DEVELOPING PROJECT
MONITORING AND EVALUATION
FOR LEARNING AND ACCOUNTABILITY (MEAL)
PLANS

Guidelines for Implementing Partners

Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT)

Yangon, Myanmar

1 April 2016

Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund

Table of Contents

Acronyms

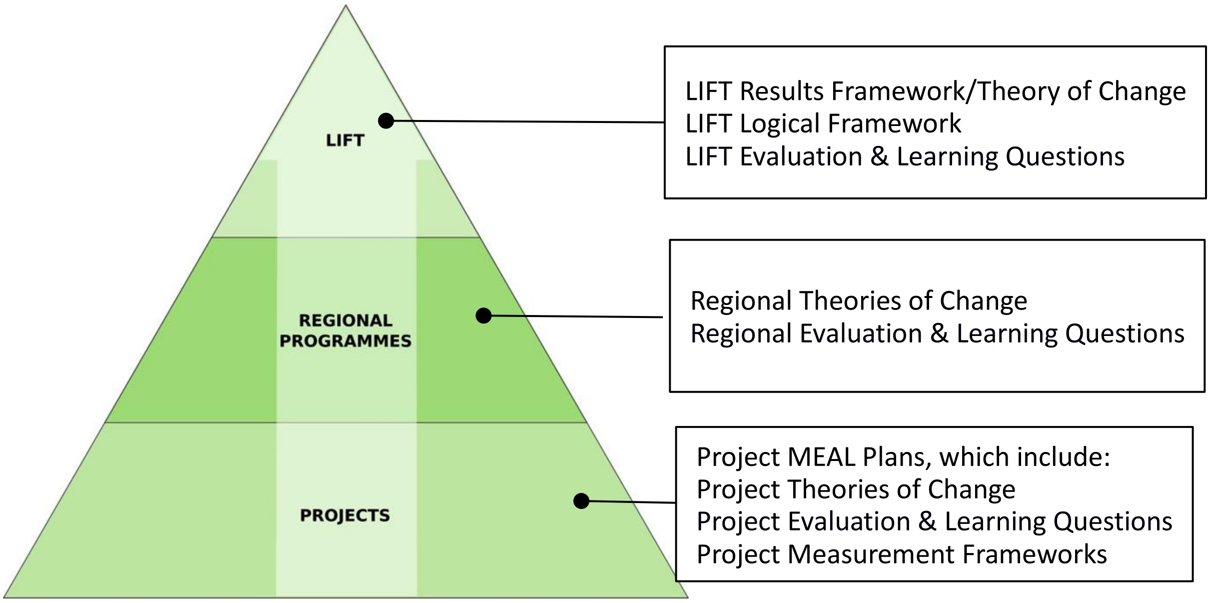
CSO	Civil society organisation
DQM	Data quality management
ELQs	Evaluation and learning Questions
FB	Fund Board
FMO	Fund Management Office
IPs	Implementing partners
LIFT	Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring and Evaluation for Accountability and Learning (MEAL)
MF	Measurement framework
TOC	Theory of change
VfM	Value for Money
WASH	Water and sanitation for health

INTRODUCTION

LIFT's approach to MEAL

LIFT's new strategy (2015-2018) envisions LIFT as a knowledge platform. In line with this, LIFT is revising its approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to place greater emphasis on learning for project improvement and to generate evidence to influence policy. To achieve this, LIFT has developed a Monitoring and Evaluation for Learning and Accountability (MEAL) Framework, which consists of three inter-related levels: (1) LIFT as a whole; (2) LIFT regional programmes; and (3) LIFT projects. LIFT projects constitute specific contributions to LIFT's regional programmes, which are themselves context-specific applications of the LIFT Theory of Change (TOC).

Figure 1. Levels and Components of the LIFT MEAL Framework



At the first level, LIFT has defined a high-level Theory of Change (see Annex 1), which summarises the LIFT Strategy and marks out the broad domains of change in which LIFT aims to achieve results and the ways in which LIFT seeks to achieve them. These results include the LIFT goal, the four LIFT purpose level outcomes and the eight LIFT programme level outcomes that LIFT aims to contribute to through its various programmes. These are defined in generic terms to provide flexibility in the way that they are adapted to the specific and diverse regional contexts in which LIFT operates. Achievement of these results will be measured through the LIFT Logical Framework (logframe), relying on data collected by LIFT through commissioned surveys and studies and project data collected and reported by Implementing Partners. LIFT as a whole will be evaluated on the basis of its achievements in terms of its theory of change, logical framework, and answering a series of evaluation and learning questions.

At the regional programme level, LIFT has developed actor-centred theories of change for each region. These TOCs present the various outcomes that the regional programmes need to achieve and the key actors contributing to the changes. Each regional programme is guided by a programme framework, which provides the necessary information for IPs to propose relevant project outcomes. The actor-centred TOCs also show how different programme components (e.g. financial inclusion, advisory services, social protection, nutrition, migration, etc.) may work together to deliver on the programme outcomes. The regional programme TOCs also provide a basis for LIFT and key stakeholders to identify preconditions and risks and to define key evaluation and learning questions. The regional TOCs are prepared and managed by the LIFT Fund Management Office (FMO), with stakeholder input.

At the project level, the MEAL Framework marks some changes for IPs. In the past, IPs have been expected to report against the LIFT logframe. With the new MEAL Framework, IPs will be expected to focus their M&E efforts on:

- The specific outcomes, indicators and questions that are relevant to the particular project;
- LIFT's revised logframe indicators that are relevant to the project and as agreed upon between the project and FMO;
- What is working, what is not working, and why;
- Learning and improving interventions based on the evidence gathered; and
- Generating useful knowledge and evidence that can influence policy and practice.

To help IPs build and use their own MEAL systems, IPs are expected to develop and implement project MEAL Plans. Project MEAL Plans include the following major components:

1) Project Theory of Change
2) MEAL Stakeholder Analysis (optional)
3) Project Measurement Framework (MF)
4) Project Evaluation and Learning Questions (ELQ)
5) Data Collection, Management and Analysis
6) Use of MEAL Results
7) MEAL Resources

Each of these components is described below. The Annexes present templates with examples. However, IPs are free to use other M&E planning methods and tools, as long as they cover the major components and elements described below.

Most of the LIFT-funded projects that began in 2015 and 2016 developed and refined TOCs, MFs and ELQs during the proposal development and contracting stages. After contracts are signed and usually during the inception period, IPs are expected to develop full MEAL Plans with the additional components listed above. MEAL Plans are living documents, which are updated and refined as needed, particularly as major circumstances change and/or more is learned about the project. However, please discuss any proposed changes to the MEAL Plan with your LIFT programme team, as well as provide them with any revised versions.

PROJECT MEAL PLANS

1. Project Description

1.1 Project Overview

Give a brief summary of the project, including the background of the project and the project's overall goals and objectives.

1.2 Project Conceptual Framework

A project conceptual framework is narrative description and/or a visual display that explains the major actors, actions, and results in a project, and the relationships among them. Most of LIFT's new projects under the 2015-16 Calls for Proposals were asked to develop a Theory of Change, which is specific type of conceptual framework. Projects that started prior to the recent Calls for Proposals may continue to use their previously established logical frameworks but may be asked to develop full MEAL Plans, depending on their stage of implementation. Please check with your LIFT programme team if your project is not sure if it needs to develop a TOC and/or a MEAL Plan.

A clear theory of change shows how a project will contribute to the achievement of LIFT's purpose and/or programme level outcomes, as defined in the Call for Proposals. The TOC is a visual tool to articulate and make explicit how a project's change process will take place. The TOC therefore is a project planning tool, a M&E tool and a communication tool and assists with one or more of the following: (1) defining the outcomes that an intervention aims to achieve; and (2) defining the causal pathways through which a given set of changes is expected to come about. Beyond this, the TOC can be used to (3) define the assumptions that underlie various casual pathways; (4) develop a coherent and logical set of metrics or measures that can be used to track change over time; (5) devise clear and useful evaluation and learning questions; and (6) organise learning processes at various levels with a diverse set of stakeholders.

As such, a project TOC will need to show:

- LIFT's programme level outcomes that the project intends to contribute to;
- The sequence of project outcomes that will lead to the LIFT programme level outcomes;
- The outputs through which these project outcomes will be achieved (i.e. what the project will do to bring about these changes);
- The major activities or interventions that will bring about the outputs; and
- The major causal connections between the different interventions, outputs and outcomes.

LIFT's programme level outcomes should be taken directly from those specified in the relevant Programme Framework or Programme Theory of Change; however, the wording can be altered slightly to better fit the project context. All project outcomes and outputs should be as clear and specific as possible. They should mention the specific actors concerned, stating either who is doing the action at the intervention level or who undergoes the change at the outcome level. The diagram needs to be clear enough for an outsider to understand the logic of the project simply by following the flow of the boxes. The TOC can then be used to develop the project Measurement Framework and the Evaluation and Learning Questions.

A template of the Theory of Change with an example is included in Annex 2.

2. MEAL Focus

Based on knowing what the project is about, it is important to then identify who within the project needs what information and for what purpose. From this information, you can then determine what of the theory of change needs to be measured and reported, and what are the larger questions that the project needs to answer. We use three tools to help us determine this focus: a MEAL stakeholder analysis (optional), a project measurement framework, and a set of carefully identified project evaluation and learning questions.

2.1. Project MEAL stakeholder analysis (optional)

When developing MEAL Plans, LIFT projects are encouraged but not required to conduct a MEAL stakeholder analysis. To be strategic in deciding what M&E information to collect, it is often helpful to identify who are the most important stakeholders to the project, what M&E information they need, how you want them to use that information, when they need that information and, depending on your audience, in what format.

In addition, and in keeping with the development principles of participation and ownership, it is important to involve major stakeholder groups in the different phases of MEAL, including design and planning, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and use of results. Research shows that involving project stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation can lead to better quality data, better use of results, greater ownership of M&E processes and the program overall, and capacity building in M&E skills. A fundamental way to involve project stakeholders in M&E is to conduct a stakeholder analysis and decide with them what information should be collected and the larger questions that need to be answered.

Table 1. MEAL Stakeholder Analysis

Who are our major stakeholders and what are their roles/ levels of importance?	What MEAL information do they need?	How will they use that information? (for what purpose?)	When do they need the information and in what format?

After completing the stakeholder analysis, you then need to decide which stakeholders' information needs should be addressed and at which point in time. This will depend, of course, on the roles of the various stakeholders and the context in which the project operates, both of which may shift overtime.

2.2. Project Measurement Framework

IPs will need to develop a clear Measurement Framework (or, more simply, a data collection plan) that sets out what data they will collect to track the achievement of the outputs and outcomes defined in their TOC. Project Measurement Frameworks should include indicators that are a combination of outreach, output, and outcome measures, as well as any other performance metrics that are relevant to the project (e.g. financial ratios for micro-finance institutions, return on investment (RoI) calculations for proposed business models)). Indicators may be quantitative or qualitative in nature.

In selecting the appropriate indicators, first state those that you are required to report to LIFT twice a year. These will include reporting on certain activities and outputs, as well as some outcomes, which align with the indicators in LIFT's logical framework.[1] This is important because LIFT is required to report on the achievement of the overall logframe to the LIFT Fund Board on an annual and semi-annual basis. **Because different projects will report on different LIFT logframe indicators, please check with your LIFT programme team to determine the specific indicators your project is expected to report on.** After including the required LIFT logframe indicators, and based on your optional MEAL stakeholder analysis, then select additional project indicators that are needed to track the other parts of your TOC. Note that it is important to measure the major pieces of your TOC, but it is not necessary to track everything in the TOC.

A template for the Measurement Framework, with an illustrative example, is included in Annex 4.

As can be seen in the sample Measurement Framework, projects also should specify the annual targets (by calendar year) for each indicator. In the Measurement Framework, projects also need to state what methods and tools will be used to collect the needed data, who will collect it, and with what frequency.

Some organizations use a different format for their measurement framework. Projects are free to submit any format they wish, as long as they include as a minimum the major outputs/outcomes from their TOCs, indicators, annual targets, and data collection methods/tools.

2.3. Project Evaluation and Learning Questions

As part of LIFT's greater focus on programme learning, it is important to ask questions about the workings of the TOC, including the how's and why's, and about possible effects outside of the TOC. To get to these types of questions, LIFT is asking for meaningful Evaluation and Learning Questions (ELQ) at the LIFT overall, programme and project levels.

LIFT overall has developed a series of seven Evaluation and Learning Questions, which it will report on regularly and answer either throughout or at the end of the Fund in 2018. For a listing of these questions, see Annex 5. For a list of the relevant programme level ELQs,

[1] For LIFT's logical framework and indicator definitions, see LIFT's Website (http://www.lift-fund.org/), under *Guidelines*.

check with your LIFT programme team.

IPs are expected to clearly indicate which of the LIFT overall and programme level questions their project will help to answer. A headline question for example, relevant to all projects, will be to ask how effective and cost-effective a project has been in achieving its outcomes. In addition to addressing the LIFT-level Evaluation and Learning Questions, projects should identify additional questions based on their own TOCs and specific learning priorities and interests.

In addition to stating their ELQs, projects should also outline why the questions are important/of interest and the methods and approaches the project will use to answer these questions. Ideally, a project should not propose more questions than it can manage efficiently and report on properly. **Note that projects are expected to report in the LIFT semi-annual and annual reports their progress in answering their Evaluation and Learning questions**.

Below is a table to use when stating your project's Evaluation and Learning Questions.

Table 2. Project Evaluation and Learning Questions

Evaluation & Learning Question *Provide a clear and specific description of your overall question. Add important sub-questions as bullets.*	**Why this Question is Important** *How will answering this question contribute to programme improvement, policy- or practice-relevant evidence, or solving a key development problem?* *How will the findings be used and by whom?*	**Approach and Methods to Answering the Question** *What data sources and collection methods will be used to answer the questions?* *How will the data be analysed?*

A template for the project Evaluation and Learning Questions, with an example, is included in Annex 6.

3. Data Collection, Management and Analysis

3.1 Data Collection

In this section, projects should briefly describe the data collection methods and tools they will use to collect the information they need to measure their indicators and to answer their ELQs. This would include brief descriptions of any planned baseline and endline surveys, individual or group interviews, field/monitoring visits, and activity tracking procedures.

Depending on the type of project, the indicators in the Measurement Framework, and the ELQs, most projects are expected to collect baseline and endline data. Specifically, a project baseline provides:

- a basis for monitoring progress - the first round of data collection against which ongoing monitoring results will be compared to track progress/performance;
- formative research – for refining project design and implementation; and
- a basis for before-after comparison – assessment of the difference a project has made either during or after implementation.

Below describes the MEAL-related roles and responsibilities of the IPs and FMO, in relation to baseline and endline assessments and project evaluations. As stated in the *LIFT Operational Guidelines*:

Table 3. M&E-Related Roles and Responsibilities (*LIFT Operating Guidelines*, p. 16)

	IPs	FMO
Baseline and endline surveys	IPs will conduct baseline and endline surveys for their projects (unless an exception is approved by the FM) with related payments subject to FM review and "No Objection" letter.	The FM commissions periodic household surveys covering all its operating areas.
Midterm reviews	IPs will assist and facilitate midterm reviews	The FM will commission midterm project reviews where appropriate
Final project evaluations	IPs will assist and facilitate independent final project evaluations	The FM will commission final project evaluations unless an alternate arrangement is agreed with the IP

3.2 Data Quality Management

It is critical that project, programme and policy decisions be based on data that are of good quality. By "good quality", we mean data that are:

- Accurate
- Reliable

- Precise
- Complete
- Timely
- Have integrity

In this section of the MEAL Plan, please describe the various steps and tools the project will use to ensure the quality of its data and findings.

3.3 Data Compilation, Analysis, and Interpretation

Describe the processes and techniques that will be used to compile, aggregate, and analyse the data collected. Specifically mention the type of data and method(s) of analysis, and when the analyses will be conducted. When deciding the "when to do analyses," consider what information is needed, when, and for what purpose. Depending on the indicator being measured, good practice indicates that data should be analysed at least twice a year, in order to make necessary adjustments to the project and for routine reporting to LIFT and communities. However, for some outcome indicators, it may make better sense to measure them once a year or even just at baseline and endline. The timing of measuring indicators should be discussed with your LIFT programme team.

Data interpretation, or giving meaning to the information within the programme context, is another very important step in MEAL. It often is not appropriate for M&E staff to conduct data interpretation themselves, but it could be extremely useful for M&E staff to facilitate and document programme staff and community members interpreting the meaning and significance of the data and the implications of the findings.

4. Use of MEAL Results

Monitoring and evaluation findings can and should be used for multiple purposes, including accountability reporting, learning for programme improvement, and generating evidence to influence policy. In this section, state how you plan to use what information.

4.1. Reporting

In this section, please list the types of reports the project will produce, for whom, and when. Depending on the information needs of your stakeholders, examples include semi-annual and annual reports, as well as less standard reports such as briefing papers, newsletters and community meetings.

For LIFT, projects are required to report on major activities conducted (referred to as "activity monitoring") and on selected LIFT logframe indicators annually and semi-annually through a set of electronic datasheets, plus narrative reports. For the specific reporting formats required by your programme, please ask your LIFT programme team.

In addition to reporting to LIFT, projects will need to report to other stakeholders. As stated in LIFT's Accountability Framework (http://www.lift-fund.org/lift-beneficiary-accountability-framework-english), LIFT and LIFT-funded partners are also accountable to local stakeholders, particularly local partners and beneficiaries at the community level. Depending on the audience and the type of information being reported, IPs are encouraged to develop appropriate ways to communicate and facilitate the use of the findings. This could include formal presentations, seminars or workshops, and/or community feedback sessions.

4.2. Improving project design and implementation

In this section, state the ways the project plans to facilitate the use of M&E results to improve the project. Such ways may include presenting or discussing M&E results and findings in:

- Regular staff or team meetings
- Review of work plans
- Site visits
- Internal newsletters
- Planned learning and sharing events, such as Community of Practice meetings, learning circles, seminars, etc., both within the project and with other projects or organisations
- Publications and other "learning products"

In order for these "events" to actually occur, it is important to plan for them ahead as much as possible and to ensure that they are budgeted for accordingly.

An optional "Learning Event" plan follows:

Table 4: Sample Learning Event Plan

Timeframe	Event/Activity/ Publication	Topics to Explore/ Expected Learning	Participants

Note that IPs are expected to report how M&E results are used to foster learning and used to improve projects and programmes. For the reporting formats, please ask your LIFT programme team.

4.3. Influencing policy

A major focus of LIFT's new strategy is to influence policy, where appropriate. With this aim in mind, FMO has developed separate guidelines on ways for IPs to plan and report on influencing policy. For these additional guidelines, please see LIFT's Website or speak with your LIFT programme team.

In this section of your MEAL Plan, and if relevant to your project, explain the ways the project plans to use M&E information to influence policy. State the policy that is being addressed, the M&E information that will be used in what type event or publication, and when. A possible format follows:

Table 5: Sample Plan for Using M&E Findings to Influence Policy

Policy Area	Type of M&E Information Needed	Audience and Type of Event/Publication	Timeframe

Depending on when you are developing the MEAL Plan, it may be too early to identify this information. If this is the case, be sure to update the MEAL Plan when this information becomes available.

Please note that projects are expected to report on their policy-related events and the results thereof in LIFT's annual and semi-annual reports.

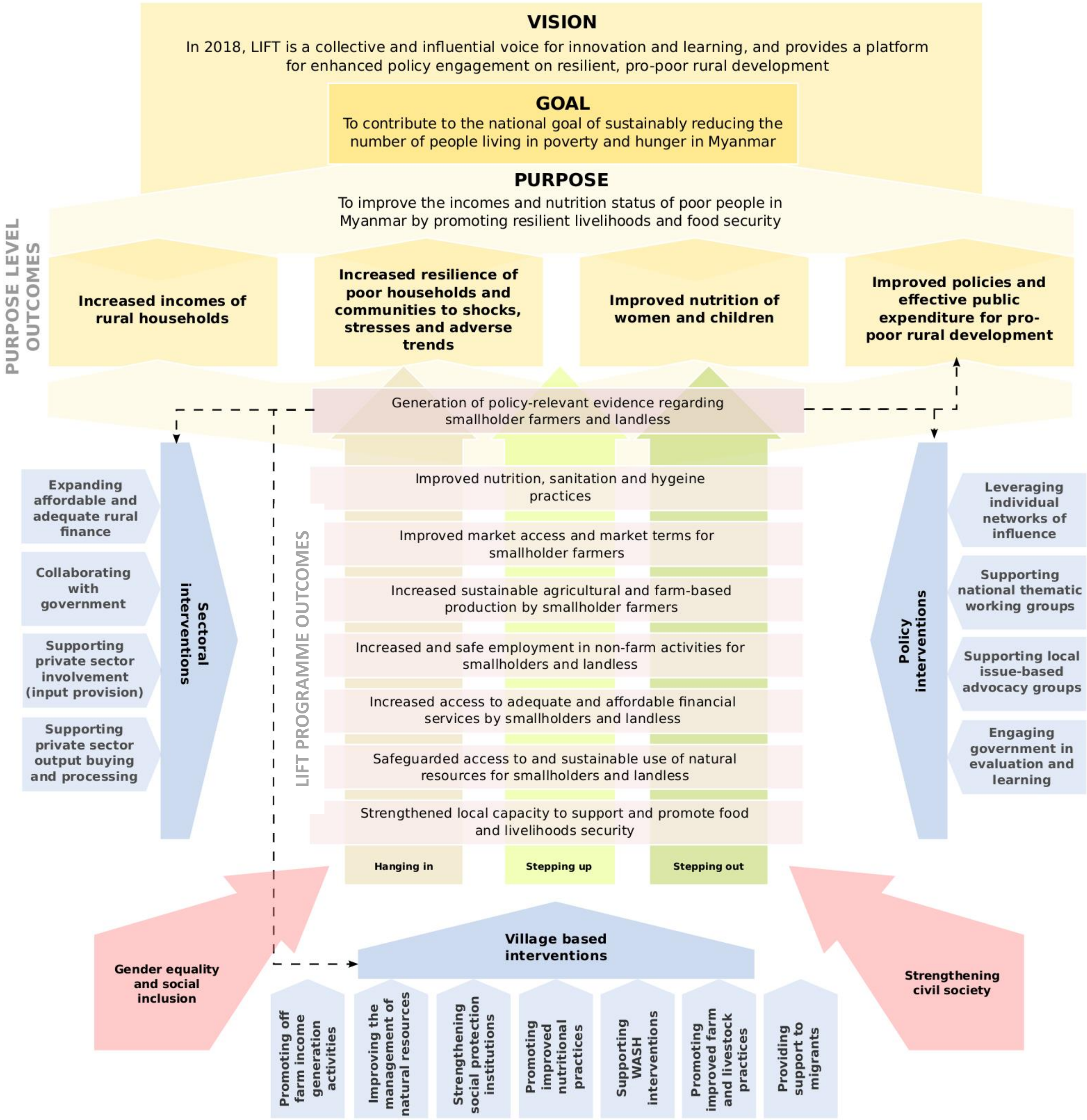
5. MEAL Resources

Review the activities called for in this MEAL Plan and identify the required staff, technical assistance (including consultants), materials and equipment, and other resources required to implement the plan. As mentioned earlier, this includes the necessary resources needed to answer the project's Evaluation and Learning Questions and, if needed, the baseline and endline assessments. Ensure that there is sufficient allocation in the project's budget.

Annexes

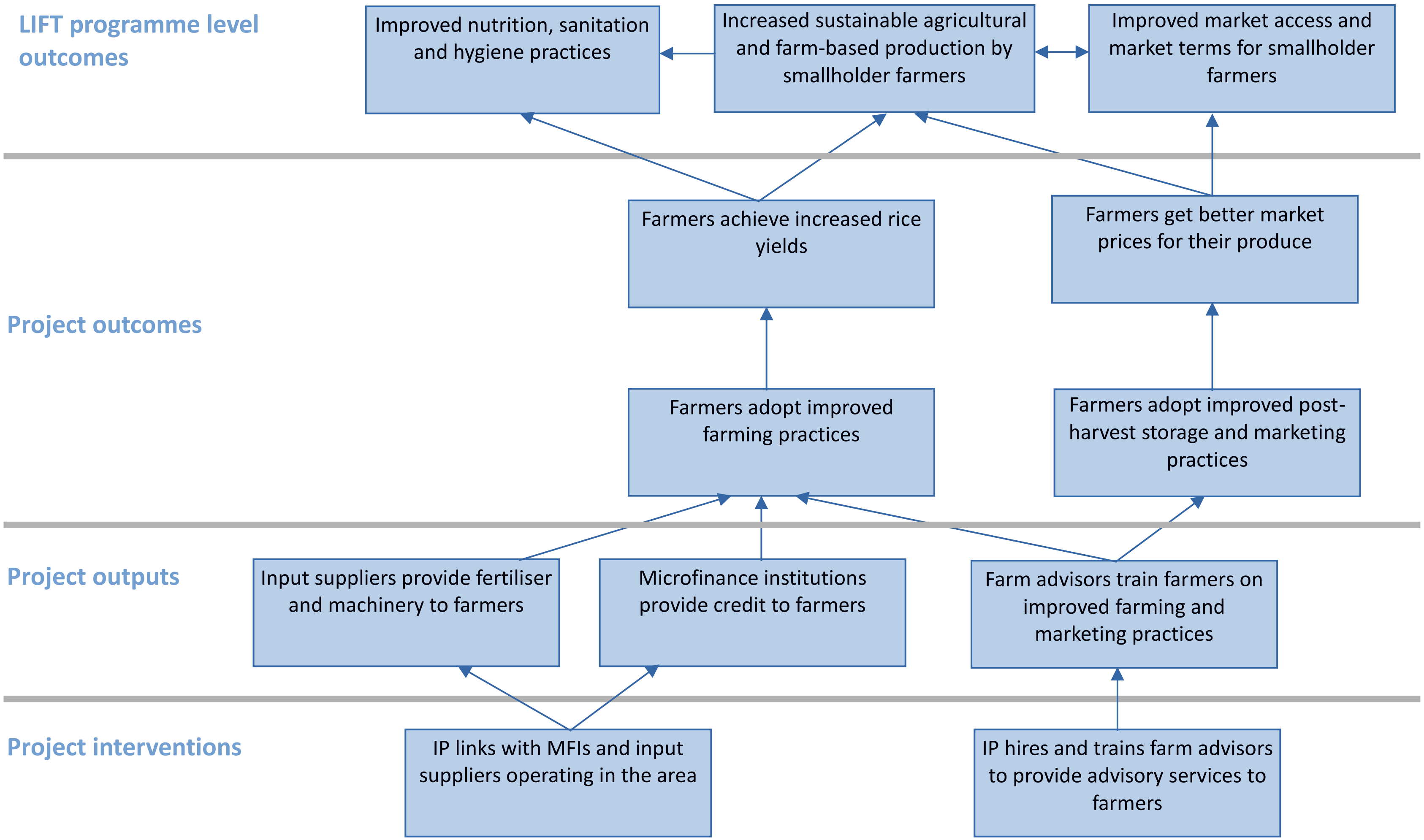
1. LIFT's Theory of Change
2. Sample Project Theory of Change
3. Sample MEAL Stakeholder Analysis
4. Sample Measurement Framework
5. LIFT's Evaluation and Learning Questions
6. Sample Project Evaluation and Learning Questions

Annex 1: LIFT's Theory of Change



Annex 2: Project Theory of Change (Template and Example)

Note: This TOC is illustrative and incomplete. Its purpose is to suggest what a project TOC might look like.



Annex 3: Sample MEAL Stakeholder Analysis

[Under Development]

Annex 4: Measurement Framework (Template and Example)

- *This table is based directly on the TOC. It takes each box from the TOC and details each one in terms of indicators, tools, frequency and who collects.*
- *The programme level outcomes and project outcomes and indicators are hypothetical only. The number of outcomes and indicators listed should not suggest what is expected for any given project.*

Type*	Output/Outcome	Indicators	Targets			Tools/Methods	Frequency	Who collects
			Y1	Y2	Y3			
PLO	Improved nutrition, sanitation and hygiene practices	• Number of months consuming own rice				• HH survey	• Annual	• Surveyor
PO	Farmers achieve increased rice yield	• Kg rice/unit area				• HH Survey	• Seasonal	• Surveyor
PO	Farmers get better prices for their produce	• Price per kg obtained for rice sold				• HH Survey	• Seasonal	• Surveyor
PO	Farmers adopt improved post-harvest and marketing practices	• % farmers using post-harvest storage facilities • % farmers selling collectively • % farmers with a contract • % farmers selling when the price is high				• Adoption survey	• Ongoing	• Farm advisors
PO	Farmers adopt improved farming practices	• % farmers applying fertiliser correctly • % farmers using recommended seeds				• Adoption survey	• Ongoing	• Farm advisors
O	Farmers have access to inputs through local input suppliers	• Number of villages covered by certified input suppliers • Number of inputs sold				• VDC records • Input supplier records	• Quarterly • Monthly	• VDCs • Field staff
O	Farmers have access to credit through MFIs	• Number of farming HH who are members of a micro-credit group • Number of agricultural loans disbursed				• MFI records	• Monthly	• MFI providers
O	Farm advisors train farmers on improved farming and marketing practices	• Number of farmers trained by farm advisors (by topic)				• Farm Advisor records	• Per training	• Advisors
I	Link with MFIs and input suppliers operating in the area	• Number of villages covered by agreements signed with MFIs and input suppliers				• Agreements	• Quarterly	• Training staff
I	Hire and train farm advisors to provide advisory services to farmers	• Number of training modules developed • Number of farm advisors trained				• Training records	• Quarterly	• Training staff

* = PLO: Programme level outcome; PO: Project outcome; O: Output; I: Intervention.

Annex 5: LIFT Evaluation and Learning Questions

At the level of LIFT as a whole, five questions[2] have been defined for evaluation purposes. They will be answered through a combination of evaluation activities at the LIFT FMO-level and through the programme- and project-level ELQs, as detailed in the table below.

Questions	Approach
1. To what extent have the LIFT strategy and LIFT interventions been relevant to the needs of the people it intends to reach?	This question will be answered through a combination of evaluation activities. It will include a detailed assessment of the LIFT strategy, and other relevant project and programme documents. It will draw on project and progamme level evaluations and will also entail an organisational assessment. Specific questions on relevance will be included in the evaluations of individual projects.
2. 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? Specific outcomes to explore include: • Income • Resilience • Nutrition • Policy influence	This question will be answered through a combination of LIFT-level surveys, in particular the LIFT Household Survey (to be administered with a representative sample across all regions where LIFT is working and including both project and comparison villages) and regional and individual project evaluations. The LIFT Household Survey will provide data on the overall changes `(including but not limited to those defined in the LIFT logframe) that LIFT has contributed to in its focus areas, using appropriate mechanisms to draw statistically sound inferences about LIFT's contribution to these changes. Regional and project level evaluations will be more narrowly focused and provide evidence about the effectiveness and sustainability of LIFT-supported models and interventions. These studies will use a combination of robust evaluation methods that are suited to the specific questions related to effectiveness that they seek to answer. They will feed into and support the evidence generated through the LIFT Household Survey in answering this question.
3. To what extent has LIFT identified and established sustainable approaches for achieving the purpose and programme outcomes after LIFT support ends?	This question will be divided into a series of sub-questions that will be set out in each of the regional ELPs. The regional ELPs will specify the specific questions to be answered and will clearly indicate how this will be done. Answers to the questions will come from a combination of project-specific evaluations, project-level outcome monitoring data, field visits by regional staff, cross-project evaluations (by theme/topic) and special studies commissioned by the regions.
4. To what extent has LIFT delivered value-for-money against the results framework, where material / tangible benefits are measureable?	LIFT is implementing a value for money (VfM) framework that focuses on four domains: • **Intervention design** to ensure that value for money has been adequately considered in the design/formulation of projects; • **Outreach** to track the cost per individual reached overall and for specific interventions (this will require systematic tracking of budgets and outreach by IPs);

[2] These will be elaborated to include a number of specific sub-questions.

	• **Selected outcomes overall and for specific interventions** to track the overall cost per individual for changes in higher level outcomes and where appropriate for specific project components by building relevant questions and evaluation design into ELPs; and • **Use of VfM results** to ensure that value for money is feeding into ongoing decision-making within programmes and projects.
5. To what extent has LIFT contributed to furthering gender equality and women's empowerment?	Answering this question will involve an analysis of LIFT 2013, 2015 and 2018 Household Survey data on key indicators disaggregated by gender. In addition, and as part of a review of LIFT's Gender Strategy, an independent consultant will assess the extent to which the Gender Strategy has been implemented and ways in which LIFT has contributed to gender equality and women's empowerment in LIFT programme areas.

Annex 6: Sample Project Evaluation and Learning Questions (Template and Example)

	Evaluation and Learning Questions	Explain why is this question important	Approach to answering the question
1	What is the most effective approach to training farmers on improved farming practices?	There are many different approaches to extension. The project uses three different approaches: Farmer Field Schools, Farm Business Advisors and Farmer-to-farmer. Each has strengths and weaknesses but it is not clear which is best.	Different approaches to extension will be randomly assigned to target villages. A group of control villages (with no extension activities) will also be used for further comparison. All other activities will be constant across all villlages (access to finance, inputs, etc.) and the same practices will be promoted in all villages. Routine monitoring data on adoption of different practices will be collected through adoption trackers, HH and seasonal survey tools.
2	What are the advantages and disadvantages for farmers of engaging in contract farming? How can it be made to work best for them?	One of the main approaches for helping farmers secure better prices in this project is through contract farming. As this is still a relatively new approach we would like to better understand how it works.	A short qualitative study will be commissioned to explore the positive negative consequences of contract farming. A participatory action research approach will be adopted to explore how the benefits to farmers from contract farming can be optimised.
3	How effective and cost-effective has the project been in achieving its higher level outcomes?	The project aims to strengthen the position of smallholder farmers in the rice value chain so that they are able to secure higher incomes and achieve food security.	The project will compare food security and income data in both project and non-project areas to assess the impact of the project on farmers' food security and income.