# M&E/Learning Guidelines for IPs

(To be used for preparation of Concept Notes and Proposals to LIFT)

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## Background

LIFT's new strategy (2015-2018) envisions LIFT as a knowledge platform. In line with this, LIFT is revising its approach to M&E to place greater emphasis on learning, knowledge management and policy influence. To achieve this, LIFT has divided its M&E/Learning Framework into three levels: (1) LIFT as a whole; (2) LIFT's regional programmes; (3) LIFT projects (Implementing Partners). LIFT projects constitute specific contributions to LIFT's regional programmes which are themselves context-specific applications of the LIFT Results Framework. This note provides a brief overview of the first two levels (that are the responsibility of the LIFT Fund Manager) and specifies the third level (for Implementing Partners (IPs)) in more detail to provide guidance for the development of the M&E/Learning components of their projects.

## LIFT level

At the first level, LIFT has defined a LIFT Results Framework (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 4 LIFT higher level outcomes and the 8 LIFT outputs 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 logframe, primarily relying on centrally collected data. LIFT as a whole will be evaluated on the basis of its achievements in terms of the results framework.

## Regional programme level

LIFT has developed actor-centred Theories of Change[1] (TOCs) for each region. These ToCs present the various outcomes that the programme needs to achieve (see more on ToCs below). These outcomes include High Level Outcomes and Intermediate Outcomes. Each regional programme involves Calls for Proposals that are guided by the programme high level outcomes and provide the necessary information for applicants to propose relevant intermediate outcomes. The actor-centred ToC also shows how different programme components (e.g. financial inclusion, advisory services, social protection, nutrition, migration, etc.) are expected to work together to deliver on the programme outcomes. The regional programme TOC also provides a basis for LIFT and key stakeholders to identify preconditions and risks and to define key evaluation and learning questions against which the regional programme is expected to generate evidence that can be used to improve both policy and practice. The regional TOCs are prepared and managed by the LIFT Fund Manager. IPs will be involved in the ongoing application and revision of the programme TOC during implementation.

## Project level

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

[1] An actor-centred theory of change (TOC) is used in complex interventions where results depend on changes in the behaviour and relationships of a large number of actors. It defines what the relevant actors in a system would need to be doing differently (individually and with each other) in order for the desired intervention goal (or vision or higher level outcomes) to be achieved. Each of these changes is understood as an outcome even if traditionally it might be described as an 'output' since it is not directly under the control of those developing the TOC.

- The specific outcomes, indicators  and questions that are relevant to them and their particular project (as for before some of these will correspond to the LIFT logframe);
- What is working, what is not working and why;
- Learning and improving interventions based on this; and
- Generating useful evidence from their projects that can inform policy and practice.

The project level M&E/Learning Framework will hinge on 3 main components: (1) a project Theory of Change; (2) a project Evaluation and Learning Plan; and (3) a project Measurement Plan. These components are described below. The Annexes present templates with examples of each.

## Theory of Change

IPs will be required to develop a clear Theory of Change (TOC) for their intervention that shows how the project will contribute to the achievement of the programme's high 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 both an 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; (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 (measurement plan) that can be used to track change over time; (5) devise clear and useful evaluation and learning questions; (6) organise learning processes at various levels by a diverse set of stakeholders.

As such a project ToC will need to show:

- The higher level outcomes that the project intends to contribute to;
- The sequence of intermediate outcomes that will lead to these higher level outcomes;
- The outputs through which these intermediate outcomes will be achieved (i.e. what the project will do to bring about these changes);
- The causal connections between different outputs and outcomes;

High level outcomes should be taken directly from those specified in the Call for Proposals. Insofar as possible, all intermediate outcomes and outputs should be as clear and specific as possible. They should mention the specific actors concerned. It should be possible for an outsider to understand the logic of the programme simply by following the flow of the boxes. The TOC can then be used to help identify a project Evaluation and Learning Plan and to develop their measurement (data collection) plan.

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

## Evaluation and Learning Plan

Each of the LIFT regional programmes has programme-level Evaluation and Learning Questions. IPs are expected to clearly indicate which of these 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 high level and intermediate outcomes. In addition to the programme-level Evaluation and Learning Questions, projects may wish to list additional questions based on their specific learning priorities and interests. An outline of why the question is important/of interest and the methods and approaches the project will use to generate insight and evidence in relation to these questions must also be provided. Ideally a project should not propose more than 10 questions (this does not include detailed sub-questions).

The Evaluation and Learning Plan should also detail arrangements for establishment of a project baseline which will provide:

- a baseline for monitoring progress - the first round of data collection against which ongoing monitoring results will be compared to track progress/performance;
- a basis for before-after comparison – assessment of the difference a project has made during implementation[2];
- formative research – to facilitate learning with additional insights that provide for ongoing refinement of project design.

A template for the Evaluation and Learning Plan questions, with example, is included in Annex 3.

### Measurement Plan

IPs will need to develop a clear measurement plan (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. It should also set out what tools will be used to collect the data, who will collect it and with what frequency. Further detail on how the data will be stored, analysed and used can be included in the proposal or else worked out at a later date. The data is expected to include a combination of outreach, output, outcome and feedback data as well as any other performance metrics that are relevant to the project in question (e.g. financial ratios for micro-finance institutions). Indicators may be quantitative or qualitative in nature. Columns are also provided for indicating annual targets against indicators.

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

In addition to this, a key set of milestones and targets should be provided for the project. This should draw on a subset of indicators listed in the measurement plan and should include a date for achievement and a quantitative target (where appropriate). Milestones and targets should be selected and defined so as to provide a high-level picture of whether the project is progressing as expected and according to the intended time-line. Ten- twelve milestones should be sufficient for a project. Ideally milestones should include a combination of outreach, output and outcome indicators.

The table below provides an example of how milestones and indicators should be presented in the concept note/proposal.

| | **Milestone** | **Target** | **Date** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Project launch workshop | NA | November 2015 |
| 2 | Formation of primary groups | 100 groups | January 2016 |
| 3 | Etc. | | |

## M&E/Learning Capacity

LIFT Fund Manager recognises that the requirements and expectations set out in this note may be new and challenging for some IPs and that IPs have different levels of experience and capacity in M&E/Learning. LIFT is committed to working with partners who are interested in and committed to taking M&E/Learning seriously. As such, LIFT intends to provide support to shortlisted IPs to help them refine their project TOC, ELP and MP. While TOCs should be agreed prior to final approval and contracting, further support and refinement of the ELP and MP can also be provided during the project inception phase.

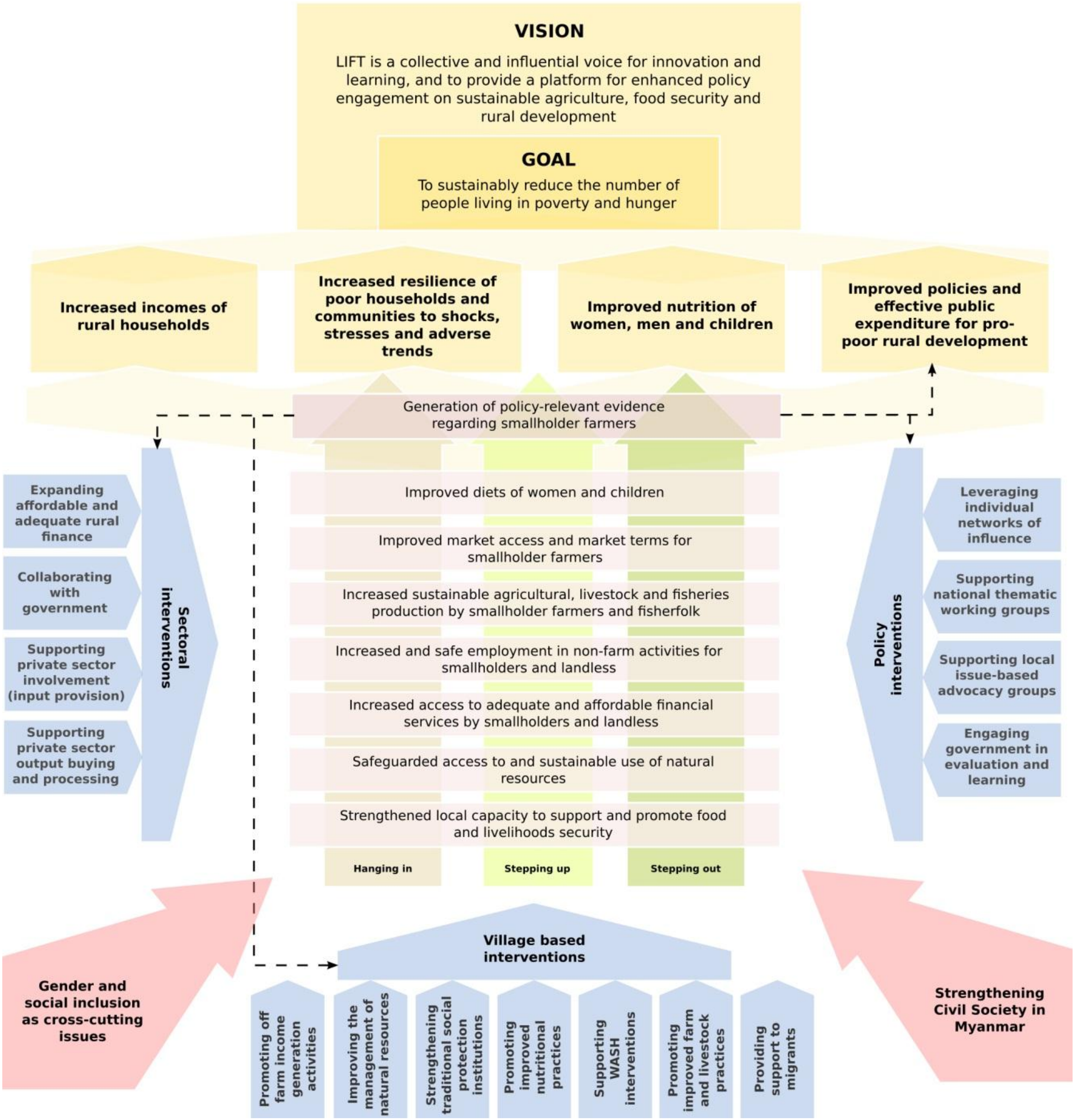
[2] Details on the requirements for midterm reviews and final external evaluations, and any end line survey activity that may be involved, can be seen in the LIFT Operational Guidelines.

IPs should give an indication in their proposal (concept note in the case of Call's for Concept Notes) submission of their existing M&E capacities based on the following parameters:

- Current M&E staffing
- Existing measurement practices
- Use of IT-based data storage systems

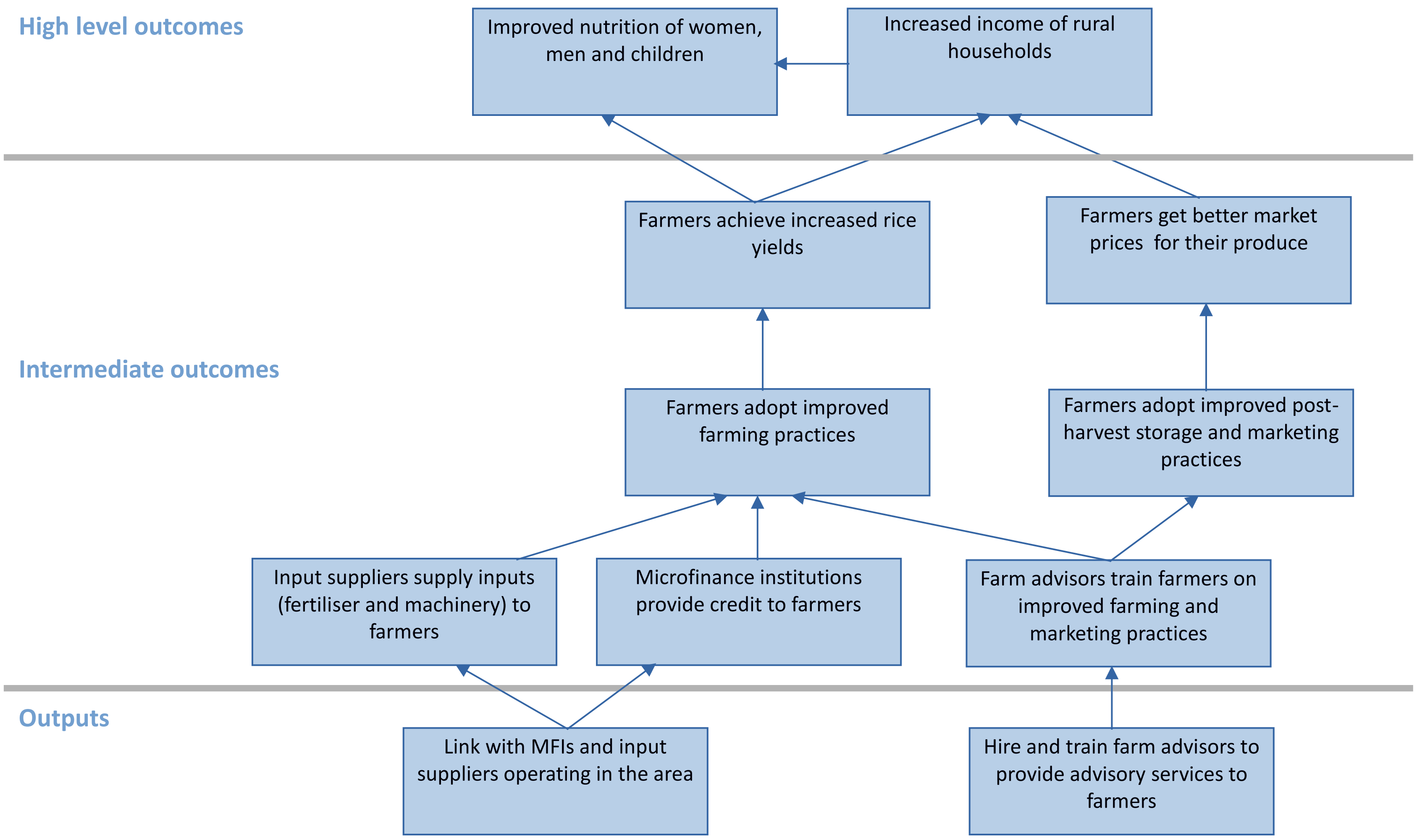
Ongoing M&E/Learning support may be agreed for some IP projects and included as part of the project design. This support will likely focus on: data collection and data storage and data analysis. IPs should give an indication of any support they think they will need for the successful implementation of their project.

## Annex 1: LIFT Results Framework



## Annex 2: 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: Evaluation and Learning Plan (Template and Example)

| | Evaluation and Learning Questions | Explain why is this question important | Proposed 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 villages (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. |

## Annex 4: Measurement Plan (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 HLOs, IOs 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 | | | |
| HLO | Increased income of rural households | • Income earned from sale of rice | | | | • HH survey | • Annual | • Surveyor |
| HLO | Improved nutrition of women, men and children | • Number of months consuming own rice | | | | • HH survey | • Annual | • Surveyor |
| IO | Farmers achieve increased rice yield | • Kg rice/unit area | | | | • HH Survey | • Seasonal | • Surveyor |
| IO | Farmers get better prices for their produce | • Price per kg obtained for rice sold | | | | • HH Survey | • Seasonal | • Surveyor |
| IO | Farmers adopt improved post-harvest and marketing practices | • % farmers using post-harvest storage facilities<br>• % farmers selling collectively<br>• % farmers with a contract<br>• % farmers selling when the price is high | | | | • Adoption survey | • Ongoing | • Farm advisors |
| IO | Farmers adopt improved farming practices | • % farmers applying fertiliser correctly<br>• % farmers using recommended seeds | | | | • Adoption survey | • Ongoing | • Farm advisors |
| IO | Farmers have access to inputs through local input suppliers | • Number of villages covered by certified input suppliers<br>• Number of inputs sold | | | | • VDC records<br>• Input supplier records | • Quarterly<br>• Monthly | • VDCs<br>• Field staff |
| IO | Farmers have access to credit through MFIs | • Number of farming HH who are members of a micro-credit group<br>• Number of agricultural loans disbursed | | | | • MFI records | • Monthly | • MFI providers |
| IO | 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 |
| O | 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 |
| O | Hire and train farm advisors to provide advisory services to farmers | • Number of training modules developed<br>• Number of farm advisors trained | | | | • Training records | • Quarterly | • Training staff |

* = HLO: Higher level outcome; IO: Intermediate outcome; O: Output.