure evidence is credible, relevant, and useful for implementation and decision-making. We combine technical rigor with flexibility, adapting our methods to programme context, institutional realities, and learning needs.

Our Methodological Approaches

1. Mixed-Methods Evidence Generation

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We combine quantitative and qualitative methods to generate a comprehensive understanding of programme performance, implementation progress, and outcomes. Depending on context, this may include surveys, routine programme data, interviews, focus group discussions, document reviews, and evidence synthesis.

2. Participatory and Stakeholder-Centred Approaches

We work closely with governments, programme teams, partners, communities, and other stakeholders to strengthen ownership, improve relevance, and support the practical use of findings.

3. Gender-Responsive and Inclusive MEL

We integrate gender, equity, inclusion, and youth considerations throughout the MEL cycle to ensure evidence reflects diverse experiences and informs more equitable decision-making.

4. Adaptive Management and Learning

We design MEL systems that support continuous learning and course correction. Through structured reflection and learning processes, we help partners adapt programmes in response to emerging evidence and changing contexts.

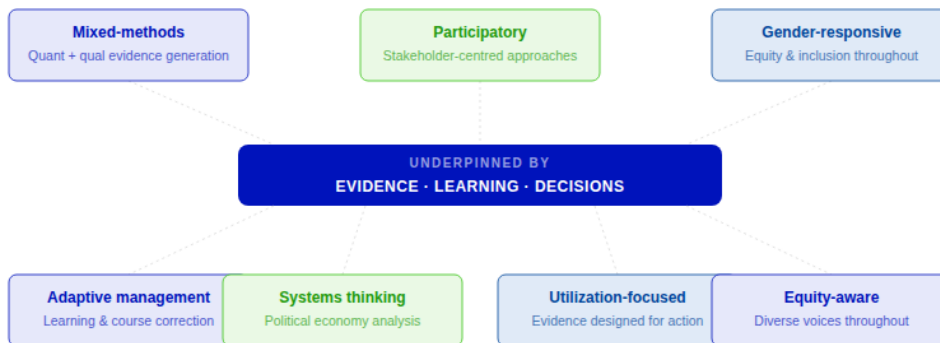
5. Systems Thinking and Political Economy Analysis

We apply systems and political economy perspectives to better understand implementation dynamics, stakeholder incentives, institutional constraints, and pathways to change.

6. Utilization-Focused Evidence

We prioritize evidence that is practical and actionable. Findings are translated into formats and recommendations that support implementation improvement, policy dialogue, and strategic decision-making.

Seven methodological approaches

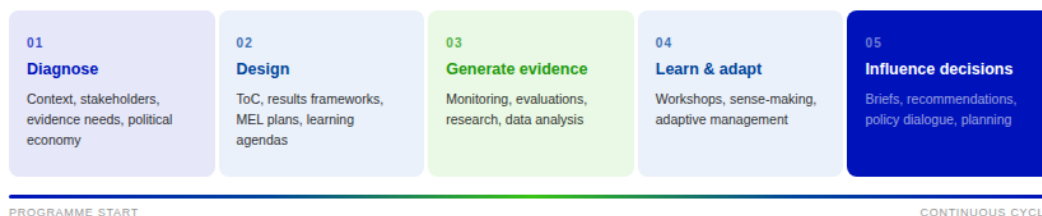


Across all our work, our focus remains consistent: generating evidence that helps partners strengthen implementation, learn continuously, and make better decisions.

7. Our Five-Stage Delivery Model

At p/s, we apply a structured but flexible delivery model that helps partners move from evidence generation to practical action. While every programme and policy environment is different, our work typically follows a structured five-stage process that connects evidence generation to learning, adaptation, and action.

From diagnosis to decisions



1. Diagnose

We begin by understanding the programme context, stakeholder landscape, implementation realities, and evidence needs.

Typical activities:

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- Context and stakeholder analysis
- Political economy and systems assessment
- Review of existing evidence and MEL systems
- Identification of learning and accountability priorities

What partners gain: A clear understanding of priorities, opportunities, risks, and evidence needs.

2. Design

We develop practical MEL systems aligned to programme goals, implementation realities, and decision-making needs.

Typical activities:

- Theory of Change development or refinement
- Results frameworks and indicator design
- MEL plans and learning agendas
- Data collection and quality assurance systems

What partners gain: A clear and actionable framework for measuring progress and supporting implementation.

3. Generate Evidence

We support systematic evidence generation to understand performance, implementation progress, outcomes, and emerging challenges.

Typical activities:

- Monitoring and performance tracking
- Evaluations and assessments
- Research and evidence synthesis
- Data analysis and interpretation

What partners gain: Credible evidence on what is working, what is not, and why.

4. Learn and Adapt

We help partners interpret findings, identify lessons, and make informed adjustments throughout implementation.

Typical activities:

- Learning workshops
- Pause-and-reflect sessions
- Sense-making processes

- Adaptive management support

What partners gain: Stronger implementation through continuous learning and course correction.

5. Influence Decisions

We help translate evidence into practical action, strategic decisions, and policy influence.

Typical activities:

- Decision briefs and executive summaries
- Strategic recommendations
- Policy and programme dialogue
- Evidence-informed planning

What partners gain: Evidence that strengthens decision-making, accountability, and long-term results.

Across all five stages, our role is not simply to measure progress, but to help partners strengthen implementation, learn continuously, and make better decisions in complex policy and development environments.

8. Sector Applications

Our MEL approach is designed to respond to the realities of different sectors while remaining grounded in implementation, learning, and decision-making. We adapt our methodologies, evidence systems, and learning approaches to sector priorities, institutional contexts, and implementation environments.

Health Systems

We support MEL for health systems strengthening, service delivery, health financing, workforce performance, policy implementation, and multisector coordination. Our focus is on strengthening implementation, improving performance visibility, and supporting evidence-informed decision-making across complex health systems.

Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (WCAH)

We design MEL approaches that strengthen accountability, financing, implementation, and learning for WCAH programmes. This includes support for leadership initiatives, adolescent-responsive programming, equity-focused monitoring, and evidence generation that informs policy and programme improvement.

Domestic Resource Mobilisation (DRM)

We support politically informed MEL for financing and reform initiatives, including health financing, resource mobilization strategies, advocacy platforms, and multisector engagement processes. Our work



focuses on reform tracking, stakeholder dynamics, policy uptake, and learning around what enables sustainable change.

Agrifood Systems

We apply MEL to agrifood systems programmes focused on resilience, livelihoods, nutrition, market systems, and food security. Our approach supports adaptive implementation, systems learning, and evidence use to strengthen programme performance and long-term sustainability.

Climate Resilience and Energy Transition

We support MEL for climate adaptation, resilience-building, sustainability, and energy transition initiatives. This includes developing context-responsive indicators, learning systems, and evidence approaches suited to rapidly evolving policy and implementation environments.

Governance and Public Systems

We support MEL for governance reforms, institutional strengthening, leadership initiatives, women and youth empowerment, and public sector transformation programmes. Our work combines evidence generation with political economy awareness to help partners navigate reform processes, stakeholder dynamics, and implementation complexity.

Youth Systems

We apply youth-responsive MEL approaches across programmes focused on health, education, livelihoods, leadership, participation, and skills development. Our emphasis is on meaningful engagement, ethical approaches, and evidence that reflects young people's lived experiences.

Across sectors, our focus remains consistent: helping partners generate actionable evidence, strengthen implementation, support learning, and make better decisions in complex environments.

9. Illustrative Projects and Experience

Our experience spans leadership platforms, policy initiatives, stakeholder engagement processes, and evidence-generation efforts across health and development sectors. The examples below illustrate how we apply MEL, learning, analytics, and implementation support to help partners generate actionable insights and strengthen decision-making.

Global Leaders Network (GLN): Leadership, Learning and Evidence Use

p/s provided Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) support for the Global Leaders Network (GLN) Domestic Resource Mobilisation (DRM) Webinar Series focused on advancing financing and accountability for women's, children's, and adolescents' health.

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- Designing audience engagement and learning approaches for high-level policy dialogues
- Developing live polling and feedback systems to capture participant perspectives and emerging priorities
- Producing webinar analytics, participation insights, and evidence summaries
- Synthesizing learning across multiple events to identify key themes, opportunities, and strategic implications
- Translating findings into practical recommendations to inform leadership engagement, advocacy efforts, and future programming

What this demonstrates: Our ability to combine learning, analytics, stakeholder engagement, and evidence use to support decision-making within complex, multi-country policy and leadership environments.

Illustrative application areas: Learning systems, leadership platforms, adaptive MEL, webinar analytics, evidence synthesis, stakeholder engagement.

The Africa HIV Control Working Group (AHCWG): Real-Time Learning and Stakeholder Engagement

p/s has supported The Africa HIV Control Working Group (AHCWG) to strengthen learning, engagement, and evidence generation for policy and technical audiences.

Our support included:

- Designing live audience polling and digital engagement approaches
- Developing structured learning questions aligned with event objectives
- Supporting evidence generation through participant feedback and engagement systems
- Producing analytics and reporting to inform future programming, communications, and stakeholder engagement strategies

What this demonstrates: Our practical approach to using real-time evidence to strengthen learning, improve engagement, and support adaptive implementation.

Illustrative application areas: Rapid learning systems, stakeholder engagement, real-time analytics, adaptive management, evidence utilization.

Building a Stronger Practice Through Applied Learning

As the p/s MEL practice continues to grow, we are expanding our portfolio of work across implementation support, policy and systems change, learning partnerships, and evidence-informed decision-making.

Across all engagements, our focus remains consistent: helping partners generate credible evidence, strengthen implementation, support learning and adaptation, and make better decisions in complex



policy and development environments. We view MEL not as an end in itself, but as a practical tool for improving performance, informing action, and supporting sustainable change.

10. Looking Ahead

As development and policy environments become increasingly complex, the demand for evidence that supports learning, adaptation, and decision-making will continue to grow. Organizations need MEL approaches that not only demonstrate results, but also help them navigate uncertainty, strengthen implementation, and respond to changing contexts.

At p/s, we see MEL as more than a technical function. We view it as a strategic tool for generating insights, strengthening accountability, supporting implementation, and informing action. By combining rigorous evidence generation with adaptive learning, political economy analysis, systems thinking, and practical implementation support, we help partners move beyond measurement to achieve meaningful and sustainable results.

As our practice continues to evolve, we remain committed to helping governments, development partners, global initiatives, and implementing organizations generate evidence that is credible, actionable, and responsive to the realities of implementation. We will continue to invest in innovative approaches to learning, evidence use, stakeholder engagement, and systems strengthening that help partners navigate complexity and drive lasting change.

Our ambition is simple: to help organizations use evidence more effectively—to strengthen implementation, improve decision-making, support reform, and achieve better outcomes for the people and communities they serve.

11. Our Team

The p/s MEL practice is led by an experienced MEL and policy professional with expertise in health systems, financing, governance, stakeholder engagement, adaptive learning, and evidence-informed decision-making across African and global contexts.

p/s — Evidence. Learning. Better Decisions.

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