MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLATFORMS

Considerations for Design and Implementation Based on a Survey of Current Practices

DISCUSSION NOTE

PUBLIC VERSION

September 2013
Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning
Office of Learning, Evaluation & Research

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Platform mechanisms have become increasingly popular across USAID missions. This report is designed to assist missions on issues to consider in developing and managing M&E Platforms based on recent experience from across the Agency. The term "Monitoring and Evaluation 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.

Data for this report is based on key informant interviews with USAID staff and a review of contract documents for M&E Platforms, including Statements of Work (SOW). In total, 23 current, recently completed, or planned M&E Platforms were identified across 20 separate missions. Mission respondents identified the following reasons for choosing an M&E Platform to address mission M&E needs:

1. *Speed*, i.e., the possibility of quickly fielding M&E tasks;
2. *Implementer continuity* from a single contractor completing mission M&E tasks;
3. *Limited staff resources* to do M&E or to contract each M&E task separately;
4. *Access to technical M&E expertise* that is not available in the mission;
5. The ability to execute *a variety of M&E related functions* in addition to M&E.

All of the twenty-three M&E Platforms addressed in this report include, at minimum, evaluation or monitoring tasks. A majority of these M&E Platforms included both. In addition to monitoring and evaluation functions, other functions frequently included in these mechanisms are:

- monitoring and evaluation data management;
- conducting other analyses and assessments;
- monitoring and evaluation capacity building; and
- various other functions, such as strategic communications and learning functions.

Overall, key informants were satisfied with their M&E Platform and at least half would recommend their M&E Platform to other missions. Satisfaction with "speed and ease of procurement" of the M&E Platform itself received the lowest levels of satisfaction among the questions asked.

Issues for missions to consider in *designing* the M&E Platform include how many and which M&E functions to include in the M&E platform, how much flexibility is needed, and whether the platform should cover specific sectors or the entire mission portfolio. These design issues affect further decisions to be made regarding *contracting* the M&E Platform, including what type of contract to use; how to fund the M&E Platform; and the entity to contract with – small/large, US/local, one contractor/multiple contractors. Finally, respondents noted a variety of issues that could affect M&E Platform implementation, such as the time and technical skills needed to manage the contract, tensions between program offices and technical offices, and capacity of M&E Platform implementers.

M&E Platforms that are appropriately designed and well managed can be a successful tool for meeting mission M&E needs and contributing to a changed culture that values evidence based decision making and learning. Details about each M&E Platform addressed in this report can be found in the Annexes. SOWs for many of these are available to USAID staff on ProgramNet.

I. PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Platform mechanisms have become increasingly popular across USAID missions. This report is designed to assist missions on issues to consider in developing and managing M&E Platforms based on recent experience from across the Agency.[1]

The report is organized as follows:
1. The rest of **Section one** defines "Monitoring and Evaluation Platform" and describes the methodology for this report.
2. **Section two** provides an overview of the M&E Platforms discussed in this report.
3. **Section three** briefly describes the motivations and potential benefits for creating an M&E Platform.
4. **Section four** discusses design issues to consider when developing an M&E Platform Statement of Work (SOW).
5. **Section five** discusses issues related to contracting the M&E Platform.
6. **Section six** discusses implementation hurdles experienced by missions with M&E Platforms.

Defining "Monitoring and Evaluation Platform"

The term "Monitoring and Evaluation 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. For the purpose of this report, a **Monitoring and Evaluation Platform is defined as *an implementing mechanism which gives a mission or other operating unit access to technical and advisory services to design and carry out multiple, third-party, monitoring and evaluation tasks.*[2]** These M&E Platform mechanisms may often include additional tasks related to monitoring and evaluation, such as management information system development, M&E training, Geographic Information System (GIS) services, strategic communications, assessments, and learning activities. Platforms that include only such services, but not monitoring or evaluation services, were *not* considered *M&E* Platforms and were not included in this report. Moreover, only those mechanisms that conduct monitoring and evaluation tasks over a minimum of two years and across multiple sectors or offices were considered M&E *Platforms* and were included in this report. However, some information was gathered on a few sector/office specific M&E mechanisms and M&E mechanisms of less than one year in duration. Information about such mechanisms are noted where appropriate.

Methodology

Data for this report is based on key informant interviews with USAID staff and a review of contract documents for M&E Platforms, including Statements of Works. To understand which missions currently have, previously had, or are planning to have M&E Platforms, PPL reached out to USAID/W regional bureaus and missions through formal and informal communications. Key informants mostly self-identified through ProgramNet or through PPL outreach. In total, representatives of 35 missions were contacted with requests for an interview. Of these, representatives of 22 missions responded (63% response rate).

One to three informants per mission were interviewed in each of the 22 missions. In total, 32 individual and group interviews were conducted. Most of the interviewees were based in mission Program Offices, with an even split between Foreign Service Officers (FSOs)/ Personal Service

---

[1] PPL thanks Jindra Cekan and Amy Stenoien for their data collection and analysis contributions to this report.

[2] For this report, "Third-party" means that the implementer of the M&E platform is monitoring and evaluating the activities and expected results of other USAID implementers; mechanisms that monitor or evaluate an implementer's own activities or expected results were not included. "*Multiple* monitoring and evaluation tasks" means that the mechanism should include at least two evaluations or the monitoring of multiple projects or activities. Mechanisms for conducting a single-evaluation or for monitoring a single project or activity are not included in this definition.

Contractors (PSCs) and Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs). Mission respondents were interviewed based on a standard questionnaire that included structured questions regarding satisfaction with the M&E Platform and open-ended questions regarding the design, implementation, and use of data from M&E Platforms in their mission. Interviews were conducted by telephone or in-person for a duration of 30 minutes to over 1.5 hours.

Finally, mission representatives were asked to send the Statements of Work (SOW) and/or contracts of their M&E Platform for further analysis. Copies are available to USAID staff on ProgramNet. Missions with multiple active, recently completed, or planned M&E Platforms were asked to send documentation about each of these contracts.

II. OVERVIEW OF MISSION M&E PLATFORMS
In total, 23 current, recently completed, or planned M&E Platforms were identified across 20 separate missions (see Table 1). Sixteen of these missions had a current or recently completed M&E Platform, while seven missions were in the process of procuring an M&E Platform as of May 2013.[3] (Three missions have a recent M&E Platform and are also in the process of procuring a new M&E Platform.) Four of these missions - Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, and Uganda - had previous M&E mechanisms that were completed prior to 2012 and are not discussed in this report.

Annex 1 provides contract details on each of the 16 current or recently completed M&E Platform mechanisms. In summary:
- 6 were Cost Reimbursement contracts
- 5 were task orders under PPL/LER's Evaluation Services IDIQC mechanism
- 3 were Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity Contracts (IDIQC)
- 2 were MOBIS task orders

Duration of the contracts varied from 1 to 5 years, although most (12 of 16 M&E Platforms) allowed 4 to 5 years of services if all option years are counted.

Annex 2 summarizes the functions of both recent and planned M&E Platform mechanisms. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the various functions across all missions. All of the 23 M&E Platforms include, at minimum, evaluation or monitoring. A majority of these M&E Platforms included both. In addition to monitoring and evaluation functions, other functions that were frequently included in these mechanisms are:
- M&E data management, such as aggregating monitoring data and preparing it for reports and reviews,
- Conducting other analysis and assessments;
- Monitoring and evaluation capacity building for USAID staff, USAID implementers, or third parties; and
- Other functions, such as strategic communications, support for learning and adapting, and business process reengineering.

Further discussion of these functions is found in section four.

---

[3] Current or recently completed M&E Platforms include those Platforms that were active anytime in 2012 or from January to May 2013.

Table 1: Recent and Planned M&E Platform Mechanisms

	Mission	Contract Name
		Current or Recently Completed Contracts
1	Afghanistan*†	Services under Program and Project Offices for Results Tracking (SUPPORT), Phase II
2	Colombia	Monitoring and Evaluation Program
3	Congo (DRC)	Monitoring and Evaluation Platform
4	Ethiopia	Performance Management System
5	Georgia	Mission Evaluation Mechanism
6	India	Evaluation Services for USAID/India
7	Iraq*†	Performance Evaluation and Reporting for Results Management
8	Kenya	Program support services contract
9	Pakistan†	Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Contract
10	Peru	Evaluation Services
11	Russia	Evaluation and Survey Services
12	Rwanda	Internal Monitoring and Evaluation Systems and Reporting
14	So. Sudan	Monitoring and Evaluation Support Project
13	Somalia	Monitoring and Evaluation Project
15	Uganda*†	Monitoring and Evaluation Management Services II
16	Yemen	Monitoring and Evaluation Tasks
		In Planning as of May 2013
17	Colombia*	Evaluation and Analysis for Learning (EVAL) Project
18	Egypt	Services to Improve Performance Management, Enhance Learning and Evaluation
19	Iraq*†	Advancing Performance Management
20	Jordan	Monitoring and Evaluation Support Project
21	Nepal	PMP Development, Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity Building Services, Evaluations, Assessments and Analyses
22	RDMA	Unnamed
23	Uganda*†	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Program

* Missions with a current or recently completed M&E Platform and *in planning for a new M&E Platform.*
† Missions with a previous M&E Platform completed prior to 2012.

Annex 3 provides summary information on mission satisfaction with their M&E Platform. As part of the interviews with mission informants, each respondent was asked a standard set of structured questions rating their current or past mechanisms on a 1-5 scale (where 1="Does not meet Mission needs" and 5="Meets Mission needs well") on the following topics:

- *Ease of procurement,*
- *Integration with other M&E mechanisms,*
- *Ease of management,*
- *Cost- and time-effectiveness,*
- *Quality of monitoring and of evaluation deliverables*

Respondents were also asked to rate their current or past mechanisms regarding *whether they would recommend their mechanism to other missions* on a 1 to 5 scale (where 1 = not recommend and 5 = highly recommend). In those missions where multiple respondents were interviewed, scores were averaged across all respondents.

Overall, missions were satisfied with their M&E Platforms (scoring them between 3 and 4 on most measures). On the question of whether respondents would recommend their M&E Platform to other missions, half of the M&E Platforms (8 of 16) would be recommended to colleagues (scoring 4 or higher), while only two M&E Platforms would not be recommended (scoring lower than 3).

III. WHY M&E PLATFORMS?

The introduction of the [USAID Evaluation Policy](#) in January 2011, along with related changes to the USAID ADS on strategy, project design, and monitoring (2012), has increased mission workload and the need for technical expertise in the area of monitoring and evaluation. While these changes in monitoring and evaluation at USAID affect all missions, responses have differed from one mission to the next.

Missions have a variety of options for conducting the monitoring and evaluation of their projects and activities. In addition to M&E Platforms described in this report, missions may choose to conduct some of these tasks with existing personnel or use implementing partners to collect monitoring data and evaluate their own projects. In some cases, though, such as for projects that are *required* to be evaluated, Missions must use third-party evaluators. Even in these instances, though, missions could choose to contract for "one-off" evaluations either through their own mechanism or a Washington-based mechanism rather than develop a multi-year M&E Platform.

So why choose to contract for an M&E Platform? Mission respondents mentioned the following:

1. **Speed:** M&E Platforms offer the possibility of quickly fielding M&E tasks. In South Sudan, for instance, the mission respondent said that they could not use PPL's evaluation IDIQC, because the situation changes quickly and they need to task contractors at a moment's notice.

2. **Implementer continuity:** Respondents noted that there seem to be special benefits of choosing one firm to do evaluations rather than have multiple contractors bidding on different evaluations. Several interviewees felt that one firm knowing the country, the mission, and the partners provides continuity and builds expertise. "It takes too much time to work with multiple contractors on aligning evaluation designs and reports to USAID's evaluation policy requirements," noted one respondent.

3. **Limited staff resources**: Some mission respondents noted that busy Program Office staff made it hard to do monitoring and evaluation themselves or to contract for each task separately. One Program Officer noted, "There was no way the Program Office could meet [the demands of] M&E along with all else on our plates… The ADS is clear but unrealistic with mission staff having 15 other things to work on… We took on the contract to expand leverage … [especially as] there is a lack of time and staff to do M&E justice." The majority of interview respondents reported feeling overwhelmed in much the same way as this Program Officer.

4. **Access to technical expertise:** Some mission respondents noted that M&E Platforms enable access to technical expertise, for instance in the design phase of an evaluation, that is neither available within the mission nor accessible under one-off M&E tasks.

5. **Multiple functions:** Some mission respondents expressed enthusiasm about using the M&E Platform mechanisms to execute a *multitude of services* to improve the efficiency of programs implemented by the mission's Technical Offices and overall mission learning. These services could include not just monitoring and evaluation, but also assessments, management information and reporting, mapping, capacity building, and learning activities.
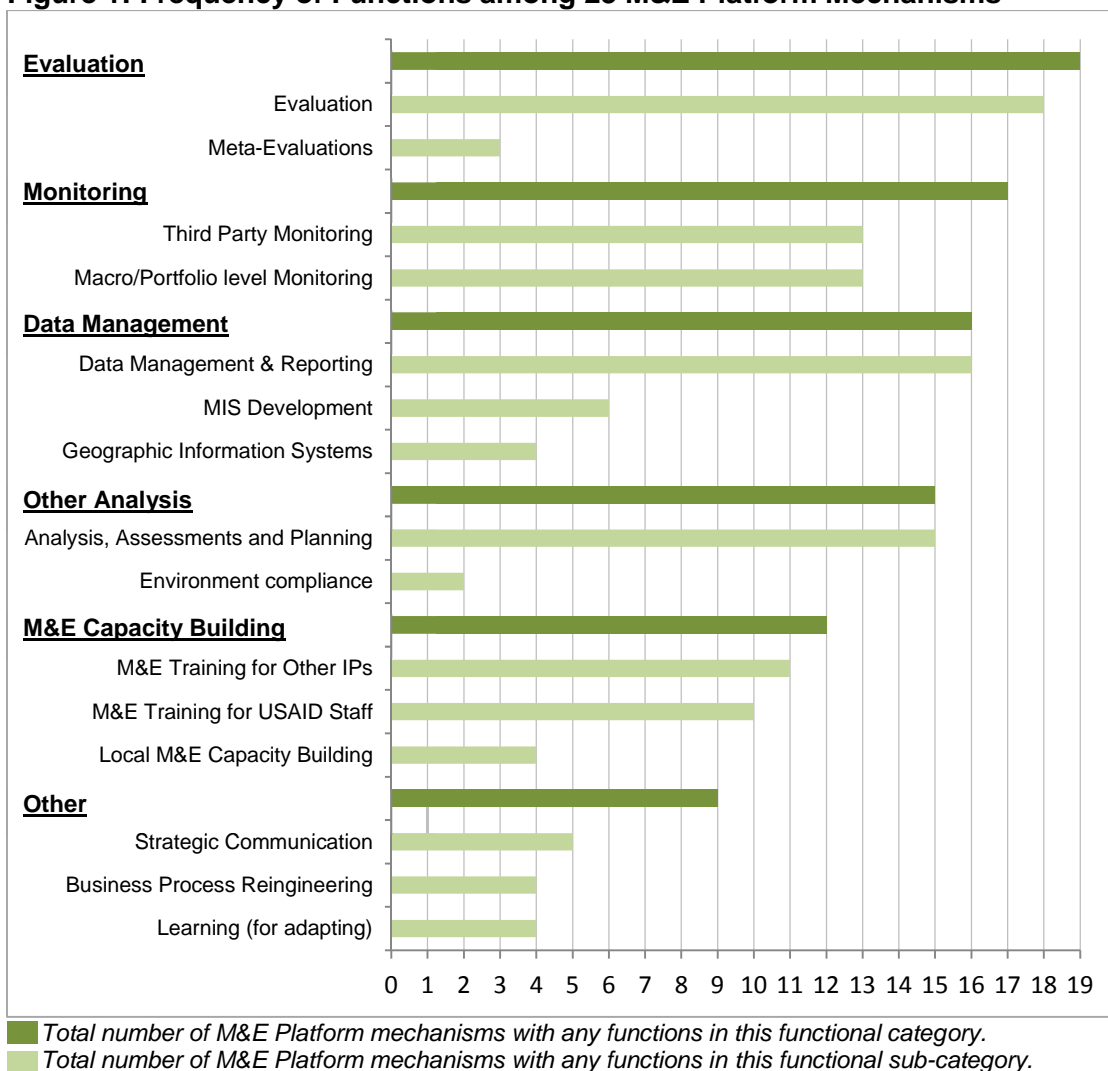
IV. DESIGINING AN M&E PLATFORM

As many respondents note, the quality of M&E Platform design is critical. The M&E Platform SOW sets content and tone for the entire contract and deliverables are only as good as the SOW. Four questions to consider in designing an M&E Platform are discussed below.

A. Which M&E related functions should be included in an M&E Platform?

One of the most important choices to address in designing an M&E Platform concerns which functions to include. Although all of the M&E Platforms examined include, at minimum, monitoring and/or evaluation functions, most of the M&E Platforms (21 out of 23) include other functions as well. These functions are grouped into the six broad categories as shown in Annex 2 and fifteen sub-categories as shown in Figure 1. Details about each of the categories are provided in Annex 4.

Each of these functions found in recent and planned M&E Platforms is discussed below along with examples and issues for consideration.

Figure 1: Frequency of Functions among 23 M&E Platform Mechanisms

Total number of M&E Platform mechanisms with any functions in this functional category.
Total number of M&E Platform mechanisms with any functions in this functional sub-category.

1. **Evaluation**
   Evaluation functions in M&E Platforms included: (1) conducting performance and impact evaluations, and (2) meta-evaluations, in which the M&E Platform contractor assesses the results or quality of evaluations performed by other implementing partners. Nineteen out of twenty-three M&E Platforms included evaluation functions.

   Considerations**:**
   Technical help in designing evaluations. A few mission and PPL respondents noted the benefit of including evaluations in M&E Platforms because they allow the Program Office to work with evaluators from the M&E Platform contractor to develop reasonable questions, budgets, and methods, which is especially important for complex evaluations, such as impact evaluations. This contrasts with the typical process of contracting individual evaluations which require the Program Office to specify evaluation questions, methods, and budgets upfront.

   Caution! Some tensions exist with this approach regarding the appropriate level of contractor involvement in developing SOWs and the resulting budget. Consult your Contracting Officer to establish the parameters for collaboration between USAID and the M&E Platform partner on developing SOWs and refining evaluation questions and methodologies.

   Meta-evaluations: Although few missions explicitly included meta-evaluations in their M&E Platform, one mission respondent noted the value of the meta-evaluation function of their M&E Platform. "It was [especially] useful for the mission's CDCS process as over 100 evaluations were analyzed, with [sometimes surprising results from the] synopsis of key recommendations that were common in almost all evaluations which included issues on host government willingness, involvement and buy-in into projects, and sustainability of activities and projects."

2. **Monitoring**
   Monitoring functions in M&E Platforms included: (1) third party monitoring – the planning, collection, verification, assessment, and/or review of performance indicator data of other implementer's projects, and (2) macro/portfolio level monitoring - the planning, collecting, verification, assessment, and/or review of portfolio level indicators or indicators relevant to multiple projects and activities. Seventeen out of twenty-three M&E Platforms included monitoring functions.

   Considerations**:**
   Third Party Monitoring in Restricted Environments: Six missions (Somalia, Colombia, DRC, Yemen, Afghanistan, Rwanda and Iraq) reported that their contractors are tasked with conducting third party monitoring, including completing Data Quality Assessments (DQAs). While there are drawbacks to relying on third party monitoring, particularly for DQAs (see below), this practice makes sense in restricted environments and has been used well and innovatively in some cases (see Example: Somalia, below)

   Caution! *Outsourcing DQAs*: Although M&E Platforms have been used to assess the quality of data reported by implementing partners, mission respondents found that the DQAs conducted by M&E Platforms were not always sufficiently rigorous to catch the

Example: Somalia. This non-presence country is piloting a third party monitoring and reporting tool to oversee its programs. *"We use GIS imagery and on the ground local monitors who can interview the population and confirm the quality of the US investments."*

errors in data reported by implementing partners. In the most egregious example mentioned, one mission respondent reported "shockingly bad data quality assessments" conducted by the M&E Platform. As noted in ADS 203.3.11.3, *"Missions should not hire an outside expert to assess the quality of their data."* In unrestricted environments, missions should therefore use caution in requesting DQAs in an M&E Platform's SOW and institute means of quality control.

Example: Kenya. The Kenya Mission used third party monitoring for its education and youth programs. *"We hired Kenyan college graduate, intern-level field monitors for capacity building and because [it is] cheaper ($100,000 a year) than alternatives. As they are all from the area, they knew who to speak with, where to go, and speak the language. They interviewed [participants], communities, and government staff. [The Mission] used EpiSurveyor to get real time data. It was shared with AOR/CORs at aggregate response level, and then they could drill down if/when some results stood out. [This approach was good because] AORs/ CORs don't have the time to monitor a representative number of sites and they're not [as] objective…"*

---

3. **Data Management**
   Data management functions in M&E Platforms included: (1) data management and reporting - aggregating data from multiple partners and projects; coordinating the compilation and validation of data for the Operational Plan (OP)/Performance Plan and Report (PPR); producing customized information products from monitoring data, etc.; (2) Management Information System (MIS) development or modifications for indicator data; and (3) developing Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Fifteen out of twenty-three M&E Platforms include data management functions.

   Considerations:
   Integrating data management with monitoring support: Respondents from Yemen, Nepal, Rwanda, Kenya and others stressed the need for centralized data collection and analysis. One interviewee said that having highly qualified technical help on PMP and indicator development is highly beneficial as is having the contractor manage the data platform.

   In Uganda, for instance, the M&E Platform contractor gave assistance to implementing partners on data collection tools, ensured data collection methods were the same, rolled-up data collected, verified/cleaned it, ensured it was verified by CORs, and even did some analysis plots over time (e.g. actual vs. targeted).

   Caution! There is currently a moratorium on developing new information systems for managing performance monitoring data as PPL and CIO move forward on the standardization process and roll-out of AidTracker Plus.

4. **Other Analysis**
   Other types of analysis services in M&E Platforms included: (1) analysis of secondary data sources to inform project design, sectoral or cross-cutting assessments, and situational reports; and (2) environmental compliance. Fifteen out of twenty-three M&E Platforms include "other analysis."

   In Uganda, for example, contractors did early analysis of monitoring data in preparation for a PPR/portfolio review which led to new program (re)designs. The contractors also conducted special studies that led to Ministry of Health policy reforms.

5. **M&E Capacity Building**
   M&E capacity building functions in M&E Platforms included training and guidance on monitoring and evaluation topics for: (1) implementing partners, (2) USAID Staff, and (3)

local evaluators and/or host country officials. Twelve out of twenty-three M&E Platforms include M&E capacity building functions.

Considerations
Building on previous M&E training. The need for much more training of USAID staff and implementing partners was a recurring theme. While mission respondents noted that they have sent their staff to M&E training which was either held in Washington or in the region itself, additional training through an M&E Platform could also be beneficial. According to one respondent, "We had several people get… M&E training [from Washington or regional courses] but this is separate from actually doing it back in the mission. It is essential; they needed practical support from experts as they applied the training." Another respondent focused on the need to involve implementing partners in local capacity building, "The culture of implementers hasn't changed, although USAID has just started to change… Implementers were upset at the new USAID Evaluation Policy and resistant to change in 2011."

> **Example: Ethiopia**. Ethiopia invested much of their early M&E Platform contract work in capacity building of mission staff and partners on M&E. The mission has already trained 25 mission staff in M&E (on DQAs, good SOWs in evaluations, streamlining the Results Framework, and doing the PMP) across different teams. However, the mission found this may not be enough. As one interviewee stated, "*We don't do M&E rigorously because we are always running to implement, implement and implement."*

Caution! Be sure your M&E Platform contractor understands current Program Cycle guidance before initiating capacity building efforts.

6. **Other Functions**
Other functions in M&E Platforms included: (1) strategic communications – producing publications and organizing public events with partners and other stakeholders; (2) learning (for adapting) – facilitating regular meetings for compiling lessons learned and sharing information relevant to USAID and implementing partner staff; (3) business reengineering – meeting with USAID staff to improve M&E efforts and/or developing a mission order. Nine out of twenty-three M&E Platforms included "other" functions.

Considerations
Integrating learning tasks into a predominately M&E Platform mechanism: As missions begin to increase their efforts to have an intentional focus on integrating learning, some have chosen to support these efforts through their M&E

> "We struggled most with the Mission staff's learning curve in learning to get to impact, such as cross-pollinating learning across sectors so that M&E isn't one more thing to do. People should feel "I'm an expert in development and my job is learning and M&E too!"
> - Deputy Program Officer

Platform contracts. The chief advantage of including learning into the M&E Platform is that it provides an opportunity to feed monitoring data and evaluation findings into broader learning processes that inform project design and implementation. An M&E Platform mechanism can support knowledge creation to fill knowledge gaps, develop a plan for filling the identified gaps through research and experiential knowledge sharing, facilitate collaboration and coordination among implementing partners and other collaborators who will have the greatest impact on the mission's results, and – reflecting on the implications of new learning – plan for adapting programs accordingly.

Caution! There may be some disadvantages to including learning tasks in an M&E Platform, simply because M&E work is often associated strongly with "accountability." An accountability focus can inhibit honest appraisals of what's working and what is not, particularly if there isn't an explicit acknowledgement that reality will always diverge from even the best plan. It may be necessary for learning-focused efforts to be supported through separate resources (whether an external mechanism or dedicated USAID staff) to enable the candid reflecting and sharing required for learning.

B. How many M&E related functions should be included in an M&E Platform?

The discussion above presents the wide array of functions possible under an M&E Platform. Each set of functions has its proponents. Deciding whether a specific function should be included in an M&E Platform should not be made in isolation, but considered in light of the entire range of services requested. As M&E Platforms evolve toward a more complex spectrum of services, integrating these functions into an M&E Platform provides both opportunities and challenges.

For some missions, the ability to contract multiple M&E related services in a single contract presents a promising opportunity to improve efficiency and/or encourage learning. Egypt's new M&E Platform is one example; it includes a host of services to improve the efficiency of programs, including assessments, evaluations, management information and reporting, mapping, translation and interpretation services, and dissemination of public information. The Uganda mission is another example; it has benefited from nearly a decade of M&E Platforms and their most recent contract includes an enhanced range of monitoring, evaluation, and learning support.

Other respondents expressed concerns about outsourcing too much of the M&E work of a mission to the M&E Platform and away from mission staff. One respondent noted, "PMP development…should be within the mission [and] shouldn't be outsourced." Several respondents were also concerned with the overall quality of services when many functions were included in the M&E Platform. They mentioned that a contractor who is good at monitoring and reporting, for instance, is unlikely to be good at MIS/GIS systems or complex impact evaluations.

C. How flexible or structured should the SOW for the M&E Platform be?

Some respondents stressed that Statements of Work for M&E Platforms needed to be clear and specific so that contractors can be held responsible for the quality of deliverables. One respondent noted that an M&E Platform contractor took advantage of an incomplete SOW and limited staff capacity to create its own work. A respondent from another mission noted that the SOW of an M&E Platform has to be specific, as some evaluations were completed contractually but were of low quality." Consequently, the mission's new contract is more rigorous, "saying clearly what we'll judge work against in the SOW".

On the other hand, flexibility can be a valuable asset in an M&E Platform, if managed well. One respondent noted that they had not put the Performance Management Plan and internal M&E systems explicitly into their M&E Platform contract, but the contractor's flexibility allowed them to be involved in supporting these processes to some degree.

In Colombia, the mission's new M&E Platform contract identified 14 evaluations over the next 5 years, but also includes 6 placeholders for TBD evaluations. For each evaluation, the mission will give the contractor a Statement of Work which they will then use to carry out the evaluation by subcontracting to a local organization. In Peru, the M&E Platform mechanism involves annual internal mission M&E team and contractor meetings to review the process, review how well it's working, and plan new evaluations.

D. Should the M&E Platform be sectoral or mission-wide?
Per the definition of M&E Platform used for this report, all of the M&E Platforms listed in Table 1 cover multiple sectors. Indeed, all except three of the current and planned M&E Platforms cover the entire portfolio of their mission. Moreover, all of these M&E Platforms are managed by the mission's program office. However, some of these missions also have sector specific M&E mechanisms and some missions without a portfolio-wide M&E Platform have sector specific M&E mechanisms.

Separation of mission M&E support among a variety of sectoral contracts has the potential to limit cross-sectoral learning and collaboration and increase inefficiencies. On the other hand, sector specific M&E mechanisms can benefit from a focus on sectoral technical expertise and familiarity with reporting requirements in a particular sector. Moreover, coordinating across sectors can be challenging. A few missions mentioned that coordinating with Health M&E mechanisms and Feed the Future projects, in particular, was challenging.

Yet silos can be bridged. One EG office with an M&E mechanism allows other offices to buy into their M&E mechanism, so it is suitable for mission-wide use. The Health Office in another mission offers other technical teams the option to buy-in to its M&E mechanism.

V. CONTRACTING AN M&E PLATFORM
Contracting M&E Platforms can be an arduous undertaking. Missions should be aware of decisions they will need to make and various hurdles that await them. In the respondent interviews on the M&E Platform satisfaction survey, "speed and ease of procurement" received the lowest levels of satisfaction. Only two of 16 M&E Platforms received a score of 4 or higher on this metric, while six of 16 received a score below 3. However, there were no discernible patterns with satisfaction by type of contract. Below are some questions to consider in contracting based on mission respondents.

A. Which type of contract should be used to procure the M&E Platform?
Annex 1 provides contract details on each of the 16 current or recently completed M&E Platform mechanisms. In summary:
- 6 were Cost Reimbursement contracts
- 5 were task orders under PPL/LER's Evaluation Services IDIQC mechanism
- 3 were Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity Contracts
- 2 were MOBIS task orders

Duration of the contracts varied, from 1 to 5 years, although most (12 of 16 M&E Platforms) allowed for 4 to 5 years of services if all option years are counted.

How a particular contract or task order is arranged can make a substantial difference in how well it works for a mission. All things equal, a MOBIS task order should be the quickest to procure followed by a task order under an IDIQC, a cost reimbursement contract, and a mission level IDIQC, according to one contract/financial management specialist. Because firms are pre-selected under MOBIS and a Washington IDIQC, though, options may be limited for these types. One respondent noted that they tried task orders under both the PPL Evaluation Services IDIQC and then MOBIS, but received only a single bid under each. Overall, a mission IDIQC can offer the greatest flexibility compared to other options.

Caution! PPL/LER's Evaluation Services IDIQC is no longer allowing task orders for M&E Platforms. In addition, recent draft OIG audit findings regarding the inappropriate use of the GSA price list in a MOBIS task order for an M&E Platform at one mission suggests caution

should be exercised in using MOBIS.[4] Finally, missions should consult with their contracting officer and the Agency Competition Advocate before moving forward on a mission-level IDIQC.

> **Example**. *"The contractor was a small business under a Washington-based Evaluation IDIQC, and they did not have the capacity to effectively implement. They had low-quality staff on the contract, and kept cutting corners even though it was a cost+ fixed fee contract. This led to not getting deliverables on time and getting bad quality deliverables. On a cost-plus fixed fee contract it is hard to hold the international contractor accountable, as you have to prove they did not make their 'best effort'. We were only one year into a three year contract, but twice the planned amount was spent in that one year because of the challenges of controlling costs on this type of contract. When the contractor makes bad decisions, USAID pays for it."*
> - From a mission that terminated its last M&E contract for poor performance.

B. How long will it take to procure an M&E Platform?
Among missions represented here, contracting normally took a year or more. On the quicker side, the Iraq mission's respondent reported procurement taking from 6-8 weeks because it was done through MOBIS, while Afghanistan's cost reimbursement contract took 2 years to procure from the design phase. The West Bank/Gaza mission was able to procure a monitoring mechanism within one month through a fixed price purchase order for a scaled down version of an M&E mechanism which focused on just third party monitoring over a half-year period.

C. What type of contractor?
The contractors who implement the current and recently completed M&E Platforms are listed in Annex 1. Of these M&E Platforms, all are implemented by US based firms - MSI manages four M&E Platforms, IBTCI manages three M&E Platforms, and all other firms listed manage a single M&E Platform. The choice of implementing contractor should be considered in light of the number and type of functions included in the M&E Platform. Options include a sole contractor or multiple contractors, a local or US contractor, and a small or large contractor.

1. **Sole contractor or multiple contractors?**
   Of the recent and planned M&E Platforms all of them chose a sole contractor. As noted by several respondents, choosing a sole contractor can encourage continuity over the life of the M&E Platform, but it may also limit the quality and range of teams they can send out, or even limit what the contractor is capable of actually delivering. On the other hand using multiple contractors bidding for different task orders can lead to time-lags in getting such competitions completed, prevent quick progress, and greatly burden mission contracting staff.

   A respondent from Colombia commented on their choice of a single contractor model, "We pay more overhead than in an IDIQC, but the contractor takes on the management burden of setting up the team, with a SOW for each evaluation, which is helpful, rather than our having to wait three months for each Task Order to be procured."

2. **Local contractors or US contractors?**
   All 16 of the recent M&E Platform mechanisms were awarded to US firms. Respondents from six missions mentioned wanting to contract locally in accordance with USAID Forward. One respondent noted that a local award would provide access to a wider database of local consultants who better understand the country context, culture, systems and sensitivities of working with the national, state and local government organizations. However, many mentioned the difficulty of contracting locally. One respondent noted that although the Evaluation Policy and USAID Forward focus on capacity building, contracting locally puts "a

---

[4] OIG report forthcoming.

lot of pressure on our contracts office. They prefer one huge procurement that gives access to technical input rather than procure 23 separate evaluations in five years."

Much more common is mandating the US contractor to use local consultants. Indeed, several respondents noted the importance of involving local contractors in M&E Platforms led by a US firm. One respondent noted that they had to block US consultants being flown in by the M&E Platform contractor because excellent local ones were available. Another respondent mentioned that local partners and consultants are key to both clamping down on costs while increasing quality. One Deputy Program Officer respondent stated, "make sure you can hire local consultants, contract with local universities, think tanks, and M&E organizations."

> **Example: Georgia**. Georgia's new M&E platform explicitly addresses local firms. *"[The contractor] must include local organizations or local experts in evaluation teams, both to meet USAID Forward policy and because local experts are so great about the context, so it makes local surveys and focus groups more realistic. While the contractor doesn't have capacity building of local organizations in their contract, we do have Georgian partners learning through collaborating rather than through more passive training and workshops….If we could do a lot of training for local organizations in evaluation and methods, it would be great, but its way beyond the scope now… maybe in the future we would invest in evaluation capacity building in the wider country."*

3. Small or large contractor?

In general, larger firms who have long experience with USAID were seen as better candidates when a wide range of services were needed. However, there were a range of preferences among missions regarding small and larger firm contracts. On mission had to terminate a small business IDIQC and the mission's key informant felt that small business IDIQCs are a bad idea because, "contractors don't have the capacity to fulfill them. They bid on many contracts and won them at the same time. We should use small businesses for one-off evaluations, but not for large mission contracts where we need large databases of consultants and systems." The mission concurrently scaled-down the non-performing contract and designed and stood-up a new contract.

On the other hand, two other missions just awarded their small business set-aside contracts. The first mission felt it was worth it given the quality of the winner relative to the competition. The second mission also chose a small business mechanism and they hope to achieve high standards through working with one contractor during the short to medium term.

D. Addressing conflict of interest

Another issue that some missions dealt with was conflict of interest, and the line between contractors being privy to too much information versus not having enough information to be effective. A few contracts prohibited program design services from being offered by the contractor, or prevented the contractor from responding to other RFPs during their contract in that country, so there would be no conflict of interest. Another approach is to limit the content the contractor is privy to. USAID Pakistan, for instance, had the contractor sign an agreement to not bid on or conduct any other USAID projects in Pakistan, otherwise they would limit what information the contractor could access.

E. Funding the M&E Platform

In most cases, funding the M&E Platform involved technical offices contributing to all Program Design and Learning (PD&L) costs including the M&E Platform contract. One mission respondent noted, "The amount [technical offices] contribute is proportional to the amount of their budget but not necessarily proportional to the amount they use the M&E contract, and we

haven't had complaints from offices that have contributed their portion but have used the contract less."

Budgeting was a key concern for a respondent from RDMA, as they are trying to create a regional mechanism: "If we did a simple contract, you have to define the LOE's cost and have to follow it by obligating money and spending it across two fiscal years. This is dangerous. If we put $1 million for FY2013, we have to spend it by end of FY2014." Consequently, RDMA is looking for a mechanism to stand up inexpensively, and trying to find out how to add funds to it when countries in the region need it.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION CONCERNS

Interview respondents from missions with M&E Platforms noted a number of concerns that arose during implementation worth considering prior to contracting for an M&E Platform.

A. Time and personnel requirements
The time, effort and skill it takes for staff to select the best contract option and manage the contract should not be underestimated. As one respondent noted, "It is a lot of work for the Program Office to manage evaluation contracts. For instance, the evaluation contract in place for an impact evaluation of our largest integrated health project…, signed early 2013, is taking close to 50% of one Program Officer's time… and this is only one."

B. Insufficient time for analysis of monitoring data
One mission respondent reported concerns regarding whether the manger of their M&E Platform allocated the proper time for each monitoring site visit to enable data collectors to record data, synthesize and analyze it prior to reporting. "A data collector shouldn't conduct site visits back to back, without taking the time to record notes and observations at each site. And a good site visit isn't just checking things off a list. We want monitors to put some thought into this and extract findings and lessons learned from the monitoring. Looking at the site visit schedule and keeping in mind the number of staff and the travel time required, I began to question the quality of the monitoring report content."

C. Weak mission M&E capacity
M&E Platforms – even with clear activities and where contractors are held responsible – can be hindered by weak M&E capacity within the mission. Respondents from half of the missions said that USAID staff needs training in M&E to improve the quality of SOWs, analysis of findings, and management of these M&E Platform contracts. They also need supportive leadership that prioritizes analysis, learning, and flexibility for course-correction if needed.

D. Weak contract management
Several respondents said USAID staff need cross-training between M&E and contracting as some missions have M&E staff managing these contracts with limited contract management skills or, conversely, skilled AOR/COR staff managing these contracts despite having little to no M&E background.

E. Quality of M&E Platform contractors
Although satisfaction ratings of monitoring and evaluation quality among mission respondents were generally positive, several missions mentioned the lack of staff quality among contractors. Problems range from a repeated turnover by Chiefs of Party, to poor quality work submitted by the consultants, to lack of capacity to hire good local consultants.

F. Program Office and Technical Office tensions

Tensions between Program and Technical staff appeared in a few missions. "Activity Managers are defensive, yet M&E is a requirement" said a Program Office respondent. Another program office respondent similarly noted,

> "In the past, we would sit with technical teams for a portfolio review, and we would basically be told, "We don't need to collect numbers. We manage just fine - I spend a lot of time on the phone with my partner. Can I tell you a story about how great we're doing?" Culturally, M&E was seen as an imposition and an obstacle to effective management. Yet these reviews-by-anecdote were hardly strategic. Our performance cannot and should not be judged by storytelling. M&E enables us to answer the important questions: who, what, when, how many, why, and so on. If you're not tracking the data, you won't have the answers."

In another mission, a respondent noted, "Generally, the Program Office is extremely happy with the contract but, if [an implementer] is not performing well, it creates tension [with the Technical Office], because we have some evaluations that are not rosy. The USAID M&E officer's role is to protect the M&E contractor from reprisals because they performed according to the methodology." Conversely, one respondent noted that some Technical Offices have expertise in M&E that they feel is pushed aside by the Program Office.

VII. CONCLUSION

While there is great enthusiasm for how M&E Platforms can transform project quality and improve results, the interviews reveal that they are no panacea. Getting the most out of M&E Platforms will likely require more time for the building of practical knowledge of what types of mechanisms can help the most, along with cultural and organizational change which supports evidenced based decision making and learning. Contracting officers are also learning more, but more time and work is needed to increase the speed and flexibility of M&E mechanisms.

Still, the interviews reveal that an appropriately designed and well managed M&E Platform can be a successful tool for meeting mission M&E needs. More research and analysis needs to be done, but learning is already occurring between USAID/W and the missions and between the Agency and its many partners and stakeholders.

Annex 1: Contract Details of Recent M&E Platform Mechanisms

Mission	Contract Name	Contract Type	Implementing Firm	Year Awarded	Duration (Option Years)
1. Afghanistan	Services under Program and Project Offices for Results Tracking (SUPPORT), Phase II	Cost Reimbursement Contract	Checchi and Consulting	2012	1(4)
2. Colombia	Monitoring and Evaluation Program	Cost Reimbursement Contract	DevTech Systems	2010	5
3. Congo (DRC)	Monitoring and Evaluation Platform	Task order under PPL Evaluation Services IDIQC	Development & Training Services	2008	N/A
4. Ethiopia	Performance Management System	Cost Reimbursement Contract	MSI	2012	2
5. Georgia	Mission Evaluation Mechanism	IDIQC	Mendez England & Associates	2013	5
6. India	Evaluation Services for USAID/India	Task order under PPL Evaluation Services IDIQC	Social Impact	2010	3(2)
7. Iraq	Performance Evaluation and Reporting for Results Management	MOBIS Task order	QED	2009	2(1)
8. Kenya	Program support services contract	IDIQC	MSI	2013	5
9. Pakistan	Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Contract	MOBIS Contract	MSI	2011	5
10. Peru	Evaluation Services	Cost Reimbursement Contract	Partners for Global Research and Development LLC	2013	5
11. Russia	Evaluation and Survey Services	Task order under PPL Evaluation Services IDIQC	IBTCI	2012	3
12. Rwanda	Internal Monitoring and Evaluation Systems and Reporting	Cost Reimbursement Contract	Social & Scientific Systems	2008	5
13. So. Sudan	Monitoring and Evaluation Support Project	IDIQC	MSI	2013	2(3)
14. Somalia	Monitoring and Evaluation Project	Task order under PPL Evaluation Services IDIQC	IBTCI	2013	3(2)
15. Uganda	Monitoring and Evaluation Management Services II	Cost Reimbursement Contract	The Mitchell Group	2008	4
16. Yemen	Monitoring and Evaluation Tasks	Task order under PPL Evaluation Services IDIQC	IBTCI	2010	3(2)

Annex 2: Functions of Recent and Planned M&E Platform Mechanisms

Mission		Evaluation	Monitoring	Data Management	Other Analysis	M&E Capacity Building	Other Functions
	Current or Recently Completed Contracts						
1. Afghanistan	Services under Program and Project Offices for Results Tracking (SUPPORT), Phase II	x	x	x	x		x
2. Colombia	Monitoring and Evaluation Program		x	x			
3. Congo (DRC)	Monitoring and Evaluation Platform	x	x	x	x		x
4. Ethiopia	Performance Management System		x	x		x	x
5. Georgia	Mission Evaluation Mechanism	x					
6. India	Evaluation Services for USAID/India	x	x				x
7. Iraq	Performance Evaluation and Reporting for Results Management	x	x	x	x		
8. Kenya	Program support services contract	x		x	x		x
9. Pakistan	Independent Monitoring and Evaluation Contract		x				
10. Peru	Evaluation Services	x	x		x	x	
11. Russia	Evaluation and Survey Services	x	x		x	x	
12. Rwanda	Internal Monitoring and Evaluation Systems and Reporting	x		x		x	
13. So. Sudan	Monitoring and Evaluation Support Project	x	x	x	x	x	x
14. Somalia	Monitoring and Evaluation Project	x	x	x	x		x
15. Uganda	Monitoring and Evaluation Management Services II		x	x	x	x	
16. Yemen	Monitoring and Evaluation Tasks	x	x	x	x	x	
Sub-Total		*12*	*13*	*11*	*10*	*7*	*7*
	In Planning as of May 2013						
17. Colombia	Evaluation and Analysis for Learning (EVAL) Project	x			x		
18. Egypt	Services to Improve Performance Management, Enhance Learning and Evaluation	x	x	x	x	x	
19. Iraq	Advancing Performance Management	x	x	x		x	
20. Jordan	Monitoring and Evaluation Support Project	x		x	x	x	x
21. Nepal	PMP Development, Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity Building Services, Evaluations, Assessments and Analyses	x			x	x	
22. RDMA	Unnamed	x	x	x	x		
23. Uganda	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Program	x	x	x		x	x
Sub-Total		*7*	*4*	*5*	*5*	*5*	*2*
Total		**19**	**17**	**16**	**15**	**12**	**9**

Annex 3: Average Satisfaction with Recent M&E Platform Mechanisms as reported by Mission Key Informants

	Average Score
Recommend Your Mechanism? *(N=13)*	3.9
Monitoring Quality *(N=11)*	3.9
Time Effectiveness *(N=12)*	3.7
Evaluation Quality *(N=10)*	3.7
Ease of management *(N=12)*	3.4
Cost Effectiveness *(N=10)*	3.4
Procurement Speed & Ease *(N=13)*	2.9

Each category was rated by key informants from each mission on a 1 to 5 scale where 1 = "Does not meet Mission needs" and 5 = "Meets Mission needs well", except for the category "Recommend Your Mechanism?", where 1 = "not recommend" and 5 = "highly recommend". One to three key informants were interviewed per mission. "N" equals the number of missions where at least one informant responded to the question about that category. In cases where multiple informants were interviewed, scores were averaged for that mission before averaging across missions. These views should not be considered representative of the missions as a whole.

Annex 4. Functions of M&E Platforms

Explicit reference to one of these functions must be made in the deliverables section of the SOW of the M&E Platform mechanism to count as meeting the criteria for that function in Annex 2 and Figure 1.

Category	Functions
I. Evaluation	
Evaluation	Performance evaluations; Impact evaluations. Does Not Include: sectoral or cross-cutting assessments.
Meta-Evaluations	Platform contractor reviews or assesses quality of evaluations performed by other implementing partners (IPs).
II. Monitoring	
Third-Party Monitoring	Collecting and/or verifying data; monitoring planning at the project level; baseline and target reviews; baseline collection; tracking and analysis of contextual indicators; activity- or project-level verification of results; conducting or reviewing data quality assessments (DQAs).
Macro/portfolio-level Monitoring	Collecting indicators relevant to multiple projects or activities; collecting monitoring data for portfolio level indicators; establishing indicators at a DO/project level; (may also include PMP-related actions as long as they are specified as portfolio-wide or mission-wide PMP actions).
III. Data Management	
Data Management & Reporting	Aggregate data from multiple partners and projects; coordinate the compilation and validation of data for the PPR; produce customized information products regarding the status of portfolio or sector progress for portfolio reviews or other uses; analyze and generate recommendations to streamline management of reporting requirements; generation of success stories; create procedures for IPs to report.
MIS Development	Developing a management information system to manage relevant indicator data: review and recommend best MIS from existing information management systems; making modifications to existing MIS.
GIS	Developing GIS functionality in the MIS
IV. Other Analysis	
Analysis, Assessments and Planning	Identify secondary data sources to inform strategy and project design; generate required sectoral or cross-cutting assessments; generate regular situational reports to inform implementation (i.e. country stability).
Environmental Compliance	Environmental Compliance
V. Monitoring Evaluation Capacity Building	
M&E Training for Other Implementing Partners	Provide training or technical guidance/assistance to IPs on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) topics; create instructional documents; create and provide follow-up to IP's individual training plans.
M&E Training for USAID Staff	Provide training or technical guidance/assistance to USAID Staff on monitoring and evaluation topics.
Local M&E Capacity Development	Managing a roster of local evaluators; building M&E capacity within a local evaluators or the national government (regardless of IP status); working to strengthen/establish a network of local evaluators.
VI. Other	
Strategic Communication	Produce publications focused on USAID's overall achievements; organize public events with the collaboration of USAID's implementing partners and other stakeholders; produce information catered to beneficiary communities.
Learning (for adapting)	Facilitate *regular* meetings for USAID staff and implementing partners with the express purpose of compiling lessons learned; review and make available secondary documents pertinent to mission projects.
Business Process Reengineering	Hold meetings with USAID technical offices to determine status of M&E efforts; develop a Mission Order.