

# Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning



## MEL SYSTEM

Relief International (RI) is committed to implementing a robust MEL system, both within projects, as well as above projects, on a country, regional, and global scale. This commitment is in place to meet and exceed donor requirements, but also to mirror industry best practices. A well-functioning MEL system is a critical component of effective project/program management as well as organizational accountability and learning.

An effective MEL system should:

- **Support project/program design** through creation of a sound theory of change and logic model, with accompanying indicators and evaluation plans that will provide accurate and meaningful data that can inform management and decision-making to guide and improve project/program performance.
- **Uphold accountability and compliance** by demonstrating whether or not our work has been carried out as agreed and in compliance with established standards and with any other donor requirements.
- **Provide opportunities for stakeholder feedback**, especially beneficiaries, to provide input into and perceptions of our work, modelling openness to criticism, and willingness to learn from experiences and to adapt to changing needs.
- **Promote and celebrate our work** by highlighting our accomplishments and achievements, building morale and contributing to future project development and mobilization efforts.
- **Contribute to organizational and sectoral learning and knowledge sharing** by reflecting upon and sharing experiences and lessons so that we and others can gain the full benefit from what we do and how we do it.

Within RI, we have identified the key overarching aspects of our work to be Monitoring, Evaluating, and Learning and have broadly defined them below to suit the needs of our various projects. These definitions are not meant to be comprehensive, but more of a guiding philosophy within our teams and will be amended and adapted over time as the MEL function within RI is developed and refined.

## MEL COMPONENTS DEFINED

### Monitoring:

Monitoring is the systematic process of collecting, analyzing and using information to track a project's progress toward reaching its objectives and to guide management decisions. Monitoring activities focus on processes, such as when and where activities occur, who delivers them, and how many people or entities they reach. Monitoring begins as soon as a program has begun and continues throughout the implementation period. Monitoring is an essential aspect of the MEL process because evaluation and learning cannot take place without accurate data that is collected through an established monitoring system.

### Evaluation:

Evaluations ask whether a project is working towards stated objectives, and whether it is resulting in intended or unintended outcomes. Evaluations are used to keep track of

### Accountability:

Accountability is the underlying element of RI's MEL system that is not included in the title of our functional team. RI believes that accountability is not an activity that one can undertake. Our MEL staff can monitor, evaluate, and learn, but they cannot "accountable". Accountability is the byproduct of our work. It is what we strive to accomplish within all of our work, from projects to operations. RI's accountability towards our beneficiaries is paramount and is reflected through our commitment towards adaptive management. Adaptive management is contingent upon RI accomplishing all three aspects of the MEL process effectively. Monitoring provides accountability through routine verification that our activities are being carried out as stated and reaching the intended individuals. Evaluation provides accountability through acknowledging the possibility of mistakes. Learning closes the accountability loop by demonstrating RI's ability and willingness to learn from mistakes and to improve our work.

key outcomes and impacts related to the different project components and assessing whether the objectives, aims and goals are being achieved. Evaluations should take place at specified times during interventions. It is RI practice to conduct baseline evaluations, when feasible, to act as appropriate benchmarks from which to measure change, as well as midline and endline assessments.

### **Learning:**

Within RI, we see learning as an iterative process both within and between projects. In the complex and uncertain environments where RI operates, learning can be a challenge, but more importantly, an opportunity to do better. Learning is key to remaining adaptive and flexible to better serve our beneficiaries. Learning is acknowledging that we can always do better, and that we remain open, as an organization, to internalizing lessons learned and recommendations that come out of internal and external evaluations and audits.

## **MEL PRINCIPLES**

Relief International holds itself to ethical and professional standards adapted from the American Evaluation Association<sup>i</sup> and the European Evaluation Society<sup>ii</sup>, and seeks to adhere to these principles in all aspects of its MEL activities.

- **Competence:** MEL staff will provide competent performance to stakeholders.

MEL staff should possess (or ensure that partner teams possess) the education, abilities, skills and experience appropriate to undertake MEL tasks and activities as outlined to and agreed upon with the donor and the beneficiary community.

- **Systematic Approach Inquiry:** MEL staff conduct systematic, data-based inquiries.

To ensure the accuracy and credibility of the data they collect and evaluations that they conduct, MEL staff should adhere to the highest technical standards appropriate to the methods they use.

- **Integrity/Honesty:** MEL staff display honesty and integrity in their own behavior, and attempt to ensure the honesty and integrity of the entire MEL process.

MEL staff should conduct themselves honestly with clients and relevant stakeholders concerning the tasks to be undertaken, end goal of methodology, scope of results likely to be obtained, and uses of data resulting from their tasks. It is primarily the MEL team's responsibility to initiate discussion and clarification of these matters, not the beneficiaries.

- **Respect for People:** MEL staff will respect the security, dignity and self-worth of respondents, program participants, clients, and other program stakeholders.

MEL staff should seek a comprehensive understanding of the important contextual elements surrounding their activities. Contextual factors that may influence the results of MEL activities include geographic location, timing, political and social climate, economic conditions, and other relevant activities in progress at the same time.

- **Responsibilities for General and Public Welfare:** MEL staff articulate and take into account the diversity of general and public interests and values that may be related to their work.

When planning and reporting on MEL activities, staff should include relevant perspectives and interests of the full range of stakeholders. MEL staff should consider not only the immediate operations and outcomes of whatever is being monitored and evaluated, but also its broad assumptions, implications and potential side effects.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.eval.org/p/cm/ld/fid=51>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.europeanevaluation.org/about-ees>