



Putting complexity into practice: Tools for complexity-aware monitoring, evaluation, and learning

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By the workshop end, participants will be able to:

- Describe common complexity-aware M&E approaches and select one based on fit for purpose.
- Determine appropriate methods for data collection and resource implications.
- Undertake small, practical steps for incorporating complexity-aware MEL into SBC programs at the project, organizational, and institutional/donor levels.

TODAY'S AGENDA

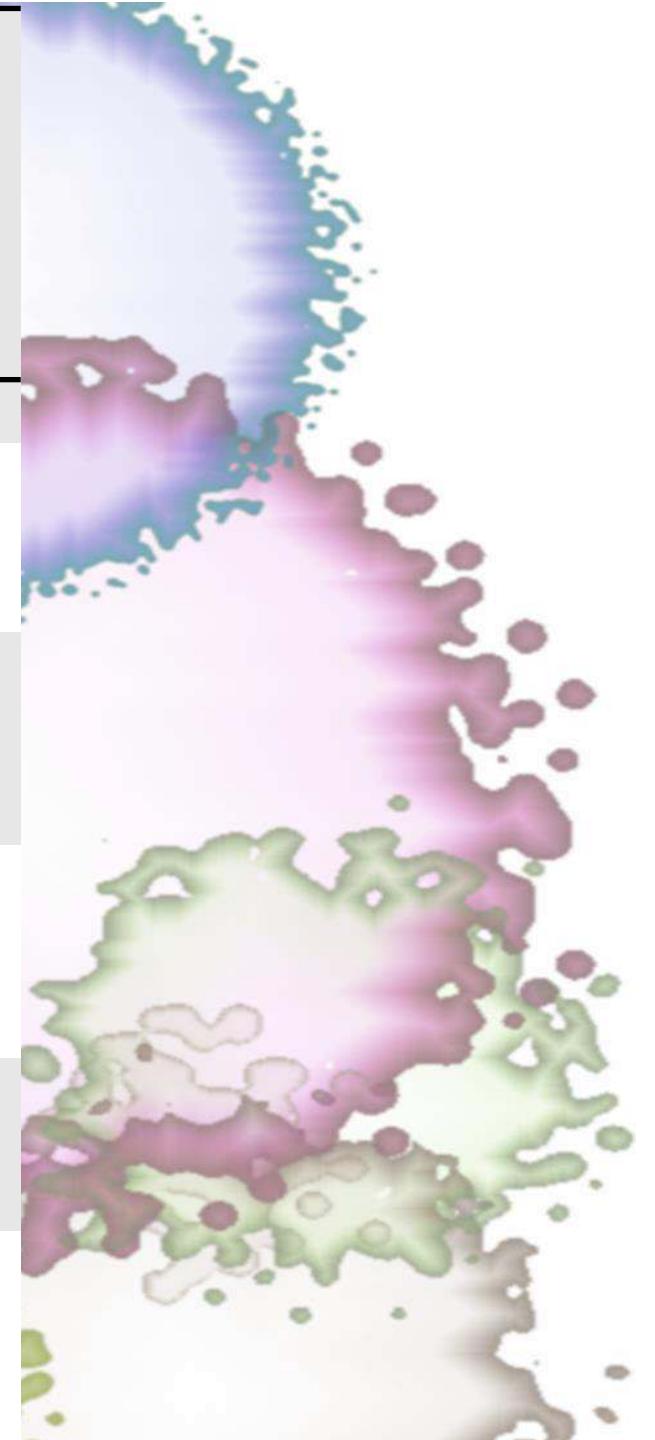
12:30-12:50 Welcome, introductions, systems thinking in motion exercise

12:50-1:10 Interactive presentation:
Current Concepts and Trends in Complexity aware MEL

1:10-2:30
including 15m
break Small group case study: Let's 'complexify' the Mathare Health Project's
MEL system

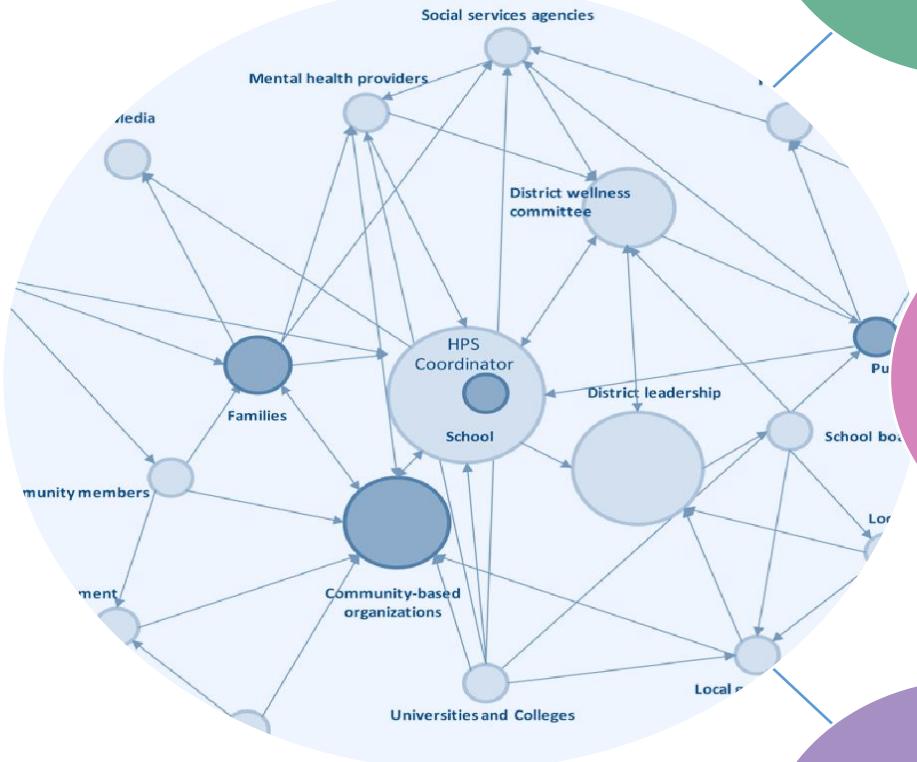
2:30-3:10 Group presentations and discussion + reflections on applications to
participant-supported projects

3:10-3:30 min Closing thoughts, key takeaways, post-conference commitments





Some Core Concepts



Systems

- Interconnected and interdependent elements
- Feedback processes shape how change happens within a system
- Emergence often unpredictable – from the interaction of the parts.

Change

- Systems move & change over time
- Change in relationships is frequently nonlinear
- Chaos describes the seemingly random behaviors seen
- Small differences in the initial system can lead to massive differences later.

Agency

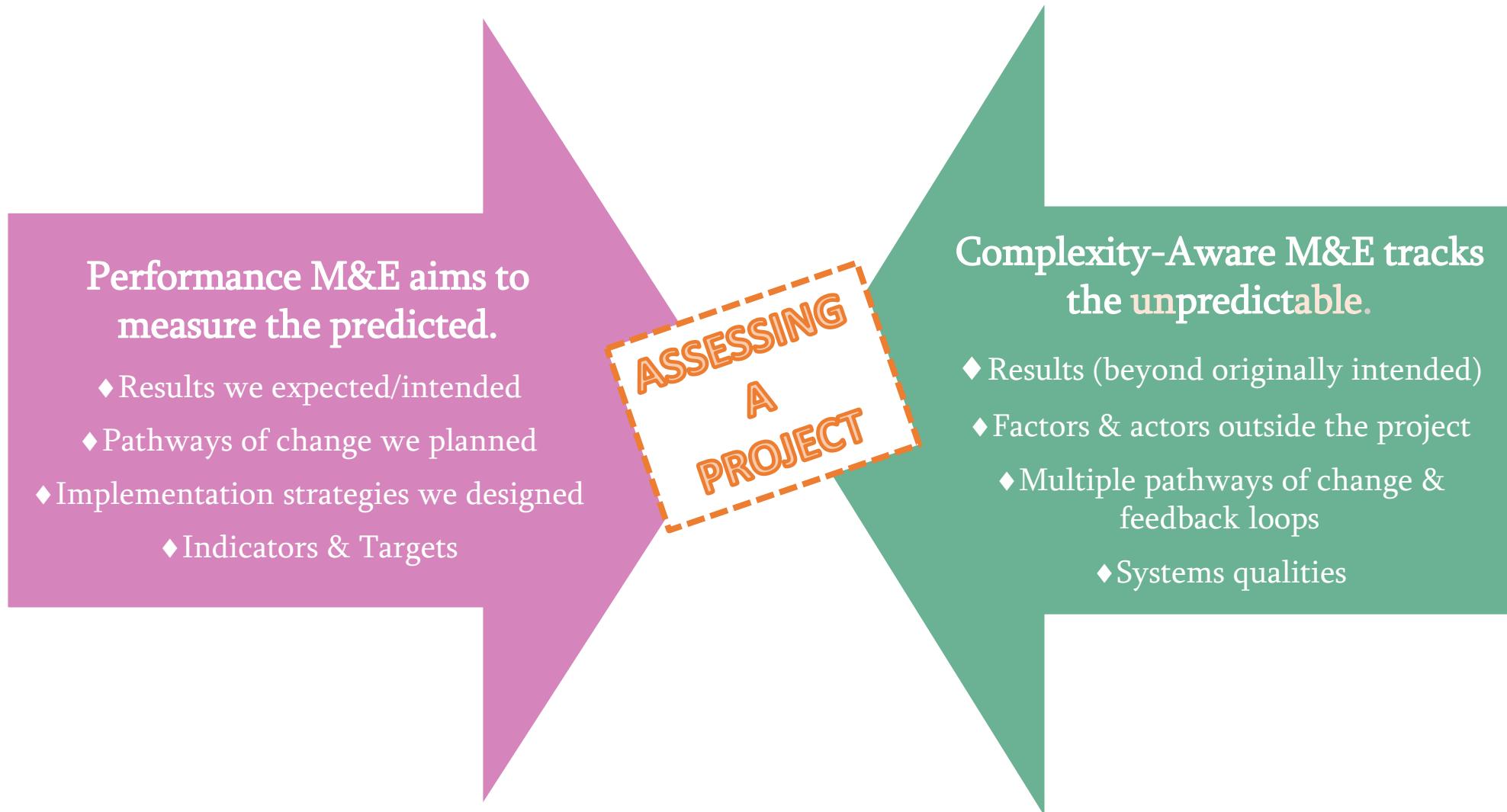
- Agents react/adapt to the system and each other
- Agents' can self-organize - an emergent property in systems
- Co-evolution can occur within the overall system.

MEL Implications for SBC Projects

- Attend to performance monitoring and evaluation's **3 blind spots**
 - What is the broader range of SBC and other outcomes that occurred, beyond those expected by the project?
 - What are alternative causes to explain the success/lack of success of social and behavior change?
 - What is the fuller range of pathways that lead to project outcomes?
- Monitoring and evaluation moments can help you be aware of the **pace of change**
- Consider **relationships, perspectives, and boundaries**
 - Who and what are the structures, processes, and connections linking actors and factors within a system?
 - What different perspectives exist in actors within the system?
 - What is in and what is outside the system?

Adapted from USAID slide deck, Complexity-Aware Monitoring

Bringing Complexity into Project MEL Systems: What it does and does not do



Complexity affects most SBC interventions through...

Contextual complexity

- The environment *and* project implementation process shape outcomes of an intervention.

Temporal complexity

- Interventions evolve over time
- Program environments shift in response to new constraints, opportunities and priorities.
- In response, a target population and implementers' understandings and behaviors also change

Interpretive complexity

- Interventions are social activities; practitioners should acknowledge that every stakeholder has a unique perspective, and understands the intervention partially and differently.

SBC Complexity Indicators Matrix (SCIM) – Illustrative Indicator Areas

	Contextual	Temporal	Interpretive
Formative assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Novelty and complexity of project approach in its context ▪ Social and political context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stability of implementation context ▪ Shifts in target behavior prior to intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community consensus around target behavior(s) ▪ Alignment with perceived social norms
Monitoring & process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interaction and reinforcement among project activities ▪ Knowability, accessibility, and certainty of implementation context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Responsiveness to changes in context ▪ Stability of implementation context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adaptive capacity ▪ Managerial responsiveness to diverse perspectives
Outcome evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knowability, accessibility, and certainty of implementation context ▪ Political economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sustainability of target behaviors ▪ Continuation of adaptive management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alignment with perceived social norms ▪ Continued managerial responsiveness to diverse perspectives

**Pause-and-Reflect
Moments (Staff,
Stakeholders)**

**Stakeholder
Feedback via
FGDs & KIIs**

**Environmental
Scanning**

**Contribution
Analysis**

**Ripple Effect
Mapping**

**Most Significant
Change**

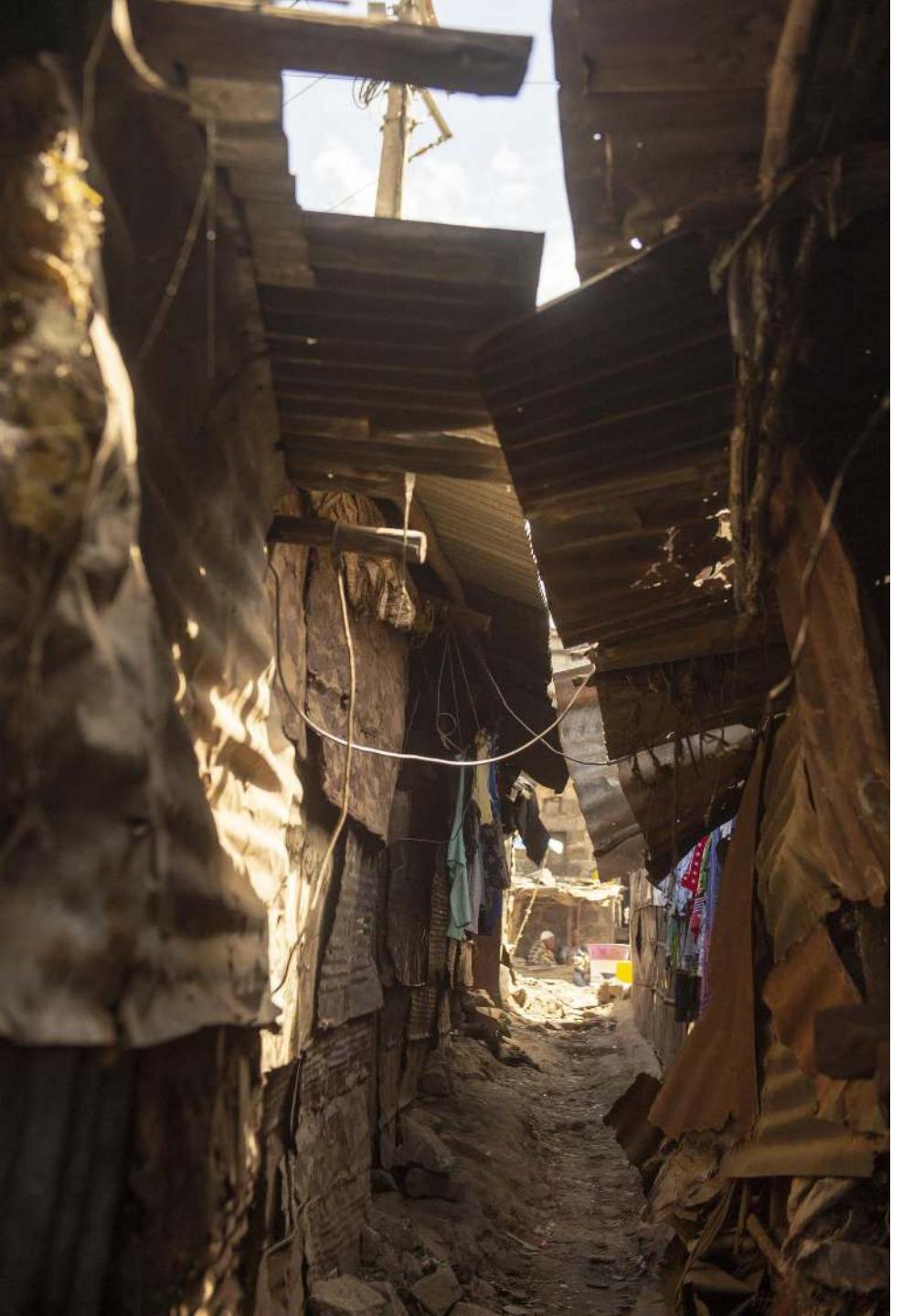
**Outcome
Mapping**

**Social Network
Analysis**

**Sentinel
Indicator
Monitoring**

Complexity-aware methods

- Give insights into broader outcomes and change pathways than those defined by a project
- Assess change over time
- Help understand the relationships of actors and factors inside and outside a project that influence implementation and outcomes
- Often used as part of a broader mixed-method MEL approach.



SMALL GROUP CASE STUDY

ADDING COMPLEXITY-AWARE MEL

Piloting and Adapting the Care Group Model to Work in an Informal Urban Settlement – Mathare, Nairobi

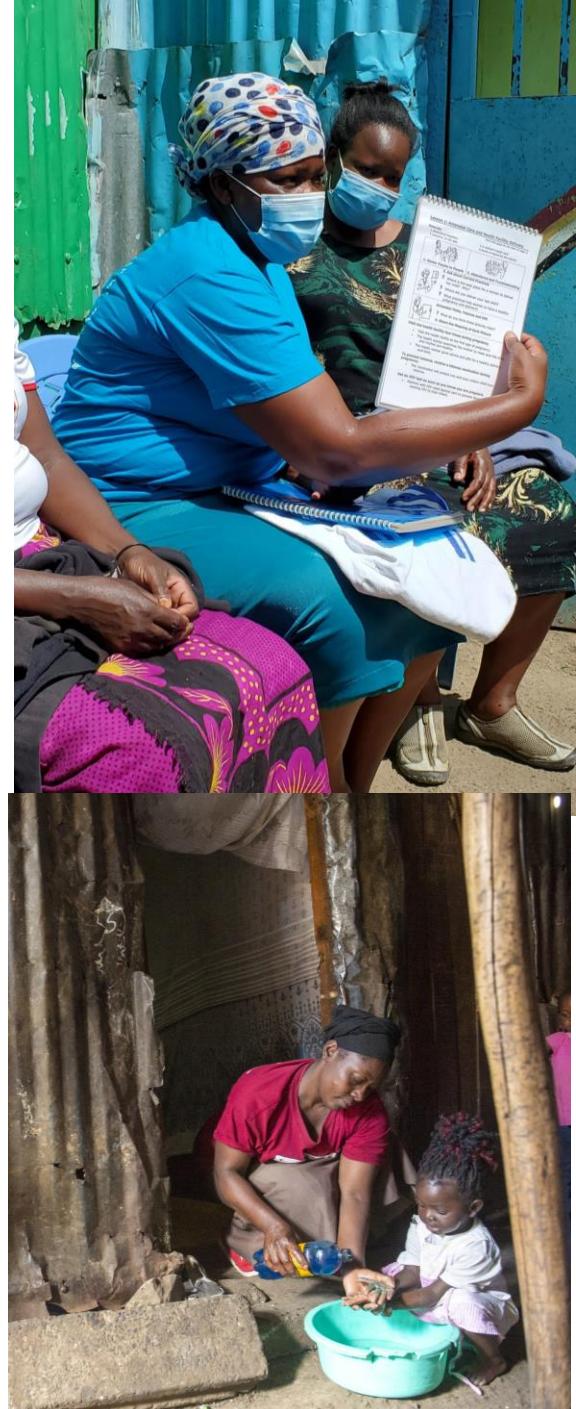
CONTEXT | One of the largest slum communities. Semi-transitory, often insecure neighborhoods. Little trust in neighbors or services. Basic public infrastructure and health services unable to serve the needs of households.

PROJECT AIM | Adapt and pilot a Care Group Model that addresses the unique challenges of working in a slum environment. To improve MNHC knowledge, home-based-care, and services use of Moms and their Children.

PROJECT BEING ADAPTED | Main activities: Clinic and health-post-based services and supportive home visits | Operated by the Center for Peacebuilding and Nationhood's MCH Care Group Project supported by the Mennonite Central Committee in Mathare

ITERATIVE APPROACH TO ADAPT & PILOT MODEL

- **Feasibility assessment and initial design.** CARE Group model needs to work with community realities and infrastructure | Selection of three pilot villages with poorest MCNH indicators.
- **Small project with limited staff dedicated to the pilot.** Project coordinator-nutritionist | 2 project officer-nurse/nutritionists | Existing CHVs known and trusted by the community.
- **Timeline.** Over two years | Initial round of Care Groups in one pilot village | Mid-point assessment of its reach, effectiveness, etc. led to adaptations | Then scale up to remaining two villages (and more villages after).
- **MEL approach.** Use existing outreach activity monitoring system. Assess effectiveness of pilot with a baseline/endline household survey.



MEL APPROACH

Existing monitoring system tracks SBC outreach to women and children (number of outreach activities, participation, thematic areas discussed).

To assess the pilot – adapting and adding Care Groups - the project conducted a household survey with control to assess changes in individual and home behaviors and services-use

Planned Outcome Indicators

% of participant pregnant and lactating women who achieve a minimum dietary diversity

% of participant pregnant and lactating women receiving recommended daily micronutrient supplements

% of children 0–6 months exclusively breastfed

% of participant children 6–24 months who are receiving all 3 ICFY recommended feeding practices

% of participant women with live birth who received at least 4 antenatal care visits prior to delivery from a skilled health professional

% of participant children who received at least 4 postnatal care visits from a trained health professional

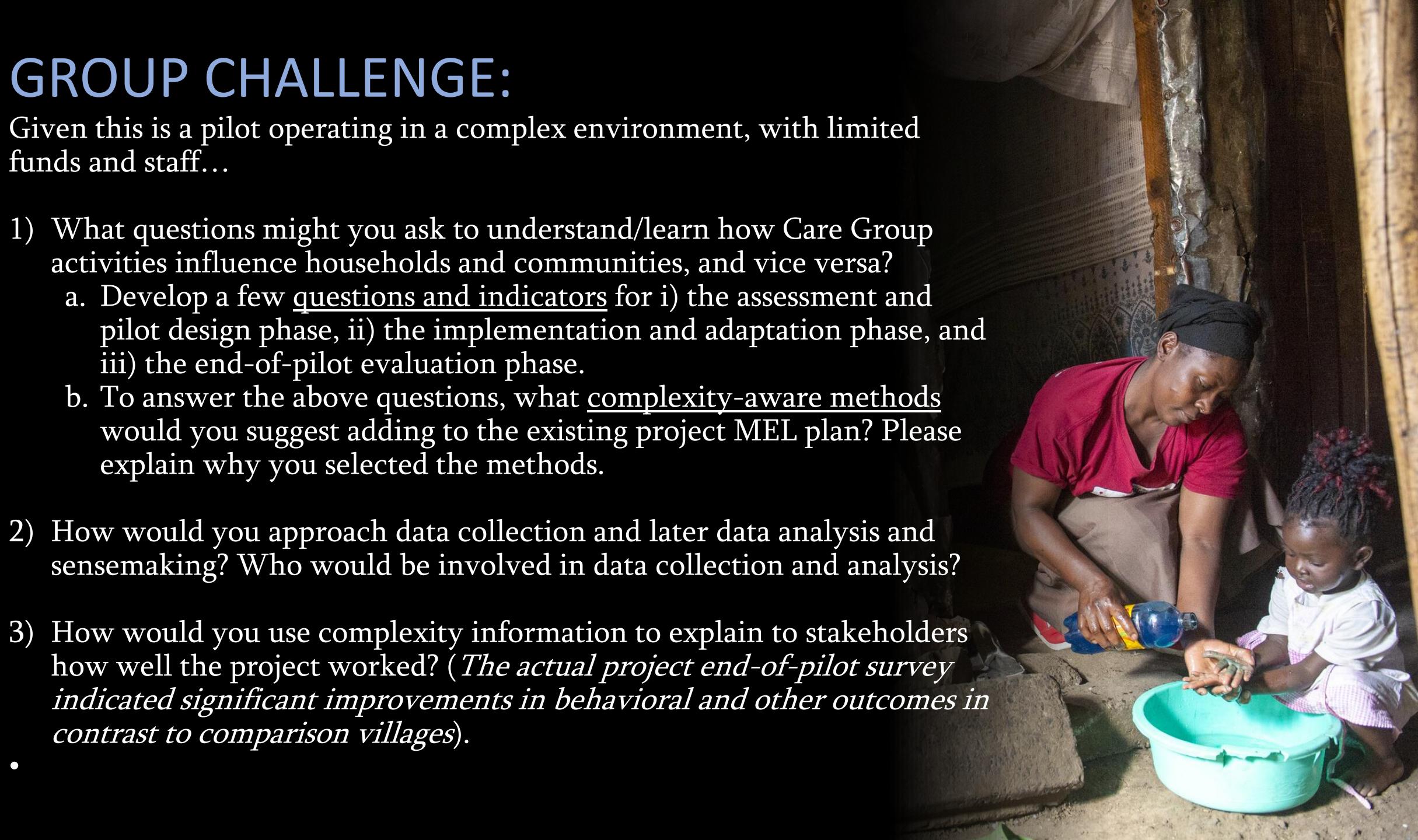
% of households practicing good hygiene with a hand washing station in the house

% of participant households that have access to improved sanitation

GROUP CHALLENGE:

Given this is a pilot operating in a complex environment, with limited funds and staff...

- 1) What questions might you ask to understand/learn how Care Group activities influence households and communities, and vice versa?
 - a. Develop a few questions and indicators for i) the assessment and pilot design phase, ii) the implementation and adaptation phase, and iii) the end-of-pilot evaluation phase.
 - b. To answer the above questions, what complexity-aware methods would you suggest adding to the existing project MEL plan? Please explain why you selected the methods.
- 2) How would you approach data collection and later data analysis and sensemaking? Who would be involved in data collection and analysis?
- 3) How would you use complexity information to explain to stakeholders how well the project worked? (*The actual project end-of-pilot survey indicated significant improvements in behavioral and other outcomes in contrast to comparison villages*).
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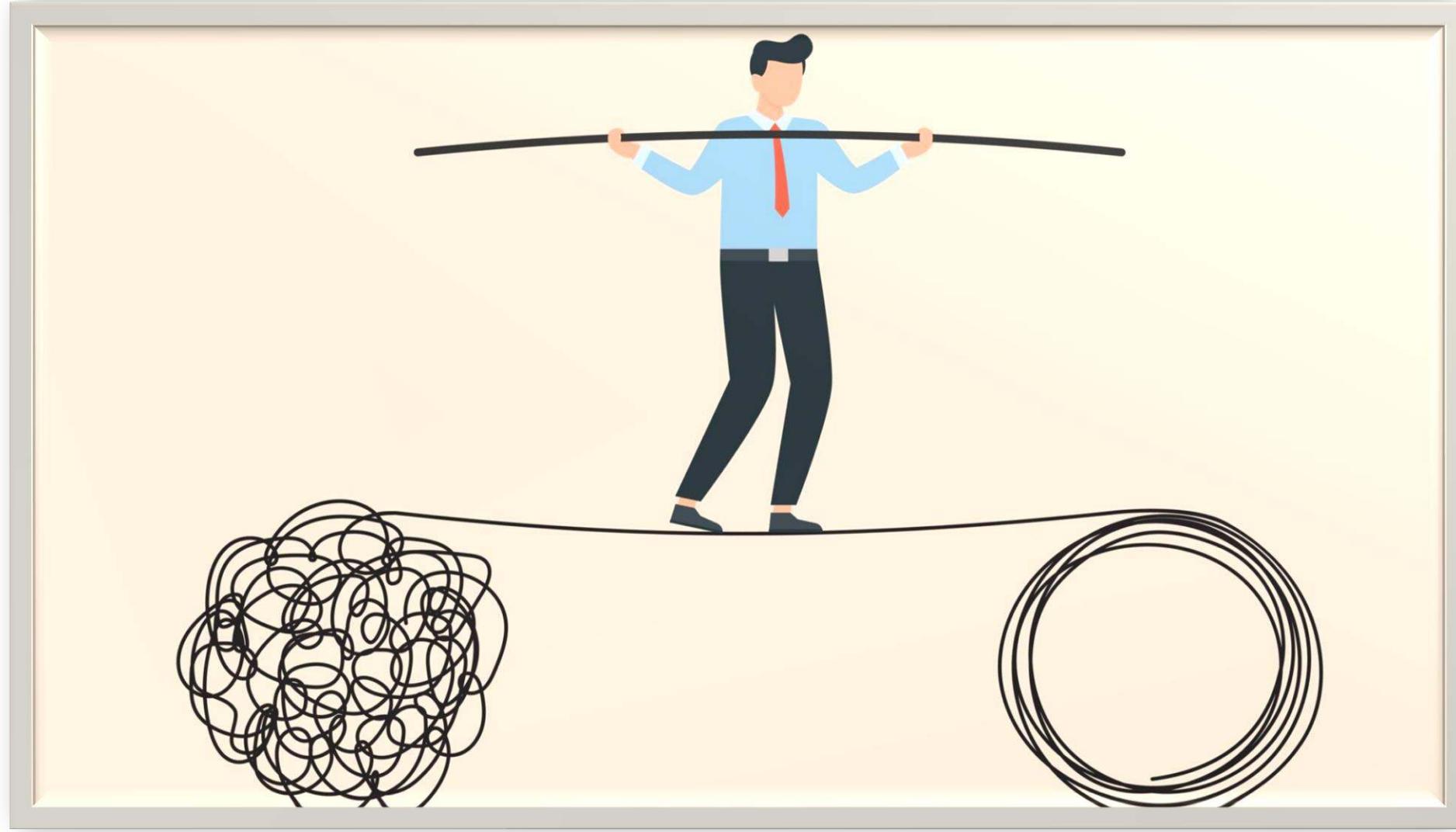
Group share and discussion

Closing | What are your take-aways?

1. Benefits: Why incorporate complexity-aware methods?
2. Application: Deciding who, what, when, and how?
3. Anticipated challenges?
4. Commitment going forward!

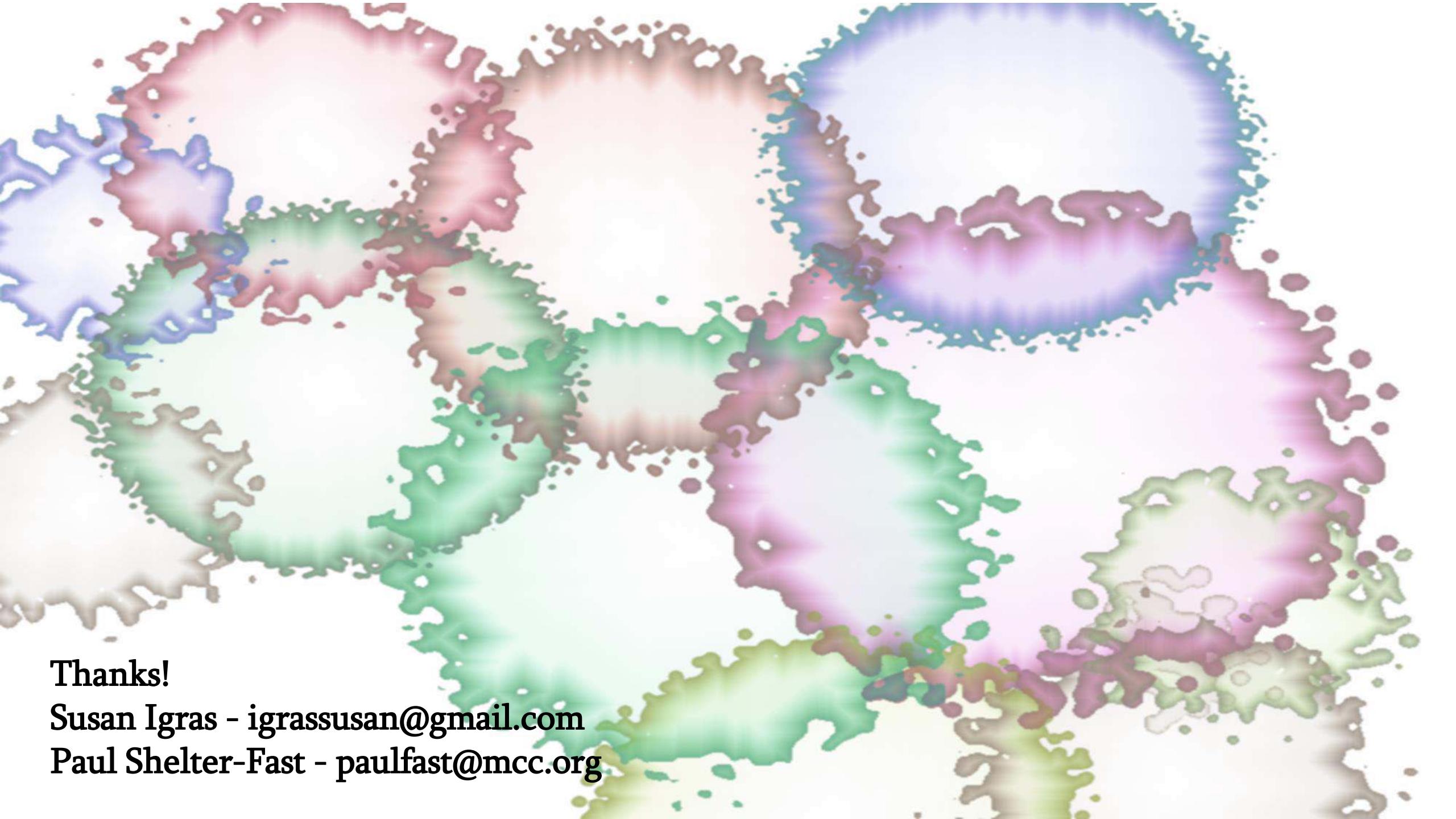
Resources To Get You Started

- [Complexity-Aware Methods Brief \(2017\) Measure Evaluation](#)
 - [A Guide to Complexity-Aware Monitoring Approaches for Momentum Projects \(2020\) MOMENTUM](#)
 - [Complexity-Aware Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning for Social and Behavior Change Interventions \(2021\) CORE Group's Social and Behavior Change Working Group](#)
- PLUS
- [Exploring the science of complexity: Ideas and implications for development and humanitarian efforts. \(2008\) ODI Working Paper No 285](#)
 - [Adapting Care Groups to Urban Slums: A Case Study of a Church-based Effort to Improve MCH Outcomes in Mathare, Nairobi, Kenya \(2019\) Christian Journal for Global Health](#)



AND REMEMBER: The art of programming [*and by extension MEL*] is the art of organizing complexity.

- Edsger W Dijkstra



Thanks!

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