

**Manual for Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation,  
Accountability and Learning (PMEAL)  
of the ACT Secretariat's Thematic Programmes and Projects  
(Thematic Programme PMEAL Manual)**

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## 0. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ACT Secretariat commits to adhering to consistent standards for **Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (PMEAL)** in programmes and projects under its management, including member- implemented projects under (sub-)grants and the humanitarian mechanism. This PMEAL Guideline formulates standards, clarifies roles and responsibilities, and provides guidance.

The main directions for ACT Secretariat's PMEAL outlined in this guidance are:

### Programme and project planning

- ✓ needs to be based on thorough situation analysis and learning from previous programmes, and align with ACT's Global Strategy.
- ✓ Development and advocacy interventions are grounded in a Theory of Change.
- ✓ All programmes require Results Frameworks, as minimum at outcome and impact levels.
- ✓ Humanitarian responses require the use of Logframe approaches and designs aligned with the [CHS](#) and [SPHERE](#) standards.

Participatory and inclusive planning approaches facilitate locally led action, apply a gender and diversity lens and mainstream climate change and environmental concerns, based on a Human Rights Based Approach.

Planning for MEAL is the crucial basis for MEAL during implementation – what is not planned for, runs the risk of being forgotten. This includes:

- ✓ Designing of a MEAL framework at the outset of each programme or project that provides guidance for data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting.
- ✓ Planning for evaluation(s) and/ or internal (after action) reviews.
- ✓ Highlighting how to realise accountability to communities, project participants and donors;
- ✓ and when and how learning mechanisms and activities are put in place.
- ✓ Budgeting for MEAL staffing and activities, and MEAL implementation planning.

Monitoring serves continuous improvement of results, of programme quality and performance against CHS commitments. Commitments include

- ✓ Systematic tracking of implementation progress, results and outcomes based on MEAL data.
- ✓ Regular monitoring activities with documentation of their findings, recommendations and agreed follow-up actions; and the
- ✓ use of generated MEAL data for accountability, learning and adaptation.

When needed, secretariat staff accompany members on their journeys for continuous improvement.

Systematic evaluations of programmes and projects are another element of a culture of learning and continuous improvement.

- ✓ Thresholds clarify when internal reviews and external evaluations are mandatory.
- ✓ Importance is given to internal, especially peer to peer reviews as part of MEAL journeys, e.g., as After- Action Reviews of humanitarian responses.
- ✓ Process criteria are spelled out from ToR and procurement to desk and field research, reporting, management responses, follow-up actions and learning.
- ✓ Evaluation methodologies need to be grounded in the operationalisation of DAC criteria, CHS commitments and ACT's commitments to gender justice and inclusion.

Accountability towards project participants, target groups and communities requires

- ✓ their participation in planning, implementation and MEAL,
- ✓ transparency on programme- and project related information as possible in given contexts,
- ✓ feedback and response channels, as well as
- ✓ complaint and response mechanisms.

Accountability and reporting to ACT Alliance and donors on programmes and projects, their progress, results, outcomes and impact to the Alliance and donors follows ACT standards and agreed requirements.

Learning is essential to continuously improve for better results and impact, for improved practise across the Alliance and in the sectors ACT works in. Learning shall be strengthened through

- ✓ integration of regular reflections on M&E findings and stakeholder feedback into project team routine,
- ✓ dedicated learning activities with stakeholders at least annually,
- ✓ adapting plans to improve, and
- ✓ documenting and sharing learning to inform strategic direction, cross- Alliance and sectoral learning.

Implementation of the manual will be steered with the support of a group of Thematic Programme PMEAL Focal Points who will refine more detailed guidance based on learning and needs, take a lead on building PMEAL capacities, and continue to harmonise standards across programmes.

This manual will be reviewed every two years.

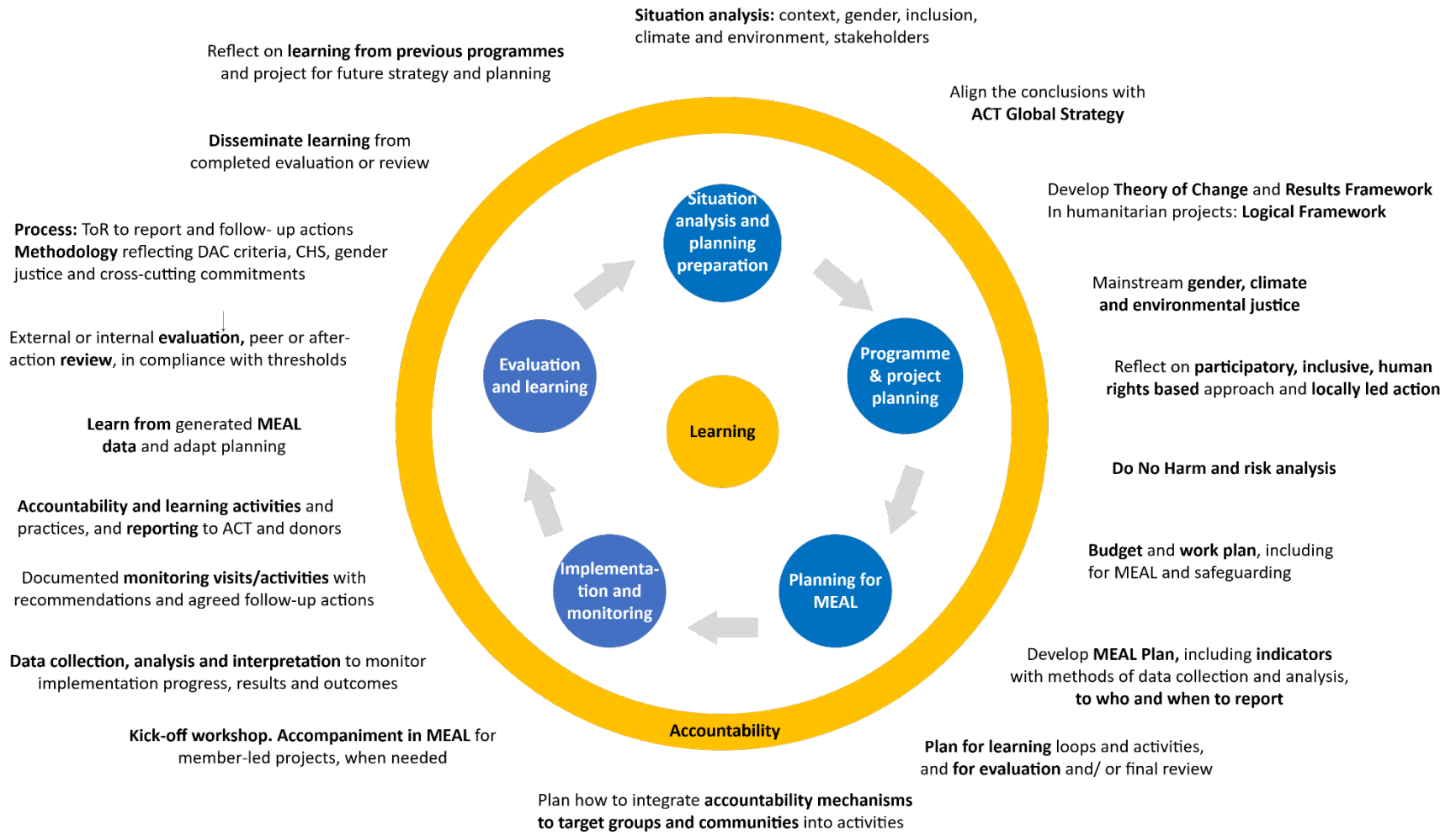


Figure 1: The ACT Thematic Programme PMEAL Cycle

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This “Thematic Programme PMEAL Manual” of the ACT Secretariat aims to support its programme and project development, management, quality, and learning in the context of the ACT Alliance’s commitment to its [Quality and Accountability Framework](#), including the ACT Alliance’s [Code of Good Practice](#), mandatory policies, international standards and guidelines.

The ACT Alliance’s [Global Strategy 2019-26 “Hope in Action – Putting People First”](#) sets five thematic priorities: Humanitarian, Climate Justice, Gender Justice, Migration and Displacement, and Peace and Human Security. The Strategy defines ‘Quality and Accountability’ and ‘Measuring Change and Impact’ as implementation approaches. The ACT Secretariat has invested considerably into the implementation of the Alliance’s Quality and Accountability Framework; and into planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting standards and practices at institutional level.

A project-based approach has played an important role in the thematic implementation of the Global Strategy 2019-26. The programmes go beyond the humanitarian mechanism and the previous coordinating role of the Secretariat in ACT’s multi-level advocacy work. They often follow the logic of sustainable development and humanitarian projects and are (co-) funded by funding members and external donors. At the same time, a humanitarian reform process has been underway since the approval of ACT’s revised Humanitarian Policy in 2021 which responds to increased member expectations towards the Secretariat’s monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) standards and procedures of member-implemented appeal and Rapid Response Fund (RRF) projects under ACT’s Humanitarian Mechanism.

The need for aligned commitments, technical and process standards and orientation for the planning, monitoring, evaluation, accountability (including reporting), and learning (PMEAL) of ACT Secretariat-managed programmes and projects, and their effective, efficient, and coherent implementation is evident. This “Thematic Programme PMEAL Manual” seeks to contribute to responding to this need and to strengthening the ACT Secretariat’s PMEAL systems.

As a cornerstone of the ACT Secretariat’s thematic programmes’ PMEAL systems, the manual provides orientation on a) PMEAL minimum requirements and mandatory processes; b) technical guidance and references on how to do PMEAL in ACT Secretariat’s programmes; and c) operationalises for programme and project PMEAL the commitments to the [ACT Quality and Accountability Framework](#) and the international standards ACT signed up to, first and foremost the [Core Humanitarian Standards](#) and the [Istanbul Principles for Civil Society Development Effectiveness](#).

## 2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this document is to have an ACT Secretariat PMEAL Manual that facilitates the design, resourcing, effective and efficient management and learning of high-quality, impactful thematic programmes and projects.

The manual is applicable to all thematic development and humanitarian programmes and projects that the ACT Secretariat is directly accountable for, based on contractual agreements and the management of financial resources. This includes sub-granted projects under thematic programmes or projects managed by the Secretariat and humanitarian projects under the Humanitarian Mechanism.

The manual is subject to the binding policy framework of the ACT Alliance, especially the Quality and Accountability Framework with its Code of Good Practise. It complies with the international standards that the ACT Alliance signed up to, first and foremost the CHS. It complements and contributes to the ACT Secretariat's regulatory and strategic framework and practices of implementation, filling a void between the high-level Global Strategy monitoring, evaluation and reporting practises and the operational-level annual institutional planning and reporting cycles. The implications of the cross-cutting commitments to gender justice and inclusion; and environmental and climate justice for PMEAL are considered throughout this manual.

Where other related policy and guidance documents exist, this document and its annexes will point the reader to the right place, seeking to avoid duplication or contradiction.

### **The ACT Secretariat's thematic PROGRAMMES and PROJECTS**

The thematic programmes refer to the development and humanitarian programmes as outlined by the valid ACT Global Strategy; while projects are planned to deliver contributions to these programmes, aiming to be resourced by ACT funding members or external donors.

This PMEAL Manual applies to both, programmes and projects. Planning (and Planning for MEAL) of the thematic programmes needs to be integrated into, aligned with and/or complement the ACT Alliance's strategic planning process. As projects of the Secretariat are expected to contribute to its programmes and their MEAL frameworks, their planning processes and deliverables can build on, use, update and refine (parts of) the available programme plans and MEAL frameworks.

### 3. PLANNING, MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING (PMEAL)

Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation create the framework, the data basis, its analysis and interpretation for Accountability to stakeholders and Learning in project and programme implementation, as well as at strategic level and the broader sectors we work in. However, Accountability needs to be practised at every step of the programme or project cycle, through transparency, participation, with responsive feedback and complaints channels, reporting, and effective and efficient resource management. Likewise, learning is the conscious reflection on collected and analysed data at all stages of the programme or project cycle, to serve continuous improvement for better results and for enhanced positive impact, both, of our own work and in the sector at large.

PMEAL requires generating and handling of personal and potentially sensitive data of project participants, target groups and communities. To protect communities' and individuals' rights to data safeguarding, ACT Alliance has adopted the "Communities Data Safeguarding Policy" that shall be considered in all humanitarian and development interventions managed under the ACT Secretariat.<sup>1</sup>

The following programme cycle chart illustrates this understanding:

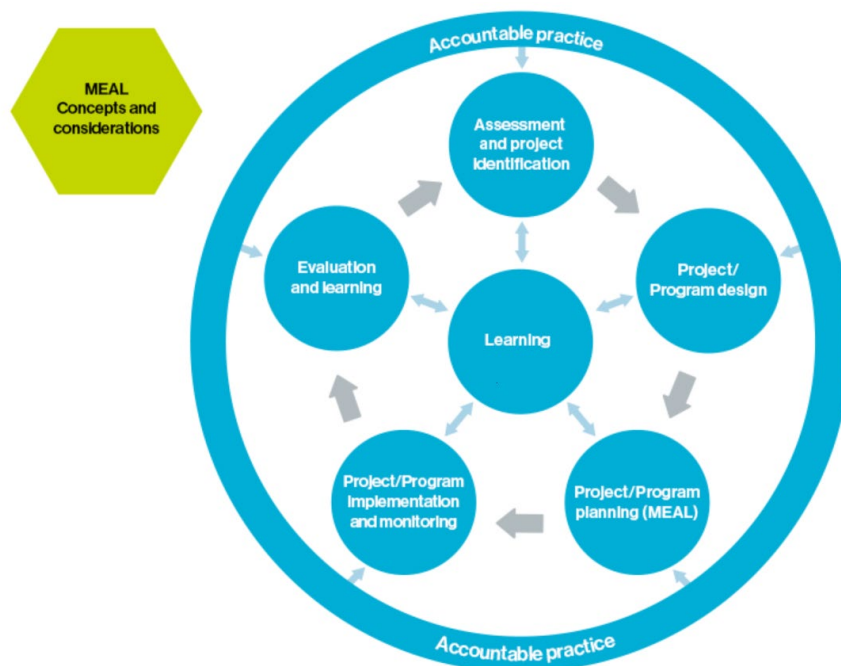


Figure 2: PMEAL in the Programme/ Project Cycle (Source: <https://meal-guide.habitat-dev.org/>)

PMEAL underlies and accompanies the programme or project cycle in all phases: from the earliest steps of programme or project design, to the last activities of programme or project closure. The MEAL Phase Model (PMEAL in terminology used here) below illustrates the loop characteristics of PMEAL: With each loop from planning, data collection, analysis and interpretation to putting the data and their analysis and interpretation to good use, MEAL helps to take the life cycle of the programme or project to a higher level of learning and accountability for improved results and enhanced impact.

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<sup>1</sup> The [Policy](#) references on p.3 the following data safeguarding- related rights of communities and individuals: the Right to Protection, the Right to Data Privacy & Security, the Right to No Harm, the Right to Informed Consent, the Right to Access and Availability of Personal Data, and the Right to Complain about Non-compliance to Data Safeguarding.

## MEAL Phase Model

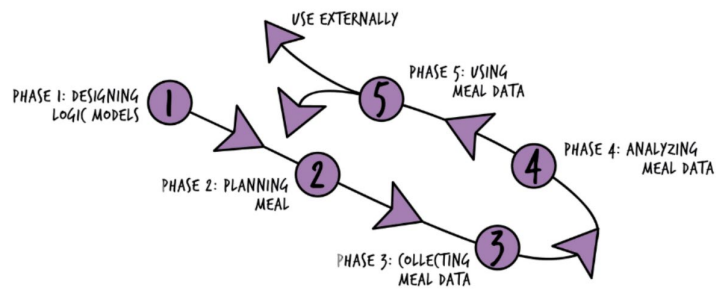


Figure 3: The MEAL Phase Model (Source: From: <https://kayaconnect.org/course/info.php?id=1272>)

How is locally led action and response considered in ACT secretariats' development and humanitarian MEAL activities?

ACT Alliance acknowledges the need to shift power in MEAL activities, and is committed to:

- ✓ Use MEAL methods and approaches grounded in local context.
- ✓ Ensure that local ways of thinking and perceptions of quality are taken into consideration.
- ✓ Value existing evidence and knowledge at local level.
- ✓ Prioritise local expertise when resourcing MEAL systems.
- ✓ Highlight the need for timely information sharing and accountability towards the target groups and the local affected population.

*Please see definitions of PMEAL terms in Annex 1: Glossary.*



#### 4. PROGRAMME AND PROJECT PLANNING

The ACT Secretariat aims for the harmonisation of approaches to planning of its programmes and projects. All planning must be in line with the valid ACT Global Strategy, must be underpinned by a Human Rights Based Approach and reflect how ACT's faith-based identity can be leveraged to create impact in the world. Locally-led action, member engagement and community participation, gender justice, environmental and climate justice, and inclusion are essential principles and cross-cutting approaches that ACT has committed to apply. Programme quality depends on high quality planning, including the planning for MEAL (see chapter 5.).

The structure of this and the subsequent chapters follows the same logic. Each chapter starts with a checklist or "in-brief" summary, to continue in detail from the ACT Secretariat thematic programmes and projects (a.) to the humanitarian response projects (b.) and sub-granted projects of ACT members (c.); with clarification of roles and responsibilities, process and deliverable(s).

##### Planning Checklist

This checklist outlines the planning essentials for programmes and projects of the ACT secretariat and for sub-granted projects of requesting members that shall be reflected in the full programme/project plan and/ or funding proposal. Concept notes are not expected to provide full planning details yet.

**Please note** that the planning requirements for humanitarian response projects (appeals and RRF) are not elaborated here but spelled out in the [ACT Humanitarian Operations Manual](#) and its annexes.

##### **Checklist:**

##### **Planning ACT Thematic Programmes and Development Projects**

**Preparation:** Adhering to the guidance by the ACT Global Strategy, conduct a situation analysis with involvement of relevant secretariat colleagues, members and forums:

- Context analysis
- Problem analysis
- Stakeholder analysis
- Gender analysis
- Learning from previous programme/ project (if any)

##### **Clarify planning process**

- Main planning methodology/ tools
- Process steps with responsibilities and timeline
- At least one planning or validation workshop with broader participation of key stakeholders (programmes, regions, ACT members, etc.)
- Considering a gender and diversity lens, inclusive and locally-led approaches, environmental and climate justice
- With participation of ACT members and other target group representatives (if any)

##### **Plan**

- Formulation of development goal (or adapt from ToC's vision of success or existing programme)
- Develop (or adapt/update existing programme's) Theory of Change (ToC)
- Develop programme/ project plan with selected planning methodology

- Develop logical framework with 1 to 3 Outcomes and at least 1 to 2 corresponding indicators per Outcome as minimum requirement; Results are optional;
  - ✓ at least 1 Outcome and 1 corresponding Indicator with explicit gender perspective;
  - ✓ Activities can be indicative and open for adaptation during implementation
- Main elements of the MEAL Plan: clarified MEAL approach and tools that will be applied; approach to accountability and learning; evaluations (if any); clear activities, technical and financial resourcing needs.
- Cross-cutting considerations reflected upon:
  - Gender mainstreaming/ gender and diversity lens
  - Human Rights Based Approach
  - Approach to Inclusion and Locally-Led Approach
- Do No Harm and Risk Analysis
- Environmental/ Climate Justice Impact Assessment of the full design
- Sub-granting mechanism specified (if applicable)
- Work Plan, per Secretariat reporting period
- Budget, following ACT Secretariat requirements

**a. Programmes and Projects of the ACT Secretariat**

**Roles and Responsibilities<sup>2</sup>**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Role in the ACT Secretariat planning processes</b>
Leading Thematic Programme Manager	Designs, leads and manages the programme planning process, including the development of Theory of Change (ToC), logframe, detailed activity descriptions and MEAL plan/ indicators, consultations, feedback loops, etc.
Finance staff dedicated to the programme/ project	Lead the budgeting process with inputs and backstopping from Director of Operations, Director of Programmes, Resource Mobilisation and Grant Coordinator as well as thematic Programme Manager(s).
Resource Mobilisation and Grant Coordinator	On the basis of existing programme plan, leads the project proposal development process and coordination of all relevant components at the intersection of programme and operations teams. In charge of writing/compiling the project proposal.
Director of Programmes	Provides guidance on overall programme or project direction and strategy, staffing and reviews final draft of programme or project plan (proposal). Ensures that programme or project is in line with overall organisational, strategic priorities.
Director of Operations	Provides guidance on budgeting, staffing and reviews the final budget draft.
Supporting Thematic Programme Manager(s)	Provide(s) support for plans/ proposals that do not fall under their thematic priority but have intersectional/crosscutting components: provide(s) thematic inputs from situation analysis, the development of Theory of Change (ToC), logframe, to detailed activity descriptions and MEAL plan/ indicators.

<sup>2</sup> For the complementary perspective of **proposal development for resource mobilisation**, see the "[Proposal Development Action Plan and Responsibility Matrix](#)", as well as guidance for "[The Go/ No-Go Process](#)" for concept note/ proposal development decision- making.

Regional Representative(s)	Feed regional perspectives into the programme and project plans, as a minimum at situation analysis, ToC/logframe design and close to final programme plan/ project proposal stages; suggest/assess member organisations' capacity as potential partners for project implementation.
Programme Quality Advisor, MEAL Staff or Focal Points	Support the development of programme and project MEAL plans, makes sure that indicators are aligned with ToC and logframe. Overall, strengthen the linkages between strategic, programme, project results and MEAL frameworks.
Advocacy Manager(s)	Provide(s) input and feedback in programme and project planning, and quality control(s) planned advocacy activities.
Thematic Reference Group, Community of Practice, Member representatives	Provide(s) input and feedback in programme and project planning processes as per design and defined participation; as a minimum at design stage of Theory of Change and logframe, and at the close of completing programme plan or project proposal stage.

## Preparation of Planning

To prepare for the planning process, the following is essential:

### Follow guidance provided by the ACT Global Strategy

Any programme or project must be planned within the parameters of the ACT Global Strategy. When a new thematic programme (phase) is planned as part of a strategic planning process, this PMEAL manual shall be considered and aligned with the strategic planning approach and process.

### Conduct a thorough situation analysis

including as a minimum:

- ✓ Context analysis, including environment and climate change
- ✓ Problem analysis
- ✓ Stakeholder analysis
- ✓ Gender analysis, including applying a diversity and intersectionality lens
- ✓ If continuing an existing programme/ project: results and learning to build the new plan on

Inputs from the broad range of available expertise at the Secretariat shall be incorporated, including from programmes, regional and advocacy perspectives. Member sources and contributions will be very helpful at this stage, too. In preparation of project plans that include interventions at local, national, or regional levels, the inclusion of member and forum sources and contributions is essential.

## The Planning Process

### Essential steps:

- ✓ Agree on a main planning tool early on and utilise it to shape the programme/ project design, before going into drafting of a narrative, budget, MEAL plan and supporting documents.
- ✓ Identify the key stakeholders to involve in the process.
- ✓ Plan the process, identify the main steps, distribute responsibilities, with timeline – however, allowing for sufficient flexibility to refine the process along the way.
- ✓ Hold at least one planning meeting or workshop and/ or validation workshop with broader participation of key programme or project stakeholders (e.g. ACT Forums that are relevant for a specific programme or project area).
- ✓ Use relevant technical standards and good practice employed across the sector to plan the programme/project

In designing the planning process, consider:

- ✓ Do No Harm and Risk Analysis.
- ✓ Applying a gender and diversity lens, as minimum considering the diversity dimensions gender, age groups and disability throughout process and design.
- ✓ Inclusion: how is it built into and practised in the planning process and the project design?
- ✓ Localisation: how is it built into and practised in the planning process and the project design?
- ✓ Environmental and climate justice: how do you assess, as a minimum, environmental and climate impact and requisite mitigation options throughout process and project design?
- ✓ Relevant participation of ACT colleagues, ACT members and structures
- ✓ Consultation of target groups, possible partners and stakeholders outside ACT

## **The Programme or Project Plan**

Programme/ project design essentials

- ✓ Start off with the formulation of a programme/ project goal responding to the identified main development challenge from the analysis that programme/ project aims to address; and/ or derived from the Vision of Success from the Theory of Change.
- ✓ Development and formulation of a Theory of Change.
- ✓ Logical Framework, as a minimum consisting of one Outcome and one to two corresponding indicators at the level of Programme/ Project Objective(s) which need to relevantly contribute to Global Strategy MEAL; with Sources of Verification, Risks and Assumptions.
- ✓ Methodological openness: Other planning methodologies like Outcome Mapping can be used if the minimum requirements for a Theory of Change and Logical Framework are met.

For project proposal development, available Thematic Programme plans, including Theory of Change and Logical Framework, shall be reviewed, used and adapted.

Main elements of the MEAL Plan (see 5. Planning for MEAL)

The MEAL framework and related plan must be clarified to the extent that:

- ✓ The Logical Framework, following at least the minimum requirements, and its Indicators are formulated in a SMART way.<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ Other essential elements of the MEAL approach, e.g. monitoring Theory of Change, Outcome Harvests, monitoring the Risk Analysis etc. are clear.
- ✓ The approach to accountability, including to communities and project stakeholders, as well as learning and related activities are clear.
- ✓ Evaluations are planned and budgeted for (in line with 7. below).
- ✓ MEAL-related activities are sufficiently clear, so that staffing, financial and technical resource needs are adequately planned for.

Cross-cutting considerations

- ✓ Systematic application of gender mainstreaming

The objectives and measurement of their achievement (indicators, progress markers or else) need to apply a gender and diversity lens. As a minimum, one Outcome and corresponding outcome indicator need to display an explicit gender (and diversity) perspective. When using alternative planning methodologies, a gender (and diversity) lens shall be equally applied.

Gender mainstreaming is applicable to all aspects of planning and MEAL.

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<sup>3</sup> SMART = specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound.

- ✓ Reflection on Human Rights Based Approach, Approaches to Inclusion and to Localisation
- The programme or project plan responds to the following questions:
- What is the underlying understanding of a Human Rights Based Approach and how does it inform programme or project planning?
  - What is the understanding of and approach towards ‘Inclusion’ and how has it been put into planning practice and resulting documents?
  - What is the understanding of a locally-led approach (Localisation) and how has it been put into planning practice and resulting documents?

#### Plan (Sub-)Granting Mechanism(s)<sup>4</sup> to members (optional)

If a (sub-)granting mechanism to ACT members is intended, different modes of grantee selection can be applied: an Alliance-wide Call for Applications, an invitation-based mechanism and/or co-creation. The preferred mechanism(s) shall be determined at planning stage, detailed guidelines by start of the programme or project.

For programme quality and accountability, an Organisational Capacity (Self-) Assessment (OCA/ Due Diligence) that also includes programme management and MEAL capacities is a mandatory requirement for awarding a (sub-)grant. This OCA shall be concluded by the agreement of an action plan that emphasizes capacity strengthening.

#### Do No Harm and Risk Analysis, with contingency planning

The ACT Alliance and members often work in challenging contexts on sensitive issues. This requires a profound Do No Harm and Risk Analysis. This analysis will be an important monitoring tool that is regularly reviewed and updated in the course of programme and project implementation.

#### Environmental/ Climate Justice Impact Assessment of the full design

Reviewing the full programme or project design for its climate and environmental impact and appropriate mitigation measures, is the minimum requirement for all ACT Secretariat- managed programmes and projects. It is strongly recommended that all programmes and projects analyse how environmental concerns and climate justice are relevant in their respective contexts, to devise programmatic interventions accordingly.

#### Work Plan

A work plan is required to support realistic planning for implementation, in line with the periods of the Secretariat’s periodic reporting cycle.

#### Budget

The budget needs to be developed with full involvement and guidance of the Finance team staff. It shall ensure adequate budget allocation (roughly 5-10% of total project or programme budget, dependent on budget volume) to cover the cost of relevant ACT Secretariat staff time for MEAL, Quality, Accountability and Safeguarding<sup>5</sup> (QAS), and the related activities.

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<sup>4</sup> Grant-making or sub-granting both refer to grants that are awarded to members (sometimes on behalf of forums or member consortia) from projects managed by the secretariat. “Sub-granting” encompasses “sub-grants” awarded from a grant received and managed by the Secretariat, while “grants” is the better term when a project is solely developed and funded with the purpose of awarding grants to ACT members.

<sup>5</sup> Safeguarding, according to the ACT Safeguarding Policy Framework (2024), is defined as: “*The responsibility of organisations to make sure their staff and others, operations, and programmes do no harm to children and adults at risk nor expose them to abuse, exploitation, bullying and harassment.*” This includes but is not limited to Child Safeguarding and the Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PSEAH).

**b. Projects of the ACT Humanitarian Mechanism (Appeals, RRFs)**

Planning requirements for humanitarian response projects (**Appeals and Rapid Response Fund**) are guided by the [ACT Humanitarian Operations Manual](#) and the annexed planning templates and guidance.

**c. Projects (Sub-grants) under ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects**

This section refers to projects that ACT implementing members propose and implement, e.g., leading a national forum, under (sub-)granting facilities of programmes or projects that the ACT Secretariat is financially directly accountable for, whether to funding members or to external donors.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

Position	Role in the planning processes for sub-grants
Leading ACT Thematic Programme Manager (or team member, if delegated)	Detailing and implementing the content side of the (sub-) grant-making process and requirements, and ensuring quality of project plans/ concept notes/ proposals.
Finance and Operations staff	Detailing and implementing the financial and operational side of the (sub-) grant-making process and requirements, including support to members in submission of budgets according to requirements.
Applying requesting members	Responsible for their own planning process and developing concept note and/or proposal that meet the requirements defined by the (sub-)granting guideline and in line with this PMEAL Manual.
A role of member representatives, e.g. of Reference Groups, Communities of Practise or Forums, in the selection process is advised.	

**Planning Standards and Deliverables:**

- ✓ In principle, the same planning standards guide the requirements for members and forums under (sub-)granting mechanisms of ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects, however, adapted in expectations to the project scope and budget volume applied for. By contrast to full proposals, concept notes are of lighter format and are not expected to cover the full scope and depth of the project plan yet.
- ✓ Adherence to the (sub-)granting guidelines of ACT Secretariat programme or project, be it based on call for applications, invitation-based application and/ or co-creation.
- ✓ Harmonisation imperative but flexibility in formats: The planning standards and templates for (sub-)granted projects shall be closely aligned with the ACT Secretariat’s standards for own programmes and projects. However, members shall be able to use their own templates and formats if they fulfil the requirements of the (sub-)granting guideline.
- ✓ Alignment with finance system and procedures of ACT Secretariat BUT seeking flexibility to facilitate efficient ways of budgeting for requesting members (e.g., using own templates).
- ✓ An Organisational Capacity (Self-) Assessment identifying actionable needs for improvement (if any) is a mandatory prerequisite for any grant. These Due Diligence and capacity strengthening procedures follow the agreed standard across programmes, with the agreed frequency of re-assessment.
- ✓ The budget shall ensure adequate budget allocation (roughly 5-10% of total project budget, dependent on budget volume) to cover the cost of relevant Operations and Support staff time for MEAL, Quality, Accountability and Safeguarding (QAS), and the related activities.

## 5. PLANNING FOR MEAL

Successful monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) practises require careful planning. Hence, the essentials of a MEAL Plan are an important part of programme or project design, together with planning for MEAL activities in the work plan and MEAL resourcing in the budget.

### Planning for MEAL Checklist

This checklist outlines the essentials of planning for MEAL and is relevant for programmes and projects of the secretariat, for sub-granted and for humanitarian projects of requesting members.

<b>Checklist: Planning for MEAL in Programmes and Projects - Requirements</b>	
<b>MEAL Plan includes</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Clarification/ definition of indicators, baseline data and targets, methods of data collection, types of data disaggregation (minimum: by gender, age group and disability), frequency and responsibilities in data collection, and purpose and target audience of data use. (Usually called 'M&amp;E Plan' or 'Performance Management Plan').</li> <li>○ Plan for communication with project participants and stakeholders about project plan and progress information incl. MEAL data, safeguarding and complaints mechanism.</li> <li>○ ACT-internal, funding member and/ or external donor reporting schedule.</li> <li>○ Outline approach to learning and learning activities, internally with team and with programme/ project stakeholders, as basis for plan adaptations based on monitoring data analysis and project progress, context and risk monitoring.</li> <li>○ Plan for internal review and/ or external evaluation (if any).</li> <li>○ Gender and diversity lens applied to the MEAL framework.</li> <li>○ Climate and environmental justice considerations mainstreamed into MEAL framework.</li> </ul>	
<b>MEAL Work Planning</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ integrated into programme/ project work plan, or separate.</li> </ul>	
<b>MEAL Resourcing</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ budgeting for MEAL and Quality, Accountability and Safeguarding staff capacities and related activities in project budget lines or as a percentage of total budget – in total, roughly 5 to 10% of the overall project budget, dependent on budget volume.</li> </ul>	

### a. Programmes and Projects of the ACT Secretariat

#### Roles and Responsibilities

Position	Role in MEAL planning
ACT Programme Manager	The ACT Secretariat Programme Manager is responsible to ensure adequate planning for MEAL for the programme/ project(s) they manage.
Programme Quality Adviser, MEAL staff or MEAL focal point <sup>6</sup> per programme	Provide technical support in the development of a quality MEAL plan.

<sup>6</sup> See Terms of Reference for MEAL Focal Points in Annex 2.

Finance and Operations staff	Responsible to contribute the financial MEAL perspective to MEAL planning.
Director of Programmes	The Director of Programmes is responsible to ensure the provision of quality MEAL plans in line with this manual as part of the approval of the programme/ project plan and upon programme/ project inception.
Resource Mobilisation Coordinator	Ensures adequate MEAL planning during the proposal development process to make sure project design is reflective of this manual.

## **MEAL Plan**

### **The MEAL Plan includes**

- ✓ Indicators, their definitions, baseline data and targets, methods of data collection, types of data disaggregation (as a minimum by gender, age group and disability), frequency and responsibilities in data collection, and purpose and target audience of data use. (Usually called 'M&E Plan' or 'Performance Management Plan')
- ✓ Plan for MEAL-related communication with project participants and stakeholders about project plan and progress information including MEAL data, safeguarding and complaints mechanism.
- ✓ ACT-internal, funding member and donor reporting.
- ✓ Regular learning activities, internally with team and with programme/ project stakeholders, to inform plan adaptations based on monitoring data analysis and project progress.
- ✓ Internal review and/ or external evaluation (based on PMEAL Manual and funding member/ donor requirements – see 7.)

The detailed MEAL plan can be completed until six weeks after programme or project start. However, major work packages, activities including data collection for indicators, and resulting staffing and resourcing needs need to be clarified at design stage. MEAL activities and staffing need to be included in work plan and budget.

Like the full programme or project plan, the MEAL Plan needs to provide for relevant data collection, disaggregation and analysis to monitor, evaluate and learn about gender justice, inclusion and exclusion, and environmental and climate change impact of the programme or project.

### **Optional: Learning agenda**

In addition, a set of learning questions relevant to the ACT Secretariat or the ACT Alliance more broadly can be formulated to encourage reflection that points beyond the scope of the programme's or the project's implementation: for example, when a new methodology, tool or approach is piloted, questions around their effectiveness, scalability or replicability could be asked and reflected upon.

### **Resourcing MEAL**

Quality MEAL requires staff capacities, technical and financial resources, which need to be planned and budgeted for. This can be done in various forms: budgeting for actual staff capacities and financial needs for the planned MEAL activities; a percentage of the overall programme or project budget; or, by an agreement with members to cover MEAL as programmatic core cost. In total, staffing and activities for MEAL, Quality, Accountability and Safeguarding shall be resourced with roughly 5 to 10 percent of total programme or project budget, dependent on budget volume.



## b. Projects of the ACT Humanitarian Mechanism (Appeals, RRFs)

### Roles and Responsibilities

Position	Role in MEAL planning
ACT requesting member	Responsible for planning for the requesting member's project MEAL, meeting the requirements defined in the ACT humanitarian mechanism and in this PMEAL Manual.
Forum coordinator, coordinating member or consortium lead (if multi- member appeal)	Responsible for coordinating and integrating the requesting members' MEAL frameworks and plans into a joint project MEAL plan, along with setting up a MEAL coordination mechanism among implementing members.
Humanitarian Programme Officer/ Adviser/ Coordinator	Responsible to ensure quality MEAL plans of requesting members and consolidated appeal MEAL plans, quality assurance and technical support to the requesting member's or implementing partner's planning for MEAL, including related budgeting. Support by co-creation when requesting members or implementing partners need to build their related capacity. Plan for Secretariat MEAL activities for humanitarian response projects as per PMEAL Manual and Humanitarian Operations Manual.
MEAL staff and/or MEAL focal point <sup>7</sup>	Provide technical support in the development of quality MEAL plans and the planning for the Secretariat's MEAL activities for humanitarian response projects
Humanitarian Finance staff	Responsible to contribute financial MEAL perspective to MEAL planning. Plan for Secretariat financial MEAL activities for humanitarian response projects.
Global Humanitarian Operations Manager	Ensures consistent approach of humanitarian team to MEAL planning in line with this manual.

### Process and product(s):

- ✓ The MEAL Plan requirements for humanitarian response projects follow the ACT [Humanitarian Operations Manual](#) with its annexes. A MEAL Plan is a mandatory part of any humanitarian project proposal.
- ✓ The MEAL plan needs to include relevant data collection and analysis to monitor, evaluate and learn about gender justice and environmental and climate justice aspects of the project.
- ✓ Data disaggregation: as a minimum by gender, age group and disability.

### Resourcing MEAL

MEAL staff capacities, technical and financial resources need to be planned and budgeted for, at implementing member level, and at Secretariat- programme level. This can be done in various forms: budgeting for actual staff capacities and financial needs for the planned MEAL activities in appeal and RRF project budgets; as a percentage of the overall project budgets; and/ or, by an agreement with members to cover Secretariat MEAL as programmatic core cost. Total resourcing for MEAL, Quality, Accountability and Safeguarding shall add up to 5 to 10 percent of the total project budget, dependent on budget volume.

<sup>7</sup> See Terms of Reference for MEAL Focal Points in Annex 2

### c. Projects (Sub-/Grants) under ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects

#### Roles and Responsibilities

Position	Role in MEAL planning
ACT requesting member	Responsible for planning for MEAL, meeting the requirements defined by the ACT Secretariat in line with this PMEAL Manual.
Coordinating member or consortium lead (if forum or multi-member project)	Responsible for coordinating and integrating the requesting members' MEAL frameworks and plans into a joint project MEAL plan, along with setting up a MEAL coordination mechanism among implementing members.
ACT Secretariat Programme Counterpart (Officer, Coordinator or Manager)	Responsible for completion, provision and quality assurance of the requesting member's MEAL plans. Coaching and co-creation are encouraged when requesting members need capacity strengthening. Plan for MEAL of member-implemented projects (grants).
MEAL staff or MEAL focal point	Provide technical support in the development of quality MEAL plans and the planning for the Secretariat's MEAL activities for requesting member/ forum projects
Finance staff in charge of projects	Responsible to confirm that proposals' budgets are sufficiently covering MEAL. Budget for financial MEAL activities for member- implemented projects.

#### Process and product(s)

- ✓ The same standard as under a) guides the MEAL planning requirements for project proposals of members under sub-granting mechanisms of ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects.
- ✓ The detailed MEAL plan can be completed within six weeks upon project start – BUT main approaches and activities, staffing, time allocation and resourcing needs must be clear at design stage (See 4. above).
- ✓ Like the full programme/ project plan, the MEAL plan needs to provide for relevant data collection and analysis to monitor, evaluate and learn about gender justice and environmental and climate change aspects.

#### Resourcing MEAL

MEAL staff capacities, technical and financial resources at implementing member or partner level need to be planned and budgeted for (in addition to the ACT Secretariat- programme/ project level MEAL budget). This can be done in various forms: budgeting for actual staff capacities and MEAL activities in project budget lines; or, as a percentage of the overall project budget. Total resourcing for MEAL, Quality, Accountability and Safeguarding shall add up to 5 to 10 percent of the total project budget, dependent on budget volume.

## 6. MONITORING

Whether the secretariat implements a programme or project directly or members implement sub-granted or humanitarian projects, the ACT Secretariat is responsible to ensure that monitoring data is collected and is of good quality. Monitoring data helps to track progress, results and outcomes; to assess expenditure against budget; and ensure accountability to communities, partners and donors.

<b>In brief: Monitoring ACT Programmes and Projects</b>	
<b>Kick off</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Kick-off workshop, incl. clarification of MEAL framework and plan</li> <li>○ Complete MEAL Plan six weeks after, baseline data within three months after project start of programmes and development projects; within two weeks after approval of humanitarian response projects (&gt;3months duration)</li> </ul>	
<b>Monitoring a programme or project</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Results monitoring: Implementing the monitoring part of the MEAL plan, especially data collection, analysis, and monitoring activities; incl. data quality reviews</li> <li>○ Humanitarian response projects: monitor adherence to CHS commitments</li> <li>○ Context and risk monitoring (including Situation Updates for humanitarian responses)</li> <li>○ Process/ work plan monitoring and updates</li> <li>○ Budget monitoring</li> </ul>	
<b>Field-level monitoring activities</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Field-level monitoring activities – humanitarian: once in 6 months, remote monitoring for RRFs &lt;3 months; development: annually, if annual project budget &gt;100,000USD; and 1 in 5 smaller projects)</li> <li>○ Activity types: on-site by ACT staff, joint monitoring visits by funding members, single funding member visits, peer or hybrid monitoring visits, e.g., including forum coordinator or other forum member(s), remote monitoring (requires justification)</li> <li>○ Based on ToR and documented in a Monitoring (Visit) Report</li> </ul>	
<b>Financial monitoring</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Monitoring of budget and expenditure, based on financial reports and audit reports (if any during implementation)</li> <li>○ Financial monitoring visits/ spot checks of sub-granted projects, especially for appeals &gt;5million USD</li> </ul>	

### Roles and Responsibilities

<b>Position</b>	<b>Role in Monitoring Programmes and Projects under ACT Funding</b>
Leading ACT Thematic Programme Manager	Ensures MEAL plan completion for ACT programme or project until six weeks after programme/ project start and availability of baseline data until three months after programme/ project start.
MEAL Staff or Focal Point per programme	Leads or supports (in agreement with Programme Manager) and quality controls MEAL planning and takes leading role in programme/project monitoring; including of requesting member projects.
Requesting members implementing projects under ACT-administered funding	Under the Humanitarian Mechanism and under Secretariat Programme/ Project grants, requesting members are responsible for monitoring their projects' progress, collection, recording and analysis of quality monitoring data, conducting field monitoring visits, documenting results and providing the Secretariat with progress reports.

ACT programme team members who act as counterparts for requesting members	Monitor requesting members' projects' implementation and progress, risks, contexts, results and outcomes based on reports, ongoing dialogue and regular monitoring activities. Identify member and partner needs in strengthening their MEAL capacities and seek ways to provide or facilitate access to such support. MEAL tasks can be shared with Programme's MEAL staff or focal point.
Finance staff dedicated to the programme/project	Responsible for budget monitoring (along with the leading Programme Manager) and for financial monitoring of expenditure and compliance; for regular review of financial and audit reports including management letters, and clarification of any observed issues and feedback to implementing member(s); other financial monitoring activities including spot checks on-site or remotely.
Director of Programmes	Holds programme managers to account for submission of full MEAL Plan within six weeks of programme or project start, and availability of baseline data within the first three months; and delivering on monitoring commitments.
Director of Operations	Leads development of financial monitoring guidance and implementation. Holds project responsible finance staff to account for adherence to financial monitoring commitments.
Funding members	Coordinate with ACT secretariat programme and finance staff in charge of programme or project, and with other funding members, for effective and efficient monitoring of secretariat and member-level implementation.
ACT and member specialists (Q&A, PMEAL, Safeguarding, Gender, Environment, etc.)	Specialists can be requested by programme staff at Secretariat or members to support monitoring in their respective areas of expertise.
All secretariat and member staff involved in monitoring activities	Are obliged to report any observed misconduct related to safeguarding and non-adherence to the ACT Code of Conduct through the respective secretariat or member mechanisms.

#### a. ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects

Programmes and projects implemented and managed directly by the ACT Secretariat monitor their progress, MEAL data, budget, contexts and risks as follows:

##### At programme or project outset

- ✓ A programme or project kick-off workshop clarifies the programme or project plan, including the corresponding MEAL framework and plan, with their links to financial and grant management requirements.
- ✓ At the latest six weeks after programme or project start the MEAL Plan (as elaborated under 4.) needs to be completed by the leading Programme Manager and MEAL Focal Point and endorsed by the Director of Programmes.
- ✓ Leading Programme Manager and programme MEAL Focal Point ensure that within three months after programme or project start, baseline data are available.

##### Monitoring at the level of Secretariat-managed programme or project:

The MEAL Plan guides results monitoring in the implementation period, i.e. regular data collection and analysis for logframe indicators, conducting activities, e.g., review of Theory of Change or Outcome Harvests. The monitoring activities shall be regularly combined with or followed by reflection and learning to adapt the programme or project strategy and plan (see 9. Learning).

Other elements of monitoring include

- ✓ Process monitoring: tracking and updating of the work plan based on gained insights and changes in context;
- ✓ tracking, reviewing, providing feedback on and following up on narrative, financial and audit reports and deliverables by grantees;
- ✓ conducting planned and needs-based monitoring activities with grantees (see in more detail under c. below); and
- ✓ data quality assurance<sup>8</sup>: assessing the quality of own and implementing members' or partners' monitoring data, as part of remote and field monitoring.

Budget monitoring is supported by monthly budget vs actuals reports from the finance team. By December, an approximate financial report for the year is produced which will be finalised when all bookings and accruals are completed in the beginning of the following year.

A financial monitoring mechanism led by dedicated staff of the finance team ensures that finance and programme and humanitarian teams work together closely to ensure financial accountability. This includes:

- ✓ Monitoring of ACT Secretariat programme or project income and expenditure; with spot checks of expenditure by programme or project team and of implementing members or partners, if any;
- ✓ Ensuring receipt, review, discussion and follow up of financial reports by implementing members or partners;
- ✓ Follow up on action to address any weaknesses in the financial management and monitoring system that were identified as part of Due Diligence at the programme or project outset.

Funding members' or external donors' monitoring of Secretariat programmes and projects will add value to programme or project implementation when coordinated well with the programme's or project's own efforts. Access to their monitoring findings and reports will provide opportunities for learning and the continuous adaptation of the plan in light of emerging evidence.

## **b. Humanitarian Projects (RRF and Appeals)<sup>9</sup>**

### **ACT Alliance Humanitarian Monitoring Requirements**

- ✓ In line with the revised ACT Humanitarian Policy, cost allocations should be included for monitoring by Humanitarian Programme Officers (HPOs) and members for all responses funded through ACT appeals or RRFs. For members this should be in the appeal budget and HPOs should have an annual budget funded from SMC (Secretariat Management and Monitoring Costs).

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<sup>8</sup> Data quality assurance is based on the criteria:

- ✓ Validity: The data should clearly and adequately represent the intended result.
- ✓ Integrity: The data should have safeguards to minimize the risk of transcription error or data manipulation.
- ✓ Precision: The data should have a sufficient level of detail to permit management decision-making.
- ✓ Reliability: The data should reflect stable and consistent collection processes and analysis methods over time.
- ✓ Timeliness: Data should be available at a useful frequency, be current, and timely enough to influence management decision-making.

([USAID' Performance Monitoring & Evaluation Tips. Data Quality Standards](#). 2009, No. 12, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

<sup>9</sup> This section is based on the "[Humanitarian Monitoring and Evaluation Mandatory Guideline](#)", version of 15 December 2023.

- ✓ A Terms of Reference document (ToR) must be prepared and shared with Head of Humanitarian Team (HOH)/Global Humanitarian Operations Manager (GHOM) and requesting members by HPOs prior to a monitoring visit. The ToR should include at a minimum the objectives of the visit, the travel plan (activities, itinerary), dates, participants, the information that will be gathered, the budget, and approvals required.
- ✓ ToRs for all on-site and remote monitoring visits must include a security risk assessment that includes all stakeholders. The relevant HPO is responsible for ensuring this takes place in coordination with the ACT Security Coordinator and requesting members and their partners.
- ✓ Monitoring activities must be timely (remote and in-person). A MEAL plan must be established by Secretariat Humanitarian staff (HPOs) within 2 weeks of approval of funding for all appeals and RRF projects (with a duration of more than three months) and where appropriate ACT consortia, to guarantee necessary follow-up, data gathering and reporting. This plan should be aligned with the requesting member(s)' MEAL plan(s); and, where possible, a joint MEAL plan should be established.
- ✓ As part of the MEAL plan HPOs will work with local and national members to provide guidance on ACT secretariat's monitoring practice, tools, and approaches.
- ✓ The ACT Humanitarian Mechanism has three distinct funding instruments: 1. The Rapid Response Fund (RRF), 2. Appeals and 3. Consortia. Each funding instrument has different management procedures. MEAL plans should be established in line with the specific requirements of each instrument.
- ✓ Projects funded under an RRF can generally be implemented for up to six months maximum. When an in-person monitoring visit by Secretariat Humanitarian staff is not possible within this timeframe, remote monitoring should take place on at least two occasions as planned and agreed with requesting members in the MEAL plan.
- ✓ For an RRF of up to three months duration at least one remote monitoring activity must be undertaken by the relevant HPO.
- ✓ For all appeals (Level 3 crises under the [IASC Humanitarian system-wide scale up](#)) Secretariat Humanitarian staff should undertake a monitoring visit every six months in person where feasible and/or combined with formal remote monitoring as established in the MEAL plan.
- ✓ To ensure a systematic approach to monitoring HPOs must use the ACT Humanitarian monitoring template. A monitoring report must be submitted to HOH/GHOM and requesting members within two weeks following a monitoring visit/remote monitoring.
- ✓ HPOs must debrief with all relevant members at the end of the monitoring visit and will follow up on discussed recommendations following consultation with GHOM/HoH. The monitoring trip report should be shared with members within one week following the visit and follow up actions should be agreed.
- ✓ Monitoring and associated costs in the framework of Consortia should be pre-negotiated with the ACT consortium based on donor parameters.

### **Types of monitoring**

Listed below are the types of monitoring that can be undertaken by ACT Secretariat Humanitarian staff

#### On-site monitoring

Appeals and RRFs are implemented by members and their partners. ACT secretariat humanitarian staff support members by collecting information on project progress through monitoring activities. Appeals should include at least one monitoring visit by the relevant HPO every six months. The timing of visits is agreed with requesting members as part of the MEAL plan. On site monitoring can include financial monitoring involving ACT Secretariat finance staff. ACT Humanitarian staff are also required to review budgetary and finance information as part of their on-site visits. When field visits are not possible for security or other reasons, remote monitoring should be included in the plan.

### Joint monitoring

Joint monitoring visits are encouraged where appropriate – such visits can include interested funding members for certain appeals based on size and complexity with costs included in the budget as required.

### Financial monitoring

Financial monitoring relates to monitoring undertaken by ACT Secretariat finance staff. The provision of regular and up-to-date financial reporting allows a review of project progress and decision making related to the use of resources. Financial monitoring involving finance staff will be scheduled as part of the MEAL plan established by HPOs in collaboration with ACT finance staff and requesting members. Major Appeals (budget >US\$5 million) should generally include at least one finance monitoring on-site visit within the duration of the appeal. All appeals and RRFs have audit requirements which are outlined in the Appeal documents and the Humanitarian Operations Manual.

### Remote monitoring

Along with on-site field visits, remote monitoring allows core monitoring activities to be undertaken across the ACT Appeal and RRF portfolio. Some of the reasons remote monitoring may be appropriate include:

- ✓ poor or deteriorating security situation,
- ✓ risk to health and safety,
- ✓ logistical challenges,
- ✓ threat of, or consequences of, severe weather or natural disaster,
- ✓ shortage of funding, e.g., for regularly accessing very remote locations,
- ✓ project modifications and no-cost extensions,
- ✓ short timeframe of implementation, e.g., 3-month RRF.

Where access is problematic, third-party monitoring should also be considered.

### ACT Alliance Humanitarian monitoring commitments

- ✓ ACT Alliance is committed to putting people first which means to respond, from an emergency response approach to the most pressing humanitarian needs without discrimination, in a timely manner. To fulfil that promise, data disaggregation by gender, age and disability must be at the centre of our monitoring and evaluation system. This includes the setting up of sensitive data protection mechanisms to avoid harm in the data gathering, analysis and disseminating processes.<sup>10</sup>
- ✓ Good quality monitoring, whether remote or on-site, should consider the participation of primary stakeholders. Discussions should be promoted in an inclusive manner to assess the impact of the project on the participants (children, women, elderly, people with disability, LGBTIQ+, etc.) and guarantee the principle of “do not harm”. It is good practice to include this approach from the proposal development stage.
- ✓ ACT humanitarian staff must not only gather information from primary stakeholders about what the project has delivered in terms of the objectives and the technical quality of assistance, but they should also follow up on how the project is being delivered (using the nine commitments of the CHS) – for example, whether the member is ensuring that the project is inclusive, gender sensitive and conflict sensitive, and has a Complaints and Feedback Mechanism that includes sensitive complaints (safeguarding and misuse of funds). Partner capacity to implement should also be monitored.

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<sup>10</sup> When collecting data for interventions specifically targeting people with disabilities, the use of the [Washington Group Questions](#) is highly recommended.

- ✓ ACT Alliance and members' staff involved in M&E activities should actively ensure the minimization of bias,<sup>11</sup> ensuring the accuracy, reliability and accountability of all monitoring and evaluation processes and data management systems.

### **c. Projects (Sub-grants) under ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects**

#### Project monitoring by requesting member(s)

When requesting members run projects with sub-grants under ACT Secretariat-managed programmes or projects, they are required to submit their completed MEAL plan within 6 weeks of project start. In forum-based or multi-member projects, the requesting member that leads the project/ the consortium is in charge of development and implementation of a joined MEAL plan.

The MEAL Plan guides data collection and analysis of the projects run by members; and reporting of data is expected as contractually agreed with the ACT Secretariat. (See also 8. Accountability) The members will conduct their monitoring, as well as further evaluation, accountability and learning activities using their own systems that are reviewed as part of Due Diligence procedures before the start of the project. Part of the ACT Secretariat's role is to provide support in further strengthening PMEAL systems and capacities of members and partners, when needed.

#### ACT Programmes' monitoring and accompaniment of projects of requesting members

Monitoring and accompaniment by the ACT programme team is set on track in a project inception workshop that includes as a minimum the relevant requesting member staff, and programme and finance team members of the ACT Secretariat.

Essential elements of ACT Secretariat programme staff's subsequent monitoring and accompaniment include:

- ✓ Documenting action points and agreements that result from ongoing requesting member dialogue, as well as their follow-up, especially on
- ✓ progress of project implementation, including with regard to gender justice and inclusion aspects, and changes in contexts and risks, with resulting needs to adapt,
- ✓ reviewed reports, including inquiries and feedback to requesting member(s),
- ✓ follow-up on recommendations and agreed actions from monitoring activities, identification of needs for capacity strengthening and facilitating access to support,
- ✓ when available, organisational capacity assessment/ due diligence action plan follow-up.

#### Project monitoring commitment by the ACT Secretariat

Projects with an annual budget volume of more than 100,000 USD need to be monitored by means of one of the below monitoring activities once per year; for smaller projects a selection of one in five per year. The ACT programme or project that sub-grants to members or partners needs to develop a monitoring plan that guides monitoring activities, based on criteria for the selection of projects. Based on urgent project or financial management needs, ad hoc monitoring activities may at times be required.

These regular monitoring activities that are documented in a monitoring report can be of the following types:

- Monitoring visit "on-site" by ACT staff
- Joint monitoring visit of funding members

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<sup>11</sup> Bias occurs when the accuracy and precision of a measurement is threatened by the experience, perceptions, and/or assumptions of the researcher, or by the tools and methods used for measurement and analysis.



- Single funding member visit (should be discouraged in favour of joint visits)
- Hybrid or peer monitoring visit of national or sub-regional forum coordinators or members, or of CoP members
- Remote monitoring

The management and coordination lead for monitoring activities is with the programme staff in charge of managing the project at the ACT Secretariat.

On-site monitoring activities are the first choice, remote monitoring exceptions need to be justified. Monitoring activities need to be planned for in the MEAL Plan.

Monitoring (visit) activities require Terms of Reference that are shared with requesting member(s) for inputs and for preparation of the activity, and include:

- ✓ the objectives of the visit and the information that will be gathered,
- ✓ the travel plan (dates and itinerary),
- ✓ participants,
- ✓ the budget, and
- ✓ required approvals.

Monitoring (visit) reports include:

- ✓ a brief description of the monitoring activity conducted, referring to ToR,
- ✓ methods of data collection and list of stakeholders met,
- ✓ findings in terms of project progress against work plan, achievements against targets, results, expected and unexpected outcomes, and risks; including reference to and analysis of disaggregated data for people of different genders, age groups and people with disability,
- ✓ findings re. implementation of safeguarding and accountability measures, including complaints and feedback mechanisms,
- ✓ when available, follow-up on previous agreed actions from project monitoring and/ or due diligence, including ACT Quality and Accountability Framework compliance,
- ✓ recommendations to implementing organisation(s) and ACT stakeholders.

As immediate follow-up of the monitoring activity within two weeks after report sharing:

- ✓ Conclude follow-up actions of requesting member and of secretariat; including, e.g., provision/ facilitation of access to capacity development support.

#### Financial monitoring of projects implemented by members

- ✓ Budget monitoring and review of financial reports against narrative reporting is the responsibility of the primary responsible staff of the programme team who manages member-led projects.
- ✓ Regular review of financial and audit reports including management letters and including clarification of any observed issues and feedback to requesting member(s) is responsibility of the project responsible of the finance team.
- ✓ Financial monitoring activities including spot checks on-site or remotely are led by the project-responsible finance staff, in close collaboration with the programme staff in charge of the project.

Financial monitoring, audit requirements and processes follow the respective financial policy and technical guidance documents. How financial instalments are linked to submission of reports is regulated through financial guidance documents, agreed procedures related to membership requirements and sanctioning, and contractual agreements.

## 7. EVALUATION

### In brief:

#### Evaluating ACT Programmes and Projects

##### Evaluations at ACT

- Can be end-of programme/ project summative assessments, or mid-term or real-time formative assessments.
- Apply the DAC criteria as standard. Humanitarian appeal evaluations also reflect on CHS commitments and DEC criteria.
- Consider participation of stakeholders, gender and inclusion, localization principles.
- Lighter, usually internal mid-term and final reviews, e.g. peer reviews, are possible.

##### Evaluate which programmes or projects?

- ACT secretariat programmes or projects, including sub-grants, with total budget of more than US\$ 1 million need to be internally reviewed at mid-term and externally evaluated after 4 years the latest. All programmes or projects with a budget of less than US\$ 1 million need to be reviewed internally within 3 to 4 years after project start or the last evaluation. After 6 years such projects or programmes need to be evaluated, either ACT- internally, or externally.
- Humanitarian appeals: >5 million USD actual budget volume= external evaluation; >2million USD= internal or external evaluation; <2million USD= a sample of appeals is evaluated; RRFs= at least two evaluated annually.

##### Process and quality criteria

- Terms of Reference, incl. methodology and participation requirements
- Transparent process, procurement and contracting in line with ACT policies
- Process: Inception report, desk and field research, debrief after field work, draft and final report (format 1:3:25)
- At least one evaluation event shall allow for broad participation of programme/ project and ACT stakeholders, for joint learning
- Broader dissemination in ACT, incl. accountability to evaluation/ project participants
- Management response on programme and organizational levels

#### Roles and Responsibilities

Position	Role in Evaluating Programmes and Projects under ACT Funding
Leading ACT Thematic Programme Manager	Ensures well-managed evaluation processes and good quality reports. In charge of due follow-up of agreed actions in programme/ project at the ACT Secretariat level.
MEAL Staff or Focal Point per programme	Plan and organise evaluation, from MEAL Plan to drafting and circulating of Terms of Reference, consultant selection/ procurement, managing consultant and process to final report including sign-off for acceptance of deliverables, and to management response led by Programme Manager and Director of Programmes.
Director of Programmes	Ensures that mandatory evaluations and dissemination of results do happen; consulted on ToR and draft report (as a minimum); leads management response to ACT programme/ project -level evaluations and follows up on implementation of recommendations at organisational or alliance- level.
Other programme manager(s) involved through integrated	To be consulted on ToR and draft report (as a minimum)

planning/ cross-cutting tasks	
Requesting members implementing projects under ACT-administered funding	To be consulted on ToR and draft report; facilitate access to project information and field research as required when their projects are part of the scope of an evaluation.
ACT programme team members who act as counterparts for requesting members	To be consulted on ToR and draft report (as a minimum); facilitate coordination of evaluation processes between evaluator(s) and requesting member(s) whose projects are part of the scope of evaluation.
Director of Operations	Ultimately responsible for the procurement process, contract management and related compliance aspects.
Finance staff dedicated to the programme/ project	To be consulted on ToR and draft report (as a minimum); provide financial information to the evaluator(s) as the scope of the evaluation requires.
Resource mobilisation lead	To be consulted on ToR and draft report (as a minimum)
Funding members and/ or donors of the concerned programme or project	To be consulted on ToR and draft report (as a minimum)
Relevant ACT specialists (Q&A, PMEAL, Safeguarding, Gender, Environment, etc.)	To be consulted on ToR and draft report (as a minimum)
Non-mandatory external evaluations and internal reviews can be managed by forum coordinators and/ or requesting members. In these cases, the roles in managing and participating in the process are adapted accordingly.	

Evaluations in ACT programmes and projects can be external end-of programme/ project summative assessments, or mid-term or real-time formative assessments. Internal mid-term, real-time or final (peer) reviews can take lighter approaches.

Quality and process criteria:

- ✓ Terms of Reference formulate the framework for the evaluation and are consulted with relevant programme/ project stakeholders for a shared basis. For member-led development and humanitarian projects, Terms of Reference must be agreed between requesting members and ACT Secretariat.
- ✓ The methodology is guided by the OECD DAC criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, with corresponding evaluation questions.
  - Humanitarian response projects also require systematic reflection on CHS commitments.
- ✓ Participation by the target groups.
- ✓ A gender-sensitive and inclusive methodology that is sensitive for the different experiences of people of different genders or social groups, and the (potentially) differing outcomes.

- ✓ Process:
  - Identification and tasking of the evaluator(s) in a transparent and accountable process on the basis of the agreed ToR and in line with ACT procurement procedures and funding member or external donor requirements (if additional ones),
  - inception report (unless the detailed methodology is fully developed and prescribed in the ToR),
  - desk and field research,
  - debrief after field research,
  - presentation of draft report,
  - final report with findings and recommendations in format 1 -3 -25 (1 page of key messages, 3 pages of Executive Summary, max. 25 pages of full report).
- ✓ At least one evaluation event shall allow for larger participation of ACT secretariat, implementing member(s), and other ACT forum/ member staff, for joint learning.
- ✓ Broader dissemination of findings and recommendations within the ACT Alliance, and publishing of reports is encouraged, whenever the context allows.
- ✓ A management response that includes agreed actions resulting from evaluation findings and recommendations, as an important step towards organisational learning concludes the evaluation process.

Mid- term, real-time or end-of-project (peer) reviews may apply lighter methodologies, based on resources and review objectives, and are advised but not bound to applying the DAC criteria.

Minimum standards:

- ✓ Terms of Reference that are consulted with relevant programme/ project stakeholders
- ✓ Agreed objective(s) and methodology
- ✓ Participation by the target groups, a gender- sensitive and inclusive approach, reflecting on principles of locally led action/ response
- ✓ Draft and final report

**a. ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects; and Projects (Grants) under ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects**

Criteria to determine evaluation type:

The ACT Alliance secretariat will use the following criteria of budget volume and duration to identify the minimum requirements for evaluation of its own programmes and projects, as well as (sub-) grants under these projects:

- ✓ All programmes or projects of a total budget of more than US\$ 1 million need to be internally reviewed at mid-term and externally evaluated after 4 years the latest.
- ✓ All programmes or projects with a budget of less than US\$ 1 million need to be reviewed internally within 3 to 4 years after project start or the last evaluation. After 6 years such projects or programmes need to be evaluated, either ACT- internally, or externally.

When a review or evaluation is due, the ACT programme or project that sub-grants to members for smaller scale and short duration projects, develops an evaluation plan with criteria that guide how a selection of projects of forums and/ or members is evaluated, either as part of the evaluation of that ACT programme or project, or as a sample of sub-granted projects.

### Participation requirements in the evaluation process

- ✓ For the evaluation of ACT Secretariat- managed programmes or projects, the selection/ procurement committee for the evaluator(s) needs to include the Programme Manager, the programme's MEAL focal point, a Reference Group member or other programme/project-engaged member representative, HR/ procurement staff.

### **b. Projects of the ACT Humanitarian Mechanism (Appeals, RRFs)<sup>12</sup>**

Evaluations of humanitarian appeals in ACT Alliance can be internal or external.

### Evaluation principles

- ✓ Transparency: findings from evaluations must be made available to stakeholders. The terms of reference, findings and recommendations of all external evaluations will be placed in the public domain and will be shared directly with members.
- ✓ Independence: An evaluation, whether internal or external, will be as objective as possible and comments/ recommendations should be taken in the spirit of improvement
- ✓ Objectivity: The evaluation must be based on verifiable facts. The presentation of facts should be clearly and recognizably distinguished from opinions.
- ✓ Usability: Information and learning from evaluations are used to inform future projects and organizational learning.
- ✓ Do no harm: The evaluation must not cause harm to individuals or entities.
- ✓ Nexus approach: All interventions should be evaluated considering the linking of relief, rehabilitation and development.

### Criteria to determine evaluation type

ACT Alliance secretariat will use the following criteria to identify the minimum requirements of Appeals and RRF projects for evaluation:

#### a) The size and scope of the Appeal/ RRF

- ✓ All Appeals with a budget of US\$5 million or more must include costs for an external evaluation in the budget.
- ✓ All Appeals with a budget of US\$2 million or more and less than US\$5 million, must include evaluation costs in the budget. The evaluation can be internal or external.
- ✓ Appeals with a budget under US\$2 million will be subject to a possible evaluation with funds earmarked for this purpose from within the humanitarian team annual budget. Selection of appeals to be evaluated will be made by the Head of Humanitarian (HoH)/ Global Humanitarian Operations Manager (GHOM).
- ✓ At least two RRFs should be evaluated annually with funds earmarked for this purpose in the GRRF Appeal. Selection of RRFs to be evaluated will be made by the HoH/GHOM.

#### b) Funding/donor requirements

- ✓ Where funding members or donors have specific evaluation requirements these should be included in the funding agreement - ACT Secretariat will ensure such requirements are fulfilled.

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<sup>12</sup> This section is based on the "Humanitarian Monitoring and Evaluation Mandatory Guideline", version of 15 December 2023.

### How do we evaluate Humanitarian Appeals/RRFs in ACT Alliance?

Evaluations may be performed at different stages of an appeal/RRF to address different needs and types of information. ACT Alliance uses three different main types of evaluation for Humanitarian appeals:

- ✓ Internal evaluation of ACT appeals/ RRFs (can be conducted either during the life of the appeal or at the end of the programme) and should be part of the MEAL plan.
- ✓ Real time evaluation (RTE) of the Appeals/ RRFs: 2 – 6 months from the appeal launch date (may be either internal or external as considered appropriate) and are an integral part of the MEAL plan.
- ✓ External Evaluation can be conducted either during the life of the appeal (normally towards the end) or at the end of the appeal.

Final project evaluations must be completed within three months of the end of the implementation period.

In addition, other types of evaluations such as thematic evaluations (that assess specific aspects, themes, and processes of ACT Alliance’s technical work) and focused impact evaluations (with special emphasis on the positive and negative long-term effects) can be commissioned internally or externally, based on the overall project/programme’s needs. Such evaluations must be signed off by HoH/GHOM.

### What information do we value in ACT Alliance evaluations of humanitarian response projects?

Accountability to affected populations is a core priority and evaluations commissioned by ACT Alliance should ensure this priority is reflected in the evaluation design. Evaluations of all types should always assess the extent to which an appeal/RRF has contributed to delivering on ACT Alliance’s Accountability Framework, in particular in relation to CHS commitments 3 (Sharing information), commitment 4 (Participation) and commitment 5 (Handling Complaints).

At a minimum all ACT humanitarian evaluations must include:

- ✓ The DAC Criteria for evaluating Development Assistance.

In addition, it is recommended that evaluations should also consider the Disaster and Emergency Committee (DEC) accountability framework criteria covering

- ✓ Use of resources, objective achievement in line with agreed humanitarian standards, principles and behaviours and learning from our experience – taking learning from one crisis response to another.

## 8. ACCOUNTABILITY

The ACT Quality and Accountability Framework (QAF) summarises the standards of quality towards which ACT can be held to account by its stakeholders and by each other. It states ACT’s primary commitments and the different responsibilities of ACT secretariat, ACT members, ACT forums and ACT governance in relation to ACT’s accountability mechanisms.

This section looks at accountability in two main areas: 1) accountability towards project participants, communities and stakeholders; and 2) accountability for the use of resources and taken investment and intervention decisions, by means of reporting; and at three different levels: a) at the level of ACT Secretariat programmes and projects, b) for humanitarian projects (appeals, RRFs) that are implemented by requesting members, and c) for sub-granted projects implemented by members under secretariat programmes and projects.

### I. Accountability towards Project Participants, Communities and Stakeholders

#### In brief:

#### Accountability to Project Participants, Communities and Stakeholders

Project participants, communities and stakeholders can hold the ACT secretariat and members to account for adherence to ACT’s Quality and Accountability Framework, and more practically, to the 9 commitments of the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS).

Within the broader framework, programmes and projects need to consider the following principles, mechanisms, policies, and guidance:

- **Participation** of project participants, ACT members and stakeholders in PMEAL cycle.
- **Disclosure of programme and project** information (incl. PMEAL) to participants, wider communities, ACT members and stakeholders.
- **Effective gender-responsive, accessible, and inclusive feedback and response channels** for project participants, communities, ACT members and stakeholders.
- **Accessible, gender-responsive Complaints Handling Mechanisms and Safeguarding systems**, harmonized across ACT stakeholders involved in a programme’s or project’s implementation.
- **ACT Communicating with Communities Guideline**: Formulated for humanitarian responses – but also relevant to development programmes and projects.
- **ACT Communities Data Safeguarding Policy**: Formulated for humanitarian responses – but also applicable to development programmes and projects.

#### Roles and Responsibilities

Position	Roles in Accountability towards Project Participants and Stakeholders
Leading Thematic Programme Managers	Ensure the planning, resourcing, implementation, and follow-up of accountability measures towards communities, project participants and stakeholders, including holding requesting members to account for their commitments and obligations as per ACT’s QAF.
Director of Programmes	Oversees accountability measures towards ACT-internal and external project participants, communities, and stakeholders; holds Programmes Team to account for their buy-in into constantly improving implementation of ACT’s QAF including Code of Good Practice and Code of Conduct in programme/project strategy; champions a culture of transparency and accountability for disclosure of relevant programme and project information including plans,

	implementation progress and reporting including MEAL data, balancing this, however, with data privacy and stakeholder safety and security concerns.
Director of Operations	Ensures accountability requirements are included in grant agreements with members and subgrant agreements with local partners, and integration of Code of Conduct in agreements with suppliers. Ensures that breaches of the ACT Code of Conduct are addressed by the management of the ACT secretariat. Leads handling and responses to complaints received by ACT, with support from Complaint Handling Committee (CHC). Implements the SCHR Misconduct Disclosure Scheme at ACT secretariat level as part of recruitment for staff and long-term consultants. Champions and oversees transparent disclosure related to ACT programme and project finance and operations at Secretariat- level and follow-up of accountability-related improvement plans from due diligence processes with requesting members.
Requesting members implementing projects under ACT-administered funding	Responsible for accountability measures towards communities, project participants and stakeholders in their projects, implementing a people-centred approach throughout the project/programme cycle. Raise awareness on quality and accountability with their staff and project participants, foster a culture of feedback and responses to project participants and communities, have functioning complaints mechanism and safeguarding systems in line with ACT commitments in place, share programme/project outcomes with all stakeholders in appropriate language, format, style, and channels. Adopt collective accountability approaches at forum level, as relevant.
ACT programme team members who act as counterparts for requesting members	Promote, support, and monitor planning and implementation of accountability practices of requesting members towards communities, project participants and stakeholders. Ensure requesting members and communities are informed about and aware of relevant ACT commitments under the Quality and Accountability Framework, in appropriate language, format, cultural style, and channels. Responsible for reporting immediately any knowledge, concerns, or substantial suspicions of breaches of the Code of Conduct. Liaise and seek support from relevant ACT secretariat staff in awareness-raising of members around ACT policies, as needed.
Finance staff dedicated to the programme/project	Capacitate and support staff and requesting members in understanding financial accountability. Develop and maintain financial management system and internal control procedures for financial accountability.
MEAL Staff or Focal Points per programme	Support the design, implementation, and follow-up of accountability measures towards communities, project participants and stakeholders, with particular attention to adherence to ACT's key commitments to Code of Conduct, Complaint and Response Mechanisms, Safeguarding and CHS. Liaise with Quality, Accountability and Safeguarding staff and/ or engage ACT structures (Reference Group on Quality and Accountability and the ACT Safeguarding Community of Practice) upon need for advice and support.
Funding members	Accountable for funding and reporting requirements that reflect ACT Alliance's ambitions of localisation and decolonisation, including with a spirit and provision of support to requesting members and the secretariat when challenges in implementation or reporting occur; and with timely provision of feedback in response to concerns raised to them.
All ACT secretariat and member staff and related personnel	Are obliged to sign and adhere to the ACT Code of Conduct, and are obliged to report misconduct related to safeguarding and the Code of Conduct through the respective secretariat or member mechanisms.



The following accountability principles and guidance shall be adhered to at the respective implementation levels:

**a) ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects**

- ✓ Mainstreaming participation opportunities of project participants throughout PMEAL.
- ✓ Disclosure of information about programme or project plans, budgets, programme or project progress to participants and relevant stakeholders, especially ACT reference groups, CoPs, Forums and members.
- ✓ Gender-responsive, accessible, and inclusive feedback and response channels from and to programme and project participants and relevant stakeholders.
- ✓ Functional, widely disseminated, gender-responsive and accessible Complaints Handling Mechanisms, and information about and implementation of Code of Conduct and safeguarding measures according to policy.

**b) Projects of the ACT Humanitarian Mechanism (Appeals, RRFs)**

- ✓ Use Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) as reference framework for quality and accountability throughout the humanitarian project cycle.
- ✓ Apply ACT's Communicating with Communities Guideline in the humanitarian project cycle, seeking participation of target groups and communities, transparency about project information (esp. PMEAL) and accountability mechanisms, especially
- ✓ Gender-responsive, accessible, and inclusive feedback and response channels from and to communities and stakeholders.
- ✓ Functional, widely disseminated, gender-responsive and accessible Complaints Handling Mechanisms, and information about and implementation of Code of Conduct and safeguarding measures according to policy.

**c) Projects (Grants) under ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects**

- ✓ In ACT standard concept note and proposal templates, questions are asked about participation of project participants in design and approach to target group and community participation in and throughout project planning and MEAL.
- ✓ Disclosure of information about project plans, budgets, programme/ project progress to relevant stakeholders, especially to other requesting members and implementing partners, project participants, and communities. ACT Communicating with Communities Guideline is advised as a reference document for development and advocacy projects, too.
- ✓ Gender-responsive, accessible, and inclusive feedback and response channels from and to communities and stakeholders.
- ✓ Functional, widely disseminated, gender-responsive and accessible Complaints Handling Mechanisms, and information about and implementation of Code of Conduct and safeguarding measures according to policy.

## II. Accountability and reporting to the Alliance, to funding members, donors, and the public

### In brief:

#### Reporting to ACT Alliance, donors, and the public

- Reporting by Secretariat programmes and projects shall **follow internal ACT secretariat reporting standards and formats** whenever and as closely as possible.
- **Internal reporting** follows the requirements and schedule outlined in the “ACT Secretariat Institutional PMER processes - Description and guidelines”.
- **Reporting to funding members** follows the Funding Framework Agreements. Additional reporting requirements shall be kept as closely to the secretariat’s standards and formats as possible.
- **Reporting to external donors** shall be kept as closely to the secretariat’s standards and formats as possible but is determined by contractually agreed requirements.
- **Reporting to the public:** in ACT’s Annual Report, and selectively in ACT’s external communications via website and social media.

### Roles and Responsibilities

Position	Roles in Reporting to ACT, funding members, donors, and the public
Thematic Programme Manager	Responsible for timely quality reporting on their respective programmes and projects, internally and externally (via Director of Programmes). They contribute to the programmes’ reporting that they have direct collaboration and interfaces with, e.g. through joint initiatives and/ or implementation of cross-cutting tasks (e.g., gender justice and inclusion, environmental and climate justice, emergency preparedness/DRR).
Director of Programmes	Ensures quality reporting on thematic programmes with a view towards integrated and nexus programming. S/he oversees the use of gathered MEAL data and the reporting on cross-cutting themes; and that programme and project reports are submitted to ACT and external donors in a timely manner.
Director of Operations	Ensures quality programme and project financial reporting to ACT, funding members, external donors, and the public, as well as timely submission.
Requesting members implementing projects under ACT-administered funding	Responsible for timely, quality narrative and financial reporting according to ACT requirements based on quality MEAL data. Requesting members engage constructively in dialogue with their respective programme counterpart(s) at the ACT Secretariat to ensure good mutual understanding and further clarify, add or improve to the report, when requested.
ACT programme team members who act as counterparts for requesting members	Assure quality of member reporting and provide timely and quality feedback as part of efforts to strengthen member reporting capacities. Aim to facilitate harmonised reporting requirements when more than one funding member or external donor are involved.
Finance staff dedicated to the programme/project	Responsible for timely quality project financial reporting, including quality assurance of requesting member project financial reports in dialogue with requesting member colleagues. Financial reporting responsibility also includes status updates on the follow up on due diligence/ organisational (self-) assessment findings and agreed actions with requesting members who implement projects under ACT programmes.
MEAL Staff or Focal Points per programme	Support the accurate provision and use of available MEAL data, their analysis and interpretation for reporting.
Resource Mobilisation Coordinator	Supports project reporting processes to donors and ensures that donor requirements are met.

Funding members	Adhere to the reporting requirements spelled out in the Funding Framework Agreement with the Secretariat, clarify additional reporting requirements in a timely manner, and aim to keep reporting requirements close to requesting members' and the ACT Secretariat's own reporting standards and templates. Provide timely feedback and engage in constructive dialogue with and through the Secretariat on clarifications, filling of gaps and improvement needs.
ACT and member specialists (Q&A, PMEAL, Safeguarding, Gender, Climate, etc.)	Contribute information and provide constructive feedback on ACT thematic programmes and project, and/ or requesting member or implementing partner projects and reports.

### a) ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects

As a general rule that should be followed whenever possible, reporting by Secretariat programmes and projects shall follow internal ACT secretariat reporting standards and formats. Enhanced outcome and impact orientation in ACT-internal reporting formats is aimed for to become better able to meet funding member and external donor information needs and reporting requirements.

#### Internal reporting: at Secretariat, to the Governing Board and the Alliance at large

Periodic reporting to ACT programme, management, and Governing Board, and annual reporting to management, Governing Board and members and the standard ACT-internal reporting procedure.

- ✓ "ACT Secretariat Institutional PMER processes - Description and Guidelines" provides details on process and templates, i.e. the Annual Planning and Reporting Cycle.

#### Reporting to funding members

- ✓ Reporting requirements should be as close as possible to ACT Secretariat internal reporting standard, both, in reporting contents and reporting frequency.
- ✓ Additional requirements, e.g., due to back donor requirements, shall be clarified along with the funding agreement.

#### Reporting to external donors

- ✓ As contractually agreed and as per donor requirements.
- ✓ However, seek to agree a reporting standard that is as closely aligned as possible with ACT-internal reporting standards, templates and reporting periods.

#### Reporting to the public

- ✓ Reporting to the public via publishing and dissemination of the ACT Annual Report.

### b) Projects of the ACT Humanitarian Mechanism (Appeals, RRFs)

#### Reporting to funding members and external donors via secretariat

- ✓ Timely quality narrative and financial reporting by requesting members to the ACT Humanitarian Programme Officer or Adviser counterpart as per Humanitarian Operations Manual requirements and annexed templates, additional funding member and/ or external donor requirements as per project agreement(s) and based on quality MEAL data.
- ✓ The ACT Humanitarian Programme Officer or Adviser assures reporting quality including outcome and impact orientation as well as contribution of quality reported MEAL data relevant for ACT reporting on the Strategy's and Programme's progress, achievements, challenges and lessons learnt.

Reporting to ACT funding members and the public

- ✓ Reporting to the Governing Board and ACT funding members with Annual Reports on Appeals and use of Global Rapid Response Fund, and,
- ✓ selectively to the public, in ACT's external, mostly digital humanitarian communications.

**c) Projects (Grants) under ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects**

Reporting to ACT Programme/ Secretariat, funding members and/ or external donors

- ✓ Timely quality narrative and financial reporting by requesting members to ACT programme at the Secretariat as per sub-granting mechanism and agreed templates or guidance (reflected in project agreements) which incorporate funding member and/ or external donor requirements and are based on quality MEAL data.
- ✓ The relevant ACT Programme counterpart assures reporting quality including outcome and impact orientation as well as contribution of quality reported MEAL data relevant for ACT reporting on the Strategy's and Programme's progress, achievements, challenges, and lessons learnt.

Reporting to the ACT Alliance and the public

- ✓ Reporting to the Governing Board and members as part of ACT secretariat programme or project, and,
- ✓ selectively, in ACT's external, mostly digital communications.

## 9. LEARNING

Learning is about striving to become a bit better with each new intervention that we plan and do, whether at the secretariat-level, or led by members. A culture of learning at the Secretariat and throughout the Alliance is essential to this ambition: planning for time to pause and reflect, and to make sense of monitoring, evaluation and accountability mechanism findings, encouraging creative, innovative and critical thinking, strengthening staff and project participant capacities to learn, speak their mind and find solutions, hence improving implementation.

ACT experienced during the Covid-19 pandemic how constant learning is essential for agile adaptations of programme and project implementation to quickly changing contexts. To activate flexibility and agility for the ACT secretariat's programming and adaptive management, recurrent learning loops and dedicated reflection and learning activities are required as part of project management and MEAL routines. These will serve enhanced accountability and impact.

### In brief:

#### Learning in/ from ACT programmes and projects

##### Plan for learning (in MEAL Plan)

- Integrate regular learning loops into internal project management and MEAL meeting routine, at least trimester-based linked to ACT-internal reporting
- Annual dedicated learning activity with project participants and stakeholders
- Consider how to build capacities and culture of learning in your programme/ project
- Optional: formulate learning questions at programme/ project outset

##### Learning for adaptive management

- Conduct and document internal learning loops and broader annual learning activities,
- To use the learning in reporting and as basis for adaptive management: how to modify the implementation strategy and activities?

##### Learn from implementation and outcomes and disseminate learning

- Identify during implementation what learning can and should be shared more widely within ACT or the thematic sector(s)
- Documented final learning review (e.g., after action review), even in case of a final evaluation-review and reflect on findings and recommendations with stakeholders

### Roles and Responsibilities

Position	Roles for Learning
Thematic Programme Managers	Ensure embedding of learning into their respective programmes' MEAL planning and practices; and for sharing of learning with relevant stakeholders. They engage in joint learning among the ACT Secretariat's Programme Department; and in dialogue with the programmes they have direct collaborations and interfaces with, e.g. through joint initiatives and/ or implementation of cross-cutting tasks (e.g., gender justice, environmental and climate justice).
Director of Programmes	Leads and enables joint learning of the thematic programmes, including in and from nexus programming; oversees the implementation of cross-cutting themes; oversees that learning is embedded into the thematic programmes' MEAL planning and actual practices; and that learning is shared across the Programme Department and in the Alliance.
Director of Operations	Champions and enables joint learning in the areas of finance and operations, including Quality and Accountability with Safeguarding and Complaints-handling frameworks that are crucial for programmes' accountability.

Requesting members implementing projects under ACT-administered funding	Responsible for the embedding of learning in their MEAL plans and practises, including reporting on learning to the ACT Secretariat and engaging in dialogue with their relevant ACT Secretariat programme counterpart(s).
ACT programme team members who act as counterparts for requesting members	Promote and support the embedding of learning and dedicated activities in requesting members' MEAL planning and practises, especially engage in dialogues on learning within projects for adaptive management, and learning from projects for improved programming across the alliance and the sector.
Finance staff dedicated to the programme/project	Leading, facilitating, and following up on learning processes on the finance-related themes of PMEAL, including strengthening of own and requesting member systems of programme and project finance (e.g. based on due diligence procedures), budgeting, financial monitoring and reporting, information disclosure, financial audits, etc.
MEAL Staff or Focal Points per programme	Responsible for quality assurance in planning for and taking learning forward. They can facilitate learning activities and build capacities for a systematic approach to learning in the Thematic Programmes.
Resource Mobilisation Coordinator	Ensures learnings are taken forward into new proposals, or new project phases.
Funding members	Promote and support culture and dedicated activities for learning, and engage in learning spaces with requesting members and the ACT secretariat.
ACT and member specialists (Q&A, PMEAL, Safeguarding, Gender, Environment, etc.)	Facilitate thematic learning spaces for members and support programmes and projects in learning in their respective areas of expertise.

### Plan for Learning

Under 4. Planning for MEAL, the need to include Learning at that early stage was highlighted. At that initial stage, the approach to learning and when and how to integrate learning loops into the programme or project cycle are clarified.

Practically,

- ✓ as a minimum, elaborate in the MEAL Plan on how you will embed learning loops into your programme/ project management/ MEAL related activities or team meetings; and when you schedule and plan for dedicated learning activities in your MEAL plan. At planning stage, also consider these aspects:
  - How can you promote a culture of learning with your team and project participants?
  - How to develop the capacities needed to foster learning within your team and in your programme or project?
  - How are you going to document and disseminate learning from your programme and project, both during and by the end of implementation?
- ✓ It is an option at strategy, programme or project level to formulate a learning agenda:
  - What critical information need for your programme delivery and development do you identify?
  - Formulate your learning question(s).
  - With which activities will you be able to gather needed data to respond to this information need?

### **Integrating Learning into MEAL practices**

The following are recommended learning practices during programme and project implementation that shall also integrate reflection on gender justice, inclusion, and other cross-cutting themes:

- ✓ Include learning prompts and reflection loops in MEAL related team or other meetings and process steps.

Periodic learning loops among the programme or project team should be arranged, ideally synchronised with the Secretariat's reporting cycle, so that latest MEAL data analysis can be used as basis for reflection – but 6-monthly as a minimum. The resulting learning from these learning loops, along with any conclusions for adaptations in programme/ project plan or strategy should be documented for accountability/ reporting, as rationale for adaptive action and, when of interest to more internal and external stakeholders, for broader dissemination.

- ✓ Dedicated reflection and learning meetings with programme and project participants and stakeholders should be conducted at least once per year.

These meetings can be combined with other MEAL related activities like outcome harvests, refreshers on accountability mechanisms (programme/ project information sharing, feedback, complaints). The results can feed into annual reporting, new rounds of annual implementation planning processes, or identify learning of interest to a broader range of external stakeholders that should be documented and disseminated.

- ✓ Adaptive management and agility

Using learning to adapt programme/ project plans and implementation, adaptive to time requirements, to crises and shocks, to changed contexts, to successes and failures of implementation strategies and activities, changes in available budget etc. ACT seeks to base adaptive management on a bottom-up, localisation- and decolonisation- oriented, participatory approach.

- ✓ Accountability for learning processes and adaptive management.

The impact of learning and adaptive management on programme or project results and outcomes should be monitored as part of programme or project MEAL, and it should be reported internally, to funding members, external donors and/ or to an interested broader range of stakeholders.

### **Sharing learning**

During and by the end of implementation, sharing of learning for the future in ACT Alliance and/ or in the thematic sector is expected, including related to cross-cutting themes gender justice and environmental and climate justice.

- ✓ Start documenting and disseminating learning from learning activities during the course of implementation.
- ✓ A documented final learning review (after- action review) that will also reflect on evaluation findings and recommendations (when applicable). Beyond taking stock of lessons learnt and good practices, it is explicitly encouraged to also reflect on less- or unsuccessful activities or strategies, on specific mistakes and on how the learning journey evolved with MEAL in the programme/ project period.

Tested good practise includes

- ✓ Tools that enable asynchronous learning practices, like a notice board that can, e.g., be activity-based, can allow to keep track of development including MEAL related information over time, to support reflection and adaptation.
- ✓ Peer learning among participating members or forums to share good practise and jointly reflect on one another's strengths and challenges.

## Specific considerations for programme and project levels under ACT Secretariat management

### a) ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects

It is the Secretariat's role to facilitate learning processes within, from and across its thematic programmes, as well as within the wider Alliance. Programme/ humanitarian staff who manage projects implemented by members, play a crucial role in the promotion and development of learning plans and practises of requesting members, in facilitating and identifying learning, in participating in joint learning activities, in documenting and disseminating learning.

### b) Projects of the ACT Humanitarian Mechanism (Appeals, RRFs)

#### Learning in the humanitarian response and early recovery context

- ✓ In Emergency Preparedness and Response Plans (EPRPs) and in planning of humanitarian responses, learning from previous interventions should be used.
- ✓ Planning for learning in MEAL Plans of Rapid Response Fund projects with a duration of up to six months are encouraged to embed learning and reflection loops into project implementation, e.g. into team meetings and/ or reflecting on updated situation reports.
- ✓ However, the minimum expectation for RRF projects is a documented after-action review.
- ✓ Humanitarian staff are tasked to identify lessons learned from monitoring, other MEAL activities and the after-action review.
- ✓ Plan adaptations based on learning about, e.g., changed situation and needs, are supported after discussion with the ACT Humanitarian Programme Officer or Adviser.
- ✓ Learning can be disseminated by requesting members to and by the ACT Humanitarian Team, within the Humanitarian Mechanism, to current or potential donors, as well as to the sectoral networks.
- ✓ The reflection of previous learning to improve successive programming of the Humanitarian Mechanism is expected.

### c) Projects (Grants) under ACT Secretariat Programmes and Projects

#### Learning in member- and forum- implemented sub-granted projects

- ✓ Plan for learning in the MEAL Plan: the smaller and short-term the project, the lighter keep the approach and plan for learning.
- ✓ Learning loops are encouraged to be included in project MEAL activities, i.e. learning from monitoring data and activities, evaluations, findings on cross-cutting themes, etc. The ACT Secretariat's reporting requirements recur to conclusions from learning loops and activities.
- ✓ Dedicated documented reflection and learning meetings with project participants and stakeholders are expected at least once per year.
- ✓ Documented final reviews of project implementation should be conducted as standard. They should include reflection of evaluation findings (if any), of what worked particularly well, what went smoothly and successfully as planned, but also challenges, mistakes and what was learnt from them.
- ✓ Adaptive management and agility are encouraged and supported by ACT Secretariat staff.
- ✓ Sharing of learning shall be supported by ACT Secretariat staff from identification to developing documentation and dissemination.



## **10. IMPLEMENTING THIS MANUAL**

This PMEAL Manual for Thematic Programmes of the ACT Secretariat is expected to be used and implemented as follows:

- ✓ Reference and guidance document and toolkit for programme and project managers and staff on the ACT Secretariat's PMEAL standards;
- ✓ Basis for orientation and capacity development of secretariat programme and related staff;
- ✓ Basis for orientation and capacity development of requesting member and implementing partner staff on the PMEAL standards in place, and the use of the available toolkit.

This manual is conceptualised as a living document that includes an evolving body of referenced tools, templates and guidance documents (the toolkit). Development of this referenced toolkit is the task of the group of MEAL Focal Persons of the Thematic Programmes.

The manual itself is to be reviewed by the ACT Secretariat staff in charge of PMEAL standards based on available implementation experience and user feedback every two years. They may propose amendments in consultation with the group of PMEAL focal persons, the Programme Team, selected members and the Quality and Accountability Reference Group, for review and final approval by the Programme and Director of Operations.

## ANNEX 1: GLOSSARY

### Accountability

*"The process of using power responsibly, and taking account of and being held accountable by different stakeholders, primarily those who are affected by the exercise of such power. Accountability means putting people and communities at the centre of decisions on issues that affect them, as described in the nine commitments of the CHS."*<sup>13</sup>

### Evaluation

*"Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed intervention, project, program, or policy, its design, implementation, and results. The purpose is to determine the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact of the intervention and to learn from the experience for future improvements."*<sup>14</sup>

Evaluation typically involves the use of specific **criteria** or standards against which the subject of evaluation is measured. The most widely used evaluation criteria have been set and further developed by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC):

- **Relevance:** The extent to which an intervention's objectives align with the needs, priorities, and policies of the target groups and stakeholders.
- **Coherence:** The extent to which the intervention is consistent and complementary with other relevant policies, initiatives, and interventions, avoiding duplication or contradictory efforts.
- **Effectiveness:** The degree to which the intervention has achieved its intended objectives and produced the desired outcomes.
- **Efficiency:** The relationship between the resources utilized in the intervention (inputs) and the results achieved (outputs and outcomes), considering cost-effectiveness and value for money.
- **Impact:** The broader and long-term effects or changes resulting from the intervention, both intended and unintended, positive and negative, and their sustainability.
- **Sustainability:** The continuation of the benefits of an intervention over time, including the capacity of the local systems and stakeholders to maintain and support the outcomes after external support ends.

### Learning

*"Learning is the intentional use of reflection and feedback to improve individual and collective practices and outcomes in pursuit of development goals."*<sup>15</sup>

*"Learning encompasses active and end-of-project learning:*

*Active learning involves ongoing reflection and responsiveness to project activities throughout the project cycle. In other words, learning and adapting in real-time as the project moves forward.*

*End-of-project learning involves evaluating and making sense of what did and did not work and the factors that influenced/contributed to the achievement of the project/program objectives and goal.*

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<sup>13</sup>Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS), Interactive Handbook, Glossary:

[https://handbook.hspstandards.org/en/chs/2024/#ch001\\_006](https://handbook.hspstandards.org/en/chs/2024/#ch001_006) (last accessed 21 March 2024)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.BetterEvaluation.org>

<sup>15</sup> "Learning By Thinking: How Reflection Improves Performance" by Giada Di Stefano, Francesca Gino, Gary Pisano and Bradley Staats, Harvard Business School Working Knowledge (April 2014): [Learning By Thinking: How Reflection Improves Performance - HBS Working Knowledge](#).

*Learning also involves sharing these findings with relevant stakeholders to ensure people responsible for designing and implementing future projects/programs are better equipped to do so – they can use the learning to replicate good practices and avoid practices that were ineffective.”<sup>16</sup>*

### MEAL Plan

A Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Plan outlines the MEAL framework for the collection, management, and use of data, including reporting requirements and schedule, and evaluation and research requirements when relevant. It guides the MEAL processes throughout the life of the program or project. It should act as a central resource for documenting the indicators the program will collect, their source of information, the tools and correct approach for collecting them, timing and frequency, resources needed to carry out all the MEAL activities, and the processes that support the correct flow of data, from collection to use. It should also include the planned learning activities and accountability measures towards project participants, communities and stakeholders.

### Monitoring

In ACT Alliance, monitoring is defined as *“a systematic and continuous process of collecting, analysing, and documenting information that enables regular reporting on the progress of project implementation over time”<sup>17</sup>* Monitoring involves activities designed to *“identify the strengths and weaknesses of a project, it involves data collection and analysis of indicators throughout implementation and tracking critical assumptions identified during planning”*.

### Safeguarding

*“The responsibility of organisations to make sure their staff and others, operations, and programmes do no harm to children and adults at risk, nor expose them to abuse, exploitation, bullying and harassment..”<sup>18</sup>* This includes but is not limited to child safeguarding and protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (PSEAH).

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<sup>16</sup> <https://meal-guide.habitat-dev.org/>, last retrieved 5 February 2024.

<sup>17</sup> ACT Alliance. Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation (PME) HANDBOOK. May 2012. Page 10. Available on [https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ACT-PME-Handbook\\_English.pdf](https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ACT-PME-Handbook_English.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> ACT Safeguarding Policy Framework (2024).

## **ANNEX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE – THEMATIC PROGRAMME MEAL FOCAL POINTS**

The function of PMEAL Focal Points as members of a Task Group for Thematic Programme PMEAL has been introduced along with the ACT Secretariat's Thematic Programme PMEAL Manual as a mechanism for PMEAL standard implementation across thematic programmes.

### Purpose

The thematic programmes' PMEAL Focal Points support implementation, harmonisation, and development of the Secretariat's PMEAL standards, toolkit, and practises in and across the Secretariat's thematic programmes.

### Responsibilities

- Engage in a joint Task Group of PMEAL Focal Points and participate in regular meetings.
- Oversee implementation of PMEAL standards and toolkit in respective programmes, support PMs, team members and, if applicable, implementing/ requesting members in using PMEAL Guideline and toolkit.
- Identify and contribute good practises, raise challenges and lessons learnt in task group.
- Contribute to finding solutions, developing, and agreeing tools for systematic application across programmes.
- Participate in regular technical reviews of the Thematic Programme PMEAL Manual

### Selection Criteria for PMEAL Focal Points

- ✓ Holding a position relevant to implementing and enforcing the programme's PMEAL standards, and/ or developing or applying PMEAL tools.
- ✓ Solid understanding of PMEAL concepts and, preferably, technical knowledge of key elements of programme/ project PMEAL.
- ✓ Ability to drive application of PMEAL standards and toolkit in the programme, good communication and coordination, initiative, and ability to engage in tool development, ability to engage in capacity development and to provide support to others.

### Key Working Relationships

Programme Managers are accountable for quality PMEAL systems and practises in their respective programmes. They nominate a thematic programme PMEAL Focal Point to support in delivering on high quality PMEAL in compliance with the Secretariat's standards. The Programme Manager can take over this function themselves. The PMEAL Focal Point works in the group of thematic programme PMEAL Focal Points that is accountable to the Director of Programmes and coordinated by the nominated programme quality/ PMEAL-related position-holder of the Secretariat.