

Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT)

Monitoring and Evaluation for Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Framework

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Acronyms

CSO	civil society organisation
ELQs	Evaluation and Learning Questions
FB	Fund Board
FMO	Fund Management Office
HH	household
IPs	implementing partners
KM	Knowledge Management
LIFT	Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring and Evaluation for Accountability and Learning (MEAL)
MFI	microfinance institution
NGO	non-government organisation
TOC	Theory of Change
VfM	Value for Money

Executive Summary

As of 2015, the Livelihoods and Food Security Trust Fund (LIFT) started implementing its work on the basis of a new and ambitious strategy to strengthen rural livelihoods in Myanmar. Central to the new strategy is the commitment to Monitoring and Evaluation for Accountability and Learning (MEAL) at all levels within LIFT, from the Fund Management Office (FMO) through to the implementing partners (IPs). The aim is to increase the capacity of LIFT and its partners to generate and use robust evidence both to measure and improve performance and to influence rural development policy and practice in Myanmar. This entails a significant upgrading of MEAL systems, capacities and practices both within the FMO and at the level of implementing partners.

Central thrusts in the new approach include:

- The creation of a three-tiered MEAL Framework that defines the scope and function of MEAL at the FMO, regional programme (funding window) and implementing partner (project) levels;
- The systematic use of Theories of Change (TOC) at each level to generate consensus on the envisioned change process and to underpin a systematic approach to MEAL;
- The formulation of clear Evaluation and Learning Questions (ELQs) at each level to ensure that there is clarity, from the outset, on the questions for which LIFT and its partners seek to generate evidence through their interventions and MEAL activities;
- The separation of MEAL at the national level (as set out in the LIFT logframe and the LIFT ELQs) from the MEAL for projects, such that the latter will be more closely linked to regional TOCs and the specific outputs, outcomes and questions that are relevant to the specific implementing partner/project in question; and
- A more intensive, hands-on and learning-oriented approach to MEAL at the level of implementing partners so that they are better equipped to generate and use robust evidence.

The [LIFT strategy \(2014\)](#) sets out the LIFT results framework and Theory of Change with a purpose, goal, four purpose level outcomes and eight programme level outcomes that define the core areas of change that LIFT seeks to contribute to through its regional programmes. LIFT's overall performance at the national level will be assessed on the basis of the impact it has achieved in terms of the results framework. Evidence of LIFT's performance will be based primarily on the Evaluation and Learning Questions set out in the 'LIFT FMO' section of this document and the indicators defined in the LIFT logframe.

Given the contextual diversity across regions within Myanmar, LIFT will develop region-specific Theories of Change for each geographic region where it operates (Delta 3, Dry Zone, Uplands, etc.). The regional TOCs clearly set out the expected pathways through which each regional programme, through its implementing partners' projects, will contribute to the higher level outcomes set out in the LIFT TOC. They also provide the basis for defining a set of core learning questions specific to

each region and for ensuring that projects are adequately aligned with regional priorities for both implementation and policy influence.

Implementing partners (projects) will develop MEAL Plans, which include their own TOCs, ELQs and Measurement Frameworks based on their specific projects. These will be refined with support from LIFT and aligned with the regional TOCs and ELQs. LIFT will provide additional capacity strengthening support to IPs to ensure that they are able to carry out their MEAL activities in a way that supports learning and generates robust evidence about project performance.

Through this, the LIFT MEAL Framework provides the basis for ensuring that LIFT is set up to deliver on three key functions: (1) accountability; (2) learning; and (3) policy influence. As such, it plays a central role in enabling LIFT to deliver on its:

- **Purpose:** to improve the incomes and nutrition status of the rural poor by promoting resilient livelihoods and food security; and
- **Vision:** In 2018, LIFT is a collective and influential voice for innovation and learning that provides a platform for enhanced policy engagement on resilient, pro-poor rural development.

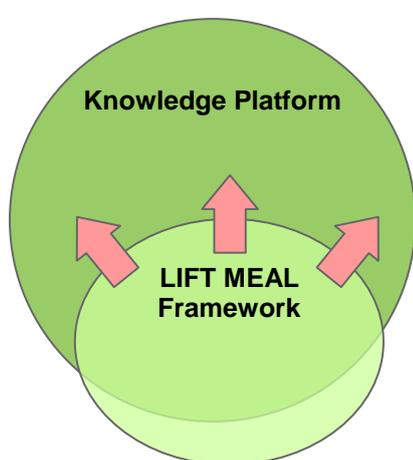
More specifically, the LIFT MEAL Framework will help to underpin LIFT's work on establishing a knowledge platform that promotes evidence-based pro-poor development in Myanmar.

1. LIFT MEAL Framework

Overview

This document sets out the LIFT framework for Monitoring and Evaluation for Learning and Accountability (MEAL). It describes the primary purposes and functions that MEAL is expected to fulfil for LIFT and its key stakeholders, provides a framework for establishing MEAL systems at various levels from the Fund Board, through the FMO, to the implementing partners, and sets out the key MEAL components that, taken together, make a MEAL system. LIFT's vision is that by 2018 it has become a collective and influential voice for innovation and learning that provides a platform for enhanced policy engagement on resilient, pro-poor rural development. The MEAL Framework establishes the foundation for LIFT to realise this vision of becoming a knowledge platform by establishing the basis for generating robust evidence that can support both learning and policy influence.

Figure 1.1: The LIFT MEAL Framework positions LIFT to evolve into a Knowledge Platform



The vision of LIFT as a knowledge platform includes both 'internal' and 'external' elements. This document is concerned primarily with the internal elements that position LIFT to generate robust evidence from across its programmes and projects. Further, this document is to ensure that this evidence is put to use to improve the quality of interventions and to feed into LIFT's direct work of influencing national policy processes and policy implementation.

The 'external' elements relate more explicitly to the role of evidence generated beyond LIFT's direct activities, both from within Myanmar and internationally and the wider network of actors. Both the internal and external elements are described in the final section of this document.

Purpose and functions of MEAL

LIFT MEAL is a balancing act between three primary functions:

- **Accountability¹ (proving)**: showing that activities are leading to certain outputs, outcomes and the goal, and that this was achieved efficiently, effectively and with good value for money;
- **Evidence-based learning (improving)**: building knowledge and evidence about the extent to which certain strategies, interventions, approaches, activities, etc. have been effective or not in their respective contexts and why;
- **Policy influence**: generating policy and practice-relevant evidence that can be used to

¹ 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.

inform government policies and the design and implementation of government programmes.

Key Principles

Evaluability

When an intervention (project, programme, etc.) is designed, its **evaluability** should be kept in consideration, i.e. has the intervention been designed in a manner that lends itself to the production of robust evidence about what works, what does not, to what extent, and under what conditions. This encompasses: (1) having a clear theory of change that maps out the causal pathways, mechanisms, etc. to be assessed; (2) having a clear set of evaluation and learning questions to be answered (moving beyond the DAC criteria); (3) designing the intervention in a manner that permits experimental methods where appropriate; and (4) ensuring that basic monitoring data about the intervention (outreach, village profiles, distribution of activities, etc.) is in place.

Value for Money

LIFT is implementing a value for money framework that focuses on four domains:

- 1. Intervention design** to ensure that value for money has been adequately considered in the design/formulation and appraisals of projects;
- 2. Outreach** to track the cost per individual reached overall and for specific interventions (this will require systematic tracking of budgets and outreach by IPs);
- 3. 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; and
- 4. Use of VfM results** to ensure that value for money is feeding into ongoing decision-making within programmes and projects.

MEAL at each level

The MEAL Framework is designed to serve the needs of a number of different actors. Primarily, these are the Fund Board, the FMO and LIFT IPs. Each has different needs and expectations from the MEAL Framework and these must be catered to accordingly. The thread that connects each level, however, is that **the FMO must be in a position to clearly demonstrate (a) the linkages that connect programme strategy with IP activities and (b) the results chain that links IP activities to regional programme and LIFT level outputs and outcomes.**

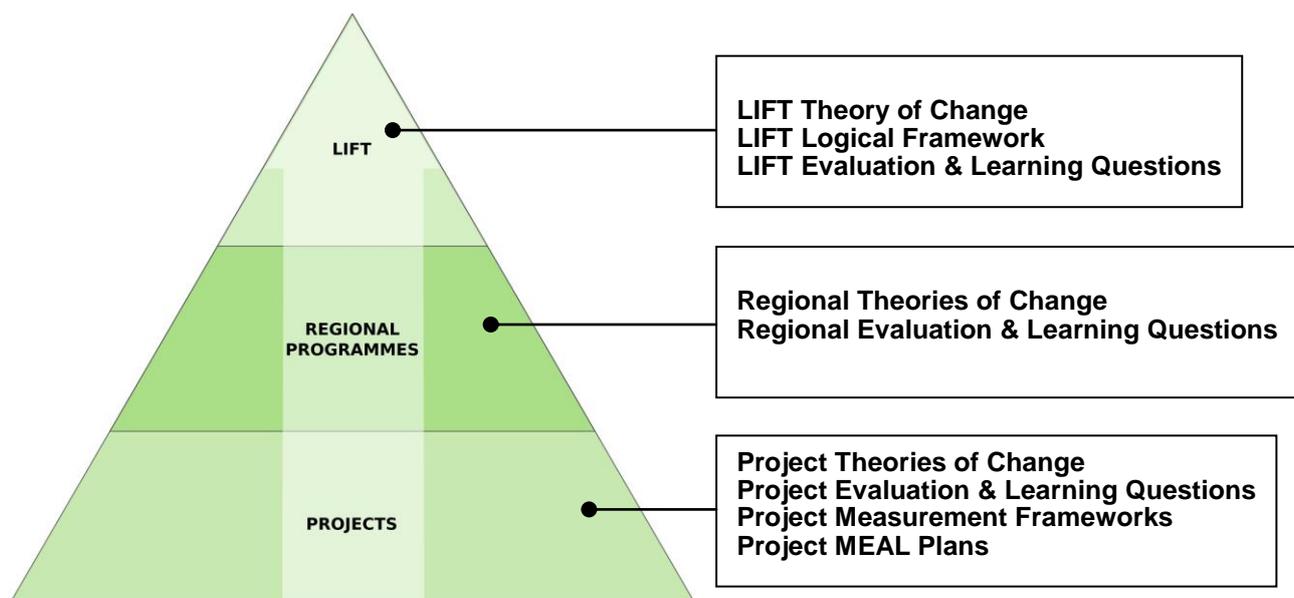
Achieving this will (a) build confidence with LIFT governance that strategic directions and priorities are being applied and are generating results, (b) enable programmes and implementing partners to focus on the details of what they are trying to achieve and (c) support clear and structured communication and learning between programmes and IPs (since it will give IPs a more tangible sense of the thinking behind a programme and how their own efforts map onto it).

Overall, the LIFT MEAL Framework is divided into three tiers:

- **LIFT FMO:** The FMO is responsible for delivering against the LIFT level Theory of Change, on the basis of indicators set out in LIFT’s Logical Framework and the LIFT level Evaluation and Learning Questions.
- **Regional programmes:** Regional programmes will have detailed TOCs indicating how various programme components are expected to come together to achieve LIFT purpose and programme level outcomes. They will also have detailed Evaluation and Learning Questions setting out the key questions that regions seek to answer through their projects.
- **Project/IP level:** Projects will have detailed TOCs indicating how they intend to contribute to specific aspects of their respective regional programme TOC. They will also have clear Evaluation and Learning Questions and state how they will answer specific questions through robust monitoring and evaluation of their interventions, and detailed measurement frameworks that specify what data they will collect and how. After developing these foundational pieces, projects will then develop full MEAL Plans, which also will include how projects plan to manage and analyse the data they collect and the specific ways they plan to use their M&E results to improve projects and influence policy.

The figure below lists the different MEAL components at each level.

Figure 1.2: Levels of the MEAL Framework and key components



MEAL components

The strategic framework for MEAL in LIFT is based on a number of interrelated components:

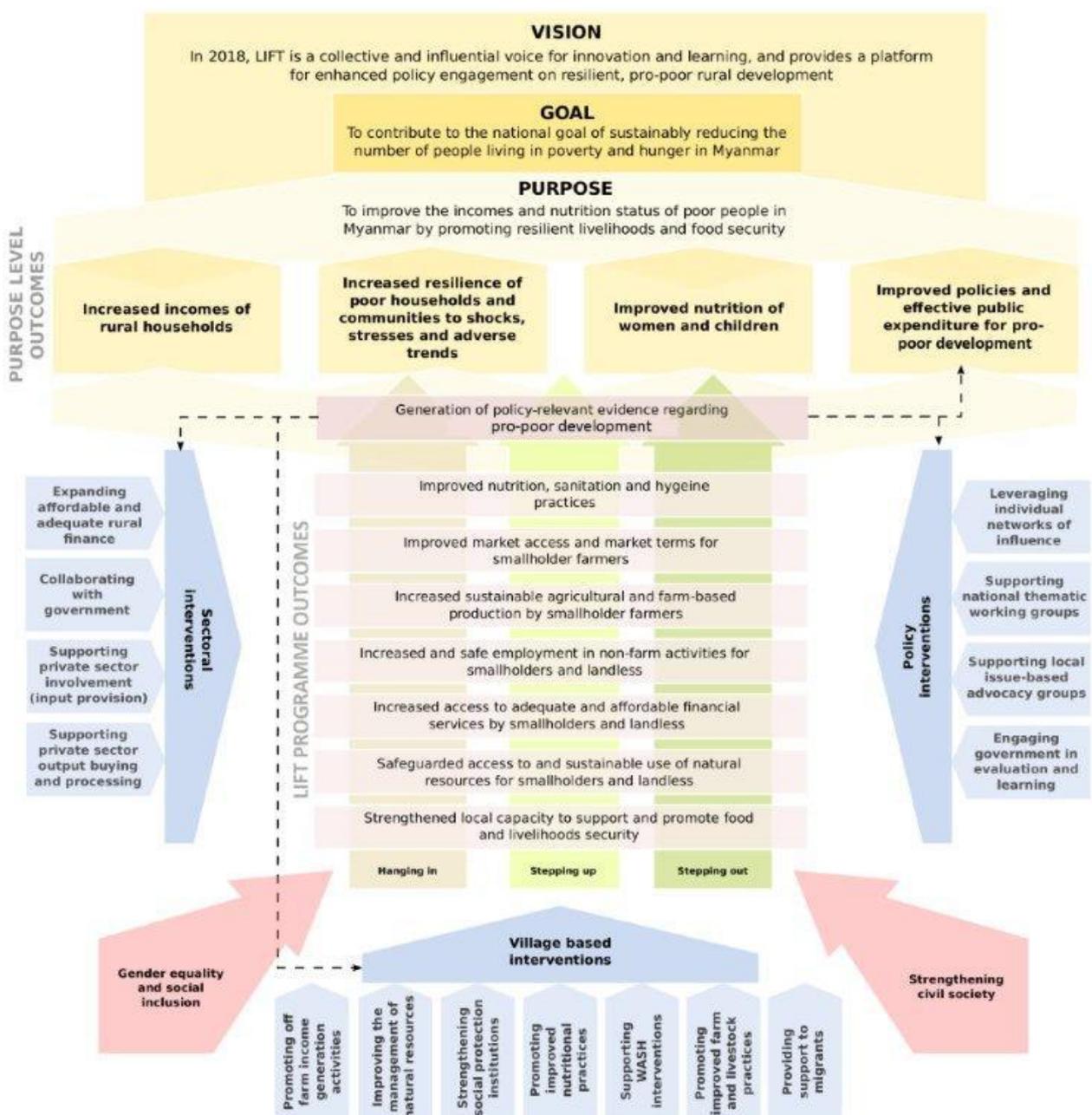
- **Results Framework.** The results framework is defined in the LIFT Strategy (2014) and sets the core set of programme and purpose level outcomes and the overall goal that LIFT has committed to deliver against. As such, it constitutes a framework against which LIFT – across all of its regional programmes and IPs – will be assessed and will report aggregated achievements, and which is further articulated in LIFT’s Logical Framework.
- **Theory of Change.** A Theory of Change is a visual tool to articulate and make explicit how concerned stakeholders envision an intervention achieving its intended changes. Within LIFT, TOCs will be required at three levels: (1) LIFT FMO (overall LIFT), (2) regional programmes and (3) projects. These TOCs are programme, M&E, and communication tools 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 (and measurement plan) that can be used to track change over time; and (5) devise clear and useful evaluation and learning questions. The key to the various TOCs is to see them as hubs around which different actors, perspectives and hypotheses converge, so that learning can be driven by a common language and a robust evidence base.
- **Evaluation and Learning Questions.** Evaluation and Learning Questions are required (1) for LIFT as a whole; (2) for each regional programme; and (3) for each project. Each set of ELQs is based on its corresponding Theory of Change. ELQs define the key questions in response to which robust and actionable evidence will be generated through the MEAL system. It also specifies how this evidence will be generated, whether through routine monitoring activities and field visits, secondary data, or internal or external evaluations and thematic research studies. ELQs will be closely tied to both the learning and policy influence functions and their corresponding agendas.
- **Measurement Frameworks.** Measurement Frameworks are tables that detail the specific set of indicators that will be used to gather evidence against the outputs and outcomes set out in the TOC. They also describe how the data will be collected (by whom, with what frequency/timing, and with which tools), analysed and put to use (for accountability, learning and policy influence). At the level of the LIFT FMO, the measurement framework is referred to as the Logical Framework (or logframe) and is tied to the LIFT results framework as set out in the LIFT Strategy (defined above). At the level of the regional programme/funding window, there is no separate measurement framework in place, since programme needs are addressed by a combination of the LIFT logframe, project Measurement Frameworks, and regional and project ELQs. At the level of an implementing partner or project, Measurement Frameworks are required and will be driven by the project TOCs and ELQs.

2. LIFT FMO

Theory of Change

The LIFT Theory of Change reflects the LIFT Strategy, placing the vision, goal, purpose and programme level outcomes that constitute the **LIFT results framework** at its centre. It highlights LIFT's three target categories of household (hanging in, stepping up and stepping out), the three levels of intervention defined in the LIFT strategy (village, sectoral and policy) and the feedback loops that feed evidence generated back into interventions, through policy and practice. For the sake of legibility and given the diversity across regional programmes, it does not show detailed causal pathways. These are, instead, detailed in the regional programme and project TOCs and elaborated in the narrative in Annex 1.

Figure 2.1: LIFT Theory of Change



Evaluation and Learning Questions

At the level of LIFT as a whole, seven questions² 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 has LIFT appropriately followed and implemented its strategy? Have LIFT-supported 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 programme 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?	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 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. 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, efficient and effective models 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 ELQs. The regional ELQs 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. What have been the positive and negative unintended and unexpected consequences of LIFT's operations?	Specific questions will be included in evaluations conducted at each level to capture and document unintended and unexpected consequences arising from LIFT's work and supported interventions. In addition to this, LIFT staff will be tracking unexpected and unintended consequences related to their intervention as part of routine monitoring of implementation. Answering this question will entail conducting a systematic review of unintended and unexpected consequences identified as resulting from LIFT's interventions.
5. 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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); • Selected outcomes overall and for specific interventions to

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

	<p>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 ELQs; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of VfM results to ensure that value for money is feeding into ongoing decision-making within programmes and projects.
<p>6. 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?</p> <p>To what extent and how has LIFT influenced pro poor rural development policy and practice?</p>	<p>This question will assess the extent to which LIFT has been successful in achieving its vision of becoming or establishing a knowledge platform that effectively sources, vets and synthesizes robust evidence and channels it into improved pro-poor policy and practice in Myanmar. This question will be answered in two parts. First, a comprehensive evaluation of all LIFT's policy work to date and up to the end of 2018 (e.g. evidence generated, disseminated, policy influencing activities carried out, contribution analysis of changes made to policies and programming through LIFT activities, etc.). Second, an assessment of LIFT's achievements in establishing a demand-driven, long-term knowledge platform that is able to continue gathering and channeling evidence for improved policy and practice after 2018.</p>
<p>7. To what extent has LIFT contributed to furthering gender equality and women's empowerment?</p>	<p>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.</p>

Logical Framework

The LIFT **Logical Framework** is pinned to the results framework and the TOC and specifies the minimum set of core indicators that need to be tracked across all regional programmes and thematic funding windows. These indicators are tracked against the goal, outcomes and outputs set out in the LIFT strategy and will be aggregated and reported at the FMO level.

- **Goal indicators:** measure national level outcomes to which LIFT aims to contribute.
- **Purpose level outcome indicators:** measure the high level outcomes in geographies where LIFT is working directly.
- **Programme level outcome indicators:** measure the changes related to the eight intermediate outcomes set out in the LIFT results framework.
- **Outreach indicators:** measure the number of individuals, households or groups reached through LIFT supported interventions. The data will come primarily from the monitoring systems of LIFT implementing partners. The results will be independently validated through centrally commissioned evaluations that draw on IP monitoring data. Outreach indicators in the logframe are included alongside programme outcome indicators.

All data will be disaggregated by sex of household head, sex of beneficiary (where appropriate) and by household wealth category where possible. Detailed indicator reference sheets will be prepared for each of the indicators to ensure consistency in measurement and reporting.

3. Regional Programmes

The LIFT strategy for 2015-18 emphasises an approach to programming based on geographic or agro-ecological zoning. While all geographic programmes are aligned with the overall LIFT strategy/TOC, context-specific opportunities and constraints will drive the way that different components of the strategy are brought together to deliver against the results framework. Thus, detailed TOCs showing programme outcomes and causal pathways present particular value at the regional programme level.

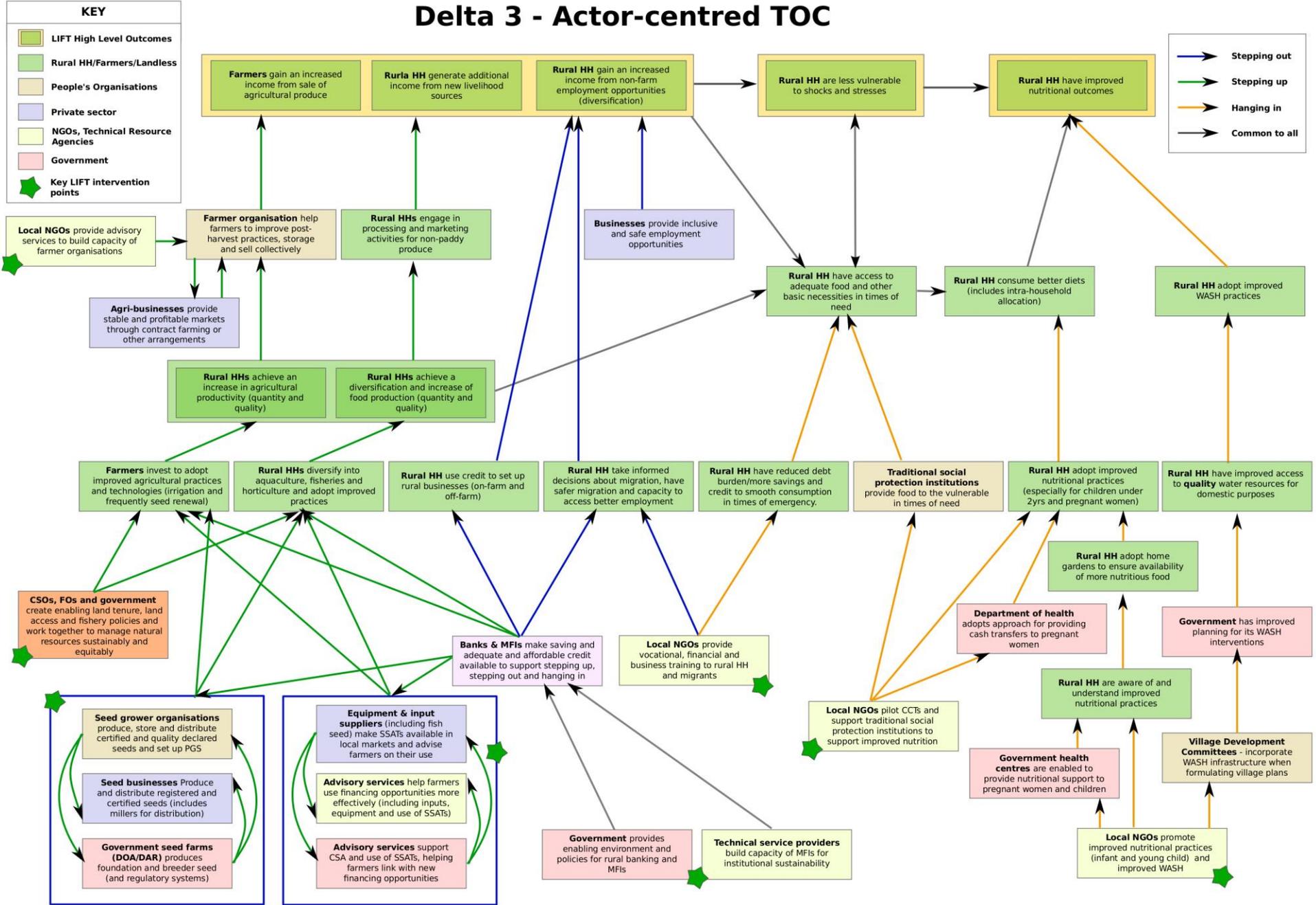
Regional programme TOC

Actor-centred TOCs are required for each regional programme. Actor-centred TOCs provide a powerful tool for articulating the changes sought, the roles of different actors in contributing to these changes and the anticipated causal pathways through which various interventions are assumed to lead to desired outcomes. These TOCs provide a basis for (1) elaborating the set of pre-conditions that need to be fulfilled at each major step (outcome) in the causal pathway from interventions through to higher level outcomes; (2) defining the key internal and external risks borne by a particular regional programme and the various actors involved in them; (3) articulating region specific evaluation and learning questions that highlight the key areas in which LIFT seeks to develop an evidence basis; and (4) assessing project proposals from implementing partners to see whether they are aligned with the regional TOC, address the preconditions and risks that have been identified, and are geared to feed into the regional programme level Evaluation and Learning Questions.

Four programmatic components – policy influence, civil society strengthening, financial inclusion and migration – will require separate TOCs because of their inherent logics (e.g. some combination of long-term change process, focus on organisational or institutional change, complex causal pathways, and high levels of contingency and dependence on external factors).

The TOC overleaf provides an example of an actor-centred TOC for the Delta 3 regional programme. Each box represents an actor-centred outcome that is linked to a specific actor (colour-coded by type). The direction of arrows indicates the causality that links one output or outcome to the next. Arrows are colour-coded to show whether the causal pathway is primarily concerned with stepping up, stepping out or hanging in (or relevant to all of these). Green stars indicate where a LIFT project would be positioned (i.e. key intervention point). These are the points where LIFT is supporting or seeking to directly influence a particular actor to play a given role in the overall system.

Delta 3 - Actor-centred TOC



Evaluation and Learning Questions

Each regional programme will identify a set of Evaluation and Learning Questions that clearly defines the areas in which it seeks to generate evidence. The regional programme TOC provides the basis for defining the questions. The following points will guide the formulation of these questions:

- What are the questions that the programme wants to answer? What are the mechanisms, assumptions, hypotheses, approaches or intervention models that are to be tested?
- What are the primary functions of data collection (accountability, learning, policy influence)?
- Which of the LIFT systemic change/policy influence themes does it relate to?
- How will the data be used and who is the target audience?

Figure 3.2: A Regional ELQ Matrix

#	Evaluation and Learning Question	Brief description	Thematic area	Use/purpose	How will the question be answered?
	<p>Write out the evaluation and learning question here. Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'What' questions • 'To what extent' questions • 'How' questions • 'Why' questions <p>Questions can include elements of all of these - e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the mechanisms and how do they work? • To what extent has X been successful and why? 	<p>Describe the question in more detail:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List out sub-questions • Provide some background or detail • Explain why it is important. 	<p>Mention the relevant thematic area based on the thematic foci of LIFT</p>	<p>Learning (improving) but with potential for dissemination and advocacy on policy A, B, and C (list relevant actors)</p>	<p>This will be through</p> <p>Projects M&E A, B and F - including baseline/endline and regular monitoring (annual reports)</p> <p>Thematic study 2 (A study of market in Delta 3 amongst small scale rice farmers)</p> <p>Field visits</p> <p>Regional thematic partner reflection workshops</p>

Once these questions have been defined, regional programmes will formulate clear plans setting out how they intend to gather the required evidence to help answer the questions.

- How will evidence be generated in response to these questions (e.g. routine monitoring data from IPs, internal or external evaluations, research studies, etc.)?
- Which projects are best placed to help gather evidence in response to the regional evaluation and learning questions?
- In the case of evaluations and studies, what approaches and methods will be most suitable given the intended use or audience of the evidence?
- Who will be responsible for gathering and analysing the data and providing internal/external technical support to the process?

Regional programme ELQs will be used as a basis for ensuring alignment between (a) regional evaluation and learning priorities and (b) the design of individual projects and their ELQs. Tables will be produced (such as the one below) to clearly map how projects will feed into regional ELQs.

Figure 3.3: Mapping regional ELQs to Project ELQs (a work in progress)

Delta 3 – Mapping Regional ELP to Project ELP (working draft)			
Theme	Regional E&L Questions	IP Sub-questions	IP
Advisory Services & mechanisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can you have efficient advisory services that clearly show the advantages to farmers of regular seed renewal? Ensuring that the advisory methodology matches the content/technology/audience? What are the optimal roles of FOs, NGO, private and public advisory service providers? What kinds of sustainable advisory services could continue to function beyond LIFT support? What are the drivers of adoption of ... seed, equipment ? Does mechanisation lead to better efficiency in production – and how? How can new equipment be made accessible to smallholder farmers? Is collective ownership and management of equipment viable/appropriate? 	What are the top farm extension services (techniques) that provide the most economic value for large numbers of smallholder rice farmers?	Proximity
		What are the most effective methods for transferring technical knowledge to smallholder farmers that lead to adoption?	Proximity
		What is the most cost-effective architecture (mix of channels) for delivering farm advisory services?	Proximity
		Among the different types of agricultural extension services, which one is the most suitable for the Delta context?	WHH/GRET
		Is provision of equipment service/ hire a better alternative to equipment purchase on credit to address mechanization gaps?	MeryCorps
Farmer & Producer Organisations and market access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do we have business models for farmer organisations? What is the best institutional arrangement for Farmer Organisations? 	There are several possible types and level of producers' organisations (informal groups/ association/ cooperatives). Which one is the best for which setting/context?	WHH/GRET

In addition to this, regional programmes will be responsible for convening relevant programme level learning and sharing events for individual project and across multiple projects as required.

Measurement

Unlike at the LIFT and Implementing Partner levels, separate measurement frameworks will not be developed at the regional programme level. Instead, the LIFT logframe will be used to organise measurement at this level. As such, to track progress, regional programmes will rely on:

1. Centrally collected data gathered on the basis of the LIFT logframe
2. Data gathered through baselines, mid-term evaluations, end of programme evaluations and thematic studies, as set out in the regional programme's Evaluation and Learning Questions;
3. Data gathered routinely by implementing partners through their project-specific Measurement Frameworks and Evaluation and Learning Questions, including (a) project baselines, mid-term evaluations, end-of-project evaluations and thematic studies; and (b) reporting against key project milestones.

4. Implementing Partners (LIFT projects)

Establishing robust MEAL systems at the project level is a central requirement of the LIFT MEAL Framework. Implementing partners will be expected to develop clear Theories of Change aligned with the regional programme TOCs, establish their own project ELQs aligned with regional ELQs, and put in place practical and well-designed Measurement Frameworks to guide the collection of data against appropriate project outputs and outcomes.

While alignment with regional programme MEAL is essential, the LIFT MEAL Framework emphasises the importance of ensuring that project MEAL is relevant to implementing partners and is aligned with their needs for project implementation and learning. Accordingly, it must be designed in a manner that is user-friendly and lightweight. A key concern in this regard is the considerable level of diversity amongst implementing partners in terms of the type of organisation(s) involved and their MEAL capacity (including human resources/technical capabilities and any systems required for data management).

Detailed MEAL Guidelines for IPs will be made available to all applicants responding to Calls for Proposals, detailing what is expected from them. This is to include:

- A **project-specific Theory of Change** that clearly shows how the project is responding to the Call for Proposals *and* aligning with the LIFT purpose and programme level outcomes that are relevant for the given project. It will be expected to show all the project specific activities, outputs, and outcomes that lead to the regional and LIFT outcomes, clearly indicating the causal pathways that connect these to each other and clearly indicating the actors concerned. In addition IPs will be expected to clearly present the preconditions to achieving the specified outputs and outcomes and to list the specific internal and external risks associated with this.
- A **project-level Evaluation and Learning Questions** that clearly defines the key questions that the project seeks to answer. As with the regional ELQs, project ELQs will explain the purpose and intended audience/use of each question and clearly indicate the combination of methods through which each question will be answered.
- A **project-level Measurement Framework** that defines for major project outputs and outcomes, the indicators that the project will use to track and assess its performance, and how the data will be collected (by whom, with what frequency, and with what instruments).

All proposals received in response to a Call for Proposals will be reviewed using a standardised MEAL Checklist to assess each of the above-mentioned components as well as to assess IP MEAL capacity. When feedback is given to individual projects, this will further provide an opportunity for aligning project and regional Evaluation and Learning Questions so as to ensure that projects are investing adequately in prioritising evaluation and learning, that they are applying the commensurate resources (human, financial), and that they either have or are in a position to access the required MEAL capacity support.

Organisations that have been awarded grants (i.e. become Implementing Partners) will then develop comprehensive MEAL plans during the project inception phase.

Outline of a Project MEAL Plan

MEAL Focus

- Project Theory of Change
- Project Evaluation and Learning Questions
- Project Measurement Framework

Data Management and Analysis

Use of M&E Results

- Reporting
- Programme improvement
- Influence policy

Required Resources

- Staff
- Consultants
- Equipment and supplies

During this period, projects will receive support to develop their MEAL Plans, in such areas as:

1. Ensuring that more detailed sub-Theories of Change are developed for specific project components where specific Evaluation and Learning Questions have been defined
2. Formulating robust evaluation designs (using appropriate quantitative, qualitative, participatory and mixed methods) to answer project-specific evaluation and learning questions in a manner that will feed into regional ELQs
3. Ensuring that the Measurement Framework and corresponding monitoring systems are well designed to feed into the Evaluation and Learning Questions, as well as to guide continuous performance management and improvement over the course of the project

The LIFT Programme and M&E teams will draw on a pool of Evaluation Consultants to help projects develop and implement their MEAL plans. Insofar as possible and appropriate, the consultant(s) assigned to a given project in the inception phase may continue to play a facilitative role over the lifetime of a given project. Depending on the needs of the regional programme and the specific projects, evaluation consultants may assist with the design and implementation of baseline surveys, mid-term reviews, end-line surveys, and end-of-project evaluations, as well as facilitate ways to integrate learning throughout the project cycle.

5. Knowledge Management: Putting MEAL into practice

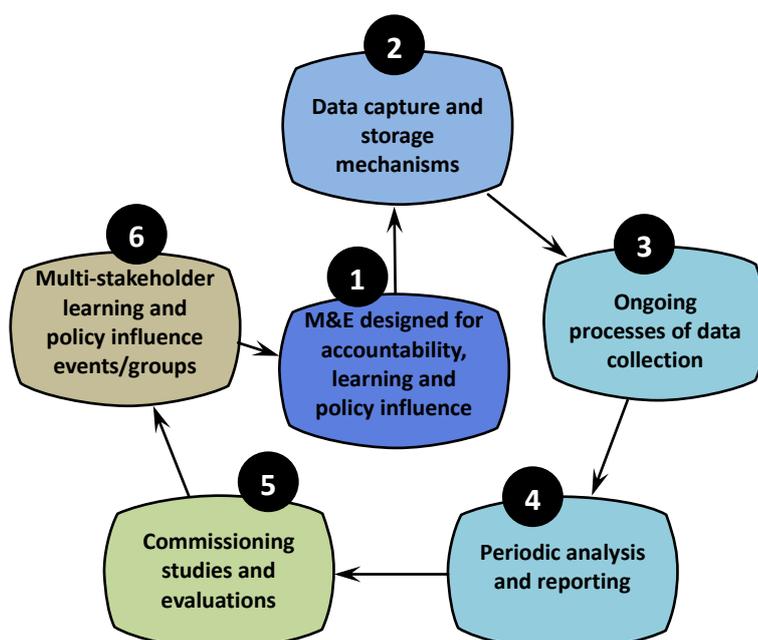
As described in Section 1, the purpose of MEAL in the context of LIFT can be characterised by three core interrelated purposes: accountability, learning for improving performance, and generating evidence that can feed into policy influence. This is in line with LIFT's vision of **becoming a collective and influential voice for innovation and learning, which provides a platform for enhanced policy engagement on resilient, pro-poor rural development**. As noted, this vision of LIFT as a knowledge platform includes both 'internal' and 'external' elements.

The preceding sections have focused primarily on setting up the components of the MEAL Framework at each level (LIFT FMO, regional programme and project) that will be required for LIFT to be able to deliver on the internal elements of the knowledge platform. However, delivering on these purposes will demand going beyond the design phase of setting up the required Theories of Change, Evaluation and Learning Questions and Measurement Frameworks. It will entail placing particular emphasis on:

- How data is collected, managed and stored;
- How evidence is synthesised from the available data and in response to evaluation and learning questions; and
- How key users of the evidence (LIFT IPs, regional programmes and the FMO) are facilitated to engage with the evidence in order to make improvements to their interventions or contribute to policy processes.

The diagram below describes six key phases of MEAL that will need to be addressed at each level to ensure that MEAL is delivering on its purpose. Each step is described in more detail below.

Figure 5.1: Six phases of MEAL



1. **MEAL designed for accountability, learning and policy influence:** the design of the overall MEAL Framework and fleshing out of all components at each level (the phase that this document focuses on).
2. **Data capture and storage mechanisms:** design of data collection tools (instruments), selection and organisation of technologies required for data collection, management of the different types of data collected according to usage requirements (databases, IT-enabled KM systems, etc.)
3. **Ongoing processes of data collection:** regular collection, storage and validation of monitoring data (including field visit notes) as per approved Measurement Frameworks and MEAL Plans.
4. **Periodic analysis and reporting:** using data to track progress internally, preparing 6-monthly progress reports, and drawing conclusions to inform mid-course corrections
5. **Commissioning studies and evaluations:** encompassing research studies, baselines, mid-term evaluation, project, regional programme/funding window and overall LIFT evaluations
6. **Multi-stakeholder learning, and policy-influence events/groups:** bringing diverse groups of concerned stakeholders together to engage with evidence and translate it into new/improved interventions

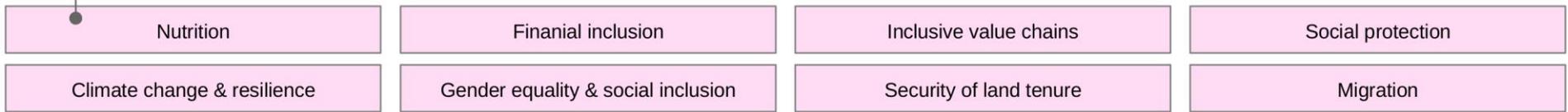
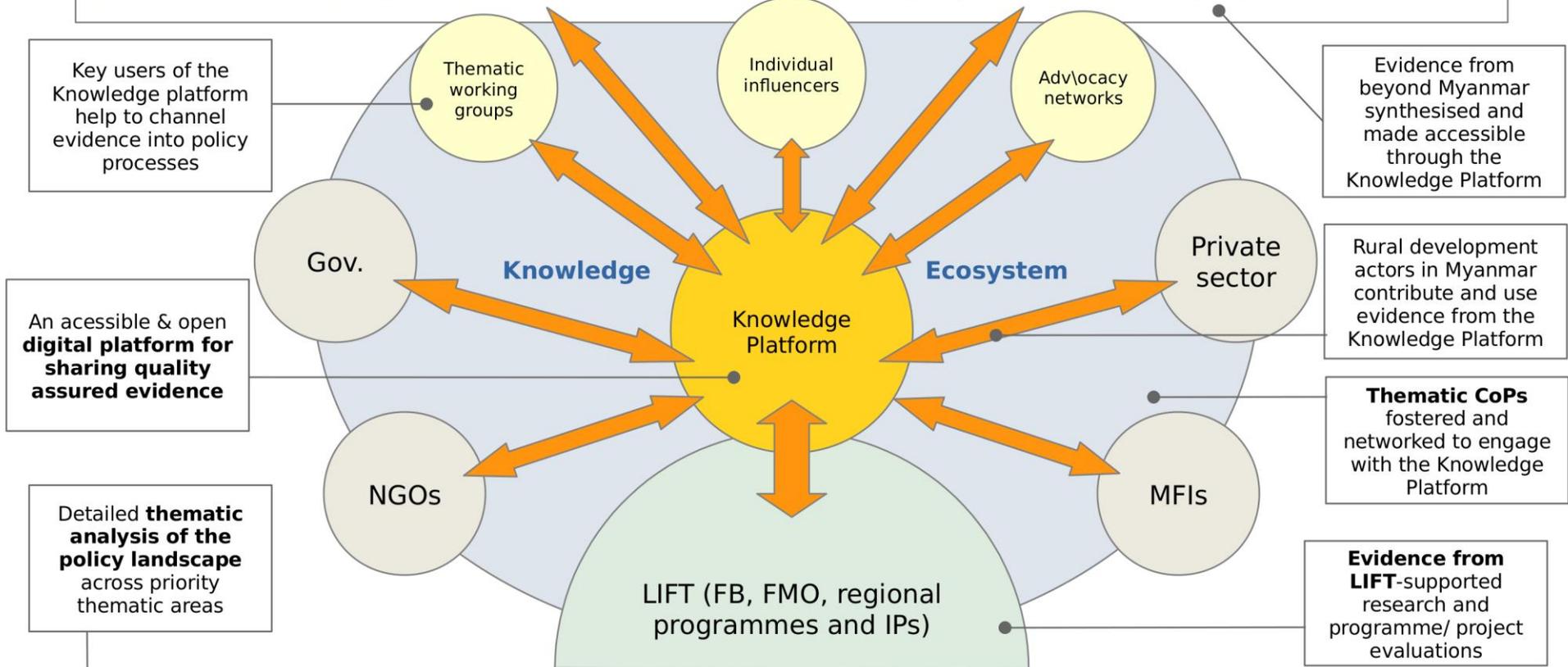
To support activities across each of the above-mentioned steps, LIFT will engage the required external technical expertise and it will do so in a manner that strengthens LIFT's own capacity across the FMO, as well as at the level of individual projects. Moreover, particular emphasis will be placed on ensuring the quality of data and evidence that is generated across all LIFT projects *and* on ensuring that the evidence thus generated feeds back into ongoing processes of learning and improvement at the level of individual projects and the regional programmes.

Beyond this, LIFT will pay particular attention to feeding the evidence generated on the basis of regional and project Evaluation and Learning Questions into its work on policy influence. This will include the direct policy influence work that LIFT carries out as part of its national and regional programmes, as well as LIFT's longer term vision of establishing a knowledge platform to promote evidence-based, pro-poor development policy in Myanmar. The full development of LIFT as a knowledge platform will require further work. However, the diagram overleaf summarises the initial thinking related to this component. In brief, this is expected to include the following:

- LIFT will establish a comprehensive mapping of the policy landscape (actors, interests, policy processes, evidence gaps, demand for evidence, etc.) in Myanmar;
- LIFT will establish the knowledge platform and contribute robust evidence related to key thematic areas through rigorous and learning-oriented M&E in its programmes and projects, as well as through conducting and commissioning relevant research;
- Through the knowledge platform LIFT will source and synthesise the best knowledge from beyond Myanmar to inform development policy and practice in-country;

- A digital evidence/knowledge hub will be established to make quality assured evidence accessible to the local ecosystem of development actors;
- Rural development actors in Myanmar will contribute and use evidence from the knowledge platform to improve their own development practice; and
- LIFT will foster, support and network national development actors to engage with evidence through a combination of on-line and off-line learning events and communities of practice.

Key national and international stakeholders of the Knowledge Platform



Thematic areas

8. Annex 1: LIFT Theory of Change Narrative

The LIFT theory of change (TOC) sets out the results that LIFT seeks to achieve across all its regional programmes and at the national level. By 2018, when LIFT's current strategy will come to an end, LIFT envisions itself as **a collective and influential voice for innovation and learning that provides a platform for enhanced policy engagement on resilient, pro-poor rural development**. LIFT's realisation of this vision hinges on its ability to generate, synthesise and facilitate the uptake of robust evidence drawn from its own interventions, as well as from other national and international sources.

LIFT's goal is **to contribute to the national goal of sustainably reducing the number of people living in poverty and hunger in Myanmar**. LIFT will pursue this goal by focusing on its purpose: **to increase the incomes and nutrition status of poor people in Myanmar by promoting resilient livelihoods and food security**. LIFT defines resilience as the increased capacity of individuals, households and communities to cope with (i.e. mitigate the negative impact of) and recover from (i.e. return to equal or better conditions after being affected by) various shocks and stresses arising from climate change and both macro³ and micro or lifecycle⁴ economic pressures. Livelihoods are resilient, then, when they enable people to continue to thrive and prosper in the face of such shocks and stresses.

To achieve its purpose, LIFT interventions will address three distinct yet at times overlapping categories of rural household. These are represented in the TOC diagram by the three vertical arrows that run through the eight programme outcomes and are defined in the LIFT Strategy as follows:

- **Stepping up:** Rural households with land, labour and/or commercial potential to 'step up' the value ladder and out of poverty through increases in labour and land productivity, as well as through enhanced capacity to market production.
- **Stepping out:** Rural households or household members to productively 'step out' of agriculture, and into more productive sectors of the economy over time. This could be a local "step out" by finding better-paid employment in local non-farm activities. It can also be a "migration step out" to take advantage of opportunities further afield.
- **Hanging in:** Households without the commercial potential to 'step up' or the ability to 'step out', can 'hang in', using agriculture, farm-based or other natural resource-based livelihood activities as a safety net and improve their food security and nutrition outcomes during Myanmar's period of economic transition.

LIFT will track its progress toward achieving its purpose by focusing on four interdependent **purpose level outcomes:**

- **Increased incomes of rural households:** by increasing their incomes through a wide range of farm-based livelihood and off-farm employment opportunities, rural households (and rural-to-urban migrants) will be better placed to fulfil their basic needs and aspirations.
- **Increased resilience of rural households and communities to shocks, stresses and adverse trends:** by enabling rural households to acquire more assets and diversify their income sources, they will be able to better cope with shocks, stresses and adverse trends.

³ Macro-economic pressures include market fluctuations and the changing structure of economic opportunities arising from economic transition.

⁴ Lifecycle pressures reflect the different economic constraints faced by individuals and households over time, typically linked to major events such as marriages and ageing.

- **Improved nutrition of women and children:** by increasing food security, ensuring an acceptable level of dietary diversity (particularly for women and children) and reducing stunting amongst children under five, the poor will experience long-term benefits to their wellbeing and increased resilience.
- **Improved policies and effective public expenditure for pro-poor rural development:** by feeding evidence from LIFT interventions and beyond into policy processes and actively working with regional and national government to improve the quality of policy implementation, the role of the public sector in supporting resilience-centred, pro-poor development will be strengthened.

To achieve these higher level outcomes, LIFT will work at three levels: village, sector and policy to achieve a set of **eight programme outcomes**.

- **At the village level:** supporting direct interventions with households, community-based organisations and local government.
- **At the sector level:** working with governments at the regional and township levels, as well as private sector players and other non-governmental and civil society organisations, to enable and influence them to play a greater role in pro-poor development.
- **At the policy level:** working through various channels to influence government policy formulation, policy implementation and spending for improved, evidence-based, pro-poor rural development.

The eight **programme outcomes** and the broad types of interventions that will help to achieve them are described below:

- **Increased sustainable agricultural and farm-based production by smallholder farmers (includes livestock, aquaculture and agroforestry):** LIFT will support the establishment of sustainable and effective advisory services that are responsive to farmers' needs and assist farmers to adopt improved and climate smart agricultural practices, inputs, technologies and equipment that are suited to their specific agro-ecological and economic contexts. This includes sustainable intensification (for example, through double-cropping), adopting more stress tolerant seed varieties, diversifying production into more nutritious and profitable crops, the use of drip-irrigation systems and various forms of mechanisation, and a variety of improved livestock management and aquaculture practices. By adopting these improved practices, rural households will be able to obtain higher levels of productivity. Where appropriate LIFT will work with private sector players involved in equipment and input supply, as well as in the provision of advisory services. LIFT will also work with government agencies to strengthen their role in this process and to create enabling policies to support such changes where required.
- **Improved market access and market terms for smallholder farmers:** LIFT will support farmers to improve farmers' access to both input and output markets with a view to enabling them to get a better deal. A key component of this will be supporting farmers to organise into producer organisations and strengthening the capacity of these producer organisations to procure inputs and distribute inputs to farmers and to store, process and market produce in a manner that increases returns to farmers. At the same time, given that many farmers will continue to sell their crops individually, advisory services will train

farmers on improved marketing practices and the adoption of various post-harvest and marketing practices (such as storage, delayed sale, quality sorting of produce, changing markets, etc.) that improve their market terms. Where appropriate, LIFT will work with private sector players to increase the availability of quality inputs and equipment and to secure stable output markets. It will also seek to influence policies that restrict farmers' abilities to secure better market terms (e.g. livestock slaughter policies).

- **Increased and safe employment in non-farm activities for smallholders and landless:** LIFT will enable individuals from poor rural households to gain access to non-farm employment, either locally or through migration, to nearby or even distant urban areas. The support provided will encompass the provision of market-oriented skills training, the facilitation of linkages with employers, various migration advice and life-skills trainings, as well as trainings to support the establishment of small businesses and micro-enterprises. In the case of the latter, a particular focus will be placed on supporting the establishment of small scale agricultural services (drip irrigation, tractor-based ploughing services, etc.).
- **Increased access to adequate and affordable financial services by smallholders and landless:** LIFT will expand the availability and uptake of inclusive financial services targeted at various categories of rural households, small businesses and micro-enterprises. It will aim to achieve this primarily by strengthening the capacity of micro-finance institutions and banks to provide appropriately sized loans at affordable rates of interest on a larger scale. A particular emphasis will be placed on providing loans to support farming and other rural households to make productive investments in either existing or new livelihood activities. Financial advice will also be provided to help rural households restructure their loans (i.e. pay off multiple high interest loans in the informal credit system with a single lower interest loan).
- **Improved nutrition, sanitation and hygiene practices:** LIFT will support communities to adopt improved nutrition, sanitation and hygiene practices, with a particular emphasis on ensuring improved nutritional outcomes for children and women. Particular emphasis will be placed on the nutrition and health status of children during their first 1000 days. LIFT will support a variety of activities to improve nutritional awareness of both men and women with a particular focus on ensuring adequate dietary intake for pregnant women, exclusive breastfeeding for children under six months of age and appropriate dietary diversity for children under five. In addition to this, LIFT will support activities that lead to improved sanitation and hygiene, including access to safe water and improved sanitation facilities, so as to mitigate the risk of diarrhoea particularly amongst young children, which adversely impacts on higher level nutritional outcomes.
- **Safeguarded access to and sustainable use of natural resources for smallholders and landless:** LIFT will support the protection of sustainable and equitable management of key common property natural resources including forests, grazing lands, mangroves and open fisheries. It will do so by promoting appropriate forms of local management (community-led, joint management with community and government, etc.) with effective mechanisms for ensuring the equitable access to benefits derived from these resources.
- **Strengthened local capacity of communities, local government and civil society organization (CSOs) to support and promote food and livelihoods security:** LIFT will support efforts to strengthen the capacity of key local actors to play an enabling role in promoting food and livelihood security. This includes ensuring that local CSOs have access to funds and technical support to enable them to perform a wide range of developmental

functions. In addition, LIFT will seek to strengthen capacity at the village level by supporting work with various village level organisations (including modern and traditional institutions, Village Saving and Loan Associations and Village Development Committees) to play a more active role in promoting food and livelihood security, both directly and through advocacy activities, as well as by strengthening linkages between such groups and local government agencies.

- **Generation of policy-relevant evidence regarding smallholder farmers and landless:** LIFT will commission policy-relevant research and conduct robust and rigorous monitoring and evaluation of activities carried out in each of the above-mentioned domains, in order to generate policy relevant evidence. Significant investment will be made to ensure the quality, reliability and utility of evidence generated and to use the relevant mechanisms to channel evidence into appropriate policy-forums, so as to improve both the formulation and implementation of government policies and programmes.

LIFT will also ensure that gender equality and social inclusion are included as cross-cutting themes in all the activities it supports. It will also work to strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations as both a means and an outcome of achieving its purpose.