Defining Outcomes and Indicators for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning in USAID Biodiversity Programming

Biodiversity How-To Guide 3 describes how program design teams can use results chains to clearly articulate outcome statements and develop indicators for managing biodiversity programs. This How-To Guide also clarifies how design teams can use the same indicators, derived from the same results chains, for multiple purposes including monitoring, evaluation, and learning across programmatic scales.

Once a design team completes the steps outlined in this How-To Guide (and the first two Biodiversity How-To Guides on developing situation models and using results chains), the team will have defined its purpose, sub-purpose, and outcome statements, identified which indicators to measure, and considered which monitoring methods would be most appropriate. These products constitute key elements of the monitoring portion of the program's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan – a plan that facilitates learning and adaptation at and across activity, project, and CDCS levels.

HOW TO DEFINE OUTCOMES & INDICATORS

Step 1: Revisit the (sub) purpose and ensure it meets the criteria of a good (sub) purpose

Step 2: Determine key results for establishing outcome statements

Step 3: Write outcome statements for the key results

Step 4: Define indicators based on the results chain

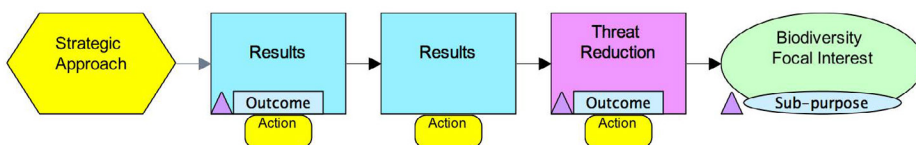**Step 5:** Add other indicators (including standard indicators), as needed

KEY TERMS

Performance Indicators can include:

Standard Foreign Assistance Framework ("F") Indicators: Indicators used in the annual Performance Plan and Report required of all State and USAID Operating Units that program U.S. foreign assistance. Starting in 2016 all standard indicators are required as applicable.

Custom Indicators: Indicators selected at the Mission level that are relevant within that setting for measuring performance. Most indicators developed from project- or activity-level results chains are likely to be custom indicators.

RESULTS CHAIN WITH MONITORING COMPONENTS

Biodiversity Focal Interest (Impact): The desired state of the biodiversity focal interest that a program seeks to achieve.

(Sub) Purpose: Project Purpose or Sub-purpose. A project purpose is the highest-level result to be achieved by a project.

Threat Reduction Result: The desired reduction in a specific threat that a program seeks to achieve.

Result: Preliminary or short-term results needed to achieve a threat reduction result and ultimately the biodiversity focal interest impact.

Outcome Statement: A formal statement that defines in specific terms what a design team hopes to achieve for key results on the way to achieving the overall purpose or sub-purpose(s).

Indicator: A quantifiable measure of a characteristic or condition of people, institutions, systems, or processes that may change over time. (Purple triangle)

Action: A specific intervention or set of tasks undertaken in order to reach one or more results. An action must be linked to a result.

Strategic Approach: A set of actions with a common focus that work together to achieve a series of results in a results chain.

CRITERIA FOR OUTCOME STATEMENTS

1. **Results-Oriented:** Represents necessary changes in the results that affect the status of one or more biodiversity focal interests.

2. **Time-Limited:** Achievable within a specific period of time

3. **Measurable:** Definable in relation to some standard scale

4. **Specific:** Clearly defined so that all involved in the program have the same understanding of what the terms mean

5. **Practical:** Achievable and appropriate within the context of the program, and in light of the political, social, and financial contexts

CRITERIA FOR INDICATORS

1. **Measurable:** Can be recorded and analyzed in quantitative and qualitative terms
2. **Precise:** Defined the same way by all people
3. **Consistent:** Does not change over time; always measures the same thing
4. **Sensitive:** Changes proportionately in response to the actual changes in the condition being measured
5. **Objective:** Conducive to impartial and independent data collection, management, and analysis
6. **Practical and Useful:** Data measured will be useful for management decision-making
7. **Disaggregated:** Can be disaggregated by gender, age, location, or other relevant dimensions

USES

Mission staff can use the entire results chain, outcomes, and associated indicators to:
- Monitor implementation of projects and activities
- Link activity-level monitoring to project- and CDCS-level monitoring
- Inform preparation of annual Performance Plans and Reports (PPR) and contributions to Portfolio Reviews

Implementing Partners can use the results chains, outcomes, and indicators to:
- Prepare work plans and activity Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plans
- Inform their annual and quarterly reporting
- Identify, understand, and communicate unexpected results or developments

DESIGN TIPS FOR DEVELOPING MONITORING, EVALUATION, & LEARNING (MEL) PLANS

1. Develop clear monitoring, evaluation, and learning questions
2. Consider level of data precision needed
3. Consider data collection methods
4. Consider the "units" to monitor
5. Consider which testing approach makes sense

LINKING MONITORING, EVALUATION, & LEARNING

The same theory of change, outcomes, and indicators can be used for monitoring, evaluation, and learning. For each use:

- Develop distinct objectives for Monitoring, for Evaluation, and for Learning
- Be explicit about what USAID, partners, and other stakeholders want to know (i.e., learning questions)
- Factor in roles, resources, and time early in the design process

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

How-To Guide 1: Developing Situation Models in USAID Biodiversity Programming

How-To Guide 2: Using Results Chains to Depict Theories of Change in USAID Biodiversity Programming

How-To Guide 3: Defining Outcomes and Indicators for Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning in USAID Biodiversity Programming

USAID Biodiversity Policy (2014)

USAID ADS Chapter 201: Program Cycle Operational Policy (2016)

USAID Biodiversity Handbook (2015)

Conservation Measures Partnership: www.conservationmeasures.org

Miradi: www.miradi.org