Adopting a behavioural science lens in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's technology and innovation investments

A portfolio review

Report prepared by
Magenta Consulting

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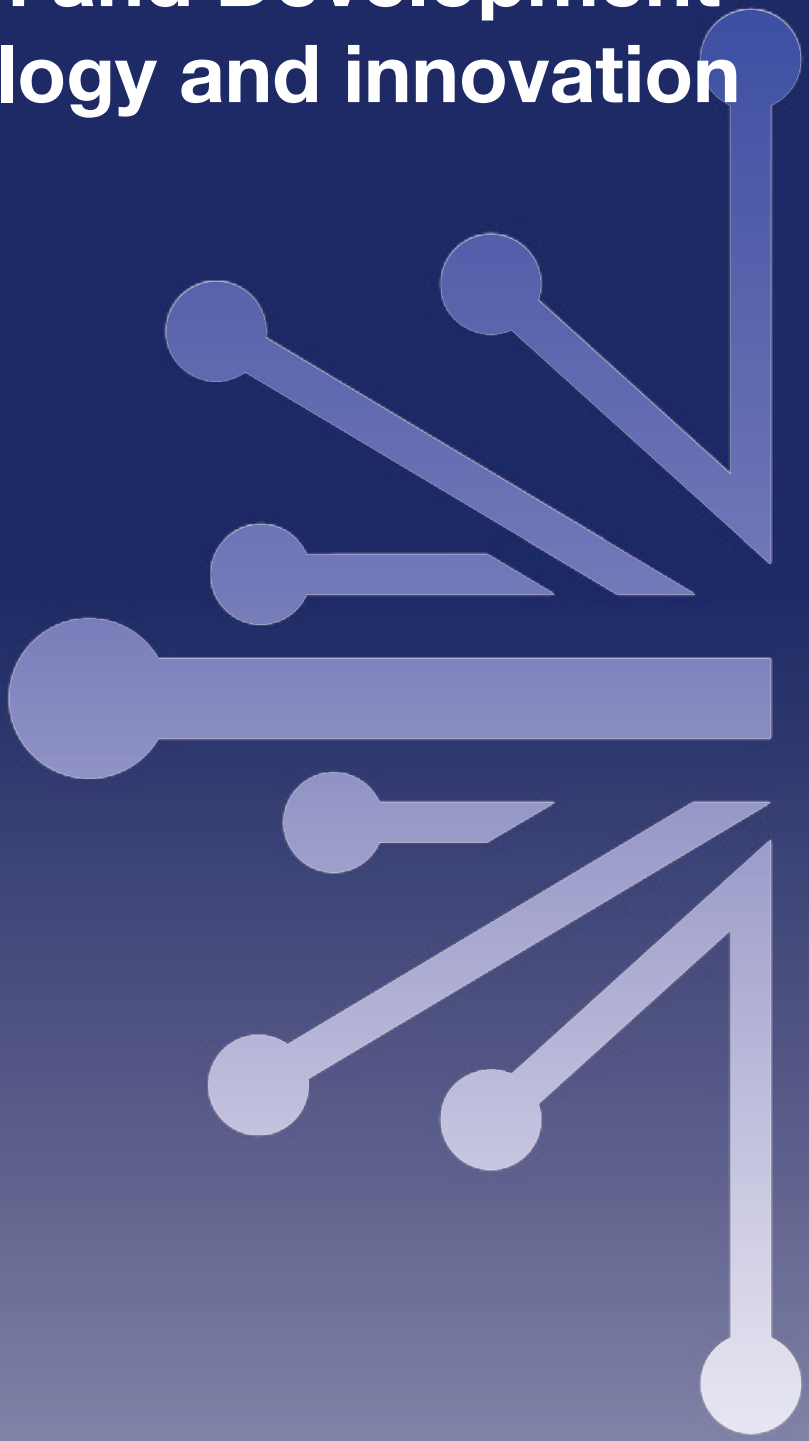

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Executive Summary

Background and Purpose

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) recognises the transformative potential of technology and innovation in advancing sustainable development across low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). However, despite technical soundness, many promising interventions underperform due to human and social factors, including entrenched social norms, behavioural biases, and insufficient alignment with local contexts. The Research Commissioning Centre (RCC), in collaboration with the Technology and Innovation Unit (TIU), commissioned this comprehensive review to explore how behavioural science can enhance the effectiveness of technological interventions within the FCDO portfolio.

This portfolio review addresses a critical gap in understanding where and how behavioural science is currently applied across TIU's technology and innovation investments, identifies barriers to systematic implementation, and develops practical tools to support more consistent integration of behavioural insights into programme design and delivery.

Methodology and Scope

The review employed a rigorous mixed-methods approach designed to balance methodological rigour with practical utility. A rapid literature review established a foundational framework of applied behavioural science, identifying eight core components: evidence review, problem definition, monitoring and evaluation, diagnosis, intervention design, co-design, implementation, and expertise integration. This framework served as the analytical foundation for subsequent portfolio assessment.

Twenty key informant interviews were conducted with grantees representing diverse programmes across seven hubs within the TIU ecosystem: Transform, AI4D, GSMA, Global Innovation Fund, Global Disability Innovation Hub, Co-Labs, and Frontier Technologies. Each interview was analysed as a discrete case study using systematic dot mapping techniques to assess the presence, absence, and quality of behavioural science integration across the component framework.

The research process incorporated participatory workshops with FCDO teams and grantees, alongside validation by an external advisory group comprising distinguished experts from academia and industry. This iterative approach ensured findings were empirically grounded, operationally relevant, and externally credible.

Key Findings

The portfolio review revealed that engagement with behavioural science occurs across projects in varied ways, though its application remains uneven and often shaped by contextual constraints rather than systematic integration. Evidence reviews were commonly undertaken, though these typically focused on user understanding rather than systematically mapping behavioural drivers. Problem definition was generally recognised as important, with many grantees drawing on contextual and user needs assessments, but behavioural perspectives were less frequently employed, particularly where solutions had already been developed.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities were widely implemented, with formative approaches such as piloting and feasibility studies representing common practice. However, behavioural MEL approaches, including the use of behavioural Theories of Change, were less frequent, though well-executed when supported by specialist partners. Diagnosis using structured behavioural frameworks was not typically a formal requirement, with many grantees reporting challenges related to time, resources, and expertise. Where diagnostic tools such as COM-B or barriers analysis were applied by specialists, they provided valuable insights to guide programme design.

Intervention design processes often incorporated behavioural ideas informally or retrospectively, whilst structured behavioural approaches were less common. Co-design with end users was recognised as highly valuable, though often limited to validation due to resource constraints. Implementation strategies predominantly focused on technical and operational aspects of scaling, with behavioural considerations less commonly foregrounded. Access to behavioural science expertise was typically sought in targeted ways, often from external specialists, though affordability and accessibility remained significant challenges.

The analysis identified strong enthusiasm among stakeholders for more methodical application of behavioural science, particularly when supported by accessible tools and clear guidance. Many grantees could retrospectively identify where behavioural approaches might have strengthened their projects, suggesting significant potential for enhanced impact through better integration of behavioural insights.

Strategic Opportunities and Recommendations

The review established clear priorities for embedding behavioural science more systematically across the portfolio. Problem definition, diagnosis, and intervention design emerged as high-priority components where behavioural science offers distinctive and complementary value beyond existing disciplinary approaches. Implementation was identified as medium-high priority, whilst evidence review, MEL, and co-design were recognised as medium priorities, though all components were considered valuable for strengthening innovation outcomes.

Short-term recommendations focus on establishing foundational capabilities through piloting practical tools and creating institutional expectations. FCDO should lead by example in piloting the developed Toolkit and Triage tools across selected hubs, whilst establishing early expectations that behavioural science should be considered at programme design stages. Hubs should trial these tools in live funding calls and begin developing internal champions ('Sherpas') who can provide light-touch guidance and connect behavioural science to day-to-day delivery.

Medium-term strategies emphasise building supportive infrastructure and embedded capabilities. FCDO should create accessible expert advisory mechanisms, invest in tailored training programmes, and convene communities of practice to enable peer-to-peer learning. Hubs should embed behavioural science into application and reporting templates, formalise Sherpa roles, and share learning through case studies that demonstrate strengthened impact.

Long-term institutional reforms focus on sustainability and systematic integration. FCDO should reform funding structures to enable greater flexibility and iteration, integrate behavioural science principles into wider innovation frameworks, and embed behavioural considerations into organisational norms and policies. Hubs should establish behavioural science as core organisational culture, partner with FCDO on evaluation approaches that measure behavioural outcomes, and continue innovating through new tool formats and delivery mechanisms

Developed Assets and Implementation Pathway

Two key prototypes were developed and validated through stakeholder engagement: a Triage tool that provides decision-support for identifying projects where behavioural science offers greatest marginal value, and a comprehensive Toolkit that offers practical guidance structured around four user-friendly categories which are aligned with entrepreneurial language and innovation practices.

The Triage tool serves as a rapid screening mechanism to help funders and grant-makers assess behavioural dependencies that underpin project success. It guides reviewers to examine whether proposed interventions require fundamental behavioural changes from system actors or end users, and whether assumptions about such changes are grounded in credible evidence.

The Toolkit reframes the eight-component behavioural science model into four action-oriented categories: Self-awareness and Market Awareness, Insight and Validation, Co-creation and Design, and Execution and Growth. This approach employs the vocabulary of start-ups and innovation rather than academic terminology, making behavioural science more accessible and directly actionable for grantees.

Both tools were designed as foundational building blocks requiring adaptation to individual hub and programme contexts, rather than standardised solutions. Piloting with willing stakeholders will serve to refine content and format whilst generating evidence about optimal embedding within hub processes and grant-making practices.

Conclusion and Strategic Impact

This review demonstrates tremendous potential to strengthen FCDO's technology and innovation portfolio through systematic application of behavioural science. The research reveals genuine enthusiasm across hubs, grantees, and FCDO teams for practical approaches that enhance problem definition, diagnosis, and intervention design. The developed Toolkit and Triage prototypes provide immediate entry points for translating this enthusiasm into actionable practice.

The evidence base establishes a clear window of opportunity to move from fragmented application to standardized practice, embedding behavioural science as a shared capability across the innovation ecosystem. Through phased implementation of recommendations, supported by practical tools and institutional commitment, behavioural science can transition from under-utilised resource to core enabler of effective, inclusive, and sustainable innovation.

This transformation will strengthen FCDO's global leadership in innovation whilst ensuring funded programmes deliver enhanced impact, value for money, and developmental outcomes across low- and middle-income countries. The systematic integration of behavioural insights represents a strategic investment in more effective technological interventions that are better aligned with human realities and local contexts, ultimately advancing the FCDO's mission of reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development.

Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ABS	Applied Behavioural Science
AI4D	Artificial Intelligence for Development
BCD	Behaviour Centred Design
BCW	Behaviour Change Wheel
CAPs	Community Action Plans
COM-B	Capability, Opportunity, Motivation - Behaviour (behavioural framework)
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FT	Frontier Technologies
GDI Hub	Global Disability Innovation Hub
GIF	Global Innovation Fund
GSMA	Global Systems for Mobile Communication Association
HCD	Human-Centred Design
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
LMICs	Low- and Middle-Income Countries
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MRC	Medical Research Council
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
RCC	Research Commissioning Centre
RCTs	Randomised Control Trials
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TDF	Theoretical Domains Framework
TIU	Technology and Innovation Unit
TMFs	Theories, Models and Frameworks
ToC	Theory of Change
UX	User Experience
WEIRD	Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic

Background and objectives

Context and rationale

The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) recognises the transformative role that technology and innovation can play in advancing sustainable development, stimulating economic growth, and promoting digital inclusion. These opportunities are particularly significant across low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where new technologies can expand access to essential services, improve livelihoods, and contribute to more resilient economies. Yet, the potential of these innovations is not automatically realised. In many cases, promising interventions have fallen short because of human and social factors.

Despite technical soundness, the real-world impact of innovations is often constrained by entrenched social norms, behavioural biases, and weak alignment with local contexts. For example, communities may resist adopting technologies that challenge established practices, or individuals may revert to familiar behaviours even when alternatives offer demonstrable benefits. In addition, solutions designed without adequate attention to local realities may fail to gain traction, resulting in missed opportunities for positive change. These challenges underscore the need to address the behavioural dimensions of innovation if long-term impact is to be achieved.

In recognition of these challenges, the Research Commissioning Centre (RCC), working in collaboration with the Technology and Innovation Unit (TIU), is exploring how applied behavioural science (ABS) can enhance the effectiveness of technology and other innovations. Behavioural science offers a systematic, evidence-based approach to understanding how individuals and communities make decisions, form habits, and respond to change. By applying these insights, interventions can be designed and delivered in ways that are more likely to be understood, accepted, and sustained. This perspective is critical for mitigating risks that might otherwise erode the developmental value of technological investments.

While behavioural science has been applied to some aspects of FCDO's programming, its potential has not yet been fully realised. There are examples of grantees and affiliated Hubs drawing on behavioural insights to encourage uptake of new tools or to frame communications in ways that resonate with local values. However, these applications are often fragmented and lack coherence across the wider portfolio. A more strategic approach would help ensure that behavioural considerations are systematically embedded in the design and delivery of technological innovations, rather than treated as an afterthought.

> Applied behavioural science is the study of human behaviour, factors that influence human behaviour and developing and evaluating interventions to influence and change human behaviour.[1]

For the TIU to maximise the impact of behavioural science, it must first establish a clearer picture of where such approaches are currently being applied and where they are absent. This requires identifying specific gaps among grantees and lead delivery partners and programmes, including limited capacity, lack of expertise, or insufficient access to behavioural evidence. Without such understanding, there is a risk that behavioural insights remain underutilised or inconsistently applied, reducing the overall effectiveness of investments in technology and innovation. This understanding will also inform options for future delivery, including system-wide or organisational-level changes that ensure behavioural approaches are embedded sustainably across TIU's portfolio.

Towards a strategic and context-sensitive approach

Addressing these gaps will allow the TIU to use behavioural science in a more strategic and targeted manner. This could involve building partnerships with behavioural experts, providing training and resources for grantees, or commissioning dedicated research to generate context-specific insights. Applying a behavioural lens is especially valuable for technology scale-up (e.g., AI tools, assistive technology design, digital inclusion platforms). By understanding how people adopt, trust, or reject new tools, TIU can increase uptake and ensure innovations are relevant to communities in low-resource contexts. In taking these steps, the TIU can ensure that technological interventions are not only technically robust but also behaviourally informed and contextually appropriate. Such an approach would strengthen the likelihood of successful adoption, long-term use, and ultimately, developmental impact.

1 West, R. and Gould, A. (2022) Improving Health and Wellbeing: a guide to using behavioural science in policy and practice. Public Health Wales NHS Trust; West, R. and Michie, S. (2022) 'Behavioural science', Qeios [Preprint]. Available at: https://doi.org/10.32388/YS056Q.

Behavioural science has significant potential to complement and strengthen FCDO's investments in technology and innovation. By recognising the central role of human behaviour in shaping outcomes, and by systematically embedding behavioural insights into programme design and delivery, the TIU and its partners can enhance the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of their interventions. In doing so, they will be better placed to realise the promise of technology as a driver of inclusive, people-centred development across LMICs.

Objectives

This project is a portfolio review of the extent to which behavioural science has been used within the FCDO's Technology and Innovation Unit (TIU). It aims to introduce FCDO officials, delivery partners, and grantees to a clear framework and practical options for embedding behavioural approaches, both in current projects and at the organisational/system level.

To achieve this, the intiative pursued the following measurable objectives:

1. Comprehensive Review of Behavioural Science Applications

   Output: A detailed review document mapping how behavioural science has been applied within a representative set of projects from the Technology and Innovation Unit (TIU) portfolio.

   Outcome: Greater institutional understanding of the extent, quality, and impact of behavioural science integration across current and past initiatives.

2. Identification of Gaps and Barriers

   Output: An assessment report highlighting key gaps, barriers, and enabling factors for the use of behavioural insights, based on consultation with grantees and FCDO-affiliated Hubs.

   Outcome: Evidence base to inform targeted support and capacity-building, ensuring behavioural approaches are both feasible and contextually relevant.

3. Development of Practical Strategies and Toolkit

   Output: A practitioner-oriented toolkit and set of strategies for embedding behavioural approaches into programme design, implementation, and evaluation.

   Outcome: Improved capability among grantees, Hubs, and FCDO teams to apply behavioural science consistently and effectively in their interventions.

4. Production of Actionable Recommendations

   Output: A set of policy and programming recommendations that translate findings into concrete, actionable guidance for FCDO and partners.

   Outcome: More inclusive, people-centred, and contextually responsive technological innovations that deliver sustained development impact.

Research questions

Four main research questions were developed to respond to the objectives of the project:

1. What is applied behavioural science and/or a people-centred approach to innovation?

2. Which conditions enable portfolio projects to adopt an applied behavioural science approach, and what barriers prevent them?

3. For those projects that do adopt an applied behavioural science approach, what does this look like, and how is this done?

4. How can we best support portfolio projects to embed applied behavioural science?

The research questions provide the conceptual and analytical scaffolding through which the stated objectives are pursued. The first question, concerned with defining applied behavioural science and people-centric approaches to innovation, establishes the theoretical foundation necessary for a systematic review of current practices (Objective 1). The second, which interrogates enabling conditions and barriers, generates the empirical evidence required to identify institutional and contextual gaps (Objective 2). The third question, focusing on how behavioural approaches are operationalised within projects, produces insights that inform the design of strategies and toolkits to guide practice (Objective 3). Finally, the fourth question directs attention to the forms of support most conducive to embedding behavioural science, thereby grounding the development of policy and programming recommendations (Objective 4).

Methodology

A research methodology consisting of secondary literature review and primary qualitative data collection was designed. The rapid review was used to define and determine model components for applied behavioural science. Grant-funded projects were then chosen from across the portfolio to apply this model to see where, why, and how behavioural science was applied to spot opportunities to integrate these approaches further in the future.

Figure 1: Methodology

Rapid review

A rapid review approach was adopted to generate timely yet rigorous insights into the conceptual and practical dimensions of applied behavioural science, using people-centred theories and approaches to understand human factors shaping innovation, AI adoption, and sustainable development outcomes.

Rapid reviews are increasingly recognised as a pragmatic alternative to systematic reviews, providing decision-makers with high-quality evidence within shorter timeframes by streamlining certain processes[2].This review ensured findings were robust while delivered quickly, employing transparent and replicable steps to ensure reliability.

1. Evidence Review

The review began with a structured search of peer-reviewed and grey literature to establish a foundational understanding of behavioural science and its application in practice. Sources were identified across interdisciplinary fields, including psychology, behavioural economics, public policy, and international development. Inclusion criteria prioritised publications that explicitly defined behavioural science, articulated its components and characteristics, or provided applied examples in programme design and delivery. Exclusion criteria removed opinion pieces lacking empirical grounding or conceptual clarity. Findings were synthesised thematically to generate a consolidated account of the essential features of applied behavioural science.

2. Identification of Theories, Models and Frameworks (TMFs)

Building on the evidence review, the second stage methodically identified and catalogued relevant TMFs that have been applied in behavioural science practice. Databases and organisational repositories were searched for

2 Tricco, A.C., Antony, J., Zarin, W., Strifler, L., Ghassemi, M., Ivory, J., Perrier, L., Hutton, B., Moher, D. & Straus, S.E., 2015. *A scoping review of rapid review methods.* BMC Medicine, 13(224), pp.1–15. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-015-0465-6

frameworks such as COM-B,[3] MINDSPACE,[4] EAST,[5] alongside complementary frameworks such as Human-Centred Design (HCD), the MRC Framework for developing and evaluating complex interventions,[6] the Behaviour Change Wheel (BCW),[7] the Theoretical Domains Framework (TDF),[8] Behaviour Centred Design (BCD), and emerging approaches under the umbrella of Behavioural Design. Each TMF was assessed against criteria including conceptual clarity, empirical support, relevance to international development, and adaptability to programme contexts. A matrix was developed to map overlaps and distinctions among TMFs, highlighting common behavioural determinants and intervention levers.

3. Development of a Working Model

The final stage synthesised insights from the evidence review and TMF analysis to develop a working model of applied behavioural science. This model served as an organising framework for subsequent assessment of the FCDO's Technology and Innovation Unit (TIU) portfolio. The working model emphasises the interplay between individual, social, and contextual factors, and incorporates practical considerations for embedding behavioural insights into programme design, implementation, and evaluation. The model was tested and refined with experts from an external advisory panel as well as cross-checked with established behavioural frameworks to ensure relevance, usability, and coherence.

By grounding the portfolio review in a people-centred behavioural science model, the review ensures FCDO's investments in technology and innovation are assessed not only for technical soundness but also for their capacity to be adopted, sustained, and scaled in low-resource contexts.

Project selection

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to identify portfolio projects for in-depth analysis, treating each as a case study. This approach was selected because random sampling was neither feasible nor appropriate for the review objectives: the intention was not statistical generalisation but the generation of analytically rich insights into how behavioural science is understood and applied across the portfolio. By focusing on information-rich cases, purposive sampling enabled a deeper examination of both exemplary practices and diverse experiences.[9]

Two complementary techniques were employed. Intensity sampling was used to identify projects that exemplified relatively strong and systematic use of applied behavioural science, without being atypical or extreme. These cases provided rich material for understanding robust but transferable practices. In parallel, maximum variation sampling was employed to ensure heterogeneity, capturing projects with minimal, moderate, and extensive application of behavioural insights. This strategy facilitated the identification of recurring patterns as well as context-specific differences across the portfolio.[10]

To ensure consistency and transparency, explicit selection criteria were applied:

- **Year:** Projects initiated from 2022 onwards, ensuring recency and alignment with current FCDO strategic priorities.
- **Stage:** Projects at implementation or under implementation, thereby providing sufficient empirical evidence of practice.

3 **Michie, S., van Stralen, M.M. & West, R., 2011.** The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Science*, 6(42), pp.1–12. https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42

4 **Dolan, P., Hallsworth, M., Halpern, D., King, D. & Vlaev, I., 2010.** *MINDSPACE: Influencing behaviour through public policy.* London: Institute for Government and Cabinet Office.

5 **Service, O., Hallsworth, M., Halpern, D., Algate, F., Gallagher, R., Nguyen, S., Ruda, S. & Sanders, M., 2014.** *EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights. London:* Behavioural Insights Team.

6 **Skivington, K., Matthews, L., Simpson, S.A., Craig, P., Baird, J., Blazeby, J.M., Boyd, K.A., Craig, N., French, D.P., McIntosh, E., Petticrew, M., Rycroft-Malone, J., White, M., Moore, L. & Campbell, M., 2021.** A new framework for developing and evaluating complex interventions: update of Medical Research Council guidance. BMJ, 374, n2061. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n2061

7 **Michie, S., Atkins, L. & West, R., 2014.** *The Behaviour Change Wheel: A Guide to Designing Interventions.* London: Silverback Publishing.

8 **Michie, S., Johnston, M., Abraham, C., Lawton, R., Parker, D. & Walker, A., 2005.** Making psychological theory useful for implementing evidence based practice: a consensus approach. *Quality and Safety in Health Care*, 14(1), pp.26–33. https://doi.org/10.1136/qshc.2004.011155

9 **Patton, M.Q., 2015.** *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice.* 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

10 **Palinkas, L.A., Horwitz, S.M., Green, C.A., Wisdom, J.P., Duan, N. & Hoagwood, K., 2015.** Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), pp.533–544. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

- **Value:** Projects with a funding threshold above £50,000, to ensure a focus on initiatives of substantive scale and potential impact.

The selection process proceeded in four steps. First, an initial filter was applied to identify all projects meeting the criteria. Second, suggestions were gathered from FCDO teams to incorporate institutional knowledge about the projects' existing behavioural science applications (or lack thereof) and contextual relevance. Third, prioritisation was undertaken in consultation with Programmes and Hubs to balance methodological considerations with operational priorities. Finally, a minimum of three projects were selected per Programme or Hub to ensure breadth of representation across the portfolio.

This combined purposive and criteria-based approach ensured that the sample was both analytically rich and institutionally relevant. It enabled the review to capture depth through intensity sampling, variation across contexts through maximum variation sampling, and representativeness across Programmes and Hubs, thereby providing a robust basis for subsequent analysis.

Key Informant Interviews

Following the selection of portfolio projects, a series of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with 20 grantees representing diverse programmes across the portfolio. These interviews were designed to generate in-depth, practice-based insights that complemented the findings of the rapid review and case selection.

Each interview lasted up to one hour and was conducted either virtually or in person, depending on the availability and preferences of participants. A semi-structured interview guide was employed to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for respondents to elaborate on issues of particular relevance. The guide was organised around four core areas of enquiry:

1. **Programme context and design –** understanding the objectives, scope, and implementation approach of each grantee's programme.

2. **Application of behavioural science –** exploring whether, and to what extent, specific components of applied behavioural science identified in the rapid review were incorporated into programme design, delivery, or evaluation.

3. **Rationale for adoption or non-adoption –** examining why behavioural approaches were applied (or not), including perceived barriers, enablers, and contextual considerations.

4. **Reflections on value and opportunity –** considering, hypothetically, whether greater use of behavioural science could have enhanced the programme's outcomes or mitigated risks if the project were to be undertaken again.

Interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and detailed notes were taken to ensure accuracy of data capture. A thematic coding approach was applied to the transcripts and notes, allowing for consistent inductive analysis across cases while remaining sensitive to the unique contexts of each programme. This method provided direct practitioner perspectives on the practical relevance, feasibility, and perceived value of applied behavioural science in technology and innovation programming, thereby bridging conceptual insights from the rapid review with lived experiences of grantees.

Case study analyses

Each interview was analysed as a separate case study, applying the applied behavioural science component model developed through the rapid review. A dot map technique was used to systematically code and visualise the presence or absence of specific behavioural science components within each programme. This approach enabled comparative analysis across cases while retaining the contextual richness of individual projects.

The analysis focused on three dimensions:

1. **Most applied components –** identifying which aspects of applied behavioural science were used most frequently, and exploring the reasons underpinning their adoption.

2. **Least applied components –** highlighting which components were seldom or never applied, and analysing the barriers or constraints that limited their use.

3. **Opportunities for added value –** assessing whether greater or different integration of behavioural science could have enhanced programme effectiveness, mitigated risks, or generated additional benefits.

This structured case-based approach provided both a descriptive account of current practice and an analytical basis for identifying where behavioural insights could be more formally and consistently embedded to strengthen FCDO's technology and innovation portfolio.

Workshops co-design and stakeholder engagement

The process of translating findings into practical tools and recommendations was deliberately designed as an iterative cycle of evidence generation, co-design, and validation. Insights from the Key Informant Interviews were first collected and analysed to identify potential opportunities where behavioural science could strengthen programme design and delivery. These insights were then refined and tested through two participatory workshops with FCDO teams and grantees, and subsequently reviewed by an External Advisory Group to ensure rigour and credibility.

- **Workshop 1: Review and Ideation (May 2025)**
  Participants: FCDO TIU and Programme/Hub teams
  Objective: Review preliminary findings, establish a shared understanding of what effective behavioural science application looks like in practice, identify barriers to adoption, and ideate practical solutions to overcome these challenges.
- **Workshop 2: Prioritisation and Concept Development (June 2025)**
  Participants: Grantee and project teams
  Objective: Prioritise the most promising ideas and provide structured feedback to inform the prototyping of tools and strategies for applied behavioural science integration.

To complement these participatory processes, an External Advisory Group was convened, comprising five distinguished experts from academia and public and private sector. The group was engaged at key points in the cycle to critically evaluate the methodology, challenge underlying assumptions, and provide strategic guidance. Their insights were instrumental in refining the analytical framework, strengthening interpretation of findings, and shaping the final recommendations.

This iterative and multi-level process — moving from practitioner perspectives (interviews), to co-design (workshops), to independent validation (advisory group) — ensured that outputs were empirically grounded, operationally relevant, and externally credible.

Prototype development and validation

Following the prioritisation of concepts during Workshop 2, selected ideas were advanced into a production phase. In this stage, draft tools and strategies were developed into practical, user-ready formats designed to support the embedding of behavioural science within programme design and delivery.

Once prototypes were produced, a refinement and validation phase was undertaken in close collaboration with Hubs and grantees. This phase provided an opportunity to test usability, assess contextual relevance, and gather practitioner feedback to strengthen the tools before wider dissemination. The iterative process ensured that outputs were not only evidence-based and theoretically sound, but also practical, contextually appropriate, and responsive to the needs of those implementing FCDO's technology and innovation programmes.

Working within the TIU ecosystem

This review of the application of behavioural science has been undertaken across three interconnected levels of the Technology and Innovation Unit (TIU) ecosystem: the TIU itself, its network of Hubs/Programmes, and the grantees who deliver projects on the ground. Each level plays a distinct role in shaping how innovation is designed, resourced, and implemented, and together they form the delivery structure through which FCDO's technology and innovation objectives are advanced.

At the highest level, the TIU manages innovation funds in line with the UK Government's broader development priorities. It provides strategic direction, oversight, and accountability to ensure that investments align with FCDO objectives and contribute to sustainable development outcomes.

Within this system**,** Hubs act as central platforms that pool expertise, resources, and technical support. They serve to coordinate innovation efforts efficiently across multiple stakeholders and ensure coherence in the pursuit of specific development objectives. By offering both thematic focus and technical capacity, Hubs play a critical role in enabling grantees to align their projects with broader strategic aims.

Operating within and beneath the hubs, grantees are responsible for testing and implementing innovative approaches. They apply for funding through Hub structures and are expected to deliver interventions that contribute directly to Hub objectives, and by extension, to FCDO's overarching goals. In doing so, grantees bring local knowledge, contextual awareness, and practical experimentation that complement the strategic vision of Hubs and the TIU.

This tiered structure—TIU, Hubs, and grantees—provides the framework through which behavioural science can be applied, assessed, and scaled. Understanding the dynamics at each level is therefore essential for identifying where behavioural approaches are already embedded, where gaps exist, and how integration can be strengthened across the ecosystem.

Figure 2: Tiered Structure

In total there are 7 hubs/ programmes managing hundreds of grants:

Organisation/Hub	Description
Transform	Tackle poverty and improve lives by scaling social enterprises, especially in areas like hygiene, sanitation, and sustainable livelihoods.
Artificial Intelligence 4 Development (AI4D)	Supports responsible AI research and innovation to address development challenges.
Global Systems for Mobile Communication Association (GSMA)	Promotes digital inclusion and mobile technology solutions for development.
Global Innovation Fund (GIF)	Invests in scalable innovations that address global development problems.
Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDI Hub)	Drives disability-inclusive innovation for a fairer and more accessible world.
Co-Labs	Facilitates locally-led innovation labs to pilot and scale solutions to development issues.
Frontier Technologies (FT)	Explores and tests emerging technologies to tackle complex development challenges.

Table 1: TIU Hubs and Programmes

Portfolio review findings

Rapid review

To inform the development of the methodology for this portfolio review, a targeted literature review of applied behavioural science was undertaken. The purpose of this review was to identify commonly recognised and widely accepted components that underpin robust behavioural science practice in applied settings. From this synthesis, a framework of key elements was established, comprising: *problem definition, behavioural insight generation and diagnosis, intervention design, testing and iteration, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), and implementation*. These elements were used as reference points to assess the integration of behavioural science across projects in the Technology and Innovation Unit's portfolio.

Figure 3: Core Components of Behavioural Science

While not every project would be expected to include all components—nor necessarily follow them in a strictly linear sequence—these elements represent the typical features of behavioural science-informed work. Applying this framework allowed us to assess both the depth (extent of integration) and consistency (how systematically components were used) of behavioural science practice, thereby providing a clearer picture of current practice and identifying areas where further support may be valuable.

The review highlighted the following core components of applied behavioural science in practice:

- **Evidence Review:** Identifying target behaviours for change (e.g. uptake of innovations), analysing relevant influences within specific populations, and drawing on existing evidence of what makes for effective interventions (e.g. how to frame a message).
- **Problem Definition:** Clarifying challenges through a behavioural lens, including which behaviours currently occur, why they occur, and which must change to achieve desired outcomes.
- **Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL):** Developing a behavioural science-informed Theory of Change (ToC), incorporating behavioural mechanisms, measurement of outcomes, and potential spillovers, including unintended consequences.
- **Diagnosis:** Using recognised theories, models, or frameworks (TMFs) to analyse behavioural drivers and barriers, and explain why particular behaviours do or do not occur.
- **Intervention Design:** Drawing on theory and evidence to map behavioural barriers to tailored solutions, ensuring a clear link between diagnosis and design.
- **Co-Design:** Engaging end users in the development of interventions to ensure acceptability, feasibility, and contextual fit, often combining behavioural approaches with participatory methods.
- **Implementation:** Considering strategies to spread, scale, and sustain interventions, with clear attention to operationalising behavioural insights in real-world settings.
- **Expertise:** Involving domain specialists from behavioural science fields (e.g. psychology, anthropology, sociology) to strengthen analysis, intervention design, and behavioural measurement.

Synthesising these elements, the review produced a component model of applied behavioural science which served as the analytical framework for the subsequent case analyses. This model was applied consistently across the portfolio to examine the presence, absence, and quality of behavioural science integration, enabling identification of both promising practices and gaps where greater use of behavioural insights could enhance outcomes.

Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with 20 grantees across the portfolio provided rich insights into how behavioural science is currently understood and applied in practice. The conversations confirmed that many teams are already engaging with behavioural principles, even if they are not always using formal terminology or frameworks. The KIIs also highlighted areas where additional tools and support could help strengthen integration.

Grantees generally described their programmes in ways that emphasised user-centred approaches, contextual awareness, and responsiveness to local needs. While not always labelled as “behavioural science,” these practices often aligned with behavioural principles such as focusing on user motivations, barriers, and decision-making processes. Where behavioural science was applied more explicitly, it tended to add value by clarifying design choices, informing communication strategies, and shaping monitoring and evaluation.

At the same time, grantees identified practical challenges they face in current conditions. These included limited familiarity with behavioural frameworks, competing priorities that made systematic behavioural analysis difficult, and resource constraints that limited opportunities for deeper engagement. Despite these challenges, respondents expressed openness to applying behavioural science more intentionally, particularly if tools were straightforward, context-sensitive, and added clear value to their existing processes.

A particularly encouraging finding was that many grantees could see, in retrospect, where behavioural approaches might have further strengthened their projects—whether by sharpening problem definition, addressing barriers more systematically, or enhancing uptake and sustainability. This openness suggests a strong foundation for building capability and confidence across the portfolio.

Overall, the interviews reinforced the importance of making behavioural science practical, accessible, and directly relevant to programme needs. They also highlighted that while current practice varies, there is significant potential to deepen impact through better integration of behavioural insights, especially when supported with clear guidance, tools, and access to expertise.

Applied Behavioural Science component analysis

The outputs of the Key Informant Interviews were analysed using the applied behavioural science component model developed through the rapid review. Each interview was examined as a discrete case study and coded to assess the extent to which individual components of behavioural science had been integrated into the project.

For every component, three levels of application were recorded:

- **Applied –** The component was present in a recognizably behavioural way, whether through methodical application of behavioural science, a focus on target behaviour(s) or in other approaches.
- **Partially applied –** The component was present but incomplete, without focus on behaviour.
- **Not applied –** The component was absent from the project.

Once components were classified, the analysis explored the reasons underlying each assessment, drawing on respondent explanations to understand contextual drivers, institutional barriers, and enabling factors. Finally, each case was assessed for future opportunities—specifically whether, had behavioural science been more systematically applied, additional value could have been generated in terms of programme effectiveness, risk mitigation, or sustainability.

This structured approach enabled both a comparative portfolio-level analysis of how behavioural science is currently being used and a forward-looking assessment of where greater integration could strengthen the impact of FCDO's technology and innovation investment.

Applications of Behavioural Science at the grant level

Applied

Partially applied

Not applied

Hub/ Programme	Project/ Grant	Component							
		Evidence Review	Problem Definition	MEL	Diagnosis	Int. Design	Co-Design	Implementation	Expertise
GIF	BI for Cash Transfers								
	Balloon Ventures								
	ImpactED								
FT	Help Mum / BIT			N/a				N/a	
	Cocoa								
	e-Triage								
GSMA	Agromail								
	ATEC								
	Rumsan								
Co-Labs	Brooks								
	Sanrai								
GDI	Attvaran								
	Inclusive Cities								
	ParaSport								
Transform	Happy Tap								
	ShuJazz								
	WeCyclers					No Info			
AI4D	AI for PWD								
	AI In Agriculture								
	AI for SDG								

Table 2: Applications of Behavioural Science

The dot map analysis highlighted that behavioural science is being engaged across the portfolio in a variety of ways, though its application tends to be uneven and often shaped by contextual constraints.

Evidence reviews were commonly undertaken, though often focused on user understanding rather than methodically mapping behavioural drivers. Where behavioural reviews were explicitly behavioural in nature, they were shown to play a valuable role in informing intervention design, suggesting scope for more consistent application.

Problem definition was generally recognised as important, and many grantees drew on contextual and user needs to frame challenges. However, behavioural perspectives were less commonly used, particularly where projects had already developed solutions and were retrospectively looking to build a need for them. This points to an opportunity for strengthening behavioural framing at earlier stages of programme design, and for making the process of defining target behaviours more accessible and relevant to grantees.

Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) activities were widely in place, with formative work such as piloting and feasibility studies being common practice. Behavioural MEL approaches, including the use of behavioural Theories of Change, tended to be less frequent, but were well executed when supported by specialist partners. This suggests that building grantees' confidence and capacity in behavioural MEL could add value to existing practices.

Diagnosis was not always a formal requirement, and many grantees noted challenges with time, resources, or expertise. Nevertheless, where behavioural diagnostic tools such as COM-B or barriers analysis were applied by specialists, they provided valuable insights to guide programme design. This highlights an opportunity to make diagnostic tools more practical and accessible for a wider range of projects.

For **intervention design**, many programmes incorporated behavioural ideas informally or retrospectively, while structured behavioural approaches were less common. Where specialists were engaged, however, design processes were more clearly informed by behavioural theory and evidence. Strengthening this systematic link between analysis and design could enhance effectiveness across the portfolio.

Co-design with end users was recognised as highly valuable, and while often limited to validation due to resource constraints, it was applied more substantively when specialist practitioners were involved. This points to potential for expanding participatory approaches that combine behavioural methods with co-design practices in feasible ways.

In terms of **implementation**, most grantees focused on technical and operational aspects of scaling. While behavioural considerations were less commonly foregrounded, this offers a clear opportunity to complement technical viability with behavioural strategies for sustainability and adoption.

Finally, on expertise, many grantees reported that **behavioural science support and expertise** was sought in targeted ways, often from external specialists. Although access and affordability remain challenges, this demonstrates the value placed on behavioural expertise and suggests that clearer pathways for sourcing, integrating, and building such expertise could help extend its reach.

Overall, the dot map analysis suggests that while behavioural science is already being engaged in meaningful ways across the portfolio, there is strong potential to deepen its application, particularly by making frameworks and tools more accessible, embedding behavioural perspectives earlier in the design cycle, and strengthening grantees' capacity to apply them in a standardised and comprehensive manner.

Evidence reviews: Summary of findings

Across the portfolio, evidence reviews were broadly recognised as a valuable step in programme development, even though there were no specific requirements for how or when they should be conducted. In practice, reviews were often carried out quickly and informally, serving as a way to better understand users or target populations and to validate existing ideas. These exercises tended to focus on analogous interventions or contextual insights, which grantees found helpful in refining their approaches and building confidence in programme direction.

From a behavioural science perspective, formal behavioural evidence reviews—defined as the systematic identification of target behaviours for change, analysis of behavioural influences within specific populations, and use of existing evidence on what makes interventions effective (for example, framing messages to increase uptake)—were less common. Where such reviews were undertaken, however, they played an important role in shaping intervention design. In these cases, behavioural evidence reviews helped grantees move beyond general user understanding to more precise identification of behavioural drivers and barriers, providing a stronger foundation for tailored solutions.

Overall, the findings suggest that while behavioural evidence reviews are not yet systematically embedded, there is strong recognition of their value. The current informal practices indicate that grantees are already engaging with the spirit of behavioural evidence review, and with clearer guidance and tools, there is considerable potential to make this a more consistent and structured element of programme design.

Case study: HappyTap — using behavioural evidence to design accessible handwashing solutions

HappyTap is a social enterprise that set out to transform global handwashing practices by addressing a simple but pervasive problem: while knowledge about hygiene is widespread, actual handwashing rates are extremely low—even among healthcare workers in high-income countries. The organisation, funded by TRANSFORM, partnered with human-centred design experts (including IDEO designers) to create a portable, attractive handwashing station that could be easily deployed in classrooms, clinics, and households. The goal was to overcome the practical barriers of convenience, access, and desirability that consistently undermine hygiene campaigns focused only on awareness.

> *"We have all these studies to show that the knowledge and awareness campaigns aren't effective, and we have quite a bit of good evidence showing that improving access and convenience and making handwashing facilities desirable is… the best approach."*

From the outset, HappyTap grounded its work in a secondary evidence review of global hygiene research, including behavioural science models from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. This review confirmed that awareness campaigns do not change behaviour; instead, convenience, visibility, and ease of use are the most powerful drivers. The review uncovered findings such as adherence dropping sharply when stations are more than seven metres away, or responsibility being greater when a handwashing unit sits in a classroom rather than a hallway. These behavioural insights then guided design and deployment decisions.

To translate these findings into practice, HappyTap ran extensive co-design and user-testing sessions. Prototypes were placed in real households and schools, rotated, and compared to uncover what people actually valued in daily use, which was often different from what they said initially. This iterative process informed features that made the stations more practical, affordable, and appealing. Beyond the product itself, the team recognised that behaviour change also depended on "upstream actors"—teachers, principals, and facility managers—who controlled access and maintenance.

The evidence-driven approach also shaped strategy for scaling. Rather than pushing for standalone hygiene programmes, HappyTap pursued a pragmatic "bundling" approach to embed handwashing facilities into existing, well-funded campaigns such as nutrition and maternal health. This made adoption easier for policymakers, who are often swayed by what is low-risk, easy to visualise, and politically rewarding. Demonstration sites with progressive leaders created visible proof points to inspire further uptake.

These cycles of evidence and adaptation delivered concrete outcomes: more consistent classroom and clinic handwashing, greater ownership by staff and teachers, and facilities that users wanted to maintain and use. Just as importantly, the work reframed the sector's understanding of the problem—shifting the focus from individual motivation to systemic convenience and access. The secondary behavioural evidence review was pivotal in this shift, helping HappyTap avoid the "knowledge trap" and instead build an intervention grounded in what truly drives behaviour.

In short, HappyTap demonstrates how combining rigorous evidence with human-centred design and political pragmatism can move hygiene initiatives beyond posters and slogans—toward scalable, sustainable solutions that make handwashing a convenient reality for all.

Problem definition: Summary of findings

Problem definition was widely acknowledged by Programmes, Hubs, and grantees as an important step in programme development. Most teams placed emphasis on understanding the context and user needs, which provided a useful foundation for shaping interventions. However, in cases where grantees already had a developed solution or existing partner, there was sometimes less attention given to articulating the underlying problem in behavioural terms. In such situations, some Programmes and Hubs highlighted the need for additional discovery work to strengthen problem framing before moving forward.

In general, problem definition across the portfolio tended to be non-behavioural in nature, focusing more on contextual challenges and user requirements than on identifying specific target behaviours. When behavioural science experts were engaged, however, problem definition was more likely to explicitly frame which behaviours needed to change and why. This demonstrates the added value of specialist input in helping teams move from broad context to sharper behavioural focus.

Some Programmes and Hubs also expressed a degree of scepticism about the value of always identifying a target behaviour, particularly in contexts where solutions were already well advanced or where behavioural change was not perceived as central to the challenge. Even so, the overall findings suggest that strengthening problem definition—especially with behavioural perspectives—could help grantees align interventions more closely with the drivers and barriers that influence outcomes. This represents a practical opportunity to build capacity and provide tools that make behavioural framing easier and more relevant across diverse project contexts.

Case study: ImpactEd – Scaling "My Better World" in Kenya

The My Better World programme, implemented by ImpactEd and scaled through the Global Innovation Fund (GIF) project, set out to address barriers to education and social-emotional well-being for young people in Kenya, particularly girls. The team recognised early that there was no single universal problem—instead, each school and community faced distinct challenges, ranging from early marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) to long travel distances, poor facilities, or low enrolment. To respond effectively, the project embedded problem definition as a local, participatory process, ensuring that each of the 110 schools and their surrounding communities could analyse their own barriers and set priorities. This approach avoided one-size-fits-all solutions and ensured interventions were grounded in lived experience.

> *'Out of 110 schools, you will most probably find that you come up with 110 Community Action Plans. Why? Because they are analysing their own specific challenge and coming up with their own home-grown solution to that specific challenge."*

Problem definition was facilitated through Community Action Plans (CAPs) and later enhanced with Community Dialogues linked to screenings of the My Better World media content. These dialogues helped families and communities name and analyse sensitive issues such as child labour or harmful norms, and then design locally appropriate responses. Importantly, this process was self-determined and self-funded, which strengthened ownership and sustainability. At the organisational level, ImpactEd also used a broader problem-framing process, asking: what behaviours or systemic issues block girls' education, and what "levers" can realistically shift those behaviours? This framing, supported by behavioural science concepts like norm change and social learning, guided intervention design from teacher training to community engagement.

What worked especially well was that the problem definition process created clarity, legitimacy, and alignment. Locally, it gave communities agency to set their own priorities, increasing buy-in and action—for example, one village prioritised an enrolment drive, while another tackled attendance or harmful practices. At the programme level, it helped ImpactEd and government partners target resources more effectively and design content that resonated with young people's realities. Respondents described problem definition as "super important" in bridging the gap between ambition and actionable pathways, and credited it with making My Better World adaptable, scalable, and credible enough to attract continued interest from the Kenyan Ministry of Education and the World Bank.

MEL: Summary of findings

Across the portfolio, MEL activities were most commonly formative in nature, focusing on feasibility testing, piloting, intervention development, and establishing proof of concept. This emphasis reflected the early-stage and innovative character of many projects. Where MEL was conducted, it often centred on a small set of straightforward metrics—such as uptake and usage—typically linked to Theory of Change (ToC) activities at the outset of the project lifecycle. These early measures provided useful insights into whether interventions were functioning as intended, and gave teams a foundation for adaptation and improvement.

Grantees generally faced constraints in conducting more sophisticated MEL, citing limited capability, resources, and time. As a result, specialist partners were frequently engaged to design and deliver more complex evaluations, including quasi-experimental and experimental studies of impact. While grantees recognised the potential value of the evidence produced by these methods, they also highlighted the significant burden such exercises placed on already stretched teams. In some cases, scepticism was expressed about the credibility and practical utility of the resulting data.

The role of ToCs was particularly noteworthy. Programmes and Hubs often emphasised their importance, and in some cases they served as helpful tools for framing assumptions and identifying pathways to change. However, they were not always consistently applied, especially in contexts of early innovation, and some grantees expressed doubts about their relevance to fast-moving project realities.

Overall, there was limited evidence that MEL activities incorporated behavioural science explicitly, either in ToC design or in measurement approaches. Exceptions occurred where specialist behavioural science partners were directly involved, demonstrating that with appropriate expertise, MEL can more effectively capture behavioural mechanisms and outcomes. This points to a clear opportunity: making behavioural MEL more accessible, feasible, and aligned with grantees' needs could enhance the value of learning and strengthen the evidence base for innovation at scale.

Case study: Ideas42 — Embedding MEL in cash transfer innovations

The Global Innovation Fund (GIF) supported a seven-year partnership between Ideas42, the World Bank, and country governments to strengthen the impact of social protection cash transfer programmes through applied behavioural science. MEL was at the heart of this collaboration. From the outset, Ideas42 developed **two layers of Theory of Change**: one for the overall engagement (to both generate scalable behavioural interventions and build government capacity to apply a behavioural lens), and more specific ToCs for each project, mapping how interventions would address diagnosed barriers and lead to improved beneficiary behaviours. This dual structure provided both strategic direction and a clear measurement framework.

The project invested heavily in rigorous impact evaluation, running seven Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) across multiple countries to assess the effects of "light-touch" behavioural interventions. These trials consistently showed positive results, such as nudges that helped households save or plan more effectively. Early in the programme, Ideas42 attempted an iterative evaluation process (a small pilot RCT followed by a larger cluster trial) in Tanzania and Kenya. While technically valuable, this approach proved demanding for government partners, who, after seeing initial positive impacts, were more interested in moving directly to scale. As a result, the MEL strategy adapted, prioritising a single, well-timed RCT per intervention and ensuring findings were actionable and aligned with governments' decision-making cycles.

> *"Our partners… after seeing the initial positive causal impacts, preferred to move directly to scale rather than additional trials."*

Crucially, MEL was not just about generating evidence but about **fostering government ownership and practical learning**. Ideas42 worked with ministries to identify evaluation sites, co-design sampling strategies, and lead "training of trainers" so officials could implement designs themselves. Survey firms were engaged for data collection, reducing the burden on governments, while Ideas42 ensured insights were accessible and timely. This blend of academic rigour with pragmatic adaptation was central to scaling successes — most notably in Tanzania, where evidence from RCTs underpinned government uptake of behavioural designs reaching half a million people. The case demonstrates that behavioural MEL can be both rigorous and flexible, provided it balances funders' need for credible evidence with governments' preference for rapid, usable results.

Diagnosis: Summary of findings

Diagnosis — the systematic analysis of behavioural drivers and barriers — was not typically a formal requirement within Programmes or Hubs. As a result, grantees often faced challenges in applying this approach independently, citing limited capability (specialist knowledge and skills), opportunity (time and resources), and occasionally motivation, particularly when the perceived value or relevance of behavioural diagnosis was not immediately clear in relation to their project goals.

Where behavioural analysis did take place, it was usually specialist-led and focused at the grantee level. In these cases, behavioural science experts applied structured diagnostic tools to identify the behavioural mechanisms underpinning programme outcomes. The COM-B model was the most commonly referenced diagnostic framework, offering a structured lens to understand how capability, opportunity, and motivation shape behaviours. This external expertise provided valuable insights that helped link problem definition to intervention design in a more systematic way.

Overall, while behavioural diagnosis is not yet embedded as a routine expectation across the portfolio, the specialist-led examples demonstrate its potential to add significant value. Making diagnostic approaches more accessible, streamlined, and feasible for grantees could help broaden uptake, ensuring that projects can more consistently identify behavioural barriers and tailor interventions for greater effectiveness.

Intervention design: Summary of findings

Across the portfolio, intervention design was rarely developed through a systematic or explicit application of behavioural science. Typically, neither Programmes/Hubs nor grantees had formal processes in place to link behavioural evidence and theory directly to design decisions. Instead, design activities often relied on existing practices, with behavioural concepts referenced in more informal or post-hoc ways.

There were, however, some notable exceptions. Two Programmes/Hubs drew on a Behavioural Innovation approach informed by the EAST framework (Easy, Attractive, Social, Timely). While the application of EAST tended to be somewhat ad hoc and its dissemination to grantees was limited, it nonetheless signalled a growing interest in integrating structured behavioural approaches into intervention design.

Where grantees without behavioural expertise engaged with behavioural science, this was often not directly tied to a diagnostic process. Instead, behavioural concepts were referenced retrospectively, to frame or explain interventions already underway. In contrast, specialist behavioural science practitioners at the grantee level employed two, more structured approaches:

1. **Barrier-to-solution mapping:** Drawing on behavioural science evidence and theory, they mapped the identified barriers (those found in the diagnostic research) to tailored behavioural 'solutions'. This ensured interventions were explicitly designed to address observed challenges.

2. **Behavioural audit and redesign:** Some practitioners conducted post-hoc behavioural science audits of existing interventions. These audits used behavioural theory, evidence, and frameworks to assess the design, identify gaps, and propose refinements. This often included integrating diagnostic insights with subsequent user testing, thereby strengthening the design process and ensuring interventions were better aligned with user needs.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while structured behavioural intervention design remains limited across the portfolio, targeted use of frameworks like EAST, alongside the work of specialist practitioners, demonstrates the value and potential of embedding behavioural science into design processes. This presents a clear opportunity for wider dissemination and capacity building.

Case study: HelpMum — diagnosing behavioural barriers to vaccination in Nigeria

HelpMum partnered with the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to strengthen a WhatsApp vaccination chatbot aimed at increasing routine immunisation among Nigerian mothers for a Frontier Technologies pilot. Rather than starting from attitudes or awareness, the team framed the challenge as a **behavioural problem:** getting caregivers to complete timely clinic visits with the right information (e.g., dates, locations, documents). With the target behaviour clear, BIT's role was to apply a **behavioural diagnosis**—mapping which specific frictions were stopping the desired actions and for whom.

Diagnosis combined desk evidence with in-context primary research. Using behaviour mapping and COM-B, the team coded barriers across Capability (e.g., understanding schedules), Opportunity (e.g., clinic distance, forgotten vaccination cards, no timely reminders), and Motivation (e.g., competing demands on disbursement days, low salience). Field usability tests with mothers on their own phones surfaced actionable frictions: menus that hid key tasks, unclear next steps, and common real-life obstacles (last-minute work, childcare) that derailed clinic plans.

These insights were translated into design hypotheses using EAST and intention-to-action tools (e.g., implementation intentions to set the where/when/how of the next visit; simpler paths to "what do I do now?"; clearer prompts to bring the child's card).

"Our role was mainly as people science experts… to provide the behavioural lens to analyse HelpMum's vaccination chatbot. We focus on behaviour, not attitudes—so we used behaviour mapping and COM-B to understand why mothers were or weren't completing vaccinations. For example, we found things like leaving vaccination cards at home or not getting timely reminders were common frictions that stopped clinic visits from happening."

What worked well was the **tight loop from diagnosis → design.** Concrete frictions identified through COM-B and user walkthroughs directly informed changes to the structured chatbot (streamlined menus, smarter reminders, step-by-step flows) and a plan to A/B test against the original via an RCT. The team also learned that solution-first constraints (arriving with a pre-chosen chatbot and agile sprints) can limit upstream discovery—but the diagnosis still produced high-leverage, low-cost tweaks aligned to government scale. In short, focusing on **specific behaviours and their barriers** made improvements obvious, testable, and scalable—turning a general "increase uptake" goal into a set of precise, behaviourally grounded product changes.

Co-Design: Summary of findings

Across the portfolio, Programmes/Hubs and grantees generally recognised the importance of engaging end users in the development of interventions and innovations. This engagement was seen as a way of improving relevance and usability, and in some cases was accompanied by a commitment to 'lean' or 'agile' methods of working.

In practice, however, end-user engagement tended to be limited in scope and depth. Rather than full co-design, activities were more often positioned as user validation (checking a solution once designed) or user involvement (providing input at specific points). These engagements were usually one-off, rather than ongoing and iterative, and therefore lacked the repeated cycles of feedback and adaptation that characterise genuine co-design. Grantees, and in some cases Programmes/Hubs, frequently lacked the resources, experience, or capability required to undertake sustained co-design processes, though many attempted to approximate them where possible.

Some Programmes/Hubs and grantees also expressed concerns about the applicability of lean or agile methods, particularly design sprints, to the development of complex interventions. These concerns centred on the burden such processes place on grantees and the risk that they may be ill-suited to contexts where a more research-led and gradual approach, such as that often used in behavioural science, could generate more robust and context-sensitive results.

Where more meaningful co-design was observed, it was typically led by specialist behavioural science practitioners. These actors were able to integrate behavioural design principles with direct engagement of end users, ensuring that interventions were shaped by both behavioural evidence and lived experiences. Importantly, the depth of end-user participation was contingent not only on available time and budget but also on whether behavioural science evidence could be leveraged to guide the process. Rather than starting entirely from scratch, practitioners often began with evidence-based intervention types or components that had already been shown to influence behaviour, and then worked with users to adapt and tailor these to the local context.

Taken together, these findings indicate that while co-design is valued across the portfolio, it remains more aspirational than embedded. Opportunities exist to strengthen capacity and resourcing for co-design, and to encourage models that balance behavioural evidence with iterative, user-led input to create more effective and sustainable interventions.

Case study: AI for Persons with Disabilities — co-designing assistive technologies in Ghana

A Ghana-based research team, working within a Responsible AI Lab, set out to develop low-cost assistive technologies for people with visual and hearing impairments. Unlike solution-first pilots, this project placed co-design at the centre: people with disabilities, their associations, and the Department of Disability and Rehabilitation Studies were engaged as co-owners of the process, shaping what problems mattered and how technologies should respond.

The starting point was behavioural. Consultations revealed strong reliance on human caregivers ("what can be better than a human being?"), resistance to data sharing due to fears of misuse in rituals ("juju"), and fatigue from past projects that had not delivered benefits. Rather than assuming uptake, the team treated these insights as behavioural barriers to adoption, not just technical gaps.

Design choices flowed from this diagnosis. Technologies were framed as assistive, not replacements, reassuring caregivers. Prototypes were adapted for different age groups and made to function in six widely spoken local languages, addressing accessibility beyond English. Hardware was designed to be affordable and lightweight, and software to run under Ghana's intermittent power supply. Crucially, engagement was iterative: stakeholder workshops, usability tests, and field feedback loops made participants "co-developers" of solutions, reinforcing trust and ownership.

"The approach where we are involving the association gives them a sense of belonging. Whatever we are doing belongs to them — they are co-owners and co-developers of the solutions."

What worked well was the participatory dynamic. Early workshops revealed both practical frictions (e.g., card-carrying requirements at clinics, limited power access) and cultural sensitivities, which directly shaped design adaptations. Involving trusted intermediaries in data collection and feedback reduced scepticism, while repeated interaction signalled that the project would deliver real benefits. The team also learned that prototyping earlier, even with paper mock-ups, and shifting sessions into communities rather than on campus would strengthen inclusivity.

In short, co-design transformed the project from a technology build into a behaviourally grounded, user-owned innovation process. By treating users as co-owners and surfacing cultural, motivational, and practical barriers, the project was able to translate behavioural insight into concrete design principles—building solutions more likely to be trusted, adopted, and scaled.

Implementation: Summary of findings

Across the portfolio, Programmes/Hubs and grantees consistently recognised the importance of implementation, particularly the challenge of moving from testing whether an intervention ***works*** towards embedding it in real-world systems. Implementation was generally seen as central to achieving sustained impact, though the depth of focus varied depending on the maturity of the intervention and the type of project or pilot.

In practice, more attention was often paid to establishing proof of concept—through feasibility testing or impact evaluation—than to subsequent implementation. Where implementation was prioritised, it tended to focus on scaling successful innovations, with some Programmes/Hubs providing targeted support to explore cost-effectiveness, infrastructure requirements, and stakeholder engagement for wider adoption. This support varied across the portfolio, but where present it added important momentum to the transition from small pilots to larger-scale interventions.

Many Programmes/Hubs highlighted that implementation is inherently behavioural and contextual: success depends not just on technical design but on how people and organisations adopt, adapt, and sustain new practices. Grantees echoed this view, noting that implementation and especially scaling can be particularly challenging for smaller, resource-constrained organisations. At the same time, grantees often demonstrated a strong commitment to planning for implementation early in the project lifecycle, recognising the value of identifying potential pathways to adoption even when resources were limited.

Notably, neither Programmes/Hubs nor grantees tended to draw systematically on behavioural science frameworks or evidence to guide implementation. Instead, approaches were pragmatic and shaped by immediate opportunities and constraints. This highlights a positive opportunity for future initiatives: to build on existing recognition of implementation as behavioural and contextual, and to strengthen the use of behavioural evidence and models to inform adoption and scaling strategies.

Taken together, these findings suggest that implementation is widely understood as critical but remains an area of variation and learning across the portfolio. With additional support, capacity, and integration of behavioural science, there is strong potential to move beyond establishing whether interventions work towards ensuring they are effectively embedded, scaled, and sustained.

Case study: Mesh — building trusted networks in Kenya's informal economy

Mesh, a spin-off from Shujaaz, set out to tackle one of Kenya's biggest challenges: helping the one million young people entering the job market every year thrive in an economy where only 70,000 formal jobs exist. Most must work in the informal economy, where they face behavioural and structural barriers: limited networks, lack of trust, scarce access to relevant skills, and invisibility to formal lenders and services.

The diagnosis was that infrastructure alone (like cheap internet access) wasn't enough. As one leader put it, "the arrival of the internet…was like a bunch of building materials had been delivered to the village" — useful only if people knew how to assemble them into something valuable. Young people wanted to learn, but not to be "taught" in traditional ways. Instead, they responded to peer-to-peer, problem-solving approaches that were immediately relevant to their daily hustles. A further systemic barrier was that informal entrepreneurs' reputations and good behaviour in local markets weren't visible to banks and fintechs, leading to exploitative borrowing rates of up to 17% per month.

Mesh's intervention design directly mapped onto these behavioural barriers. It created a digital platform — "the first social media for the informal economy" — where young entrepreneurs could build trusted networks, exchange peer-led lessons, and demonstrate skills through visible behaviours. Every user action on Mesh is observable, forming a reputation layer. A badge system and five-star profiles reward positive behaviours, creating a "virtuous circle" where users know that being reliable and supportive leads to more opportunities. Partnerships with lenders link these digital reputations to access to finance, de-risking loans and reducing costs. Crucially, content and learning modules are delivered by peers, framed around solving immediate, practical problems rather than abstract training.

> *"Young people in Kenya want to learn, but they do not want to be taught. The education system has delivered disappointment, so please don't return me to anything that feels like an education experience."*

Co-design is central to Mesh's philosophy. The team operates on a "player first" principle, rigorously testing every feature and piece of content with real users through their "ground truth toolkit." After a year, "power users" themselves co-created the "five rules of Mesh," embedding behavioural norms into the platform's culture. This approach ensures relevance, ownership, and sustained engagement; users feel they are co-developers rather than passive recipients.

The results are striking. Mesh has tripled in size in six months, reaching three-quarters of a million active users in 30 days, growing at 50,000 new users per week, and recording a Net Promoter Score of 87. Beyond scale, early behavioural data show that 90% of users report earning more since joining, with half doubling their income. Formal lenders are starting to adapt to Mesh's rules, recognising its unique behavioural data as a credible way to assess and serve informal borrowers.

The key learning is that Mesh doesn't try to formalise the informal economy. Instead, it creates a trusted behavioural ecosystem that allows young people's everyday actions — networking, helping peers, honouring contracts — to become visible assets. By translating these into data and reputation, Mesh shifts the behaviour of both its users and the formal sector, demonstrating how identity, trust, and positive deviance can unlock large-scale change.

Expertise: Summary of findings

Across the portfolio, Programmes/Hubs and grantees frequently drew on external expertise when specific needs arose and when resources allowed. This expertise was often highly targeted, covering areas such as human-centred design (HCD), gender, or digital health systems, and tended to be brought in for particular projects rather than through ongoing advisory structures. Grantees, in particular, expressed a preference for focused, practical advice that could directly address a pressing challenge, rather than investing in standing advisory boards or more permanent arrangements.

While some grantees recognised the potential value of behavioural science expertise, it was often perceived as harder to identify, relatively costly, and less of a priority compared to other forms of technical input. In several cases, behavioural science was also understood in broader terms, sometimes conflated with social science or general research skills, rather than seen as a distinct and specialised discipline.

Notably, the clearest example of successfully embedding behavioural science expertise occurred in a programme where a senior leader had formal behavioural science training. Positioned close to decision-making and able to influence a range of portfolio projects, this individual was able to ensure behavioural science was not only visible but actively integrated into design and delivery. This suggests that, while targeted inputs remain valuable, embedding behavioural science expertise within leadership roles may offer the most effective route to shaping portfolios in a systematic and sustained way.

Case study: Sanrai — integrating behavioural expertise mid-implementation in Uttar Pradesh

Sanrai launched a two-year pilot in one district of Uttar Pradesh to deliver "oxygen as a service" to 19 community health centres, supplying concentrators and diagnostic equipment. The programme initially assumed that, in the wake of COVID-19, both patients and clinicians would be familiar with and accepting of oxygen therapy. Early implementation focused on infrastructure and logistics: placing equipment, training staff, and monitoring usage.

Halfway into the pilot, monitoring data and field observations revealed a surprising behavioural challenge: despite clinical need, patients were not using oxygen. Many discontinued therapy as soon as they felt slightly better, while others refused altogether, perceiving oxygen as unnecessary or even a "death sentence". Mothers, in particular, resisted neonatal oxygen use due to fears of machines signalling imminent death. As a result, equipment often sat idle.

> *'We had a session with CoLab. One of their founders is focused on behavioural science. We spent an hour with her and what came from that was creating more patient literature as well as giving the doctors prescription pads where they could write specifically to the patient, tear it off, and give it to the patient'*

Recognising this as a behavioural barrier to programme success, Sanrai brought in an external behavioural science expert from CoLab. In a focused session, the team co-designed simple but targeted interventions: posters and banners to normalise oxygen use, and prescription pads enabling doctors to give patients written instructions that reinforced the legitimacy and safety of oxygen therapy. These small, behaviourally informed adjustments helped shift perceptions and improve uptake.

The case illustrates the value of integrating behavioural expertise, even reactively. While the original programme design did not foreground behavioural science or involve co-design with clinicians and patients, the mid-course pivot showed that behavioural issues could not be overlooked. By drawing on specialist expertise, Sanrai translated observed frictions into practical solutions. Importantly, the experience also underscored a lesson for future initiatives: engaging stakeholders and behavioural experts earlier might pre-empt similar challenges, ensuring smoother implementation and more sustainable adoption.

Opportunities to intervene

Our review of the portfolio showed that the application of behavioural science is still relatively limited, but the process of taking these findings back to programme and hub leads provided rich insights into why this is the case and how it might be addressed. The conversations revealed a picture of growing recognition and interest in behavioural approaches, alongside some systemic barriers that make their consistent use more difficult.

Many programmes, hubs and grantees had little prior knowledge of behavioural science or how it could be practically applied. Few were familiar with the frameworks and methods that underpin behavioural design, and most did not have direct experience of operationalising them. Rather than being a deliberate omission, this reflects the fact that behavioural science has not yet been a common feature of innovation practice in this space. At the same time, we saw strong examples where specialist organisations brought dedicated expertise to projects, and where influential programme staff with behavioural backgrounds were able to shape portfolios in positive ways. These examples demonstrate the value of expertise and how it can ripple outward when embedded in the right places.

In terms of day-to-day working, there were few formal processes that naturally encouraged the use of behavioural science. Methods such as Human-Centred Design or Lean/Agile dominated the landscape, while behavioural science was less well integrated into programme requirements or grantee guidance. As a result, behavioural approaches were not typically embedded at the application stage or in routine project management. When expertise was sought, it was often difficult to identify credible practitioners or to justify the additional costs within already constrained budgets. Even so, we noted promising practices in some hubs, such as directing grantees to behavioural design toolkits or frameworks that offered practical entry points for integration.

Perceptions of value also shaped the extent of application. Many grantees and programme teams prioritised technical, business, or design expertise, viewing these as more directly tied to project outcomes. Behavioural science was often conflated with general research or evaluation, or assumed to be “common sense.” This meant it was not always seen as something requiring dedicated investment. Where behavioural methods were applied, however, and the benefits were clear in terms of improved uptake or more effective interventions, enthusiasm grew. These moments showed how powerful behavioural science can be when translated into tangible results.

Taken together, these findings point to a system in which behavioural science has not yet become a norm or expectation, but where there is appetite to learn and potential to grow. Programmes and hubs that have already seen the benefits are well placed to demonstrate the value of embedding behavioural approaches, while targeted tools, case studies, and accessible expertise could lower the barriers for others. By framing behavioural science not as an abstract discipline but as a practical means of achieving more effective innovation, there is real opportunity to shift the culture of practice across the portfolio.

Establishing priorities for prototyping

Building on the insights from the portfolio review and the reflections of programme and hub leads, MAGENTA worked closely with hubs and FCDO partners to establish where to prioritise behavioural science for prototyping. The discussions highlighted that successful application of behavioural science requires more than isolated expertise – it depends on drawing together a wide range of skills, experiences and perspectives. Applied behavioural science in the context of intervention and innovation development is inherently multi-disciplinary, weaving across three overlapping domains:

- **Research & Evaluation** – including both secondary research (building knowledge and synthesising evidence) and primary research (making reasoned judgements about the merit or value of an intervention). User research and impact evaluation methods such as RCTs remain vital, but we emphasised that behavioural science is a distinct, complementary field that adds unique value beyond evaluation alone.
- **Design** – the practical realisation of interventions and innovations through graphic, content, communication, interaction, product, and service design. Here, behavioural science works in tandem with participatory and user-centred methods to shape solutions that are not only usable but behaviourally informed.
- **Behavioural Science** – applying theory, evidence and frameworks from behavioural science and adjacent disciplines such as implementation science to ensure interventions are grounded in a clear understanding of human behaviour.

Working through these perspectives with partners, we asked programmes, hubs and grantees to prioritise components of the innovation model where behavioural science could make the greatest marginal contribution. The aim was to identify where a behavioural lens adds distinctive and complementary value, beyond what other disciplines already provide, and where it can most effectively address the challenges facing portfolio projects.

The result was a clear prioritisation framework. **Problem definition, diagnosis, and intervention design emerged as high-priority components**. These are the stages where embedding behavioural science is essential: clarifying what the real behavioural challenge is, identifying the mechanisms driving behaviour, and designing practical solutions that target them directly. Partners agreed these steps should be systematically integrated into projects to maximise adoption, sustained use and long-term impact.

Implementation was identified as a medium-high priority, with partners noting its importance in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of interventions, particularly when resources and expertise are available. Here, behavioural science has a crucial role to play in adapting interventions to context, supporting uptake at scale, and ensuring solutions are sustained.

Evidence review, MEL, and co-design were recognised as medium priorities. These remain valuable areas for behavioural input, but their impact was seen as less critical compared to the high-priority components. Even so, partners stressed that applying behavioural insights to evidence gathering, learning cycles, and participatory design can help ensure interventions are more responsive and context-sensitive.

Notably, no components were judged to be low-priority, underscoring the broad potential for behavioural science to strengthen innovation across the portfolio. The clear implication is that focusing efforts on the prioritised components – with particular emphasis on problem definition, diagnosis, and intervention design – offers the strongest opportunity to embed behavioural science where it can have the greatest effect on outcomes.

Prototyping

Concepts

Taking into consideration the analysis of the portfolio, as well as the wishes and desires of FCDO, grantees and hub leads, a series of potential prototypes were developed. These prototypes reflect both systemic needs and practical opportunities for embedding behavioural science more effectively across the portfolio. In total, seven concepts were drawn up, each offering a complementary pathway for strengthening behavioural science in technology and innovation projects.

1. **Application Process**: This prototype focuses on restructuring the grantee application process to require explicit consideration of behavioural science and its relevance to a given pilot or project. The application process would be redesigned so that applicants must reflect on which behaviours their innovation is targeting, how behavioural science might add value, and whether behavioural insights could improve uptake or impact. This would create an early-stage entry point for behavioural thinking, ensuring it is considered from the outset rather than retrospectively.

2. **Funding**: Reviewing current funding arrangements to improve flexibility and reactivity is critical. Current mechanisms can be perceived as rigid, particularly for early-stage innovations that require iteration or pivots. This prototype would explore mechanisms that allow for more adaptive use of funds, supporting experimentation and behavioural testing without penalising projects that change course. By creating room for flexibility, promising ideas would have greater space to mature and integrate behavioural approaches, rather than being prematurely discarded.

3. **Triage**: This prototype would consist of a simple tool, such as a checklist, to support the identification of projects where behavioural science could add most value. Not every project requires behavioural science to deliver impact. The triage tool would help hubs and programmes assess where behavioural science is most relevant, ensuring resources are used where they add the greatest marginal value. This would also support grantees by providing a clear rationale for when to invest in behavioural expertise, reducing uncertainty and enabling more targeted support.

4. **Sherpas**: Identify and develop Sherpas: champions for behavioural science who act as intermediaries between FCDO, grantees, and experts. Sherpas would not be behavioural science experts themselves but trusted guides who can spot opportunities, explain value in accessible terms, and connect the right people. Their role would include translation between disciplines, supporting adoption, and helping navigate barriers. Sherpas would play a crucial role in building momentum and shifting norms, embedding behavioural science in everyday conversations across the portfolio.

5. **Advisory**: An expert advisory function available to Hubs, Programmes, and Grantees to support the application of behavioural science. This could take the form of an expert directory, advisory surgeries, or short secondments. It would ensure that when a project identifies a behavioural challenge, credible and relevant expertise is accessible. By lowering barriers to entry, this approach would help overcome grantee concerns about cost and difficulty in identifying experts, while enabling hubs to deliver more consistent and higher-quality behavioural support.

6. **Community**: This prototype consists of a community of practice with specific interest in applied behavioural science for technology and innovation. Convened and facilitated by FCDO, this community would enable grantees, hubs, and experts to share experiences, challenges, and resources. Regular exchanges (through newsletters, user groups, or message boards) would help create a shared language and strengthen peer learning. This community would foster a sense of belonging among those applying behavioural science, contributing to emerging norms, and building a stronger culture of practice across the portfolio.

7. **Toolkit**: A set of short, user-friendly educational materials covering each component of the model of applied behavioural science. The toolkit would provide practical guidance on applying a behavioural science lens across the key components of technology and innovation projects. For each component—such as evidence review, problem definition, diagnosis, intervention design, co-design, implementation, and MEL—the toolkit would describe how behavioural science can be applied in practice, signpost resources and frameworks (e.g., COM-B, EAST, Behaviour Centred Design), and include work examples. Designed to be accessible and actionable, the toolkit would give hubs and grantees a clear starting point for integrating behavioural science systematically.

Selection process - Prioritisation of prototypes

As part of this project, a smaller selection of the prototypes has been selected to take to full development to pilot within the FCDO. The process of prototype prioritisation and selection was undertaken collaboratively with Hubs, Programmes, and grantees, who were asked to assess potential concepts against two principal criteria: perceived value (the extent to which a given prototype could strengthen the application of behavioural science within portfolio projects) and implementation feasibility (the degree to which the prototype could realistically be deployed within current institutional, resource, and organisational constraints). This dual-criteria approach ensured that prioritisation captured both normative judgments of value and pragmatic considerations of delivery.

The analysis highlighted a clear hierarchy of priorities. Toolkit and Triage emerged as high-priority concepts, reflecting their capacity to provide an immediate, foundational infrastructure for the integration of behavioural science. These tools were viewed as essential in establishing a shared understanding across diverse stakeholders and in providing practical mechanisms for identifying where behavioural science could add value.

Sherpas and an Advisory function were classified as medium–high priority. While recognised as important vehicles for sustaining behavioural science application, their effective deployment would necessitate greater coordination and resourcing. Community of Practice and Application process reforms were placed in a medium-priority category, reflecting their utility in embedding behavioural science more systematically, but also the perception that they are less immediately critical. Finally, Funding reforms were assessed as medium–low priority: although potentially valuable for long-term sustainability, they were judged resource-intensive and institutionally complex.

Taken together, these findings suggest a staged strategy for implementation. Early efforts should focus on high-priority prototypes—specifically Toolkit and Triage—as these represent low-cost, high-impact interventions that can establish immediate behavioural science capability. Subsequent phases should concentrate on the development of Sherpas and Advisory functions, alongside the cultivation of a Community of Practice, to build durable structures of support. Revisions to application processes and the reconfiguration of funding mechanisms should follow as later-phase activities, undertaken once institutional familiarity and capacity have been established and evidence of impact is available.

Development of prototypes into full assets

Following the prioritisation process, two prototypes were selected for full development: the Triage tool (Appendix 1) and the Toolkit (Appendix 2). These concepts were identified as both high-value and highly feasible, providing an essential foundation for embedding behavioural science systematically across the portfolio.

The Triage tool was advanced in recognition of its potential to support decision-makers in identifying projects and pilots where the application of behavioural science would generate the greatest marginal value. By offering a simple yet structured mechanism, the tool enables Hubs, Programmes, and grantees to allocate resources more effectively and ensure that behavioural insights are applied where they are most likely to strengthen impact.

The Toolkit was prioritised as a complementary intervention, designed to provide practical, accessible guidance on how to apply a behavioural science lens to each component of the innovation model. In doing so, it establishes a shared frame of reference for diverse actors across the portfolio, ensuring that behavioural science principles are consistently understood and operationalised.

Together, these two prototypes were considered the most strategic entry points for strengthening behavioural science application, offering both an immediate decision-support function (Triage) and a practical learning resource (Toolkit). Their joint development represents a deliberate focus on building core capacity and establishing the enabling conditions necessary for broader, sustained integration of behavioural science in future projects.

Triage design considerations and testing

The Triage tool was conceived as a rapid decision-support mechanism intended to help funders and grant-makers identify where an Applied Behavioural Science (ABS) approach could provide the greatest added value. Its purpose was twofold: first, to highlight projects where behavioural science could increase the likelihood of success, and second, to identify contexts where its application might reduce the risk of project failure at later stages. The tool was therefore designed not as an evaluative framework in itself, but as a lightweight screening device to inform funding and support decisions.

In order to maximise usability across a diverse set of stakeholders, the design principles emphasised accessibility, simplicity, and neutrality. The tool deliberately employs clear, non-technical language so that both practitioners with behavioural science expertise and those without it—such as hub leads, programme managers, and innovators—could engage with the tool effectively. This approach reflects the broader ambition of embedding ABS as a practical and usable resource within the funding ecosystem, rather than as a specialist or siloed practice.

The core analytic focus of the tool is on the behavioural dependencies that underpin project success. Reviewers are asked to consider whether a proposed intervention requires either system actors or end users to fundamentally alter their behaviour in order for outcomes to be realised. Where such dependencies exist, the tool guides reviewers to assess the strength of assumptions about why behavioural change would occur, and whether these assumptions are grounded in credible evidence. The tool encourages reviewers to interrogate proposals for implicit biases, particularly those linked to WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic) assumptions, as well as issues of gender and accessibility. Where assumptions appear weak or untested, the tool advises funders to consider providing additional support, resources, or access to behavioural expertise to strengthen project design and mitigate downstream risks.

The Triage tool was iteratively tested in a working session with hub and programme leads. The feedback was broadly positive, with participants recognising its value as a structured prompt for critical reflection. However, concerns were raised regarding the simplicity of the tool. Some participants cautioned that it should not be perceived as overly reductive, nor should it risk discouraging potential grantees from applying. One key recommendation was to adapt the tool's language to align more closely with that of start-ups and innovators, rather than the terminology of academic behavioural science, in order to avoid overwhelming applicants.

Importantly, one hub committed to piloting the tool in its own funding call, with plans to experiment with alternative formats to enhance usability, such as adapting it into a spreadsheet template (Excel) or an interactive version delivered through an AI-enabled chatbot. This illustrates both the adaptability of the Triage tool and its potential to evolve in line with the operational contexts of different actors.

In sum, the Triage tool represents an attempt to bridge the gap between behavioural science theory and funding practice. By helping reviewers to surface behavioural dependencies, challenge implicit assumptions, and consider the evidence base underpinning proposals, it provides a pragmatic entry point for mainstreaming behavioural science into decision-making processes.

Toolkit design considerations and testing

The Toolkit was developed as a practical resource to support grantees and programme actors in their efforts to bring an applied behavioural science (ABS) lens to their work. The overarching principle guiding its design was accessibility. Given that grantees are primarily focused on ensuring their programmes, products, services, and campaigns achieve traction (i.e., being used, shared, and scaled) the Toolkit needed to be worded in a way that was meaningful and engaging to them. Rather than employing academic behavioural science terminology, the design team sought to mirror the language of start-ups, entrepreneurship, and enterprise, thereby positioning ABS as a tool for innovation and growth rather than an external, specialist discipline.

To achieve this, the Toolkit was structured not around the eight original components of the applied behavioural science model (Evidence Review, Problem Definition, Diagnosis, MEL, Intervention Design, Co-creation, Implementation, and Expertise), but instead streamlined into four broader, action-oriented categories:

1. **Self-awareness and Market Awareness –** encapsulating Evidence Review and Problem Definition, this category supports grantees in understanding their own assumptions and capacities while also interrogating the external environment, user needs, and market context from a behavioural perspective.

2. **Insight and Validation –** encompassing Diagnosis and MEL, this category focuses on surfacing behavioural mechanisms, testing underlying assumptions, and generating credible evidence about whether interventions are achieving intended outcomes.

3. **Co-creation and Design –** integrating Intervention Design and Co-creation, this category provides guidance on how to design, prototype, and iterate interventions that are behaviourally informed while engaging users directly in the process.

4. **Execution and Growth –** combining Implementation and Expertise, this category helps grantees plan for scaling, sustainability, and the integration of behavioural insights into longer-term systems and partnerships.

This reframing was deliberately chosen to employ more active, outcome-oriented language that resonates with the operational priorities of grantees and aligns with the wider discourse of the FCDO Technology and Innovation team. By embedding behavioural science into terms already familiar to innovators such as growth, validation, and design, the Toolkit increases the likelihood of uptake and use.

Each category includes simple, user-friendly resources such as checklists, question templates, and signposts to relevant examples and existing resources. The aim was not to replace the deep expertise of behavioural science specialists, but rather to offer grantees practical entry points to integrate behavioural thinking into their existing processes. For example, templates for rapid evidence reviews are paired with guidance on interrogating behavioural assumptions; prototyping methods are linked to simple behavioural design principles (e.g., EAST, MINDSPACE); and implementation guidance highlights contextual factors, such as timing and stakeholder incentives, that influence scaling success.

Through this reframing and simplification, the Toolkit provides a pragmatic bridge between behavioural science theory and grantee practice. By adopting the vocabulary and perspective of start-ups and innovators, it transforms behavioural science from something external and specialist into something embedded, familiar, and directly actionable within the lifecycle of technology and innovation projects.

Piloting and adaptation of tools

While there is clear enthusiasm across FCDO partners, hubs, and grantees for the application of the Toolkit and Triage tools, there is also a shared recognition that these should not be viewed as off-the-shelf solutions. Rather, they represent foundational building blocks which provide structure and direction but must be tailored to the realities of individual hub and programme contexts. Differences in organisational capacity, sectoral focus, partnership arrangements, and the maturity of projects mean that direct, uniform application of the tools is neither feasible nor desirable.

Accordingly, the recommendation is to pilot the Toolkit and Triage tools with willing stakeholders who are both motivated and positioned to experiment with their use. These pilots will serve a dual purpose: first, to refine the content and format of the tools so that they are fit for purpose in diverse contexts; and second, to generate evidence about how such resources can best be embedded within hub processes and grant-making practices.

Piloting should be accompanied by the development of a series of monitoring and implementation metrics to track uptake, usability, and impact. This will allow the FCDO and partners to assess not only whether the tools are being adopted, but also whether they are enabling more consistent, effective application of behavioural science within technology and innovation projects. Feedback loops should be embedded to ensure that lessons learned during pilot use directly inform iterative improvements to the tools themselves.

The emphasis, therefore, is on a phased and adaptive strategy: beginning with targeted piloting, building the evidence base and practical learning, and only then considering a broader roll-out at scale. This approach will maximise the tools' relevance, usability, and impact across the portfolio, while mitigating the risks associated with premature standardisation.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

This report has demonstrated both the value of behavioural science and a pathway to embedding it across the FCDO innovation system. There is tremendous potential to strengthen the impact of the FCDO technology and innovation portfolio through a more systematic application of behavioural science. While use of behavioural science to date has been nascent and often informal, there is real enthusiasm across hubs, grantees, and FCDO teams to take this further. Stakeholders consistently highlighted the value that behavioural science can bring to defining problems more clearly, diagnosing systemic barriers, and designing interventions that are both more targeted and more effective.

Importantly, there is a strong appetite for practical, accessible tools that make behavioural science usable for innovators, entrepreneurs, and programme staff. The Toolkit and Triage prototypes have already begun to create that foundation, showing that behavioural science does not need to remain an academic exercise but can be translated into the everyday realities of programme design and delivery.

What emerges clearly is that there is a window of opportunity: to turn willingness into action, to move from fragmented use to systematic practice, and to embed behavioural science across FCDO, hubs, and grantees. This requires a shared vision for behavioural science and its integration, anchored in leadership commitment and aligned language. Making progress in both vision and action will not only strengthen individual projects but also enhance the overall credibility, sustainability, and impact of the portfolio.

Recommendations

To realise this opportunity, we propose a phased and collaborative approach. These recommendations are organised by timeframe and responsibility, with a view to building momentum quickly and sustaining it over time.

Short-Term

FCDO

- Lead by example by piloting the Toolkit and Triage tools (Appendices 1 and 2) across select hubs, signalling commitment to behavioural science as part of the innovation agenda.
- Establish early expectations that behavioural science should be considered at the outset of programme design, giving teams permission and encouragement to experiment.
- Provide communication and framing that positions behavioural science in the language of entrepreneurship and innovation, making it meaningful and motivating to grantees.
- Embed inclusivity as a principle, ensuring behavioural tools reflect diverse perspectives and support equitable innovation outcomes.

Hubs

- Trial the Toolkit and Triage tools in live funding calls, using them to shape grantee applications and programme decisions.
- Gather and share feedback with peers to demonstrate the tools' value and refine them further.
- Nominate and begin to develop Sherpas: champions who can connect behavioural science to day-to-day delivery and provide light-touch guidance.

Medium-Term

FCDO

- Build supportive infrastructure by creating an expert advisory mechanism (e.g., office hours, expert directory) to make credible behavioural science support accessible.
- Invest in tailored training offers for FCDO staff, hubs, and grantees, ensuring that everyone can engage with behavioural science at the level most useful to them.

- Convene and support a community of practice to connect Sherpas, programme leads, and grantees, enabling peer-to-peer learning and cross-portfolio momentum.

Hubs

- Embed behavioural science into application and reporting templates so that it becomes part of the normal rhythm of innovation work.
- Formalise Sherpa roles and resource them so they can act as consistent champions.
- Share learning and case studies widely to show how behavioural insights have strengthened impact, reinforcing the value of this approach.

Long-Term

FCDO

- Reform funding structures to allow for greater flexibility and iteration, enabling projects to adapt as behavioural insights emerge.
- Integrate behavioural science principles into FCDO's wider innovation frameworks, establishing it as a natural counterpart to human-centred design.
- Secure sustainability by embedding behavioural science in norms, policies, and expectations across the innovation system.

Hubs

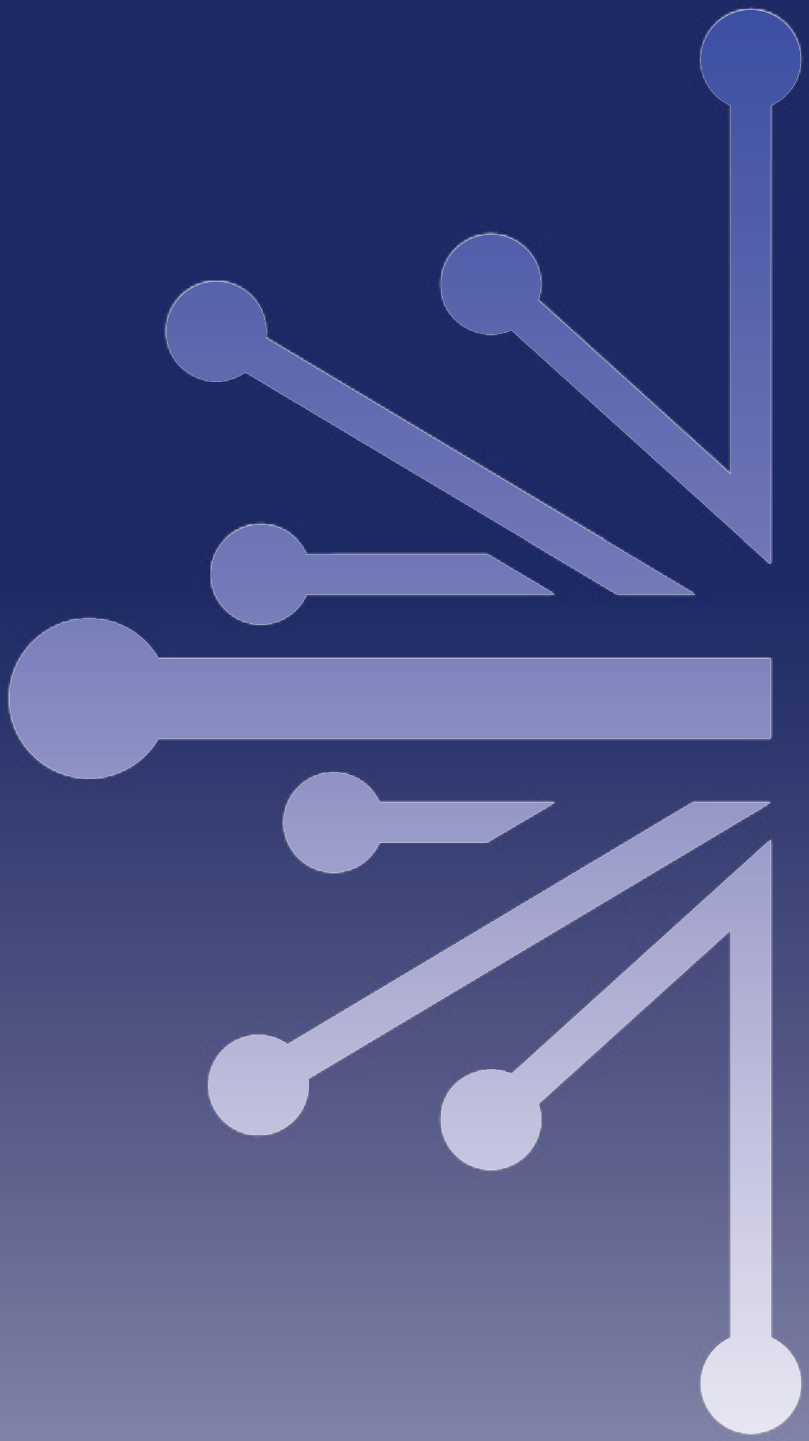
- Make behavioural science a core part of organisational culture, ensuring that every project benefits from tools, champions, and shared practices.
- Partner with FCDO to advance evaluation approaches that measure behavioural outcomes as well as technical ones.
- Innovate further by experimenting with new tool formats (e.g., AI chatbots, adaptive Excel versions), keeping behavioural science accessible, engaging, and scalable.

Policy recommendations

There is a clear opportunity for the FCDO, hubs, and grantees to take a leadership role in embedding behavioural science across the technology and innovation portfolio. The groundwork has already been established through the development of the Toolkit and Triage tools, which provide practical entry points for applying a behavioural lens.

The recommended course of action is to pilot these tools in selected programmes, refine them through feedback, and scale their use across the portfolio. In parallel, investment should be made in building capability and supporting infrastructure—through the development of champions ("Sherpas"), communities of practice, and access to expert advisory functions. These recommendations build on the LOGIC framework and OECD's adoption of innovation principles, ensuring coherence with global best practice.

By taking this phased and systematic approach, behavioural science can move from being an under-utilised resource to a core enabler of effective, inclusive, and sustainable innovation. This will strengthen the FCDO's global leadership in innovation and ensure that funded programmes deliver greater impact and value for money.



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