SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

On Think Tanks

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

On Think Tanks

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning of policy influence

9 and 10 February 2022

Dena Lomofsky and Stephen Yeo

dena@southernhemisphere.co.za
jsyeo@outlook.com

Session 2 - Thursday

- Welcome and introduction *(10 minutes)*
- Participants' experiences with MEL-I *(brainstorming, 5 minutes)*
- MEL for policy influence (MEL-I) *(presentation, 20 minutes)*
- Planning for MEL-I *(presentation, 15 minutes)*
- Break *(5 minutes)*
- Constructing an MEL matrix for the case study *(group work, 30 minutes)*
- Feedback on group work *(plenary, 15 minutes)*
- Where do I go next? *(presentation and Q&A, 10 minutes)*
- Close *(5 minutes)*

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

Resources

- **Selected references** (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning References 2022). Shortlist of recommended reading is highlighted.
- **Slides from Session 1** (OTT_School_slides_MEL - Session 1 only –Final)
- **Case study** (OTTschool-MEL casestudy-2022)

These are all posted in the Slack channel and will be available on the School website

- **Slides from Session 2** will be posted later today

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

MEL for Influence (MEL-I)

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

Why is the monitoring and evaluation of policy influence so difficult?

- no politician wants to admit to influence
- causation, how can we prove that it was US – because politics is a complex process (attribution vs causation vs contribution)
- we work in coalitions, so how do we identify our contribution to the broader group
- Because its not numeric or quantitative
- Several actor advocating for the same thing, how much credit can we take?
- Some of the factors you would want to measure are beyond your control. That creates a challenge how do you collect information on your contribution where you don't have the full picture of why things changed.
- The policy influence is volatile. It depends of the context... the momentum.
- Behind the scene influence most effective but a luxury since not measurable
- in more qualitative
- part of your influence comes from being discrete but evidencing your influence comes from the opposite – so you don’t break relationships.

MEL for Policy Influence (MEL-I)

- Why is MEL-I difficult?
  - Impact or influence is difficult to define and multidimensional
  - Most policy changes involve multiple actors and multiple factors
  - Lags between influencing activities and their impact are long & unpredictable
  - Evidence is hard to obtain
- But funders want evidence of impact …

What do we mean by influence?

- “Bring about a change in a specific policy, regulation or practice”
- This is what most people think of as “policy influence”
- Here is one scheme for tracking impact defined in this way
  - You can clearly see the Results Chain underlying this scheme

A Four Level Scheme for Measuring Policy Impact

Level 1 **- 'ideas created/mobilised'.** This is where the think tank produced work analysing a policy question, but it has not yet fed through to senior government officials or other policy stakeholders, often because it is at an initial stage.

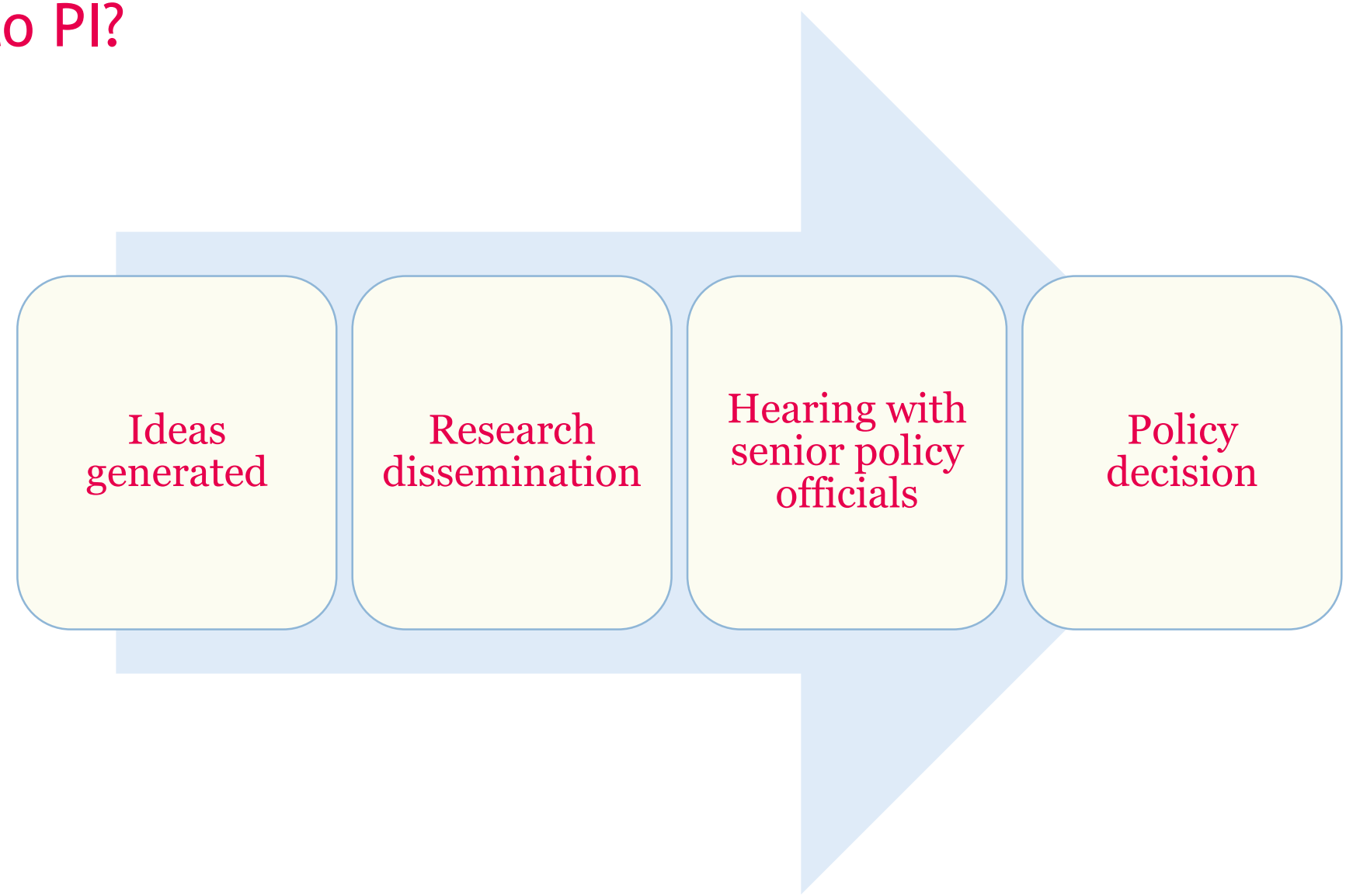
Level 2 **- 'disseminated to government'.** These are outputs that have been formally conveyed to the requesting minister or permanent secretary (or other senior policy stakeholder) but not yet discussed in depth.

Level 3 **- hearing with senior/influential policy-makers,** with evidence* that recommendations were internalized and/or that exchanged ideas have influenced policy discussions.

Level 4 **- policy decision** taken that is demonstrably and substantially informed, caused or influenced by the think tank.

* Evidence will include, for instance, follow-up meetings, email exchanges, requests for materials to disseminate amongst colleagues, requests for follow-up discussions/projects, meeting minutes detailing internalisation of IGC work which are then sent to policymakers etc.

Typical results chain – but does Policy Influence typically happen in this linear fashion? Are there other dimensions to PI?



SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

Policy Influence has more than one dimension

- Influence is not just about changes in specific policies
- There are other aspects of influence that may be more important in the long run
  - "Expand policy capacities"
  - "Broaden policy horizons"
  - "Affect decision regimes“
- This classification is taken from Carden (2009). Chapters 1-3 of this book (which can be downloaded) should be required reading for every ThinkTanker

Expand policy capacities

“Research can strengthen the institutional framework supporting policymaking by enhancing the policy community’s own collective ability to assess and communicate innovative ideas, and by cultivating new talents for analyzing and applying incoming research advice.”

Broaden policy horizons

“Policy is often frustrated by a scarcity of choices. Research can improve the intellectual framework surrounding policymaking by introducing new ideas to the policy agenda, by ensuring that information comes to policymakers in a form and language they can quickly grasp and use, and by fostering helpful dialogue between researchers and decision makers.”

Affect decision regimes

“The quality of a policy can be determined as much by the procedures of deliberation and decision as by its content. Research findings can improve the policy-process framework by helping to open and rationalize the procedures of legislating, administering, and evaluating government policies and programmes. Skills and attitudes characteristic of good research—not least, a spirit of curiosity and fact-based argument—can improve the operations of government”

Evaluating these aspects is challenging

- They take even longer to occur
- Attributing these changes to a specific think tank or research project is even more difficult than tracing the impact on a specific policy
- So their influence on M&E practice has been limited to date

OK, so it's all very difficult, but how do you actually evaluate *policy influencing*?

- No consensus in the evaluation community
  - Still the subject of debate and research
- There is no "magic bullet" nor is there ever likely to be one
  - You cannot run experiments to test the influence of a think tank
  - You cannot expect politicians and civil servants to admit (or even remember) who or what influenced their decisions

OK … but funders want evidence of impact, so what should you do?

- Don't spend too much time worrying about this
- Let the external evaluators do the worrying, but in the meantime
  - Think about what approaches the evaluators might use
  - Set up a monitoring system and start collecting the data they might need – right now!
  - The sooner you start collecting information, the more likely it is to be accurate and useful

Reference: Lucas (2017)

Narratives

- In the end, you will have to tell stories about influence.
- The more convincing they are, the better
- How can you make your stories convincing?
  - Base them on your “Theory of Change”
  - Use one of the mainstream evaluation approaches
  - Have the evidence to back up your claims – focus on monitoring

Some “Mainstream” Approaches

- Outcome Mapping and Outcome Harvesting
- Rapid Outcome Assessment and Episode studies
- Contribution Analysis and Process Tracing (not quite mainstream yet)
- “Realist” evaluation (challenging)

How do you get the right evidence, at the right time?

Set up an MEL plan or matrix

but how? Start with your objectives …

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

Typical policy objectives (outcomes)

Build a policy community

Increased media awareness of an issue

Great awareness of the issue in the general public

Issue is more salient in the policy agenda

Greater capacity to do research on G20

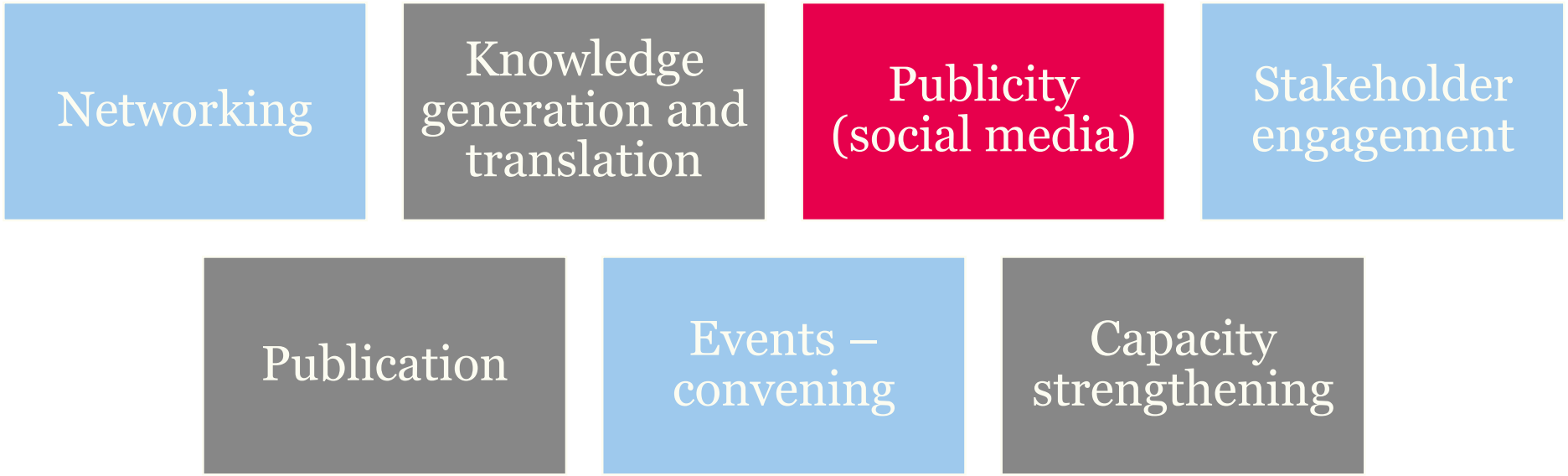
Enhanced understanding of the policy issue

Stronger network advocating for a policy issue

Laws and policies are passed in support of an issue

G20 becomes more favourable to African concerns

Typical policy influence strategies (outputs, activities)



SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

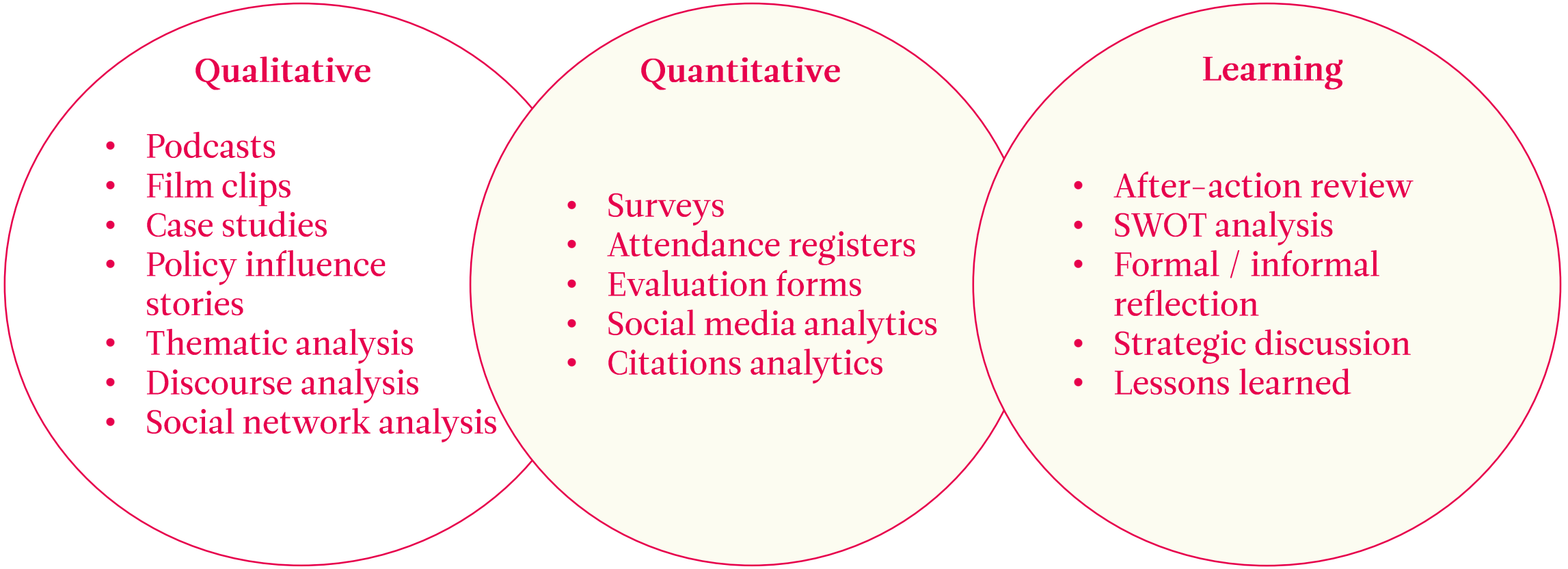
What methods or data sources do you have to measure or describe these kinds of objectives?

- Social media references
- Page views, downloads and reports
- Google analytics, views, visits
- Citations
- Media references
- Tracking meetings

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

What you can not measure, you can describe!

You most likely have many of these already in your day to day work?



SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

Learn: what is working? what can we do better?

Outputs / indicators

Evaluation Focus	What can be evaluated?	Aspects to evaluate	Indicators (examples)	Examples of tools
Outputs	Papers or research reports	Quality, clarity, relevance, usefulness	Quotes in legislative sessions, feedback from external evaluators, inquiries from public officials.	External Committee of Evaluation
	Policy Briefs or public policy documents	Clarity of identified problem, suitability of proposed solution, relevance and opportunity for public policy	Quote or use in a program or law, public official inquiries, organized or called meetings to discuss the problem in depth.	Interviews to targeted public officials
	Blogs/web sites	Website browsability, quality of content, feedback from relevant actors	Number and profile of visitors, number of downloaded documents	User interviews
	Publications	Quality, clarity, relevance, usefulness	Invitations to present publications, quotes in public documents, inquiries from public officials	Analysis of quotes, reader surveys
	Seminars/events	Level of assisance, quality of the debate, profile of external presenters	Number and profile of assistants and presenters	Participant and presenter surveys, after action reviews
	Press clippings	Projected image of institution/ research, correlation between plan and actual publication	Number and type of published articles, profile of publisher	Media clippings

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

Source: Pasanen, T. and Shaxson, L., 2014. *How to design a monitoring and evaluation framework for a policy research project*. ODI Working Paper

Example of a simple MEL matrix

Objectives: Outcomes & outputs	Indicator	Data source	When -= frequency of data collection	Who is responsible	How will this information be used
Policy community around G20 in Africa is strengthened and sustainable	# of African Think tanks starting research streams on G20	Survey with participating think tanks	Annual	Program officer	To see if the program is effective in building a policy community on G20 in Africa
OUTPUT: 4 Publications on G20 by African think tanks by end of 2015	# of publications	Publications register	Monthly	Publications officer	To see if the program is on target with its publications objectives, and to take corrective action if necessary

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

Break 5 mins

SCHOOL for
THINKTANKERS

Instructions for group work

Complete the MEL Matrix in the google slides

Select one objective from your case study.

Start with that one objective, and work along the row to identify indicators, data sources, frequency, person responsible and use of data

If you have more time to complete another row, you can move on with another objective

Roles: Note taker, time keeper, and reporter

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

Goal/ Longer term outcome

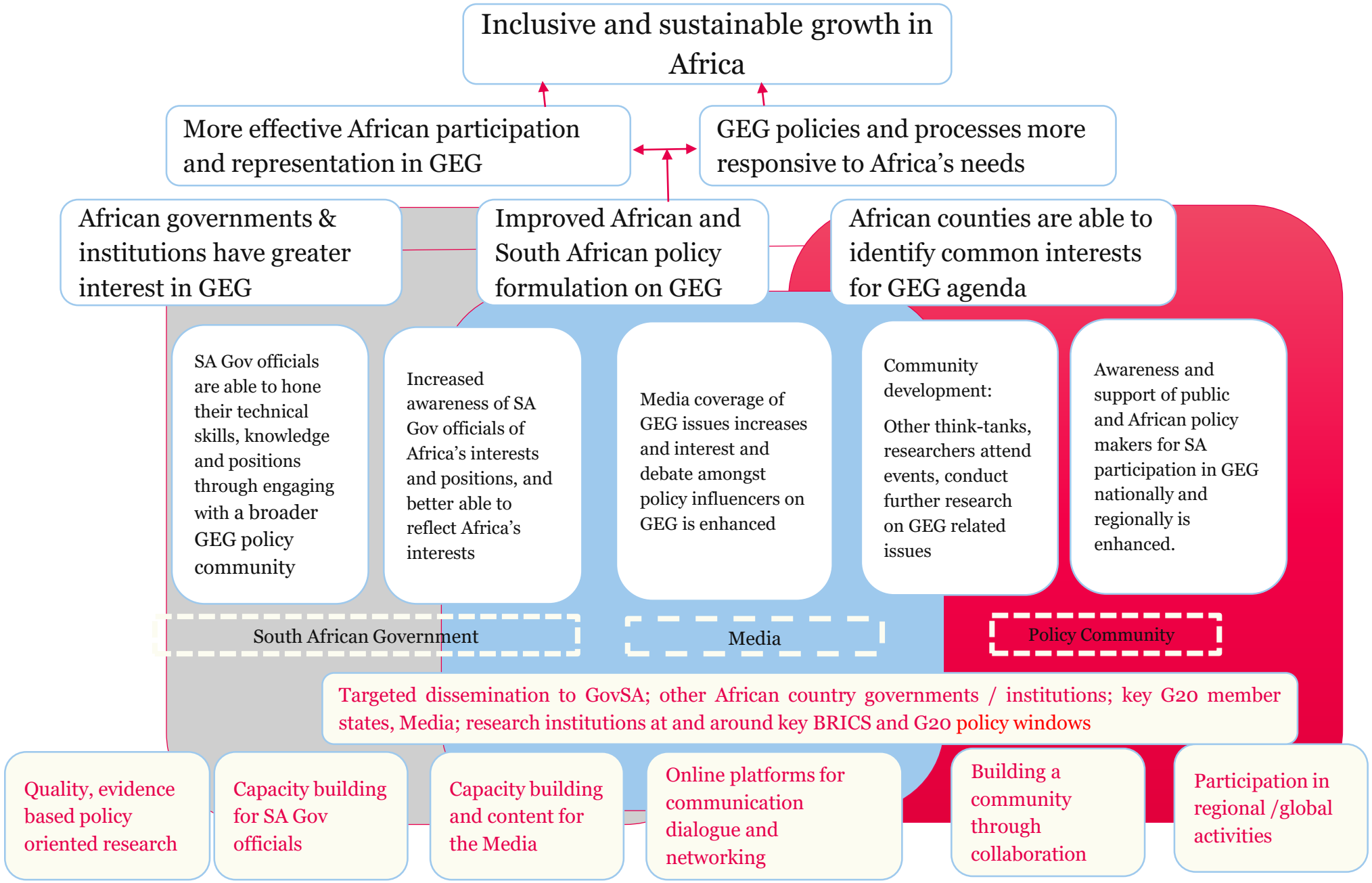
Intermediate outcomes

Immediate outcomes

Interventions

Policy influence strategies or outputs and activities.

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS



Feedback on group work

Each group has 3 minutes to feed back on their MEL matrix

How it might benefit your organisation to have an MEL matrix?

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

Where do I go next?

- If your main concern is with understanding how to monitor, evaluate and improve your management and operations:
  - Download / purchase a copy of Struyk's 2015 book and work your way through his detailed examples, in particular his indicators in Chapter 12. Details on the book can be found in the references list
- If your main concern is with understanding how to monitor, evaluate and improve your policy influencing or advocacy:
  - Download a copy of Carden's book and read at least Chapter 1, then read the paper the 2013 paper by Stachowiak on "Pathways for Change: 10 Theories to Inform Advocacy and Policy Change Efforts" listed in the references.
- If you understand all of the above and just want to get on with it:
  - read the 2014 ODI paper by Pasanen and Shaxson listed in the references

Final words

If you have to choose one key take-away from the two sessions, what is it?

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS

SCHOOL for THINKTANKERS
www.ott.school