Webinar 7: How to use monitoring and evaluation tools to guide project success

Horticulture for Development Professional Series

Questions? Email horticulture@ucdavis.edu

USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HORTICULTURE INNOVATION LAB UCDAVIS UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

RTI International's Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, Learning, and Adapting (MERLA) Cycle

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What is Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning?

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning is a systematic approach to measure performance and results, aid decision making, learn from successes and challenges, and adapt the project or program to help reach the intended objectives.

It is important for **project management**, **accountability** and **program effectiveness**.

MEL is important for **good project management.**

Useful, timely data gleaned through MEL inform project managers and stakeholders about:

- Project performance relative to planned actions.

- Fidelity of implementation across multiple sites and groups.

- The effectiveness of actions in reaching anticipated results and objectives.

- Project adjustments needed to increase effectiveness.

MEL is important for **accountability.**

- They contribute to effective communication and accountability with all stakeholders, including our clients, our participating counterparts, and our beneficiaries.

- MEL activities help account for resources, such as money or time, and determine whether resources bring about desired changes.

MEL is **important to increase program effectiveness.**

When we compile a solid body of evidence on the inputs, actions, outputs and outcomes of a project or program we can:

- Test our assumptions.

- Make decisions based on evidence.

- Adjust program activities based on what is working and not working.

- Apply learning to other related projects.

Who is MEL important to?

- **To donors:** helps a program measure its achievements and therefore provide accountability for funding

- **To beneficiaries-** helps a program track their activities, outputs, and results to provide transparency to intended end-users and/or recipients

- **To project staff-** helps to guide the implementation of MEL activities in a standardized and coordinated way

- **To project leadership-** helps them understand the results of the program to inform decision-making using evidence.

MEL Tools to Guide Program Design

❑ Theory of Change
❑ Results framework
❑ Performance Indicators
❑ Baselines
❑ Targets
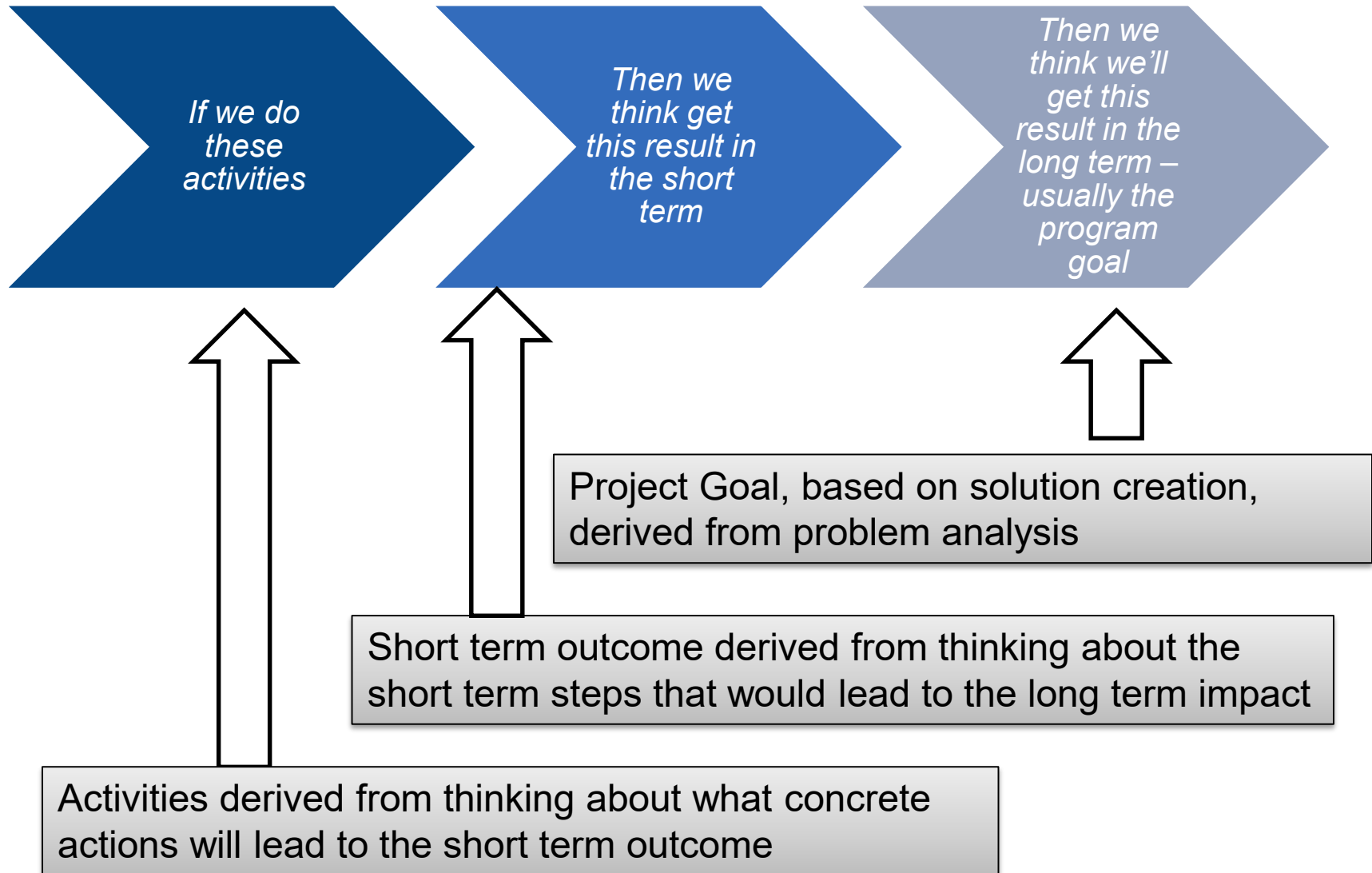❑ Types of Evaluation
❑ Learning (USAID CLA Approach)

Theory of Change

A Theory of Change is…

- an if-then statement describing the expected results of activities in reference to a stated problem

- State clearly what the intended outcome of programs will be

- your presentation of how and why you believe change will occur. TOC illustrates your assumption of how your activities will lead to your intended solution.
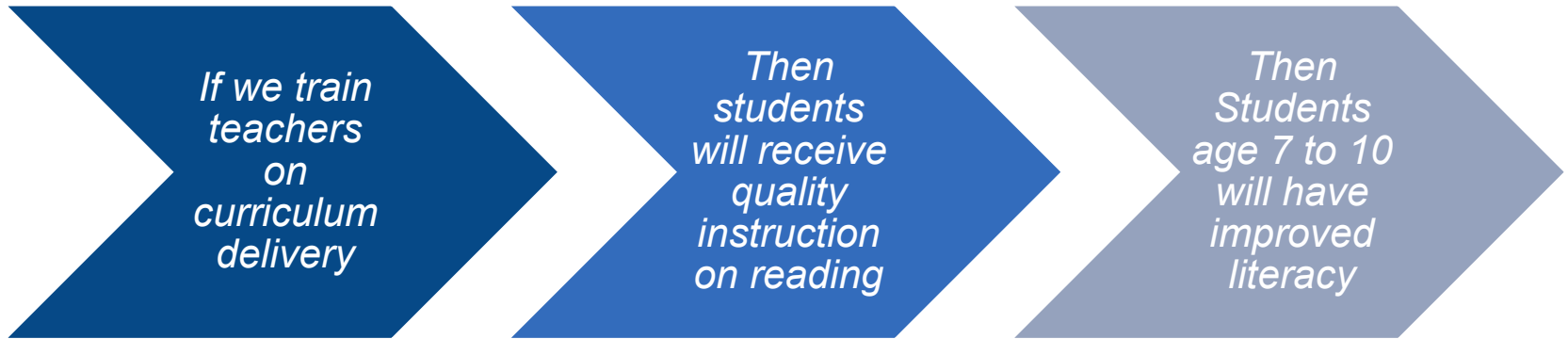
Sometimes ToC is also called "development hypothesis"
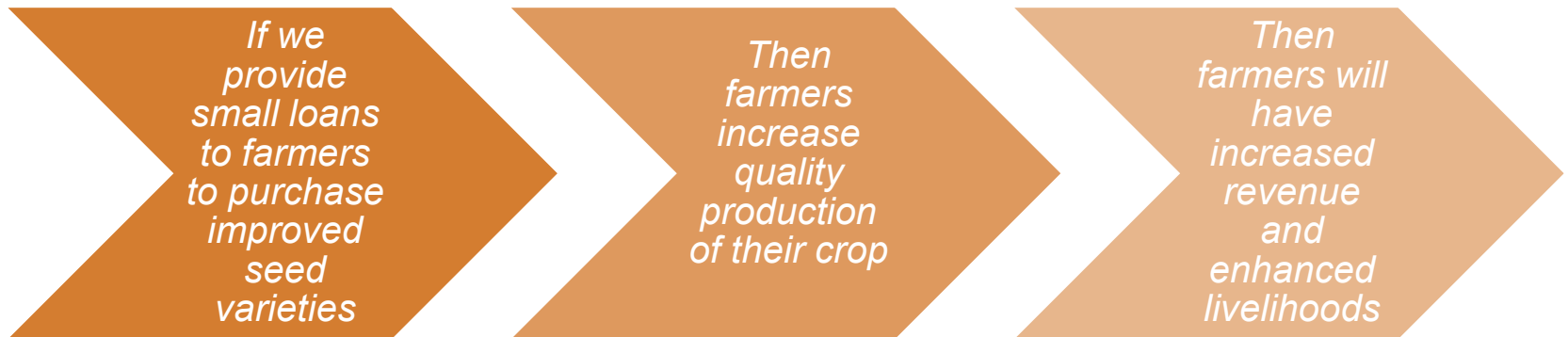
Basic structure of a theory of change

If we do these activities

Then we think get this result in the short term

Then we think we'll get this result in the long term – usually the program goal

Project Goal, based on solution creation, derived from problem analysis

Short term outcome derived from thinking about the short term steps that would lead to the long term impact

Activities derived from thinking about what concrete actions will lead to the short term outcome

Example Theories of Change

Example Simple Education Project Theory of Change

If we train teachers on curriculum delivery → **Then students will receive quality instruction on reading** → **Then Students age 7 to 10 will have improved literacy**

Example Simple Agriculture Project Theory of Change

If we provide small loans to farmers to purchase improved seed varieties → **Then farmers increase quality production of their crop** → **Then farmers will have increased revenue and enhanced livelihoods**
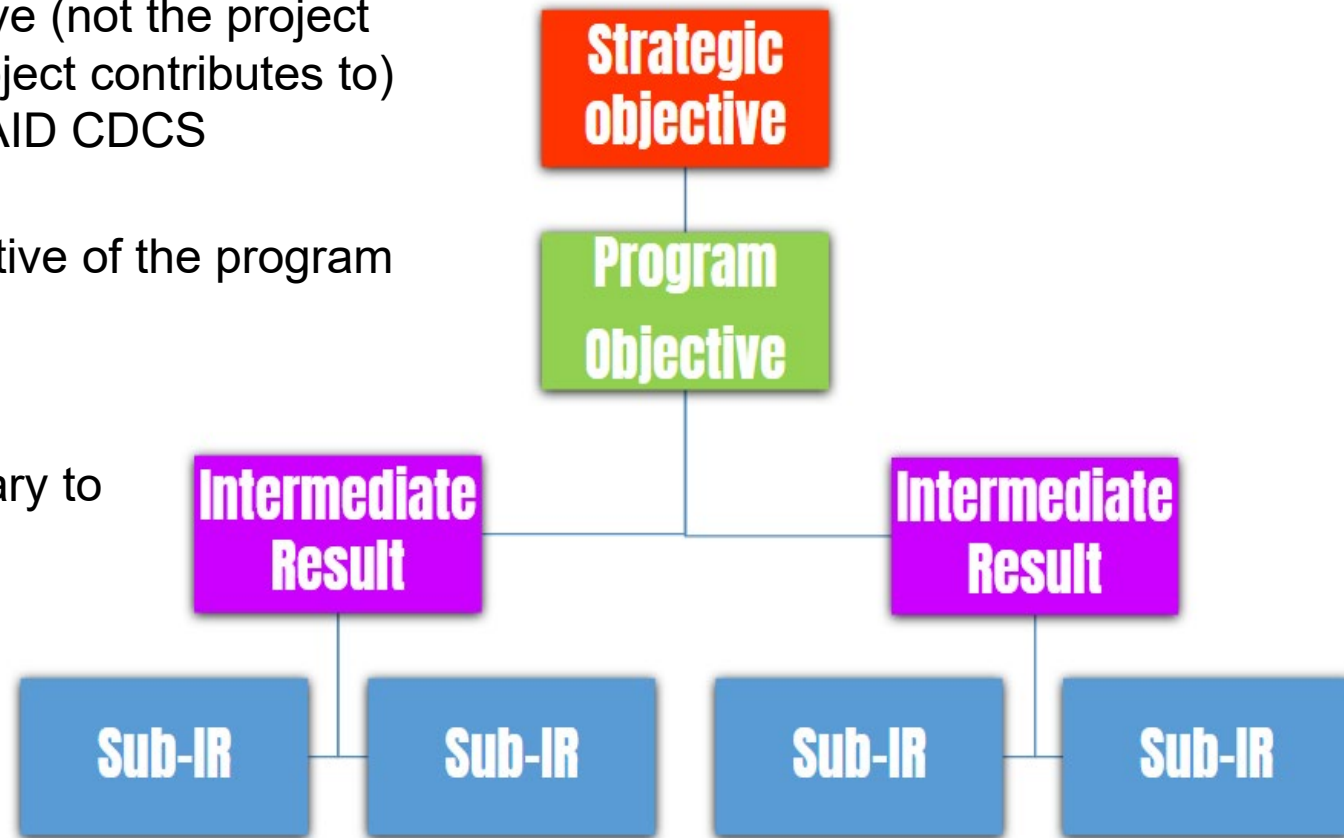
Results Framework

High level impact, USAID might call it the Development Objective (not the project goal, but what the project contributes to) often pulled from USAID CDCS

Primary goal or objective of the program

Major Results necessary to achieve the goal

Sub results necessary to achieve intermediate results

Strategic objective

Program Objective

Intermediate Result

Intermediate Result

Sub-IR

Sub-IR

Sub-IR

Sub-IR

Example Project Results Framework

A results framework has causal linkages where results flow from the bottom up, where each level is necessary to achieve the next level. This logical relationship of results is a way of showing what results you expect if your theory of change holds true.

Example education project
Results Framework
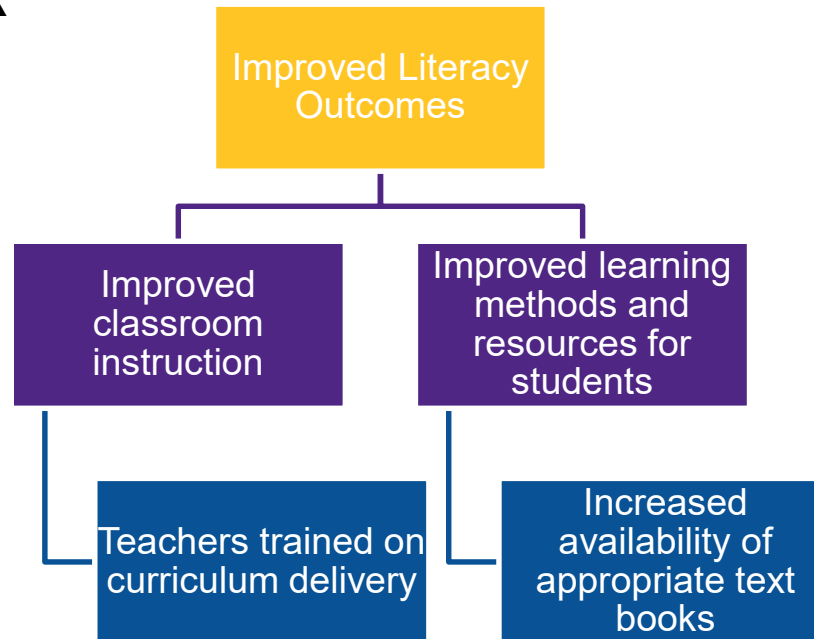
Performance Indicators

An indicator is a *variable* that *measures one aspect* of a program or project that is directly related to the program's objectives.

An indicator is a *variable* whose value changes from the baseline level at the time the program began to a new value after the program and its activities have made their impact felt. At that point, the variable, or indicator, is calculated again.

Secondly, an indicator is a *measurement*. It measures the value of the change in meaningful units that can be compared to past and future units. This is usually expressed as a percentage or a number.
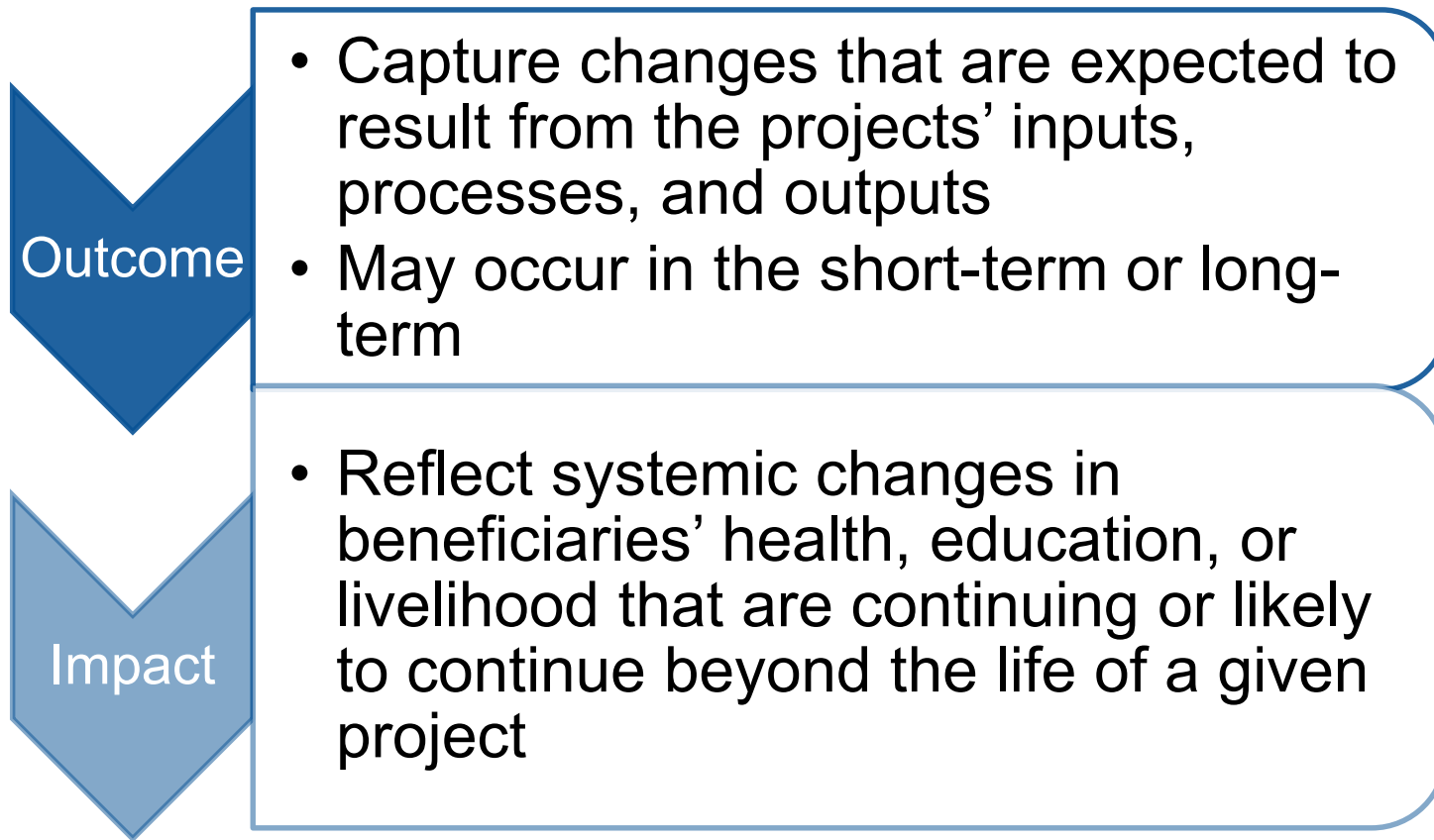
Indicator Development: Levels of Indicators

Inputs
- Number and nature of material, financial, and human resources used by the project

Outputs
- Represents the direct (in)tangible benefits produced by project that resulted from use of inputs and completion of processes
- Expressed in quantitative terms, often with a qualitative element

Outcome

- Capture changes that are expected to result from the projects' inputs, processes, and outputs
- May occur in the short-term or long-term

Impact

- Reflect systemic changes in beneficiaries' health, education, or livelihood that are continuing or likely to continue beyond the life of a given project

Design S.M.A.R.T. Indicators

Specific - the 'who' and 'what' of the results statement; avoid indicators with multiple subjects

Measurable - counted, observed, analyzed, or tested

Attainable – as a result of the project or measure of realism

Relevant – valid measure of results statement

Time bound - when it will be measured

Why establish Baselines?

- Baselines help managers determine progress in achieving outputs and outcomes.

- They also help identify the extent to which change has happened at each level of result.

- Lack of baseline data not only presents challenges for management decision-making purposes, but also hinders evaluation efforts. For example, it is generally not possible to conduct a rigorous impact evaluation without solid baseline data

Why establish Targets?

- Justify a program by describing in concrete terms what donor(s)' investment will produce.

- Targets orient stakeholders to the tasks to be accomplished and motivate individuals involved in a program to do their best to ensure the targets are met.

- Targets also help to establish clear expectations for donor staff, implementing partners, and key stakeholders.

- Once a program is underway, they serve as the guideposts for monitoring whether progress is being made on schedule and at the levels originally envisioned.

- Targets promote transparency and accountability by making available information on whether results have been achieved or not over time.

Types of Evaluation

| Internal Evaluation | Performance evaluation | Assessment | Impact evaluation |

The decision on which type of evaluation is the one which we will proceed with depends on the stage of project planning and budget.

Types of Evaluation

Internal Evaluations: is a process of quality review undertaken within an institution for its own ends (with or without the involvement of external peers)

Performance Evaluations: Encompass a broad mix of methods. May incorporate before-after comparisons but generally lack a rigorously defined counterfactual. May address descriptive, normative, and/or cause-and-effect questions. External evaluations are commissioned and managed outside of the implementing organization, removing potential biases

Assessments: Evaluations investigate a funded intervention, while assessments look at contextual aspects of a sector or geographic area

Impact Evaluations: Measure a defined intervention's attributable change to a development outcome. They are based on cause-effect models and require a counterfactual to control for factors that might explain an observed change.

Learning as part of the MEL Cycle

Learning can occur:

- In formal and informal settings

- At large and small scales

- With internal or external stakeholders

- For programmatic or organizational contexts
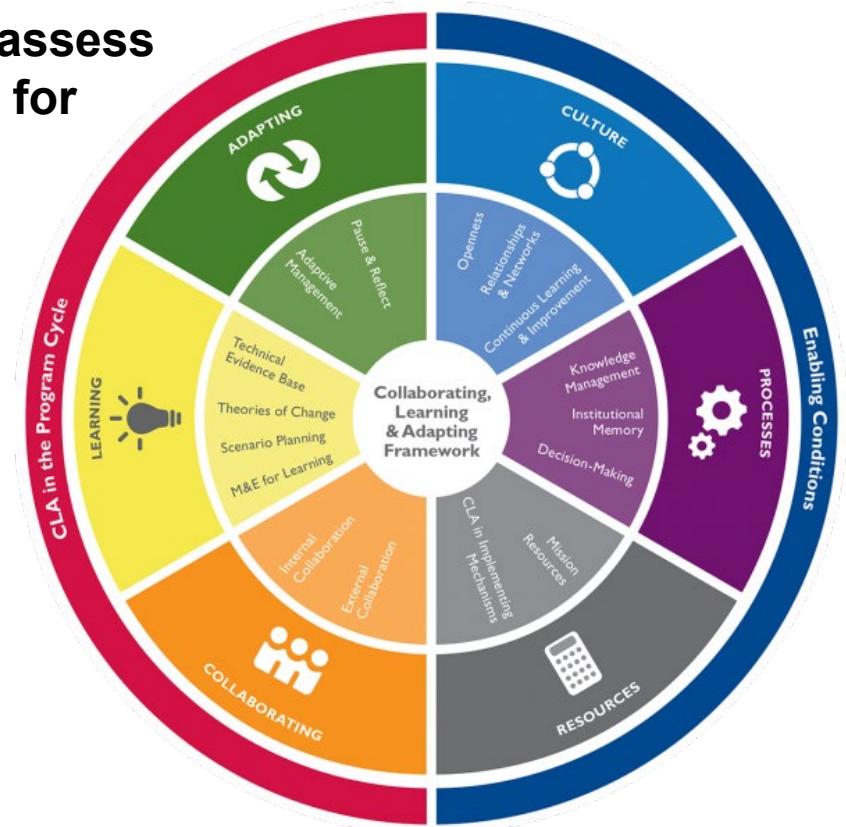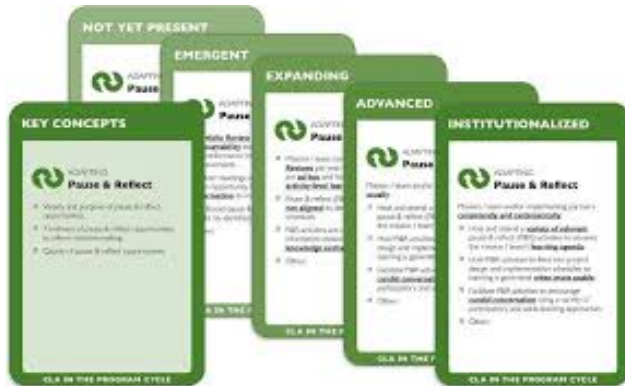
Examples include:

- Pause and reflect sessions

- After action reviews

- Portfolio reviews

- Learning symposia

- Stakeholder engagement sessions

- Community of Practice Meetings

Why is Learning Important?

- **Though popular now, learning was always central to development!**

- **Learning helps us evolve and adapt, improving operational effectiveness and efficiencies to achieve greater results**

- **As operating environments become more complex and dynamic, learning becomes increasingly essential**

- **Development hypotheses must be tested and new approaches piloted**

- **Learning is broad, incorporating many things:**

  - Collaborating with partners and stakeholders

  - Using what we learn to manage adaptively

  - Knowledge management

USAID Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting Framework and Tools

USAID's CLA Maturity Matrix is a tool developed to assist organizations/teams assess existing CLA maturity and develop a plan for improving CLA practices

Resources

- http://betterevaluation.org/
- http://usaidprojectstarter.org/sites/default/files/resources/pdfs/TIPS-BaselinesandTargets.pdf
- https://usaidlearninglab.org/
- http://www.tools4dev.org/resources/me-framework-template/
- http://theorymaker.info/
- https://www.sopact.com/social-impact-assessment-tools