

Title of Proposed Co-creation Session

The “MEL Escape Room”: moving beyond challenges to co-created solutions for MEL for adaptation

(Wānanga/Talanoa/Dialogue/Workshop)

Abstract: 1195 words**Summary of Objectives and Expected Outcomes**

This session aims to engage climate adaptation practitioners, researchers, and policymakers in co-creating actionable solutions to the five core Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) challenges identified by a survey conducted by IMAGINE Adaptation. By adopting a participatory, transdisciplinary approach, the session will foster collaboration across sectors and diverse knowledge systems, ensuring the development of creative, feasible strategies to enhance MEL for adaptation. The “MEL Escape Room” combines role-playing with speculative futures thinking to create an environment that ignites the creativity of participants to craft potential solutions together in an energetic gamified environment.

In summary, our objectives are:

- To engage diverse stakeholders in co-creating innovative solutions to challenges in MEL for climate adaptation, with a focus on practical, actionable pathways forward.
- To create a fun, collaborative learning process that invites diverse voices and experiences, ultimately fostering a greater understanding of MEL's broader social, political, and economic implications.
- To develop concrete outputs, including a workshop report and an open call for co-authorship in a peer-reviewed publication, fostering the wider dissemination of insights.

Background and Significance of the Event

Effective MEL for climate adaptation is crucial for tracking progress, guiding investments, and ensuring that adaptation measures are responsive to emerging needs. However, practitioners and researchers in this field consistently face significant barriers, as identified in a [recent survey](#) (manuscript in preparation) conducted by the project IMAGINE Adaptation (Basque Centre for Climate Change, BC3). These include:

1. Lack of financial resources for MERL.
2. Difficulty to establish a causal connection between intended outcomes and adaptation activities.
3. Lack of data.

4. Difficulty in defining successful adaptation.
5. Lack of early integration of MERL into the policy cycle.

While these challenges have been well-documented, there has been limited acknowledgement of their implications and a lack of exploration of practical, systemic solutions that account for the complex interplay of social, economic, and political forces that shape adaptation (Fisher, 2023; Olazabal et al., 2024, Goodwin & Olazabal, 2025).

Method Used for Co-Creation and Rationale

Our session will take a novel and creative game-like approach by engaging participants in a co-creation process that seeks to design feasible, creative solutions to these key challenges (Flood et al., 2018; Sparkes and Werners, 2023). This approach is rooted in the understanding that addressing MEL challenges requires a participatory and transdisciplinary approach (Arteaga et al., 2023; Mills-Novoa, 2023). It is only through fostering inclusive dialogue between diverse knowledge systems—spanning research, policy, finance, and practice—that we can co-create real-world solutions (Coger et al., 2021). We aim to break through the technical framing of adaptation MEL, conveying it as a dynamic and socially embedded process shaped by broader social, economic, and political forces (Chmutina et al., 2023, 2021).

This session benefits from the collaboration of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), the Adaptation Fund (AF) and BC3 which ensures that the content developed reflects the real-world challenges facing MEL on the ground.

Session Format

- **Welcome, Framing the Challenges and Setting the Scene (10 min)**
 - **Introduction** to the five core MEL challenges identified in the IMAGINE Adaptation survey (Sean Goodwin, BC3), with contributions from IISD (Emilie Beauchamp) and Adaptation Fund (Vladislav Arnaoudov) sharing practical examples of these challenges. The format of the activity is also explained.
- **The MEL Escape Room Challenge (30 min)**
 - **Solve a key MEL challenge (20 minutes):** Participants are presented with their scenario (below). To escape, they must work together on the challenges presented to them.
 - **Sharing Back (10 min):** Groups present their refined solutions, inviting discussion on feasibility and next steps.
- **Wrap-Up & Next Steps (5 min)** – Summary of insights and invitation for participants to participate in a peer-reviewed publication.

Challenges

The game is to be run in two “rounds” that try to reflect real-life constraints and opportunities. Participants move between rounds sequentially when they compete each activity. They are below:

1. **Initial Solution:** Participants must agree on the two “solution keys” they feel will best help them solve the MEL challenge they are presented with. Each table has one unique MEL challenge. Groups have ten minutes for this round.
2. **Interruption:** Once they have selected their two solution keys, the group is presented with an interruption that complicates their solution. They must solve this together in the remaining 10 minutes.

Escape Room scenarios

1. Lack of Financial Resources for MEL — “The Empty Ledger”

Scenario: Your adaptation project has six months of funding secured for implementation, but MEL is entirely unfunded. The donor insists that “results matter,” yet won’t allocate money to track them.

Escape Goal: As a group, agree on two “solution keys” that will help you develop a cost-effective MEL strategy that demonstrates value, and makes MEL into a non-negotiable budget item in future.

2. Lack of Causal Connection — “The Broken Chain”

Scenario: A high-profile adaptation programme reports success based on the number of workshops and trainings held. But a local advocacy group demands evidence of how these activities actually reduce vulnerability in their area.

Escape Goal: As a group, agree on two “solution keys” that will help you demonstrate a causal pathway between what has been done, and whether vulnerability was reduced.

3. Lack of Data — “The Missing Pieces”

Scenario: Your team is asked to evaluate whether an adaptation programme is reducing climate risk. But the available data is patchy: climate baselines are outdated, monitoring systems don’t cover all regions, and key social and economic indicators are incomplete.

Escape Goal: As a group, agree on two “solution keys” that will help you generate or piece together credible evidence from incomplete data so your evaluation can still inform adaptation decisions.

4. Defining Success — “The Battle of Measures”

Scenario: You are in the process of outlining an adaptation strategy for your town. Each stakeholder has a different definition of “success”. The finance ministry wants cost-benefit ratios. The donor wants short-term measurable indicators. Local neighbourhood groups want improved wellbeing and cultural resilience.

Escape Goal: As a group, agree on two “solution keys” that will help you design an approach to reconcile competing definitions of success.

References

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PARTICIPANTS

Participant 1

Full Name: Sean Goodwin

Organisation:

Bio (up to 50 words)

Dr Sean Goodwin is a multidisciplinary researcher with a focus on urban climate adaptation, nature-based solutions, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). His research addresses pressing questions facing communities of research and practice at the intersection of climate change, biodiversity conservation, urban planning and social justice.

Participant 1 Contribution:

Chair, discussant, co-facilitator and moderator of the plenary sessions.

Participant 2

Full Name: Marta Olazabal

Organisation: Basque Centre for Climate Change (BC3)

Bio (up to 50 words)

Dr Marta Olazabal is an interdisciplinary scientist exploring pathways of progress on climate action in cities worldwide. She is an Ikerbasque Research Associate and Ramon y Cajal Fellow at BC3 where she leads the Adaptation Research Group. She is the Principal Investigator of the European Research Council project [IMAGINE Adaptation](#).

Participant 2 Contribution:

Co-chair of session and co-facilitation (responsible for one of five tables).

Participant 3

Full Name: Ana Terra Amorim Maia

Organisation:

Bio (up to 50 words)

Dr. Amorim-Maia is an interdisciplinary socio-environmental scientist exploring the intersections of climate change adaptation, urban governance, and social justice. She is a Juan de la Cierva Fellow and postdoctoral researcher at BC3, where she contributes to IMAGINE Adaptation, supporting cities in envisioning resilient futures and assessing progress toward achieving them.

Participant 3 Contribution:

Co-facilitation of session (responsible for one of five tables).

Participant 4

Full Name: Emilie Beauchamp

Organisation: International Institute for Sustainable Development

Bio (up to 50 words)

Emilie Beauchamp is a lead on monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) with IISD's Resilience program. She has 17 years of experience in MEL and research methods in environmental change and sustainability. She specialises in developing complex evidence systems to assess adaptation impacts with national, sub-national and civil society partners.

Participant 4 Contribution: Contribution to Session 1 "Framing the challenges"

The IISD is a global think tank that works on sustainability issues, including climate change adaptation, resilience, and policy development. It conducts research, provides policy recommendations, and facilitates dialogues on sustainable development. IISD is known for its work on climate adaptation, monitoring and evaluation, and governance, as well as its management of NAP Global Network, which supports developing countries in their National Adaptation Plan (NAP) processes. IISD will provide this expertise for the framing and execution of this workshop on policy frameworks for adaptation MEL, drawing on its experience supporting National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and governance strategies. IISD's insights will help ensure that challenges related to defining successful adaptation and integrating equity into MEL are well represented in the session. The representative from IISD will contribute directly to the session by providing feedback on the framing of the session, as well as assisting with facilitation of group work, as well as contextualising the results of the IMAGINE Adaptation survey in relation to their work.

Participant 5

Full Name: Vladislav Arnaoudov

Organisation: Adaptation Fund

Bio (up to 50 words)

Vladislav Arnaoudov leads monitoring and evaluation at the Adaptation Fund. He has 18 years of experience in climate finance, results management, and policy design. He specialises in developing frameworks to assess adaptation and resilience impacts, drawing on experience working with the Green Climate Fund, Deloitte, and Mitsubishi UFJ Morgan Stanley.

Participant 5 Contribution: Contribution to Session 1 “Framing the challenges”

The Adaptation Fund (AF) is a financial mechanism established under the Kyoto Protocol and later serving the Paris Agreement. It funds adaptation projects in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to climate change. The fund prioritises direct access to finance, allowing national and regional institutions to implement projects without needing international intermediaries. It supports initiatives in sectors like agriculture, water management, and disaster risk reduction. AF brings critical knowledge on funding mechanisms for adaptation, offering guidance on securing financial resources and aligning MEL with donor requirements. AF’s experience in financing locally led adaptation can inform solutions that make MEL more actionable and investment-ready. Their contributions will strengthen the session’s focus on practical, policy-relevant, and feasible solutions. he representative from AF with contribute directly to the session by providing feedback on the framing of the session, as well as assisting with facilitation of group work, as well as contextualising the results of the IMAGINE Adaptation survey in relation to their work.

Hybrid Platform requirements

- **We are not requesting a hybrid format** (because of the interactive nature of the activity).