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# Mission-Based Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Platforms Assessment Report



December 4, 2017

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# Mission-Based Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Platforms Assessment Report

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**DISCLAIMER:** The document was produced at the request of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was prepared independently by Laura Arntson, Tonya Giannoni, Nancy Peek, and Kristin Saarlans under the Expanding Monitoring and Evaluation Capacities (MECap) task order, under contract number AID-OAA-M-14-00014.

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## ACRONYMS

ADS	Automated Directives System
AMELP	Activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan
AOR	Agreement Officer's Representative
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CLA	Collaborating, Learning and Adapting
COP	Chief of Party
COR	Contract Officer's Representative
DO	Development Objective
DQA	Data Quality Assessment
FY	Fiscal Year
G2G	Government-to-Government
GIS	Geographical Information Services
IDIQ	Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity Contract
IP	Implementing Partner
IQC	Indefinite Quantity Contract
LER	Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MIS	Management Information System
MEO	Mission Environmental Officer
NPE	Non-Permissive Environment
OU	Operating Unit
PAD	Project Appraisal Document
PEPFAR	U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PIRS	Performance Indicator Reference Sheet
PMELP	Project Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plans
PMP	Performance Management Plan
POC	Point of Contact
PPL	Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning
PPR	Performance Plan and Report
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trial
RFTOP	Request for Task Order Proposals
SIMS	Site Improvement Through Monitoring System
Social Solutions	Social Solutions International, Inc.
SOO	Statement of Objectives
SOW	Statement of Work or Scope of Work
TCN	Third Country National
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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December 1, 2017

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bureau of Policy, Planning and Learning, Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research (PPL/LER) requested an Assessment of mission-based *Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Platforms* to update the 2013 M&E Platforms Assessment.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of the 2016 Assessment is to inform Platform design and management, as well as outreach to those implementing and managing Platforms.

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*A “Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Platform” is used to describe a variety of mission mechanisms to support monitoring, evaluation, data management, learning, and other performance management tasks for USAID missions.*

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As of April 2016, there were 55 identified mission-based Platforms (in 41 missions) active or completed within 18 months that deliver(ed) services across six main functions: monitoring; data management; evaluation; studies/analyses; collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA); and capacity building.

The findings and analysis are drawn from a document review and a synthesis of in-depth qualitative interviews representing 30 Platforms (in 22 missions). The interviewees included staff from USAID missions/offices, Platforms, Activity Implementing Partners (IPs), and USAID/Washington. Interviews were conducted between May and September 2016 (prior to the updated USAID operational guidance).

The majority of Platforms included in the assessment are managed by the Program Offices (40 of 55), with the balance managed by Technical Offices. The MEL work expected of USAID staff can exceed the hours in the day, and mission staff face operational challenges in non-permissive or uncertain environments. All interviewees identified advantages and challenges in the design and management of MEL Platforms.

**Advantages.** Nearly all interviewees shared that Platforms can help overcome constraints by providing sustained and dedicated MEL expertise. Interviewees note that as a mission-based institutional support contract, typically for three to five years, Platform staff often become deeply familiar with the mission's strategy, context, sectors, and staff. They fill time-demanding tasks to allow USAID staff (as reported) to do more critical analysis, and may improve the ability to carry out MEL tasks:

- *Monitoring/Data Management:* Platform contractors assist with monitoring and data management across the mission and across levels of data.
- *Evaluations/Assessments:* The Platform staff's familiarity of a given context and the ability to devote time and resources to innovative and participatory methods provide expanded access to information, knowledge, and learning (including learning across evaluations).
- *CLA:* Platform staff can bring together a range of stakeholders to collaborate for improved sharing of lessons among Activity Implementing Partners (IPs).
- *Capacity Building:* Platforms can integrate capacity building into all the MEL work they do and “hit the ground running” with their technical expertise and contextual knowledge.

**Challenges.** Platforms are a mechanism to outsource MEL functions, yet outsourcing presents its own set of challenges for both USAID and Platform staff. For USAID staff, there is a recognized risk of outsourcing MEL responsibilities to the extent that mission MEL staff and Agreement Officer and Contracting Office Representatives (A/CORs) outsource responsibility for using information for adaptive management. For Platform staff, a key challenge cited is being able to meet technical and staffing demands that continuously change, given turnover and emerging priorities and unclear expectations. The

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<sup>1</sup> See: <https://usaidlearninglab.org/library/discussion-note-monitoring-evaluation-platforms-considerations-design-and-implementation>.



type of contractual mechanisms for Platforms can add to the management burden for both USAID and Platform contractors.

Several key enabling conditions for Platforms to be successful emerged from a synthesis of the interviews (from both USAID and Platform staff). They include the need for:

- **Consistent support and buy-in from mission leadership** for sustaining and institutionalizing good MEL practices.
- **A mission-wide ‘mindset’ that considers MEL a shared responsibility** rather than the perception that MEL expertise and responsibility reside primarily with mission M&E Specialists, CLA Advisors, and the Program Office or the Platform itself.
- **Close collaboration** and the development of a partnership with Platforms.

**Considerations for Design.** No two MEL Platforms are the same, as they are unique and multifaceted mechanisms and there is no single, perfect design. Those interviewed reiterated the importance of dedicating sufficient time and resources to thoughtful planning and design of Platforms as a key factor in improving the effective utilization of Platform resources. In addition to creating the enabling conditions described above, Platforms that build in a clear management structure, flexibility in staffing, and recognize staffing limitations in the local labor market were regarded as better at meeting expectations. Based on a synthesis of the interviews, design considerations are:

- Which MEL functions will be included (based on assessed needs)?
- Will the Program or Technical Office design and manage the Platform?
- What type of staffing pattern (in-country/international, core/short-term, and expatriate/local) responds to MEL support needs?
- How much is known about MEL needs? How will flexibility and collaboration be addressed in the solicitation?

**Considerations for Management.** All interviewees able to comment on the motivation behind procuring a Platform (60% of those interviewed) cited having Platform staff take on various MEL functions as a prime motivation. Both USAID and Platform staff shared the need to balance priorities and approaches with the shifting needs of USAID, USAID staff time, and capacity constraints. Particularly for USAID, Platform management demands a time commitment and involvement by USAID staff throughout all phases of MEL support.

While a MEL Platform COR’s authority is clear, mission staff noted a risk of placing all management tasks and responsibility on a single person. Systematic management processes for communication, access, and product review are key. Other tips for Platform managers that emerged out of the interviews are to:

- Communicate clearly and frequently about Platform capabilities and services in the mission.
- Actively manage access and establish protocols between the Platform and users of the services.
- Actively manage the relationship between Platform staff and Activity IPs, especially as it relates to expectations, coordination, and deliverables.

In conclusion, the 2016 Platform Assessment validates a key finding from the 2013 assessment that Platforms can resolve bureaucratic challenges and provide ease of access to MEL talent. Yet, a Platform cannot strengthen the use of MEL practices without inclusive design and effective management.



## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Purpose

In recognition of the increased number of mission-based *Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Platforms*, USAID's Bureau of Policy, Planning and Learning, Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research (PPL/LER) requested that an assessment of these Platforms be undertaken in FY2016. A *Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Platform* is used to describe a variety of mission mechanisms to support monitoring, evaluation, data management, learning,<sup>2</sup> and other performance management tasks for USAID missions. PPL/LER maintains a list of these mechanisms.

The purpose of the assessment is to provide evidence and learning for PPL/LER, missions, and Washington-based operating units to inform Platform mechanism design and management considerations. Findings will also inform USAID outreach and training for those implementing and managing Platforms to build their knowledge and application of USAID MEL policy, guidance (including ADS revisions), and tools.

### 1.2. Methodology

This assessment builds and expands on the previous M&E Platform study (September 2013). The 2016 MEL Platforms Assessment began with collecting descriptive characteristics of all Platforms for which Statement of Works (SOWs) were available. This effort resulted in a list of 55 mission-based MEL Platform mechanisms. Platforms for which the assessment team did not receive or could not locate a SOW (or the equivalent content through other data sources) are not included in this assessment. For each of the 55 Platforms (in 41 missions) in the assessment, the functions, configurations, and other characteristics were documented.

A subset of 30 Platforms (22 missions) was selected for additional, in-depth qualitative data collection and analysis, which included key informant and group interviews with relevant USAID mission/office staff, Platform personnel, USAID activity implementing partner personnel, and USAID/Washington staff who have had direct experience with at least one Platform. Platforms were selected for the in-depth assessment based on a list of key criteria, including balanced representation of Platforms from the typologies. The full assessment design analysis is described in Annex A.

### 1.3. Report Content and Limitations

Findings and analysis in this document are drawn from a document review and a synthesis of 107 in-depth key informant and small group interviews conducted between May and September 2016, representing 30 Platforms. Interviewees were guaranteed strict confidentiality and assured that their names would not be directly attributed to anything they said in the interviews. No specific mission, Platform, or personally identifiable information is included in these findings.

The qualitative data collected for this assessment was acquired through phone and in-person interviews among selected missions. The purposive collection of data and findings and conclusions included in this report are not intended to be representative or to offer inferences about Platforms beyond those interviewed. The interviews utilized a semi-structured questionnaire (see Annex A). Responses were recorded as answered. Patterns and themes were identified by the analysts across all questions. The

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<sup>2</sup> Platforms are typically referred to as "MEL." Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) has been formally updated in the USAID operational guidance. At the time of the assessment, CLA was still an emerging approach and thus its components were referenced under the umbrella of learning.

findings are not quantified, as the nature of the open-ended questions elicited individual responses that varied across interviewees. For example, an interviewee may have identified a solution to a challenge in response to a related or un-related question. If a challenge was identified by one interviewee but not another in response to a question, interviewees who did not identify a challenge in response to the same question were not re-interviewed. In other words, not everyone was asked the exact same questions in the same way.

According to the standards of reporting on qualitative data<sup>3</sup>, reporting on frequency is limited to the questions and/or data collected in the same way across the sample. The authors, in consultation with key stakeholders designed the assessment in a way to gain a richness of experiences that elicited sufficient context and nuance to understand reported advantages and challenges. The findings and conclusions as reported in this document were reviewed with stakeholders. Findings that were not supported by USAID policy or official guidance are excluded from the report. In short, the authors have purposely not quantified open-ended questions in order to focus on the personal experiences, descriptions, and observations of the interviewees. However, where possible, the different institutional affiliations and type of respondent (USAID or IP) is numerically reported.

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<sup>3</sup> For a good summary about the quantification of qualitative data, please see Neale, Joanne, Miller, Peter, and West, Robert. "Reporting quantitative information in qualitative research: guidance for authors and reviewers," *Addition*, Volume 109, pp 175-176.

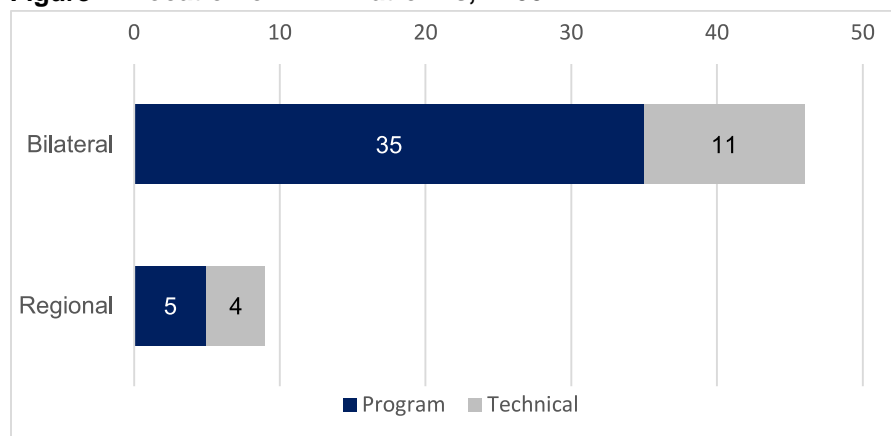
## 2. OVERVIEW OF MISSION-BASED MEL PLATFORMS

### 2.1. Platforms in 2016

The decentralized and competitive sourcing processes for acquiring MEL support services have contributed to variation in Platform design and functions. To inform the assessment design, the team consulted with Washington M&E points of contact (POCs) and PPL/LER to classify the 55 mechanisms based on the following characteristics (see Figure 1):

- Type of mission: Regional or Bilateral
- Managing office: Program Office (40 out of 55) or DO/Technical Office (15 out of 55)

**Figure 1: Location of MEL Platforms, n=55**



The main reason stated for the majority being managed by the Program Office is because Platforms supporting an entire mission's portfolio and cutting across sectors are best managed centrally (e.g., by the Program Office). In addition, as per USAID's evaluation policy, "the Program Office will manage the contract or grant relationship with the evaluation team or consultant except in unusual circumstances, as determined by the mission director."<sup>4</sup>

The 15 Platforms in this assessment managed by a Technical Office had a sector-specific focus. Technical office staff felt it was an advantage to have a Platform dedicated solely to their office's M&E needs because the Platform could meet specific technical demands and focus on a limited portfolio rather than possibly get overwhelmed by demands from the entire mission.

Not all Platforms provide services in all monitoring, evaluation, and learning functions. Across the 55 Platforms, most include capacity building, monitoring and/or evaluation, and special studies functions (see Figure 2).

<sup>4</sup> USAID Evaluation Policy (January 2011; updated October 2016), page 5.

**Figure 2: MEL Functions across Platforms**



### 2.2. Mission Motivation for MEL Platforms

The reasons given for choosing a Platform reported by mission interviewees in the 2013 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Platforms study, do not vary dramatically from the motivations expressed by interviewees in the 2016 MEL Platforms Assessment. In 2013, they were:

- 1) quick turnaround in the fielding of M&E tasks;
- 2) the continuity and ease of engaging a single contractor (as opposed to one-off procurements);
- 3) the challenge of limited staff M&E capacity within USAID;
- 4) access to technical M&E expertise not available in the mission; and
- 5) the ability to execute a variety of M&E functions.

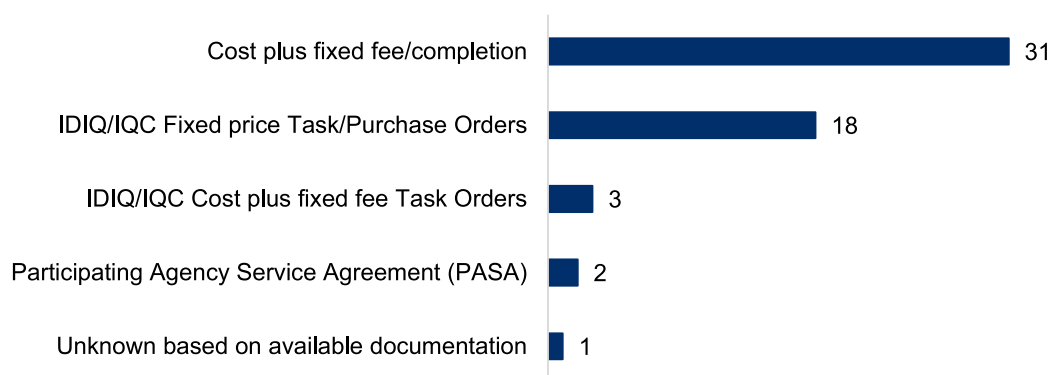
In 2016, USAID interviewees most often cited one, or a combination, of the reasons presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Reasons USAID Missions Opt for a Platform (2016)**

<b>Capacity Related to Workload</b>	USAID missions have more MEL work than they can handle, with an increasingly large portfolio (including government-to-government [G2G] needs and expectations), a large number of mechanisms, and no commensurate expansion of USAID staff to complete the MEL tasks, and/or insufficient space to expand staff to the levels required.
<b>Capacity Related to Skills or New Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USAID and activity IP staff are weak in MEL and need training and technical assistance to improve quality in evaluations data collection and reporting.</li> <li>• The challenge of conducting MEL in non-permissive environments (NPEs).</li> <li>• An opportunity for a cost effective, quicker turnaround for MEL tasks.</li> <li>• A need for procuring evaluations more efficiently and in a timely manner, with the opportunity to gain from a Platform contractor’s MEL experience from across a mission’s programs and elsewhere.</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A need for a centralized and accessible M&amp;E data repository and systems in place for improved reporting.</li> </ul>

### 2.3. Mechanism Type

Missions have several options for the type of contract to use to set up a Platform mechanism. Figure 3 shows the general contract types represented by the 55 Platforms in this assessment.

**Figure 3: Summary of Platform Mechanism Types, n=55**

The period of performance for the mechanisms vary. The majority of Platforms are for five years (39 of 55). Nine Platforms are structured to have a base of two or three years with option years to total five years of services. Seven Platform contracts are set up to be for four years or less.

## 2.4. Summary of Key Platform Functions

MEL Platforms may be used to support and carry out a range of monitoring-, evaluation-, and CLA-related support. Missions are engaging Platforms in different ways to provide technical assistance and support for a variety of tasks, examples of which are in the following sections.

### 2.4.1. Monitoring Support

Most (44 of 55) of the Platforms in this assessment have at least one type of monitoring task in the Platform Statement of Work (SOW). Platforms undertake a range of monitoring support services, such as those noted in Table 2.

**Table 2: Monitoring Support Provided by Platforms**

Monitoring Supports	Examples of Platform Support Provided by Interviewees
Performance Management Plans (PMPs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide facilitation and analysis support to Program and Technical Offices engaged in strategy-level PMP development.</li> <li>• Facilitate stakeholder meetings for the purpose of developing a learning agenda.</li> <li>• Collect, analyze, and disseminate data for required or prudent strategy-level assessments (e.g., gender-integration or political economy analysis).</li> <li>• Review draft sections for clarity, checking of assumptions, and causal logic.</li> </ul>
Project MEL Plans (PMELPs) and Activity MEL Plans (AMELPs) Conception and Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect data for baselines and facilitate analysis for setting appropriate project/activity performance targets.</li> <li>• Support and technical assistance to partners (e.g., IPs or partner governments) in the development of causal models and the refinement of project/activity result frameworks.</li> <li>• Provide capacity building and technical assistance for implementation of a responsive monitoring framework.</li> <li>• Assist with the identification of indicators, standardization of definitions, and establishment of norms for common reporting across a diverse range of partners.</li> </ul>

Monitoring Supports	Examples of Platform Support Provided by Interviewees
Project and Activity MELPs (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review and recommend refinements with respect to performance indicator reference sheets (PIRS).</li> <li>Facilitation, capacity assistance, and the development of tools for Agency reviews of partner accountability and learning plans.</li> </ul>
Context Indicator Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate discussions regarding the incorporation of context monitoring and assistance in data collection and review of emerging trends of importance to USAID efforts.</li> </ul>
Data Quality Assessments (DQAs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide complementary DQA support to USAID teams through capacity building assistance, facilitated reviews, and tool development.</li> <li>Direct support in non-permissible environments, including logistical support and/or third-party visits when Agency staff are unable.</li> </ul>
Site Visit Assistance and/or Third-Party Monitoring/ Verification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop tools for higher quality and systematic site visits across a range of contexts, geographies, and beneficiary types.</li> <li>Assist in the selection of appropriate sites for visitation (e.g., number of sites, which sites, when and how often).</li> <li>Direct site visit monitoring for specific interventions or in non-permissible environments.</li> <li>Provide specialized monitoring and verification for inter-agency, G2G, or whole-of-government programming (e.g., PEPFAR or environmental mitigation compliance monitoring).</li> </ul>
Remote Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct indicator data verification, especially in non-permissive environments where USAID access is restricted.</li> <li>Assist in the procurement and utilization of new technologies that improve the accessibility and safety of difficult to reach implementation sites.</li> </ul>

#### 2.4.2. Data Management Function

The majority of Platforms in this assessment have data management tasks in their scope (36 of 55), mainly around the four sub-tasks noted in Table 3. While the development of new Management Information Systems (MIS) is suspended, missions using existing systems may provide support to data management.

**Table 3: Data Management Support Provided by Platforms**

Data Management Support	Examples of Platform Support Provided by Interviewees
Management information systems (MIS) <sup>5</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide indicator data display and disaggregation.</li> <li>Generate charts from MIS.</li> <li>Establish E-libraries with activity documents.</li> </ul>
MIS Adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set up an already-existing, ready-made system (e.g., DevResults).</li> <li>Organize future system migration (e.g., creating a data migration template and framework).</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> For this assessment, an MIS is defined as a computerized information system and associated procedures designed for performance monitoring (and/or other data) reporting, compilation, management, and access.

Data Management Support	Examples of Platform Support Provided by Interviewees
Data Compilation, Aggregation, Validation, and Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify specific indicators and reporting requirements for each activity.</li> <li>• Train IP staff to use the system.</li> <li>• Aggregate data across the mission.</li> <li>• Link activity-level data to the mission-level PMP and results framework.</li> </ul>
Geo-coded Data Collection and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compile and maintain geo-coded data.</li> <li>• Respond to mission requests with maps generated from MIS.</li> </ul>

A little less than half of Platforms (24 of 55) contain geo-coded data collection or management tasks in the contract SOW. In a few cases, while Platforms may have this function, the Platforms have yet to undertake this role. Reasons for this underutilization include: limited bandwidth for the Platform to implement geo-coding and difficulty in hiring Platform staff with the required skills to manage the tasks; USAID and the Platform underestimated the cost (human resources as well as technical system requirements) of creating or managing this kind of capability; and partner government sensitivities and barriers around collecting geo-coded data.

### 2.4.3. Evaluation Services in Platforms

Of the 55 Platforms in the list of mission-based MEL Platforms active in the timeframe of this assessment, 46 include evaluation services in their SOW. In most cases, evaluation planning is conducted by mission teams who then engage Platforms. In these instances, Platforms may be part of the discussion of evaluation planning but they do not identify the evaluations. Some Platforms play a role in keeping track of evaluation planning according to a mission's evaluation plan. Specific kinds of examples of support are noted in Table 4.

**Table 4: Evaluation Support Provided by Platforms**

Evaluation Support	Examples of Platform Support Provided by Interviewees
Evaluation statement of work (SOW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate an iterative process to tease out the SOW details through a probing conversation.</li> <li>• Draft an initial SOW based on a program office or technical team's Statement of Objectives (SOO) or initial thoughts on purpose, use and evaluation questions.</li> <li>• Provide feedback, comments and suggestions on a SOW—specifically, data collection, analysis and evaluation questions.</li> <li>• Initiate a G2G evaluation SOW with the go-ahead of the Platform COR to support the host government in their evaluation activities.</li> <li>• Finalize the SOW after an iterative SOW development process.</li> </ul>
Performance and Impact Evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify evaluation team members from consultant rosters, solicit applications from independent evaluators with specific expertise and/or identify Platform field or HQ staff for specific evaluation team roles.</li> <li>• Manage an evaluation team in the field.</li> <li>• Provide evaluation logistics, such as providing meeting space for evaluation planning, overseeing travel, lodging and transportation arrangements and providing office (e.g., desk space, internet access, printing, etc.) support.</li> <li>• Draft, review and disseminate an evaluation report.</li> </ul>



Evaluation Support	Examples of Platform Support Provided by Interviewees
Whole of Project Evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Only one mission mentioned an evaluation that addressed several activities within a sector-specific portfolio. This was designed as part of a learning and evaluation plan to address questions related to specific sectors, such as trade, energy and biodiversity.</li> </ul>
Meta-evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None of the missions interviewed were conducting meta-evaluations at the time of the survey.</li> </ul>
Baseline, mid-term and/or final data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Subcontract with a local firm if an evaluation or reporting and planning tasks require substantial data collection.</li> <li>Identify data collection team members (e.g., enumerators and team leads).</li> <li>Develop or identify sampling frame(s) or enumeration areas for a statistically representative quantitative survey.</li> <li>Manage the data collection teams in the field.</li> <li>Manage data entry, cleaning, coding and analysis.</li> <li>Draft and/or review and disseminate report.</li> </ul>

When asked about using a Platform for impact evaluations, six missions reported being at various stages of considering, discussing, or actively planning one or more impact evaluations. Five missions reported they had at least one impact evaluation completed or underway with a Platform, while four missions noted that the Platform would not be conducting an impact evaluation even though evaluation support is in the Platform's SOW.

#### **2.4.4. Special Studies and Assessments**

Missions frequently rely on Platforms to conduct special studies or assessments (44 of 55 Platforms have this function in their SOW). Special studies and assessments carried out by Platforms mentioned in the in-depth interviews include:

- Baseline assessments (for the purpose of reporting, target-setting, or as part of an evaluation design utilizing a pre-/post-intervention comparison)
- Sector-specific assessments
- Political-economy analyses
- Case studies of conflict zones
- Meta-analysis of learning reviews, synthesis reports, and studies of democracy
- National survey of citizens' perceptions
- Ethnographic studies and operations research
- Cost-effectiveness analysis

#### **2.4.5. Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA)**

As CLA has been introduced and emphasized in the Program Cycle, some missions are turning to Platforms to help with CLA efforts. Around half (26 of 55) of the Platforms contain CLA-related tasks in the SOW whether referring to CLA or one of its components. For those missions that are engaging Platforms in CLA, a few tasks emerged as frequently implemented across Platforms. These tasks commonly focus on collaboration (internal and external) and on organizing and convening learning events and stakeholder meetings. Platforms are also working on several aspects of learning, adapting, and enabling processes, such as basic knowledge management tasks (websites and dissemination) and internal tasks to build institutional memory (such as turnover notes and videos). The ways in which missions reported using Platforms for CLA include those described in Table 5.

**Table 5: CLA Support Provided by Platforms**

CLA Components	Example of Platform Support Provided by Interviewees
Collaboration (Internal and External)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate with external associations (such as local M&amp;E associations).</li> <li>• Manage and support communities of practice (M&amp;E-related, for partners, for USAID staff, etc.).</li> <li>• Run collaboration retreats with IPs, government, private sector development partners, etc.</li> <li>• Organize stakeholder consultations for program design.</li> <li>• Convene M&amp;E Specialist working group meetings (for IPs and/or USAID).</li> <li>• Facilitate collaboration among IPs on indicator and data issues.</li> <li>• Coordinate Sector Working Groups and donor-partner meetings.</li> <li>• Facilitate collaboration on evaluation/study designs between mission, IPs, MEL consultants.</li> <li>• Coordinate a working/collaboration group of IP Chiefs of Party.</li> <li>• Lead annual M&amp;E conference with all IPs.</li> <li>• Quarterly/semi-annual/annual USAID IP Sharing Meetings.</li> </ul>
Learning (Scenario planning and M&E)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide CDCS input.</li> <li>• Support development of learning agendas with DO teams.</li> <li>• Scenario planning for evaluations.</li> <li>• Create one-page syntheses of evaluation findings and recommendations.</li> <li>• Organize learning tours and exchanges with IPs across regions/districts.</li> <li>• Host brown bags for knowledge sharing (internal and external).</li> </ul>
Adapting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in Portfolio Reviews.</li> <li>• Organize learning events and stakeholder meetings (involvement could include: planning, logistics, coordination, content development, knowledge capture/exchange from events), focused on evaluation findings or topical, sectoral assessments.</li> </ul>
Enabling conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop orientation guides for newly awarded IP teams to understand mission-specific MEL expectations and communicate latest agency policy.</li> <li>• Facilitate succession planning.</li> <li>• Capture cases and videos for a mission archive.</li> <li>• Conduct handover exit interviews (filmed).</li> <li>• Maintain learning website.</li> <li>• Maintain a database of people with expertise in region/sector.</li> </ul>
General support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide translation support for meetings and documents.</li> <li>• Create/disseminate media products (regular newsletters, press releases); social media management.</li> <li>• Facilitate logistics to send people to events in other parts of the region.</li> </ul>

#### **2.4.6. Capacity Building**

The majority of Platforms (47 of 55) in this assessment include some kind of M&E capacity building support in the SOW. Based on interviews with staff from USAID, activity IPs, and Platforms, the majority of Platform capacity building efforts are focused on strengthening IPs and external stakeholders' M&E capacity, not that of USAID staff. Overall, interviewees from USAID and Platforms felt that Platforms are well-placed to provide capacity building services, but that this Platform function was often underutilized.

Missions are using Platforms for capacity building through a number of different approaches and models, which are discussed below.

- *Regular partner meetings/Communities of Practice.* The Platform may provide the logistical coordination of meetings, contribute to developing technical content, and/or facilitate sessions.
- *Formal trainings or workshops.* These trainings vary in format (from 2-4 hours to 4-day workshops) and size (from a handful of participants to over 50).
- *Informal sessions.* Platforms handle the planning and scheduling of regular brown bags and develop content depending on the audience (internal to USAID, external, etc.).
- *Mentoring/coaching.* Missions are using Platforms to work with activity IPs on an ongoing basis on their MEL plans. Some Platforms are working to partner local M&E personnel with U.S.-based mentors or setting up intern programs or embedded staff to provide coaching and technical support.

In addition, missions are using Platforms to expand the capacity of selected local organizations/firms. At least three missions have set up a capacity building model for their Platforms to focus efforts on a select number of promising local M&E organizations/firms or activity IPs.

### 3. ADVANTAGES OF USING PLATFORMS FOR MEL FUNCTIONS

Emerging from the interviews are several reported advantages of using Platforms for MEL functions.

#### 3.1. Skills and expertise

Commonly cited advantages of contracting Platforms as a mechanism are: Platforms bring technical knowledge across the broad range of MEL skills, and, in general, provide dedicated staff with more in-depth technical expertise in MEL compared to mission staff. They also have the ability and flexibility to engage headquarter staff or consultants, as needed, and especially can bring the advantage of accessing specific, hard-to-find expertise in innovative and emerging methods.

*In supporting missions with monitoring:*

- Platform staff bring in specific expertise, such as indicator development for job creation measures applicable across a mission's portfolio of activities, and enhance collaboration across teams.
- Platform staff joined technical teams on field visits to provide additional insight on implementation and data collection—according to mission staff; aspects that would have been missed otherwise. In NPEs, Platforms can provide essential capacity and access to “monitor the monitors” through local field monitoring, geo-coded tags and methods of triangulation.
- Platform staff complemented mission gaps, such as:
  - a gender specialist, who looked at the extent to which gender is mainstreamed within activities during site visit monitoring;
  - a short-term data visualization specialist that worked with IPs to improve the capture and reporting of achievements to A/CORs; and
  - expertise in emerging methods (e.g., organizational analysis, outcome harvesting, most significant change, and qualitative comparative analysis) not available in the mission.

*In supporting missions in evaluations and special studies:*

- Platforms bring technical expertise and/or ability to engage headquarter staff or consultants with the specific technical expertise required for rigorous evaluations. Platforms also draw on technical expertise to apply innovative and emerging methods.

- Platforms can engage local staff who know the environment and can reach rural areas that mission staff may not be able to reach, which means that studies and assessments are not unnecessarily delayed.

### 3.2. Knowledge of context and portfolio

A big benefit of having a Platform provide MEL functions is that Platforms bring a portfolio-wide perspective of a mission's programming and are uniquely positioned to work and collaborate across sectors and stakeholders. According to both USAID and Platform staff, Platforms are typically well-positioned to see a fuller picture than USAID staff, who may only be familiar with their portfolio or technical team's work. Sustained MEL expertise available through the same mechanism ensures familiarity of the entire mission's strategy, program, context, sectors, and staff. Examples of the advantage to this cross-portfolio perspective shared by interviewees during the assessment include:

- *Monitoring*: Platforms can assist with data management across the mission and across levels of data. One Platform played a critical role in creating a data system and aligning indicators across the mission's CDCS, PAD and activity M&E plans.
- *Evaluations/Assessments*: A Platform's familiarity of a given context and the ability to devote time and resources to innovative and participatory methods provide access to information, knowledge, and learning through evaluations and assessments that would otherwise not be available. Platforms also tap into local staff and local organizations, which helps avoid what one interviewee characterized as "parachute bias" on evaluation teams. Local staff know the environment and are able to adapt survey and other data collection instruments to the local context. Engaging a Platform that develops the capacity of locally identified partners also provides consistency and an opportunity to continue to improve on evaluations and build institutional learning across evaluations. One example noted a Platform's ability to conduct case studies in hard to reach rural areas, providing access to information, knowledge and learning that would otherwise not be available.
- *CLA*: Platforms can bring together USAID, other donors, the partner government, and activity IPs for collaborative efforts and for improved sharing of lessons between activities, especially between more experienced partners and new awardees.
- *Capacity Building*: Platforms are well-placed to integrate capacity building into all the MEL work they do and "hit the ground running" with their technical expertise and contextual knowledge to strengthen MEL capacity.

### 3.3. Dedicated time and resources for MEL to enable Program Office staff (and missions) to do more

Platforms are able to extend the reach of the mission and provide systematic attention to MEL-related work by structuring staff time to focus on key MEL tasks, whereas USAID staff may not be able to devote as much time. MEL tasks and good practices often require continuous engagement or follow-up with partners and internal USAID staff, and Platforms can greatly help with the associated workload. Platform staff can dedicate the time and effort it takes to establish a collaborative and inclusive working relationship between the Program Office, technical teams, and Platform staff and consultants. Platforms take on time-consuming tasks, such as planning and coordinating logistics of MEL-related events/trainings, freeing up mission staff time to focus on analytical work such as technical input and review of evaluation designs and reports or Activity MEL Plans, for example.

Platforms are able to structure staff time to focus on key **monitoring tasks** where USAID managers (A/CORs) cannot always devote the level of effort required. Examples synthesized from all the interviews include:

- *Assist in the AMELP review process when USAID staff lack the time or capacity to review AMELPs thoroughly.* Activity IPs develop their own AMELPs for USAID A/COR review and approval; however, there is a lot of variation in the quality of AMELPs across IPs and some IPs require more technical input in MEL than others.
- *Provide parallel oversight with more regular, methodical monitoring* than what A/CORs may have time for consistently throughout a fiscal year. This is especially valuable in NPEs, where USAID access is restricted due to security or other reasons. It is also useful where USAID staff cannot meet policy requirements for site visit monitoring (such as the frequent and comprehensive monitoring and site visit requirements for PEPFAR SIMS monitoring).
- *Work with the mission environmental officer (MEO) for environmental compliance monitoring.*<sup>6</sup> One mission's MEO developed a checklist for the Platform to use as they conduct environmental compliance monitoring in a limited capacity as part of their monitoring support to the mission.
- *Devote more time for thorough DQAs.* Platforms assigned to conduct DQAs devote time that mission staff may not have to i) review, compilation and analysis of information collected during the DQA and ii) follow up with IPs when necessary. Where Platforms interact with IPs on their MEL Plans, a Platform's DQA assistance contributes to improved IP data collection tools. Platforms are able to refine and where Platform contractors work across missions, standardize good DQA practices and promote learning across USAID. In another example, A/CORs accompanied Platform staff to the field to observe and learn how to do DQAs so they could conduct them going forward.
- *Provide additional geographical reach.* An advantage to having Platforms conduct site visits is that they may be able to devote more time for more extensive site visits—an activity closer to a performance review or inventory than a limited number of selected site visits.
- *Support IPs with reporting and data requirements.* Activity IPs are typically responsible for sending or entering indicator data into the mission's reporting system. Platforms offer training to IPs to use data management systems where they are operational, and also work with the partners on their own internal data management systems to improve quality. Platforms also serve as a help desk for partners to troubleshoot any problems they may encounter using or entering data into the system.

Engaging a Platform for **evaluations and special studies/assessments** enables mission staff to do more with data. Examples synthesized from all the interviews include:

- *Facilitation for evaluation planning.* One mission's Program Office initiated an approach that takes advantage of an inclusive and iterative process between the Program Office, technical teams and the Platform staff so that it "gets everyone on the same page and really looking through pertinent information, asking the right questions, etc." Platforms help mission staff think through the requirements of an evaluation and where there is room for compromise.
- *Logistical support for evaluations.* Platforms help missions do more by taking on some of the time-consuming tasks involved in conducting evaluations. Having Platform staff take over a bulk of the logistical tasks helps alleviate some of the management burden for the mission and enables a more extensive peer review of evaluation reports.
- *Consistency of engagement.* A big benefit of having a Platform provide CLA and evaluation support is that they build an understanding of a mission's portfolio and are responsive to mission needs. Evaluations that are completed as one-off activities without the engagement of an in-country Platform lack the kind of institutional learning across evaluations gained by using a Platform. Platforms help create a rapport and consistency of engagement with USAID teams, even as different evaluation team members come through.

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<sup>6</sup> While environmental compliance monitoring is the responsibility of the A/COR (or Activity Manager, if the activity is centrally managed) (see ADS Chapter 204), a Platform may bring their monitoring expertise to facilitate environmental compliance monitoring, with oversight from the A/COR and MEO.

Platforms have the ability to dedicate time and expertise to **specific data** needs. Some examples noted include:

- A regional assessment of violent extremism completed with a quick turnaround time for the mission's use in project design.
- An ethnographic study of IPs' gender-related activities in the field, which provided feedback for activity management and planning.
- Learning reviews, synthesis reports and a meta-synthesis of studies looking across assessments related to governance and democracy, which provided input into the development of the mission's strategy.
- Completion of a youth assessment and other assessments across the mission's portfolio that provided clear opportunities for collaboration and learning among the mission and its stakeholders.
- Follow up with how to implement gender recommendations coming out of a mission gender assessment. The survey the Platform completed aligned with the gender handbook and the data collection tool helped staff move beyond what was mandated.

In support of CLA, Platforms have resources to dedicate to stakeholder coordination and the associated planning and logistical requirements:

- Platform collaboration efforts emphasize external partners and groups.
- Mission staff felt that CLA efforts require continuous messaging and socialization within the mission and with partners, and that Platforms can greatly help with the associated workload.
- Platforms provide further reach for USAID CLA teams by further boosting awareness of CLA, supporting demand, and helping institutionalize good practices. One mission noted that since their Platform has come on board they have seen an increase in demand for assessments and studies; this was interpreted by the interviewee as a reflection of interest in learning and the realization of the need for evidence-based decision-making.
- Platforms are able to encourage a more systematic approach to collaboration and learning activities. Also, by including CLA tasks in a Platform SOW, missions can be pushed to think through and articulate what CLA actually means and looks like in their context.

### **3.4. Higher quality and improved ability to carry out MEL work**

Platforms can help boost awareness of MEL roles and responsibilities and improve the quality of MEL for partners and within USAID. Mission staff reported increased levels of partner awareness of and engagement on MEL issues as a result of Platforms' work on MEL and capacity building efforts. USAID staff themselves have reported an increased understanding of M&E processes, as well as ability to understand and use M&E data/results reporting as a result of Platform capacity building work.

Platforms can instill a culture of transparency and objectivity and provide an extra level of quality control, which contributes to improved data quality. Mission staff noted Platform contributions to improvement in the quality, consistency, and timeliness of partner data, MEL plans, and reporting. While the review of partner data and reports is a role of USAID activity managers, mission staff reported they appreciated the ability of Platforms to provide an additional layer of quality control and to have "extra eyes" on reported data. Platform staff are able to take additional time to review documents against indicator data and reported data to ensure consistency. The Platform also helps to check the accuracy of the data reported by checking calculations, formulas, etc.

*In supporting missions with **data management**, examples synthesized from interviews include:*

- Mission staff noted the benefits of a central system for collecting, managing and using M&E data and a standard or automated work flow for partner data set up by the Platform.



- Interviewees noted that Platform staff provide an additional layer of quality control with the ability to take additional time to review documents against reported indicator data to ensure consistency and accuracy across levels of data.
- Platforms can enable missions to be more responsive to data requests with more accurate and consistent data—one mission Program Officer noted that they use the data management system through the Platform on a weekly basis to respond to data requests from Washington or other offices within the mission/embassy.
- Platforms assist missions with improving reports for the portfolio review process by creating custom templates generated from the mission MIS; and in one mission the Platform assisted with geo-coded activity indicator-level data overlays for a map of poverty-related data.

*Platforms bring in specific staff and technical expertise for evaluations and special studies.* For example, mission staff reported utilizing this expertise to conduct assessments and studies to inform project designs. Utilizing a Platform to conduct a gender analysis, one mission developed more robust gender indicators and conducted a gender-based survey to provide additional analyses.

*Platform staff may be uniquely positioned to collaborate across sectors and stakeholder for **CLA activities**,* given an appropriate Platform design for cross-mission collaboration and learning. Examples synthesized from all the interviews include:

- *Coordination and collaboration capabilities.* USAID staff appreciated the Platform’s ability to not only handle the logistics of coordinating CLA events, but also the time Platform staff devoted to cultivating relationships with external stakeholders, such as donor working groups, government partners, IPs, M&E associations, etc.
- *Cross-sectoral, cross-mission collaboration and learning.* USAID staff noted that having an in-house MEL Platform increases the opportunity for cross-sectoral collaboration and learning by implementing partners, the Platform staff, as well as USAID teams. Platforms are typically well-positioned to see a fuller picture of mission programming than USAID staff, who may only be familiar with their portfolio or technical team’s work. Platforms improved the mission’s ability to provide sharing of lessons between activities, especially between more experienced partners and new awardees.

Overall, where USAID staff felt the Platform has been successfully utilized for MEL, they generally felt that Platforms are able to encourage a more systematic approach to MEL in the mission and with partners and to help institutionalize good practices.

#### **Highlighted case: Strengthening capacity of local M&E service providers**

One regional Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) Platform contains local capacity development as one of four core objectives in the SOW. The regional mission aims to mobilize the Platform’s resources and expertise to strengthen technical and management capacities of local/regional M&E partners and to improve their knowledge of USAID M&E policies, regulations, and practices. The goal is to increase the pool of potential M&E service providers for USAID and other donors in the region. The tasks outlined for the Platform include:

- Identify promising local/regional M&E service providers and carry out organizational capacity assessments of selected firms.
- Determine milestones to measure progress in M&E capacity.
- Develop a strategy, collaboratively with USAID, for capacity development.
- Provide technical assistance to strengthen M&E capacity and organizational/management capacity.



## 4. KEY CONSIDERATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR USING PLATFORMS FOR MEL FUNCTIONS

The missions that have had the most success, as they define it, in effectively using their MEL Platforms reveal a collaborative effort within the mission and with partners, with the responsibility and ownership of M&E and CLA functions in the hands of mission staff. Achieving this and getting to the point of balance is where tensions or challenges to utilizing Platforms often arise.

ADS 201 (revised 2016) spells out the roles and responsibilities of USAID offices and staff in carrying out monitoring, evaluation and CLA functions:

- Mission staff must conduct performance monitoring of their strategies, projects, and activities. This means ongoing and systematic collection of performance indicator data and other quantitative or qualitative information that reveals whether implementation is on track and whether expected results are being achieved.
- A/CORs have a responsibility to provide technical oversight direction to IPs and other actions based on their A/COR designation letter.
- Mission technical offices are responsible for monitoring throughout the Program Cycle, including working with partners to develop monitoring plans, develop or select indicators, ensure data are collected, maintained, and of sufficient quality, and analyze data for decision making and adaptation. The Program Offices support them in these tasks.

The following sub-sections address **four overarching questions** related to the role of Platforms for which there are no precise answers. Nevertheless, the interviewees offered lessons learned from the different configurations, operating contexts, and management structures. While the interviews for the assessment were conducted prior to the revised ADS, there are common themes that remain relevant and offer lessons learned that are still applicable. The lead authors of this report synthesized across the interviews to summarize the key themes (in underlined italics) in response to each question.

### 4.1 What are the challenges to best engaging Platforms to complement and augment MEL tasks?

As noted under advantages, Platforms, when designed and staffed to complement and extend the reach and scope of mission MEL tasks (as required), can support mission efforts in significant ways. Yet, Platforms are designed, awarded, and managed in an operating context of constraints. USAID staff resources (e.g., time and transportation) to perform MEL responsibilities (site visits and DQAs, for example) may be limited. A/CORs (or Activity Managers, in the case of a centrally-funded activity where the A/COR is in Washington) may not be able to visit all activity implementation sites on a routine basis. In cases where a mission is managing a large number of activities and IPs, and where IPs may be operating in multiple sites, site visit monitoring (and DQA) presents a significant logistical and time challenge.

However, there is a risk of outsourcing MEL responsibilities that are the obligation of mission staff, and A/CORs in particular. If too much responsibility is outsourced, mission staff may not feel ownership of the monitoring process or evaluations. Platforms run the risk of taking away responsibilities from A/CORs and the mission in general. Examples raised by USAID staff on how Platforms affect internal USAID capacity or the quality of MEL functions include:

- Outsourcing monitoring tasks can have the unanticipated negative outcome of eroding communications and collaboration between mission staff and IPs. In other cases, IPs may be

reluctant to accommodate Platform staff involvement if the Platform's role has not been adequately introduced.

- Deferring MEL leadership and responsibility to a Platform may undermine USAID opportunities to grow internally and strengthen MEL in the mission.
- Failing to fully integrate the Program Cycle at the mission level or sharing of inaccurate information to IPs or the mission contribute to a lack of adherence to USAID MEL policy and guidance. This is especially the case when Platform staff (particularly locally-based) are not fully aware of USAID Program Cycle policy and guidance.<sup>7</sup>

As part of the analysis, the authors observed several key patterns across the USAID and Platform staff that can be grouped in a set of themes related to challenges. These represent a set of common operating environments across Platforms that relate to the design and/or management of the Platform that impede the success of Platforms in extending the reach of MEL functions:

- *When needs are not clear or are changing, Platform staff may not have the skills to match the need.* For example, if Platform staff are asked to provide feedback on an AMELP or evaluation SOW outside their sector expertise, their input can meet with resistance from A/CORs and potentially lead to devaluation of a Platform's other MEL contributions.
- *When USAID has an evolving or unclear approach, Platforms may be unable to respond to needs.* For example, when Platforms have wide objectives and few end deliverables related to CLA in the contract, the SOW may be unable to support CLA. If Platform staff is expected to design or facilitate a learning agenda, this requires clear definitions for both Platform and USAID staff. While interviewees noted instances of successful utilization of Platforms for CLA, they also expressed uncertainty and hesitation about the long-term ability of their mission to jointly implement CLA through Platforms without first clarifying and making changes to their mission's approach to CLA.
- *When unique skills sets are needed (and are not found in the mission) they may be equally difficult to find for Platform staff.* For instance, there are specific challenges to staffing for CLA tasks, which can require unique skills that are often not associated with a typical M&E skillset. Finding personnel with CLA-related skills can be difficult. Likewise, in many cases, mission staff rely on the strength of a Platform's roster of consultants for evaluations. Some evaluations require specific expertise for which the evaluation team pool is limited. Additionally, not all Platforms include staff with the technical expertise for rigorous impact evaluations, such as randomized control trials (RCTs). As a result, missions either dropped their plans for an impact evaluation or looked to a centrally-funded mechanism instead.
- *When USAID staff and IPs do not understand the role or the Platform, staff engage late in the process of developing or reviewing AMELPs or evaluation SOWs.* For example, suggestions may be seen as burdensome or as described by an interviewee, the Platform is "drumming up business for itself."

## **4.2. What are the enabling conditions for a collaborative relationship with a Platform?**

Platforms provide a much-needed service, and a set of enabling conditions were shared by USAID and Platform staff related to fostering a collaborative relationship. First, the organizational culture within a mission needs to recognize the importance of MEL and support the integration of MEL into its practices. Second, the Platform design augments and complements current USAID staff's MEL functions. Third, the mission's organizational culture is inclusive and collaborative in the design and management of the Platform. Thus, even before putting out a solicitation, USAID staff are recommended to carefully consider

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<sup>7</sup> This is similar to a caution highlighted in the 2013 M&E Platform study whereby the M&E Platform contractor needs to understand current Program Cycle guidance before initiating capacity building efforts.

how to best use a Platform, and how to prepare for and socialize the Platform within a mission before it is awarded to make sure that the investment is fully utilized.

*Conducive USAID mission culture/environment:* USAID and Platform staff alike both discussed challenges related to the mindset or attitude of mission staff towards MEL roles and responsibilities. There can be the perception that work related to monitoring, evaluation, and learning is not a shared responsibility, but that the technical expertise and responsibility reside primarily with mission M&E Specialists, CLA Advisors, and the Program Office or the Platform itself. Platform and USAID staff both noted the importance of consistent support and buy-in from mission leadership and senior management as a factor for sustaining and institutionalizing good practices around M&E and CLA as a core managerial initiative. Mission senior management plays a critical role in: 1) setting the tone for M&E and CLA in the mission; 2) thinking through the implications for having a Platform engage in this kind of work before including it in a SOW or task request; and 3) clarifying the Platform's role and responsibilities in supporting that work.

Both USAID and Platform staff noted that missions should create an internal environment conducive to MEL before putting everything on the Platform, as there is only so much a Platform can take on. MEL Platforms are not a familiar kind of mechanism to many USAID staff. This suggests that the Platform managing team clearly communicate what functions the Platform can and cannot undertake in order to appropriately set expectations for potential users. Platform staff roles and tasks need to be introduced and socialized for better reception by IPs and mission staff.

*Support roles that complement and augment USAID staff:* A USAID staff interviewee noted that for Platform resources to be used most effectively, the role of the Platform should be seen as complementary, while ownership, responsibility, and processes for CLA, for example, should rest with the mission.

While the previous (2013) study cautioned against outsourcing DQAs, based on the interviews for this assessment, Platforms have been used successfully in conducting DQAs in NPEs and when sufficient specific sectoral expertise is available.

**Highlighted Case: Augment Rather than Outsource DQAs**

An approach that promises success as a response to the challenges of outsourcing MEL is to design the Platform activities in a way that supports A/CORs to better fulfill their core MEL functions and to augment rather than replace the mission's role.

One bilateral mission with M&E specialists in the Program Office and two technical offices (Democracy and Governance, and Economic Growth) and an active mission M&E working group engages a Platform to augment the monitoring activities that mission staff conduct. Platform staff accompany A/CORs on their DQAs and provide feedback and further insight on learning opportunities. An analysis from the findings point to the observation that the ability to draw upon a functioning M&E working group that has a POC from each technical office makes this approach viable.

*Importance of an inclusive, collaborative relationship.* MEL Platforms seem to work best for missions when the USAID management mindset is about close collaboration and partnership, not simply fulfillment of contractual deliverables. Interviewees consistently stressed the importance of the relationship—characterized by collaboration, open communication, and trust—between the mission and Platform as being a key determinant of successful use of resources.

In summary, the more information and communication a Platform receives, the better and more usable the product will be. If technical offices have the time and appetite for a collaborative process, it makes for a better product in the end. This approach can build partnership and illustrate how MEL is meaningful and useful, beyond accountability purposes, to technical teams.

There is a need for respecting differences and boundaries between a mission and a Platform, but at the same time; there is a need to collaborate closely and for a thoughtful process for discussing what missions need. This means a shift away from “you have to do this because of policies” to “what do you need to help you do your work?” The trust-building, relational aspect of the Platform in interacting with a mission and with IPs underlies its success.

### **4.3. In what ways can USAID staff contribute to improved design and management of Platforms?**

Platforms are designed to improve the quality of M&E and CLA. Yet, there are three areas of support for which the existence of a Platform does not necessarily achieve this purpose. A frequently cited observation is that mission staff need to be explicit about their needs, requirements, and expectations when engaging a Platform for MEL functions so that the roles, responsibilities, and the scope of activities are clear. In turn, the Platform can provide the required expertise to match the MEL requirements.

Based on an analysis and synthesis of the findings from all the interviews, there are a set of promising practices for three of these areas of support: evaluation SOWs, data management, and CLA, which are highlighted in the discussions below.

#### ***4.3.1. Address the Challenges of Evaluation Statement of Work (SOW) Development***

Clear expectations are especially critical when it comes to engaging a Platform in the design or implementation of evaluations, given USAID policy guidance for evaluation use and application. USAID has a responsibility to ensure consensus on the purpose of the evaluation and set appropriate standards for the level of rigor required for the intended use at the very beginning of the development of an evaluation SOW. Table 6 includes examples of areas of potential mismatch between mission staff expectations and what a Platform can realistically accomplish in an evaluation, along with possible responses and tips based on guidance documents and the experience of interviewees that may mitigate some of these issues.

#### **Highlighted Case: Forms to Capture Key Information for SOW Development**

One bilateral mission with 11 M&E specialists (split between the Program Office and technical teams), with an MEL Working group supported by the Platform, has introduced forms to capture key information to help in evaluation planning and the development of SOWs. During the annual PMP update, technical teams identify which evaluations are coming up in the next year and complete a form explaining everything they want from the evaluation for the Program Office to review to make sure there is enough information to move forward. This is then shared with the Platform. A series of meetings between the Platform and USAID are scheduled in order to come up with a work plan, budget, and other information required for the SOW.

**Table 6: Common Issues to Clarify During Evaluation SOW Development**

Areas for mismatched expectations	Possible response
<p><b>What an evaluation can answer.</b> Too often it is only when mission staff see the findings in the evaluation report that they know what they want. The problem can come from a misunderstanding of what evaluation questions are answerable and what a performance or impact evaluation provides.</p>	<p>Evaluation SOW development is an iterative process that requires open and frank conversations to reach consensus among stakeholders regarding what is already known, data gaps, and the feasibility of answering the evaluation questions given available time, resources, and information needs.</p>
<p><b>Evaluation design and methodology.</b> USAID staff may not understand what the various types of evaluations (e.g., performance, thematic, impact, meta-, or whole of project evaluations) can and cannot provide, given the study designs, methods, and analysis, and how to expect the most of an evaluation without exceeding the limits of what any particular evaluation can provide.</p>	<p><b>Tip: Bring Platform expertise in early in the SOW development.</b> USAID/Washington and Platform staff can do more to build USAID staff capacity and possibly challenge mission staff preconceptions on appropriate evaluation types and designs.</p>
<p><b>Data availability.</b> Data required to answer an evaluation question or meet the requirements of a specific evaluation study design (e.g., baseline data or a counter-factual) may not be available and expectations of mission staff may not align.</p>	<p><b>Tip: Engage USAID and Platform evaluation experts in a frank discussion of evaluation options.</b></p>
<p><b>Evaluation team expertise.</b> The quality of an evaluation is highly dependent on the quality of the evaluation team. Without clear expectations, as to the purpose and level of rigor required, the evaluation team members' skills may not match the required expertise.</p>	<p>Platform staff with detailed knowledge of implementing partner data can be well positioned to assist missions in identifying data sources and collection methods.</p> <p><b>Tip: Engage Platform staff at the beginning of new awards to ensure adequate baseline data collection and the availability of data to answer future evaluation questions.</b></p>
<p><b>Budget implications.</b> Platforms may want to provide an evaluation that meets a gold standard, while mission staff information needs for decision making may require a simpler design and budget. The caution regarding an appropriate level of contractor involvement in developing SOWs and the resulting budget that was noted in the 2013 study still holds.</p>	<p>Missions need to work with the Platform to clearly define what skills and expertise are necessary—differentiating between the <i>must have</i> and the <i>nice to have</i> qualifications—and be realistic and flexible in identifying the skills mix of a team.</p> <p><b>Tip: Do not chase after unicorns! In writing an SOW, there are ways to be creative and flexible in describing the mix of skills and experience required.</b></p> <p>Review roles and expectations in collaboration with the Contracting Officer, Program Office, technical teams, and Platform staff to help clarify what is driving the evaluation design and budget.</p> <p><b>Tip: Be transparent and receptive to evaluation design needs.</b></p>

This issue of clarity in evaluation expectations is larger than the use of a Platform—improved Platform design, management, and implementation alone cannot address the inherent challenges. Ultimately, USAID staff, with or without the help of Platform staff, need to ensure the evaluation purpose and use are clearly articulated in the SOW and the evaluation questions are answerable and realistic, given budget and time allocated, and the nature of the activity being evaluated. The highlighted cases from two missions provide examples of responses to the challenges noted.

#### **Highlighted Case: SOO-to-SOW Development**

In a bilateral mission programming in a NPE, with one M&E specialist position filled by a temporary staff and the other position currently vacant, and four technical offices to support, the mission issues a Request for Task Order Proposals (RFTOP) using a SOO. Technical teams develop SOOs and the Platform responds with a full technical proposal that includes the evaluation SOW.

#### **4.3.2. Clarify Expectations and Guidance for Data Management**

USAID staff expressed frustration with feeling like their “hands are tied” as to what data management systems they can ask Platforms to develop and use (as a result of the limits on custom-developed software<sup>8</sup>) due to the anticipated future deployment of an Agency-wide data management software system.

The 2013 Platforms Discussion Note similarly noted the challenge for missions related to the moratorium on developing new information systems for performance monitoring data. However, missions have recognized the need to have some kind of M&E data management system and want to use their Platform to help with developing or managing interim data management solutions (as a second-best option while waiting to deploy a full Agency-wide MIS), but missions are encountering a number of challenges (themes as noted in italics) related to their ability to identify the needs and requirements for their mission-wide data management system, including:

- *Shifting expectations and differing guidance regarding the purpose and requirements of a data management system.* Interviewees spoke about encountering differing opinions among stakeholders, including different schools of thought around data management vs. knowledge management and how a MIS is utilized (and how the Platform can contribute). In one example, the mission’s expectations changed from having the Platform coordinate frequent, proactive knowledge sharing among USAID and partners through a data management system to having the Platform only create and maintain a website as a data repository.
- *Lack of agreement within the mission.* Another fundamental challenge can be reaching agreement on the kind of information and the necessary level of detail to include in a system. While, in theory, mission staff may want detailed indicator data with as much disaggregation as possible, in reality there is a tradeoff between the utility of keeping all micro-data for all indicators and the cost associated with designing and maintaining a system with such capabilities. Lack of agreement can go unresolved because a Platform may not feel comfortable or empowered to intervene in these situations.
- *Differences in MIS use.* One COR of a Platform undertaking mission-wide data/MIS management recognized that users, both in mission offices and with IPs, value and use data and data management systems differently. This COR also noted that there is a risk in ignoring any differing opinions because criticism of the system can endanger front office support, which they remarked is critical to the success of any system because the enforcement and motivation for uploading timely and high-quality data needs to start with senior leadership.

<sup>8</sup> ADS Mandatory Reference 547MAA, “Limits on Custom-Developed Software”.  
<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/547maa.pdf>



### **4.3.3. Clarify Expectations and Guidance on CLA**

While learning is a part of everyone's role in a mission, the responsibility for CLA is often centered in the Program Office. As CLA has been introduced and emphasized in the Program Cycle, some missions are turning to Platforms to help with CLA efforts.

As noted, the interviews conducted for this assessment were all conducted prior to the release of the updated operational guidance (ADS). While CLA was an emerging approach at the time of the interviews, clarity on CLA was not part of official guidance. Thus, all the responses reflect interviewee perspectives without the definitions and requirements identified in the updated operational guidance.

Overall, interviewees felt that Platforms may be well-placed to support missions with CLA efforts. Yet, how CLA fits into the mission (at the time of the assessment) remained unclear. Platform staff with CLA (directly or indirectly) in their SOW noted that they struggle with a lack of clarity around how CLA tasks may be different from, for example, knowledge management.

Without clear direction, leadership, and buy-in from the mission, the Platform's CLA efforts are not likely to be institutionalized or sustainable and assignments may end up as discrete learning tasks rather than as part of an overall learning strategy. There were two broad areas of clarification required:

*1. Clarity around what missions wants with respect to CLA.* Interviewees consistently emphasized that in order for a Platform to contribute and fit in to CLA efforts, a mission needs to define for itself what it wants to do with CLA and think through a Platform's potential role. This kind of thoughtful, robust planning does not seem to be taking place in the majority of missions spoken to for this assessment. When USAID staff were asked to characterize their mission's approach to CLA, descriptions such as "emerging", "hazy", "unclear", and "nascent" were commonly used. When Platform staff were asked about how they felt they were contributing to CLA, the frequent perception was that Platforms were "trying to figure out USAID's vision" and that their "role is not fully defined."

While interviewees recognized that CLA is an ongoing process, they also noted that thinking through key deliverables in CLA in advance is critical and may require USAID to do annual stocktaking to identify needs and expectations. Interviewees expressed challenging experiences with Platforms that have wide objectives and few end deliverables related to CLA in the contract SOW. If a Platform is expected to design or facilitate a learning agenda, this will need to be clearly defined for both Platform and USAID staff. Likewise, collaborators are best systematically identified by Platform and USAID staff, not treated as presumed or incidental.

*2. Clarity on CLA leadership.* When it comes to defining and implementing CLA, who is guiding whom between the mission and the Platform? One COR of a learning-focused Platform explained what they see as a paradox of some Platform mechanisms, which is that USAID is contracting out for certain knowledge because the Agency does not have it internally, but the nature of contracts is for implementers to rely on USAID to direct the contractor's activities and tell them what to implement. This disconnect is illustrated by the comments of one USAID technical office staff working with a sector-specific Platform who stated, "The biggest overall challenge in using the Platform for CLA is that we (the mission) want them (the Platform) to take the ball and run with it, rather than continuing to have the back-and-forth." Platform contractors can be involved in helping define the nature of the learning, the core set of users, the key collaborators, etc., but for Platform resources to be used most effectively, their role should be seen as complementary, while ownership, responsibility, and processes for CLA should rest with the mission.



#### **4.4. How can Platform services and MEL products be better utilized?**

Platform staff often find themselves balancing priorities and approaches with the shifting needs of USAID and USAID staff time and capacity constraints. Mission staff report that they are very busy and having Platform staff take on various MEL functions is seen as a prime motivation for engaging Platforms.

The business of mission staff often translates into unrealistic expectations or demands on Platforms (such as the ability for a quick turnaround on tasks that may require more time for a higher quality product, for example see Section 4.3.1. related to evaluation SOWs) as well as underutilization of the Platform for certain tasks. Furthermore, finding time and focus to engage mission staff can be quite a challenge. However, as outlined in the ADS, the involvement of USAID staff throughout all phases of MEL tasks is a critical factor for the successful utilization of M&E data and products for learning and adaptive management as well as the perceived satisfaction with the Platform itself.

*Build MEL Capacity.* In a time-constrained mission environment, mission staff often focus on fulfilling minimum M&E requirements and compliance over other functions; oftentimes little time remains to dedicate to thoughtful learning and use of M&E data and for providing feedback to appropriate stakeholders. In particular, USAID and Platform staff alike commonly cited that MEL capacity building and CLA are often overlooked in missions and are considered underutilized functions of Platforms.

Most of the interviewees expressed an interest in having the Platform involved across the spectrum of MEL functions (beyond the minimum requirements), but they may have not made any formal requests because other MEL work has been prioritized and Platform or USAID staff are working at capacity. Platforms are interested and willing to work on the full range of MEL functions, but have to wait on guidance from USAID. One Platform staff noted, "Everything we do is driven by the mission. Technical teams focus on the required M&E and the mission does not really have the bandwidth to think through how they want to undertake CLA and use the Platform to support their efforts." Yet Platform staff who were not explicitly involved or tasked with capacity building or CLA efforts, felt that they sometimes can indirectly strengthen the M&E capacity and contribute to learning with USAID, IPs, and local M&E firms staff with whom they work by sharing their technical expertise.

*Involve USAID technical experts.* The involvement of mission technical office staff, from the design and planning through to completion of a task, are important for the Platform to receive internal buy-in and feedback and is a key factor for the perceived quality and utilization of MEL products. There has to be dialogue and engagement between a Platform and technical teams to define MEL purposes and questions and to explore the advantages and challenges of using certain techniques and methods of data collection or other MEL approaches. When USAID staff provide technical input and time for review, MEL products are considered of higher quality and are perceived to be more useful to the intended audience/users.

### **5. CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING AND DESIGNING MEL PLATFORMS**

MEL Platforms are unique and multifaceted mechanisms for USAID staff to plan for and design. While there is no single, perfect design among the Platforms included in the in-depth review, USAID staff consistently reiterated the importance of dedicating sufficient time and resources to thoughtful planning and design of Platforms as a key factor in improving the effective utilization of Platform resources. There are choices and tradeoffs. Thus, MEL Platforms seem to work best for missions when planning and the design process for the mechanism is collaborative and participatory across mission stakeholders/offices/potential users as different perspectives are considered.

In designing a Platform, consider carefully anticipated demand and use of a Platform in the mission, given the missions' own MEL configuration, technical offices supported by MEL in the mission, and MEL functions that require the support of a Platform. Based on a synthesis of the interviews, design considerations include:

- Which MEL functions will be included (based on assessed needs)?
- How to manage the Platform? Will the Program or Technical Office design and manage?
- What type of staffing structure (in-country/international, core/short-term, and expatriate/local)?
- How much is known about MEL needs? How will flexibility and collaboration be addressed in the solicitation?

#### **Highlighted Case: Ongoing, Discrete and Targeted Data Collection for Evaluations**

In a mission with large and complex projects and activities, evaluations present a challenge in staff time and dedication. Typically, evaluation planning begins several months before field work, which can take an average of six weeks. The mission has learned that six weeks is a long time to engage an international specialist in the field. It is often difficult to find evaluation team members with the appropriate mix of technical sector skills and writing skills, knowledge of the country and the available time. Therefore, the Platform is encouraging the mission to do more ongoing assessments of manageable and discrete components of activities, which would mean better data sets, more targeted data, and more frequent and timely information than waiting for the results in a large, all-encompassing evaluation.

## **6. MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEL PLATFORMS**

MEL Platforms are unique and complex mechanisms to manage, both for USAID and Platform staff. Effective management of MEL Platforms requires a somewhat different management approach because of the often high-level of collaboration necessary between USAID and Platform staff and the cross-cutting nature of MEL services.

Management approaches and challenges vary mechanism to mechanism, based on context and contractual requirements.

General tips for effective management (across mechanism type) sourced through interviews and discussions with USAID staff include:

- *Build a management mindset of close collaboration and partnership*, not simply fulfillment of contractual deliverables. Relationships built on open communication and trust work best.
- *Do not underestimate the time required of the COR to manage the MEL Platform*. Significant time is needed to facilitate conversations between the Platform staff and technical team/users, especially during back and forth on evaluation SOW and technical report development/reviews. Additional management/administrative support may be needed.
- *Be aware of the risk of assigning all management responsibilities to one person*. It is important for the office managing the Platform to put in place systematic management processes for communication, access, and product review that can withstand personnel changes in the mission.
- *Engage proactively and regularly with potential users of the Platform*. Platform CORs and other USAID staff may consider working with the Platform staff to draft a communication strategy with designated responsibilities and timelines for outreach to potential Platform users at the beginning of the contract and regularly throughout the period of performance.
- *Develop protocols and tools for requesting Platform services*. Set clear expectations for accessing MEL contract services and determine how to document decisions.

- *Facilitate proactively communication and interaction between the Platform and activity IPs and to clearly designate the relationship and roles between different implementing partners.*
- *Review roles and responsibilities periodically and be flexible to shifting needs and relationships.*
- *Ensure MEL Platform staff are fully up to date on ADS 201 and other relevant guidance and have access to M&E resources. Encourage the use of USAID's [Learning Lab](https://usaidlearninglab.org/)<sup>9</sup> for MEL toolkits.*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://usaidlearninglab.org/>

## ANNEX A: DESIGN AND TYPOLOGY ANALYSIS

USAID's Bureau of Policy, Planning and Learning, Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research (PPL/LER) asked the Expanding Monitoring & Evaluation Capacities (MECap) task order to undertake an assessment of mission-based Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Platforms (or mechanisms). This document summarizes the design and typologies of MEL Platforms.

### Section 1: Assessment Purposes and Primary Users

**Background:** A "Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Platform" is used to describe a variety of mission mechanisms to support monitoring, evaluation, data management, and other performance management and learning tasks for USAID missions. In addition, some missions are including support for collaboration, learning, and adaptation (CLA) with the monitoring and evaluation functions of these mechanisms. For the purpose of this document, monitoring and/or evaluation and/or CLA support mechanisms will be referred to collectively as "MEL Platforms" or "Platforms."

A Platform is defined as an implementing mechanism that provides a mission or other operating unit (OU) access to technical and advisory services to design and carry out various M&E and possibly CLA tasks as a third-party extension of mission MEL capacity. Platform mechanisms include a variety of tasks related to M&E and CLA, such as training and workshops for USAID partners, assessment and learning activities, internal/external collaboration facilitation, data quality assessments, performance evaluations and/or evaluation administrative support, stakeholder analyses/engagement, third-party data verification, management information system (MIS) development, and Geographic Information System (GIS) services, to name a few.

The assessment design is based on the following set of premises:

- Missions are increasingly contracting out monitoring, evaluation and/or CLA services through Platforms.
- The decentralized and competitive sourcing processes for acquiring monitoring, evaluation and CLA support services have contributed to variation in Platform design and outcomes.

**Purposes:** This assessment builds and expands on the previous M&E Platform study (September 2013) and will achieve the following two purposes:

1. Provide evidence and learning to missions and Washington-based OUs that support missions to inform Platform design and use considerations; and
2. Support the roll-out of the ADS revisions and inform USAID outreach and targeted training for Platforms to build their knowledge and application of USAID policy, guidance, and tools.

**Primary Users:** The anticipated primary users and use of this assessment include: PPL/LER personnel and USAID/W M&E POCs and Learning Advisors engaging with USAID missions; missions contemplating establishing a MEL Platform or those seeking to improve practices within a current Platform; and MECap. The primary USAID/W and mission users can take learning from the assessment to provide advice or helpful guidance and input on Platform design and application.

MECap will use the findings to develop orientation and outreach products for existing Platforms toward improved knowledge and alignment with program cycle guidance and PPL expectations and improved MEL practices.

## Section 2: Assessment Questions

Based on consultations with LER and the M&E POCs, three key questions guided the assessment design and data collection.

Purpose #1: Provide evidence and learning to inform Platform design and use

1. What can be learned from how missions or overseas OUs have been structuring and utilizing Platforms?
  - What are the different configurations (descriptive)?
    - How are Platforms structured within missions?
    - What are Platforms' designated roles, responsibilities and functions?
  - What are the observed differences in the **planning and management** of Platforms?
  - What are the observed differences in the **use, access and expectations** of Platforms?
    - Does the whole mission have access to the Platform? And do all teams use it (if mission-wide)? How do teams access/use the Platform?
    - How do Platforms interact with implementing partners and/or how do implementing partners access technical expertise provided by the Platforms?
  - What are the key factors identified by stakeholders that affect the perceived utility and function of the Platform?
  - What implementation hurdles are missions/operating units experiencing, as identified by stakeholders?
  - What key components of Platform structure and their management are credited with a mission's successful utilization of the Platform (e.g., as identified by mission staff and pillar/regional bureau office staff)? Are these based on the design and/or management of the Platform?
2. How are Platforms affecting the capacity of the missions to successfully conduct monitoring, evaluation and CLA functions?
  - What are the types of M&E and CLA tasks and processes that are addressed effectively through the Platforms (as reported, and as evident through a selected review of documentation)?
  - What are the types of M&E and CLA tasks and processes that remain challenging despite having the Platform in place?

Purpose #2: Support the roll-out of the ADS revisions and inform USAID outreach and targeted training for Platforms

3. What are the gaps in understanding among USAID Platform C/AORs, Technical Office C/AORs with access to Platforms, and Platform staff regarding the Program Cycle, ADS guidance, and other USAID M&E and CLA references, resources, tools, and good practice?

## Section 3: Overview of Assessment Design and Methodology

The assessment is primarily qualitative, with some descriptive quantitative data collection, using purposive selection criteria and convenience sampling. Qualitative data collection involved interviews and group discussions with key informants selected from among USAID Mission/Office staff (from Program and Technical Offices), MECap M&E Fellows, USAID Implementing Partner personnel, Platform Chiefs of Party (and other Platform personnel, such as DCOPs, M&E Specialists, and home office support staff), and others who have had direct experience with at least one Platform, or who utilize or have access to

the technical services of a Platform, such as other USAID/W staff or PPL Program Cycle Network personnel.

### **3.1. Data Sources and Methods of Data Collection**

Data sources identified for this study include:

- Available documentation of current Platforms (including updated lists of M&E Mechanisms and Knowledge Management and Learning Mechanisms)
- RFPs/RFTOPs and SOWs (through FedBizOpps.gov, etc.) of Platforms
- USAID/Washington M&E POCs
- USAID Mission/Office Platform C/AORs/activity managers, CLA/Learning Advisors, POCs, and champions, key Program Office staff, and selected technical team staff with access to Platforms
- USAID Implementing Partners and Platform staff (i.e., COPs, DCOPs, M&E Specialists, and home office support staff, as appropriate)

Methods of data collection include:

- Desk reviews of available documentation on selected Platforms and selected M&E and CLA products and other documentation
- Key informant interviews
- Small group discussions

It is noted that PPL/LER did not release a data call for this assessment, as interviews and other data collection were managed by MECap. All data was collected by MECap staff (i.e., core staff, consultants, and Fellows) through contacts made by the M&E POCs and LER staff.

Data collection instruments:

- A spreadsheet was used for the capture and compilation of data from desk reviews
- Semi-structured interview/group discussion guides tailored to specific interviewees (by role/responsibility) were used for in-depth qualitative data collection (See Table A-2)

### **3.2. Platform Inventory and Initial Typology Analysis**

The MEL Platforms Assessment includes a limited level of data collection for all 55 Platforms for which MECap has documentation. Data across all Platforms was compiled from a review of each Platform SOW. A subset of 30 Platforms was selected for additional, in-depth data collection and analysis which included key informant and group interviews with relevant USAID staff (Platform C/AORs; key Program Office staff; CLA/Learning Advisors or POCs and CLA champions; Technical Office staff; and M&E POCs), Platform staff (COP, DCOP, M&E Specialists, home office-based support), and USAID implementing partner staff if/as appropriate (if they engage with the Platform on M&E and/or CLA).

The following sections summarize the process undertaken to create the Platform inventory, typology analysis, and the selection of Platforms for inclusion in the in-depth assessment.

#### **3.2.1. Platform Inventory Process**

The initial sources of information for creating an inventory of mission-based Platforms were the USAID master tracker Google sheets for M&E, Knowledge Management and Learning support mechanisms. Initially, a decision was made, in consultation with LER and M&E POCs, for the assessment to focus on field-based mechanisms rather than Washington-based Pillar Bureau mechanisms, although the



assessment team expects to inquire as to the interaction (or lack thereof) between field-based and Pillar-based mechanisms, as appropriate.

The team searched FedBizOps/the public domain for RFPs/RFTOPs/SOWs for mechanisms on the master tracker lists and added any additional mechanisms to the list as we came across SOWs in the public domain. Regional M&E POCs verified the Platforms on the list to the best of their ability and shared any additional SOWs.

This effort resulted in a list of 55 mission-based MEL Platform mechanisms for which the team has gathered RFP/RFTOP, SOW, or other documentation (such as a work plan, fact sheet, J&A). Platforms for which the assessment team did not receive or could not locate a SOW (or the equivalent content through other data sources) are not included in this assessment. For each Platform for which the team has a SOW or other sufficient documentation, the roles and responsibilities for each Platform are documented and a typology analysis undertaken. This is described in the next section.

### **3.2.2. Key Typologies**

One of the first steps in the assessment design and analysis was to identify and organize Platforms by typologies. A typology analysis was undertaken for all Platforms, based on information available to the MECap team. Typologies are based on key characteristics that define different types of Platforms. Based on consultations with Washington M&E POCs and PPL/LER, the MECap team developed a list of priority criteria for developing mechanism typologies. Key characteristics for the grouping and analysis of mechanisms include:

- Regional or Bilateral Mission placement
- Managing office (i.e., Program Office, DO/Technical Office)
- MIS<sup>10</sup> development/management component to Platform
- Collaborating, Learning & Adapting (CLA) incorporated (or not) into the mechanism
- Services offered (e.g., evaluation and/or monitoring functions; baseline data collection; capacity building; other services)

The assessment team developed typologies by first creating a dataset that includes the above characteristics for each Platform. The team then sorted and grouped the Platforms into regional (9) or bilateral (46) mechanisms, then within these categories, according to management from a Program Office or Technical Office. Within each of these basic typologies are additional typologies identified by the various combinations of characteristics that emerge as common or shared characteristics. Each of the Platforms in the assessment (i.e., for which we have adequate documentation) is included in the typologies described below. The initial typologies (Regional/Bilateral, Program Office/Technical Office) are mutually exclusive categories. Below this level, Platforms may share a variety of characteristics, thus the nested typologies are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Figure A-1 illustrates the characteristics of:

- Typology 1: Platforms placed in the Program Office in a regional mission
- Typology 2: Platforms placed in a Technical Office in a regional mission

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<sup>10</sup> For this assessment, an MIS is defined as a computerized information system and associated procedures designed for performance monitoring (and/or other data) reporting, compilation, management and access.

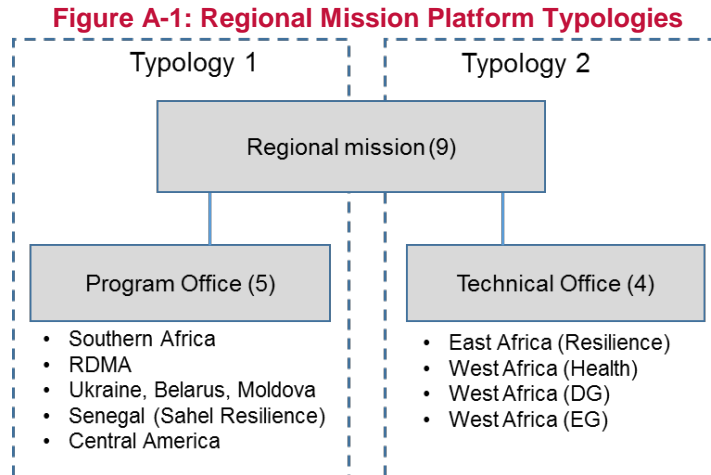
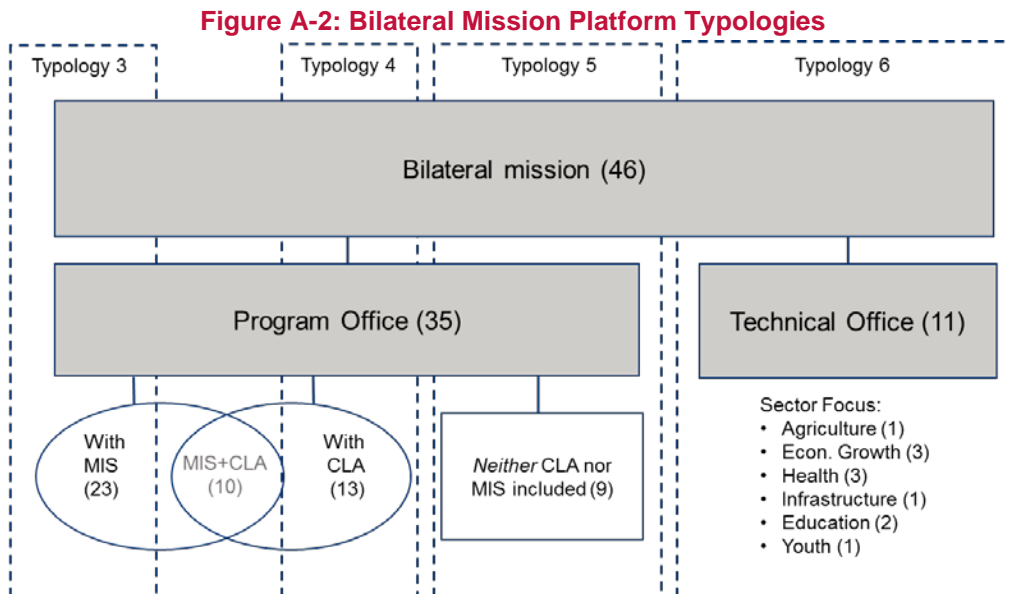


Figure A-2 illustrates the four basic Platform typologies found within those mechanisms placed in bilateral missions.

- Typology 3 includes Platforms placed in a Program Office in a bilateral mission that incorporate the development and/or management of an MIS/data management system.
- The fourth typology covers Platforms placed in a Program Office in a bilateral mission that include CLA as a function. Ten mechanisms overlap between Typology 3 and 4, as they are Platforms that include an MIS system component *and* CLA.
- Typology 5 is comprised of Platforms that are placed in a bilateral mission Program Office that incorporate *neither* MIS nor CLA functions. The last typology, Typology 6, consists of Platforms managed from a bilateral mission Technical Office; there are 11 such Platforms focusing on six different sectors.



The typologies served as criteria for selecting Platforms for inclusion in the in-depth data collection and analysis, the process for which is described in the next section.

### **3.2.3. Missions/Mechanisms Included for In-depth Data Collection and Analysis**

Due to the time and resources available for this assessment, it was not feasible to conduct in-depth data collection and key informant interviews for each of the identified Platforms. The MECap team included a subset of 30 mechanisms for in-depth data collection for answering assessment questions 1 and 2. The selection criteria, as developed in consultation with LER and M&E POCs, strived for a balanced representation of:

- All predominant typologies of Platform mechanisms
- Geographical regions (Africa, Asia, LAC, ME, E&E, OAPA)
- Permissive and non-permissive environments<sup>11</sup>
- A range of mechanisms by size (identified by mechanism ceiling amount, classified as High=More than \$30M; Medium=\$12-\$30M; Low=Less than \$12M)
- A range of sector-specific Platforms versus Platforms serving all programs
- A range of missions with Initiative-heavy portfolios (identified as a Feed the Future focus country and/or PEPFAR bilateral country)
- Longevity (first or follow-on Platform for the mission, early-to-late in implementation)
- Integration of Local Solutions (identified by a local prime contractor and/or Platforms' contribution to local partner MEL capacity development)

Platform selection was also informed by regional M&E POCs' perspectives on a mission's availability and capacity to be able to participate in the assessment. In addition, missions where the assessment team had easy access or presence (such as the placement of a MECap Fellow, TDY assignments, and expressions of interest from individuals in the mission) were included in the in-depth analysis.

In answering question 3, "What are the gaps in understanding the Program Cycle and ADS guidance among the Platform staff and C/AORs?", missions with a current MECap M&E or Learning Fellow were selected for an in-depth look at current (or in the case of Rwanda, prior) experience with a Platform. MECap Fellows offer a unique perspective as well as an accessible entry point to examine issues related to MEL and Program Cycle implementation in a mission. These missions included Kenya, Nepal, Somalia (Kenya-based), Uganda, Sahel Regional, Senegal Bilateral, Southern Africa, and Rwanda missions or offices.

#### **Selection Process**

The first step in the selection process was to group all mechanisms by region because along with Platform typology, regional representation was identified as a critical factor for the in-depth assessment. The assessment team calculated a target number of missions to include in the selected subset for each region, roughly proportional to the number of mechanisms from each region in the complete list of Platforms for which documentation is available. Once grouped by region, missions with a MECap M&E or Learning Fellow were selected because of the ease of access to the Platform/mission and the desire to capture the unique perspective of the MECap Fellows in these missions. Then each Platform was assessed against the additional selection criteria and selected or not selected to provide balanced

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<sup>11</sup> At the time of the assessment, USAID defined a non-permissive environment country as having significant barriers to operating effectively and safely due to one or more of the following factors: armed conflict to which the U.S. is a party or not a party; limited physical access due to distance, disaster, geography, or non-presence; restricted political space due to repression of political activity and expression; or uncontrolled criminality including corruption.

representation across the criteria. After Platforms from each region were selected, the full list of Platforms across regions was assessed again to ensure the representation of the full subset was balanced.

The MECap team undertook an initial mechanism selection, based on the criteria above, and received feedback and confirmation on this short list from Regional M&E POCs and LER. Table A-1 contains the list of all 55 Platform mechanisms in the assessment. Regional representation in the final selected mechanisms is as follows: Africa = 17; Asia = 5; Europe and Eurasia (E&E) = 1; Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) = 3; Middle East (ME) = 3; and Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs (OAPA) = 1.

**Table A-1: List of MEL Platforms in Assessment<sup>12</sup>**

Managing OU	Name of Mechanism <sup>13</sup>
AFRICA (26)	East Africa Evaluation Services & Program Support
	East Africa Resilience Learning Project
	Ethiopia Ethiopia Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Service (EPMES)
	Ethiopia Agriculture Knowledge, Learning, Documentation and Policy Project
	Ghana Evaluate for Health
	Ghana USAID Partnership for Education: Monitoring Support Services
	Ghana Evaluating Systems
	Ghana Monitoring and Evaluation Technical Support Services (METSS II)
	Kenya Kenya Program Support Contract*
	Liberia Liberia Monitoring and Evaluation Program (L-MEP)
	Liberia Liberia Strategic Analysis
	Mali Monitoring and Evaluation Platform (IDIQ and Task Order 1)
	Mozambique Mozambique Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism and Service (MMEMS)
	Nigeria Monitoring and Evaluation Management Services, Phase II
	Rwanda Monitoring and Evaluation Management Services (MEMS)*
	Senegal USAID/Senegal Monitoring & Evaluation Project
	Sahel Regional Sahel Resilience Learning (SAREL)
	Somalia Somalia Program Support Services (SPSS)
	South Sudan Monitoring and Evaluation Support Project (MESP)*
	Southern Africa Local Indefinite-Quantity Contracts (IQCs) for Evaluation Services
	Tanzania Tanzania Mission Monitoring and evaluation Services (TMEMS II)
	Uganda Monitoring and Evaluation of Emergency Plan Progress - Phase Two Program (MEEP II)
	Uganda Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Program (Contract)*
	West Africa Regional Analytical and Support Services for Evaluations for Sustainable Systems (ASSESS)
	West Africa Regional Evaluation and Analytical Services for Peace and Governance Programs in West Africa
	West Africa Regional Evidence for Development (E4D)
ASIA (7)	Bangladesh Accelerating Capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation (ACME)
	India Evaluation Services*
	Indonesia Monitoring and Evaluation Support

<sup>12</sup> Platforms included in the assessment are those for which the team received or located a SOW (or the equivalent content through other data sources).

<sup>13</sup> Mechanisms marked with an asterisk (\*) were part of the 2013 M&E Platform Study.

<b>Managing OU</b>	<b>Name of Mechanism<sup>13</sup></b>
	Nepal Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL)
	Nepal PMP Development*
	RDMA USAID Asia Learning and M&E Support*
	Vietnam Vietnam Evaluation, Monitoring, and Survey Services (VEMSS)
<b>E&amp;E (3)</b>	Bosnia & Herzegovina Monitoring and Evaluation Support
	Georgia Mission Evaluation Mechanism (MEM)*
	Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova Analytical Services
<b>LAC (8)</b>	El Salvador/Central Amer. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (M&E&L)
	Colombia Evaluation and Analysis for Learning (EVAL) Project*
	Colombia M&E Clearinghouse – MONITOR
	Dominican Republic M&E for Caribbean Basic Security Initiative
	Guatemala Monitoring and Evaluation Program (MEP)
	Honduras M&E Support for Collaborative Learning & Adapting (MESCLA)
	Peru Evaluation Services*
	Venezuela Venezuela Monitoring Award
<b>ME (7)</b>	Egypt Services to Improve Performance Management, Enhance Learning and Evaluation (SIMPLE)*
	Iraq Advancing Performance Management*
	Jordan Monitoring and Evaluation Support Project*
	Lebanon Performance Management and Support Program for Lebanon- PMSPL (follow-on)
	West Bank/Gaza Short-Term Performance Monitoring for USAID-Funded Gaza Activities
	Yemen Yemen Monitoring and Evaluation Program (YMEP II)
	Yemen Yemen Monitoring and Evaluation Program (YMEP)*
<b>OAPA (4)</b>	Afghanistan Engineering, Quality Assurance, and Logistical Support (EQUALS)
	Afghanistan Monitoring Support Project (MSP)
	Afghanistan Services under Program and Project Offices for Results Tracking (SUPPORT), Phase II*
	Pakistan Performance Management Support Contract (PERFORM)

**Table A-2: Questionnaire (Extraction from Excel-Based Instrument)**

- ID**
- A) Mission (or Country):
  - B) Platform Name
  - C) Bilateral or Regional (mark one)
  - D) Name of Interviewee
  - E) Type of Interviewee
  - E) Office of Interviewee
  - F) Interviewee Position or Role
  - G) Name of Interviewer
  - H) Date of Interview
  - I) Performance Monitoring in SOW?
  - J) Data Management in SOW?
  - K) Evaluation in SOW?
  - L) Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) in SOW?
  - M) MEL Capacity Building in SOW?
  - N) Other Assessments or Analysis in SOW?
  - Do you agree to participate?

**I. MEL IN THE MISSION**

**M&E(L) positions within Program Office**

- 1) How many M&E Specialist positions are currently filled in the Program Office?
  - 1a) FSOs
  - 1b) FSNs
  - 1c) PSCs
  - 1d) Other (EFM, etc)
- 2) Are there any vacant M&E positions currently in the Program Office?
  - 2a) Notes
- 3) Is there anyone else in the Program Office who undertakes M&E responsibilities? Part-time or full-time?
  - 3a) Explanation/ Notes
  - 3b) Part Time (#)
  - 3c) Full Time (#)
- 4) Is there anyone in the Program Office who has responsibility for CLA?
  - 4a) Notes

**M&E(L) in Technical Offices**

- 5) What are the Technical Offices in the mission?
  - 5a) Office 1:
  - 5b) Office 2:
  - 5c) Office 3:
  - 5d) Office 4:
  - 5e) Office 5:
  - 5f) Notes:
- 5g) Are there M&E specialists in Technical Offices?
  - 5h) Notes
  - 5i) If YES, how many? And in which office(s)?
    - 5j) # in Office:
    - 5k) # in Office:
    - 5l) # in Office:
    - 5m) # in Office:
    - 5n) # in Office:



**Table A-2: Questionnaire (Extraction from Excel-Based Instrument)***M&E(L) in Technical Offices (continued)*

5o) Is there anyone in a technical office who has responsibility for CLA?

5p) Notes

6) Do Program Office staff regularly attend Tech/DO team meetings?

6a) Notes

## M&amp;E(L) working group(s) in Mission

7) Is there an M&amp;E &amp; Learning Working group in the mission?

7a) Notes

7b) If YES: What is their role? What do they do?

## Your M&amp;E background/experience

8) How many years have you worked on USAID programs, either as a USAID staff or with an IP?

9) How many years have you worked in monitoring and evaluation?

10) Have you have been involved in reviewing/developing the CDCS?

11) Have you have been involved in developing PMPs and/or Project M&amp;E Plans?

12) Have you have been involved in developing PADs?

13) What M&amp;E and Learning guidance and/or tools have you used? (Name a few)

14) How useful would you say the guidance or tools are, for the most part? (check one)

15) Which guidance or tools would you say have been most helpful and/or most useful to you?

**II. PLATFORM DESIGN, MOTIVATION & RATIONALE**

16) Basic Information on Platform

16a) Managing Office

16b) Sector/Office Coverage

16c) Start Date of Platform

16d) End Date of Platform

16e) Mechanism Type

16f) Follow-on vs. First MEL Platform?

17) Based on your understanding, why did the mission decide to procure a MEL Platform?

18) If the Platform is based in the Program Office, what is your understanding of why the Platform is based in the Program Office and not in a Technical Office?

19) Can you describe how the Program Office received input from the Technical Offices for the design of the Platform?

20) If the Platform is based in a Technical Office, what is your understanding of why the Platform is based in a Technical Office and not in the Program Office?

21) Please describe how the Program Office provided input to the Technical Office in the design of the Platform?

22) How long did it take [the mission/your office] to complete the Platform contracting process?

23) Based on your understanding, did the mission encounter any difficulties or challenges during the original procurement process (prior to any amendments, etc.)?

23a) Please explain.

24) What is your understanding of why [the mission/your office] chose to work with a local partner to implement the Platform?

**III. OVERALL PLATFORM STRUCTURE AND ACCESS**

25) Please describe the current staffing structure within the Platform.

25a) Platform staff in country

25b) Platform staff in HQ (e.g., DC area)

26) What staffing roles are filled by expat staff?

27) What staffing roles are filled by local staff?

28) Has the staffing structure changed over the life of the Platform?

**Table A-2: Questionnaire (Extraction from Excel-Based Instrument)**

- 28a) Why or why not?
- 29) Management of Platform
- 30) How is information about available services/functions of the Platform communicated?
- 30a) FOR USAID interviewees ONLY: Within the Mission
- 30b) Externally (e.g., with implementing partners, government stakeholders)
- 31) What is the process for requesting support from the Platform?
- 31a) FOR USAID interviewees ONLY: For Mission Technical Teams requesting support?
- 31b) For implementing partners requesting support?
- 32) Would you change anything about this process for engaging the Platform?
- 32a) If yes, please describe.
- 33) Do you know if activity mechanism contracts/agreements contain language requiring IPs to work with the Platform?
- 33a) If yes, please describe.

#### IV. MEL PLATFORM ASSESSMENT FUNCTIONS

##### SECTION A. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

- 34) I understand from the SOW that performance monitoring IS included in the scope of the Platform. Is this correct?
- 34a) NOTES
- 34b) Has this always been the case?
- 34c) NOTES
- 34d) [If it has changed] what changed and why? (&/or other NOTES)
- 35) Does the platform undertake the following performance monitoring tasks?
- 35a) Remote Monitoring
- 35b) Remote Monitoring: Can you please describe some of the remote monitoring practices undertaken by the Platform?
- 35c) Remote Monitoring: Particular successes or challenges?
- 35d) Third-party indicator data verification (e.g., Does Platform staff go out and verify indicator reporting on behalf of an activity C/AOR? Does Platform staff verify IP activity reporting & indicators?)
- 35e) Context indicators
- 35f) CDCS/DO-level performance monitoring indicators
- 35g) Activity ME(L) Plans
- 35h) Activity ME(L) Plans: Help C/AORs review AMEPs
- 35i) Activity ME(L) Plans: Help IPs develop AMEPs
- 35j) Activity ME(L) Plans: NOTES
- 35k) Indicator DQAs
- 35l) How frequently does the Platform do DQAs?
- 35m) What prompts or triggers DQAs? Does the platform conduct DQAs more frequently than every 3 yrs and what is the process that would trigger a DQA?
- 35n) Mission PMP Development or Revision
- 35o) Mission PMP Development or Revision: NOTES
- 35p) Other? Any other monitoring functions undertaken by the platform not already addressed above?
- 35q) Other - Please describe:
- 36) Has this portfolio of monitoring tasks changed over the course of the Platform mechanism?
- 36a) If YES, How and Why? (or if you want to add any other NOTES, you can include them here)
- 37) Why are/were certain monitoring tasks included and others excluded in the scope of the Platform?

**Table A-2: Questionnaire (Extraction from Excel-Based Instrument)**

38) Do you know if the Platform has used any innovative (non-traditional) monitoring methods in their work?

38a) If YES, Please describe. (&/or other NOTES)

39) Have you or your team used the Platform for monitoring functions (e.g., remote monitoring, data verification, Activity MEL Plans, DQAs, etc.)?

39a) If YES, Please describe. (&/or other NOTES)

40) About the performance monitoring services—would you say they meet your expectations....

40a) Why/Why not?

41) Can you tell me about any successes or positive strategies that have come about through the Mission/Offices' use of the Platform for performance monitoring?

42) Please describe any specific challenges to using the Platform for performance monitoring functions.

#### SECTION B. DATA MANAGEMENT

43) I understand from the SOW that data management (i.e., indicator and/or reporting data management) IS included in the scope of the Platform. Is this correct?

43a) NOTES

43b) Has this always been the case?

43c) NOTES

43d) If it has changed, why?

44) Does the Platform undertake the following specific data management tasks?

44a) [Indicator] Data reporting and management

44b) [Indicator] Data reporting and management: Aggregating data from multiple partners

44c) [Indicator] Data reporting and management: Compiling data for PPR, Portfolio Reviews

44d) [Indicator] Data reporting and management: Creating data reporting procedures

44e) [Indicator] Data reporting and management: Creating customized information products

44f) [Indicator] Data reporting and management: Other

44g) [Indicator] Data reporting and management: NOTES

44h) MIS Development/Management

44i) MIS Development/Management: IF YES, Please describe the capabilities of the MIS system.

44j) MIS Development/Management: Is proprietary software used?

44k) MIS Development/Management: Who maintains the MIS and how?

44l) MIS Development/Management: Are there plans to shift management of the MIS to USAID?

44m) MIS Development/Management: Any other pertinent information to share related to the MIS?

44n) Geo-coded data collection and management

44o) Geo-coded data collection and management: NOTES

45) Has this portfolio of data management tasks changed over the course of the Platform mechanism?

45a) If YES, how and why? (&/or other NOTES)

46) Why are/were certain data management tasks included and others excluded in the scope of the Platform?

47) Have you or your team requested/accessed the Platform for data management?

47a) NOTES

48) About the data management—would you say they meet your expectations....

48a) Why/Why not?

49) Can you tell me about any successes or positive strategies that have come about through the Mission/Offices' use of the Platform for data management?

**Table A-2: Questionnaire (Extraction from Excel-Based Instrument)**

50) Please describe any specific challenges to using the Platform for data management functions.

### SECTION C: EVALUATION

51) I understand from the SOW that Evaluation IS included in the scope of the Platform. Is this correct?

51a) Has this always been the case?

51b) NOTES

51c) [If it has changed] what changed and why? (&/or other NOTES)

52) Does the platform undertake the following evaluation tasks?

52a) Develop Evaluation SOWs

52b) Performance Evaluations

52c) Impact Evaluations

52d) Meta-evaluations

52e) Whole-of-project Evaluations

52f) Platform sources/manages/provides logistics/admin for evaluations only

52g) Evaluation Action Plans

52h) Evaluation Action Plans: Developing Evaluation Action Plans with/for USAID

52i) Evaluation Action Plans: Tracking Evaluation Action/Use

52j) Identify what Evaluations will be undertaken

52k) Other

52l) Other - Description

52m) Please explain or elaborate on tasks checked.

53) Has this portfolio of evaluation tasks changed over the course of the Platform mechanism?

53a) If YES, how and why? (&/or other NOTES)

54) Why are/were certain evaluation tasks included and others excluded in the scope of the Platform?

55) Do you know if the Platform has used any innovative (non-traditional) evaluation designs or methods in its work?

55a) If YES, Please describe. (&/or other NOTES)

56) Have you or your team used the Platform for evaluations?

56a) Evaluation SOWs

56b) Performance Evaluations

56c) Impact Evaluations

56d) Meta-evaluations

56e) Whole-of-project Evaluations

56f) Platform sources/manages/provides logistics/admin for evaluations only

56g) Evaluation Action Plans

56h) Evaluation Action Plans: Developing Evaluation Action Plans with/for USAID

56i) Evaluation Action Plans: Tracking Evaluation Action/Use

56j) Identify what Evaluations will be done

56k) Other

56l) Other - Description

56m) ANY NOTES on tasks checked.

57) About the evaluation services—would you say they meet your expectations....

57a) Why/Why not?

58) Can you tell me about any successes or positive strategies that have come about through the Mission/Offices' use of the Platform for evaluation functions?

**Table A-2: Questionnaire (Extraction from Excel-Based Instrument)**

- 59) Please describe any specific challenges to using the Platform for evaluation functions.  
 60) Please describe any specific challenges you (as the Platform) have encountered in carrying out the evaluation functions noted earlier. (Q 52)

**SECTION D: COLLABORATING, LEARNING, AND ADAPTING (CLA)**

- 61) How would you describe this Mission's general approach to CLA?  
 62) I understand from the SOW that CLA IS included in the scope of the Platform...?  
 62a) Has this always been the case?  
 62b) NOTES  
 62c) [If it has changed] what changed and why? (&/or other NOTES)  
 63) Does the Platform do the following CLA or Learning tasks?  
 63a) Collaboration  
 63b) Collaboration - Description  
 63c) Learning  
 63d) Learning: CLA plans  
 63e) Learning: Learning agendas  
 63f) Learning: Partner meeting agendas  
 63g) Learning: Learning events  
 63h) Learning: Learning/portfolio reviews  
 63i) Learning: Knowledge capture/exchange  
 63j) Learning: Handover exit interviews  
 63k) Learning: Scenario planning  
 63l) Learning: Other Learning  
 63m) Learning: Other - Description  
 63n) Learning: NOTES  
 63o) Other CLA  
 63p) Other CLA - Description  
 64) Has this portfolio of CLA or Learning tasks changed over the course of the Platform mechanism?  
 64a) If YES, how and why? (&/or other NOTES)  
 65) Why are/were certain CLA or Learning tasks included and others excluded in the scope of the Platform?  
 66) Has the Platform used any innovative (non-traditional) methods in its CLA or Learning work?  
 66a) If YES, Please describe. (&/or other NOTES)  
 67) Have you or your team used the Platform for CLA or Learning services?  
 67a) NOTES  
 67b) Collaboration  
 67c) Collaboration (Specify):- Description  
 67d) Learning  
 67e) Learning: CLA plans  
 67f) Learning: Learning agendas  
 67g) Learning: Partner meeting agendas  
 67h) Learning: Learning events  
 67i) Learning: Learning/portfolio reviews  
 67j) Learning: Knowledge capture/exchange  
 67k) Learning: Handover exit interviews  
 67l) Learning: Scenario planning  
 67m) Learning: Other Learning  
 67n) Learning: Other - Description  
 67o) Learning: NOTES

**Table A-2: Questionnaire (Extraction from Excel-Based Instrument)**

- 67p) Other CLA  
 67q) Other CLA - Description  
 68) About the CLA or Learning services— would you say they meet your expectations....  
 68a) Why/Why not?  
 69) Can you tell me about any successes or positive strategies that have come about through the Mission/Offices' use of the Platform for CLA or Learning functions?  
 70) Please describe any specific challenges to using the Platform for CLA or Learning functions.
- SECTION E: MEL CAPACITY BUILDING**
- 71) I understand from the SOW that Capacity Building IS included in the scope of the Platform. Is this correct?  
 71a) Has this always been the case?  
 71b) NOTES  
 71c) [If it has changed] what changed and why? (&/or other NOTES)  
 72) If the Platform provides capacity building, does it conduct.....?  
 72a) Formal training (workshop, clinic, etc)  
 72b) Formal training (workshop, clinic, etc): USAID staff  
 72c) Formal training (workshop, clinic, etc): Implementing Partner Staff  
 72d) Formal training (workshop, clinic, etc): Host Government Staff  
 72e) Formal training (workshop, clinic, etc): Other  
 72f) Formal training (workshop, clinic, etc): Other - Description  
 72g) Formal training (workshop, clinic, etc): NOTES  
 72h) Mentoring on an as-needed basis  
 72i) Mentoring on an as-needed basis: NOTES  
 72j) Other MEL Capacity Building  
 72k) Other MEL Capacity Building - Description  
 73) In what topics does the Platform do capacity building? Please elaborate.
- PERFORMANCE MONITORING:**
- 73a) Third-party indicator data verification (of IP activity reporting/indicators)  
 73b) Third-party monitoring of higher-level indicators for USAID (context and/or performance monitoring indicators)  
 73c) Activity ME(L) Plans  
 73d) Activity ME(L) Plans: Review AMEPs  
 73e) Activity ME(L) Plans: Development of AMEPs  
 73f) Indicator DQAs  
 73g) Mission PMP Development and/or Review  
 73h) Other Performance Monitoring  
 73i) Other Performance Monitoring - Description
- DATA MANAGEMENT:**
- 73j) Data reporting and management  
 73k) MIS Development/Management  
 73l) Geo-coded data collection & management
- EVALUATION:**
- 73m) Performance Evaluations  
 73n) Impact Evaluations  
 73o) Meta-evaluations  
 73p) Platform sources/manages/provides logistics/admin for evaluations only  
 73q) Evaluation Action Plans  
 73r) Evaluation planning support

**Table A-2: Questionnaire (Extraction from Excel-Based Instrument)**

- CLA:
- 73s) Collaboration (e.g., internal/external, stakeholder engagement, etc.)
  - 73t) Learning
  - 73u) Learning: CLA plans
  - 73v) Learning: Learning agendas
  - 73w) Learning: Partner meeting agendas
  - 73x) Learning: Learning events
  - 73y) Learning: Learning/portfolio reviews
  - 73z) Learning: Knowledge capture/exchange
  - 73aa) Learning: Handover exit interviews
  - 73ab) Learning: Scenario planning
  - 73ac) Learning: Other Learning
  - 73ad) Learning: Other - Description
  - 73ae) Other CLA
  - 73af) Other CLA - Description
- OTHER STUDIES/ASSESSMENTS:
- 73ag) Special Studies
  - 73ah) Special Studies - Description
  - 73ai) Gender Assessment
  - 73aj) Climate Change Assessment
  - 73ak) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring
  - 73al) GIS Analysis
- 74) Has this portfolio of capacity building tasks changed over the course of the Platform mechanism?
- 74a) If YES, why? (&/or other NOTES)
- 75) Have you or your team attended capacity building sessions provided by the Platform?
- 75a) If YES, What?
- 76) About the MEL capacity building— would you say they meet your expectations....
- 76a) Why/Why not?
- 77) Do you think your/your team's capacity to carry out monitoring, evaluation, and learning tasks changed?
- 77a) Improved
  - 77b) How?
  - 77c) Remained the same
  - 77d) How?
  - 77e) Decreased
  - 77f) How?
- 78) Can you tell me about any successes or positive strategies that have come about through the Mission/Offices' use of Platform for capacity building?
- 79) Please describe any specific challenges to using the Platform for capacity building.
- SECTION F: OTHER ASSESSMENTS or ANALYSES**
- 80) I understand from the SOW that other assessments or analyses ARE included in the scope of the Platform. Is this correct?
- 80a) Has this always been the case?
  - 80b) NOTES
  - 80c) [If it has changed] what changed and why? (&/or other NOTES)
- 81) Which assessments or analyses does the platform undertake?
- 81a) Special Studies



**Table A-2: Questionnaire (Extraction from Excel-Based Instrument)**

- 81b) Special Studies - Description  
81c) Gender Assessment  
81d) Climate Change Assessment  
81e) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring  
81f) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring: Environmental Threats and Opportunities Assessment (ETOA)  
81g) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring: Environmental Mitigation & Monitoring Plan (EMMP) development and/or review  
81h) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring: Environmental Mitigation & Monitoring  
81i) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring: Training in Environmental Mitigation & Monitoring  
81j) GIS Analysis  
81k) Other  
81l) Other - Description  
81m) NOTES  
82) Has this portfolio of assessments or analyses changed over the course of the Platform mechanism?  
82a) If YES, how and why? (&/or other NOTES)  
83) Why are/were certain assessments or analyses included and others excluded?  
84) Do you know if the Platform has used any innovative (non-traditional) designs or methods for the assigned assessments or analyses?  
84a) If YES, Please describe. (&/or other NOTES)  
85) Have you or your team used the Platform for assessments or analyses?  
85a) NOTES  
85b) Special Studies  
85c) Special Studies - Description  
85d) Gender Assessment  
85e) Climate Change Assessment  
85f) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring  
85g) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring: Environmental Threats and Opportunities Assessment (ETOA)  
85h) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring: Environmental Mitigation & Monitoring Plan (EMMP) development and/or review  
85i) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring: Environmental Mitigation & Monitoring  
85j) Environmental Assessment/Monitoring: Training in Environmental Mitigation & Monitoring  
85k) GIS Analysis  
85l) Other  
85m) Other - Description  
85n) NOTES  
86) About the assessments or analyses— would you say they meet your expectations....  
86a) Why/Why not?  
87) Can you tell me about any successes or positive strategies that have come about through the Mission/Offices' use of the Platform for assessments or analyses?  
88) Please describe any specific challenges to using the Platform for assessments or analyses.
- SECTION G: FUNCTIONS, OVERALL ASSESSMENT/IMPRESSIONS**
- 89) Are there any other functions/tasks that the Platform has done for your team?  
90) Are there services that the Platform is NOT providing that you expect it should be?  
90a) If YES, please explain. (&/or other NOTES)  
91) Anything else you would like to add about how the -- M&E Support (Partnership for Education) -- functions and how it can be accessed by your team?

**Table A-2: Questionnaire (Extraction from Excel-Based Instrument)**

92) Can you name 1 or 2 areas where having the platform exceeds your expectations and/or the Mission's expectations?

93) Are there areas where the Platform has given you pause or led to doubts about the value of having an MEL Platform?

94) As you know, part of this assessment includes a selected document review. Which documents or MEL products could you share that would help illustrate or elaborate on what we've discussed?

**V-A. USE/ACCESS OF OTHER MEL PLATFORMS IN THE MISSION**

95) Does your [mission/office] use multiple MEL Platforms?

95a) Yes, other Platforms in the mission

95b) Yes, a Regional mission platform

95c) Yes, DC-based Platforms

95d) Pillar/Sector

95e) General M&E(L) IDIQ

95f) I don't know

95g) No

95h) Why or why not? When are other Platforms typically accessed? Please explain.

96) Does the -- M&E Support (Partnership for Education) -- interact with other Platforms used in the mission?

96a) Why or why not? What is the nature of that interaction? Please explain

**V-B. USE/ACCESS OF REGIONAL MEL PLATFORMS**

97) How does the regional platform service missions in the region?

97a) MISSIONS with no MEL PLATFORM

97b) MISSIONS with a BILATERAL MEL PLATFORM

98) What is your understanding of why missions are using either their own Mission-based Bilateral Platform, a DC-based Platform (e.g., either pillar bureau/sector-based or a other general M&E IDIQ), or a Regional Platform?

99) Are there any particular benefits or challenges to the regional nature of the platform you'd like to tell us about?

100) Does the -- M&E Support (Partnership for Education) -- interact with other Platforms in the region or in DC?

100a) Why or why not? What is the nature of that interaction? Please explain

**VI. OVERALL: IMPLEMENTATION / CAPACITY / EXPECTATIONS / SUCCESSES**

101) Are you aware of any hurdles, challenges, or barriers to the implementation of the M&E Support (Partnership for Education)?

101a) Can you elaborate?

102) Any particular successes with the Platform that you would like to share?

103) What further technical and/or capacity building support in MEL would be helpful? (Probe for USAID: from PPL/LER?)

104) Is there anything else you would like to share about the M&E Support (Partnership for Education)?

**VII. CLOSING**

INTERVIEWER NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

**SUPPLEMENTARY FIELDS**

Total # of months in Platform

Total # of months into Platform

% Platform Complete

Implementation Status

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