



Responding Adaptively to the COVID-19 Crisis in Indonesia: Insights and Implications from an Indonesian Governance Program

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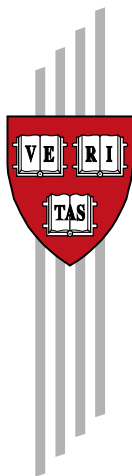
Responding Adaptively to the COVID-19 Crisis in Indonesia:

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Maliki Achmad, Graham Teskey, Anna Winoto, and
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Responding Adaptively to the COVID-19 Crisis in Indonesia: Insights and Implications from an Indonesian Governance Program

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Abstract

Since March 2020, the novelty, intensity, and scale of the COVID-19 pandemic has placed enormous stress on governments, delivery systems, and social order around the world, especially so in countries with modest public health resources, where targeting is especially difficult, and among occupational groups working in close proximity to others. Those overseeing Indonesia's health care system from mid-2020 onwards faced precisely this vortex of existential challenges, but certain organizations within this system were well placed to deploy an adaptive implementation strategy. KOMPAK was one such organization²; its efforts were not universally successful, but their achievements (e.g., coherently coordinating governance efforts between national, regional, and local levels of government; building effective village information systems) were nonetheless distinctive, consequential and enduring. In this sense, COVID-19 can be understood as a perverse but instructive "natural experiment" in how well public sector organizations respond in the face of unexpected high-stakes, high-uncertainty, low-resource, low-prior-experience crises. We document key insights and implications for public sector administration from KOMPAK's efforts, not just for Indonesia and other developing countries but for public service delivery systems more generally.

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors alone and should not be attributed to the respective organizations (their leaders or executive directors) with which they are affiliated. Achmad and Winoto were directly engaged in authorizing and implementing KOMPAK, and Teskey with designing the performance framework and adaptive management practices. The authors thank Bolormaa Amgaabazar and Berk Ozler for helpful comments on an earlier draft, and the Government of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for supporting KOMPAK's adaptive approach throughout the program period. Email addresses for correspondence: maliki@bappenas.go.id, graham.teskey@abtassoc.com.au, anna.winoto@abtassoc.com.au, mwoolcock@worldbank.org

² The authors loosely identify KOMPAK as an organization in this context to illustrate its nature as "an organized group of people with a particular purpose". KOMPAK was a donor-funded program managed by Abt Associates; it was not an organization by legal definition.

1. Introduction and background

The COVID-19 pandemic continues, as it has since March 2020, to place enormous stress on governments, delivery systems, and social order around the world, especially so in countries with modest public health resources. For more than two years, the novelty, intensity and scale of the pandemic has placed existential pressure on policymakers, front-line implementers and everyday citizens, with political repercussions and severer economic consequences enduring for much longer. Perhaps the only silver lining has been the pandemic's role as a perverse "natural experiment", in which all layers and sectors of government have been subjected to an overwhelming but similar "stress test", which in turn has generated outcomes that have been, not surprisingly, highly variable – especially in low-income countries.

This paper provides a summary of the COVID-19 response undertaken in Indonesia by KOMPAK³ (*Kolaborasi Masyarakat dan Pelayanan untuk Kesejahteraan* or Governance for Growth), a program funded by the Australian government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and which aimed to support the Government of Indonesia (GoI) in improving basic services and economic opportunities, especially for poor and vulnerable people. From 2015 to 2017, KOMPAK delivered policy advice, technical assistance, pilots and analytics to support the Government of Indonesia's service delivery reforms at national and sub-national levels. With a budget of \$180 million over 7.5 years (January 2015 – June 2022), KOMPAK was one of Australia DFAT's largest development programs in Indonesia. Over the same time period as KOMPAK, Abt Associates managed programs with a similar focus in Timor Leste (Australia-Timor Leste Partnership for Human Development) and Papua New Guinea (Papua New Guinea Governance Facility).

We provide examples of how the KOMPAK program capitalized its long-term investments in systems and processes at the 'lowest levels' of the state – i.e., where sub-District and District staff engaged with villages and communities – in order to strengthen the government's COVID-19 policies and improve implementation effectiveness. Using the Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) framework (see Andrews et al 2017), we present a case study on how KOMPAK's ways of working enhanced the effectiveness of the program during the pandemic. While not universally successful, the KOMPAK experience nonetheless yields important insights and implications for governments, civil society organizations, donor programs and researchers seeking to build adaptive capacities within development programs, in order that they can better prepare for, embrace, and withstand major changes in their operating environment in the future.

Although the term (and the idea) is now wholeheartedly out of fashion in the aftermath of Iraq and Afghanistan, KOMPAK is a 'state-building' initiative at heart. KOMPAK was mandated to strengthen core systems and processes within the state to design, deliver, monitor, and learn from its public services programs – mainly health, education, and civil registration – in a decentralized context. At national level, this involved partnering with central government ministries to reform key policies related to public financial management, provision of public services, and village development. At sub-national level, KOMPAK worked in 24 districts and seven provinces to trial local-specific approaches to deliver services better, faster, and more cheaply to communities. This was done in partnership with local governments and civil society organizations.

In a country of over 17,500 islands and 75,000 villages, 'delivering development' effectively, efficiently, and equitably is a huge challenge at the best of times. Indonesia is geographically, ethnically, and culturally diverse: what works in Aceh may not work in Papua or Kalimantan; local contextual knowledge is therefore paramount. Historically, however, the state in Indonesia has been centralised, and it is only since 2000 that meaningful decentralisation policies have been enacted. President Widodo further extended decentralisation efforts in 2014, with financial allocations directly provided to each and every village (via the 'Village Law'), which in turn demanded improved levels of

³ <https://sikompak.bappenas.go.id>

financial disbursements, reporting, recording, and accounting. It also required (and continues to require) an engaged citizenry. This is a challenging governance agenda but one upon which KOMPAK was founded.

At the strategic level, KOMPAK sought to achieve longer-term ‘big changes’ in two key institutions of the state. First, to seek to *facilitate the different levels of the state to work together* more collectively. To this end, KOMPAK made available technical skills and additional resources to key stakeholders, both in upstream central ministries (Ministry of Planning [BAPPENAS], Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Villages) and downstream offices (Governors’ offices, regents, front-line service units and villages) and facilitated their collaboration on pilot and reform initiatives with a view to demonstrating the benefits of (and to incentivize) collaboration. Second, by influencing *how the state learns*: how evidence and experience is collected and analysed at the downstream sub-national level; how that learning is then fed back into upstream policy deliberations and resource allocation; and how – in an otherwise strongly decentralised system – the successes and failures in one province can be shared with other provinces thousands of kilometres away, likely with very different geographies, demographics, and sometimes languages and cultures.

Attaining these two major institutional changes would not be possible without first achieving a sequence of short-term results: ‘deliverables’ upstream (such as regulatory changes, policy shifts, process and/or system revisions) as well as downstream (such as KOMPAK achieved through its innovative work on civil registration). Furthermore, it was understood that short-term results would not be sustainable without these two major changes starting to take hold. As such, KOMPAK had one eye on each from the beginning: in order to ‘toggle’ between the two, KOMPAK set up an adaptive management system from inception, one which emphasised the importance of embedded practices of internal, rigorous, review and reflection.

COVID-19 arrives: the best laid plans...

The arrival of COVID-19 in early 2020, however, subjected KOMPAK to a stress-test far beyond anything envisaged in the original design. This paper considers how KOMPAK’s adaptive design and implementation mechanisms – an explicit feature of the program from its inception – enabled the program to adjust workplans quickly and effectively. KOMPAK was able to respond to emerging needs of the government while remaining true to its core strengths and high-level objectives. Moreover, its role and ways of working to facilitate change in government have supported a more coordinated government response to COVID-19. A mix of downstream and upstream approaches – facilitating pilot-to-policy processes, and synthesizing learning – proved to be crucial for increasing the relevance and uptake of pilots beyond what was expected under “normal” circumstances.

Nearly three years in, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to test the resilience, flexibility, and adaptive capacity of governments the world over. Health systems, social protection programs, and disaster response mechanisms have been (and in many cases remain) stretched to extremes in responding to the pandemic. Economies have plummeted, social unrest has reached breaking point. In Indonesia, the so-called “hypermart” of natural disasters, the government has named COVID-19 the first public health disaster in the history of the country, thereby distinguishing it from the natural disasters that frequently afflict the country. As of early February 2023, more than three years since the start of the pandemic in Indonesia, the country has registered over 6.7 million positive cases and 160,000 deaths⁴.

As has been the case in most countries, the government of Indonesia (GoI) has faced major challenges in mitigating the health and economic impacts of the pandemic. The immediate response was to reprioritise development plans and budgets toward the COVID-19 response. Top priorities included

⁴ The most current World Health Organization data on the incidence of COVID-19 cases and deaths across Indonesia are available at: <https://covid19.who.int/region/searo/country/id>

strengthening health system capacities for prevention and treatment of COVID-19, expanding social protection schemes, and promoting economic recovery. All parts of governments – central government ministries, local governments at province, district, and village levels – were required to revise their plans and budgets. They also had to adjust ways of working to incorporate virtual meetings and field visits, and to reduce operational costs. Donors and multilateral institutions were tasked by their capitals to re-align workplans and budgets toward addressing the pandemic. The ability of such programs to adapt in this way was (and remains) critical to maintaining relevance during the crisis.

Prior to COVID-19, KOMPAK was heading into its final two years of a 7.5-year investment, with its focus on ensuring the institutionalisation and sustainability of its successful trials and pilots. When the pandemic hit, KOMPAK's sustainability agenda was at stake. The KOMPAK team, together with its stakeholders in Gol and DFAT (the government of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), were required to respond quickly to the emerging needs and priorities of Gol regarding COVID-19, while staying true to its comparative strengths, core activities, and legal requirements.

This paper explores three key factors which enabled KOMPAK to assist the Gol in its COVID-19 response: first, its adaptive management and programming approach; second, the inherent nature and value of its governance interventions; and third, its ways of working to facilitate coherence and coordination across government. Each of these three factors was a direct result of KOMPAK's design and structuring as an 'adaptive' development program.

The remainder of this paper has four sections. Section 2 summarises KOMPAK's understanding of, and approach to, 'adaptation' – how did the program seek to operationalise what is often little more than rhetorical claims? Section 3 summarises how KOMPAK 'adapted' to the overwhelming challenges imposed by the pandemic and the moral/political imperative of responding to it in real time. Section 4 considers how the nature of KOMPAK's discrete governance interventions were able to support a wide range of Gol COVID-19 responses. Section 5 explains how KOMPAK's ways of working were able to support the adoption and diffusion of effective practices and processes within Gol, and the implications of KOMPAK's experiences more broadly. Section 6 concludes.

2. What is an 'adaptive' program, exactly?

There is little agreement in the literature or in practice as to the precise meanings attached to the terms 'responsiveness', 'flexibility', and 'adaptation'. Most of the time these terms are undefined and used inter-changeably. KOMPAK adopted the clearest interpretations to date of these terms.⁵ Here, each term had a specific meaning, and was deployed in different ways and at different speeds (Figure 1). *Responsiveness* happens at the upper part of the program logic – at the goal or impact level. Programs change in response to major policy shifts or crises, such as COVID-19. Such changes are authorised by the donor and the host. By contrast, adaptation and flexibility take place lower down the project framework, focusing on activities and outputs. *Flexibility* refers to increasing or slowing the rate of spend or the rate of implementation on existing (agreed) activities. *Adaptation* refers to amending activities, outputs and sometimes even outcomes. The key element of adaptation is that it occurs as a result of a *considered, purposive, and purposeful assessment* of project progress. Adaptation is not the result of significant high-level policy change or major contextual impact, such as a pandemic; a program can be responsive without being adaptive or flexible. Adaptation and flexibility are the central aims of adaptive management, not responsiveness.

As the following sections will show, KOMPAK's sponsors (the Gol and DFAT) demanded that KOMPAK *respond* to COVID-19, but it was able to do so because its systems enabled *flexibility* and *adaptation*.

⁵ Teskey and Tyrrel (2021); see also Rogers and Macfarlan (2020).

Figure 1: Flexibility, adaptation and responsiveness

Flexibility – Activity level	Adaptation – Activity and Output levels	Responsiveness – Outcome and Goal / Impact
The ability within the financial year to:	The ability within the financial year to:	The ability within the program period to:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>increase or decrease spending and/or the budget, on planned activities</i> ➤ <i>increase or decrease the pace of implementation on planned activities</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>amend planned Activities</i> ➤ <i>add new Activities</i> ➤ <i>drop existing Activities</i> ➤ <i>amend agreed Outputs</i> ➤ <i>add new Outputs</i> ➤ <i>drop existing Outputs</i> ➤ <i>amend milestones</i> ➤ <i>add new milestones</i> ➤ <i>amend the Theory of Action and the Theory of Change</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>amend Outcome and Goal statements in response to policy changes of the donor</i> ➤ <i>amend Outcome and Goal statements in response to policy changes of the host government</i> ➤ <i>amend Outcome and Goal statements in response to sudden and major political, economic, or social events</i>

Source: Teskey and Tyrrel (2021)

KOMPAK as an adaptive program

KOMPAK was able to switch its resources and activities toward supporting the GoI’s COVID-19 response because it had *already learned* how to be flexible and how to adapt over the previous five years. The program has a set of goals and end-of-investment outcomes, with workplans and budgets developed annually. The performance management system embraces monitoring, learning, reflection, adaptation, reporting and evaluating. The team undertakes six-monthly reviews to reflect on progress and adjust activities and outputs where needed. These processes are designed to be undertaken rigorously (initially this proved challenging for many staff: they feared their performance was being questioned). While end-of-investment outcomes are given, workplans and activities can be adjusted as the project team gains learning and as the context evolves. In fact, the structure of activities was revised three times in the lifetime of the project. DFAT and GoI held the project team accountable to deliver the end-of-investment outcomes through established program governance mechanisms, namely the Steering Committee and Technical Committee, which were co-chaired by DFAT and GoI. KOMPAK reported progress to the Steering Committee annually and the Technical Committee on a six-monthly basis with validation by independent advisors. Major changes to the workplan and activities had to be endorsed by the Committees. These mechanisms were critical to ensure that KOMPAK stayed focused on its core mandate and on track to achieve the end-of-investment outcomes.

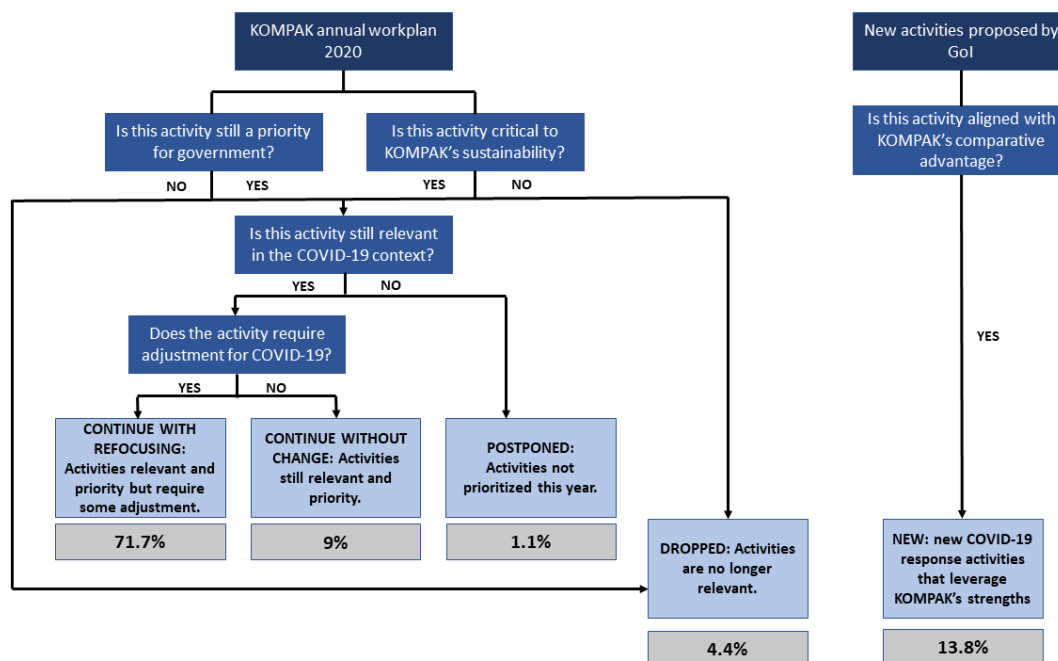
So far, so conventional. But it was a mix of KOMPAK’s working processes and its five years of staff experience that facilitated such effective adaptation. KOMPAK’s now routine and regular internal review and reflection exercises enabled the rapid recalibration of the portfolio, while delivery staff were now comfortable with peers interrogating ‘their’ programs. KOMPAK’s design encouraged this: core interventions were derived to address common issues; they are adjusted and trialled in very different locations in the country; and learning and results are synthesised to inform national-level policies. This was how KOMPAK was set up; COVID-19 was merely its biggest test to date. As an effective COVID-19 response became the top priority for the whole of government, KOMPAK was able to use its established practice of reflection quickly to adapt its workplan. KOMPAK activities had to be re-prioritised; in so doing, some became less relevant and could be deferred or dropped. Crucially, KOMPAK was able to maintain its acquired trust and confidence from both GoI and DFAT to build on its existing investments, rather than morph into an emergency program.

Initially, KOMPAK adjusted at the Activity-level. The team revisited planned 2020 Activities against three criteria: relevance; priority; and alignment with KOMPAK’s focus areas. Activities were assessed

against these criteria and judgments reached: whether to continue with no change, continue with revision, postpone, or drop. A further question was also asked: Does KOMPAK need to introduce new activities? As a result of this exercise, over 71% of activities were able to continue with some revision, while 9% could continue without change. Most KOMPAK's activities remained relevant and a priority in the COVID-19 environment, but their focus shifted to address the urgent and important challenges that government was facing. Only 4% of activities were dropped, and 1% postponed. New activities amounted to 13% of the revised portfolio. The result of this rapidly conducted but detailed assessment was that 80% of activities could continue with some revision or no change at all. Figure 1 outlines the decision tree that led to KOMPAK's COVID-adjusted workplan for 2020.

KOMPAK's less 'conventional' monitoring, evaluation and learning framework was also important for the recalibration. The higher-level results framework captures the wide spectrum of 'big changes' that KOMPAK seeks, namely policy changes at national and provincial level, durable changes at the district level, and successful models that have been piloted with KOMPAK's support. A lower-level framework details 'immediate results', including specific targets and indicators for each activity. For the recalibration, no major adjustments were needed at the higher-level. Specific targets were tweaked to reflect the switch to COVID-19. For example, public financial management related targets to improve quality of local budget allocations for health and education were revised to improve timeliness of budget revisions to accommodate COVID-19 response activities.

Figure 1. Decision tree for revising KOMPAK's workplan to respond to COVID-19



Crucially, KOMPAK's primary stakeholders – GoI and Australia DFAT – fully supported the process. The GoI looked to KOMPAK for quick ideas and solutions to their pressing problems in responding to COVID-19. Given the reallocation of budgets to COVID-19, they also needed additional resources. Meanwhile, as a long-time development partner to GoI, DFAT wanted to ensure that its development assistance contributed and added value to the Government's pandemic response. Both sets of stakeholders urged KOMPAK to reprioritise plans and budgets toward COVID-19 but remain within the scope and expertise of KOMPAK. It was important for both stakeholders to promote complementarity among donors and donor programs. At the national level, Steering and Technical Committee meetings

were held to align the two stakeholders' guidance on the proposed recalibration of the program. At the local level, KOMPAK facilitated consultations with the GoI-led Regional Technical Teams, which comprised the main government technical agencies involved in KOMPAK at provincial and district level. Having program governance structures at both national and local levels enabled KOMPAK to respond to local-specific needs, while maintaining coherence and accountability in delivering the overall objectives of the program.

Table 1. KOMPAK flagships and priority COVID-19 objectives

Flagship	Pre-COVID focus	COVID-19 Priority
Public financial management	Support district governments to improve budget allocations for health, education and civil registry services	Support district governments to revise their budgets (APBD) to respond to COVID-19
Civil registration and vital statistics	Improve coverage of CRVS services and quality of population data	Strengthen the role and capacity of village CRVS facilitators to support data collection for vulnerable people affected by COVID-19
Kecamatan and village strengthening	Strengthen capacities of sub-district and village stakeholders to improve basic services and quality of village development	Strengthen the role and capacity of subdistrict and village stakeholders to revise and use their budgets (APBDes) for handling COVID-19
Village information systems	Strengthen the use of village data and village information systems to improve planning and budgeting, targeting and delivery of services, and transparency of village development	Improve the collection and use of data on vulnerable groups in village information systems to enable more targeted COVID-19 response activities
Social accountability	Develop mechanisms for communities to hold village governments accountable for delivering effective village development activities and services	Improve community awareness of COVID-19 and oversight from village councils and communities on budget plans and implementation of response activities
Market linkages	Pilot an approach for brokering partnerships among micro, small enterprises, private sector, local and village governments to improve their productivity	Strengthen the role of village-owned enterprises (BUMDES) to support economic resilience at the village level
Cross-cutting	Provide cross-cutting support related to research and analytics, Gender and Social Inclusion, and innovations	Explore digital solutions to measure and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic Ensure people with disabilities, women and vulnerable groups receive adequate services as part of the COVID-19 response

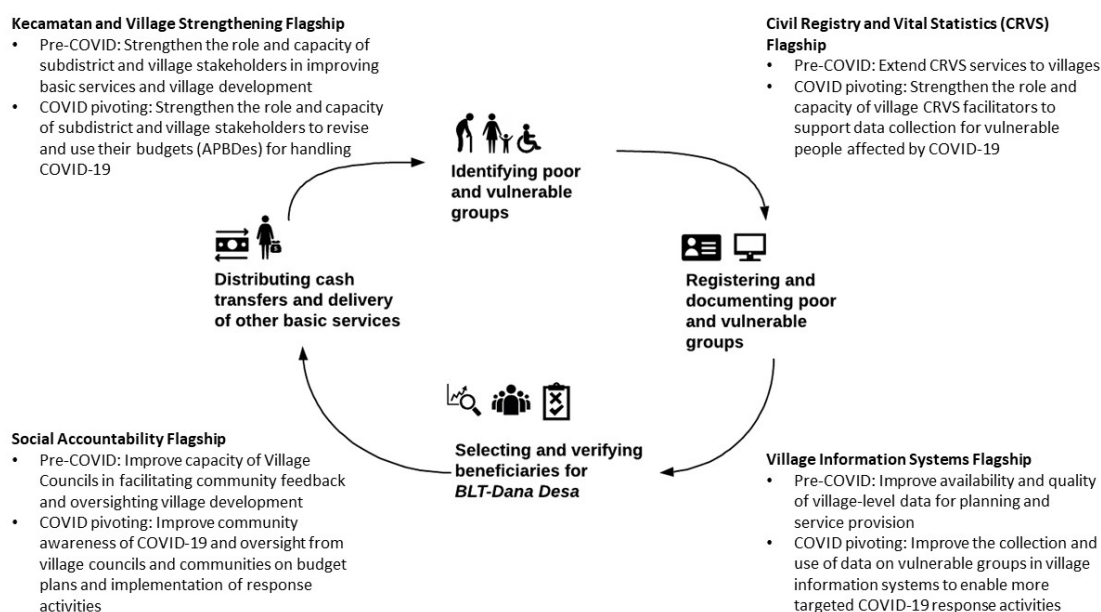
The workplan was reframed around seven key issues facing the GoI, and which could be solved by KOMPAK's interventions. The original 2020 workplan comprised six programs: Public Financial Management, Civil Registry and Vital Statistics, Sub-district and Village Strengthening, Village Information Systems, Social Accountability, and Market Linkages. KOMPAK revised the goals and objectives of these programs to address the seven key GoI issues. For example, the Social Accountability program was redesigned to focus more specifically on strengthening community oversight of the villages' COVID-19 response activities and budgets. The activity outputs, timeline, and resourcing were also adjusted accordingly. In the revised 2020 workplan, adaptation was made at both the Activity- and Output-levels. These adaptations were made on the basis not only of the

immediate need to respond to the crisis, but on what KOMPAK had learned regarding program effectiveness. Table 1 summarises how KOMPAK adapted its programs. Figure 2 illustrates the recalibration of KOMPAK activities to support the GoI-distributed ‘Village Funds’ cash transfers to households most affected by the pandemic.

As a final step, KOMPAK revised its program logframes to reflect the changes in Outputs and Outcomes. Given workplan revisions and limited means for data collection under COVID remote working conditions, it was necessary to adjust performance and monitoring frameworks. Simple indicators were defined to measure specific Outputs, as well as their scale and reach. Outcome indicators were defined to assess the extent to which desired changes were achieved.

KOMPAK was thus able to revise its investment portfolio to meet immediate and urgent COVID-19 needs. There was no need to change KOMPAK’s goal: “to help the poor and vulnerable benefit from improved delivery of basic services and economic opportunities”. KOMPAK was designed to achieve this by supporting initiatives to improve the capabilities of sub-national government – at the national, provincial, district, sub-district and village levels – to manage and deliver basic public services. It was activity level that required the fundamental re-prioritisation. KOMPAK’s original design, and its acquired experience, enabled it to adapt immediately. Adaptation occurred across the full spectrum of Activities, Outputs and Outcomes/Goals.

Figure 2. Recalibrating KOMPAK activities to support Village Funds cash transfers



The unprecedented scale and nature of the COVID-19 pandemic called for extensive adaptation among all development actors and sectors in every country. Aside from health, one of the public services sectors most impacted worldwide has been social protection. Often referred to as the “shock absorber” of government machinery, social protection systems experienced enormous stress in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on populations. During the first two years of the pandemic,

countries worldwide invested over \$3 trillion on social protection and labor interventions to dampen the impact of the pandemic (Gentilini et al 2022⁶).

Adaptation took different forms. A common objective was to expand coverage and the adequacy of social assistance through existing mechanisms and resources. Of these, cash transfers have been the most popular intervention (ILO 2020). Many governments, including Indonesia, initiated new cash transfer programs to help populations cope with the immediate effects of income and job losses; they also increased funds to existing social assistance schemes, such as pensions and unemployment benefits. Beyond increasing coverage and benefits, countries also took on significant innovations and modifications in delivery mechanisms. These include simplified administrative requirements, online registration, and intensifying electronic and digital payment systems. In this sense, KOMPAK in Indonesia was one case among many.

Global experience thus far highlights that having a well-functioning and universal social protection system already in place enhanced a country's ability to respond to the pandemic effectively (ILO 2020); for example, countries with an existing social registry could roll out cash transfers more quickly (Gentilini et al 2022). A recent review of social protection crisis responses in low- and middle-income countries identified the primary enablers and constraints as the extent to which: (1) pre-crisis social protection, including coverage, infrastructure, and enabling infrastructure could be rapidly configured; (2) programme design adjustments could be accommodated, particularly to expand the reach of routine programs to underserved and excluded populations; (3) programme implementation adjustments could be made to address specific operational constraints imposed by the pandemic; and (4) financing approaches and mechanisms could be enacted to accelerate the availability of existing resources and the mobilization of additional ones (Batagli and Lowe 2021). In the following sections, we explore the distinctive ways in which KOMPAK addressed these issues and identify the key factors that made this possible.

3. KOMPAK's governance activities: Enhancing strategic platforms for Gol's COVID-19 response

KOMPAK's 'governance' interventions proved appropriate for strengthening the government's COVID-19 response. Prior to the pandemic, KOMPAK had been investing in activities to help government deliver services and resources to communities more effectively, quickly, and cheaply. Much of KOMPAK's work had been designed to address four challenges specifically related to the governance and implementation of basic services:

- How can local governments use fiscal transfers more effectively to improve basic services?
- How can local governments provide effective guidance and support to villages?
- How can communities influence village plans and resource allocations?
- How can communities, villages and local governments use data to better inform targeting of government programs and resources?

KOMPAK sought solutions by introducing tweaks and improvements to the core systems, functions, and business processes of government, especially at the district, sub-district, and village levels. Although KOMPAK's interventions focus on basic services and local economic development as primary objectives, staff were aware that they could be adapted to solve other development issues, including COVID-19 pandemic response and mitigation.

⁶ Gentilini et al (2022) is a comprehensive compilation by the World Bank of real-time efforts by countries to adjust social protection systems in the face of challenges imposed by Covid, as documented by hundreds of social protection specialists from around the world. At over 900 pages, the document provides a summary of some of the "3,856 social protection and labor measures [that] were planned or implemented by 223 economies" (p. 5) as of January 2022.

In responding to the pandemic, the Gol faced virtually the same questions as the four listed above. Fiscal transfers and budgets had to be re-prioritised to mitigate COVID-19 and its impacts. Villages needed guidance in revising their plans and budgets. Communities needed credible data and viable means to ensure that COVID-19 programs and resources were targeted to those in greatest need. KOMPAK's models and best practices experience generated practical solutions for both government and communities.

One example of this was the capacity building 'model' KOMPAK had pioneered for delivering technical support to villages, to enable them to better plan, allocate, and use limited resources in response to community needs. The model brings together qualified sub-district officers (*Pembina Teknis Pemerintahan Desa, PTPD*) who provide trainings and technical assistance to village governments. Independent learning modules (*Pembelajaran Mandiri Aparatur Desa, PbMAD*) are also made available for village governments. The model serves as a coaching and learning platform helping villages address a range of issues, including the roles and authority of village government, planning, budgeting and reporting the use of village funds, and village-level services. KOMPAK and the Ministry of Home Affairs initiated this pilot in 2015 following the enactment of the Village Law, which significantly elevated the resources and responsibilities of 75,000 villages across the country. The model has now been adopted by 109 sub-districts (42 in KOMPAK locations and 67 in other 'non-KOMPAK' sub-districts) and is being scaled nationally through a partnership between the Gol and the World Bank.

This coaching and learning platform became particularly useful during the pandemic as villages were receiving multiple policy instructions from central government, some of which were contradictory. Village officials were confused about how to reallocate their budgets for addressing COVID-19, which activities to prioritise, how to engage communities under social distancing restrictions, and how to administer the new cash transfer program for households that are impacted by COVID-19. Where KOMPAK's village capacity building model had been piloted, coaching capacities and mechanisms were already in place for sub-district officers to provide information and guidance to villages and, conversely, for village officials to seek resources and help. In West Nusa Tenggara, KOMPAK drew on the PTPD platform to collate the main issues causing difficulties and confusion for villagers. Based on these 'frequently asked questions', KOMPAK – together with the Ministry of Development Planning, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Ministry of Villages – developed guidebooks on issues related to village-level responses to COVID-19. These were then disseminated nationally.⁷

4. KOMPAK's ways of working

Since inception, KOMPAK has used pilots and associated evidence to influence larger-scale change. Piloting is a key instrument in KOMPAK's technical assistance to government. KOMPAK designs pilots to trial solutions to common problems that hamper delivery and quality of basic services. Working at both national and sub-national levels, KOMPAK proved itself able to tailor pilots to the local context, while drawing evidence and lessons that could be adapted in national policies. To do this effectively, KOMPAK developed specific and particular 'ways of working' that reflect some of the main principles of the Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) approach⁸, namely:

- *Local solutions to local problems.* KOMPAK has piloted different approaches to address critical barriers related to public financial management, service delivery systems, and community

⁷ These changes were enacted within four months after the onset of pandemic in Indonesia in early March 2020 (or three months after the issuance of the Village Funds cash transfer policy in early April 2020). The FAQs were drafted and disseminated in late April; thereafter the established coaching platforms were used to respond to village and local government officials' queries. The official guidelines were issued in July 2020.

⁸ Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock (2017). These authors published their first formal articulation of PDIA in 2013 (which explains why KOMPAK's adoption of PDIA from 2015 predates the book-length version).

engagement across 24 districts in seven provinces. The design of the pilots starts with analysing the local situation to define systemic barriers. Potential solutions are defined as core components of the pilot. Components are then further refined based on the specific context and issues. Thus, pilots take different forms across the country.

- *Promoting problem-driven ‘positive deviance’ (i.e., instances of especially noteworthy success).* KOMPAK facilitates the change process by diagnosing problems in collaboration with government counterparts, whether at national or sub-national level. This builds urgency and ownership of the problem and ensures that counterparts lead the change or reform process. Engagement is a core competency in KOMPAK’s technical team, as they are called upon to create the ‘change space’ that is needed. When positive deviance emerges, KOMPAK helps convey and promote such examples to higher authorities to assist with legitimation and institutionalisation.
- *Try, learn, iterate and adapt.* Most of the issues on which KOMPAK focuses relate to core government performance and functionality. KOMPAK seeks to introduce ‘tweaks’ to these, but space for multiple iterations within the government system is limited. Often it takes one full government budget cycle to introduce changes in the system. Nonetheless, for some small-scale activities, KOMPAK has been able to facilitate iterative learning processes, in which multiple stakeholders conduct joint research and problem analysis, design multiple prototypes to test, trial them, and make continuous improvements.
- *Scale through diffusion.* KOMPAK strives to take pilots to scale in order to demonstrate their contribution to larger-scale reforms in government. This is partly done through formal mechanisms to showcase good practices and provide opportunities to learn from them, such as knowledge sharing events and cross-learning between provinces and districts. KOMPAK facilitates policy dialogue among government ministries and between national and local governments, thus helping the GoI enhance coherence and coordination.

PDIA practices established by KOMPAK also helped expand diffusion of ‘best practices’ on Village Information Systems. Generating updated and accurate population data at the village level has been a longstanding concern since the start of KOMPAK in 2015. Since 2015, all 75,000 villages in Indonesia have received a direct annual transfer (The Village Fund averages 800 million rupiah or 80,000 US dollars per year per village) for improving infrastructure, basic services such as health and education, and economic development. However, without accurate population data, villages are not able to effectively allocate these funds to meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Health facility and school managers cannot adequately target them in their plans, budgets, and services; social protection and assistance cannot effectively reach targeted groups.

KOMPAK therefore designed a pilot on ‘Village Information Systems’ (VIS) to make basic data available at the village level for planning, budgeting, and services provision. The pilot was initiated in 14 districts in four provinces. Although each pilot location has a different context and starting point, KOMPAK defined common objectives and principles for the pilot. KOMPAK’s VIS work focused on village governments utilizing data to: support administration and civil registration services; provide data for evidence-based planning and budgeting; develop reports to subdistrict and districts; and verify poverty data (*Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial* or DTKS). It was important to emphasize desired functions rather than a prescribed ‘one-size-fits-all’ IT system for all 75,000 villages.

By 2021, KOMPAK’s VIS pilot had covered 339 villages across 23 districts in 7 provinces. The VIS took on different forms and strengths in different locations. For example, in Papua and Papua Barat, where basic data is lacking, the VIS model featured a prominent role for youth cadres who were mobilised and trained to conduct house-to-house data collection. In Lombok Timur district in West Nusa Tenggara, the local government used the civil registry data system to generate core data for the VIS. In Bondowoso district in East Java, the pilot demonstrated a workable mechanism for using the VIS to update the poverty database, otherwise known as the Integrated Social Welfare Database (*Data*

Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial, or DTKS). This enables villages to identify eligible households who have been previously missed by the system and register them to receive support.

The accuracy of population data became pressing during the pandemic. As the government rolled out new programs and social assistance schemes to mitigate the impact of the pandemic, they grappled with major data gaps in trying to identify individuals and households who have been most affected and those who were most in need of assistance. The national poverty database was outdated, and the pandemic affected not only poor households. The government needed to identify the households that had recently suffered from job losses or were experiencing other vulnerabilities related to COVID-19. Not being able to do so threatened the effectiveness of the program, as well as the credibility of the government’s pandemic response.

In this context, KOMPAK’s VIS pilot became even more relevant. The Ministry of Development Planning (BAPPENAS), the Ministry of Villages, and local governments all looked to KOMPAK for practical solutions regarding how villages and communities could update poverty data to inform targeting of government programs and schemes. In April 2020, the government launched direct cash transfers from the Village Funds (called *Bantuan Langsung Tunai Dana Desa*, or BLT-DD) for households affected by COVID-19. This program was to provide IDR 300,000 (USD \$27) per month to households who were not receiving social assistance from the government pre-COVID. The Gol’s major task was quickly to generate an up-to-date list of beneficiaries and one which fulfilled eligibility criteria and was endorsed by communities. Maintaining transparency was critical to minimize social unrest. This needed to be done across all 75,000 villages in the country.

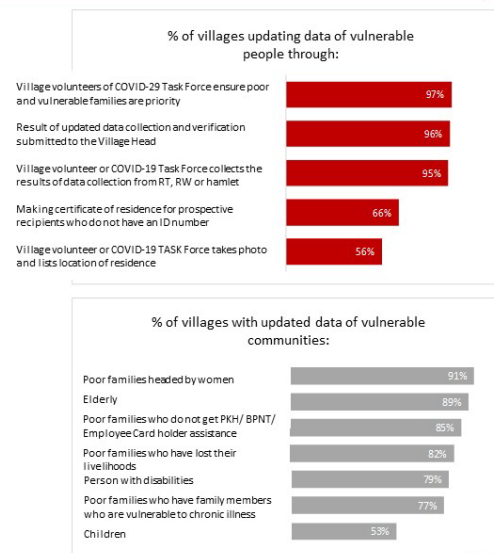
Figure 3. Results from recalibrating KOMPAK’s Village Information Systems flagship to channel social assistance and other support to vulnerable groups

Using villages to update data on vulnerable groups

72% of villages report using the integrated database on social welfare (DTKS) database to update data on vulnerable groups

32% of villages updated data using the application ‘Village Against COVID-19’ (issued by Ministry of Villages)

44% of villages updated data using other applications (such as the SAIK application in Papua)



KOMPAK’s pilot yielded valuable lessons learned and identified instances of positive deviance regarding how VIS could respond to these data issues. Based on the different models across regions, KOMPAK identified appropriate business process for village governments to update and validate the

poverty list using their own village information system.⁹ With a functioning VIS, village and local governments could more easily collect and update data on eligible beneficiaries of social assistance schemes. This included people already enrolled in social assistance programs, people living in poverty or who had recently lost their jobs, female-headed households, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. KOMPAK advocated for beneficiary lists to be verified by the Village Task Force and endorsed by village consultative assemblies (*Musyawarah Desa*). KOMPAK also identified the enabling factors and authorising environment needed for VIS to function at-scale – meaning all villages in a given district. To this end, KOMPAK worked with BAPPENAS and the Ministry of Villages to collate lessons learned into national guidelines and accompanying FAQ to guide local governments and villagers regarding how to collect and manage data for the Village Funds cash transfer program. These guidelines and FAQ are the direct result of KOMPAK’s learning from the design and implementation of its Village Information Systems pilot.

In essence, the urgency and political salience of ‘getting the data right’ gave impetus to more rapid diffusion of KOMPAK’s best practices on Village Information Systems. Prior to COVID-19, local government leaders were the ‘problem owner’ on figuring out ways to reconcile the village and local data with the national poverty database. The ownership of the problem shifted to national government stakeholders when the problem became a hindrance to implementing a massive cash transfer program in response to COVID-19. BAPPENAS became the problem owner and solver, championing wider adoption of VIS and advocating a greater role for villages in improving the data, targeting and effectiveness of national programs such as the Village Law (BLT-DD). As the government agency entrusted to put into effect the ‘One Data’ policy, BAPPENAS had the legitimacy to expand the ‘change space’ and lead the reform together with the Ministry of Villages, which has overall responsibility for implementation of the Village Funds cash transfers program.

Together with BAPPENAS and the Ministry of Villages, KOMPAK hosted knowledge sharing events to share best practices on VIS with other provinces and districts outside of KOMPAK locations, which are trying to tackle similar data challenges. KOMPAK facilitated policy coordination among key government agencies – namely BAPPENAS, Ministry of Villages, Ministry of Home Affairs, and Ministry of Finance – in order to support coherence in the messaging from national to sub-national governments. KOMPAK was able to play this role on account of the trust and networks it had built over the past few years with these ministries and local governments in 24 districts across seven provinces. These established networks, relationships, and coordination mechanisms (both vertical and horizontal) proved essential in consolidating COVID-19 response policies and actions by different parts of government. In addition, the mode of virtual workshops during the pandemic enabled wider knowledge exchange and diffusion because virtual platforms enabled more extensive participation and eliminated the confines of space, cost, and travel.

As part of the government’s social reform agenda, BAPPENAS is now leading a new initiative to develop a national Socio-Economic Registry (*Registrasi Sosial Ekonomi* or *Regsosek*) that adopts and builds on KOMPAK’s VIS pilot. The policy promotes linkage among VIS, the poverty database, and the civil registration system to improve the accuracy and efficiency of social protection programs. Through the *Regsosek* initiative, the iteration and adaptation cycle of KOMPAK’s VIS work continues but now on a larger scale, with government leading the reform and KOMPAK shifting to a mentoring role, supporting the government with technical assistance, analytics, and documentation.

⁹ The primary measure justifying this approach was the extent to which the VIS was utilized by the local government: if they were already using VIS to update their poverty data routinely (pre-COVID), we considered these particular VIS models to be positive deviant. In addition, we also checked whether the local government had already put in place institutional arrangements (i.e., enabling regulations, funding, and human resources) to safeguard and support VIS implementation. Doing so, we reasoned, goes beyond utilization and reflects strong leadership and commitment of the local government to scale up VISs.

5. Implications and lessons learned, for Indonesia and beyond

The ability of a development program or agency to thrive in a drastically changed operating environment is strongly influenced by pre-existing adaptive capacities. In the case of KOMPAK, when COVID-19 hit Indonesia, the program had already been applying adaptive approaches for over five years. The program had fixed goals at the end-of-program outcome and goal level but enabled adjustments at activity and output levels through annual work planning and six-monthly review and reflection exercises. The program team readily deployed these practices to revisit the 2020 workplan in light of the shifting priorities of the Indonesian government and to leverage KOMPAK's activities and resources to support the government's COVID-19 mitigation strategies. KOMPAK applied *flexibility* in slowing down implementation of its planned activities, so that KOMPAK's support could be better utilized by government to address the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Amid the flexibility and adaptation, it was equally important for KOMPAK to remain focused on its comparative strengths and end-of-investment outcomes. The program governance committees at national and regional levels provided GoI and DFAT with the means to facilitate and authorize change quickly, while still holding the KOMPAK team accountable for delivering its longer-term, higher level, objectives. All seven program activities in KOMPAK's portfolio were refocused on COVID-19 priority policies of the government, such as reallocation of fiscal transfers, village-level prevention and mitigation, and data collection to identify the most vulnerable and impacted households. KOMPAK's experience highlights that embedded practice of reflection and adaptation along with well-functioning program governance mechanisms are critical to ensuring timely, whole-of-program pivoting.

As a governance-focused program, KOMPAK's ongoing work lent viable platforms and solutions for the government's pressing problems in mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic. The program had built platforms within government to channel technical assistance and capacity development to local governments, including villages, for trialling new approaches. These platforms served as entry points for local governments to resolve issues in managing their COVID-19 response, such as conflicting regulations. In the KOMPAK locations, local governments could utilize the coaching and learning platform (called PTPD) that had been trialled together with KOMPAK to provide guidance and support to villages and communities in developing village-level plans and budgets to respond to COVID-19. Moreover, the learning and experience from the pilots provided the government and communities with practical solutions to address pressing challenges, such as how to collect accurate data on eligible beneficiaries for COVID-19 social assistance. Although the pandemic itself was (and remains) a novel experience, the government faced "classic" governance issues, such as efficient resource planning and streamlining data systems, for which KOMPAK had already been trialling some solutions. Moreover, the learned practice of piloting, which involves tailoring to different contexts and iterative tweaks and improvements, also enhanced KOMPAK's agility in changing its workplan and activities in response to the urgent imperatives of COVID-19.

Applying the PDIA principles can help programs to build adaptive capacities for the long run and to leverage opportunities that surface during emergency situations, such as the pandemic. Having piloted Village Information Systems in different local contexts, KOMPAK was able to identify positive deviances from KOMPAK-supported regions and advocate them to national government ministries as proven solutions to overcome major data gaps for the COVID-19 response. Moreover, the pandemic situation elevated the urgency and political salience of getting the data right and, hence, gave impetus to more rapid diffusion of KOMPAK's best practices on Village Information Systems. The national government, particularly BAPPENAS, took ownership of both the problem and the solution. Iteration and adaptation of the Village Information System model is now continuing on a larger scale (as noted above) through a new, national-scale, government-led initiative called Socio-Economic Registry (*Registrasi Sosial Ekonomi*). Critical to this process is KOMPAK playing its role as facilitator to introduce changes in government policies, systems, and procedures, and leverage trust and networks to expand the change space for greater impact. Harnessing its downstream and upstream

approaches, facilitating pilot-to-policy processes, and synthesizing learning, KOMPAK was able to maintain and even enhance its value-add during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In hindsight, a valuable learning for KOMPAK has been the importance of a sound knowledge management system as an integral part of PDIA in practice. To promote diffusion of good practices, a knowledge management system is needed that collates all evidence and materials on pilot results and best practices, from which program teams could readily draw. At the start of the pandemic, KOMPAK was just starting to develop its knowledge management system. Hence, it took some time to pull together (written) documentation on positive deviances across the regions, though the program team has the tacit knowledge and dispersed information. The urgency from Government for quick evidence and solutions gave KOMPAK the impetus to accelerate its knowledge management system.

The experience of KOMPAK, including during COVID-19, also shed some light on challenges and limitations of an adaptive programming approach. For example, throughout its lifetime, KOMPAK constantly faced challenges in “telling the story”, because the program went through numerous iterations to consolidate activities and respond to changes in the operating environment. While tailoring the program’s activities to diverse contexts across 24 districts and seven provinces was a strategic approach, synthesizing the narrative of progress and results – What does all this add up to? – was a hugely complicated task. After four years of implementation, the program had to undergo a major revamp of its performance and MEL (monitoring, evaluation, learning) framework. A more streamlined framework was derived with a common set of aspirational targets at the higher level and immediate results at the lower level. These lower-level results could be tweaked, as in the case of COVID-19 pivoting. The important lesson learned here is that an adaptive program must be supported with a clear and simple results framework and a strong communications strategy to convey a coherent results story.

Being adaptive also carries significant risk that the program becomes stretched too thinly and diverted from its core objectives. Working as it was with four different ministries at national level, 24 district governments, and seven provincial governments, the KOMPAK team was often caught in a conundrum of competing interests between government institutions. Moreover, KOMPAK’s label as a ‘facility’ spurred expectations among government counterparts that they could draw down whatever support they needed from KOMPAK. This was especially challenging at the start of KOMPAK, whereby the team had to juggle varying demands from its stakeholders while also under pressure to demonstrate early results. Indeed, the program was stretched too thinly, and it took more than two years for KOMPAK to take shape. It is worth mentioning that KOMPAK itself was a pilot to test out the design-and-build approach to bilateral development programs. In retrospect, developing a simpler results framework (as mentioned above) earlier on in the program would have certainly helped to tighten the scope and focus. More importantly, though, it is critical to leverage the political nous and brokering skills of the team, so they can navigate the different stakeholder interests and continuously calibrate them toward the program’s objectives. Implementing an adaptive approach requires strong skills set in sensing, facilitating, and strategizing, as well as resilience and perseverance. These competencies should be sought and prioritized in recruiting for adaptive programs.

6. Conclusion

We have presented a case study from Indonesia documenting how a 7.5 year commitment by two national governments (Indonesia and Australia) and a private agency (Abt Associates) to implement a large local-level development initiative (KOMPAK) using adaptive management principles laid the foundation, in “normal” times, for a subsequent response to a national public health crisis (the COVID-19 pandemic) that was robust and effective. The positive outcome from these efforts thus far is a product of several contingent – and potentially idiosyncratic – factors, but, even so, it is clear that such approaches to implementation, and to building capability for engaging with increasingly complex

and consequential policy challenges, *can* succeed. Note that this is not the same as claiming that they do, universally, “work”¹⁰; they are not pills, but people-centred strategies for preparing for and responding to problems that require flexible, context-specific, locally legitimate solutions. In addition to pre-existing adaptive practices, KOMPAK’s ability to pivot to COVID-19 benefitted greatly from a trusting and effective partnership between the government of Indonesia and Australia’s DFAT, these entities being the main stakeholders and authorizers of any changes to the program. Trust and alignment among stakeholders are critical enablers of adaptive programming; by extension, development programs wherein the priorities and day-to-day practices of donor and host government are not well aligned, especially in relation to strategic objectives and overall direction, may have to invest considerably more time and effort to consolidate and sustain stakeholder agreement when faced with an unprecedented challenge. This Indonesian case is thus of importance not only for Indonesia itself, but for others elsewhere facing similar challenges, and for those seeking to “practice what they preach” when calling for more adaptive approaches to designing and implementing development initiatives.

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¹⁰ See Woolcock (2019) for a related discussion on assessing the impact of ‘participatory’ development programs, wherein the key evaluation question for program managers should be *when* do such programs work in particular, rather than whether they work in general, on average.