Innovation Edges for Learning through Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

Colloquium on Resilience for Development – Assessment Methods and Transformation Practices

Johannesburg, 8-10 May 2017

Mini-workshop on Resilience Monitoring, Evaluation, Assessment and Learning (MEAL)

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Innovation Edges for Learning through Monitoring, Evaluation & Reporting in Resilience Building Natural Resource Management & Development Programmes

- The NLEIP Programme in the Eastern Cape (Rhodes University and DEA)

- The Resilience in the Olifants Catchment (RESILIM-O) programme in SA and Mozambique (AWARD and USAID)

- WWF and Mondi Wetlands Programme

- If time permits: EMG Changing Practices Course

NLEIP

Ntabalanga-Lalini Ecological Infrastructure Programme (DEA, RU)

Multi-layered design for the early stage of the programme:

Aggregating into national NRM programmes (indicators)

And capturing emergence in a complex system – to guide

Resilience principles for the NLEIP MEAL Plan:

Selection from Simonsen *et al*. (2015):

1. Broaden and increase participation

2. Promote complex adaptive thinking

3. Manage slow variables & feedbacks

4. Promote polycentric governance systems

5. Encourage learning

Related NLEIP Project Features:

1. Aim to increase access to ecosystem resources

2. A strategic adaptive management framework

3. Developmental evaluation

4. For real time learning

5. Citizen monitors recruited to measure siltation

MEAL Challenges & Responses

MEAL Challenges:

- NRM programmes tend to be evaluated against quantitative indicators ONLY

- The way they are used by e.g. Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation and Treasury encourages:

- Targets setting and 'delivering' against them

- Performativity - hide or non-report mistakes

- Focus on compliance rather than learning

- Closing spaces for strategic adaptation, innovation – resilience building

- DPME and others appreciate the limitations of only using quantitative and indicator based M&E BUT there are few examples of alternatives and how they can work in practice

- It is hard to aggregate qualitative data

Addressed in the NLEIP MEAL plan with a hybrid approach:

- Accountability and Learning

- Indicator based and Open ended M&E

- Quantitative data and Qualitative data

- Outputs and Processes

- Ongoing monitoring and ongoing evaluation

# MEAL Challenges & Responses

Challenge:

The planned hybrid approach in the NLEIP MEAL plan :

Few examples of alternatives and how they can work in practice

- Accountability and learning

- Indicator based and open ended M&E

- Quantitative data and Qualitative data

- Outputs and Processes

- Ongoing monitoring and ongoing evaluation
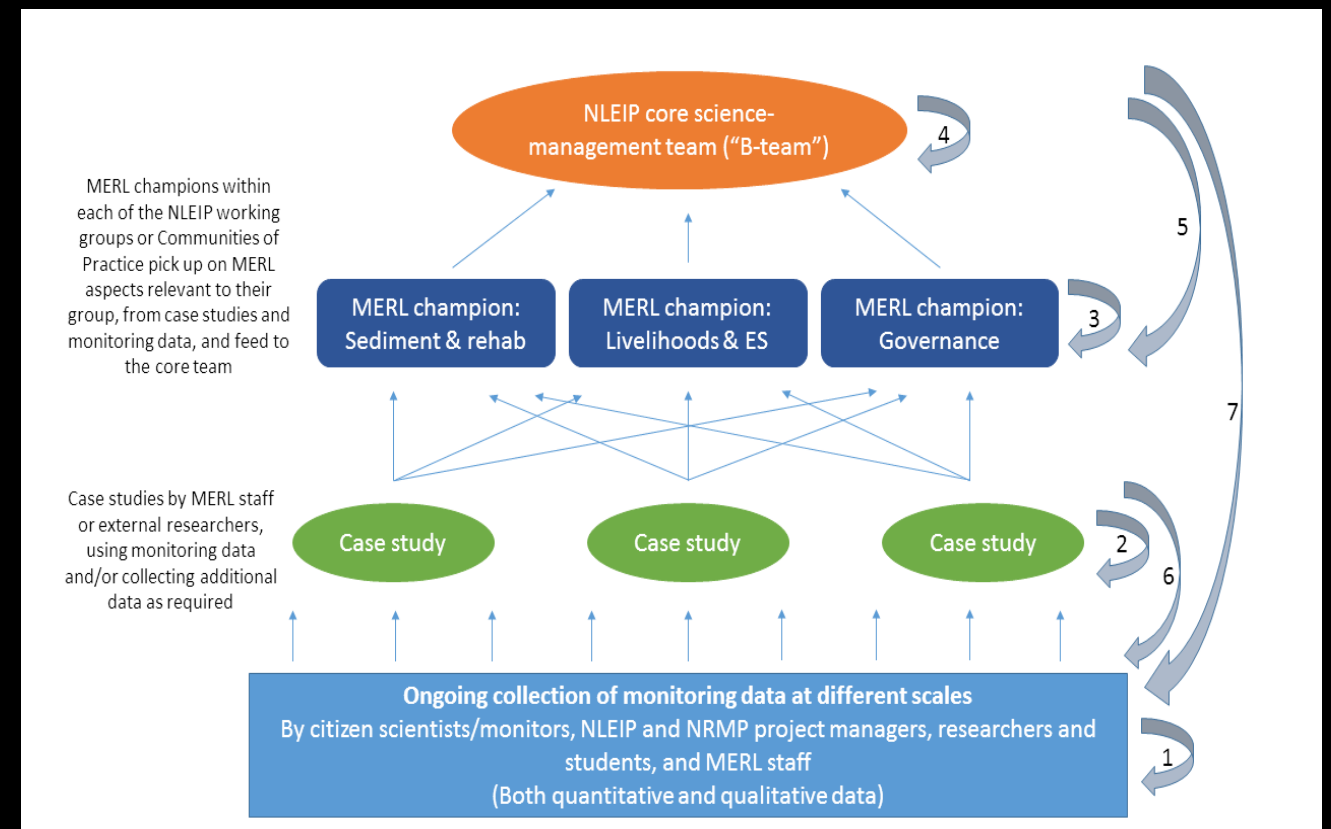
Combine monitoring and case based evaluation, with synthesis (meta-evaluation) and integrative MEAL management:
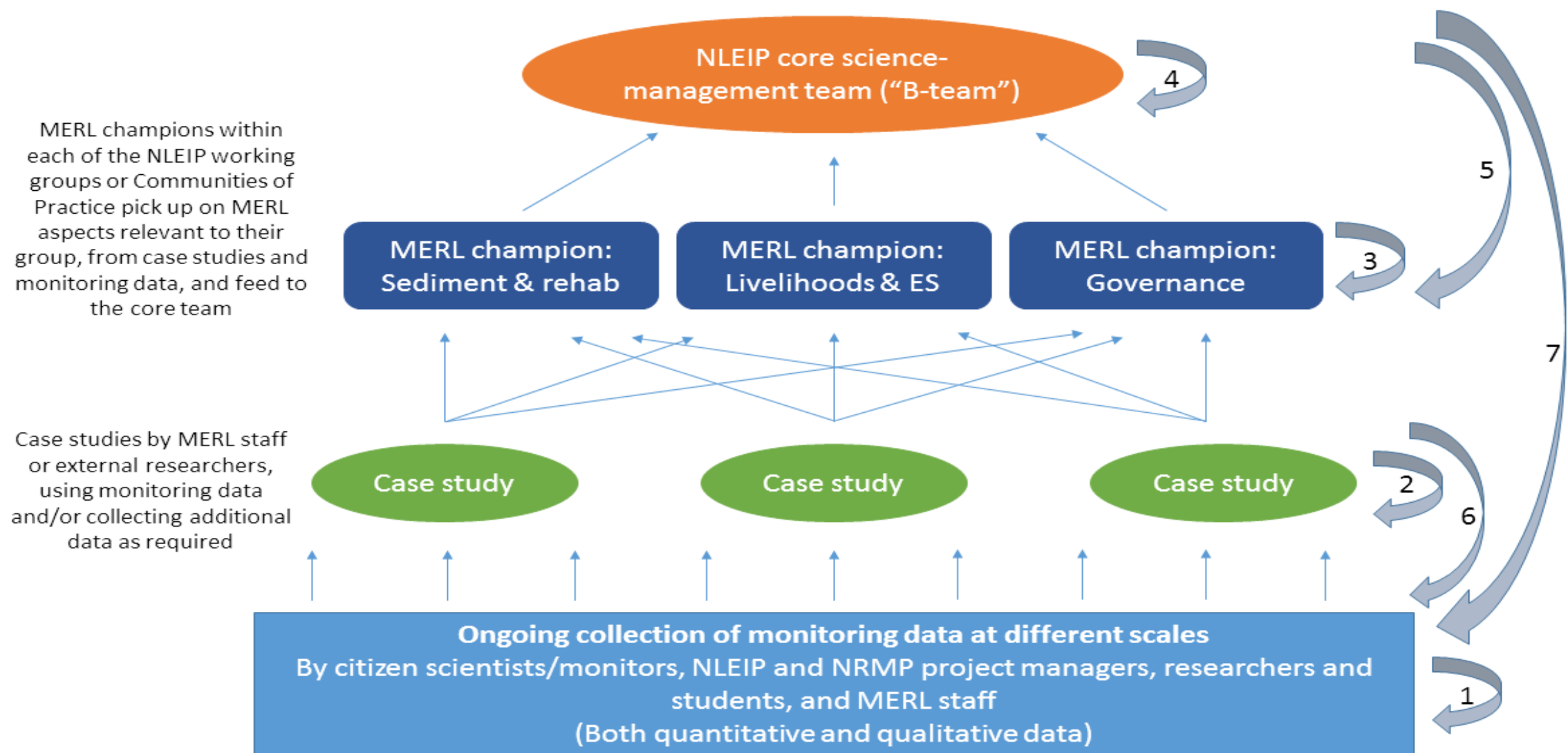
NLEIP Example:

Monitoring data:

# of training days for NLEIP citizen monitors*

# of new jobs created (*reported to DEA)

# of measurements taken by citizen monitors[+]

# of errors & missed readings[+] ([+]case study data only)

Case study questions:

How well is the citizen monitoring working?

What are the challenges?

What is the quality of the training?

What are the benefits for the citizen monitors?

How can we improve these benefits?

Meta-evaluation question:

What is the NLEIP learning about working with citizen monitors?

Across all SA NRM programmes, to 'aggregate' …

Report from all NRM programmes into DEA, DPME, Treasury both quantitative and qualitative, monitoring and evaluation insights, accountability & learning

Programme Learning: Key Insights

x **N**

Quantitative Monitoring Data

Qualitative Case Evaluation Insights

Synthesis Meta Evaluation
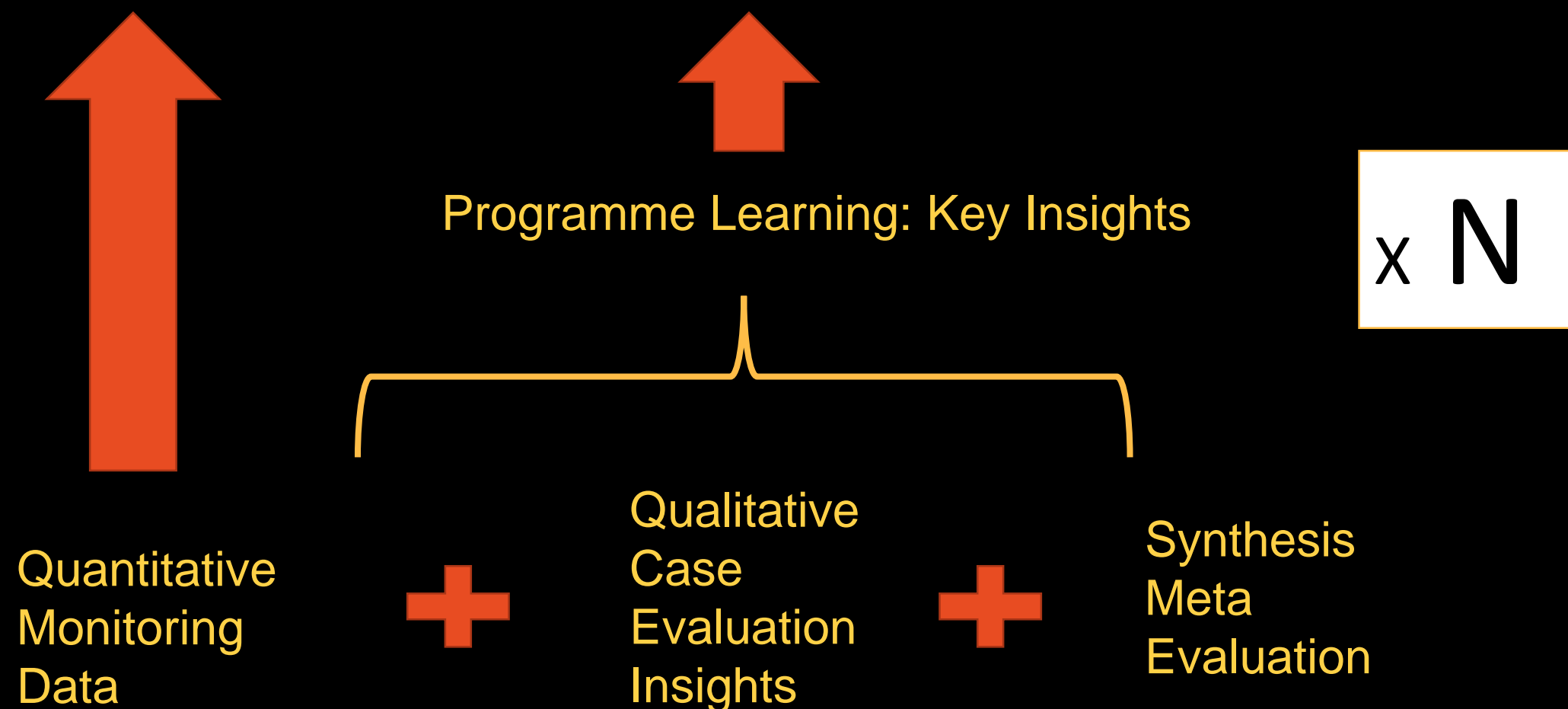
RESILIM-O

Resilience in the Olifants Catchment (AWARD, USAID)

The role of reporting in fostering and capturing learning

Staff feedback

Lessons learnt

Multi-layered & Hybrid MERL design – Generic Questions

Indicator Based Monitoring

e.g.:

What is the state of key aspects of the system?

Did we do what we planned / agreed to do?

How are key parameters changing? (quantitative)

Are we moving in the right direction?

Case study Based Evaluation

e.g.:

How and why is change happening (or not)?

What is new and emerging?

What is the quality of the processes?

What can be learnt from failures or struggles?

Meta-evaluation

e.g.:

Is the program achieving its overall objective?

What strategic direction changes may be necessary?

Is the evaluation process appropriate for the programme?

RESILIM-O Example Questions

Indicator Based Monitoring

# of people participating in climate change and biodiversity training

# of institutions with stronger capacity to respond to climate change

# of plans, guidelines, policies being produced

# of hectares of biological significance under better management

Case study Based Evaluation

What value is being added through the RESILIM-O programme?

What are the most significant changes happening?

Meta-evaluation

What are the main threads and insights emerging after the first phase?

How should we decide on which projects to continue and which projects to cut?

How can the monitoring and evaluation be strengthened?
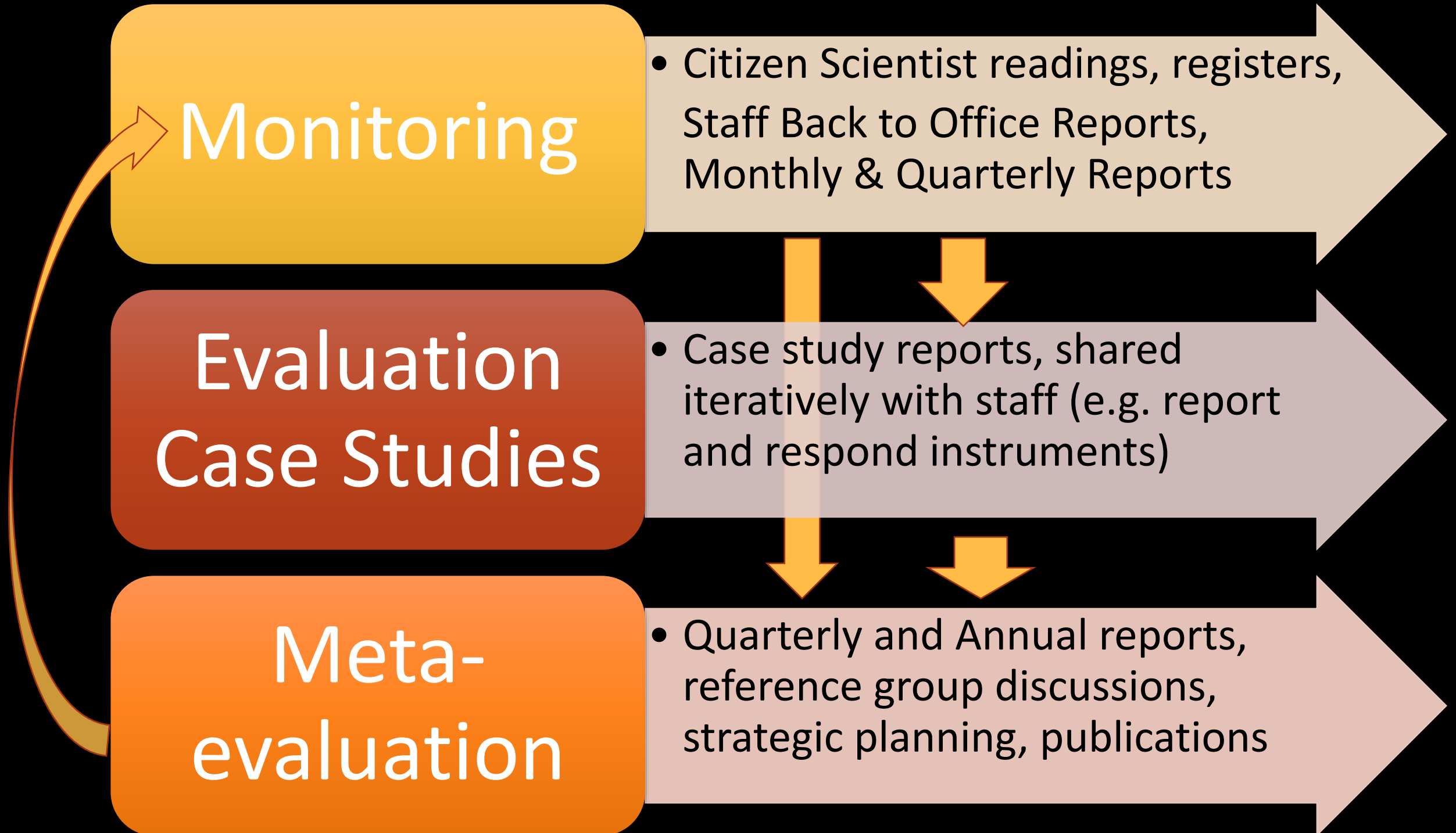
Role of Reporting

Monitoring

- Citizen Scientist readings, registers, Staff Back to Office Reports, Monthly & Quarterly Reports

Evaluation Case Studies

- Case study reports, shared iteratively with staff (e.g. report and respond instruments)

Meta-evaluation

- Quarterly and Annual reports, reference group discussions, strategic planning, publications

Reporting as a tool to foster and capture learning

Feedback from RESILIM-O staff on the reporting process:

"I (and probably my team as well) have found these [B2O reports] very useful in quickly summarizing the key "messages" of events. This has made it easier not only to go back to previous workshops/meetings, but also easier to quickly but concisely "catch-up" with events which I did not attend."

"Completing the B2O itself is also a useful part of the post-workshop/meeting reflection process, to capture some of what we have learned in a written form."

"Going through the process of the monthly report forces me to really sit down and think what we have achieved as a team this month, where are some loose ends that need follow-up, and to what extent we have made progress. It helps to give a bit of a snap shot of the bigger picture, drawing us out of the nitty-gritty details of daily to-do-lists."

"Overall, I am finding the monthly report in its current format to be very useful for reflective learning. It is much more streamlined than the previous versions….It takes me on average 4 hours to complete, but it is 4 hours well spent because I would use this time to think about activities for the following month and get a collective view on the two projects."

RESILIM-O B2O Report Template

RESILIM-O Monthly Report Template

Insights about implementing reporting for learning in RESILIM-O

- How the MERL team understands their role is important: "We are here to help staff achieve the results they really want" rather than "we are here to make sure staff comply with the requirements of the funder".
- MERL team to "walk the talk" when it comes to reflection and learning.
- Reporting templates continuously improved based on user feedback.
- Support from the leadership of the organisation is essential.
- Cultivate a learning culture (value everyone's inputs, accept criticism, non-punitive, mistakes = learning opportunities).
- Create time for reflective reporting processes (e.g. reflection time after events, Home Day, RESILIM-O Day).
- Provide frequent friendly guidance on what is required (e.g. guiding questions for reflection), and why.
- Give staff individual feedback on their reports (recognise good work and improvement, guide as to how to improve if necessary).

Multi-layered & Hybrid MERL design – Generic Questions

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e.g.:

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What is new and emerging?

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Meta-evaluation

e.g.:

Is the program achieving its overall objective?

What strategic direction changes may be necessary?

Is the evaluation process appropriate for the programme?

Is our theory of change changing? How should we adjust it?
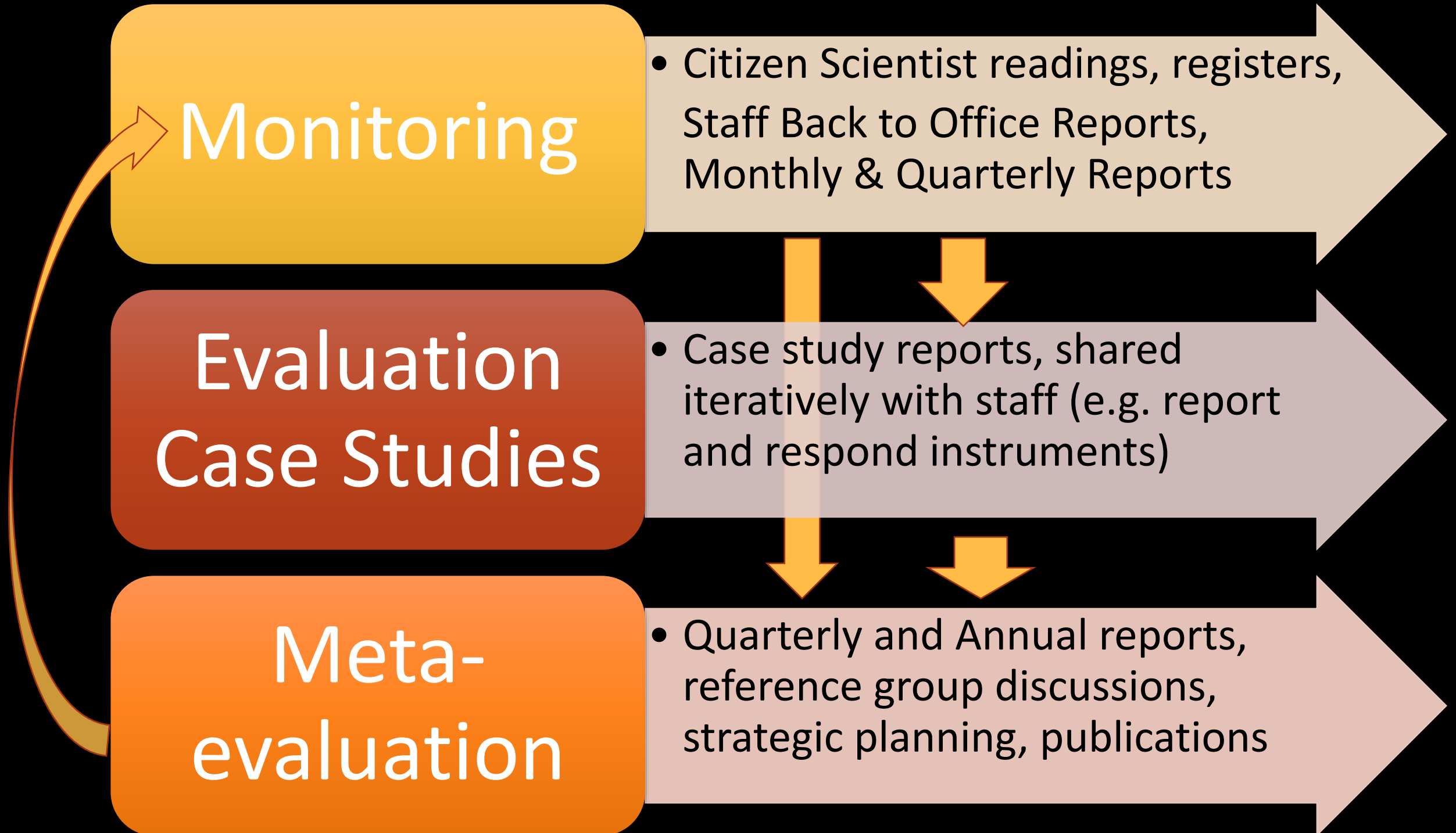
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WWF - Mondi Wetlands Programme

A methodological journey
towards social learning through participatory evaluation
using case studies

...the programme began to reach for coherent theory that was congruent with the grounded action that they and their project partners were involved in. It was at this time that the programme underwent a formative evaluation and through this process the programme began to discover the importance of better understanding how adults learn, how to support social change, and the importance of having grounded theory to support their wetland conservation practice ….Their previous understanding that learning involved experts determining solutions to wetland issues, moved towards an understanding of learning as a social process of combining a diversity of opinions, beliefs and ways of doing things and co-constructing solutions to wetland issues."

2009 Mondi Wetlands programme evaluation report.

A key mechanism for this continual reflection and change has been investment in evaluation involving all MWP staff. After both the 2005 and 2009 evaluations staff began considering and experimenting with different enabling methodologies. In 2005 the MWP consciously began exploring social learning, while the 2009 evaluation led to the programme piloting a resilient landscapes approach.

Rapid Review of Recent literature on Social learning, its promotion and scaling up (Burt, Rivers & Colvin, 2016)

"MWP staff realised that their knowledge of the social sciences
and, in particular of what it means to learn and change, was underdeveloped."

"They realised they were dealing with a social crisis rather than an ecological one, since people are the key drivers of environmental degradation."
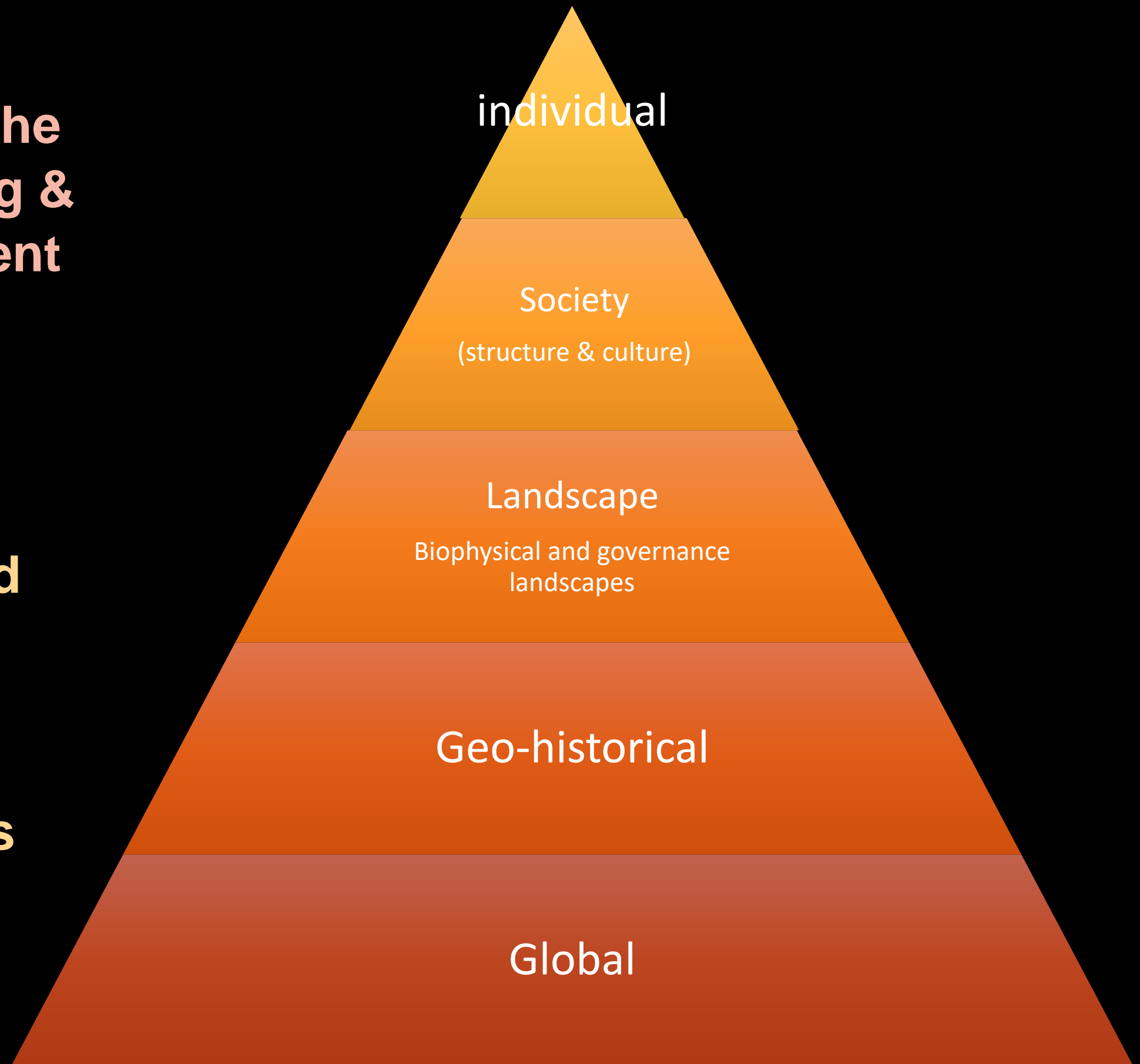
Sweet Transformations:
In-depth realist synthesis of WWF-MWP sugarcane work
"Understanding how change happens"

- realist synthesis – a exploratory and explanatory synthesis that considers the *interventionist's strategy/theory* (in this case MWP-WWF's) AND the *context* within which an intervention is made (in this case the sugarcane industry's).

- Both are documented as equally important, as various contextual factors may influence the way in which an intervention has effect.

- Realist synthesis aims to explicate what works for whom, in what circumstances, in what respects and how.

- Differs from other approaches which aim to draw out lessons or conclusions rather the evaluation offering explanations to contribute to MWP-WWF staff and practitioners 'sense-making' in evaluating their contributions to the sugarcane industry and in considering further interventions in other agricultural sectors.

by looking at the role of learning & the development of agency - influenced by context at different interconnected levels
Leading to identifying Contradictions & Principles

individual

Society
(structure & culture)

Landscape
Biophysical and governance landscapes

Geo-historical

Global

Evaluation case studies as mirror back data for catalyzing learning

Emergence

Difficult conversations can begin if we understand that we are born into structure but that we have some agency within this context.

Context at different interconnected levels
Enables explanations and insights into how action is constrained and transformed at different scales and across different scales which opens up new spaces in to which to work which is the 'happy moment' for any evaluator.

Example of "Triple Loop Learning"

Ethics and values are developed and can change through social interaction.

The belief that only those who already care for the environment are the only ones who can change their practice, is a false self-perpetuating belief and is not aligned with a social learning approach to change. One possible reason for this prevailing view, is that the social learning network may not be wide enough to include people that could have different value systems. Learning and change is then narrowly limited to a group that self-perpetuate the belief that it is only those who have a 'conservation ethic' that will embrace change, without considering that they were not born with this ethic, but, like all value systems, this ethic was learnt through social interaction.

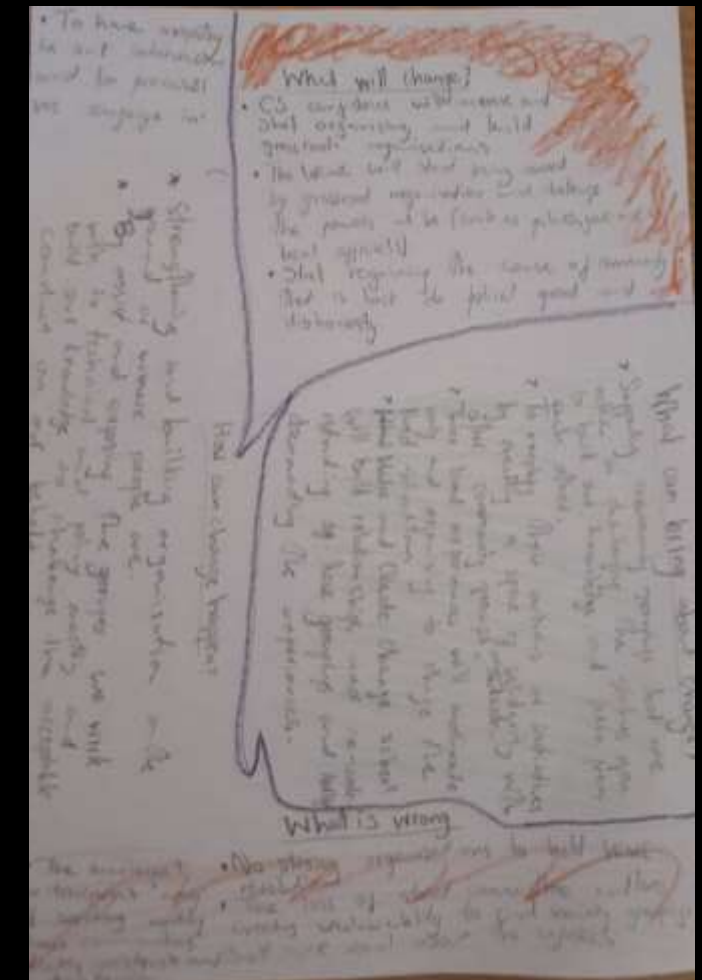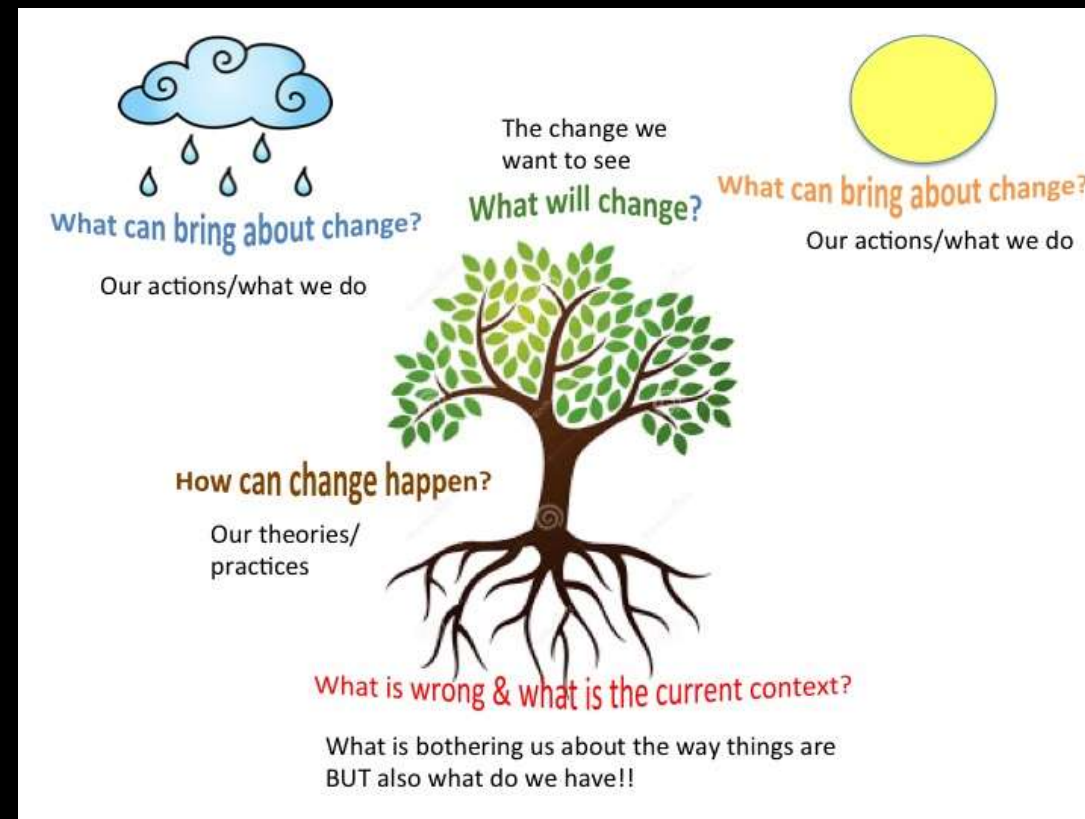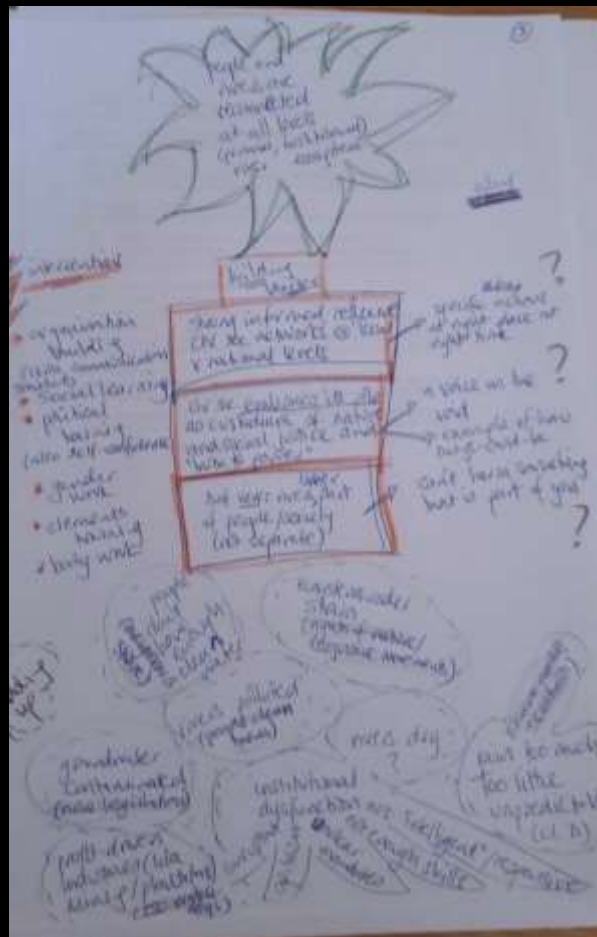# Examples of working embodying evaluation in our work

Our outcomes as a nature shrine

Reflecting on: What value do I bring to our work? What value do my colleagues bring to our work?

Embodying our 'theory of change'

Reflection: Basing the hybrid approach on a Critical Realist ontology allows for deeper learning

Abstract evaluation: Ongoing refinement of Programme Theory: Theory of Change

From Andrew Sayer, *Methods in Social Science: A Realist Approach* (1984/1992)