USAID/RDMA ASIA LEARNING AND M&E SUPPORT IDIQ

8 Years of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning in Asia

From 2014-2022, the USAID/Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) Asia Learning and M&E Support Indefinite Delivery, Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) Contract provided monitoring, evaluation, learning (MEL) and other advisory services to USAID operating units (OUs) and key stakeholders throughout the Asia Region. The IDIQ's objectives were to: 1) Provide monitoring and evaluation (M&E) technical services; 2) Provide knowledge management and advisory services, and 3) Improve collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) capacity within USAID. This brief highlights the accomplishments and learnings from implementing the IDIQ.[1]

OVERVIEW

CONTRACT TYPE
IDIQ contract with a single award-holder

PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE
September 23, 2014-September 22, 2022

ORDERING PERIOD
September 23, 2014-September 22, 2019

CONTRACTOR
Social Impact, Inc.

TOTAL BUY-IN AMOUNT
$31,773,287.22

SERVICE BUY-IN AMOUNT RANGE
Smallest buy-in: $9,786
Rapid Assessment on Effective Communication with USAID/RDMA Audiences

Largest buy-in: $3,498,968
Developmental Evaluation of USAID/Indonesia Jalin

SERVICE DURATION RANGE
Shortest service: 49 days
USAID-Australia Mekong Safeguard Activity Design Workshop Facilitation

Longest service: 5 years, 2 months
USAID/Lao PDR Nurture Impact Evaluation

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[1] From 2014-2019, OUs bought into the IDIQ by issuing Task Orders (TOs). TOs could be for a single service or multiple, bundled services. Towards the end of the ordering period in 2019, RDMA issued the USAID Asia Strategy & MEL Support TO, which was a platform TO that OUs could buy into until the end of the IDIQ's period of performance.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

SERVICES PROVIDED

3 POPULATION-BASED SURVEYS

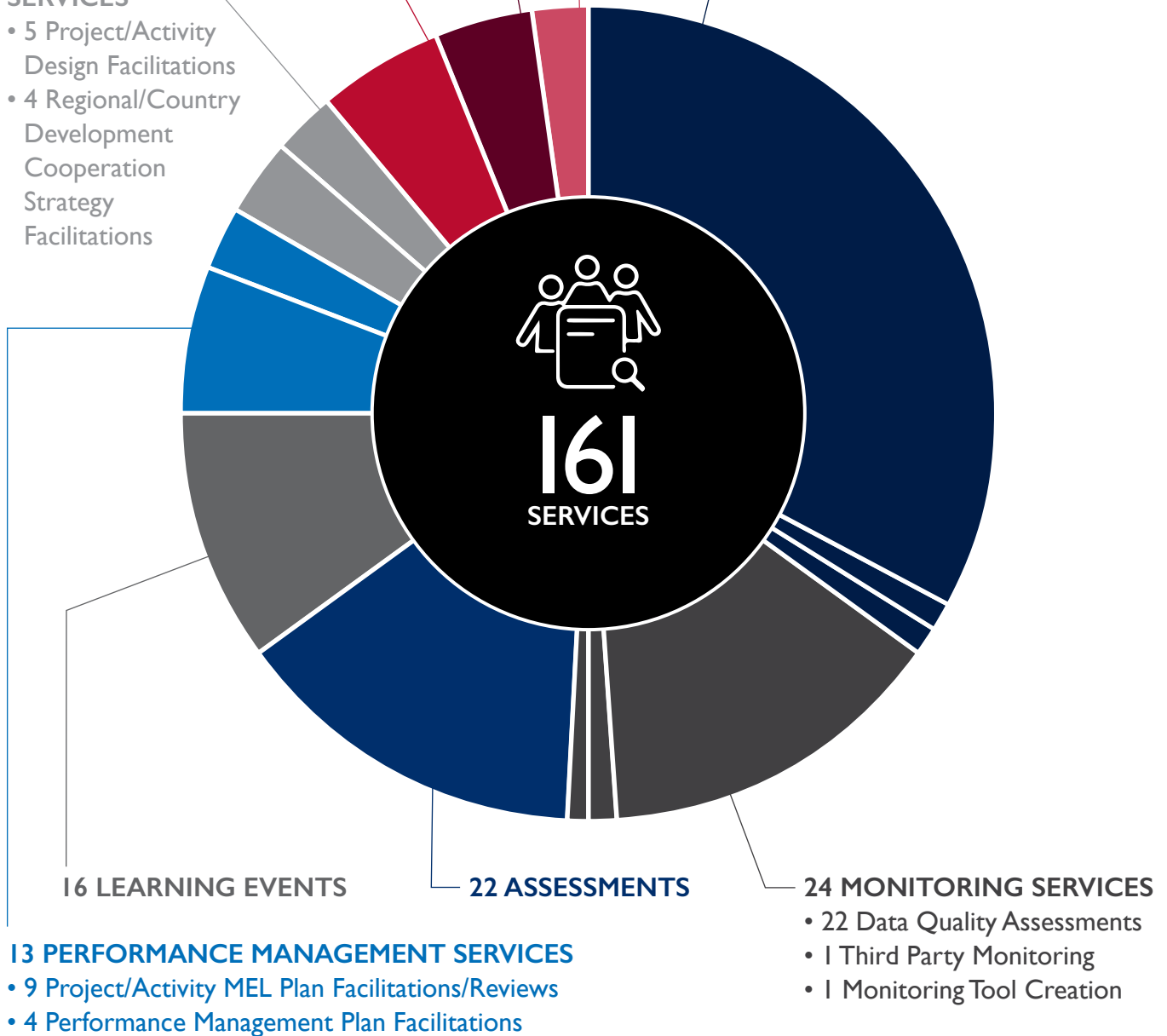**7 MEL TRAININGS FOR USAID AND PARTNERS**

8 TEAM STRATEGY RETREATS
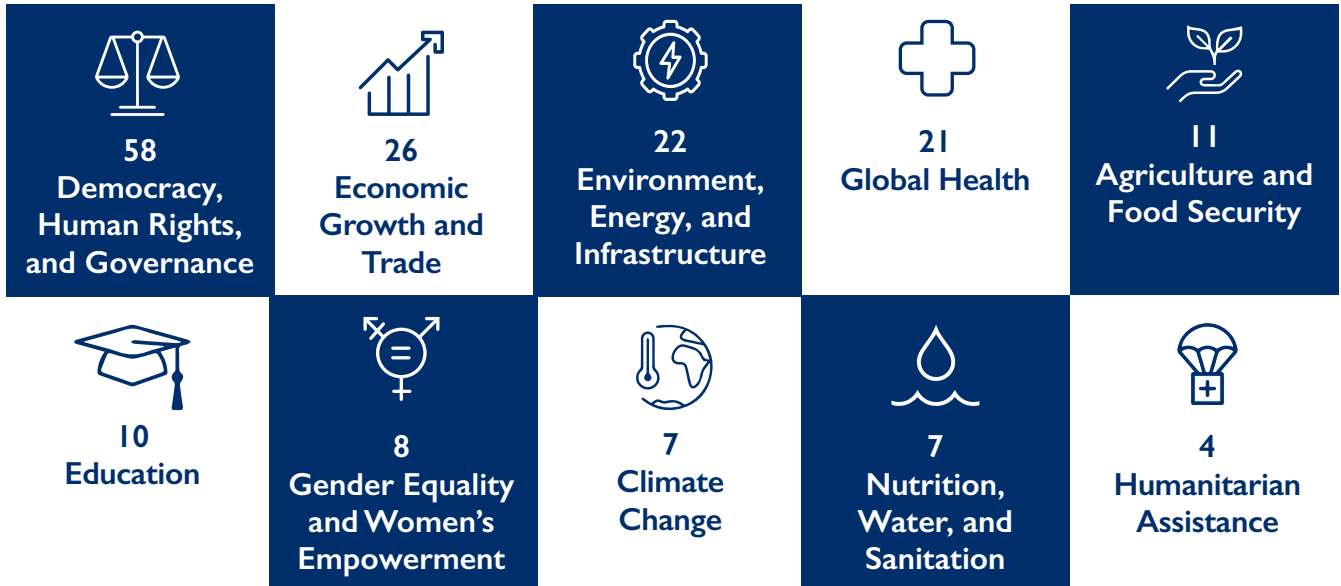
9 STRATEGIC PLANNING SERVICES
- 5 Project/Activity Design Facilitations
- 4 Regional/Country Development Cooperation Strategy Facilitations
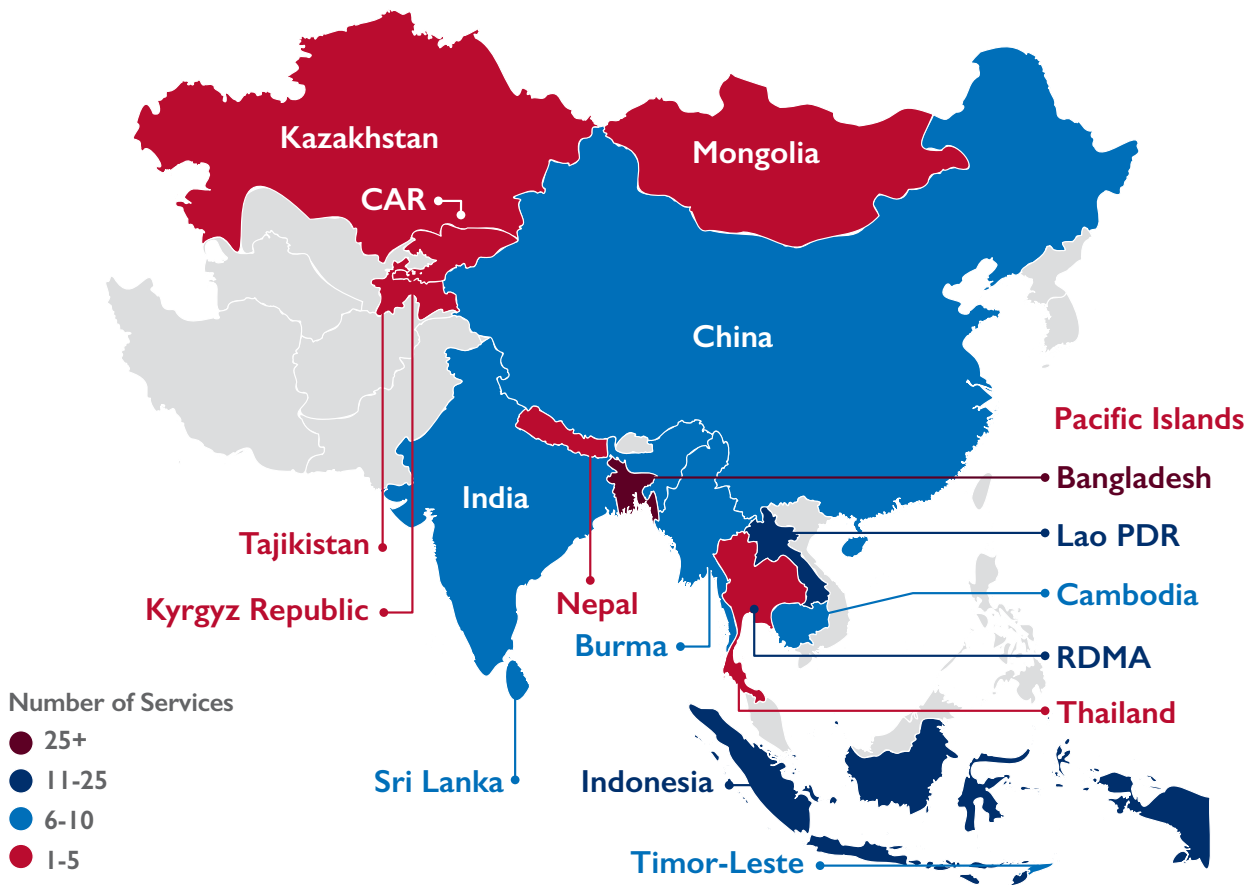
59 EVALUATIONS
- 57 Performance Evaluations
- 1 Impact Evaluation
- 1 Developmental Evaluation

161 SERVICES

16 LEARNING EVENTS

22 ASSESSMENTS

24 MONITORING SERVICES
- 22 Data Quality Assessments
- 1 Third Party Monitoring
- 1 Monitoring Tool Creation

13 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SERVICES
- 9 Project/Activity MEL Plan Facilitations/Reviews
- 4 Performance Management Plan Facilitations

10 SECTORS SERVED[2]

58 Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance	**26** Economic Growth and Trade
22 Environment, Energy, and Infrastructure	**21** Global Health
11 Agriculture and Food Security	**10** Education
8 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	**7** Climate Change
7 Nutrition, Water, and Sanitation	**4** Humanitarian Assistance

18 OPERATING UNITS PROCURED SERVICES

Kazakhstan
CAR
Mongolia
China
Tajikistan
Kyrgyz Republic
Nepal
Burma
India
Sri Lanka
Indonesia
Timor-Leste
Pacific Islands
Bangladesh
Lao PDR
Cambodia
RDMA
Thailand

Number of Services
- 25+
- 11-25
- 6-10
- 1-5

[2] The combined number of services across all sectors differs from the total number of services procured (161). Some services were cross-cutting or not aligned with specific sectors (e.g., information technology) and therefore not included in specific sector counts. Other services were multi-sectoral and included in the counts for each relevant sector.

IDIQ MANAGEMENT

Involved IDIQ management increased quality

The IDIQ included a centralized IDIQ management team. Frequent and open communication between the IDIQ's Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) and the IDIQ management team allowed both parties to promptly provide feedback to each other and learn from the implementation of multiple TOs. On USAID's side, the COR supported OUs, discussed budgetary implications, and clarified IDIQ requirements. On the Contractor's side, the IDIQ management team facilitated knowledge sharing across TO implementing teams to generate improvements in service delivery.

Single award-holder IDIQ enabled quick service responses

As a single award-holder IDIQ, USAID was able to receive proposals and procure services quickly. The time required between issuance of the Request for Task Order Proposal (RFTOP) and the Contractor's proposal submission was minimized to 14 calendar days on many occasions. Meanwhile, services procured under platform TOs without formal RFTOPs could require the Contractor to propose implementing teams and budgets within two weeks, with work beginning as soon as one week after budget and team approval. Although the IDIQ enabled quick service delivery, the lack of competition at the RFTOP level meant that OUs could not choose from a variety of proposed designs, teams, or budgets.

Recurring buy-ins allowed for continued engagement and learning

Recurring buy-ins from OUs led to more productive working relationships between OUs and the Contractor, as the Contractor developed a better understanding of OUs' unique needs and operating contexts. In addition, buy-ins for services that built on one another (e.g., strategy development followed by activity design, or an evaluation followed by an associated learning event) allowed the Contractor and the OU to ensure learnings identified in one service were applied in the follow-on service.

Early engagement helped align expectations and reduce risks

Services were more effective and led to smoother implementation when OUs planned ahead around timeline and budget, and gave the Contractor enough lead time before beginning work. As a single award-holder IDIQ, USAID could inform the Contractor of upcoming TOs, enabling the Contractor to begin sourcing technical candidates further in advance. This increased the likelihood of finding the "best-fit" technical team in the desired timeframe. OUs could also release draft statements of work (SOWs) for the Contractor to quickly review and ask clarifying questions before award. This review process resulted in better defined scopes; increased alignment of expectations between USAID and the Contractor; more appropriate team compositions; and more feasible timelines, budgets, and designs.

Contractual requirements promoted gender integration

The IDIQ championed USAID's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy by including contractual provisions requiring the Contractor to promote gender integration in all work and include Gender Specialists on implementing teams. These provisions gave the Contractor an entry point to discuss the importance of gender integration with OUs, and include gender-related topics and level-of-effort (LOE) for Gender Specialists in SOWs. Gender Specialists were able to have more meaningful input (e.g., provide feedback on designs in addition to advising teams during implementation) if they were allotted sufficient LOE and engaged early on. In the future, similar contractual requirements would benefit from having a greater emphasis on social inclusion and intersectionality in addition to gender equality.

POPULATION-BASED SURVEYS AND IMPACT EVALUATIONS

IDIQ services included an impact evaluation (IE) and population-based surveys (PBSs). These experiences offer the followings tips:

Incorporate sufficient time for start-up and planning

Starting the IE or PBS planning phase early on and taking into consideration relevant events/seasonal calendars increases the ability to understand the interests of key stakeholders, refine the approach as needed, coordinate logistics, and maintain quality assurance. In addition, it is important to incorporate sufficient time in both the IE/PBS and project/activity for collaborative design and start-up logistics since many projects/activities are not fully developed in their initial stages.

For the IE and PBSs completed under the IDIQ, adequate lead time was needed to competitively procure a local data collection partner (up to two months); receive local Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and obtain permissions from the host government (several months); and collaboratively refine and pilot test surveys.
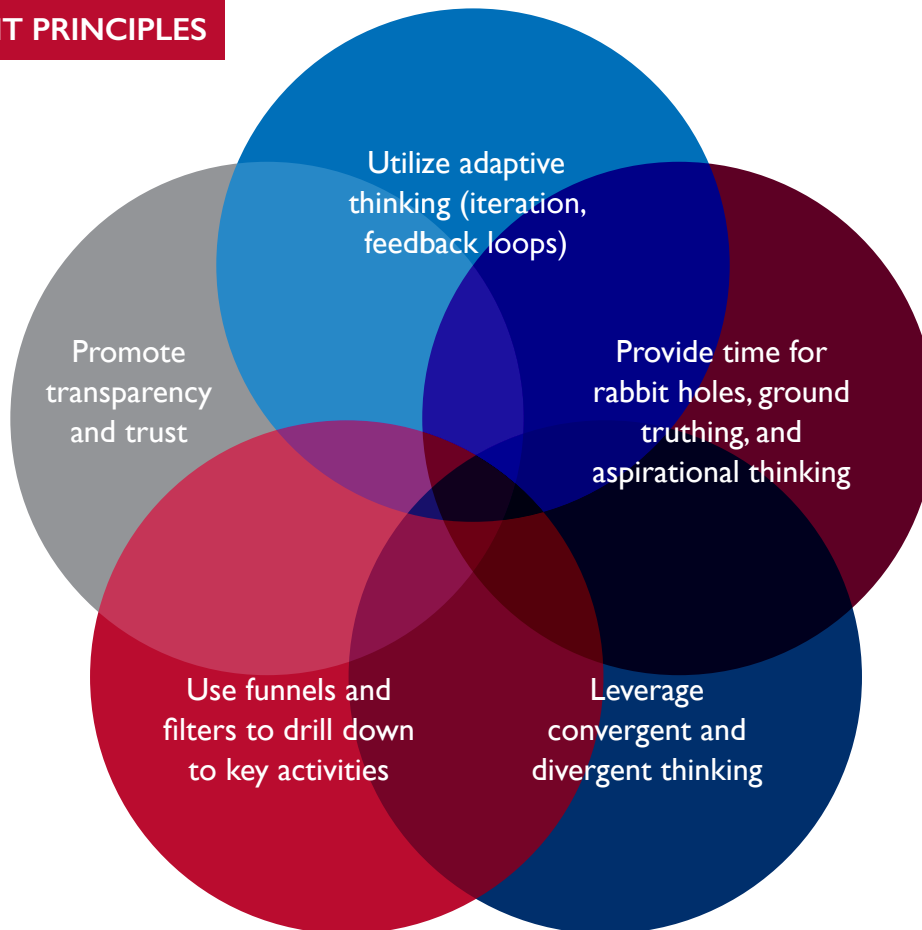
Recruit a strong local team

Strong local partners, both locally based data collection firms and staff members, were critical to the success of the IE and PBSs procured under the IDIQ. They provided sectoral, contextual, and methodological expertise; facilitated close collaboration with key partners in country; and guided teams through required local permissions and approvals.

CO-CREATION

The IDIQ demonstrated USAID's commitment to collaboration and localization through services such as co-creation workshops for project/activity designs and associated MEL plans. These services helped OUs to meaningfully engage with local stakeholders, benefiting from these stakeholders' perspectives and expertise in order to design more relevant, inclusive, and sustainable projects/activities.

ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Utilize adaptive thinking (iteration, feedback loops)

Promote transparency and trust

Provide time for rabbit holes, ground truthing, and aspirational thinking

Use funnels and filters to drill down to key activities

Leverage convergent and divergent thinking

CO-CREATION WORKSHOP TIPS INCLUDE:

Start the process early
Engage with stakeholders ahead of a co-creation event to understand their priorities and expectations coming into the process.

Anticipate uncertainty
Explicitly recognize points of complexity and uncertainty and next steps early on to help focus the co-creation workshop.

Cast a wide net
When working with stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, and when considering several potential interventions, it may be necessary to build in specific times for divergent thinking.

Start with the hard part
Designs of more complicated or complex projects/ activities require significant time in the beginning for group context setting and analysis.

IMPLEMENTING DURING COVID-19

Travel restrictions and increased health risks due to COVID-19 necessitated creative adaptations, heightened vigilance, and new expectations for conducting MEL services. Depending on the country context, from 2019-2022, the IDIQ conducted MEL services through either a fully remote design or hybrid design (i.e., remote services combined with in-person services). Learnings from implementing both models include:

Choosing the right technology

When using virtual platforms and technology for facilitation or simply for communication between implementing team members, it is important to consider tradeoffs between the usefulness of the technology, the time needed for stakeholders to learn and use a new technology, and whether all targeted stakeholders have equal access to the technology. The IDIQ utilized both well-known platforms (e.g., Google Jamboard) and lesser known ones (e.g., BlueJeans, Mural) depending on the perceived benefits of the technology and stakeholders' comfort levels.

Upholding ethical standards

Data collection during COVID-19 required heightened precautions to keep stakeholders and implementing teams safe. The Contractor's IRB reviewed all in-person data collection designs to assess risk and ensure protocols were in place for preventing the spread of the virus. For virtual data collection where internet connection was unreliable or time with stakeholders was more limited, implementing teams administered informed consent scripts via email to efficiently obtain stakeholders' consent prior to speaking with them.

Lengthening the period of performance for virtual services

With implementing teams and stakeholders dispersed across multiple time zones, there were fewer working hours available for data collection and team meetings throughout the day. Additionally, it was sometimes challenging to reach stakeholders in a remote environment. For these reasons, services implemented remotely benefited from longer data collection windows and, in turn, longer periods of performance that allowed implementing teams more time to get in touch with stakeholders, as well as conduct data analysis and other work across time zones.

Reimagining costs

Although remote implementation reduced travel costs, it often required more management time to support implementing teams to collaborate effectively in a virtual environment and across time zones. Implementing team members also needed additional time to learn and test selected technologies for virtual communication and data collection, or craft written communications to coordinate work when meeting was not possible. This increase in personnel costs caused an increase in associated indirect costs, which often times led to larger budgets than if the work were performed in-person.

BASELINE EVALUATION

A baseline evaluation of the USAID/Okard Activity was timed to coincide with the beginning of the Activity and included one comprehensive evaluation question about the validity of the Activity's Theory of Change (ToC). The evaluation was also designed to provide an early opportunity for a participatory pause-and-reflect session. This resulted in an agreement among partners and stakeholders, including the Government of Lao PDR, to strengthen the ToC and update the Activity MEL Plan based on the adjusted ToC. A baseline evaluation can be a useful means to:

Provide updated evidence to support validation of the ToC

Set a framework for the overall measurement of an Activity
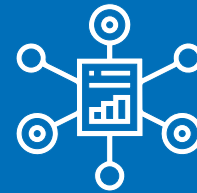
Determine points of reference that inform an implementation plan, as well as follow-on evaluations at later stages of an Activity

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