A picture containing food, drawing

Description automatically generated

Logo, company name

Description automatically generated

*Replace logos below with logo for your research center*

*Replace CRP logos on right with those associated with your project*

**Instructions:**

* This document is a template for the creation of ICARDA MEL plans. While this template aids in supporting a standardized process, all projects are different, thus adaptations should be considered.
* It is suggested to begin the MEL plan process by familiarizing oneself with the project proposal and discussing preliminary M&E related questions with Enrico Bonaiuti and the project manager.
* The “Data management” section should be discussed with Pietro Bartolini
* Highlighted content indicates placeholder text that should be replaced.

**Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan Template**

*[Project Title]*

*[Date]*

**Authors**

Laura Becker[[1]](#footnote-1), Pietro Bartolini1, Claudio Proietti[[2]](#footnote-2), Innocent Bikara1,[[3]](#footnote-3), Enrico Bonaiuti1

[Please replace names above with the authors of this MEL plan]

**Project**

[Project title]

**Funded by**

[Donor name]

**Project Manager**

[Name]

**Project agreement number**

[#]

**Prepared by**

International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA)

**Suggested citation**

[Authors. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan. Project Title. ICARDA.]

**Keywords**

[Insert]

**Type: Manual**

A manual is any type of technical documentation that describes handling, functionality and architecture of a technical product or a product under development or use. Source: COAR

**Disclaimer**

A close up of a sign

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**About [Project title]**

*[Insert high-level summary of project goal and activities; dates of implementation]*

**About [Donor]**

*[Insert brief summary about the donor, their mission, the work they fund, etc.]*

**About ICARDA**

Established in 1977, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) is a non-profit, CGIAR Research Center that focusses on delivering innovative solutions for sustainable agricultural development in the nontropical dry areas of the developing world.

We provide innovative, science-based solutions to improve the livelihoods and resilience of resource-poor smallholder farmers. We do this through strategic partnerships, linking research to development, and capacity development, and by taking into account gender equality and the role of youth in transforming the non-tropical dry areas.

Address: Dalia Building, Second Floor, Bashir El Kasser St, Verdun, Beirut, Lebanon 1108-2010.

www.icarda.org

# Acronyms

*[Insert alphabetical list of acronyms here]*

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# 1. Introduction

This document provides an overview of the monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plan for the project, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Implementation of MEL in research for development projects ensures that the results are accurately reported, analyzed, and shared. This process is essential for donor reporting and accountability. Additionally, it works to ensure that the investment translates into sound research outcomes and shared learning. This establishes stronger, results-based projects, which together work to improve development outcomes.

## Project Overview

### Project Goals and Objectives

*[Dates of implementation, rationale for project]*

**Goal**

*[Insert text]*

**Objectives**

*[Insert text]*

### Project Components

*[List and brief description of project components, if applicable]*

Each component has corresponding activities, outputs, outcomes, and indicators. The pathways from these activities to the corresponding outputs and outcomes are further described in section X, and the indicators are detailed in section X.

### Project Governance and Management Structure

*[Information on who is implementer, who are partners, basic roles and responsibilities, is there a steering committee, how are decision-making processes organized]*

## Purpose of the Project MEL Plan

The purpose of this document is to set a plan in place for how MEL activities will be structured and approached for the *[Insert title]* project. The project activities, outputs, and outcomes are linked in an impact pathway, showing how the project activities ultimately are expected to lead to the end goals, as well as the identified risks and assumptions along the pathway [Note, some projects will not have impact pathways, adapt accordingly]. The activities, outputs, outcomes, indicators and data sources are defined, as well as the corresponding parties responsible. Together, this system will aid in tracking project progress and whether the intended outcomes were achieved at the end of the project.

# Project Results Framework

This section outlines the logical and theoretical frameworks for the project. The logical framework (section 2.1) outlines project outputs in relation to the three project components and the theory of change (section 2.2) describes the pathway from activity to outcome, linkages across project outputs, and key risks and assumptions. This section also analyses the project’s alignment with the CGIAR Strategic Results Framework from the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and the ICARDA Strategic Plan.

## Project Logical Framework

*[Insert table of logical framework, use this template: https://mel.cgiar.org/reporting/report/id/8410/del\_id/21920*

## Theory of Change

### 2.2.1 Impact Pathway

*[Summary of impact pathway; figure of impact pathway]*

*Example impact pathway, including activities, outputs, outcomes, and linkages*

*Timeline

Description automatically generated*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| *[Table X: Risks and Assumptions along the impact pathway]* | | | | | |
| **Link** | **Assumption** | **Risk** | **Risk mitigation measure** | **Other inputs needed** | **Unintended effects** |
| 1 |  |  |  |  |  |

*\*Note the link number should correspond with the number used to label the link in the impact pathway above*

## Project Alignment to ICARDA Strategic Plan

*[Paragraph explaining how project links to* [*ICARDA Strategic Plan*](https://www.icarda.org/publications/11369/icarda-strategic-plan-2017-2026-summary)*]*

*Figure X: Linkage between project outcomes and the ICARDA strategic framework (SRFs) and cross-cutting themes (CCTs).*

*Example figure linking project outputs to CGIAR strategic plan*

*Diagram

Description automatically generated*\*\*Note: Include number labels on each linkage in order to describe them in the section below

**① *Link between output X and ICARDA sub-SRP Y***

*[Name of project output and ICARDA sub-SRP and how they are linked]*

* **Assumptions:** [Insert]
* **Risks:** [Insert]
* **Risk mitigation:** [Insert]

## Project Alignment to CGIAR Strategic Results Framework

*[Paragraph explaining how project links to* [*CGIAR strategic framework*](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjArZbnzLHsAhVSLewKHYRxDbQQFjAAegQIBBAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fcgspace.cgiar.org%2Fbitstream%2Fhandle%2F10947%2F3865%2FCGIAR%2520Strategy%2520and%2520Results%2520Framework.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1_j94QrQwoSycr_BNMB6PD)*.]*

*Figure X: Linkage between project outputs and the CGIAR strategic framework SLOs, Intermediate Development Outcomes (IDOs), and sub-IDOs*

*Example figure linking project outputs to CGIAR strategic framework*

Diagram

Description automatically generated

**① *Link between output X and sub-IDO Y***

*[Name of project output and CGIAR sub-IDO and how they are linked]*

* **Assumptions:** [Insert]
* **Risks:** [Insert]
* **Risk mitigation:** [Insert]

*[Paragraph explaining how project links to \_\_\_ CRP]*

*Figure X: Linkage between project outputs and the CGIAR CRP \_\_\_*

**① *Link between output X and CRP FP outcome Y***

*[Name of project output and CGIAR sub-IDO and how they are linked]*

* **Assumptions:** [Insert]
* **Risks:** [Insert]
* **Risk mitigation:** [Insert]

## 2.5 Project alignment to Donor Results Framework

*[Paragraph explaining how project links to donor strategic framework (if they have one)]*

*Figure X: Linkage between project outcomes and the donor strategic framework.*

**① *Link between output X and donor outcome***

*[Name of project output and donor outcome and how they are linked]*

* **Assumptions:** [Insert]
* **Risks:** [Insert]
* **Risk mitigation:** [Insert]

# 3. Monitoring System

The project MEL system includes indicators to track the project’s overall progress and provide measurable means of verifying whether or not the outputs and outcomes are achieved. Because indicators are integrated along the impact pathway, they also assist in identifying project components that have enabled or disabled predicted project outputs and outcomes. Indicators will be collected on a routine (frequently collected, measured, and assessed throughout the project) or periodic (measured biannually or annually) basis. The following sections include details on these indicators and how they will be collected. Table X provides an overview of all indicators, noting when an indicator has a matching or similar ICARDA indicator.

Table X: Summary of Routine Project Indicators

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Relation to impact pathway** | **No.** | **Indicator** | **Monitoring frequency** | **Reference ICARDA or CGIAR CRP indicator** |
| Output X |  |  |  |  |

## 3.1 Routine monitoring

Project staff will collect routine data regularly as part of project activities and [person/group] will be responsible for obtaining data and uploading into MEL to ensure up-to-date documentation. Indicators are listed below and data management is detailed in the following section 4.

### 3.1.1 Routine Indicator Definitions

|  |
| --- |
| **1. Indicator Title** |
| **Description** |
| **Definition:**  **Unit of Measure:**  **Method of Calculation**:  **Disaggregated by:**  **Baseline:**  **Target**:  **Rationale**: |
| **Data Collection and Analysis** |
| **Data sources:**  **Data collection method:** [Relevant details on data collection methods and/or tools should be included in the annex]  **Timing/Frequency of data collection and report:**  **Primary data collection responsibility:**  **Evidence required:**  **Comments and limitations**: |

## 3.2 Periodic Evaluation

*[Summary of when and what periodic monitoring/evaluation measures will be used.]* Periodic monitoring will consist of the following:

***(1) Survey/evaluation 1:*** *Description*

### 3.2.1 Key Evaluation Questions

The final project evaluation will be undertaken by an independent consultant(s) to complete the following:

1. Appraise the activities and outputs achieved by ICARDA and partners,
2. Identify and assess outcomes of the project,
3. Identify the enablers and/or constraints to the attainment of project results and lessons learned

The selected evaluator(s) will make reference, but not be limited, to the following evaluation questions. *[If donor has evaluation guidance document, make sure this is integrated or adapted. The CRPs also have evaluation questions to take into account. Some projects may also include mid-term evaluations.]*

Table 5: Project Evaluation Questions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Project Evaluation Questions** | |
| **[Overarching topic 1]** | |
| 1 | Question |

### 3.2.2 Periodic Evaluation Indicators

Table X: Summary of Periodic Evaluation Project Indicators

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Relation to impact pathway** | **No.** | **Indicator** | **Baseline** | **Target** | **Data collection frequency** |
| *Outcome X* | ***X*** | *Indicator title* | *Value* | *Value* | *Baseline/annual/endline* |

|  |
| --- |
| **1.**  **Indicator title** |
| **Description** |
| **Definition:**  **Unit of Measure:**  **Method of Calculation**:  **Disaggregated by:**  **Baseline:**  **Target**:  **Rationale**: |
| **Data Collection and Analysis** |
| **Data sources**:  **Data collection method:**  **Timing/Frequency of data collection and report:**  **Primary data collection responsibility:**  **Evidence required:**  **Comments and limitations:** |

# 4. Data Management

## 4.1 Data Summary

[Provide an overview of the data to be collected and the key platforms for data collection/storage]

[Describe the data collection process and the type of expected dataset. Specify if the datasets will contain exclusively original data or it will re-use any existing data]

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ID/name of the associated deliverable | Provisional Title of the planned Dataset | Type of dataset [choose from MEL option:  - socio-economic survey data - crop yields in field experiment - spatial (raster) - spatial (vector) - other (specify type)] | Expected delivery date | Expected publication date (if applicable) | Main responsible/author | Data collection approach | Data collection platform |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

[Provide indication about the target audience and the value of the data]

## 4.2 FAIR data

### 4.2.1 Making data findable, including provisions for metadata

All datasets and related products will be provided with extensive metadata and search keywords:

* Keyword(s): MEL provides a list of keywords from [AGROVOC Web Service.](http://aims.fao.org/vest-registry/vocabularies/agrovoc-multilingual-agricultural-thesaurus)New subjects can be added by typing or copy & paste them from another source, if comma separated (All new, non-AGROVOC subjects are coloured in green). Please ensure to includes at least one keyword from AGROVOC and that all keywords are coherent with the knowledge reported.
* Commodity(ies): MEL provides a list of crops/livestocks to be mentioned if relevant to the uploaded item.
* Abstract: Each dataset must include a brief abstract of the content of the dataset.
* Dataverse subject: MEL provides a list of broad subjects (Agricultural Sciences, Earth and environmental Sciences, Social Sciences, etc…) to be related to the item.
* URL to related publication(s): Several options are made available to link the item to related publications, if available (DOI, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, CGSpace and Other URL).
* Research country(ies) & location(s): MEL provides options to indicate the exact location of the research (countries, cities, coordinates).

For more details, please follow the “edit details” section of the [MEL USER GUIDE](https://cgiarmel.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/MEL/pages/594739266/Edit+details).

Once the curation will be completed, the products will be findable with an ID code and persistent link. Previous version of the data will be stored on MEL and can be made available by the author upon request.

### 4.2.2. Making data openly accessible

Unless otherwise stated by the publisher, ICARDA’s outputs will be published under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0) license that allows others to reuse, redistribute, translate, and make an adaptation to the work subject to the publication being fully attributed. This license is chosen because of its “right to offer” nature, which ensures maximum dissemination.

[If different agreements are in place, please substitute the previous text providing the right information]

Researchers are required to ensure that all their datasets (and data collection tools) are freely accessible through the publisher's website or ICARDA’s repository on Dataverse MEL in accordance with the CGIAR OA Guidelines[[4]](#footnote-4).

The datasets described in the present document will be available in the following Dataverse repository:

[Select one or more of the following repositories from Dataverse MEL (In case the datasets need to be approved to a different Dataverse the list of repositories will be different):

* Collect, Conserve and Use Agricultural Biodiversity
* Climate adapted crops and livestock
* Building resilient integrated crop-livestock farming systems
* Sustainable value chains, supportive policies and viable off-farm activities
* Sustainable use and management of scarce water and land resources
* Scaling-up of proven technological packages
* Gender equality and youth
* Capacity development
* Big Data and ICT]

### 4.2.3 Making data interoperable

Each dataset produced by ICARDA is related to a specific research project configurated onto the MEL platform, under which it is reported. Once uploaded on MEL, each dataset will be curated by the Data Curation team in accordance with the General Dataset Curation Guide (GDCG)[[5]](#footnote-5). The Data Curation Team is composed by 5 Data curators and 1 Data Management coordinator. Each data curator is responsible for the cleaning of the data and for the preparation of a complete data dictionary, the coordinator reviews the final product, updates the metadata on MEL and approves the dataset to DataverseMEL.

A curated dataset contains only raw data, without additional elaboration (no graphs, no formulas, etc…) and follows machine-readable standards. The standard curated dataset is in English. However, in order to avoid translation errors, whenever a product includes different languages, these are maintained. The CSV or comma-separated value files are the preferred data format for most data repositories and are recommended for publishing machine-readable tabular data.

[Specific type of dataset may require different ad hoc data format. If your datasets are composed by raster, maps, images, or specific type of compressed files, please describe them in detail]

In order to provide information about the content and the context of the research, each dataset must include a complete Data Dictionary. The Data Dictionary must include the following three elements (each one represented by a CSV file):

* DataDictionary\_Introduction: the file provides background explanatory information about the dataset.
* DataDictionary\_ElementDescription: the file provides explanation for each variable/column and any code used inside the dataset.
* DataDictionary\_UniqueIdentifier: the file provides reference links to an online resource for elements, terms, and concepts used inside the dataset.

### 4.2.4 Increase data re-use (through clarifying licences)

[Specify if the data will be immediately available for re-use or if they will be subjected to an embargo (and until when)]

[Specify any other restriction in place to data re-usability (if applicable)]

## 4.3 Allocation of resources

Unless otherwise agreed in the project agreement, ICARDA Data Management Team will be in charge of the datasets curation, as part of the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) activities.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| ID/name of the associated deliverable | Provisional Title of the planned Dataset | Main responsible/author/point of contact | Data curator | Data Management Coordinator |
|  |  |  |  |  |

[Specify if the project is allocating a specific amount of resources to data curation and MEL activities]

## 4.4 Data security

MEL is under a Secure Socket Layer (SSL) that ensures that any traffic exchange to and from its server is encrypted. Access Controls provide any given user with different permission levels (for example, there are normal users, CRP admins and individual assigned in different areas of the workflow). Each user can only access and/or make changes what he has permission for, this ensure that a normal user cannot access any privileged information without authorization. In terms of code/development, there are validation checks for all user content to ensure that only required data is entered (for example, if a form requires a number, entering a letter is not acceptable). These validation checks are meant to hinder attack vectors such us SQL Injections, and Cross Server Scripting (XSS) attacks.

Dataverse is a software installation that allows for sharing, citing, and analyzing research data. In MEL, it has been implemented as an Application Programming Interface (API). Dataverse has security measures in place to protect the loss, misuse and alteration of the information under their control. In order to access data on dataverse, any user needs to have API keys (credentials). Without them, he will not be able to send or retrieve any data stored. The API is developed in a way that one can only query and retrieve data that they need. User actions (edit, delete, update) are limited with regards to the user's permission level. The communication between MEL and Dataverse is secure as it is under a Secure Socket Layer (SSL) that ensures that any traffic exchange between the two is encrypted.

## 4.5 Ethical aspects

The authors are responsible for documenting that prior informed consent was obtained for all research activities in a manner consistent with the Research Ethics Policy. All sensible personal data obtained during the data collection will be anonymized during the curation process in order to protect the privacy of data collectors and interviewed people.

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships which have, or could be perceived to have, influenced their work.

[This is a standard formula. In case there is an interest conflict please disclose it in detail]

## 4.6 Other issues

[Do you make use of other national/funder/sectorial/departmental procedures for data management? If yes, which ones? For example: https://dmptool.org/]

# 5. Learning and Adaptive Management

The project team will document, share, and make use of lessons learned for continuous project improvement. The project criteria for identifying lessons learned will be as follows:

1. Lessons that are relevant/related to the **project thematic areas**;
2. Lessons whose recommendations have a bearing on **project relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact**

Learning and adaptive management will be based on (1) operational processes-related lessons learned, which captures more day-to-day learnings as they arise, and (2) research-based learning which is more of a periodic, reflective process that focuses around revisiting the ToC.

## 5.1 Operational Processes-Related Lessons Learning

1. **Operational experience-based/ After-Action lessons learned identification**

During their regular roles, project staff shall identify operational experiences that are potential learning experiences per the three topic areas above and document them in the [Lessons Learned report template](https://repo.mel.cgiar.org/handle/20.500.11766/11140) and submit it to MEL staff.

1. **Staff Meeting and Project Review Workshop Pause-and-Reflect sessions:**

The Project Manager will ensure that pause-and-reflect sessions are incorporated in regular staff meetings, as well as during the Annual Project Review Workshop. These sessions will focus on three questions[[6]](#footnote-6):

1. What went right, why, and things that worked that can be continued/repeated
2. What went wrong, why, and things that didn’t work that should be avoided/discontinued
3. What needs to be improved

Through discussion and brainstorming during these meetings, the meeting chair will seek to determine whether any of the discussed experiences are worth documenting as a lesson learned. The chair or a volunteer from the meeting shall fill out the Lessons Learned template and submit it to MEL staff, who will review all submitted operational processes-based lessons learned documents and provide guidance and feedback to project staff within 14 days. Completed Lessons Learned Report Templates will be uploaded onto the [MEL Platform](http://mel.cgiar.org) by project MEL staff. The institutional MEL Specialist will review the submitted lesson learned and provide feedback to the project MEL staff and/or approve the lesson learned. The institutional MEL Specialist will approve each lesson learned either internal or public sharing.

## 5.2 Research-Based Lessons Learning

### 5.2.1 ToC Review and Adaptation

The ToC was developed based on an understanding of how change may happen as a result of the project activities, based upon multiple assumptions, hypotheses, and linkages. However, it is recognized that the understanding of change and the realities of project implementation are not static. Therefore, the project team will routinely test, revise, and adapt the project ToC.

The project team will organize a one-day meeting to review and refine the ToC with project staff and stakeholders at two points: (1) after the first three months of the project and (2) after the first year of project implementation, during the Annual Project Review and Planning Workshop, further described in section 6.

For the ToC Review process, the meeting participants will break into groups, making sure that each group includes of members with a breadth of expertise and knowledge. The breakout groups will discuss key questions related to the: (1) relevance of outcomes in the ToC, and (2) the rationale of the outcomes and causal pathways. For each outcome, groups should document responses to the following questions:

1. **Relevance of outcome:**
2. Is the outcome still relevant? If Yes, maintain; If No, delete and document the irrelevant ones and include any new ones.
3. Is the outcome still achievable within the ICARDA and partners’ technical and operational capability, and within the available project resources?
4. Are the output results critical for achieving the corresponding outcomes?
5. Are the associated outputs actionable?
6. **Rationale of outcomes and causal pathways:**
7. Do the assumptions still hold? If Yes, no need to review them; If No, revise the assumptions and the associated risk analysis and risk mitigation measures.
8. Are there shifts in the risks of the ‘unchanged’ assumptions? If yes, document these and design appropriate risk mitigation actions.
9. Do we now have better or worse evidence for the assumptions made? If better, document. If worse, how can we seek/generate better evidence?
10. **Final assessment**
11. Which of these outcomes to you predict will be at risk of insufficient evidence and why?
12. Which of these outcomes have knowledge gaps (insufficient evidence to support the preconditions, assumptions, linkages, and activities) and therefore should be the basis for a learning action plan?

It is recommended that the initial group of people that conduct ToC analysis do not exceed 5. If a review meeting is comprised of more than 5 people, create breakout groups of equal numbers, with a mix of specializations. The meeting facilitator should spend some time checking on the groups, ensuring that varying viewpoints are considered, and consensus generated. The meeting facilitator will collate the information from all groups and share the joint ToC analysis responses with the project MEL staff, who will make final ToC revisions in consultation with the institutional MEL Specialist. Changes made in the project ToC will be clearly communicated back to the project staff and donor with clear justification.

### 5.2.2 Identification of Learning Outcomes & Action Plan

As identified in the “final assessment” question from the previous activity, the ToC outcomes for which there is [a risk of] insufficient evidence to support the preconditions, assumptions, linkages, and activities will be considered to represent a knowledge gap and will be the basis for the subsequent year’s learning agenda. This activity will be challenging during the first ToC review, as the majority of project activities will not have started yet. Therefore, participants are encouraged to prioritize well and predict areas that may be at risk of insufficient evidence. The learning agenda should be limited to two outcomes. If more than two learning outcomes are initially identified, the project team will prioritize the top two for which the learning will be most useful and actionable and those with the riskiest assumptions and thus endanger the achievement of project outcomes.

To ensure a broad and beneficial learning agenda, each outcome identified will have only one to three learning questions associated with it. Each learning question must have an associated action plan clearly stating the metrics that will be used to measure the different dimensions of the learning questions, the data collection mechanism, timing, and responsible parties. The Learning Question Action Plan shall become an integral part of the subsequent year’s MEL Annual Plan. A template for the Learning Question Action Plan is presented in Annex X.

## 5.3 Storage and Dissemination of Lessons Learned

After approval from the Institutional MEL Specialist, operational and research-based lessons learned may be disseminated to the stakeholders below through the following methods.

**Table X:** Dissemination of Lessons Learned to Internal and External Stakeholders

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Audience | Dissemination methods |
| Internal |  |
| ICARDA staff | MEL Platform |
| Project staff and consultants | E-mails |
| External |  |
| Donor | E-mails |
| Partner | E-mails, shared databases |
| Other institutions involved | Conferences, blogs, webinars |

# 6. MEL Support Supervision

This section serves to guide MEL system and data quality checks at the project-level. MEL support supervision (MSS) will be conducted to appraise the project MEL system and the data collected and used for routine reporting. The specific objective of MSS will be to assess project reporting systems and routine reporting data, to identify strengths and weaknesses so corrective action can be taken.

The first cycle of MSS will be completed within six months of project initiation and the second cycle will be conducted after completion of year 1. The general approach is explained in section 5.1, the approach for data collection and validation are presented in sections 5.2 and 5.3, deliverables from MSS are included in section 5.4, and guidance on sharing MSS results is provided in section 5.5.

## 6.1 MSS Approach

The institutional MEL Specialist or Project MEL staff will lead an MSS at the project level. Each time MSS is conducted, an appreciative and supportive inquiry approach will be applied. After introducing the purpose of the MSS to the project staff, the assessment team shall discuss each evaluation criterion and create an understanding of the importance/scores attached to each criterion. Staff will be given ample opportunity to discuss the relevance, purpose and outcomes of each of the assessment criterion so as to ensure maximum benefit from the exercise.

The following steps will be followed in the implementation of MSS:

1. **Identification of the MSS team**: The Institutional MEL Specialist will identify the team to conduct MSS at the project office. The principle that will guide the selection of the team will be to promote learning across the institution and the project and thus other project team members with MEL roles may be invited onto the team.
2. **Developing a schedule** for the MSS as a team: Whereas a tentative schedule may have been developed by the MSS leader, the schedule will be revisited and/or adopted collectively.
3. **Identifying the MEL system components and/or indicators to be included** in the MSS.
4. **Selecting and refining the MSS templates**.
5. **Conducting MSS visits**.
6. **Preparing, presenting & sharing the MSS report** and creation of an action plan.
7. **Follow up** on the implementation of the MSS recommendations.

## 6.2 MEL System Assessment

The following sections are “checklists” of items to be reviewed during the assessment that should be saved in the MEL system or appropriate project data management system. The MEL staff should record the status of each component, the primary data source, and a brief explanation of how the action exists/is implemented.

### 6.2.1 MEL Governance/Leadership

1. There is a clear linkage between the MEL plan and the [MEL Platform](http://mel.cgiar.org), for recording MEL data;
2. These is sufficient structural MEL oversight and process supervision to minimize errors such as data measurement, recording, transcription, and transmission.

## 6.3 Data Verification & Validation

This will be done by tracing and verifying (recounting) data collected and used for reporting indicator results. This will help determine if the data was correctly recorded at the primary source and if there were no transcription and transmission errors. The following steps will be followed in the implementation of the data verification/validation component of MSS:

1. Cross-check the data submitted/reported in the quarterly, semi-annual or annual reports and identify indicators that are:
   1. Key for overall project reporting,
   2. Problematic in measurement and reporting,
   3. Have not been the subject of MSS before, or
   4. Whose reported figures seem not to conform to expectations;
2. Ascertain whether the recorded output at the primary data source matches the indicator definition;
3. Check availability and review completeness of all indicator source documents/data collection forms and summary forms at all the data aggregation levels:
4. Are some source documents missing? If Yes, determine how this might have affected reported numbers;
5. Are all available source documents complete? If no, determine how this might have affected reported numbers;
6. Review the dates on the source documents. Do all dates lie within the reporting period? If no, determine how this might have affected reported numbers;
7. Recount results from the source documents, compare the verified numbers to the reported numbers;
8. Conduct random verification of the records. For example, if the subject of verification is the number of trainees, randomly select a manageable number of trainees and reach them by telephone or e-mail to verify the authenticity of the records. In case some of the selected trainees for verification refute the claims as contained on the source documents, utilize the ratio of negative responses to the total responses to deflate the ‘verified number’;
9. Calculate the ratio/percent of the verified numbers to reported numbers, and determine the level of discrepancies (if any);
10. Seek additional information regarding any discrepancies encountered;
11. Document the observed discrepancies (if any) and the reasons provided; and
12. Collegially discuss solutions to the discrepancies.

## 6.4 Sharing MSS Results

Upon completion of each MSS assessment, a formal report of the results will be developed and shared with project staff and relevant MEL staff. The report will be discussed in a project staff meeting convened specifically for this purpose. An action plan to address the identified issues will then be developed and used as the basis for follow up to check on improvements. The MSS report template in Annex X will be used for this purpose.

## 6.5 Deliverables

1. Completed MSS checklist, as listed in sections 5.2 and 5.3 above. (Including status of each component and a brief explanation.
2. MSS report (Template in Annex X)

# 7. Project Review and Planning

The project review and planning process is envisioned to build a common understanding of performance of the project, create shared ownership for the achieved results, set the stage for entrenching corrective measures in subsequent project implementation cycles. MEL data should be a key part of project review and planning. The specific objectives of the project review workshops will be to:

1. Inform project and MEL staff of project implementation, progress, and results
2. Identify lessons learned based on the pause-and-reflect approach and the ToC review process outlined in Section 4.1
3. Plan for the following year
4. Enhance team building, team ownership of strategies, implementation plans, and results

## 7.1 Planning for the Project Review & Planning Workshops

The project review workshops will occur at \_#\_\_ points: [e.g. end of project year one, midline, endline. For your project, are there may be other meetings, opportunities where MEL information will be needed / used?]

Table: Implementation plan for the Annual Project Review Workshop

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Issues | Year 1 |
| Timing of the Workshop | At end of project year 1 |
| Duration | 3 Days |
| Workshop facilitators | Project MEL Research Fellow or Institutional MEL Specialist |
| Participants | Project staff |

### 7.1.2 End of Year 1 Workshop Agenda

**Date:**

**Location:**

*[\*\*Please adapt agenda as needed for your project]*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day 1: Progress to date** | | | |
| Time | Activity | Activity Facilitator | Note taker |
| 8:45-9:00 | Arrival |  |  |
| 9:00-9:30 | Introductions & Ice Breaker |  |  |
| 9:30-10:00 | Ground rules, expectations, and workshop objectives |  |  |
| 10:30-11:15 | The Bigger Picture: Setting the Stage |  |  |
| 11:15-11:30 | Break |  |  |
| 11:30-12:30 | Implementation Progress & Results: Part 1 |  |  |
| 12:30-13:15 | Lunch Break |  |  |
| 13:15-14:00 | Implementation Progress & Results: Part 2 |  |  |
| 14:00-15:30 | Breakout session: pause and reflect   * 45 min – group discussion of questions (listed in section 6.2.2) * 45 min – presentations of group discussions & Q&A |  |  |
| 15:30-15:45 | Break |  |  |
| 15:45-16:30 | Finance Report |  |  |
| 16:30-16:45 | Wrap up, plan for tomorrow |  | TBD |
| **Day 2: Theory of Change** | | | |
| Time | Activity | Activity Facilitator | Note taker |
| 8:45-9:00 | Arrival |  |  |
| 9:00-9:30 | Welcome & Ice Breaker |  |  |
| 9:30-10:00 | Overview of ToC, relevance, and introduction of ToC review activity |  |  |
| 10:00-12:30 | Breakout groups ToC review: Outcome 1 & 2 |  |  |
| 12:30-13:15 | Lunch Break |  |  |
| 13:15-15:15 | Breakout groups ToC review: Outcome 3 & 4 |  |  |
| 15:15-15:30 | Break |  |  |
| 15:30-17:00 | Group discussion & presentations |  |  |
| **Day 3: Planning for the Future** | | | |
| Time | Activity | Activity Facilitator | Note taker |
| 8:45-9:00 | Arrival |  |  |
| 9:00-9:30 | Welcome & Ice Breaker |  |  |
| 9:30-11:30 | Breakout groups: Identification of Learning Outcomes & Action Plan |  |  |
| 11:30-12:30 | Presentation and Q&A |  |  |
| 12:30-13:15 | Lunch Break |  |  |
| 13:15-15:30 | Thematic group breakout session: Work plan & budget for next year |  |  |
| 15:30-16:30 | Summary presentations and Q&A |  |  |
| 16:30-17:00 | Next steps & thank you |  |  |

## 7.2 Reflection on Progress Results

Reflection on the results achieved by the project will be done at two stages during this workshop: (1) A presentation of progress results; (2) Break-out sessions to reflect on positive and negative results.

### 7.2.1 Results Plenary Presentations

The following are the guiding principles for all presentations:

* 1. Start the presentation by celebrating team achievements. This is crucial to cultivate a positive team spirit.
  2. The presentation should, as much as possible, relate to the project result areas, activities and targets.
  3. The presentation should include time for group comments and questions. Any interactive components (especially during the virtual workshop) will be key for maintaining interest and engagement.

Table 9: Guidance on the presentation themes, content, presenters, and the required resources for the presentations

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Theme | Presenter | Content | Key resources |
| The bigger picture: Setting the stage | Project Manager | * Highlight key sector and program trends; * Strategic developments and frameworks | * + - Relevant and up-to-date national and international statistics and policy proclamations;     - ICARDA, CGIAR, CRP-WHEAT, and CRP-GLDC Strategies;     - Project proposal and bi-annual reports;     - Project work plan and budget |
| Implementation progress and results | Project component leaders | * Progress against work plan, budget, and allocated output indicator targets * Milestones achieved and deliverables completed | * Project implementation records * Project work plan and budget |
| MEL Research Fellow or MEL Specialist | * Consolidated status of project output and outcome indicators based on quarterly progress data, highlighting the actual achievement per planned result area and pitfalls * Lessons learned | * Project work plan and budget * Implementation reports, evaluation reports, data from the [MEL Platform](http://mel.cgiar.org) * Lessons learned reports |
| Finance report | Finance and Procurement Officers | * Expenditure by project component and any variances from plan * Unit cost of deliverables across the project implementation areas and implications thereof * Financial compliance issues and highlight of project or related audit issues * Regulatory developments that require budgetary changes | * Project work plan and budget * Audit reports and correspondences * National regulations, tax reforms etc. |

### 7.2.2 Breakout session: pause-and-reflect

Participants will break up into groups of 5 people maximum with a mix of skills and operational geographies. The groups reflect on result areas that had positive and negative variance as highlighted during the Implementation Progress and Results presentations. Each group works to answer the following questions:

1. What could we have done differently to achieve the planned targets? (Reflect on the planned processes, strategies, activities, partners, resources, etc.)
2. What are the key learning points from this under achievement and the reasons we have put forward?
3. Among the strategies, partners etc., what do we recommend to;
   1. Carry forward,
   2. Drop/discontinue or,
   3. Modify and continue, in the coming project implementation cycle (year).

The groups will present their findings in 15 minutes and follow-up 10 minutes for questions and clarifications and a rapporteur takes notes. A volunteer from each group or the MEL staff will summarize key points in the Lessons Learned template.

## 7.3 Theory of Change Review

Refer to Section X.

## 7.4 Action Planning / Plan for Next Year

Each thematic group gathers and creates a plan of work and budget for the upcoming project year/implementation cycle. In doing so they consider:

* the output-level indicator targets that were allocated to them
* the strategies that worked well in the just-ended year/project implementation cycle,
* the lessons learned,
* ToC modifications, and the
* key practices to carry forward, drop and modify items listed by the rapporteur of the group feedback session (section X)
* label the strategies and actions for the upcoming year (i.e. by rationale).

## 7.5 Deliverables

1. Workshop report
2. PoWB for the upcoming project implementation period (draft version)
3. Lessons learned reports

# 8. Reporting

This section describes the types of reports that are required at different time intervals for both internal and external results communication and accountability purposes. Section 7.1 addresses internal reporting requirements while section 7.2 addresses external (donor) reporting requirements.

## 8.1 Internal Reporting

All planned project deliverables will be configured in MEL to facilitate reporting by project staff. This will make it easier to report on the planned deliverables assigned to respective project staff. There will also be the option for staff to report unplanned deliverables. Research-related deliverables will go through internal controls to ensure that they meet the required standards (i.e. compliance with science quality standard, ensuring proper metadata fields, proper licenses applied etc.). Once this is done, each deliverable will be pushed on [DSpace](https://digitalarchive.worldfishcenter.org/) (Publications) and [Dataverse](https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/worldfish) (data). It is recommended that project staff make deliverables Open Access, however, where there is reason to restrict access, staff will have the option to save deliverables internally and fix an embargo period if needed. The internal reporting process will include:

1. **Monthly reporting by project staff on the status of planned tasks:** [If applicable: The MEL Research Fellow will attend and take notes on the monthly meeting and shall record these in an appropriate repository.] During this meeting, the [project staff member/MEL Research Fellow] will (1) ensure that indicators requiring monthly reporting frequency are being tracked, (2) probe deviations from the plan of work, (3) provide timely advice to the Project Manager and field team on appropriate remedies, (4) use the meetings as a platform to gather and record lessons learned from the operational processes, and finally (5) ensure that appropriate follow-up is made with the respective field/project team members to record reported deliverables in the [MEL Platform](http://mel.cgiar.org).
2. **Quarterly documentation of progress:** This will be achieved through progress reports complemented by recording of output-level indicator values in the MEL Platform. The report should include: (1) a summary of all project activities, (2) physical and financial progress over the previous three months showing targets and achievements, (3) highlighting significant key issues and challenges identified, and (4) lessons learned and recommended solutions to overcome the challenges. The indicator values on the status of output-level results will be recorded in MEL following the pre-recorded indicators definitions as laid out in section 3.1.

## 8.2 Reporting to donor

1. **Report X:** [Timing and purpose]

The completed donor reports will be uploaded to the MEL Platform under the ‘Donor Reports’ section, here [insert link to MEL donor reports page]

## 8.3 Special Cross-Cutting Reports

Given project connections to CRP \_\_\_ and cross-cutting issues of \_\_\_\_ .These may be a result of a deliberately and systematically recorded case studies/success stories, or learning agenda implementation.

# 9. MEL Budget

*[Information on how MEL is budgeted]* Note that ICARDA staff costs are based on estimated daily rates of $500 and represent the cost of staff time-- not additional costs.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Activity | Staff | Time total | Staff cost | Inputs | Inputs cost | Total cost | Summary of Results |
| ***X*** | *# staff type* | ***# days*** | *Total cost* | *i.e. travel costs, special equipment costs* | *$* | ***$*** |  |
| *# staff type* |  |  |
| **Y** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| **Total MEL activity costs** |  |  |  |  |  | **$** |  |

**\*\*Note:** Betty has shared the following estimates: *[Costs of travel, transportation, catering, etc. can be checked with Betty Abrilian and noted below]*

* Cost of hotel room per night: \_\_\_

# Annexes

## Annex X: Glossary of Terms

[Define any key concepts for this project or M&E, such as “performance; result; output; outcome… Some terms may be found in the MEL CoP glossary.]

## Annex X: Indicator targets

**Routine Indicators**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Indicator** | **Baseline** | **6 mo. target** | **12 mo. target** | **18 mo. target** | **24 mo. (final) target** |
| **1** | *Name* | *value* |  |  |  |  |

**Periodic Indicators**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **No.** | **Indicator** | **Baseline** | **6 mo. target** | **12 mo. target** | **18 mo. target** | **24 mo. (final) target** |
| **1** | *Name* | *value* |  |  |  |  |

## Annex X: Survey

*[if applicable]*

## Annex X: Learning Question Action Plan

**Prioritized Outcome:** *(Example: Outcome 1 (CRP-WHEAT 2.5) Breeders* ***develop improved varieties more efficiently*** *via access and use of germplasm and tools)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Learning question | Metrics/Measures | Data collection mechanism | Data collection timing | Responsible parties | Requires update to MEL plan? | Why will this data be helpful/ what will it be used for? | Next steps |
| [Question 1] *Example: how can we measure efficiency?* | *Currently there are questions on time spend in the breeder survey, but there are also additional measures we can automate in data collection tools to measure this* | *BMS* | *Quarterly* | *Biometrics team (to automate measures)* | *No, does not affect impact pathway or indicators* | *Provides a less biased measure of “efficiency”* | *Raise this idea w/ biometrics team and PM to see if inclusion in BMS is feasible/helpful* |
| [Measure 2] |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| [Question 2] |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

## Annex X: MSS Report Template

This template shall accompany completed checklists from sections 5.2 and 5.3. While the checklists provide details of each criterion, this report should provide a summary of the strengths, weaknesses, and suggested corrective actions for each component assessed by the MSS.

* 1. MEL Governance Leadership
     1. Strengths
     2. Weaknesses
     3. Suggested Corrective Actions
  2. MEL Plan
     1. Strengths
     2. Weaknesses
     3. Suggested Corrective Actions
  3. Standard Operating Procedures
     1. Strengths
     2. Weaknesses
     3. Suggested Corrective Actions
  4. MEL Work Plan & Budget
     1. Strengths
     2. Weaknesses
     3. Suggested Corrective Actions
  5. Human Capacity for MEL
     1. Strengths
     2. Weaknesses
     3. Suggested Corrective Actions
  6. MEL Information Systems & Knowledge Management
     1. Strengths
     2. Weaknesses
     3. Suggested Corrective Actions
  7. Data Verification & Validation
     1. Strengths
     2. Weaknesses
     3. Suggested Corrective Actions

1. International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement (CIRAD) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. WorldFish [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://hdl.handle.net/10947/4489> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11766/9400> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Adapted from Rowe, S. F. & Sikes, S. (2006). [Lessons learned: taking it to the next level.](https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/lessons-learned-next-level-communicating-7991) Paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2006—North America, Seattle, WA. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)