NEXUS RESPONSE MECHANISM

MEAL Guidelines for Implementing Partners

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Contents

Glossary

Systemic Theory of Change	A systemic Theory of Change is a type of Theory of Change that adopts a systemic perspective. This means that it corresponds to a defined system in which a particular set of changes is sought; that it defines the key actors and relationships/interactions that make up the system; and indicates the changes in behaviour, composition, functioning, dynamics and roles and relationships of actors within the system.
Downward accountability	Downward accountability refers to the accountability that duty bearers have towards rights holders, for example the accountability of governments to their citizens and of aid projects or agencies to their beneficiaries. Downward accountability relies on having mechanisms in place that enable those impacted, directly or indirectly, by the activities of duty bearers, to hold them to account. This is often achieved through the implementation of feedback systems and institutional arrangements that strengthen citizen/beneficiary voice in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions.
Collective Outcome	A collective outcome is a concrete and measurable result that humanitarian, development and other relevant actors want to achieve jointly over a period of 3-5 years to reduce people's needs, risks and vulnerabilities and increase their resilience.[1]

[1] OCHA, "Collective Outcomes: Operationalizing the New Way of Working," April 2018: http://agendaforhumanity.org/sites/default/files/resources/2018/Apr/OCHA%20Collective%20Outcomes%20April%202018.pdf

Checklist

This checklist is intended to serve as a quick reference of the required MEAL elements at each stage of the project cycle, from proposal submission to closure. Further details can be found in Table 1. Certain projects (for example, rapid humanitarian response) are exempt from these requirements. Full details of requirements will be provided at the Call for Proposals stage.

	Proposal	Inception	Implementation
Meal Objectives and Users		✔	Updates to relevant components should be made if/as required to reflect agreed changes in the MEAL Framework that may arise during the course of implementation.
TOC	✔	✔	
Learning and Evidence Agenda	✔	✔	
Measurement Framework	✔	✔	
Feedback Mechanisms		✔	
Monitoring Tools		✔	
Data Management		✔	
Learning and Adaptive Management	✔	✔	
Reporting		✔	
Knowledge Products		✔	
MEAL Capacity Development		✔	
Resourcing	✔	✔	

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to NRM

The Nexus Response Mechanism (NRM) is one of six global pilots funded by the EU and the only one in Asia. It was founded as an effort to bring together the EU External Action Service, Development Cooperation, and ECHO, as well as other EU member states, in order to operationalize the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus. The NRM became operational in January 2020.

1.2 What is this document?

This document contains the guidance for implementing partners (IPs) on the development of project-level Monitoring and Evaluation for Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Frameworks. A project MEAL Framework is a document that describes the overall purpose, scope and design specifications for a project level MEAL system. This guidance document situates project MEAL Frameworks within the broader context of the NRM MEAL Framework and intermediate/programme-level MEAL Frameworks and explains how these different levels are interconnected. It then describes all of the key elements that make up a project MEAL Framework and provides guidance on how to develop and operationalise them.

1.3 Who is it for?

This document is a public document, but is primarily targeted at Implementing Partners, specifically project managers and MEAL officers.

1.4 How should it be used?

This document is intended to serve as a reference for all NRM Implementing Partners (including sub-partners) in developing project level MEAL Frameworks, which are important contractual documents required for each project.

As a background to NRM MEAL

All organisations applying for proposals should familiarise themselves with this document, as well as the NRM MEAL Framework document.

At key stages from proposal to project implementation

The development of NRM Project MEAL Frameworks is expected to take place over a series of stages from proposal preparation to project closure. At each stage, different MEAL elements are required, starting with a limited number of core elements at the proposal stage. These elements can then be further developed along with others as a project progresses through to the implementation stage.

Table 1: **Key Meal Requirements by Stage**

Stage	Requirements	Relevant Sections in this Document
Proposal Submission Stage	> Proposed project Theory of Change > Proposed project Measurement Framework > Proposed project learning and evidence objectives, including planned studies > Overview of proposed monitoring, learning and adaptive management systems > MEAL Resourcing	3.1 3.5 3.2
Contracting Stage	> Updates to all MEAL elements based on agreements between NRM and the Implementing Partner > Additional clarifications as requested	
Inception Stage	> Development of a full Project MEAL Framework, covering all components set out in section 3	All Section 3
Implementation Stage	> 6 monthly or annual review and updates to the MEAL Framework if/as required for key components	

Part 3 of this document details all of the key sections that should be included in a project MEAL Framework document. It includes general guidance introducing key elements, provides examples and references to useful literature, and contains a combination of templates to be filled in.

Templates are distinguished by their **purple-coloured labels** whereas general information tables or boxes are **grey**. Example content is provided in the tables to illustrate what is expected. The full set of templates that should be populated as part of the MEAL Framework can be found here. Links to the relevant sheets are included alongside their respective templates.

1.5 Overview

Section 2 provides a brief overview of the NRM MEAL Framework, highlighting the different tiers and where project MEAL is situated. Section 3 defines the key MEAL components that each project should have in place and provides guidance on how to develop these components. This includes: (1) Project Theory of Change; (2) Project Policy, Learning and Evaluation Questions; (3) and Project Measurement Framework. Section 4 focuses on more operational aspects of MEAL, in particular: (1) monitoring; (2) studies; (3) reporting; (4) adaptive management; (5) knowledge management; and (6) evaluations. Section 7 discusses key MEAL resourcing considerations for implementing partners.

2. MEAL in the NRM

The overall purpose of NRM MEAL is to support the NRM in achieving its goals by focusing specifically on the generation, sharing and use of evidence. Given the complexity of NRM, working across geographic and thematic areas, integrating work from the humanitarian, development and peace sectors, and adopting a variety of innovative 'nexus' operating principles, the approach to MEAL must also be flexible, innovative and comprehensive, balancing practical considerations with a focus on both quality and accountability. The following sections summarize the NRM's MEAL Framework, which can be found in full here.

2.1 MEAL Functions

NRM MEAL has four core functions:

1. **To support learning related to the piloting of nexus approaches in Myanmar**: what can be learned about nexus approaches? How can they best be implemented in Myanmar and what learning can this generate for the global community? This will require a consideration of the broader learning objectives of the EU about working in a nexus modality across multiple locations.
2. **To support evidence-based contributions to policy and systemic change in Myanmar**: how can evidence from NRM initiatives feed into and inform ongoing efforts by the donor community and other stakeholders?
3. **To support responsive, innovative and dynamic programming in Myanmar**: how can evidence generated within the project support quality programming that is accountable to communities while also delivering value for donors?
4. **To ensure that NRM programming remains conflict sensitive in a challenging rights context**: how can NRM initiatives avoid causing unintentional harm or perpetuating structural discrimination inherent to some of the areas in which it will operate?

2.2 MEAL users and uses

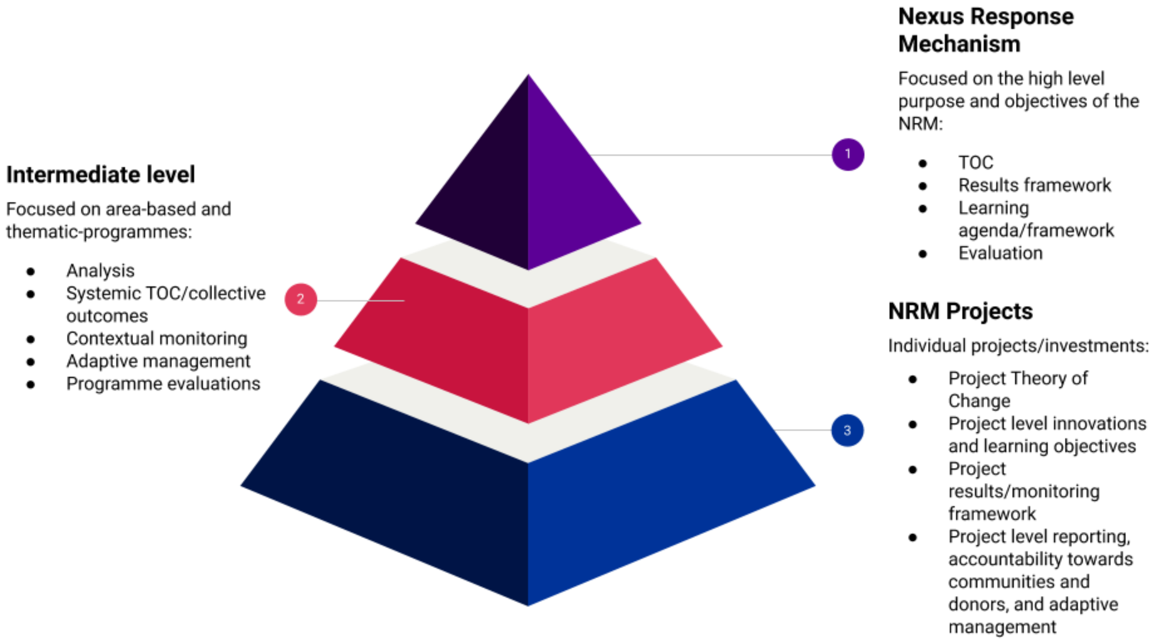
The NRM MEAL system is expected to generate value for a number of key stakeholders, including communities, donors, UNOPS Myanmar / NRM Secretariat, implementing partners, Myanmar government (various levels), Civil Society Actors (e.g. INGOS, NGOs, CSOs, etc.), private sector.

2.3 MEAL Levels

Keeping in mind the overall objectives and the specific uses of different MEAL stakeholders, the NRM MEAL Framework can be conceived as having three distinct levels:

1. **National:** NRM-wide
2. **Intermediate:** focused on area-based, thematic and ad hoc programmes
3. **Project:** focused on individual projects that contribute to the intermediate level programmes

Figure 1: **Levels and key components of the NRM MEAL Framework**



The table below expands on these levels and indicates the key MEAL components at each level. These are then unpacked in more detail in the subsequent sections.

Table 2: **Key MEAL Components at each level of the NRM**

<table>
<tr><th>Level</th><th colspan="3">Key MEAL Components</th></tr>
<tr><td>NRM</td><td colspan="3">> NRM Programmatic Theory of Change
> NRM-wide Results Framework / logframe
> NRM-wide learning agenda & strategy
> NRM evaluation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Intermediate</td><td>Area-based Approach
> Joint analysis (DDCAF/COAR)
> Systemic theory of change with collective outcomes
> Area-based Call for Proposals
> Areas-based contextual monitoring
> Area-based evaluations</td><td>Thematic Approach
> Thematic analysis (COAR)
> Systemic theory of change with collective outcomes
> Thematic Calls for Proposals
> Thematic monitoring
> Thematic evaluations</td><td rowspan="2">Stand-alone Projects
For NRM projects that are not part of a larger programme
> Analysis
> Project level Theory of Change
> Project level learning and innovation objectives
> Project level Results Framework
> Project monitoring
> Project reporting and adaptive management
> Project evaluations</td></tr>
<tr><td>Project</td><td colspan="2">> Project Theory of Change
> Project policy and learning questions
> Project level measurement framework
> Project monitoring
> Project reporting
> adaptive management</td></tr>
</table>

2.4 Alignment with NRM principles

Ensuring that NRM MEAL supports and reinforces the approach and principles of the NRM strategy is critical. This ensures that MEAL - and the evidence and knowledge it generates - is in service of the overall strategy and that it equips key stakeholders with the evidence they need to effectively contribute to the NRM Objectives.

The table below provides an overview of how MEAL is aligned with each of the key principles/ elements of the NRM approach as set out in the strategy and TOC.

Table 3: **Alignment between MEAL and the NRM Strategic Approach**

Aspect	How MEAL is aligned with this
1. Integration	
Area-based and Thematic Interventions	> Systemic TOCs for specific geographic or thematic 'areas' as and when they are defined
Collective Outcomes	> Collective outcomes defined as part of systemic TOCs jointly with local stakeholders (drawing on NRM Prog TOC)
Joint Assessments	> Collective context analysis (can be thematic or area-based) > Multi-project rather than individual project evaluations (where possible)
2. Transformation	
Localization	> Participatory approach to developing area-based calls for proposals (including definition of collective outcomes and associated systemic TOCs) > Strengthening MEAL capacity of local actors - emphasis on embedding MEAL evidence in local coordination processes > Embedding project TOCs within area-based TOCs (linked to collective outcomes)
Inclusion	> Power analysis incorporated into context analysis > Participatory and transformative approaches to project M&E and evaluation
Systems Flexibility and Adaptation	> Approaches to M&E that lend themselves to evidence-based learning and adaptive management > Innovative ways of promoting learning and accountability among non-traditional implementing partners. > Addressing systemic barriers to adaptation and innovation
3. Accountability	
Analysis, Monitoring and Evaluation	> Advancing innovative approaches to MEAL that support transformative, learning-oriented approaches; > Creating a learning-oriented culture of M&E
Downward Accountability	> Incorporating mechanisms for constituent/stakeholder feedback and voice in project MEAL (feedback loops) > Participatory approaches to MEAL and evaluation
Communities of Learning	> Thematic, drawing on project MEAL + programmatic KM tools for cross-project and cross-level knowledge exchange > Cross-thematic learning based on key NRM principles/approaches

3. Project MEAL Framework

Each project will be required to develop a project MEAL Framework. Project MEAL Frameworks will set out all of the key functions, components and systems for project level MEAL. Alignment with NRM and Intermediate level MEAL Frameworks will therefore be required. Project MEAL Frameworks will be iteratively developed starting with proposals and progressing through contracting and inception phases. Project MEAL Framework are living documents and can be updated and revised during the course of implementation.

3.1 MEAL Objectives

The first step in developing a MEAL Framework is to clearly identify the objectives for MEAL. What functions or project objectives is project MEAL supposed to contribute to or support? The NRM MEAL Framework identifies three main overarching objectives for MEAL (see section 2.1). At the project level, more specific objectives can be defined, drawing on those at the NRM level, but focusing on what is most relevant and important to the project.

Clearly defining MEAL objectives helps to ensure that MEAL is not seen merely as a compliance or upward reporting exercise, but that it is an integral part of delivering good quality and impactful projects. It increases the focus on generating useful evidence that can support ongoing adaptive management and underpin advocacy efforts and coordination with key stakeholders.

The table below can be used to document the overall and actor-specific MEAL objectives for your project. It may be useful to first brainstorm the different objectives that you envision for MEAL and then cluster and prioritise them to arrive at a manageable set of 5 to 7 objectives. To develop the actor-specific objectives, first identify which project actors or stakeholders you see as users or of the MEAL system. Once you have listed your actors, identify what, specifically, the MEAL system is supposed to achieve for that actor. This could be something that the actor is specifically expecting from MEAL or something you could be seeking to influence.

Template 1 **Overall and actor-specific MEAL objectives (link)**

Overall Project MEAL Objectives

- To ensure accountability to donors, communities and external stakeholders by providing accurate and timely data on project progress and learning
- To support ongoing adaptive management to ensure the relevance, effectiveness and sustainability of project activities
- To generate robust evidence to support project policy components 1 and 2
- To share knowledge of best-practices and scalable approaches with donors, government and other development partners.

Actor-specific MEAL Objectives

Actor	MEAL Objectives
Government Officials	> Provide government officials with credible evidence on the performance of public services to inform policy-dialogue
Communities	> To create channels for communities feedback to influence local government decision-making and the design of policies > To enhance community understanding on key issues and effectively involve them in deciding on and evaluating key aspects of the project
CSO Partners	> To enhance partner capacity to use evidence for improved programming and learning > To ensure timely and accurate progress reporting

3.2 Project TOCs

Theory of Change (TOC) is an approach to project design, monitoring and evaluation. The term encompasses both a process (of developing and using a Theory of Change) and a product (the articulation of the how change is expected to come about). As a product, the Theory of Change minimally should include out:

- The ultimate changes that an intervention seeks to contribute to
- The interventions through which these changes will be achieved
- The various layers of intermediate changes and their associated pathways
- The assumptions that underpin key steps in the theory of change

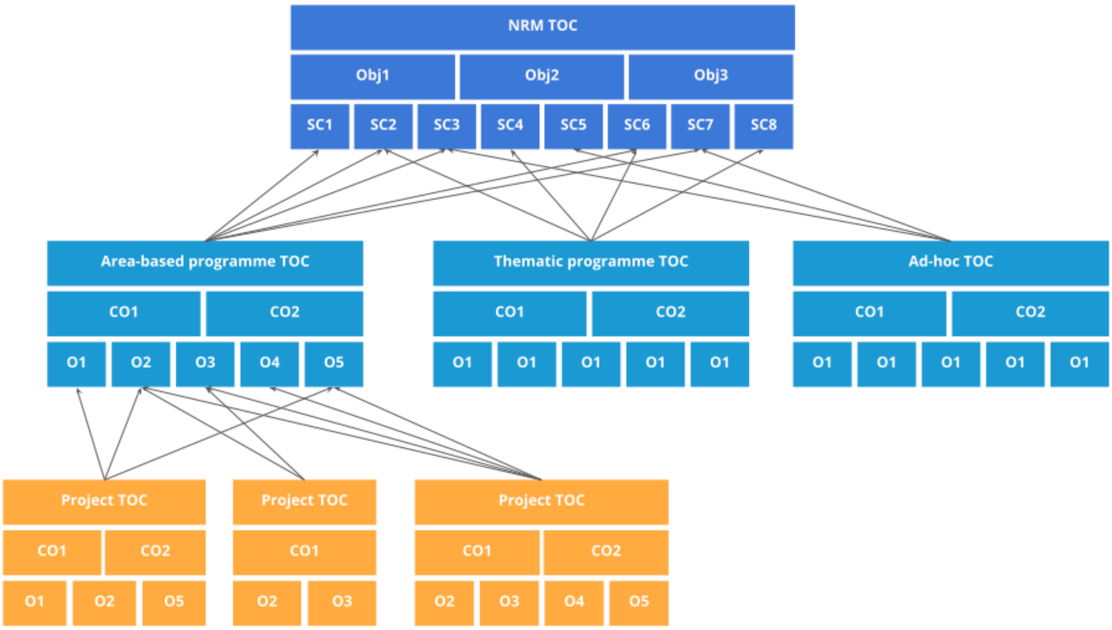
It is called a Theory of Change because it describes how a specific group of people (the project team, for example) think, believe, expect or assume that a series of changes will occur that lead toward the ultimate change they are trying to achieve - i.e. how change will come about 'in theory'. The actual change process will unfold 'in practice' and may stay true to the 'theory' or deviate from it. To understand the gap between theory and practice, TOCs are used as the basis for developing a measurement framework that specifies how the project will generate evidence that can be used to interrogate key aspects of the theory of change. A subset of this evidence is generally used for reporting on progress to key stakeholders for accountability purposes, while the broader reflection can support learning, adaptive management, knowledge management and evidence-based advocacy.

Theories of change, particularly for complex interventions, are generally much more useful when they are actor-centred. In actor-centred theories of change, results or changes are composed of statements that are written in the active voice (rather than the passive voice) wherever possible.

This helps to ensure that changes are clearly linked to specific actors and also helps to centre the agency of the concerned actors in the change process. When Theories of change are used at the design stage, they can be layered on top of a stakeholder analysis exercise that helps to build a clearer picture of each actor's roles, constraints and enablers. Where possible Theories of Change should be developed together with representatives of the different actors. This further helps to ensure that the Theory of Change is realistic and also helps to build ownership of the change process.

Project Theories of Change set out how individual projects are expected to contribute to the 'collective outcomes' defined as part of the area-based / thematic systemic TOCs. It is important to note here that the area-based and thematic TOCs will always map onto one or more systemic changes from the NRM TOC. Project TOCs are therefore more detailed than the area-based/thematic TOCs (which are in turn more detailed than the overall NRM TOC). They allow projects to unpack the specific pathways through which they expect their interventions to contribute to 'collective outcomes'. The relationship between the different levels is summarised in a simplified format in the diagram below:

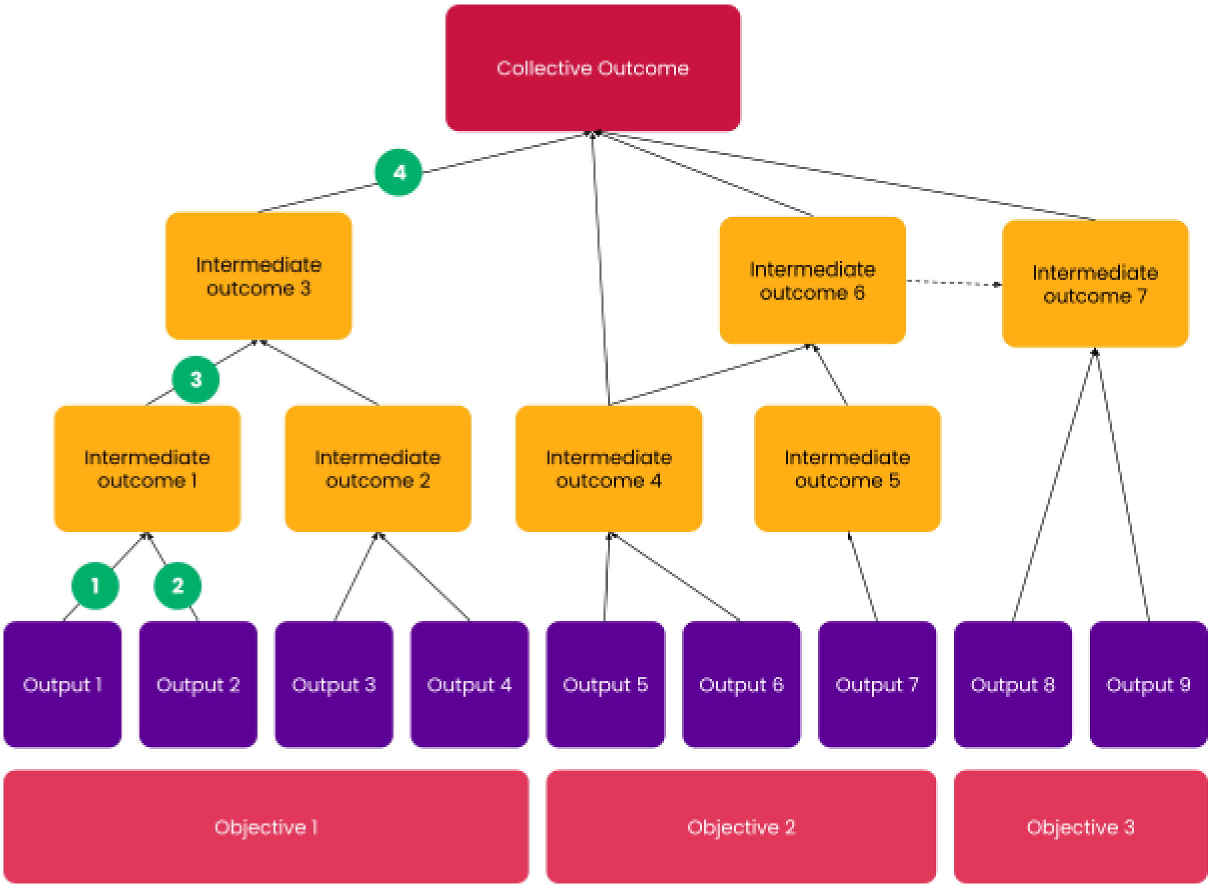
Figure 2: **Nested Theories of Change at the NRM, intermediate and project levels**



In some cases projects may benefit from or be required to develop sub-TOCs in cases where the overall TOC cannot accommodate sufficient detail to serve its purpose (e.g. of informing evaluation design, communicating how a specific activity is expected to work, etc.).

A sample Project Theory of Change is presented below:

Template 2 **Project Theory of Change ([link])**



Assumption	
1. 2	**4.** 2
2. 2	**5.** 2
3. 2	**6.** 2

3.3 Project Policy and Learning Questions

Each project should have clearly defined its policy and learning objectives in the project design document. This section of the Project MEAL Framework should specify what evidence the project will seek to generate in service of these objectives and how it will do so.

The table below provides a useful template for organising this information and providing an easily accessible overview. Completing this step helps to ensure that project data collection is not only limited to reporting on the indicators in the measurement framework (see section 3.3), but on analysing the data generated and using the evidence produced to achieve project objectives.

If your project has not already defined its policy and learning objectives, now is the time to do so. While doing so, refer back to your MEAL Objectives and the analysis by actor. Keep in mind both internal and external objectives, those that are for direct use by the project (e.g. formative studies) and those that are geared toward influencing others (e.g. generating evidence on effectiveness of a specific intervention to support future replication and scaling by the government/other actors).

For each objective, list out the key questions that will guide the generation of evidence. There is no need to go into great detail here as the aim at this stage is to provide an overview. More detailed questions may need to be developed in the form of separate methodology or concept notes associated with specific studies, inquiries or knowledge products.

Briefly summarise the methodology that will be used to respond to the questions. It is important to note that the methodology can combine both standalone studies as well as routine monitoring data. In cases where routine M&E data is expected to help answer policy and learning questions, this may necessitate additional design considerations (e.g. implications for sampling, comparability, etc.).

The next step is to briefly describe how the findings will be used and what they will be used for.

Template 3 **Policy and Learning Objectives (link)**

<table>
<tr><th>Policy and learning objectives</th><th>Policy and learning questions</th><th>Methodology
(approach, source of evidence)</th><th>Use
(key processes and/or knowledge products)</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Understand the impact of camp closure on X, Y, Z...</td><td>What are the specific impacts of camp closure on the most vulnerable (women, children, people with disabilities, at risk youth)?</td><td rowspan="2">A mixed-methods study will be conducted at the end of year 1 in 7 host communities.

Ongoing monitoring data (see indicators 1.1, 1.7 and 2.4) will supplement the study in years 2 and 3.</td><td rowspan="2">The findings will be shared with key actors involved in coordination of camp closure to develop a better response mechanism.

A policy brief will be produced.</td></tr>
<tr><td>What is the relationship between camp closure and localised conflict dynamics?</td></tr>
</table>

Etc.

Drawing on these policy and learning objectives, the project should define the key studies that will be conducted to generate evidence. This helps to provide a quick overview of the planned studies and facilitates the management of studies and broader NRM knowledge management processes.

Template 4 **Overview of Studies (link)**

Name of Study	Description	Timing	Responsibility
Baseline Study		Y1 Q2	M&E team
Gender Analysis		Y1 Q2	Gender Specialist
Labour Market Assessment		Y1 Q3	Labour Market Specialist
Comparative study on different delivery modalities		Y3 Q2	Research Consultant
Endline Study		Y3 Q4	M&E Team

3.4 Project measurement framework

The Project Measurement Framework provides an overview of the key **indicators** that the project will monitor throughout the project cycle. It defines indicators (operational definition, collection methods, frequency of collection, responsibility, etc.) and targets for key outputs and outcomes as well as for feedback from project stakeholders/beneficiaries.

Each project is required to develop a measurement framework based on its Theory of Change. Since the Project Theory of Change describes the project's contribution to the programme and NRM TOCs, the project measurement framework will include a subset of common indicators. However, the majority of indicators in a project's measurement framework are likely to be project-specific and tied to the specific outputs and outcomes set out in the project Theory of Change.

Broadly speaking the project measurement framework will encompass the following types of data:

Table 4: **Overview of types of monitoring data**

Type of Data	What does this include?
Outputs	> Outreach (number of people reached through various activities) > Establishment of entities, physical structures, etc.
Outcomes	> Changes in knowledge, behaviour, attitudes, relationships, roles and relationships of/amongst key actors > Changes resulting from the achievement of outputs
Collective Outcomes	> Specific changes defined at the level of a programme that are the result of multiple partners working together jointly
Impact	> Change in vulnerability, resilience and rights
Feedback	> Perceptions of stakeholders about key aspects of the intervention > Suggestions for improvement > Complaints

The measurement framework details key attributes of the indicators, including the frequency, source, means of verification, responsibilities, and utilisation. Wherever data is captured on individual beneficiaries, sex-disaggregated data is a requirement. Further disaggregation by disability status, age or ethnicity may be required depending on the nature of the assignment. This will be agreed upon between the NRM Secretariat and implementing partners.

The measurement framework is a contractual document that is mutually agreed between the NRM Secretariat and the Implementing partner.

The table below shows the template that should be used to develop the project measurement framework. Additional columns can be added as required.

Template 5 **Measurement Framework** (link)

Result	Indicator	Definition	Source/ MOV	Frequency/ Timing	Who Collects	Utilization	Targets Y1...
Impact/Collective Outcome							
Impact 1							
Collective Outcome 1							
Project Objective 1							
Outcome 1.1							
Outcome 1.2							
Output 1.1							
Output 1.2							
Project Objective 2							
Etc.							

3.5 Project monitoring

Monitoring is the routine or periodic collection, analysis and communication of data in order to keep track of something. As such, it encompasses all of the regular data collection activities that take place during the course of an intervention cycle. As noted, the design of monitoring systems, including what they monitor, can vary considerably.

Activity, output and outcome monitoring

All projects are expected to conduct routine monitoring of activities, outputs, outcomes and community feedback, as set out in the project measurement framework. Projects are expected to develop the required data collection tools and processes and ensure that those involved in data collection have the necessary training required to ensure quality data collection and to maintain appropriate standards of ethics and integrity (e.g. informed consent, data protection). Projects will also be required to store and manage their own data and ensure that they have mechanisms in place for analysing and making use of the monitoring data to make course-corrections as required.

Projects are encouraged to adopt flexible and innovative approaches to monitoring that support learning and adaptive management. Two examples include:

Box 1: **Outcome Mapping: a learning and complexity-sensitive MEAL approach**

Example: Outcome Mapping

Outcome mapping is an approach to monitoring that is centred on learning and complexity. It takes an actor-based view of the change that an initiative seeks to bring about and uses flexible tools to track changes in the activities, behaviours, roles, relationships, etc. (the outcomes) of the concerned actors. It is premised on the notion that most development interventions do not directly impact on their ultimate beneficiaries, but do so through their direct partners (boundary partners). Measurement is thus typically concentrated on the boundary partners, making it a particularly relevant tool for multi-actor interventions - such as those concerned with governance, research and advocacy, or market systems interventions.

Outcome mapping can be combined with more traditional results and measurement frameworks and Theories of Change to provide an integrated framework. This is best achieved through the development of actor-based theories of change that link all outcomes to specific actors and are framed in the active voice.

For more information:

> https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/outcome_mapping
> https://www.outcomemapping.ca/

Box 2: **Most Significant Change**

Example: Most Significant Change

Most Significant Change is a flexible and participatory approach to identifying and prioritising changes that have occurred in a given context, as perceived by project beneficiaries and other key stakeholders. It is particularly useful for capturing unexpected or unintended changes, both positive and negative. A key benefit of this approach is that it allows stakeholders to describe the changes they have observed/experienced in their own words, and thus avoids some of the biases that often affect measurement of outcomes using predetermined indicators. Typically, it entails harvesting a list of changes based on a series of key domains of interest and going through a participatory process of discussion and debate to select the most significant ones.

For more information:

> https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Most-significant-change.pdf
> https://www.odi.org/publications/5211-strategy-development-most-significant-change-msc

When designing monitoring systems, care should be taken to ensure that tools and methods used are feasible and practical, particularly for local partners. Approaches that involve extensive data collection, or specialised methods or techniques - or that otherwise overwhelm local partners - should be avoided, unless there are adequate provisions in place to ensure the required capacity, expertise and resources are in place. Sound budgeting and a clear capacity development plan are important elements of this.

Feedback systems

In line with its commitment to accountability, localisation and transformation, the NRM considers feedback systems to be an essential component of all projects and an integral part of MEAL. Feedback systems are important for strengthening downward and horizontal accountability, stakeholder engagement, learning and adaptive management, and for amplifying the voices of key stakeholders in decision-making processes. Feedback systems can be conceived as repeated cycles of listening, sensemaking[2] and responding, though feedback can also be gathered through one-off or ad hoc mechanisms.

Table 5: **Three key steps in a feedback process**

Step	What does it include?
Listening	> Who are the key stakeholders from whom you want to gather feedback? > What are the prevailing contextual factors that could impact on their ability to express themselves honestly and safely? > How can you design feedback mechanisms, processes and tools that are enabling, empowering and accessible?

[2] The term sensemaking refers to collective processes of engaging with and interrogating various forms of evidence about a complex matter in order

	> What are you listening for? What should the feedback mechanism focus on?
Sensemaking	> Who should be involved in sensemaking? > How will the feedback be analysed and presented back to relevant stakeholders in an accessible, understandable and engaging way? > How will a shared understanding of issues, their implications and potential solutions be identified together with key stakeholders?
Responding	> How will adaptive actions be identified, agreed upon and prioritised? > How will they be incorporated into ongoing project management and implementation? > How will the actions taken be communicated to those who provided feedback? > How will follow-up on the actions be ensured at both project level and through subsequent rounds of feedback?

There is no single approach to feedback. Different feedback mechanisms may be required for **different purposes**, for **different stages of a project** (e.g., design, implementation, evaluation), for **different stakeholders** (e.g. based on their capacities, prevailing power dynamics, access to technology, etc.) and for **different aspects of the intervention** (e.g. feedback on specific activities and interventions, versus feedback on the overall experience of the project). The table below illustrates some of the different functions that feedback mechanisms can play at key stages in the project cycle.

Table 6: **How feedback can be used at different stages of the project cycle**

Design	Implementation	Conclusion
> Free, Prior and informed consent > Understanding needs and priorities > Validating the project design	> Feedback on beneficiary satisfaction with project activities (e.g. trainings, workshops) > Feedback from key project stakeholders on the impact of the project > Adaptive management and downward accountability > Reporting to donors > Capacity building and community ownership > Grievance redressal	> Ensuring community voices are reflected in evaluations

The choice of feedback and monitoring systems can have significant implications in terms of intervention design, capacities of the actors involved and resources invested. Partners should identify the purpose of any feedback systems that they put in place and select and develop approaches and tools that are most appropriate to achieving these objectives.

Feedback can be collected from individuals or from groups, through the use of various tools/methods such as questionnaires/surveys; focus group discussions; and participatory methods, amongst others. They can be proactive, with partners actively soliciting feedback, or reactive, as with complaints and suggestions boxes. Feedback can also be technologically enabled, for example, through mobile phone surveys, SMS based surveys, interactive voice response (IVR) surveys, specialised apps, or through popular social media and messaging platforms from Facebook to WhatsApp and Viber. Feedback data can be structured or unstructured, and can be representative of a population or based on Key Informants each offering different advantages and disadvantages.

Management of feedback systems entails paying particular attention to the quality of engagement throughout the feedback cycle and ensuring that adaptive decisions are taken that respond to the feedback received. The concept of 'closing the loop' is often used to describe the final stages of a feedback cycle, when feedback findings are reflected upon and validated together with stakeholder representatives and used to inform decisions about follow-up actions.

The table below provides an overview of different types of feedback mechanisms that could be incorporated in a project MEAL framework.

Table 7: **Examples of feedback mechanisms and tools**

Type	Summary
Short structured feedback surveys	Structured surveys are typically administered to an individual and use a set of standards questions. While their length can vary, they generally need to be kept short and shouldn't take more than 15 minutes to administer. The specific questions are determined by the topic they are focused on, but generally encompass: > Satisfaction > Relationships > Voice / engagement > Problems > Suggestions Examples include: > Post-session feedback surveys for trainings and workshops - e.g. > Beneficiary satisfaction surveys for interactions with service providers Such methods typically allow for statistical analysis and thus can be readily integrated into dashboards and other performance management tools and processes. They also lend themselves well to digital data collection
Key Informant Interviews	Semi-structured or unstructured interviews with individuals representing specific groups or actors, and who are expected to have an in-depth understanding of the topic in question.
Focus Group Discussions	Semi-structured or unstructured group-based discussions on selected topics, to explore multiple perspectives and draw from the depth and analytical insights that can be gained from the content and dynamics of such groups.
Participatory Learning and Action	Participatory Learning and Action is an approach to embedding participatory methods in monitoring, evaluation and learning. Participants, typically belonging to specific community-level groups, engage in a cyclical process of planning, action and reflection, typically employing a selection of participatory tools (i.e. PRA methods) that facilitate collective analysis, planning, acting, monitoring, evaluation and learning. An extensive set of resources on PLA and participatory methods can be found here: https://www.iied.org/participatory-learning-action-pla
Community meetings	Community meetings (e.g. at village or group levels) can provide a mechanism for open dialogue and voicing of concerns.
Public hearing	Public hearings are events, typically organised by civil society actors to hold public or private actors to account by gathering and presenting evidence, and creating a

	forum for testimonies and grievances to be aired. They typically include a panel to draw conclusions and share the findings with relevant stakeholders as part of an ongoing advocacy campaign.
Participatory Action Research	Participatory Action Research is a research paradigm that centres on the relationship between knowledge and power and is centred on the empowerment of those participating in the research. PAR initiatives are thus centred on empowering participants to achieve collective changes efforts by actively researching their efforts at doing so. The level of participation varies in practice and across various stages of the research process. However, gaps in participation are seen to introduce power dynamics between the research-facilitator and those they are supporting. Ideally, the research purpose and questions themselves are defined by the participants and they participate throughout the process.
Suggestion boxes	
Complaints boxes	

Each project should develop a community feedback plan, by thinking through the key considerations discussed above. Feedback mechanisms can then be integrated into the relevant sections of the MEAL Framework, including the monitoring system (see below) and plans for learning and adaptive management (see section 3.6).

Monitoring methods and tools

It is generally useful to compile the list of all monitoring tools that will be used for routine monitoring and/or feedback data collection in a single table. This helps to provide an overview and also give a clearer picture of the size and complexity of the monitoring system that has been developed.

Template 6 Summary of the Project Monitoring System Tools (link)

Monitoring Tool	Brief Description	Actor(s)	Timing/ Frequency	Responsible
Activity Monitoring				
Training attendance sheets	A paper-based form for capturing basic details of project participants	Trainees	Ongoing	Field officers
Women's group register	A record with membership and attendance details for group meetings	Group leaders	Ongoing	Group leaders
Outcome Monitoring				
Outcome survey questionnaire	Mobile-based survey for target beneficiaries	Training beneficiaries		Hired enumerators
Feedback Monitoring				
Post-training feedback survey	Short structured questionnaire administered to all trainees to get feedback on the training delivery and content. Not more than 5 questions.	Trainees	Ongoing (post-training)	
KIIs	Periodic interviews to gain nuanced insights into emerging issues and challenges related to the intervention	Community leaders, women's group	Quarterly	

		leaders, journalists		
PLA	Embedding ongoing reflection and learning into meetings of community action groups established by the project, based on a set of participatory tools for assessing, ranking and scoring project performance.			

Data analysis

MEAL systems generate a substantial amount of information. This includes survey data, data and reports from research studies, interview transcripts, audio files, etc. Analysis of the data can be a lengthy task that requires relatively specialised expertise. It is critical, therefore, to ensure that the project has planned for the capacity to analyse the data collected and make it accessible to its intended users. This requires giving due consideration to the types of data that different methods or tools will generate, dividing roles and responsibilities for data analysis, and defining how the data be analysed.

Template 7 Data Analysis Plan (link)

Tool	Product	Responsible for Analysis	How
Feedback Survey	Quarterly Feedback Report	Lead IP M&E Team	Automated performance dashboard using Software A
Outcome Survey	6-monthly outcome study report	Lead IP M&E team	Manual analysis using Software B
Community Meetings	Community meeting summary report	Local partner w/ project-wide aggregation by Lead IP	Synthesis workshop with structured report

Data Quality Management

Data management comprises quality assurance and storage for all data collected from the start of a project to its closure.

Table 8: **Key data quality considerations at various stages**

Stage	Steps to Ensure Quality
Design of tools	How has data collection been designed to ensure quality? How will tools be tested to ensure they are fit for purpose?
Sampling	If sampling is required, what steps have been taken to make the sample as representative as possible?
Training	What training will be provided to those who are responsible for data collection?
Data Collection	What steps will be put in place to ensure the quality of data during the data collection phase?

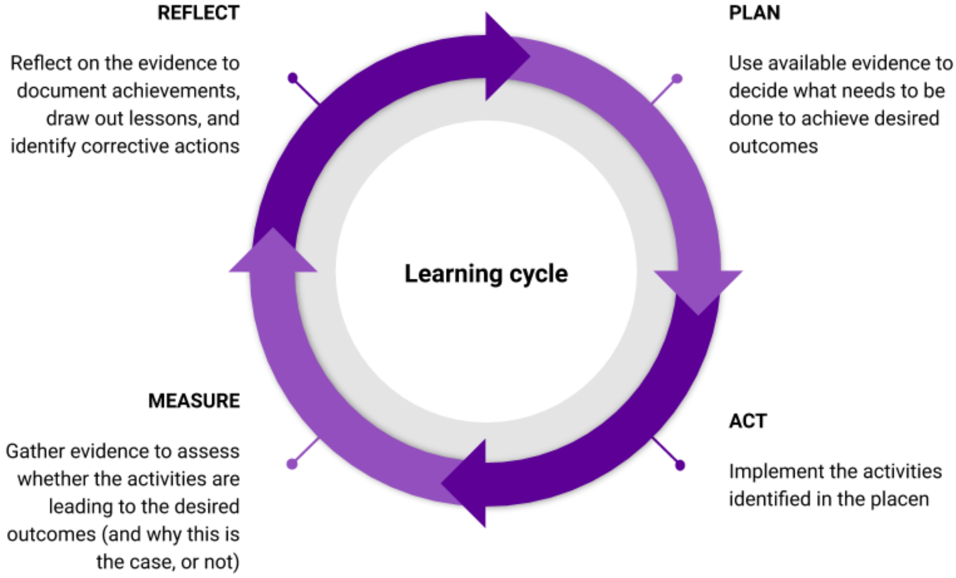
	This may include, for example: random checks of entered data, involvement of a supervisor to check on data that has been collected, use of digital data collection tools that limit errors, use of GPS to track the exact location of data entry.
Data Entry	What measures will be put in place to ensure the quality of data at the stage of data entry? This may include, for example: use of specialised digital data collection software, restricting the type or format of data entered for specific fields, manual checking of data that has been entered, double-entry of data to catch inconsistencies.
Data Cleaning	What steps will be taken during the data cleaning and analysis stages
Data Storage	What steps will be taken to securely store the raw and cleaned data so that it can be retrieved when needed?
Data Analysis	What steps will be taken to ensure the quality of the analysed data?
Report	What steps will be taken to ensure the quality of the data once it has been reported?

3.6 Learning and adaptive management

NRM places great emphasis on ensuring that projects are adaptive, that they support localisation and that they are transformative and empowering. Achieving this requires having appropriate learning mechanisms in place that can support the generation and use of feedback and other evidence by all key actors from communities to local CSO partners, implementing agencies and the NRM itself.

Learning in such contexts is typically depicted in the form of a cycle: (1) plan; (2) act; (3) measure; and (4) reflect. Insights gained from reflection can then feed into planning for the next iteration of the cycle. Such cycles can be embedded within the regular functioning of community groups and local CSOs, as well as at the level of projects or programmes. They can operate on various time-scales - from short weekly events involving a community self-help group, to quarterly performance reviews or three-yearly strategic reviews. Such events should be designed to enable the relevant stakeholders to collectively make sense of the findings, draw out their implications and make corrective decisions as needed.

Figure 3: **Learning cycle**



Evidence plays an important role in such learning processes, and mostly consists of data about (1) the context; (2) progress with implementation and results; (3) feedback from stakeholders; (4) experiences of field staff. The data may come from external sources, project monitoring (including community level monitoring), research studies and evaluations. When the evidence - from both project monitoring, studies and other sources - is used to generate insights that inform decisions addressing emerging issues (for example by making changes to design and implementation), it is called adaptive management.

Projects are expected to develop and implement their own mechanisms for adaptive management based on their project monitoring systems, while also being involved in broader adaptive management mechanisms at the intermediate and NRM-wide levels as appropriate. Creating alignment between the learning cycles across levels can help to ensure that learning from one level (e.g. project) feeds into the next level (e.g. programme).

Mechanisms for adaptive management should provide an opportunity for those concerned to engage with relevant evidence while reflecting on changes in the context and learning gained through the process of project implementation. Adaptive management will therefore need to draw on data and analysis from the project monitoring system, regular reports, evaluations, studies and evidence generated by the DDCAF. Appropriate fora - both internally and with external stakeholders (e.g. government, community) where relevant - should be created and used for this purpose. These may take the form of virtual and/or physical workshops that provide the opportunity for the relevant participants to engage with the data, interpret it and discuss challenges and solutions.

Template 8 Learning/Adaptive Management Events (link)

Event	Purpose	Evidence Sources	Frequency/Timing	Participants/Audience
Baseline sense-making and validation workshop	To reflect on baseline findings and identify implications for project design	Baseline study, gender study, labour market assessment	Once, Y1 Q2	All project staff + external stakeholders
Monthly field staff meeting	Track progress on key activities and outreach figures	Training attendance reports	Monthly, as per field plan	Area coordinator, outreach workers
Six-monthly reflection workshop	To review overall project progress and identify corrective actions	Project database / comprehensive reports	Six-monthly	Project manager, M&E Officer, Thematic leads, Field coordinators
Quarterly progress review				Project manager, M&E Officer, Thematic leads, Field coordinators

Adaptive measures that do not impact on contractual commitments, such as objectives, budgets, results, indicators and/or targets can usually be addressed directly at the project level without approval from NRM. Changes that do or may impact such commitments must be agreed with NRM before they can be introduced.

In either case, documenting adaptive changes is a very important element of doing adaptive management in a rigorous manner. It ensures that an evaluator or manager can understand why certain changes were made at specific points in time, and thereby helps to tell the story of the project, consolidate learning and evaluate the quality of adaptive decision-making.

The table below provides a basic template for such a log. This log should be included with the narrative report.

Template 9 **Adaptations log (included in the reporting template, not the MEAL Framework)**

Date	What Changed?	Description of Changes	Reasons for Change (logic and supporting evidence)	Contractual or non-contractual change	Implications for Project Design documents and MEAL

3.7 Reporting

Projects are required to submit six-monthly basis narrative - included updated measurement frameworks - and financial reports to the NRM Secretariat. The template for these reports can be found here. Reports are based on data collected through regular monitoring activities as defined in the measurement framework, combined with technical analysis provided by the project team. Reports are reviewed by concerned officers of the NRM Secretariat and used to provide updates to the NRM Steering Committee and extract results data that feeds into the NRM Measurement Framework.

3.8 Knowledge Products

Provide details of any knowledge products that you intend to generate through the project (whether internal or external). Refer back to the table in section 3.3. Knowledge products include all types of documents, videos, audio clips, infographics, etc., that aim to consolidate, synthesise and share the knowledge gained during the course of an intervention, whether through research or MEAL. Common examples include policy briefs, good practice guides, case studies, manuals, journal articles, research reports, presentations and blog posts. Developing a suitable dissemination and uptake plan tailored to the needs of specific stakeholders is important for maximising the circulation and uptake of knowledge products. This applies to both internal and external stakeholders. Knowledge products should contribute to the MEAL objectives.

Template 10 **Knowledge Products (link)**

Name of product (type)	Brief Description	Dissemination and uptake plan	Contributes to (actor, objective)
General understanding of MEAL with focus on adaptive management and evidence-based advocacy			
Activity monitoring training			
Outcome survey training			
Sharing data with local partners training			

Etc

3.9 Evaluations

Evaluations at the project level encompass mid-term reviews and final evaluations. In most-cases, however, projects will not be evaluated individually. Rather, they will be evaluated collectively within the framework of the area-based or thematic programme that they are part of. This is intended to bring a stronger focus on the nexus approach, on overall coherence, on synergies, coordination and integration, and also the emphasis on the contribution made by different project partners to achieving collective outcomes.

3.10 MEAL Capacity Development

Implementation of quality MEAL is notoriously challenging. It is often jargon heavy, requires a variety of specialised skill-sets and, especially when it aims to go beyond mere reporting, requires an enabling organisational culture. The design of project level MEAL systems must:

1. Take into account the existing MEAL capacities and systems of all project partners;
2. Introduce approaches, methods and tools that build on existing capacities and systems;
3. Include sufficient MEAL capacity development support for partners wherever required.

In order to do this, lead partners should:

1. Conduct a MEAL capacity assessment of sub-IPs to understand current systems and capabilities;
2. Generally aim for lightweight MEAL systems that do not overburden sub-IPs with data collection and analysis responsibilities;
3. Co-create and agree on the design of the MEAL system together with sub-IPs;
4. Ensure sub-IPs have the requires HR in place to carry out MEAL related functions and tasks;
5. Carefully divide MEAL responsibilities between the lead IP and sub-IPs to achieve a fair distribution of work;
6. Develop a MEAL capacity strengthening plan for each sub-IP that corresponds to their capacity support requirements and the specific roles that they will need to play
7. Use ongoing MEAL processes and events as an opportunity to strengthen capacities

Template 11 **Capacity Development Plan (link)**

Domain	Description	Participants	When
General understanding of MEAL with focus on adaptive management and evidence-based advocacy			
Activity monitoring training			
Outcome survey training			
Sharing data with local partners training			

Etc

3.11 MEAL workplan

It is also recommended to develop a full MEAL work-plan as exemplified below:

Template 12 **MEAL Work Plan (link)**

Tool	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	...
Studies								
Baseline Study								
Monitoring								
Training Attendance Sheets								
Outcome Survey Questionnaire								
Community Feedback Survey								
Etc.								
Events								
Baseline Launch Workshop								
Multi-Stakeholder Reflection Workshop								

Mid-term Review Workshops								

3.12 Resourcing for MEAL

All projects are expected to allocate sufficient funds to MEAL related activities, including for staff and transport and to support all activities set out in their MEAL Frameworks.

This section should describe what human, financial and material resources are allocated for MEAL in order to implement the project MEAL system.

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NEXUS RESPONSE MECHANISM

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