LIFT MEAL Framework 2019 to 2023

November 2019

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Background

In 2015, LIFT developed an organisation-wide MEAL Framework for its 2014-2018 strategy cycle. This MEAL Framework, for the first time, set out the overall architecture of LIFT's MEAL system across the LIFT, programme and project levels. It defined the primary functions - related to accountability, learning and influencing policy and practice - that LIFT's MEAL system should serve.

The 2015-18 MEAL Framework also introduced a number of new elements that marked a notable departure from LIFT's earlier M&E system. Key amongst these were the introduction of Theories of Change (TOCs) and Evaluation and Learning Questions (ELQs) at the LIFT, programme and project levels. Moreover, projects were encouraged to develop measurement frameworks that corresponded to their TOCs rather than purely reporting against LIFT logframe indicators. While aggregation of Implementing Partner data on outreach and outputs continued to feed into LIFT level logframe reporting, outcome level data was primarily generated through a centrally managed LIFT Household Survey. The new MEAL Framework sought to enhance flexibility of LIFT's MEAL system while simultaneously placing a greater emphasis on the generation of useful evidence and learning.

As a result of the aforementioned advances, understanding and capacity for MEAL within the FMO and across IPs has progressed as key users of the MEAL system have become familiarised with the new tools and products. Through these systems LIFT has succeeded in consistently reporting in a robust and timely manner to its donors.

The refreshed MEAL Framework for 2019 to 2023 builds on the achievements of the previous phase, responds to key strategic shifts in the 2019-2023 strategy and addresses a number of shortcomings of the previous phase.

The LIFT MEAL Framework will be accompanied by a number of supporting documents, some existing and some under development, including:
- LIFT Learning and Knowledge Management Plan
- LIFT Policy Priorities
- IP MEAL Guidelines
- Beneficiary Accountability Guidelines
- Refreshed approach for evaluations
- Guidelines on Theories of Change
- Value for Money Guidelines
- Guidelines on contribution analysis/policy tracking
- Guidelines on Adaptive Management

Part A: Overall MEAL Framework

1. Overview: responding to strategic shifts and feedback on the previous framework

Selected LIFT strategic shifts and implications for MEAL

LIFT's refreshed strategy sets out a series of strategic shifts which have notable implications for MEAL, simultaneously creating new opportunities and challenges. The most critical of these for LIFT's MEAL Framework are set out below, along with a brief commentary on how they relate to MEAL:

- **Increased focus on ethnic/border states and conflict affected areas**. This implies greater involvement in sensitive and at times inaccessible geographies and with key actors involved in conflict dynamics. This presents challenges for data collection, ensuring data quality and monitoring visits; entails working with partners who are likely to have limited MEAL capacity; and requires that MEAL activities be subject to the same conflict sensitivity principles and considerations as programming in these regions. Moreover, this shift requires the development of additional (beyond the logframe) conflict-related outcomes and indicators and risk monitoring.
- **Greater focus on inclusion and social cohesion**. LIFT's focus on reaching the most vulnerable, including people with disabilities, those at risk of exploitation and trafficking, and internally displaced people (IDPs), creates additional reporting requirements and requires adopting appropriate and sensitive approaches to data collection. Moreover, LIFT's performance in reaching the most vulnerable and addressing key issues of social cohesion will need to be evaluated. This also represents an important arena of learning for LIFT and it's partners.
- **Increased focus on gender equality and women's empowerment**. While the previous MEAL Framework included an ELQ on gender and required the collection of sex disaggregated data, the new strategy includes a more explicit focus on women's empowerment, reflected in a series of logframe indicators specifically focused on women's economic empowerment across the four thematic programmes. This will requires both the collection of additional data and ensuring that LIFT and its Implementing Partners are equipped to capture such data.
- **Adoption and implementation of policies and reforms**. With an intensified focus in the current phase on leveraging evidence for policy implementation and reform, LIFT's ability to generate and synthesise robust policy-relevant evidence and feed it into various policy processes will need to be strengthened. This will require a more strategic, purposeful and focused approach to both research and MEAL.

- **New focus on urban/peri-urban areas, mobile populations & displaced**. Expansion into urban/peri-urban areas requires shifts in the way that key aspects of LIFT's formerly rural focused MEAL are designed. This extends to populations that are increasingly moving (whether through choice or forced to do so through displacement) to seek opportunities outside their traditional home areas. These factors impact on the formulation of LIFT-wide evaluation questions as well as the design of key data collection instruments such as the LIFT Household Survey.

Alongside these strategic shifts, LIFT has changed from a primarily geographical organisation of its programmes in the previous strategy phase, to a combination of both thematic programmes (based on the four pillars) and geographic programmes (through which most calls for proposals are issued). This change has brought with it an intensified focus on integrated programming in LIFT. LIFT's refreshed MEAL Framework will respond to this by accommodating both geographic and thematic programmes and building in a specific focus on integration into the design of Theories of Change, evaluation questions and multi-stakeholder learning processes for its geographic programmes.

Summary of feedback on the previous Framework

During October 2019, a consultation process with key stakeholders took place involving collecting feedback from Fund Board members, Implementing Partners and FMO staff. The main findings are set out below.

Box 1: MEAL Feedback Survey: Selected Headlines[1]
Gaps in understanding of MEAL across all levels. Several surveyed IPs reported that they are confused by TOCs, ELQs and Measurement Frameworks and that they are not sure how to develop them or use them. For example, some felt that their Measurement Frameworks did not match their TOCs while others found themselves unable to answer their ELQs. In some cases Implementing Partners were not clear on the difference between their measurement frameworks and the LIFT logframe, or felt that they were expected to collect data that was not relevant to them. Some FMO staff also reported a lack of confidence in their understanding of the LIFT MEAL Framework and the use of TOCs and ELQs tools, limiting their ability to support or guide IPs effectively in how to use them. As a result, the full value of using these tools could not be realised and in some cases the tools were experienced as frustrating or counterproductive.
Weak IP capacity on data collection, management and analysis. Several surveyed IPs reported that they find it difficult to collect, manage and analyse data. In some cases this pertains to the requirement to collect disaggregated data (e.g. on disability) or data that is perceived to be sensitive. In other cases

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1 These headlines based on the preliminary findings from a series of interviews conducted with LIFT Fund Board members, LIFT FMO Officers and 20 Implementing Partners focus on some of the key issues with the 2015-18 LIFT MEAL Framework. Some interviews are still ongoing and the full analysis of findings will be documented in a separate report once all the interviews have been completed.

it is more general. Staff at the FMO reported that IPs generally faced more difficulties in collecting outcome level data than output level data. As a consequence, it can be difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of projects from their monitoring systems. Related to these points, most IPs reported that they required additional guidance and capacity support on MEAL in order to be able to develop and utilise their MEAL plans and get the full value from their MEAL activities. This point was reiterated by interviewees at the FMO and Fund Board levels, particularly in light of LIFT's expansion into conflict sensitive areas and increased expectations on IP reporting on outcomes.

Greater flexibility. In some cases IPs reported that they found TOCs, ELQs and indeed MEAL Plan in general to be rigid and inflexible. While this was not intended, it indicates that there are gaps in capacity for adaptive management at various levels. MEAL Plans, TOCs and the learning component of ELQs are intended to be flexible, should be reflected upon annually and may be revised in those cases where there is a sufficiently strong justification to do so. This is central to adaptive management and the concerned projects should not be treated as static documents developed at the start of a project and not revisited later. Some IPs commented that LIFT's guidelines on TOCs were too rigid/linear and proposed that different approaches to TOCs should also be encouraged. The interactions related to MEAL that take place during project inception and implementation are critical for shaping IPs understanding of MEAL and provide a key opportunity for clear guidance on how to use MEAL Plans and their various components to be provided to IPs.

More strategic use and generation of evidence. A number of FB respondents noted that while LIFT generates a large volume of evidence, it is not clear what happens to it or how it is being used. As LIFT's contribution to improved policy and practice in Myanmar is a high priority, more efforts should be directed to extracting value from the evidence generated by ensuring the investments in MEAL and research result in useful and tangible products that support policy and adaptive management. Moreover, a number of FMO representatives reported that too many evaluations are conducted and that their quality is not consistent. The fact that evaluations are often carried out in the absence of outcome or endline survey data further limits their utility. The absence of systematic approaches to extracting and synthesising learning from evaluations was also flagged as a key issue at the FMO level and concerns were raised as to whether they offer value for money.

More digestible knowledge products. Many of the reports that are produced through research and/or ELQ studies are too large to be of use to the Fund Board and other key users. Briefs summarising the most important findings, learning and recommendation should be produced so key stakeholders can use them to make evidence-informed decisions, with the option of engaging with full reports/details where possible to do so.

Less intensive reporting processes. Reporting processes are experienced as particularly labour intensive and time-consuming at the LIFT FMO and IP levels. There may be opportunities to simplify and streamline the IP report structure. Similarly, a number of respondents across levels suggested that a lighter touch approach to semi-annual reports produced by IPs and at the FMO level could significantly ease the burden. It should be noted, however, that the lengthy LIFT annual report is a very valuable resource because of its

comprehensiveness and should not be reduced if possible.

Clearer communication of indicator reference sheets. Differences in indicator definitions between project measurement frameworks and the LIFT logframe were a source of confusion for some IPs. IPs expect LIFT to provide them with clear indicator reference sheets in time so that they are able to align their indicators with LIFT definitions were it is relevant or necessary for them to do so.

More realistic measurement expectations from IPs. Some IPs felt that they were expected to report on high level outcome indicators (e.g. related to income) that were beyond the scope of what their project could achieve within the project timeframe. Clearer/more consistent guidance should be provided on what is expected.

MEAL system strengthening priorities for 2019 to 2023

LIFT's 2019-2023 Strategy sets out a broad set of priorities related to Monitoring and Evaluation and Knowledge Management. Taken together, these priorities focus on enhancing the contribution that evidence generated by LIFT and its partners can make to enhancing LIFT's impact, supporting inclusive development in Myanmar and informing government policy formulation and implementation. It also sets out four key principles, underpinned by a commitment to strengthen partner MEAL capacity:

1. A more intensive outcome- and learning-oriented approach to MEAL at programme and implementing partner levels;
2. A stronger and more explicit thematic learning agenda tied to the four thematic programmes;
3. Improved tracking of contributions to policy development and its links with programmes; and
4. A more strategic and systematic approach to knowledge management to contribute to LIFT's effectiveness and Myanmar's development.

These principles drive a more strategic and systematic approach to MEAL, KM, Policy and communications across LIFT. In particular, LIFT has identified synergies and strengthened coordination across the teams responsible for these functions, including M&E, Learning and Knowledge Management (LKM), Policy and Communications. More detailed strategies for Policy Engagement, Communications and LKM are forthcoming.

Building on these developments, the implications of the strategic shifts and the findings from the MEAL Framework review summarised above, a number of MEAL system strengthening priorities have been identified. These are:

● **Refreshed and more strategic approach to evaluations.**
  ◦ Refreshed set of strategic evaluation questions reflecting the priorities of the new LIFT strategy

- ◦ Fewer, more robust and targeted evaluations: shifting emphasis from project to programme and programme component[2] level evaluations, including multi-project reviews/evaluations focused on specific themes or categories of intervention
- ◦ Building a more diverse pool of retainer evaluators
- ◦ Improved guidance and clearer requirements for commissioning evaluations and tasking evaluators
- **More systematic use of evidence for learning and adaptive management**
  - ◦ Establishing stronger internal learning mechanisms and tools[3], including for synthesising evidence from studies, research, reports and evaluations into useful briefs and learning products
  - ◦ More concise, timely and user-oriented knowledge products tailored to relevant audiences and capitalising on opportunities of technology and new media (see LIFT level section)
  - ◦ Stronger guidance and requirements for project-level outcome monitoring and data utilisation for accountability, learning and adaptive management
  - ◦ Continue building on internal and external events where a diverse range of stakeholders can meet face-to-face to debate critical issues. This includes Communities of Practice - see Part B section 4
- **Clearer LIFT-wide policy priorities merging from programmes, and backed by stronger evidence from research and MEAL**
  - ◦ LIFT-wide policy agenda encompassing programme and project level policy objectives
  - ◦ Ensuring policy objectives and associated research initiatives are more closely aligned with programme priorities, feeding off programme experience more effectively to use in influencing, and feeding policy thinking into programme development so that policy outcomes are clear and agreed as objectives of the programme in their own right
  - ◦ Strategic use of policy-relevant research and MEAL evidence to inform policy processes
- **Strengthening project level MEAL focused on outcome monitoring, learning and adaptive management**
  - ◦ Increased emphasis on project level MEAL to generate evidence on the achievement of outcomes and analysis of performance[4]
  - ◦ Emphasis on utilisation of project MEAL evidence to inform ongoing learning and adaptive management for enhanced impact
  - ◦ More systematic approach to capturing and sharing project-level evidence for learning and policy contribution
- **Streamlined reporting in semi-annual report and for IPs**

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2 LIFT's geographic programmes are typically divided into a series of components that set out specific objectives, outcomes and types of intervention related to one more thematic programmes
3 Such as standard formats for learning extracts and improved executive summaries from external evaluations
4 This pertains particularly to project reporting on their own logframes, but also includes selected LIFT logframe indicators that IPs are expected to report against

- Revised reporting format for Implementing Partners with greater emphasis on learning, supplementing quantitative reporting with enhanced emphasis on reasons underlying performance[5]
- Simplified M&E datasheets updated to ensure capturing of all relevant targets for project activities can be captured with the required disaggregation
- Consider options for simplifying semi-annual reporting at LIFT and IP levels
- **Stronger process orientation of MEAL activities across levels**
  - Clearer directives for IPs and evaluators on MEAL requirements at key stages of the strategy and programme cycle
  - Deepened engagement of FMO personnel with MEAL products (TOCs, ELQs, MEAL Plans) and processes throughout the project cycle
- **Enhanced cross-team collaboration and knowledge management**
  - Improved centralised and searchable databases for management of data and knowledge assets
  - Strengthened internal systems and ways of working for sharing and leveraging knowledge for collective impact
- **Strengthened MEAL capacity support to Implementing partners**
  - Focus on effective use of TOCs, evaluations, learning questions and measurement frameworks for accountability, learning and adaptive management
  - Expanding range of MEAL capacity support options available to IPs through FMO and retainers

See section for details on the internal Division of Roles and Responsibilities.

Box 2: A note on Knowledge Management
Knowledge Management is the process of creating, sharing, using and managing the knowledge and information of an organisation. It refers to a multidisciplinary approach to achieving organisational objectives by making the best use of knowledge. This is often broken down into two interconnected categories of "explicit knowledge" (materials stored in documents, media and systems, that are easily transferable and existing independently of how people use them), and "tacit knowledge" (the insights, experience and skills of people that are more difficult to transfer and often stored in the heads of individuals). Most knowledge management strategies seek to address weaknesses and opportunities in both explicit and tacit knowledge. For LIFT, improving explicit knowledge will include completion of the new Dashboard, and improved production, storage and accessibility of knowledge supported by the new Google based system. Sharing tacit knowledge will continue through established practices in sectoral events, Communities of Practice, and field visits amongst others. Both will benefit from a more creative use of communications channels to share knowledge internally and externally.

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[5] For example through improved use of case studies, field visits and debrief notes.

2. MEAL objectives and functions

This section identifies the high level objectives to which the MEAL Framework aims to achieve, the key functions that it serves and the main users of the MEAL system along with their MEAL-related objective

MEAL Framework Objectives

- To produce robust information about LIFT's **performance** on strategic priorities and results to ensure accountability to beneficiaries, Implementing Partners, donors and the GoUM
- To support robust evidence-based **learning and adaptive management** within LIFT to inform project and programme development including resourcing, scaling up, phasing out and future strategy development
- To enhance the collective impact of LIFT and its partners at the local, regional and national levels by channeling evidence-based learning into high quality **knowledge** products and processes that inform decision-making by policy-makers, managers, practitioners and funders working in the livelihoods sector

Key functions of the MEAL Framework

LIFT MEAL is a balancing act between three primary functions:

- **Accountability**[6]: demonstrating the extent to which LIFT's investments are in line with its strategy and that key results were achieved efficiently, effectively and with good value for money;
- **Learning and adaptive management**: generating, sharing and using evidence about what works and what does not to improve performance and make course-corrections;
- **Contribution to policy development**: generating and using policy- and practice-relevant evidence to inform government policies and the design and implementation of public programmes.

These functions are underpinned by **capacity support** to ensure that MEAL tools, processes and products are of sufficient quality and effective in supporting LIFT to achieve its accountability, learning/adaptive management and policy objectives.

Box 3: Adaptive management[7,8]

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6 Accountability here refers specifically to 'upward' accountability, rather than 'downward' accountability. LIFT has a beneficiary accountability mechanism that elaborates its accountability to implementing partners and beneficiaries in detail.

7 Ben Ramalingam, Leni Wild and Anne L. Buffardi (2019) Making adaptive rigour work: Principles and practices for strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning for adaptive management. Accessed at: https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12653.pdf

8 BOND (2016) Adaptive management: What it means for CSOs. Accessed at:

Adaptive management is a relatively new concept in the development sector that has emerged in response to the recognition that traditional, linear approaches to programme and project management are generally unsuccessful in complex contexts, characterised by multiple actors and significant levels of uncertainty. Adaptive management provides a framework for supporting evidence-based decision-making in such contexts by drawing on monitoring evaluation and learning mechanisms. It requires flexibility in the management of programmes, projects and MEAL systems so that development efforts are responsive to changes in context, emerging issues and challenges faced during implementation, and the acquisition of new insights and understanding emerging from MEAL processes.

Findings from the Relevance and Sustainability ELQ Summative Study, which reviewed a sample of 50 projects from LIFT's portfolio for the 2015-2019 strategy period, highlighted the importance of adaptive management at both IP and LIFT levels in order to achieve relevance, sustainability and impact of LIFT supported initiatives. The study found that projects often need an initial phase of piloting before rolling out their interventions, that contextual changes and learning often necessitate changes to intervention design and that supportive monitoring and management systems are required to enable this. A detailed set of recommendations can be found in the report. Broadly, strengthening adaptive management across LIFT will require:
- Quality evidence generated in a timely manner through project MEAL systems and evaluations to inform reflection and analysis
- Regular reflection on TOCs (and revision where there is sufficiently strong justification) at each level based on evidence generated through MEAL Frameworks
- Adjustments to project designs, interventions, budgets and work-plans based on this evidence
- Ensuring LIFT policies, systems and protocols are flexible enough to accommodate this
- Ensuring the LIFT FMO Officers have the understanding, skills and capacities to put adaptive management in place

User-specific MEAL objectives

The LIFT MEAL system will need to serve a range of audiences in different ways. The table below summarises the key audiences and their needs.

Table 1: MEAL Objectives by MEAL system user category

Users	MEAL Objectives
Fund Board	• To have a clear account of how effectively and efficiently LIFT is delivering on its strategy and achieving its results • To learn from LIFT's experiences and use this learning to inform strategic decision-making • To share good practices and knowledge from LIFT within their own organisations and across other programmes • To have timely, good quality information to use in

	informing HQs and the public in donor home countries on progress
Government (at various levels)	● To have a clear account of how effectively and efficiently LIFT is delivering on its strategy and achieving its results ● To identify and be able to scale/replicate successful models, approaches, practices to increase resilience and strengthen livelihoods in Myanmar. ● To use evidence from LIFT to develop and strengthen inclusive policies and programmes that support enhanced resilience, poverty reduction and improved nutrition in Myanmar ● To share good practices and knowledge from LIFT within their own organisations and across other programmes
Fund Management Office	● To ensure that LIFT is learning systematically and improving from its experiences through robust MEAL and KM processes ● To facilitate the exchange of robust knowledge amongst implementing partners and development partners ● To advise/provide partners with relevant/practical knowledge on key aspects of programming ● To continuously improve the quality of programming supported by LIFT ● To provide timely and accurate reporting on progress, performance on priority strategic considerations and learning to donors and other stakeholders
Implementing partners (including HQs and sub-IPs)	● To be able to demonstrate and communicate their achievements based on project commitments ● To effectively learn from their own interventions and make mid-course corrections in response to this learning ● To share knowledge with each other on what works, what doesn't, etc., across contexts and thematic areas; and share harmonised tools and best practices ● To generate and utilise evidence to support their own policy contribution activities ● To contribute evidence to the LIFT's learning and policy development agendas
Development partners[9]	● To utilise evidence from LIFT's experiences to inform their own policies and programmes in the field of resilience, rural livelihoods and nutrition (in Myanmar and beyond)
Civil society	● To have a clear account of LIFT's activities, achievements and performance in terms of socially responsible investment ● To identify and be able to scale/replicate successful models, approaches, practices to increase resilience and strengthen livelihoods in Myanmar.

9 This includes bilateral and multilateral agencies, academic and research institutions, UN agencies and other development and humanitarian organisations that are not directly supported by LIFT

	● To use evidence from LIFT to develop and strengthen inclusive policies and programmes that support enhanced resilience, poverty reduction and improved nutrition in Myanmar ● To contribute their own experiences to LIFT's learning and policy agendas
Media and wider public	● To have a clear account of LIFT's activities, achievements, contributions to Myanmar's development and performance in terms of socially responsible investment ● To disseminate information about LIFT's work in Myanmar, including achievements of national significance and other contributions to national discourse on resilience and development in Myanmar

3. Levels and components of the framework

This section defines the three levels of MEAL in LIFT and highlights the major emphasis at each level.

Levels

LIFT's MEAL Framework is divided into three tiers. These are:
- **LIFT strategy**. This level is focused on accountability, learning and policy across LIFT as a whole, with particular focus on the LIFT strategy. Key stakeholders at this level are the Government of Myanmar, the LIFT Fund Board, the LIFT Fund Management Office and key development partners. In the refreshed MEAL strategy, the emphasis at the strategic level will be on **supporting the implementation of the LIFT MEAL strategy** at the LIFT, programme and project levels.
- **LIFT programmes**. This level is focused on how the thematic and geographic programmes contribute to LIFT's evidence-based accountability, learning/adaptive management and policy objectives. Key stakeholders at this level include the LIFT programme teams and implementation partners. In the refreshed MEAL strategy, emphasis at the programme level will be placed on **strengthening programme contribution to knowledge management**. This will focus on enhancing the capacity and mechanisms through which programmes generate, synthesise, communicate and make use of evidence from projects and through programme level mechanisms (such evaluations, studies and learning fora) to support learning, adaptive management and policy contribution functions.
- **LIFT projects**. This level is focused on how projects contribute to their own and LIFT's evidence-based accountability, learning/adaptive management and policy objectives. In the refreshed MEAL strategy, particular emphasis will be given to **strengthening MEAL systems and practices at the project level for accountability and**

learning/adaptive management. As the primary mechanism for LIFT to achieve its objectives, projects require strong MEAL systems that generate robust evidence to serve accountability, learning and adaptive management, and policy contribution at the project, programme and LIFT levels.

Figure 1. Levels of the MEAL system

LIFT Strategy
Assessing and communicating LIFT's overall performance and learning. Contributing to national policy processes.

LIFT Programmes
Evaluating integrated programmes and components. Synthesising learning

LIFT Projects
Evaluating individual project, generating practical knowledge, learning for adaptive management and enhanced impact.
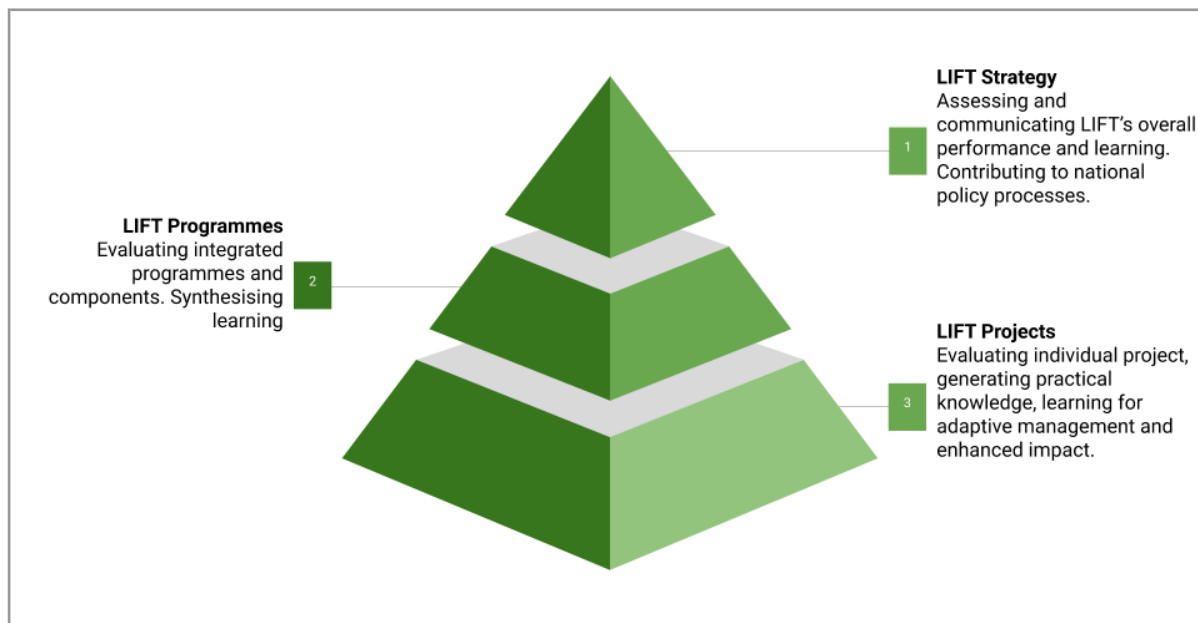
MEAL components, processes and products

The LIFT MEAL Framework sets out a series of tools, processes and products, which taken together and put into practice by the relevant users, constitute the MEAL system. This Refreshed MEAL Strategy will continue to focus on the use of MEAL Plans/Frameworks, Theories of Change, Evaluation and Learning Questions and Measurement Frameworks across LIFT, Programme and Project levels. Concerted efforts will be made to improve the way they are used through updated guidelines, closer follow-up on their ongoing use and revision at programme and project levels and enhanced and more flexible capacity support.

Theories of Change (TOCs), Evaluation and Learning Questions (ELQs) and Measurement Frameworks (MFs) are the central elements of LIFT's approach to MEAL. Deployed in combination, and used effectively, they support design, monitoring, learning and adaptive management, reporting, evaluation and policy across programmes and projects. These elements are discussed in more detail later in this section and expanded upon in subsequent sections discussing how they feature at the LIFT, programme and project levels. It is important to note here, that these elements underpin all the various components that constitute LIFT's MEAL system.

The diagram below sets out the various interdependent elements (tools, processes and products) that make up LIFT's MEAL system across the three key functions and the three levels. Blue boxes indicate primary responsibility and ownership lies with the LIFT M&E, LKM, Policy and Communications teams. Green boxes indicate primary responsibility lies with programme teams and Implementing Partners. Yellow boxes indicate where the combined efforts of both groups contribute to LIFT's outcomes related to policy contribution.

Figure 2. Components of the MEAL system by function and level
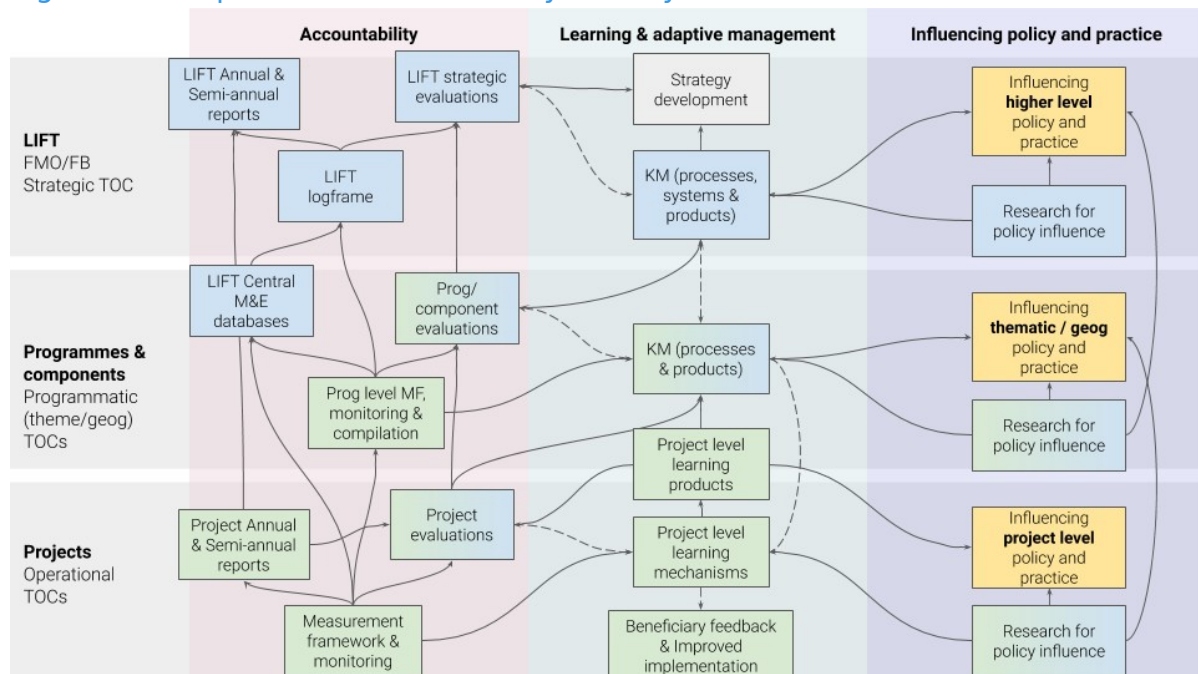
Across the three levels, the accountability function is primarily concerned with gathering data based on results measurement frameworks, generating independent evidence through evaluations and reporting upward through annual and semi-annual reports. The learning function focuses on engaging internal and external actors in utilising evidence gathered through results measurement frameworks, evaluations, learning studies and research studies for learning, adaptive management and enhanced performance/impact. The policy function focuses on conducting policy-relevant research, leveraging evidence from project MEAL processes and feeding these into ongoing policy processes.

Theories of Change

LIFT introduced theories of change as a central element of its approach to MEAL in 2015 and will continue to strengthen the use of this approach in the current phase. Theories of Change (TOCs) are powerful tools that support design, monitoring, evaluation and learning for complex change processes. TOCs can be presented in a variety of formats and designs and there is no single way to approach them. However, for TOCs to be useful for learning and adaptive management, they must fulfil some fundamental criteria. In particular, they should clearly indicate:

- The series of critical changes that are sought (i.e. in order to sustainably achieve the intended impact);
- The pathways that connect them;
- The underlying assumptions at each step and which would be periodically tested during implementation to learn, improve and contribute to adaptive management; and
- The interventions that are expected to contribute to this change.

LIFT endorses a flexible approach to TOCs across programme and project levels to ensure that projects are working with conceptual models that are suited to their needs. However, LIFT highly encourages the use of actor-centred Theories of Change that place the actors involved in change processes at the centre by framing outcomes in actor-oriented terms. **More detailed guidelines on the use and development of TOCs across levels and for different purposes are forthcoming.**

Evaluation and Learning Studies

Building on LIFT's experience with ELQs in the 2015 MEAL Framework, LIFT is adopting a clearer demarcation between evaluation questions, learning questions and questions that are primarily intended to contribute LIFT's policy objectives. Recognising that some questions may fit into more than one category (for example, evaluations should contribute to learning and may also contribute to policy research), the distinction serves to clarify different uses, standards, approaches and levels of rigour associated with each. Evaluation and learning questions at each level will be developed on the basis of their corresponding Theories of Change (e.g. where there are specific assumptions, approaches, mechanisms, interventions or results on which evidence is required).

Whereas evaluations[10] are generally conducted by independent, external evaluators, learning and research studies may be led internally or by LIFT's implementing partners. The full range of evaluation and learning studies encompassed by the LIFT MEAL Framework are presented below.

- **Strategic evaluations** focus on LIFT's performance in terms of delivering against the overall LIFT strategy. Their primary audience is the LIFT Fund Board and LIFT FMO. These are based on a set of Strategic Evaluation Questions, which cascade from the LIFT level down to the programme, component and project levels. At the LIFT level these evaluations will rely on a combination of syntheses of programme and project level evaluations as well as standalone studies where necessary.
- **Thematic programme reviews and targeted evaluations** seek to consolidate learning and evidence across multiple projects related to a particular thematic programme (i.e. DWLM, AMFS, FI or Nutrition) or category of thematic interventions (e.g. related to specific approaches within a given thematic programme). Where appropriate, such evaluations should also address aspects of relevant strategic evaluation questions.

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10 The term 'Evaluation' comprises a wide range of approaches and methods. For more details, see: INTRAC (2017) Types of evaluation. Accessed at:
https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Types-of-Evaluation.pdf

- **Geographic programme evaluations** include both programme-wide evaluations and evaluations of specific geographic programme components.[11] These evaluations may focus on the strategic evaluation questions and/or may comprise targeted and robust impact or process evaluations[12] where appropriate.
- **Project evaluations** focus on individual projects. They may focus on Strategic Evaluation Questions or have their own specific questions linked to particular accountability, learning and/or policy objectives. They aim to provide an independent assessment of how individual projects have performed.
- **Learning studies** encompass a wide range of flexible and topical studies designed to generate learning in relation to key themes relevant to a given programme or project (e.g. related to the context or key aspects of the Theory of Change or intervention approach that require further inquiry). They may have varying standards of rigour and are primarily oriented toward informing adaptive management and enhanced performance rather than serving accountability or policy influence purposes (though they may be useful for these purposes too).

Geographic programme and project mid-term reviews may be conducted to assess performance issues and inform mid-course corrections where a specific need to do so is identified. They can be tailored to focus on key issues that present the greatest opportunity for learning and adaptive management.

LIFT will develop improved guidance and clearer requirements for commissioning evaluations and tasking evaluators to ensure quality standards and utility of the evaluations, including on the format and use of debriefs, executive summaries and standards around rigour and evidence amongst others.

Measurement Frameworks

Measurement Frameworks define the key results and indicators that LIFT (through the LIFT logframe), Programmes and Projects are expected to report against. In addition to listing the results and their indicators, Measurement Frameworks also include targets and additional information on the data source, data collection tools, disaggregation of data and frequency of data collection amongst other relevant parameters (as required). In addition to the core set of relevant LIFT level indicators, programme and project measurement frameworks may also include other relevant quantitative and qualitative indicators where there is a specific need to do so. Key areas of emphasis will include:
- Ensuring alignment between LIFT level indicators and programme and project indicators through standardised Indicator Reference Sheets;
- Ensuring that indicators selected at the programme and project levels are relevant and feasible, that they can support reflection on the TOC and support those using them to respond to their Evaluation and Learning Questions.

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11 For example in the case of the 2019 South East Call for Concept Notes, this includes four distinct yet interrelated components.
12 For example, through the use of experimental, quasi-experimental, realist or other theory-based evaluation methods.

- Ensuring that outcome level monitoring and reporting is prioritised, alongside the inclusion of beneficiary/constituent feedback data that can be used to enhance programme and project performance.

The link between Theories of Change, Evaluation and Learning Questions and Measurement Frameworks is visualised in the diagram below.

Figure 3: From Theories of Change, to Evaluation and Learning Questions and Measurement frameworks
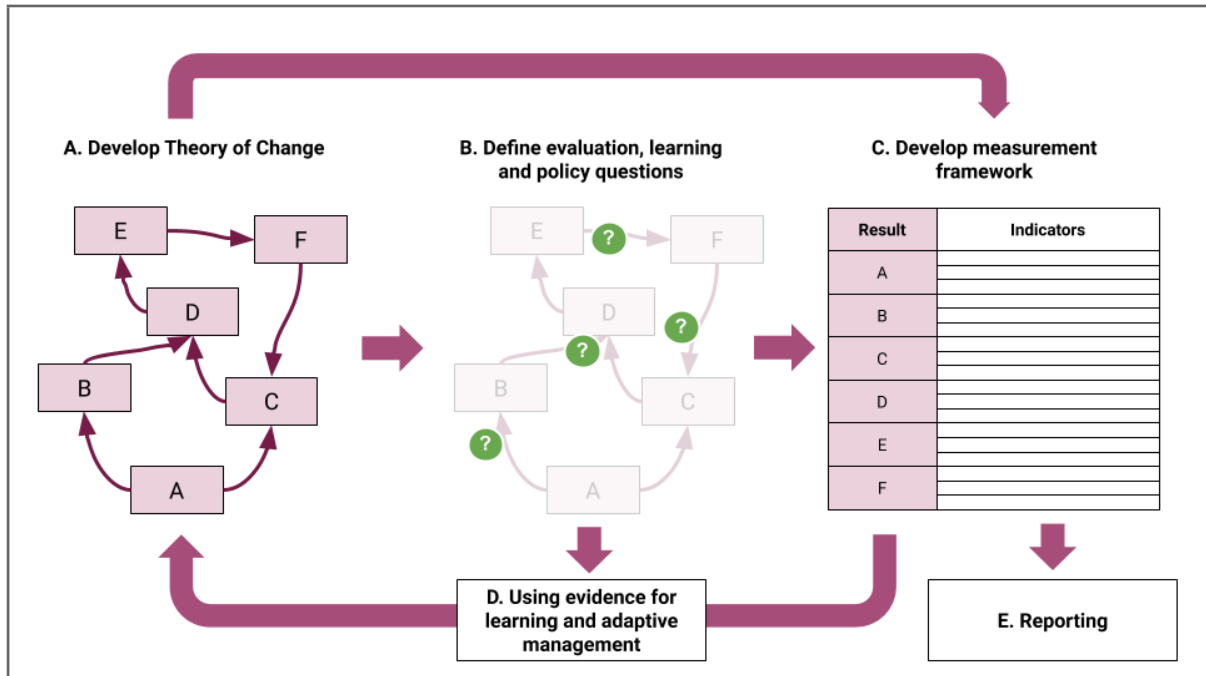
The remaining sections of the document set out how the framework will be operationalised at the three levels of LIFT: the FMO/FB/Strategy level; the programme level; and the project level.

PART B - MEAL Framework by level

4. Strategy level

This section outlines how the accountability, learning and policy functions will work at the LIFT FMO/FB levels. It describes the main products and processes associated with each.

At the overall LIFT level, MEAL is strategic in nature: it focuses on how LIFT is delivering against its strategy (accountability); how LIFT can better deliver on its strategy or improve its strategy (learning); and LIFT's contribution to national level policy priorities (policy).

The key users of MEAL at this level include:
- The LIFT Fund Board
- The Government of Myanmar
- Development partners
- Civil society and the wider public

LIFT Theory of Change (Strategy diagram)

The LIFT Strategy Diagram (a high level LIFT Theory Of Change) is a visual representation of the strategy. It defines the various results to which LIFT aims to contribute overall and across the four thematic programmes at household, system and policy levels. The diagram can be found in Annex 6.

Accountability

The LIFT results framework (logframe)

The logframe is LIFT's primary tool for accountability and reporting to the LIFT Fund Board (donors) as well as the government and the wider public. The LIFT results framework (or logical framework) is based on the LIFT Theory of Change. It details the full set of indicators for each result in the TOC that LIFT is committed to reporting against as an organisation, with organisation-wide targets set for each indicator. Achievements against targets for each indicator are compiled on a 6-monthly basis and included in both Annual and Semi-Annual Reports. The logframe specifies the source of data used for reporting against each indicator (e.g. LIFT Household Survey, Implementing Partner M&E systems, or special studies). It is accompanied by a set of Indicator Reference Sheets that provide clear definitions and standard measurement guidance for each of the indicators.

Strategic evaluation questions

At the strategy level, LIFT's accountability function is addressed through a set of Strategic Evaluation Questions (SEQs). SEQs provide a mechanism for assessing the extent to which LIFT has delivered on its overall commitments for the strategy period running from 2019 to 2023 and focus on priority elements of LIFT's strategy, including its strategic shifts. The questions cascade down from the strategic level to the project level, where they may need to be adapted for relevance. More detailed sub-questions will be developed to guide strategic evaluations and review processes at various levels.

The SEQs will be answered through a variety of mechanisms, including standalone evaluation studies, syntheses of evaluations conducted at the programme and project levels, compilation of results data from programme and project level MEAL systems and data from LIFT's household survey.

Box 4: Indicative LIFT level Strategic Evaluation Questions (2019-2023)

1. **Strengthening government and civil society capacity**: To what extent has LIFT successfully contributed to strengthening the capacity of civil society, Ethnic Service Providers and government, at the local, regional and national levels?
2. **Gender and inclusion**: To what extent has LIFT contributed to furthering equity and empowerment for traditionally excluded and voiceless groups - women, people with disabilities, and minorities?
3. **Effectiveness in improving livelihoods**: To what extent has LIFT helped target beneficiaries to sustainably improve their livelihoods through the enhancement of, or alternatives to, traditional livelihoods?
4. **Resilience and responsiveness to risk**: To what extent has LIFT enhanced the resilience of vulnerable populations to climate and other types of shocks and stresses?
5. **Conflict sensitivity**: To what extent has LIFT proved to be effective, and sufficiently sensitive and responsive to conflict dynamics when working in conflict affected areas (and on issues prone to conflict)?
6. **Programme synergies**: To what extent has the LIFT strategy been implemented in an integrated manner and tapped into synergies and complementarities across themes, geographies, actors and other ongoing investments and development interventions?
7. **Sustainability and scalability**: To what extent has LIFT identified and established sustainable and scalable models or approaches for achieving programme outcomes after LIFT support ends?

LIFT Annual and Semi-Annual Reports

LIFT reports on its progress on a 6-monthly basis. The primary audience for the Annual Reports is the LIFT Fund Board. Other key audiences include the Myanmar government, national level development partners and the wider public. Whereas the LIFT Annual Report provides comprehensive documentation including detailed programme level narratives, a summary of learning, listings of events and publications, details of the LIFT project portfolio, the LIFT Semi-

Annual Report is shorter in nature serving primarily to provide brief highlights and an update on progress against the LIFT logframe.

LIFT-wide surveys

In order to report on selected LIFT level indicators, to respond to selected evaluation questions, LIFT conducts periodic LIFT-wide surveys and regional surveys. LIFT's survey has been reviewed and revised in 2019 in order to be leaner and aligned to shifts in LIFT's strategy, including the new logframe. It now comprises a series of modules covering:

- Household socio-economic characteristics;
- Abbreviated-Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index;
- Progress out of Poverty Index
- Nutritional status of women and children
- Labour module (covering informal employment and forced labour)

LIFT M&E databases

LIFT will develop, manage and maintain organisation-wide and programme level databases for storing project and programme related data in a manner that ensures access and enables quality assurance of the data that is received.

Learning and adaptive management

Learning at the strategic level focuses on how LIFT as an organisation (including both the Fund Management Office and the Fund Board), together with its key partners, generates and uses evidence to inform improvements in its strategy and operations. This requires that adequate time and resources are allocated to (a) the production of high quality knowledge products that are tailored to the requirements of specific users *and* (b) mechanisms through which the evidence in these knowledge products is shared, interrogated and used to inform decision-making. This will be supported by better guidance on distillation of learning, embedding M&E officers in programme teams and systems improvements for sharing and co-working on documents.

LIFT learning agenda

The LIFT learning agenda is a curated set of LIFT-wide learning objectives that may be thematic or geographic in nature. It provides a central repository for tracking LIFT-wide learning priorities and evidence-generating processes and studies. Whereas evaluation questions focus on accountability and the policy questions focus on generating evidence to contribute to policy changes, the learning agenda is focused primarily on generating actionable knowledge that can be used to inform development policy and practice both within LIFT and amongst LIFT's partners. The LIFT learning agenda is the product of a series of interactions between the strategic, programme and project levels through which learning priorities/objectives and studies are jointly negotiated and agreed upon. As such it is intended to be dynamic in nature and will require regular/periodic review and updating in response to changing priorities at national, programme and project levels.

Figure 4: LIFT learning agenda and its relationship with MEAL and policy
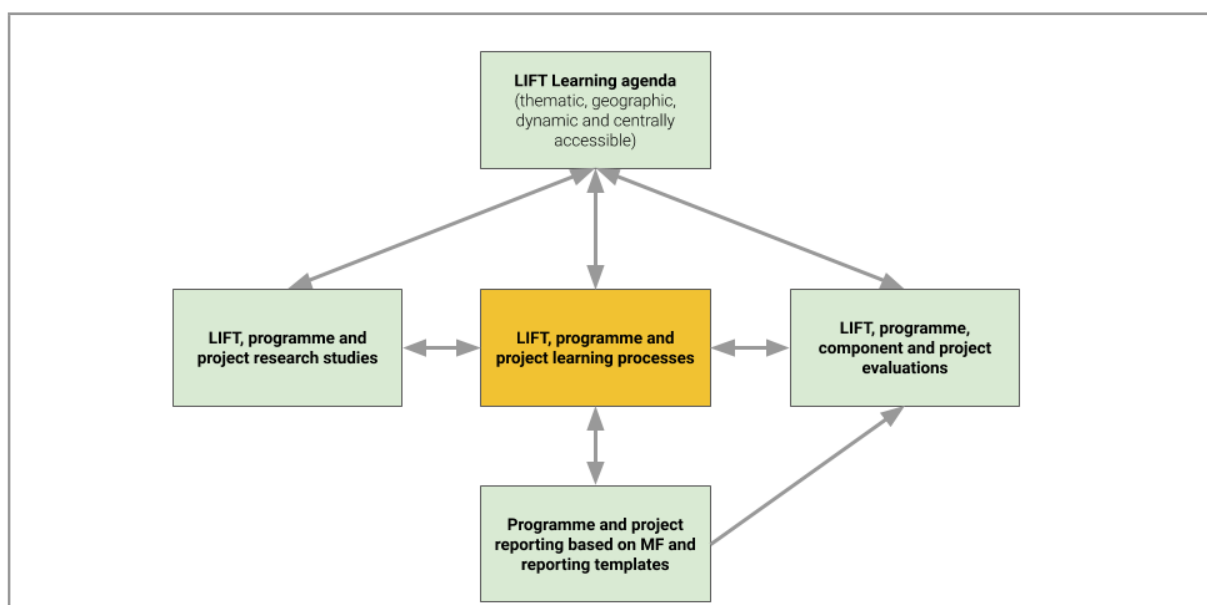
Multi-stakeholder learning fora and platforms

Learning fora at the LIFT level provide an important avenue for key stakeholders and partners to engage with high-profile and topical evidence emerging from LIFT's MEAL and research work. Such events may be held on an annual or bi-annual basis and can be used to launch, share or get feedback on specific studies, reports, publications or other issues that are expected to be of high relevance to the wider development sector. In addition to dissemination, such platforms provide a valuable opportunity for gathering feedback and perspectives from the wider development sector. With its extensive networks, partners and relationships, LIFT is well placed as a sector convenor, helping bring together policy makers and practitioners from a wide range of agencies.

In addition to such large-scale one-off events, LIFT will help to further develop **Communities of Practice.** CoPs focus on specific programme areas or around policy and cross-cutting issues and themes and have proven valuable in enabling debate, learning and dissemination of knowledge amongst policy and decision-makers, donors and programme managers.

Internal learning processes

Robust internal learning processes are central to ensuring that LIFT operates as an effective learning organisation and maximises its use of the substantial body of evidence it generates through MEAL and research activities. More specifically, this requires: (i) that the relevant users have sufficient opportunities to engage with the evidence; (ii) that they are able to identify the key issues that need to be addressed and integrate follow-up actions into management responses; and (iii) that issues requiring further investigation or analysis are flagged and integrated into the relevant evaluation, research and/or learning agendas. Examples to achieve this include internal fora for sharing and reflecting upon and findings from research studies, evaluations, learning events; ensuring that knowledge is effectively institutionalised and integrated into practice; and making evidence-based adaptive management decisions throughout the strategy cycle.

Learning products

LIFT generates a substantial volume of evidence through the various evaluations, research studies, narrative reports and MEAL activities described in this document. The knowledge embedded in these processes and products must be synthesised and packaged into useful knowledge products for internal and external use and supported by the required communication efforts. Strengthening this is a major thrust of the refreshed MEAL Framework Responding to the actor-specific objectives and priorities defined in the LIFT learning agenda, LIFT will thus produce a series of knowledge products tailored to the needs of specific audiences across a variety of media. This includes:

- Reports responding to the Strategic Evaluation Questions will be produced at appropriate stages in the strategy cycle. Several of these will draw on and synthesise findings from MEAL systems, research/learning studies and evaluations across LIFT. They will be accompanied by standalone executive summaries for wider uptake and circulation.
- Major achievements, lessons, challenges/gaps and recommendations emerging from various studies will be documented in the form of **short learning briefs** or **thematic learning papers** (depending on the subject and the source material) that can be shared with key stakeholders at the LIFT level.
- Audio, video and written blogs, featuring internal and guest commentators, providing coverage of topical issues, updates on recent learning studies, user-friendly summaries of (and links to) key publications
- Social media feeds and website developments including better presentation and search functions of reports, research studies, case

studies. In addition to this a variety of learning briefs will be produced compiling the evidence emerging form LIFT learning processes and forums including project level learning products, evaluations at various levels and research studies. These will be targeted to relevant audiences to ensure relevance and uptake.

The learning processes set out at strategy and programme level will be used to ensure that the full value of the knowledge embodied in these products is exploited.

Google drive systems development

LIFT has shifted its internal document management system to Google Drive. This enables enhanced cross-team collaboration within LIFT; improves searchability and organisation-wide access to and use of knowledge resources and is an enabler of LIFT's core MEAL functions.

Contribution to policy development

LIFT will establish a set of LIFT-wide policy objectives and define the corresponding engagement with actors/networks and mechanisms. This may include research to generate policy-relevant evidence, leveraging evidence generated through MEAL processes at various levels and engagement with key stakeholders through a variety of channels and processes. Full details can be found in LIFT's Policy Engagement Strategy document. An updated approach and corresponding guidelines for tracking LIFT's policy contribution efforts across the strategic, programme and project levels will be developed, building on the tools developed in the previous strategy cycle.

Capacity support

LIFT will enhance the quality and quantity of MEAL-related capacity support to ensure that LIFT MEAL systems, processes and products are able to deliver against the strategic priorities. As such, it will focus on the key components that make up the MEAL system (Theories of Change, Evaluation and Learning Questions, Measurement Frameworks, IP MEAL Guidelines, outcome measurement, policy contribution analysis, and Data Quality Assurance), including capacities to deliver on accountability, learning and adaptive management and policy contribution. Details of the types of support required at each level are provided in the following sections

5. LIFT Programme level

This section is relevant for both thematic and regional programmes, including the components that make up these programmes.

Marking a shift from the previous strategy, the programme level in LIFT now refers to both thematic and geographic programmes. While LIFT's technical expertise is organised primarily around the four thematic programmes, most of LIFT's operational programmes are geographic in nature, integrating elements from all four thematic programmes while also including context-specific features.

At the programme level, MEAL is more operational in nature: it focuses on how programmes (and components) are delivering against their objectives and results (accountability); generating more in-depth contextual knowledge and facilitating knowledge exchange across programme partners (learning); and targeting specific programmatic policy priorities, often by demonstrating sustainable and scalable models and approaches in partnership with key stakeholders (policy).

The key users of MEAL at this level include:
- LIFT Programme teams
- The Government of Myanmar
- Ethnic Armed Organisations (in conflict-affected regions)
- Development partners
- Implementing partners
- Civil society and the wider public

Programme TOCs

Programme TOCs provide a greater level of thematic and/or contextual detail than the overall LIFT TOC. In some cases, a single programme level TOC will be insufficient to provide the level of details required to address all the different uses of the programme TOC. In these cases, programme sub-TOCs will be required - e.g. for specific programme components in geographic programmes or for distinct types of intervention in thematic programmes. Such TOCs will serve multiple purposes, including the development of programme and component level results frameworks and measurement plans, the formulation and design of contextualised evaluation and learning questions and studies, as well as ongoing monitoring, reflection and adaptive management. Further information on the development of programme TOCs is included in the **Processes** section of this document.

Programme MEAL Frameworks

Programme MEAL Frameworks spell out how a given programme will deliver on the three MEAL functions of accountability, learning and policy. The key components of the programme MEAL Frameworks are outlined below.

Accountability

Programme measurement framework
Programme level measurement frameworks set out the results and indicators that a programme is committed to achieving. They include the subset of relevant

programme results and indicators from the LIFT logframe. However, they may include additional results and indicators beyond those set out in the LIFT logframe that are important for the programme's own monitoring, evaluation and learning purposes, for example related to conflict sensitivity or strengthened capacity of Ethnic Service Providers..

Thematic programmes are responsible for aggregating and quality assuring data related to their thematic area from across all projects and geographic programmes and submitting the approved data to the LIFT M&E team for final review, quality checks and inclusion in consolidated reporting of achievement against the LIFT logframe and indicators.

Programme and component level evaluations

Thematic and geographic programme level evaluations provide important opportunities for contributing to accountability, learning and policy objectives. The refreshed MEAL Framework encourages **the use of more systematic, robust and rigorous evaluations at the programme level rather than a larger number of smaller evaluations at the project level**. This has the opportunity to ensure greater cross-project learning, to reinforce the integrated nature of LIFT programming and to offer greater value for money from LIFT's investments in evaluations. These evaluations are based on the various types of evaluation presented in section 3 of this report.

Programme level evaluation questions and their associated evaluation designs will be determined and refined during the course of programme development, starting from the design of programme frameworks and evolving as projects are selected and programme MEAL Frameworks are finalised together with the selected Implementing Partners.

Learning and adaptive management

Both thematic and geographic programmes present substantial opportunities for learning. While thematic programmes present the opportunity to consolidate thematic knowledge at a national level, geographic programmes bring together a wide set of internal and external stakeholders working toward shared context-specific objectives.

Programme learning objectives

Programme-level learning objectives define the thematic, contextual and actor-specific priorities for learning in the context of a given geographic or thematic programme. They will be based on key topics where important gaps in knowledge have been identified. Learning objectives are expected to evolve over time as a result of changes to the context and in response to new insights and learning that emerge during the course of implementation. In addition to drawing on evidence from project MEAL processes, programmes may seek to conduct or commission learning studies to explore specific issues in more detail.

Synthesis of learning from projects and programmes

Central to effective learning at the programme level is the synthesis of learning from across programme components and projects. Both thematic and geographic programmes are responsible for compiling, reviewing and summarising the evidence emerging from relevant project narrative reports, project evaluations and studies produced by projects as well as from programme and component level evaluation and studies. The output will take the form of learning briefs that summarise the key achievements, gaps/challenges, lessons learned and recommendations that will be taken forward. The efforts in this direction are part of a concerted drive to strengthen LIFT's use of evidence to contribute to inclusive development in Myanmar and are supported by multiple areas of focus outlined in this document.

Multi-stakeholder learning fora

Programme level multi-stakeholder learning fora (geographic and thematic) provide a critical platform for ensuring that the relevant internal and external stakeholders are able to engage in joint evidence-based learning processes. Such fora can play a central role in collective learning and capacity development and support adaptive management at a systems level by creating a shared understanding of key issues, challenges and opportunities, and the roles all stakeholders can play in addressing them. Such events may take the form of a Community of Practice where it is appropriate to do so.

Contributing to policy development

Programmes will leverage MEAL to contribute evidence to the relevant LIFT-wide policy priorities and define the corresponding engagement with actors/networks and mechanisms to channel evidence into decision-making.

Capacity support

Thematic and geographic programme teams will provide capacity support to projects, both in terms of understanding MEAL capacity support needs of relevant implementing partners and providing capacity support through routine interactions and the delivery of structured capacity development on MEAL where required.

6. LIFT Project level

At the project level, MEAL is largely operational in nature: it focuses on how well projects are delivering against their objectives and outcomes (accountability); how they can continuously improve their relevance, effectiveness and sustainability by adapting to new situations, emerging issues and knowledge (learning); and, where there are clear policy priorities, how they generated and

leverage evidence to feed into project and wider LIFT-level policy processes (policy).

The key users of MEAL at this level include:
- Implementing partners (both direct and indirect)
- The Government of Myanmar and EAOs (in conflict affected areas)
- Development partners
- Civil society and the wider public
- Project beneficiaries and their communities

Project TOCs

Project TOCs provide a detailed articulation of the envisioned change pathways for a given project. In some cases, a single project TOC will be insufficient to provide the level of detail required by different levels of staff (from management to field) and across distinct project components. In these cases, project sub-TOCs will be required. Project TOCs serve multiple purposes, including the development of the project level results framework and measurement plan, the formulation and design of project evaluation and learning questions and associated studies, as well as ongoing monitoring, sensemaking and adaptive management. Project TOCs are developed by Implementing Partners during their inception phase with inputs and guidance from LIFT Programme Officers. Further information on the development of project TOCs is included in the **Processes** section of this document.

Project MEAL Frameworks

Project MEAL Frameworks spell out how a given project will deliver on its three MEAL functions of accountability, learning and, where relevant, policy.[13] Full guidance on project level MEAL frameworks can be found in the **IP MEAL Guidelines** (forthcoming).

Accountability

Project results framework and measurement plan
Implementing partners will develop their project results frameworks and measurement plans on the basis of their TOCs and in alignment with relevant LIFT-level and programme-level results and indicators. Agreements on relevant results and indicators are agreed jointly between LIFT Programme Officers and Implementing Partners during the course of the inception phase.

Projects are expected to focus their measurement plans primarily on the results and indicators that are of most relevance to them for the purposes of reporting on and improving their performance. This will require going beyond reporting on activities and outputs and focusing on (intermediate) outcomes and beneficiary feedback that can support rapid learning and adaptive management. Projects will

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13 In recognition that not all projects will have specific policy objectives

not be expected to report quantitatively on high level outcomes that are beyond the scope of their interventions to influence in the project time-frame. However, projects will be expected to conduct outcome studies that enable them to illustrate the extent to which project contributions to higher level outcomes have been achieved. In selected cases where high level outcomes are deemed to be highly relevant and feasible for a given project, measurement of these results may be agreed upon jointly in consultation with concerned Programme Officers.

Project annual and semi-annual reports

Project annual and semi-annual reports are the primary means for comprehensive reporting on project progress, achievement of results, performance against key strategic priorities and learning. Project annual reports are expected to demonstrate the learning that is taking place during the course of implementation.

Modifications will be made to LIFT's reporting template where possible to make it leaner, avoid duplication and to be more flexible. Moreover, project semi-annual reports will be made lighter and less involved. LIFT will provide additional guidance and technical support on the development of these reports to ensure that Implementing Partners produce higher quality and more useful reports.

Project evaluations and mid-term reviews

The refreshed LIFT MEAL Framework marks a shift in emphasis in the approaches to project evaluation. Whereas project evaluations have been a standard requirement for all projects, the current MEAL Framework includes a provision for a more flexible approach by allowing joint evaluations across multiple projects associated with a particular programme or programme component as an alternative (or supplement) to individual project evaluations.

Decisions on how and whether project evaluations should be conducted will be decided upon during the development of Programme level MEAL Frameworks by the concerned LIFT Programme Officers in consultation with relevant technical advisors.

The value of project evaluations will be enhanced by ensuring that they are able to draw on robust evidence regarding project performance, whether by making use of project level outcome studies and endline surveys (which have implications for the timing of evaluations) or by incorporating more comprehensive data collection activities into the design and budget of project evaluations.

Similar considerations apply to **project mid-term reviews**. There is, moreover, considerable opportunity to improve the utility of such reviews by focusing them on aspects of project implementation that would best support learning and adaptive management to address bottlenecks to achieving impact, sustainability and scale.

Clearer guidelines and standards for project evaluation will be developed for project evaluations to ensure quality, consistency and increased value and utilisation of evaluation findings by IPs and the LIFTM FMO.

Learning and adaptive management

Project learning objectives

As at the programme level, projects should identify the learning objectives for key stakeholders involved in a given project. These should be based on reflection on the TOC and the identification of areas where significant gaps in existing knowledge (about the context, key actors or how innovative or complex project components will work) are identified. Project learning objectives may be dynamic, evolving over time in response to contextual changes, shifting priorities and new insights and evidence that emerge over the course of implementation. Appropriate means of addressing these learning objectives should be identified, drawing on project measurement plans, evaluations, research and/or learning studies and through project level learning processes.

Project learning studies

Project learning studies provide a mechanism for projects to generate additional evidence in response to learning objectives beyond what is specified in their measurement frameworks or covered through project and programme level evaluations. Learning studies can take a wide range of forms with varying degrees of and approaches to rigour. Examples include participatory action research[14], outcome-oriented case studies[15], constituent feedback surveys[16] or light-touch experimental designs[17].

Field visits

Field visits provide a critical opportunity for LIFT Programme Officers to gain insights into field activities, to reflect on project TOCs together with Implementing Partners, to provide actionable recommendations that support adaptive management at the project level, and to feed the emerging learning into learning and knowledge management activities at the programme level.

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14 Rachel Pain, Geo Whitman and David Milledge (Durham University) & Lune Rivers Trust (2017) Participatory Action Research Toolkit: An Introduction to Using PAR as an Approach to Learning, Research and Action. Accessed at: http://communitylearningpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/PARtoolkit.pdf
15 Lightweight mixed methods case study approach that gather evidence on the links between project activities and intended outcomes by gathering feedback from key stakeholders across high, medium and low-performing cases.
16 Keystone Accountability (2013) Technical Note 1: Constituent Voice. Accessed at: https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/technical-note-1-constituent-voice-.pdf
17 For example, by comparing two service delivery modalities in contexts where the modalities in question can be randomly assigned with minimal effort.

Project level learning products

Where appropriate projects will be encouraged to produce concise and accessible learning products that compile the lessons learned regarding different aspects of project interventions. These may take the form, for example, of case studies, good practice guides or learning briefs. Such products should be developed with clear audiences in mind based on the definition of project learning objectives.

Project level learning processes

Projects are expected to put in place appropriate and robust internal and external learning mechanisms that enable concerned staff, key project partners and where appropriate LIFT personnel, to engage with the evidence that is generated through the results framework, through various evaluation, research and learning studies, to reflect upon the TOC and to support adaptive management.

Beneficiary feedback mechanisms

Projects are expected to have beneficiary feedback mechanisms in place to strengthen downward accountability and increase project responsiveness and relevance to target beneficiaries. Existing guidelines on project level beneficiary feedback mechanisms are currently under review.

Contribution to policy development

Where relevant, projects that aim to contribute to LIFT's policy priorities will be expected to detail how they will leverage evidence from project MEAL systems and the mechanisms and channels through which they do so. Existing policy contribution tracking guidelines for Implementing Partners will be revised to support LIFT's tracking and analysis of LIFT-wide policy contribution efforts.

Capacity support

Provision of more and better targeted capacity support to projects will be a major thrust of the refreshed strategy, as outlined under the capacity support headings of sections 4 and 5 of this report. Clear guidance will be provided to all Implementing Partners on how to fulfill LIFT MEAL requirements for their projects. They will also receive ongoing support and guidance from LIFT programme teams as part of regular project management. However, it is anticipated that certain projects will require some level of MEAL capacity support at key stages in the project cycle in order to effectively deliver on the accountability, learning and policy functions. This applies in particular to projects that have high-priority learning and policy components and those that involve national NGOs and local CSOs as key partners.

Annexes

Annex 1: MEAL Risk Matrix

Risk	Risk likelihood	Risk impact	Risk management
Cross-Cutting			
Capacity of some of the IPs to operationalise the requirements of the refreshed MEAL framework is inadequate Some stakeholders are not adequately engaged on the refreshed MEAL framework to allow for its effective implementation across the three levels	Mid	High	LIFT to prepare plans for induction of IPs on refreshed MEAL framework; revised IP MEAL guidelines to be simplified for IPs with limited capacity IPs MEAL capacity, including staffing and engagement of suitable MEAL firms where necessary, is given sufficient attention LIFT management provides ongoing support to ensure all stakeholders are engaged with the refreshed MEAL framework and integrate all the relevant provisions at all stages of the program/project cycle. LIFT and thematic M&E teams are sufficiently capacitated and resourced to provide required level of support as needed
MEAL activities are underfunded limiting quality and quantity of MEAL processes and products	Mid	High	Ensure sufficient allocation of funds for MEAL is included in FMO and IP budgets
Accountability			
FMO and IPs are overwhelmed by reporting requirements that divert energy from learning and adaptive management that would otherwise enhance	Mid	Mid	Lighten the reporting load by simplifying semi-annual reports Streamline the annual reporting template for IPs

impact			Ensure that there are clear learning objectives at the programme and project level
			Ensure LIFT and IPs are accountable for learning, not just results
			Track progress and gather feedback from key users to ensure that the balance between accountability and learning functions is working well in practice. Make adjustments as needed.
Increased dependence on IP data for reporting impacts LIFT ability to ensure timeliness and quality of data for logframe reporting	High	High	Ensure plan B is in place to report on indicators using LIFT managed HH-survey
			Provide capacity support to IPs to enhance their MEAL capacity as well as on reporting on a case by case basis.
			Explore options for simplification and streamlining of standard formats for IP semi-annual and annual reports to LIFT
			LIFT to review internal modalities for enforcing adherence to reporting timelines
IPs collect inconsistent data that cannot be aggregated	Mid	High	IPs receive clear indicator reference sheets on time and also receive appropriate technical support to assist them in collecting the right data
			Ensure plan B is in place to report on indicators using LIFT managed HH-survey
			LIFT to strengthen data verification checks as part of the regular field monitoring visits by M&E teams
Opportunities for impact evaluation designs are not identified in time	Mid	Mid	Guidance will be provided on when and how to identify suitable opportunities for

			pursuing such evaluations during the programme development process.
MEAL activities are not sufficiently resourced to allow for robust evidence gathering either through the monitoring system or evaluations	Mid	High	Clear guidelines on MEAL requirements in line with the refreshed strategy and corresponding budgeting to be included in the calls for proposals Technical review of partner proposals to include provision for scores on the proposed partner MEAL strategies, capacity and resourcing plans
Insufficient number and / or quality of external evaluators available to undertake the range of evaluations	Mid	Mid	Build evaluator retainer pool Plan further ahead on major evaluations to help secure consultants Engage the top consultants on the thematic and multi-project evaluations as they would likely be motivated to be able to evaluate beyond individual projects
Variable quality of evaluations	Mid	Mid	Review standards for external evaluations and evaluators. Prepare guidelines for external evaluators.
Learning/Adaptive management			
Findings from evaluations, learning studies and research are not received in time to inform decision-making	Mid	High	Evaluations, learning studies and research should be timed so as to ensure that their findings can feed into key decision-making processes. Feeding the highlights/findings into decision-making processes should be prioritised over full publication of reports if necessary. LIFT to prepare appropriate evaluation planning and tracking tools to facilitate effective follow up and

			utilisation of evaluation products
Management of projects is too rigid and does not allow for mid-course corrections	Low	Mid	Clear communication on approach to adaptive management within FMO and to IPs, including guidelines on adaptive management IP Project design to incorporate relevant mechanisms/processes for adaptive management and clarify the extent to which this will be followed Capacity support on adaptive management for LIFT Programme Officers
Intended users do not engage with LIFT's learning and knowledge products, resulting in wasted effort for limited gains	Mid	Mid	Establish clear standards on tailoring knowledge products to the needs of specific audiences to enhance uptake and utility. Ensuring dedicated time and clear processes for engaging with knowledge products are put in place. Require responsible managers to produce briefs summarising key conclusions and actions based on evaluations and learning studies. Embed reporting on actions taken in response to learning in standard reporting formats.
Policy			
Large volumes of MEAL evidence generated do not feed into policy processes	Mid	Mid	Keep systematic track of policy relevant evidence generated across LIFT through MEAL systems and ensure concerned officers can facilitate linkages with relevant FMO staff working on related policy issues Provide capacity support on policy contribution across

			FMO and to IPs
Policy processes at LIFT-wide, thematic and geographic programme levels are not aligned	Low	Mid	Institute a robust process for formulating and aligning policy processes across levels and regularly reviewing and updating them
MEAL evidence is not of sufficient quality to inform policy processes	Mid	High	Do not expect to use all MEAL evidence for policy processes; rather identify where there is significant scope for MEAL evidence to support policy and address quality issues in these cases.

Annex 2: MEAL Processes across the strategy cycle

Strategy Design
- Formulation of LIFT TOC
- Formulation of LIFT logframe and indicators
- Development of LIFT level Evaluation Questions
- Refreshed MEAL Strategy

Programme design
- Development of programmatic TOC
- Development of programmatic results framework
- Development of draft programme/component evaluation, learning and policy questions
- Identification of relevant learning and knowledge management processes

Project selection
- Refinement of TOC, results framework and evaluation design for programme and components
- Development of project TOC and alignment with component and programme TOC
- Multi-stakeholder workshop(s) for programme/component MEAL framework design and alignment

Project inception
- Refinement of project level TOC
- Finalisation of project-level evaluation designs
- Development of data collection systems
- Multi-stakeholder workshop(s) for programme/component MEAL framework refinement and alignment
- MEAL Capacity support as appropriate

Preparation for next strategy cycle
- Conducting scoping studies and consultations to address remaining knowledge gaps
- Synthesising evidence, learning and recommendations from across LIFT's evaluations, research and studies
- Ensuring evaluation findings are accessible to strategic decision-makers in a digestible form and in a timely manner

Project/Programme/LIFT evaluations
- Commissioning LIFT-wide, programme, component and/or project evaluations
- Organising sensemaking and validation workshops for key LIFT-wide programme, component and/or project review stakeholders
- Jointly identifying and agreeing on corrective actions based on review findings
- Synthesis and dissemination of learning

Project/Programme review
- Commissioning programme, component and/or project reviews
- Organising sensemaking and validation workshops for key programme, component and/or project review stakeholders
- Jointly identifying and agreeing on corrective actions based on review findings
- Synthesis and dissemination of learning

Project implementation
- Ongoing data collection against the measurement framework
- Learning and adaptive management
- Project level learning, evaluation and research studies
- Ongoing Data Quality Assurance
- Field visits by programme staff
- Multi-stakeholder learning events
- Development and dissemination of learning and knowledge products

Annex 3: Overview of MEAL tools, processes and products

Tools	Processes	Products
- Theories of change - Evaluation and learning questions - Logframe and measurement frameworks - LIFT HH Survey tools - LIFT M&E Databases - Indicator Reference Sheets - MEAL Plans	- Strategy, programme and project design - Knowledge synthesis processes - Evaluations studies - Multi-stakeholder MEAL platforms - Policy research and contribution processes - Communities of Practice - Data Quality Audits (internal +external) - Multi-stakeholder Learning fora - LIFT HH Survey and Tracking Surveys	- Annual and Semi-Annual Reports - Strategic evaluation studies - Programme and component evaluation studies - Project evaluations - Policy and practice briefs - Podcasts and blogs - Research studies - Learning studies - Field visit reports - LIFT HH Survey report and other specialized reports(WEAI, Poverty, Nutrition, Vulnerability and Resilience)

Annex 4: LIFT ELQs from the previous MEAL Framework

LIFT ELQs (2016 MEAL Strategy)
- To what extent has LIFT appropriately followed and implemented its strategy? Have LIFT-supported interventions been relevant to the needs of the people it intends to Reach?   - Is the strategy working? To what extent has LIFT been effective in achieving its intended purpose and higher level outcomes, including in helping people to step up, step out and hang in?   - To what extent has LIFT identified and established sustainable, efficient and effective models for achieving the purpose and programme outcomes after LIFT support ends?   - What have been the positive and negative unintended and unexpected consequences of LIFT's operations?   - To what extent has LIFT delivered value-for-money against the results framework where material / tangible benefits are measurable?   - To what extent has LIFT positioned itself as an influential knowledge platform on sustainable agriculture, food security and rural development policy and practice in Myanmar?   - To what extent and how has LIFT influenced pro poor rural development policy and practice?   - To what extent has LIFT contributed to furthering gender equality and

	women's empowerment?

Annex 5: Internal division of roles and responsibilities

Team	Roles and responsibilities
Programmes	● Commissioning programme and project reviews and evaluations ● Driving communities of practice ● Regular field monitoring visits ● Support LIFT IPs in roll out of IP level MEAL Systems ● Support in IP MEAL Systems Strengthening; Data Quality Verification ● Commissioning and taking part in research and scoping studies ● Commissioning thematic reviews and sectoral events
M&E	● Owns and maintains LIFT logframe and Indicator Reference Sheets ● Manages LIFT-wide surveys ● Consolidates data for LIFT level reporting ● Conducts data quality verification ● Manages LIFT central database and provides oversight to program level databases ● Responsible for LIFT MEAL Framework ● Responsible for LIFT level evaluation questions/studies ● Responsible for developing, maintaining and communicating MEAL-related guidelines and SOPs ● Arranges internal and external capacity support to programmes and IPs
LKM	● Owns and curates LIFT-wide learning agenda ● Tracks production of knowledge products ● Develops internal KM systems ● Facilitates internal and external KM processes and events ● Leads development of LIFT level learning products ● Develops internal learning and KM capacity ● Ensures knowledge and learning from projects and programmes is captured and organised at the LIFT level
Policy	● Owns and curates LIFT-wide policy agenda ● Maintains overview of all policy-relevant research and learning activities ● Organises policy-related events ● Monitors and tracks policy processes ● Commissions policy evaluation studies
Comms	● Supports development and production of knowledge products ● Co-organises outward facing KM events ● Supports field visit communications, special meetings and events ● Leads on major event design and management ● Generation of quality communications arising from the above activities (print, online, audio-visuals etc) ● Leads on collation and production of major LIFT reports

Annex 6: LIFT TOC/Strategy Diagram

LIFT Strategy - 2019 to 2023

Goal:
To support Myanmar in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (1, 2, 5, 6 and 8)

Purpose:
To strengthen the resilience and sustainable livelihoods of **poor and vulnerable groups** in Myanmar, particularly women, internally displaced people, migrants, smallholder farmers, landless people, people with disabilities and those vulnerable to trafficking and forced labour

| | Improved nutritional status, particularly of women and children | Increased household income and assets, with greater control by women | Reduced vulnerability of households and individuals to shocks, stresses and risks |

Interventions (left) / **Interventions** (right)

| | Nutrition | Financial inclusion | Agriculture, markets and food systems | Decent work and labour mobility | |

Household results

Nutrition interventions (left)	Nutrition	Financial inclusion	Agriculture, markets and food systems	Decent work and labour mobility	Interventions (right)
MCCTs with SBCC to promote improved nutrition practices	Increased adoption of improved nutrition, sanitation and hygiene practices	Increased control of savings and credit by women; Increased utilisation of socially responsible and sustainable financial services	Increased productivity, income and food security through commercialisation of sustainable and nutrition sensitive agriculture; Increased control and decision-making over agricultural production by women	Expanded opportunities for decent work, particularly for workers at risk of exploitation and abuse; Increased access to information, training and support services for migrants and other vulnerable workers	Catalysing private sector engagement in inclusive value chains
SBCC for improved nutrition and IYCF practices					Promoting productivity through climate smart and nutrition-sensitive practices and technologies
Improving access to IMAM services and addressing cases of severe malnutrition					Promoting rural entrepreneurship and livelihood diversification

System results

Promotion of good hygiene and sanitation practices	Increased quality and coverage of nutrition and WASH interventions	Increased institutional capacity for provision of inclusive and socially responsible financial services	Value chain actors promote inclusive, climate smart and nutrition-sensitive agriculture	Enhanced capacity of stakeholders to support decent work, labour mobility and anti-trafficking	Developing the labour migration governance framework
Expansion of pro-poor financial services					Building the capacity of key migration stakeholders, including CSOs
Leveraging finance for market development					Expanding access to services for women and men migrant workers

Policy results

| Digital financial services | Improved gender-responsive nutrition policies and strengthened implementation | Improved regulatory framework for socially responsible financial services | Improved gender-responsive agricultural policies and strengthened implementation | Strengthened policies and legislation on decent work, labour mobility and counter-trafficking | Enhancing the knowledge base on labour migration issues |

Left side labels: Nutrition, Financial inclusion
Right side labels: Agriculture, markets and food systems; Decent work and labour mobility

Hanging in — **Stepping up** — **Stepping out**

Strategic shifts

| Greater emphasis on inclusion and social cohesion | Intensified focus on gender equality and women's empowerment | Increased programming in areas affected by conflict | Greater focus on displaced people and returnees | Increased programming in underserved urban & peri-urban areas | Policy reform and accountability |

Contextual drivers

| Unequal access to natural resources | Opportunities for pro poor policies | Conflict and displacement | Growing government capacity for development | Growing social and economic inequality | Large scale labour migration | Expanding non-inclusive markets | Significant exposure to various shocks and stresses |