

Getting Started with MEL for Climate Adaptation



Why MEL



Challenges with Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Climate Adaptation Initiatives



What we Monitor & Evaluate



Key MEL concepts



MEL design and implementation

Why do we monitor & evaluate CBA initiatives?

MEL helps us ...

- Identify **bottlenecks or 'sticky points'** in our projects, programs, or policies
- **Make adjustment** to improve program quality
- Observe **intended (and unintended!)** outcomes of our interventions
- **Communicate impact of our work** to others-including donors, public officials, and the community
- To be **more accountable** to ourselves, our organizations, and communities we serve
- Feel **inspired by achievements** of our efforts

What do we M&E in Community Based Adaptation projects or initiatives?

- Impacts of Climate Change on people and systems
- Vulnerability to climate change
- Implementation of adaptation strategy (ies)
- Resource spending for adaptation
- Impact/outcomes of adaptation measures

Challenges for adaptation M&E

- Absence of a universal indicator for performance measurement
- Adaptation to climate change takes place within specific and diverse socio-cultural, socio-political, and local or regional settings
- Uncertainty about climate change projections
- Extended timeframes
- Many drivers of climate change

Key MEL Concepts

What is it?

The purpose of monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) practices is to apply knowledge gained from evidence and analysis to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and, ultimately, the outcomes and impact of their projects/initiatives and ensure accountability for the resources used to achieve them. Before we plan our projects/initiatives, we need to know what we are trying to do and what we need to learn to ensure that the data we collect will help us make decisions.

It is important to remember that MEL are not the end goal, but rather how we achieve our development outcomes more effectively. If the knowledge we are generating through monitoring or evaluation is not yet contributing to real-time decision-making about design and implementation, we may need to take a deeper look at our MEL systems. In short, monitoring and evaluation data should always be used to inform management decisions, which, in turn, promote learning.

We can also assess other aspects such as the enabling conditions and decision-making processes that may hinder the effective use of analysis of monitoring data and evaluations.

Monitoring: The continual and systematic collection of data to provide information about project/initiative progress.

Evaluation: The user-focused, systematic assessment of the design, implementation, and results (outputs, outcomes & impact) of an ongoing or completed project/initiative.

Learning: Having a culture and processes in place that enable intentional reflection to make smarter decisions.

Results Chain

Just like a theory of change, a results chain is **a tool that shows how a project team believes a particular action it takes will lead to some desired result.**

Activity	Outputs	Outcomes	Goal
<p>Activity: what an intervention does, not what the ‘beneficiary’ will do. Activities are targeted at people, family, community organizations, private sector, public sector, CSO</p>	<p>Outputs: are tangible, concrete results. These are direct results of project’s work. Targeted at people, farmers, community members, government representatives, private sector, CSO</p> <p>Outputs are not activities Outputs are attributable to the intervention i.e. there is a direct link between project’s activities and the output</p>	<p>Outcomes: are specific changes in behavior, practices, performance knowledge, skills, status of our intermediaries or ‘beneficiaries’.</p> <p>Project contributes to outcome i.e. Project’s activities contribute, along with (many) other factors, to change (outcome)</p>	<p>Goal: fundamental intended or unintended long-term change occurring in organizations, communities, or systems— such as reduction in poverty and improvements in people’s health and welfare, environmental conditions, or governance.</p> <p>Project contributes to impact i.e. Project’s activities contribute, along with (many) other factors, to change.</p>
<p>Immediate: Activities are steps and processes that form the ‘content’ of the project/initiative</p>	<p>Short term: happens within the term of the project</p>	<p>Medium to long term: change that occurs during or after project</p>	<p>Long term: change that often, but not always, occurs after the term of the project</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify competent training provider for Integrated Pest Management (IPM) course • Organize Integrated training course (i.e notifies farmers, organizes venue) 	<p>500 Farmers trained in Integrated Pest Management (IPM)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower-level outcome: Farmers have improved knowledge to use IPM techniques • High level outcome: Farmers practice IPM on their farms [behavior change] 	<p>Farmers have improved yields (productivity) resulting in higher income from crop sales.</p>

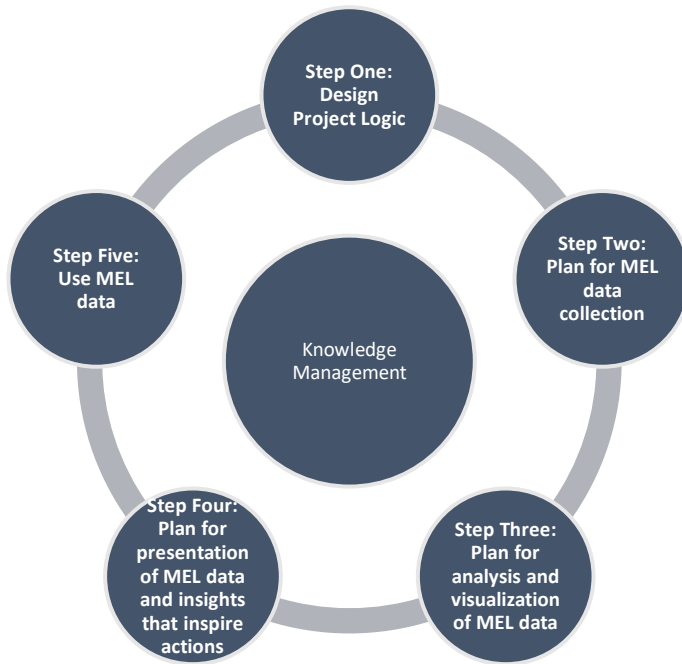
Designing and Implementing MEL Systems

Before designing a MEL system for tracking or measuring adaptation, know what the intervention contributes to Climate Change Adaptation Dimensions

Dimensions	Examples	Sample parameters
Building adaptive capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening the capacity to undertake assessments Prepare climate information and use/communicate it Mainstream climate change in planning frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existence and quality of coordination/mainstreaming processes Availability of climate information and analytical capabilities Risk management capacity in dealing with increasing climatic variability Operational early warning systems
Reducing vulnerability and risks	Measures aimed at reducing specific vulnerabilities and risk such as enhancing water storage capacity, crop diversification, coastal zone management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volume of water available Extent of diversification of income in regions affected by extreme weather events
Securing development goals in the face of climate change	Development goals as the focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stable income in particularly vulnerable sections of the population Reduced dependence on highly climate-sensitive sectors Availability of climate-resilient infrastructure Expansion of and participation in educational provision

A MEL system is made up of three key pieces. Each piece—monitoring, evaluation, and learning—has its unique place and purpose, but the MEL system is only effective when the pieces are aligned, connected, and working together.

MEL is present and ongoing during every stage of a project: from the earliest steps of project design to the last activities of project closure. Project MEL activities are organized into five phases as shown below.



Step One: Design Project Logic

- **An effective MEL system starts with developing a credible project logic. Make sure there is a clear logic model whether ToC or Logframe or Results Framework.** These planning tools give clarity on the goal, outcomes, outputs, and resources as well as hypothesis upon which a project or an initiative has been built. Therefore, define your MEL system based on a clear logic and evidence needs
- Make sure that you have a clear definition of participants: direct/indirect participants and target/impact groups. This promotes consistency when registering, counting, tracking, and reporting on project reach and impact.
- Identify and define meaningful and manageable set of quantitative and qualitative indicators and/or questions for impact, outcomes and outputs in each participant group, and the methods to track them.
- Determine baseline values for each indicator especially at outcome level
- Set targets to be achieve at especially at outcome and output levels

Step Two: Plan for MEL data collection

- Now that your MEL planning process is complete, the next step is to get started with collecting data.
- Timely, high-quality data are the foundation upon which project teams can measure progress, make decisions, and learn.
- Data quality is an important consideration for all, so much so that standards exist to define various characteristics of high-quality data. Therefore, for each indicator, consider what issues may arise regarding data quality and develop mitigation measures upfront.
- Develop and test data collection tools. As you begin developing your data collection tools, it is a good idea to revisit the question, “*What do I need to know?*” Your tool development should be based on your indicators and learning questions.

- Define the monitoring and evaluation moments and methods that best ensure robust and comparable tracking of outputs, outcomes, and impact
- Design data storage mechanisms
- Collectively agree on frequency of data collection, analysis, and dissemination
- Assign responsibilities for data collection, aggregation, analysis, and dissemination as well as storing.
- Now that you have a tested data collection instruments/tools and you know who is responsible for data collection, roll them out and continuously track the usage of the instruments. Make sure your team knows how to use the instruments developed. Always tools are not static. They evolve based on the context and needs.

Step Three: Plan for analysis and visualization of MEL data

- **First and foremost, get to know your audience:** Who is my audience? What do they care about? Getting to know our audience and understanding their needs and what drives them is an important early part of the process for successfully communicating with data. **When communicating with data, don't do it for yourself-do it for your audience!**
- **Clean and analyze your data:** Start with data cleansing first. You need to ask yourself: Are any values outside expected range? Are names and locations spelled correctly? Do any scores/entries appear unrealistic? Once you have got clean and credible data, it is high time you go ahead and analyze check for correlation, relationships, and trends overtime. Diagnose why something happened.
- **Choose an effective visual:** Once you've taken time to understand the context and planned your communication. You need to answer the most critical question: when I have some data I need to show, how do I do that in an effective way? There is no single "right" answer when it comes to how to visualize data. Any data can be graphed countless different ways. Often, it takes iterating—looking at the data one way, looking at it another way, and perhaps even another—to discover a view that will help us create that magical "ah ha" moment of understanding that graphs done well can do.

Step Four: Plan for presentation of MEL data and insights that inspire actions

Always remember that data in a spreadsheet or facts on a slide aren't things that naturally stick with us—they are easily forgotten. Stories, on the other hand, are memorable. Pairing the potency of story with effective visuals means that our audience can recall what they heard or read in addition to what they saw.

Start with context, audience, and message. Time spent there will serve you well even if you don't take things full course and employ story. There's value in doing these things up front before you spend much time with your data: they can help you target your data visualization process and make it more efficient. But then *after* you've spent time with your data, know it well, and have identified what you can use it to help others see, it's time to look at the big picture again and figure out how to best communicate it to your audience. This is the precise moment story comes into play.

Not only are well told data stories memorable, but they can also be retold, empowering our audience to help spread our message.

Step Five: Use MEL data

Everything about your presentation should be geared towards making an action plan to build on strengths/mitigate challenges identified based on your findings and reflections.

- **To be of value, MEL data need to be used**, particularly in the context of learning.
- Data are used internally to inform management decisions, and externally to inform communications and promote accountability.
- Project should use MEL data to periodically **revisit the logic, design and implementation** of the project and its MEL system. Furthermore, based on your learning, you should update the original project design and adjust the MEL system accordingly, if needed.

Important Tips When Designing a MEL system

- **Be strategic and prioritize.** Our MEL systems can provide vast amounts of rich information and potential for learning, but we often do not have the absorptive capacity to take it all in. We need to make deliberate choices about what learning can contribute most to our development objectives and what data will support us in that effort.
- **Focus on openness.** If you are experiencing barriers to learning from your MEL systems, take a step back and assess where the roadblock lies. It could be a problem with the system itself, or it might arise from a challenge elsewhere in your processes (e.g., decision-making protocols). The strongest learning happens when there is openness to talking about challenges and unexpected outcomes at all levels, including with implementing partners and other stakeholders.
- **Build collaboration around MEL.** Generating buy-in from relevant stakeholders early and often can improve our ability to adapt based on learning generated by our MEL systems. Open conversations about the findings of our monitoring and evaluation efforts can build trust and provide a foundation for stronger collaboration.
- **Timeliness matters.** Timely MEL activities can go a long way to informing key decision-making. Plan your MEL activities so that you have the relevant information in time and current to make critical decisions.
- **Evidence:** Ensure your evidence can be translated into learning and support on the identification of potential for scale. Also make your evidence accessible and ensure your MEL practices are participative and responsive to feedback.
- **Read Context:** Use your MEL system to continuously read the context and adapt to it.