MEASURING IMPACT II
FINAL REPORT

MEASURING IMPACT II

CONTRACT INFORMATION

This program is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the terms of its requisition number REQ-EGEE-18-000127 (Measuring Impact II), implemented by prime recipient Environmental Incentives, LLC, in partnership with Foundations of Success and ICF International, Inc. Measuring Impact II has been issued under contract number GS-00F-193DA Order No. 7200AA18M00013 and supports the same program objectives as described in RFQ number 7200AA18Q00020. Measuring Impact II is funded and managed by the USAID Biodiversity Division in the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation.

PREPARED BY

Measuring Impact II Team: Environmental Incentives, Foundations of Success, and ICF International, Inc.

SUBMITTED BY

Shelly Hicks, Chief of Party
Environmental Incentives, LLC

SUBMITTED TO

Sara Carlson, Contracting Officer's Representative
Biodiversity Division
USAID Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation, Center for Environment, Energy, and Infrastructure

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Environmental Incentives, LLC
725 15th Street NW, Floor 10
Washington, D.C. 20005
Tel: 202.525.2450

Email: shicks@enviroincentives.com
Website: www.enviroincentives.com

DISCLAIMER

Table of Contents

Acronyms

CLA   Collaborating, learning, and adapting

FY   Fiscal year

KSA   Knowledge, skill, and abilities

LAC   Latin America and the Caribbean

MEL   Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

MI   Measuring Impact

MI2   Measuring Impact II

USAID   U.S. Agency for International Development

List of Figures

Executive Summary

Biodiversity sustains life on earth but faces severe threats. Species are declining at accelerated rates, and a changing climate presents unprecedented challenges to humans and nature alike. In the face of these threats, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) invests in biodiversity conservation initiatives that protect priority land and seascapes and promote the security, health, and prosperity of local communities.

Measuring Impact II: Background and Activities

As part of USAID's development and conservation efforts, the Measuring Impact II (MI2) activity supported USAID over five years (2018–2023) to strengthen global biodiversity and integrated programming. The MI2 team—led by Environmental Incentives (prime), with partners Foundations of Success and ICF International—worked in close collaboration with USAID's Biodiversity Division, Bureau for Africa, and Bureau for Latin America and the Caribbean in Washington, D.C., to achieve its goals. MI2 focused on three key strategic approaches and built on the successes and learning from the predecessor activity, Measuring Impact (2012–2018).

First, MI2 worked to strengthen the **enabling conditions** for adaptive management in the Agency's business processes and policies to help USAID staff and implementing partners connect design, monitoring, evaluation, and learning across the Program Cycle. Second, through **field support**, MI2 built the capacity and motivation of stakeholders to adopt best practices in biodiversity programming by providing the right knowledge, tools, and guidance to technical, program, and sector partners. And, third, MI2 facilitated **cross-Mission learning** to promote the use of evidence and a culture of learning, which informs decision making while growing and strengthening the evidence base.

Through these approaches, MI2 aimed to achieve more effective and impactful USAID programs and, ultimately, to improve biodiversity and human well-being.

Outcomes and Learning

MI2 has centered its outcomes and learning on the project's six key results. These findings highlight some of the most valuable lessons that MI2 has synthesized from five years of technical assistance, collaboration with USAID and partners, and assessment of biodiversity programming best practices.

Key Result 1: Shared Understanding Exists of Context-Appropriate Actions and Objectives for Operationalizing Best Practices in Adaptive Management
Key Finding: USAID staff and partners have a shared understanding of the importance of adaptive management and the tools and practices that enable it, and this understanding was present at baseline.

Other Lessons Learned:
- At the project endline, USAID staff showed high agreement about the importance of all four adaptive management practices: developing situation models, developing results chains, using monitoring data in adaptive management decisions, and applying evaluation findings to program design and implementation.
- MI2 analyses suggest that USAID staff recognize the importance of evidence-based practice, but there is a lack of understanding or inconsistent understanding of the tools and practices to implement it.

Key Result 2: Enabling Conditions in Place at Agency Level for USAID Staff and Implementing Partners to Improve Decision Making

Key Finding: MI2 found a supportive culture for adaptive management and staff who have the knowledge, skills, ability, and capacity to implement programming best practices, although with room for improvement. Insufficient resources were a persistent barrier to adaptive management and evidence-based practice throughout MI2, which the activity addressed in part by incorporating adaptive management into business processes.

Other Lessons Learned:
- Missions often turn to Washington or to contractors for assistance when staffing is insufficient. As such, MI2's main pathway for addressing resource constraints has been to provide additional assistance to alleviate this barrier.
- MI2 found that flexible, collaborative, and trusting relationships—with other Agency staff, implementing partners, partner country governments, and local stakeholders—are critical to effectively implement adaptive management.
- Across all project years, MI2 greatly exceeded its targets for the number of business processes it contributed to at the programmatic level, suggesting a high level of demand for such support.

Key Result 3: Best Practices Increasingly Socialized and Reinforced across USAID

Key Finding: High levels of requests for MI2 technical assistance throughout the activity, with a notable increase after the project's first year, suggest that programming best practices are valued, encouraged, and being socialized across the Agency. MI2 provided technical assistance to nearly every Mission where USAID supports biodiversity programs.

Other Lessons Learned:
- Long-term engagements with the Biodiversity Advisors training program provided staff with opportunities to practice their skills and develop their confidence and capabilities. These advisors exemplify the role of champions in sharing best practices.

- MI2 identified few Front Office and Program Office champions, but the Front Office and Mission leadership are the most influential actors for encouraging adaptive management behaviors, emphasizing that more work is needed to build commitment to adaptive management among this group.

Key Result 4: Conditions Set for Broader Adoption of Best Practices in Biodiversity Programming

Key Finding: High perceived value and engagement with the Biodiversity Cross-Mission Learning Program suggest the broad adoption of learning supports programming best practice.

Other Lessons Learned:
- Guided by detailed learning agendas, the Cross-Mission Learning Program critically advanced the evidence base around common strategic approaches and priority topics in conservation programming and shared these learning products with the broader conservation community.
- As the biodiversity learning groups continued to mature, staff found increasing value in them. The groups grew to function as hubs that strengthened all four adaptive management practices and that built important connections among staff.
- Mission staff sometimes lack the systems and the resources to ensure knowledge and learning continue beyond a single activity's life cycle.

Key Result 5: USAID Staff and Partners Broadly Adopt Best Practices in Biodiversity Programming

Key Finding: MI2's data show uneven perceptions about the *adoption* of different adaptive management practices, with higher reported use of situation models and results chains than of monitoring data and evaluation findings.

Other Lessons Learned:
- Restrictive time frames can challenge evidence use during design, limiting teams' abilities to synthesize evidence in robust ways to inform decisions.
- Third-party facilitators often have limited access to monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) data to inform decision making, pointing to an opportunity for more direct support to fill adaptive management gaps in implementation.
- MI2 helped ensure that teams could work better with partners in co-creation and have process and knowledge continuity through an activity. Future efforts should build on MI2's experience facilitating the Conservation Standards with diverse partners outside of the conservation sector.

Key Result 6: More Effective and Impactful Biodiversity Conservation and Integrated Programming

Key Finding: Despite persistent barriers, MI2 found that the vast majority of stakeholders perceived adaptive management as improving programs and believed MI2 strengthened adaptive management and, overall, positively affected programming.

Other Lessons Learned:
- Learning groups were important fora to build staff capacity for adaptive management Staff learned new ways to measure success, developed a better understanding of the enabling conditions affecting their work, and enhanced their ability to critically assess their work and analyze reasons for mistakes and failures.
- Third-party facilitation from MI2 encouraged and supported more systematic and robust ways of approaching program logic, activity design, and implementation for biodiversity programs and built staff skills and confidence to use the Conservation Standards.
- Long-term engagements with MI2, including consistent support from the same staff who have contextual and institutional knowledge of USAID, positively affected uptake of adaptive management, the perceived quality of outputs, and trust among stakeholders.

Introduction

Biodiversity Programming at USAID and Measuring Impact II

In 2014, USAID established the first Biodiversity Policy to foster more "strategic, focused, and results-oriented programming that applies scientific and evidence-based approaches." The Policy explicitly outlined approaches to guide program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and adaptive management. In addition, the Policy and Program Cycle Operational Policy (ADS 201) required the use of theories of change to ground program logic and articulate assumptions and pathways to impact. USAID's Biodiversity Division in Washington, D.C., launched Measuring Impact (2012–2018), a contract that aimed to operationalize the 2014 Biodiversity Policy and ADS 201 for the biodiversity sector. At the core of MI's approach was the Conservation Standards for the Practice of Conservation (the Conservation Standards), which is a set of principles and practices for biodiversity activity design and adaptive management. The Conservation Standards originated in the conservation sector and are promoted by the Conservation Measures Partnership and adopted by many organizations, including many USAID implementing partners. MI adapted the Conservation Standards for USAID's biodiversity programming priorities, structures, and languages. MI worked to develop capacity and tools, encouraged evidence use and learning, and promoted policies to support adaptive management throughout the USAID Program Cycle. A performance evaluation of MI concluded that the mechanism was able to further USAID's capacity and appreciation for adaptive management and evidence use, particularly at the Agency level.

As a follow-on to MI, USAID's Biodiversity Division launched Measuring Impact II in 2018 (MI2; 2018–2023), which sought to build on the success of MI to strengthen global biodiversity programming and improve development outcomes. Differently from MI, MI2 was designed to accept "buy-ins" from other operating units and included 17 buy-ins by the end of the activity, including three Washington-based bureaus and 14 Missions (Fig. 1). Led by the same implementing partners as MI, Environmental Incentives (prime), Foundations of Success, and ICF International, MI2 implemented three key strategic approaches (Fig. 2).

Figure 1. A map of MI2–supported Missions.

MI2 MANAGEABLE INTEREST

Field Support

Enabling Conditions

Cross-Mission Learning

KR 1
Shared understanding exists of context-appropriate actions and objectives for operationalizing best practices in AM

KR 2
Enabling conditions in place at Agency level for USAID Staff & IPs to improve decision-making

- Targeted & effective use of resources (time, money and people)
- Supportive culture & motivation for learning, adaptive management & EBP
- Needed knowledge skills & abilities for integrated & climate-smart programing & the application of learning, adaptive management & EBP
- To build the capacity of USAID staff in CS and adaptive management/EBP
- Business processes & policies enable learning, adaptive management & EBP

Operating Unit policies & business processes set expectations for and incentivize AM

Missions are capturing necessary data for learning & adapting

Early adopters embrace and apply better practices
- Technical Office (i.e., COR/AOR) and IPs increasingly implement best practices, including involving sector partners
- Contract Office supports flexible procurement
- Biodiversity Division, Regional Bureaus and Advisors spread new practices
- Program Officers capitalize on opportunities for learning, evidence, and AM

Stronger evidence base, and processes and systems for information use

KR 3
Best practices increasingly socialized and reinforced across USAID
- Champions share experience and promote best practices
- Lessons learned from early adopters are collected, synthesized, and shared
- Front Office staff advocate for best practices
- Technical Officers (i.e., COR/AOR) & IPs embrace evidence, learning, and AM
- Sector partners recognize value of best practices
- Program Officers advocate for AM-enabling MEL Plans*

KR 4
Conditions set for broader adoption of best practices in biodiversity programming
- Organizational capacity for improved decision-making exists at scale
- Best practices in AM in biodiversity and integrated programming included in relevant Agency policies and guidance documents, and promoted
- Information, evidence, and knowledge are synthesized and shared to inform programming decisions
- Learning systems are strengthened that transmit more information and better feedback across program, mission, and Agency scales

KR 5
USAID Staff & IPs broadly adopt best practices in biodiversity programming
[Best practices in AM are mainstreamed and become the new normal]
- USAID activities, projects, & programs are well designed*
- USAID activities, projects, & programs are well implemented*
- USAID activities, projects, & programs integrate w/ other sectors & partners when appropriate

Learning outcomes inform decision-making

KR 6
More effective and impactful biodiversity conservation and integrated programming

Global Threats to Biodiversity Reduced or Mitigated

Global Threats to Human Well-being Reduced or Mitigated

Global Biodiversity

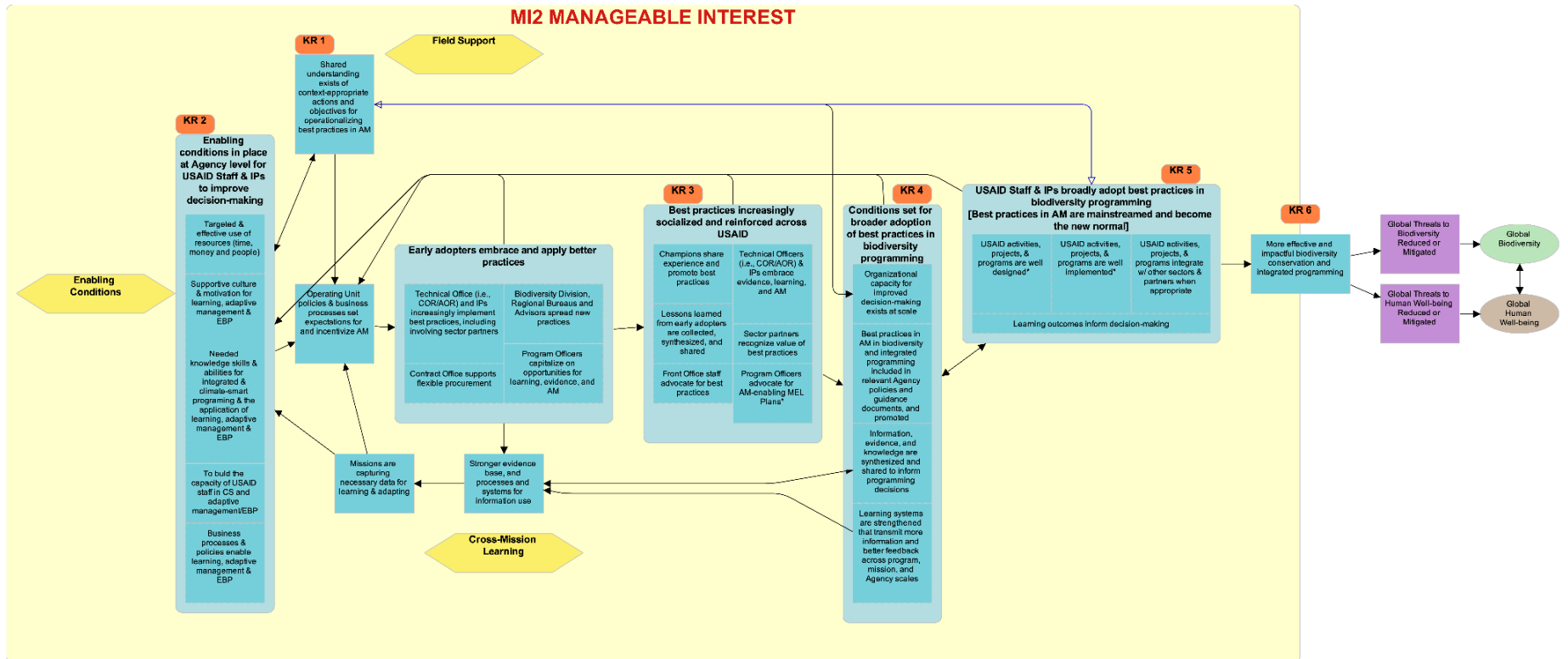Global Human Well-being

Figure 2. The detailed MI2 theory of change.

The first strategic approach focused on strengthening the **enabling conditions** for adaptive management and evidence-based practice to improve decision making in biodiversity programming. Enabling conditions considered essential for successful adaptive management and evidence-based practice included sufficient resources (time, funding, and staff), a supportive culture, sufficient capacity among staff to implement adaptive management and evidence-based practice, and supportive business processes and policies. The second strategic approach was to provide "**field support**" or technical assistance to USAID operating units designing and implementing biodiversity activities. Through field support, MI2 sought to build the capacity and motivation of USAID staff and implementing partners to adopt best practices in biodiversity programming by providing the right knowledge, tools, and guidance. And, third, MI2 facilitated **cross-Mission learning** to promote the use of evidence on key conservation topics and support sharing experiences across Missions and programming contexts. The three strategic approaches were designed to be mutually reinforcing; that is, the activities undertaken through each strategic approach all worked to strengthen the enabling conditions for adaptive management and evidence-based practice, improve field support, *and* promote cross-Mission learning.

Adaptive Management and Evidence-Based Practice

Adaptive management and evidence-based practice are integral to all USAID programming. USAID's Operational Policy defines **adaptive management** as "an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context." This approach helps staff to react efficiently and thoughtfully to changes in programming contexts and to incorporate new learning and evidence into activities for greater impact. The four fundamental practices of adaptive management in USAID biodiversity programming, based on the Conservation Standards framework, are:

1. Robust problem analysis documented in a situation model to guide the design of biodiversity programs
2. Clearly articulated theories of change about how interventions work through the development of results chains or other logic models
3. Use of monitoring data to make decisions about adapting implementation
4. Review and application of evaluation findings for the design and implementation of programs

Evidence-based practice is sometimes thought to be included within adaptive management, but MI2 tended to consider it a distinct process that occurred alongside adaptive management. Per *Evidence in Action*, developed by MI, evidence-based practice in biodiversity programming refers to using the best available evidence for decision making to reduce programming risks, and to generate evidence to fill knowledge gaps. Evidence in USAID biodiversity programs can include scientific research (e.g., from the peer-reviewed literature), practitioner experience (e.g., stakeholder consultation, performance evaluations), or context analysis (e.g., political economy analysis). Evidence appraisal and triangulation across evidence sources is needed to reduce the risk of bias in programming decisions. While adaptive management has been the central paradigm for biodiversity programming for decades, the conservation field is in the midst of a cultural and practical transformation around evidence use. There are growing calls to model conservation on sectors that have institutionalized evidence-based practice such as

medicine and education.[1] During MI2, evidence-based practice was facilitated through the existing technical assistance model for adaptive management (i.e., the Conservation Standards), aided by guidance produced by MI2 on how to better incorporate evidence into adaptive management processes.[2] Outside of the Program Cycle, evidence-based practice was facilitated through evidence synthesis and dissemination activities in cross-Mission learning.

The MI2 Final Report: Methods and Data Sources

This report is organized around the key results depicted in the MI2 theory of change (Fig. 2). Moving from left to right across the theory of change, the report begins with the first results the project expected and advances through the programming logic. Each section describes accomplishments and key findings with discussions about contributing factors and lessons learned. This report is a synthesis of MI2's body of work, drawing from several data sources: project performance indicators, the baseline and endline surveys, and a qualitative mapping of flagship published reports and assessments conducted through the life of MI2.

Baseline survey data for indicators 1.1, 4.1, 5.1 was collected October 2020–April 2021 and baseline survey data for indicator 6.1 was collected from October 2020–February 2021. Endline survey data was collected from October–November 2023. The baseline and endline datasets included 72 and 49 respondents, respectively. Approximately 75 percent of baseline survey respondents reported working in a USAID Mission, representing 20 different Missions. Seventy-one percent of respondents to the endline survey reported working in a USAID Mission, representing 21 different Missions. The endline sample had a more balanced representation across various Missions than the baseline dataset, which appeared to be skewed to Missions where MI and MI2 had extended engagement. Throughout MI2, several of the Missions included in the baseline survey "graduated" and received less support in the final years of the project. Additionally, MI2 continued to expand the Missions it supported, creating differences in the sample from baseline to endline. Due to the different sizes and distributions across Missions, this report does not consistently compare baseline and endline results.

Overall, these findings highlight some of the most valuable lessons that MI2 synthesized from five years of technical assistance, collaboration with USAID and partners, and assessment of biodiversity programming best practices.

---

[1] Kadykalo A.N. et al. (2021). Bridging Research and Practice in Conservation. *Conservation Biology*, 35:1725-1737.
[2] Strengthening Competencies for Evidence-based Biodiversity Programming (USAID, 2022)

Key Result 1: Shared Understanding Exists of Context-Appropriate Actions and Objectives for Operationalizing Best Practices in Adaptive Management

MI2 first aimed to build a shared understanding among USAID staff and implementing partners of what actions are needed to operationalize best practices in adaptive management. **Overall, the project found that USAID staff and partners have a shared understanding of the importance of adaptive management and the tools and practices that enable it, and this understanding was present at baseline.** A shared understanding of the importance of evidence-based practice was also found, although knowledge of the tools and practices to implement it was varied and uneven.
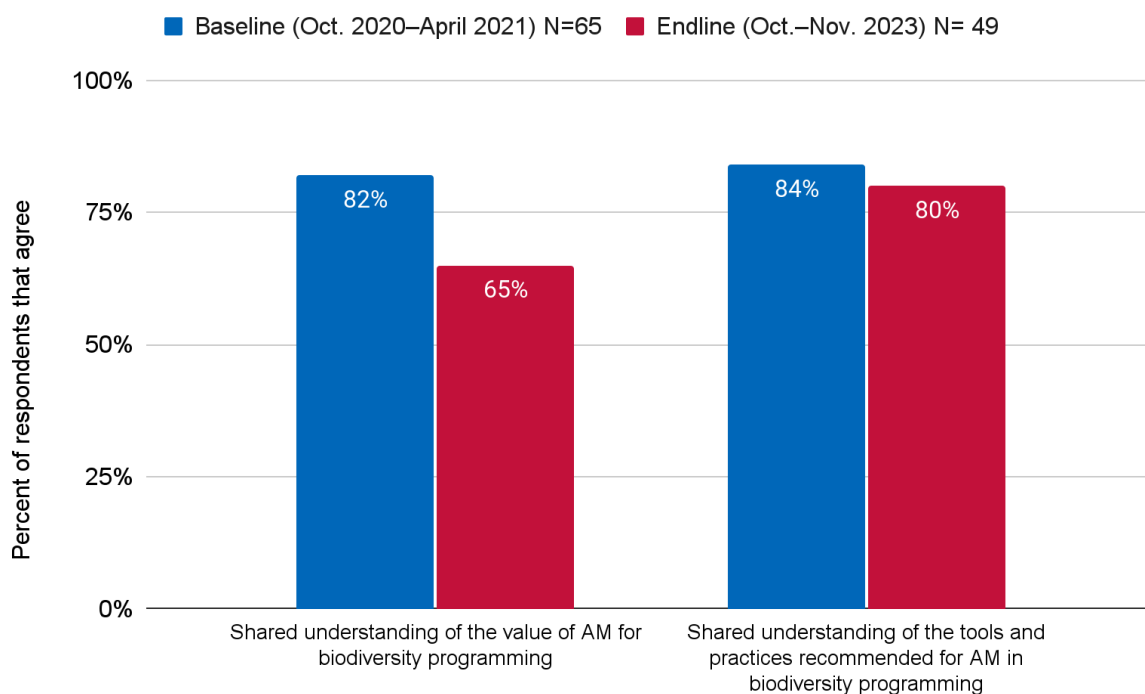

Figure 3. Baseline and endline survey results on shared understanding of actions needed to operationalize best practices in adaptive management (Key Result 1, MI2 Indicator 1.1).

MI2 measured shared understanding through five baseline and endline survey questions, focusing on the perceived value of adaptive management and knowledge of the tools and practices recommended for adaptive management. Shared understanding of the value of adaptive management and recommended tools and practices were both high at baseline (82 percent and 84 percent, respectively; Fig. 3). Shared understanding of tools and practices remained high in the endline survey (80 percent), while respondents

reporting a shared understanding of the value of adaptive management dropped to 65 percent. However, when asked about specific adaptive management practices, endline survey respondents showed high agreement about the importance of all four practices: developing situation models (88 percent) and results chains (90 percent), using monitoring data in adaptive management decisions (95 percent), and applying evaluation findings to program design and implementation (93 percent; Fig. 4). The data representing the shared understanding of the tools and practices recommended for adaptive management (the second set of bars in Figure 3) reflect the percentage of respondents who agreed that *all* four practices were important or very important.

How important is it for biodiversity program teams to...

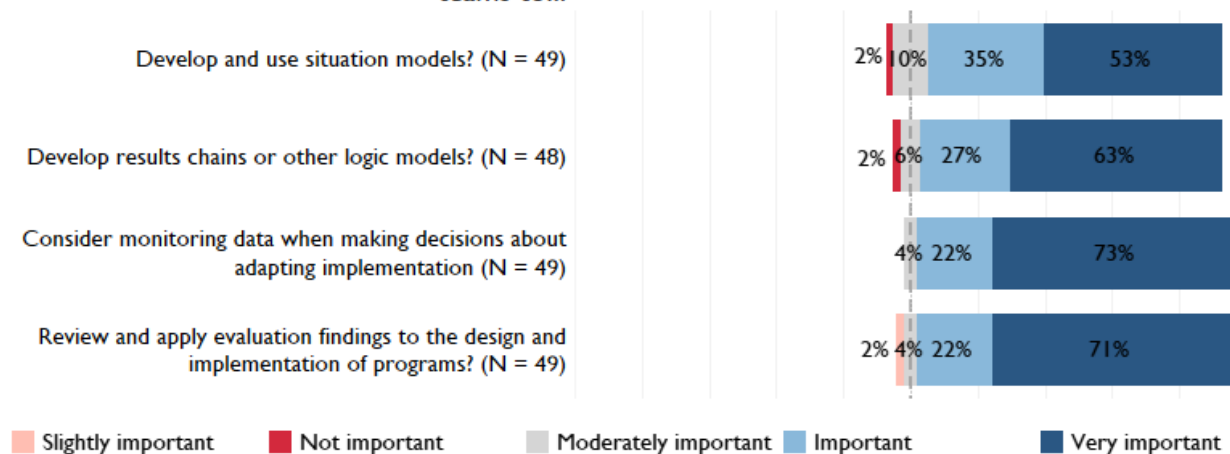|	Slightly important	Not important	Moderately important	Important	Very important
Develop and use situation models? (N = 49)		2%	10%	35%	53%
Develop results chains or other logic models? (N = 48)		2%	6%	27%	63%
Consider monitoring data when making decisions about adapting implementation (N = 49)			4%	22%	73%
Review and apply evaluation findings to the design and implementation of programs? (N = 49)	2%		4%	22%	71%

Figure 4. Endline survey results on perceptions of the importance of specific adaptive management practices. Stacked bars are centered around the midpoint of the Likert-style response scale (1 = not important, 5 = very important).

The data in Figure 3 also show that a shared understanding of adaptive management value and tools and practices existed early in the activity (with baseline survey data collected at the beginning of project year 3). This finding may be due to work carried out under MI, where USAID supported 20 Missions across adaptive management processes, building an initial understanding that carried into MI2.

The drop in the shared understanding of the value of adaptive management from baseline to endline could be due to the survey limitations described above; MI2 did not follow the same cohort of Missions across surveys, and the baseline data may be skewed more heavily toward Missions where MI and MI2 provided significant technical assistance. Beyond the baseline and endline surveys, the 2021 *Adaptive Management in the USAID Combating Wildlife Trafficking (CWT) Portfolio* report (hereafter "*CWT Portfolio Report*"), which included qualitative data from 15 USAID and 21 implementing partner key informant interviews representing 12 CWT activities, also concluded that both Mission and implementing partner staff had a shared understanding of adaptive management and reported a commitment to implementing it. Informants noted that they rely on collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) guidance, the Conservation Standards, and engagement with adaptive management experts to

shape their understanding and practice of adaptive management. All respondents generally defined adaptive management as comprising four practices, similar to those outlined in this report's Introduction and in MI2's endline survey. The assessment also highlights that "across the board" respondents spoke about the importance of developing situation models and theories of change.

Additionally, other MI2 analyses and reports consistently highlight the perceived importance of evidence-based practice for biodiversity programming. In MI2's 2020 *Stakeholder Needs Assessment* (internal document; hereafter, "*Needs Assessment*"), 35 out of 44 interviewed technical staff (80 percent) either identified evidence-based practice as important or displayed behaviors supportive of evidence-based practice. In the *CWT Portfolio Report*, respondents repeatedly used the term "evidence based" to characterize good adaptive management. MI2's 2023 *[Learn, Adapt, Repeat: Lessons from a Decade of Practicing Adaptive Management to Improve Biodiversity Conservation](#)* report (hereafter "*Adaptive Management Case Studies*") also concluded that, across three Missions on different continents, interviewees recognized the importance of identifying evidence gaps and building a learning culture where evidence is used consistently to adapt and improve.

While MI2 analyses suggest that USAID staff recognize evidence-based practice as important, there was a general lack and inconsistent understanding of the tools and practices to implement it. The *Needs Assessment* conducted at the beginning of MI2 revealed that some staff equated evidence-based practice solely with activity MEL processes, while others had a broader view that includes using existing evidence sources, such as high-quality evidence syntheses, to inform decisions. This inconsistency is not surprising: An MI2 research study by Dubois et al. (in preparation), which analyzed technical assistance delivered between September 2021 and August 2022, found that the tools and practices used by MI2 and USAID/Washington facilitators to support evidence use were heterogeneous and varied in the level of rigor.[3] This finding is likely not specific to USAID biodiversity programs, but relevant to the wider conservation sector as the tools and structures to implement evidence-based practice continue to mature.[4]

With shared understanding and commitment in-place, MI2 worked to understand and address the barriers to adaptive management and evidence-based practice.

Key Result 2: Enabling Conditions in Place at Agency Level for USAID Staff and Implementing Partners to Improve Decision Making

---

[3] Dubois, N.S. et al. (submitted). Using Technical Assistance to Bridge Evidence-to-Action Gaps in Biodiversity Conservation.
[4] Jarvis, R.M. et al. (2020). Navigating Spaces between Conservation Research and Practice: Are We Making Progress? *Ecological Solutions and Evidence*, 1:e12028.

By the end of MI2, the activity found a generally supportive culture for adaptive management and that staff have the knowledge, skill, and abilities (KSAs) and capacity to implement programming best practices, although with room for improvement. Insufficient resources were a persistent barrier to adaptive management and evidence-based practice throughout the life of MI2, which the activity tried to address in part by incorporating adaptive management into activity-level business processes.

Table 1. Most commonly cited adaptive management (>40 percent) barriers and incentives found in the *Needs Assessment*.

| Barriers	# (out of 145 participants)	Percent
Insufficient resources or lack of access to resources, such as time, budget, staff, champions, or technical assistance	101	70%
Insufficient knowledge, skills, and abilities	76	52%
Business and procurement processes get in the way	75	52%
Cultural resistance to change (at USAID, the Mission, the office)	72	50%
Insufficient or unclear authority to act or direct others to act (e.g., to require implementing partners to do adaptive management)	65	45%
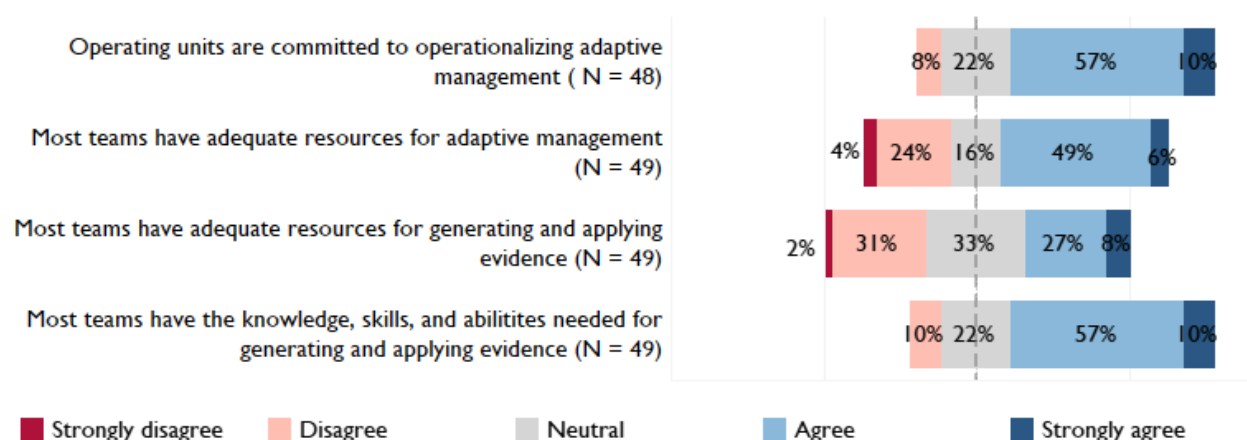
Figure 5. MI2 endline survey responses on commitment and resources for adaptive management and generating and applying evidence (MI2 Indicator 4.1). Stacked bars are centered around the midpoint of the Likert-style response scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Intermediate Result: Targeted and Effective Use of Resources

Sufficient time, funding, and staff comprise the resources required for effective adaptive management and evidence-based practice. The MI2 activity was, in part, designed to reduce the resource constraints faced by Missions by providing contractor support (staff) to prepare for and facilitate adaptive management

processes, in many cases funded by Washington bureaus (funding). At the start of MI2, 70 percent of respondents to the *Needs Assessment* cited insufficient resources as a barrier to adaptive management (Table 1), and only 55 percent of endline survey respondents said that teams have adequate resources for adaptive management (Fig. 5), emphasizing the persistence of this challenge despite MI2 support.

This barrier appeared across MI2's workstreams and adaptive management practices, from developing theories of change to applying learning. The 2023 *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* noted that constraints on time, capacity, and resources (including access to software) are primary factors limiting USAID staff's ability to fully engage in the Conservation Standards process without third-party facilitation. Respondents to the 2023 *Applying Cross-Mission Learning at USAID* synthesis (internal document; hereafter, "*Cross-Mission Learning Synthesis*") noted that they struggle to find time to participate meaningfully in USAID's biodiversity learning groups, particularly when learning is not incorporated into their job descriptions. "It is ever more difficult to participate … just for the sake of learning," one respondent said.

The *Needs Assessment* also identified insufficient resources as the largest barrier to evidence use and generation (Table 1), with 63 percent of respondents reporting this as a barrier. Only 35 percent of respondents to the project endline survey agreed that teams had adequate resources for generating and applying evidence (Fig. 5), suggesting the persistence of this challenge for evidence-based practices as well as for adaptive management. Dubois et al. found that although many MI2 and USAID/Washington facilitators of adaptive management processes performed functions to help teams use evidence, they faced the same resource barriers as practitioners. In many cases, this challenge resulted in "evidence shortcuts," in which teams relied on a small set of selected studies or defaulted to expert opinion, which can introduce bias into programming decisions. This result signals a need for more intentional resource allocation for evidence use and generation.

In the *Needs Assessment*, staff reported that MEL, specifically, was under-resourced. Respondents interviewed for the *Adaptive Management Case Studies* shared that learning questions may be more useful than standard indicators for driving adaptation, but that time and funding constrained their ability to gather additional data beyond the standard indicators. According to the *Measuring Impact II Evaluation*, in some cases, MI2's support helped staff and partners increase the time spent on MEL design and implementation. In other cases, MI2 helped stakeholders consider how to improve data collection and update MEL plans, but staff capacity limited the ability to implement these changes without additional support.

As noted in the 2020 *Program Cycle Learning Study*, Missions often turn to Washington or outside contractors for assistance when staffing is insufficient to support consistent and coherent Program Cycle implementation. MI2's main pathway for addressing resource constraints has been to provide such additional assistance. Said one respondent to the endline survey, "Resources from biodiversity staff in Washington, including contract support such as MI2, make adaptive management much easier and manageable."

Intermediate Result: Supportive Culture

MI2 sought to build a supportive culture for adaptive management and evidence-based practice throughout all of its activities. At the beginning of MI2, 50 percent of respondents to the *Needs Assessment* cited cultural resistance to change (Agency-wide and at the Mission or office levels) as a barrier (Table 1). Sixty-eight percent of endline survey respondents reported that their operating unit or Mission is committed to operationalizing adaptive management (Fig. 5), suggesting a generally supportive culture for adaptive management at the close of MI2. Despite this, some challenges remain. Although the MI2 surveys did not query participants more directly about USAID culture, several respondents noted cultural challenges in open-ended responses about the barriers they face. One participant wrote, "Decision-making at the Agency seems often to be made within the comfort zone. Adapting often requires getting out of that zone." Another shared, "Knowing the technical steps to do adaptive management does not guarantee that all the needed stakeholders are able/willing to follow."

Throughout implementation, both in its assessments and anecdotal experience, MI2 found and observed that a culture of flexible, collaborative, and trusting relationships—with other Agency staff, implementing partners, partner country governments, and local stakeholders—were critical to implementing adaptive management. The *CWT Portfolio Report* highlighted that when strong relationships and collaboration do not exist partners may have different objectives or feel the need to compete for resources or credit; as a result, they may selectively report outcomes or avoid sharing lessons learned. Additionally, the *Adaptive Management Case Studies* and the *Needs Assessment* reiterated that a key factor affecting a Mission's ability to implement the Program Cycle is a supportive culture among Front Office and Program Office leadership.

Host-country governments also play a significant and often under-recognized role in influencing USAID's ability to perform adaptive management. Respondents to the *CWT Portfolio Report* noted that host-country governments determine which interventions USAID may undertake and in what form; likewise, a *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* respondent shared that custom indicators their team developed were not a priority for their government counterparts. Host government officials who do provide USAID and partners with updates on changing contexts and then accommodate flexibility in programming greatly enable adaptive management—emphasizing the importance of strong relationships and a supportive culture both *within* the Agency and *among* stakeholders.

Intermediate Results: Needed KSAs and Capacity Built

Building staff capacity and ensuring they had the appropriate KSAs to implement adaptive management and evidence-based practice was integral to almost all of MI2's activities. In addition to direct technical assistance provided through field support, the Biodiversity Advisors cohort (see below), and cross-Mission learning exchanges, MI2 produced six guidance documents to support general best practices in biodiversity programming on topics ranging from how to better facilitate evidence-based practice to better incorporating climate resilience in biodiversity programming (see Annex 2 for a full list).

The *Needs Assessment* found that about half of respondents (52 percent) identified insufficient KSAs as a barrier to adaptive management at the beginning of MI2 (Table 1). By the end of MI2, KSAs and capacity appeared to have improved. While endline survey respondents were not asked about KSAs specifically, in open-ended responses to the endline survey, one staff member shared, "I feel well trained in adaptive management and I am confident in my use of those skills." Another wrote, "I understand adaptive management and how to apply it…" Respondents to the *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* noted that, after receiving MI2 support, they gained or improved their techniques for facilitating adaptive management tasks; the evaluation concluded that MI2 helped both USAID and implementing partner staff develop skills and confidence in using the Conservation Standards.

The *Needs Assessment* found that less than half (40 percent) of respondents (17 out of 43) reported insufficient KSAs as a barrier to evidence-based practice. Some respondents did identify challenges in understanding and applying sectoral evidence, generating good evidence, finding evidence, and facilitating evidence-based practice processes themselves. When endline survey respondents were asked if most teams have the KSAs needed for generating and applying evidence, 67 percent agreed or strongly agreed (Fig. 5), similar to the *Needs Assessment*. While MI2's technical assistance encouraged participants to integrate evidence, most respondents to the *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* reported that it was not always clear how to *obtain* evidence or to *apply* it to programming. Dubois et al. found variability in the KSAs of facilitators who support evidence use during adaptive management processes. USAID (and the conservation field as a whole) is still developing what is considered "best practice" for evidence use and generation in conservation,[5] and MI2 made significant contributions to this effort in the peer-reviewed literature, guidance documents, and piloting approaches in field support.[6, 7]

The *Adaptive Management Case Studies* highlighted how the biodiversity Cross-Mission Learning Program contributed to addressing the barrier of KSAs and needed capacity. All informants said they gained new skills and knowledge through participation in the learning groups; informants also shared that knowledge gained from the learning groups enabled them to be more adaptable in their work. Similarly, the *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* found that participants in the Conservation Enterprise Learning Group's Impact Labs gained stronger skills in critically assessing their theories of change and adapted them after collaboratively reviewing key assumptions.

Intermediate Result: Business Processes and Policies Enable Adaptive Management

USAID business processes and policies set expectations for quality programming and contribute to the enabling conditions for adaptive management and evidence-based practice. In MI2, business processes primarily included key programming documents at the activity level such as work plans, scopes of work

---

[5] See Huntington, H. et al. (in press). Implementation Science to Achieve Improved Environmental and Health Outcomes.

[6] Dubois et al. (2020). Bridging the Research-Implementation Gap Requires Engagement from Practitioners. *Conservation Science and Practice*, 2:e134.

[7] Dubois et al. (submitted). Using Technical Assistance to Bridge Evidence-to-Action Gaps in Biodiversity Conservation.

in solicitations, and MEL plans that articulated expectations for programming. MI2's work to support business processes occurred largely through the technical assistance provided during field support, including document review after adaptive management workshops.

At the beginning of MI2, the *Needs Assessment* found that 52 percent of respondents reported that business processes and policies "get in the way" of adaptive management (Table 1). In other MI2-produced reports, staff and partners shared that the USAID policy context and business processes can be enabling factors *or* barriers to adaptive management. The Agency policy context is, in general, very supportive of adaptive management, which is codified in ADS 201. The *CWT Portfolio Report* highlighted how the Agency's prioritization of CLA practices encouraged commitment to these approaches. However, at the programmatic level, business processes were found to sometimes hinder adaptive management. The *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* and the *Adaptive Management Case Studies* found that internal processes and timelines, such as the five-year Program Cycle, may limit uptake. The perception of this barrier may also differ by role: The *Needs Assessment* noted that Mission staff may look to Washington for help in changing policies and processes, and Washington staff should understand that Missions are more limited in their ability to advocate for or implement such large-scale change.

To address this barrier, MI2 provided input on 231 business processes, primarily activity MEL plans and work plans (Fig. 6). **Across all activity years, MI2 greatly exceeded its targets for this activity, suggesting a high level of demand for support to enhance business processes at the programmatic level.**
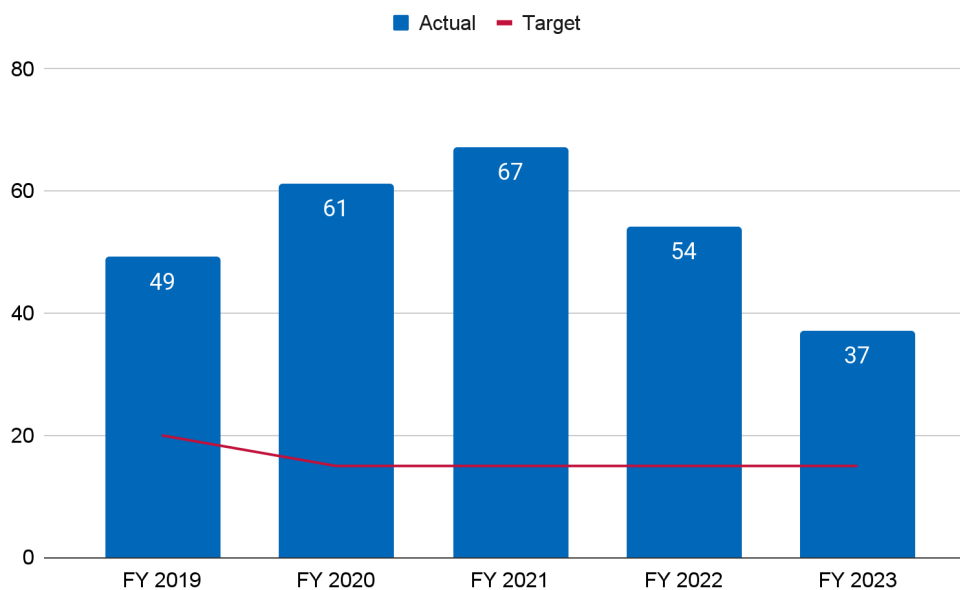

Figure 6. Summary of business processes MI2 contributed to (MI2 Indicator 2.1).

MI2 examined the language of 51 of the 231 enhanced business processes, prioritizing those with Agency-wide reach and high potential impact, to find examples of enhanced adaptive management. Enhanced adaptive management language included, for example, allocating resources for staff training for

adaptive management, identifying key assumptions and learning needed to be addressed through activity implementation, or requesting that partners conduct annual pause and reflect events. Ultimately, these enhancements created a greater commitment to and space for strong adaptive management and addressed some of the other key barriers to best practices, such as lack of resources and skills.

Key Result 3: Best Practices Increasingly Socialized and Reinforced across USAID

High levels of requests for MI2 technical assistance throughout the activity, with a notable increase after the project's first year, suggest that programming best practices are valued, encouraged, and being socialized across the Agency. During the first year of MI2, the activity provided 1,666 days of requested technical assistance; this number grew to around 3,000 days in the activity's second year and held steady for the remainder of the activity life span (significantly exceeding its targets in both fiscal year (FY) 2022 and FY 2023) (Fig. 7). MI2 ultimately provided 13,511 days of technical assistance, which represents a 170 percent increase in total days of technical assistance from the predecessor MI activity.
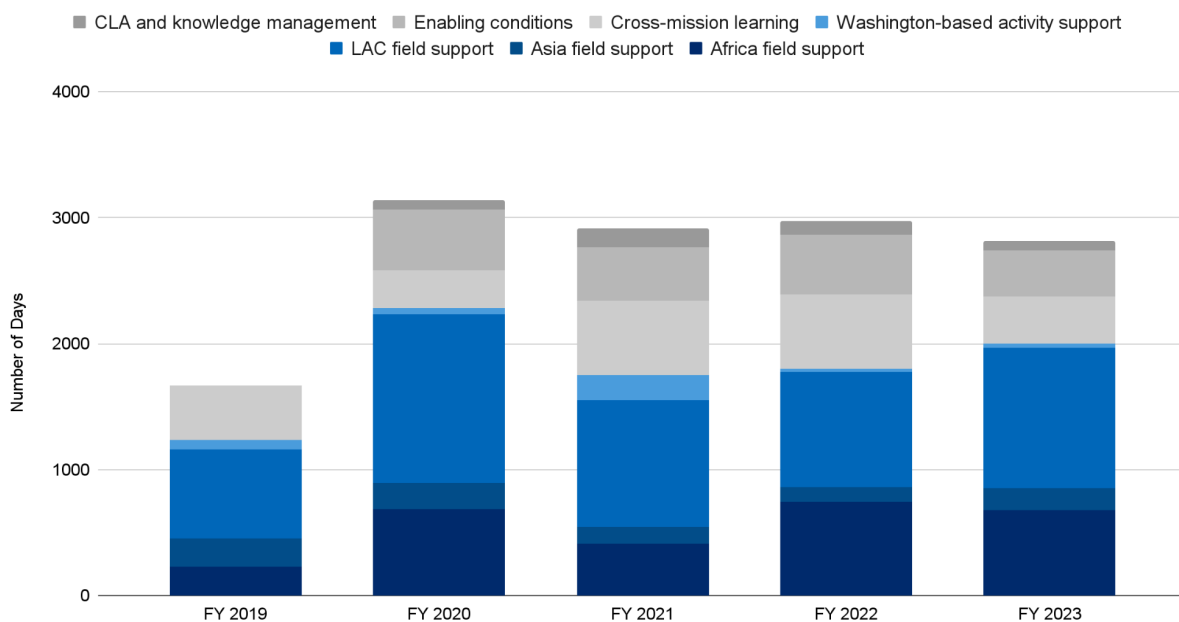
Figure 7. Days of MI2 technical assistance provided by fiscal year and workstream (MI2 Indicator 3.2).

This work included 265 workshops across Program Cycle processes—strategy design, activity design, activity start-up, and pause and reflect—for 41 Missions, pillar bureaus, and regional bureaus (Fig. 2; see Annex 3 for the full breakdown of workshops). Notably, MI2 provided technical assistance to nearly every Mission where USAID supports biodiversity programs. In other terms, MI2 provided an average of

about 4.5 adaptive management–related workshops every month across its five years of implementation. Pause and reflect workshops were the most common type of engagement, with 101 total events, reflecting the higher frequency of these annual workshops that are important for assessing activity progress and revisiting assumptions in the activity theory of change. MI2 engagement particularly grew in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), with technical assistance nearly doubling from FY 2019 to FY 2020. MI2 provided more than 5,000 total days of technical assistance to the LAC region, primarily to the Amazon Regional Environment Program and the Missions in Colombia and Peru. Overall, field support in Africa experienced the greatest surge in demand, going from 228 hours of assistance in FY 2019 to a peak of 743 hours in FY 2022—a 226 percent increase. Due to the buy-in feature of the MI2 contract, 14 out of 40 Missions that received MI2 technical assistance funded it themselves, with the LAC Bureau funding technical assistance in four LAC Missions and the Bureau for Africa funding technical assistance for seven Missions in Africa. The Biodiversity Division and Global Health Division funded support to Missions in Asia without buy-ins to MI2 (e.g., in the Philippines, Timor-Leste, India, Bangladesh, the Pacific Islands, and Papua New Guinea).

Intermediate Result: Champions Share Experience and Promote Best Practices

In addition to direct field support, MI2 engaged with USAID staff through the **Biodiversity Advisors Cohort**. The advisors cohort guided a group of 40 staff through a year-long learning journey, providing guidance on key skills and connecting staff for peer-to-peer learning. This long-term engagement gave staff a unique opportunity to build their capacity for adaptive management and to, in turn, share their learning with their colleagues and implementing partners. The *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* found that the Biodiversity Advisors training program provided staff with opportunities to practice their skills and develop their confidence and capabilities. These advisors exemplify the role of champions in sharing best practices; staff interviewed for the *Adaptive Management Case Studies* shared the importance of having those experienced in adaptive management coaching others, especially in-county, to facilitate wider adoption and improved practices over time.

Anecdotally, other examples of champions included Foreign Service Officers who encouraged and supported the use of the Conservation Standards at each Mission where they served; staff from implementing partners who formed a Conservation Standards facilitation group; and a Mission staff member who facilitated pause and reflect events within and across Missions. This range of champions' roles suggests that adaptive management uptake is occurring *across* USAID and partner organizations. Additionally, interviewees in the *Adaptive Management Case Studies* reported that while initial uptake of adaptive management processes was slow and experienced challenges or cultural resistance, the number of champions grew as the benefits of adaptive management became apparent in activity results.

Intermediate Results: Front Office Staff and Program Officers Advocate for Best Practices

While MI2 engaged with numerous champions among technical staff, the activity's assessments identified few Front Office and Program Office champions. Additionally, interviewees in the *Adaptive Management Case Studies* noted that the Program Office may sometimes hinder adaptive management when there is pressure to prioritize performance indicators over broader learning goals. Staff expressed concerns that

the five-year Program Cycle is not long enough to monitor activities, gather strong data, and implement adaptations. Additionally, respondents to the *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* noted that Program Office priorities for MEL data (e.g., for submission to Congress) may be different than those of technical staff implementing adaptive management. While the MI2 surveys and various assessments did not measure the level of commitment among Front Office and Mission leadership, the *Needs Assessment* identified the Front Office and Mission leadership as the most influential actors for adaptive management behaviors, emphasizing that commitment to adaptive management among this group is critical.

Key Result 4: Conditions Set for Broader Adoption of Best Practices in Biodiversity Programming

High perceived value and engagement with the Biodiversity Cross-Mission Learning Program suggest the broad adoption of learning supports programming best practice. As one respondent shared in the *Adaptive Management Case Studies*, "When you know you might not be able to achieve desired results because of the many barriers, you have to embrace the power of learning. If we share our learning, including our challenges, as a conservation community, we can be more effective next time."

With the Conservation Enterprises and Combating Wildlife Trafficking learning groups initiated under MI, USAID's Biodiversity Cross-Mission Learning Program grew under MI2 to include two additional global learning groups (Marine Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries and Wild Meat) and two LAC regional learning groups (LAC Environment Combating Conservation Crimes and LAC Environment Private Sector Engagement). The learning groups engaged 2,551 participants over the life of MI2, internal and external to the Agency, through learning events and newsletters (Fig. 8). Note, in Figure 8, the FY 2023 data are not complete due to complications with the learning groups' newsletter platform; this may be the primary reason that MI2 did not meet its engagement target for the year. Additionally, in FY 2023, the learning groups increased the number of in-person events—including a conservation enterprise learning exchange in Peru and a wild meat learning exchange in the Democratic Republic of the Congo—and these generally engage fewer participants than similar virtual events. BiodiversityLinks is the primary platform of communication for the learning groups, and as a proxy indicator, MI2 documented learning group users on the site, which reached 5,532 users in FY 2023. In FY 2022, MI2 did not reach the target of 600 participating staff this fiscal year due to shifting priorities for the learning groups, which focused on scoping and implementing legacy learning products and targeted learning engagements like the CE Impact Lab, resulting in a reduced number of newsletters disseminated and webinars organized.
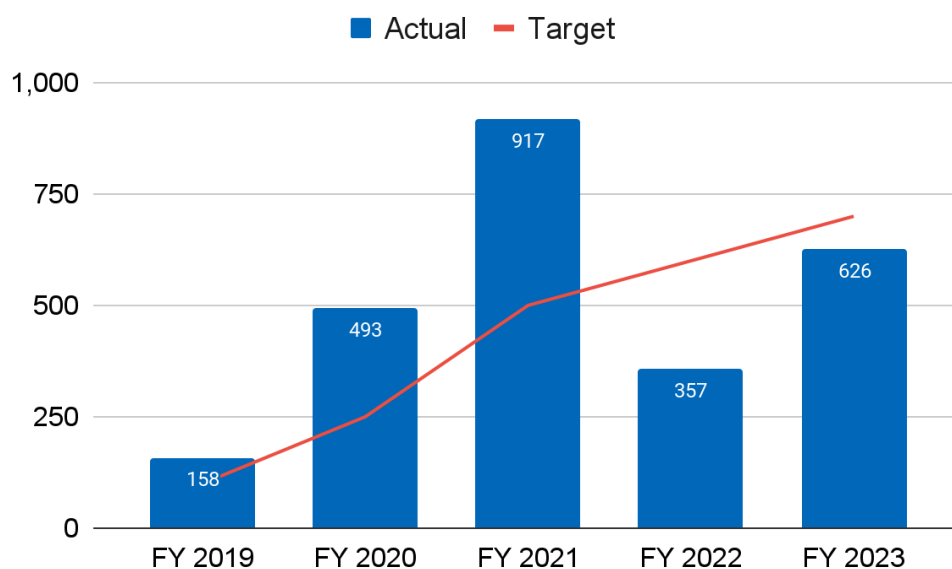
Figure 8. Cross-Mission Learning Program participants over five years of MI2 (inclusive of multiple participations; MI2 Indicator 4.2).

Intermediate Result: Information, Evidence, and Knowledge Synthesized and Shared

Guided by detailed learning agendas, the Biodiversity Cross-Mission Learning Program advanced the evidence base around common strategic approaches and priority topics in conservation programming and shared these learning products with the broader conservation community. Over the life of the activity, MI2 developed 40 learning products, including evidence syntheses, case studies, research and learning agendas, policy briefs, and recorded webinars that were directly relevant to USAID programming on learning group themes (see Annex 2 for a full list).

Informants to the *Cross-Mission Learning Synthesis* reported that they found many critical resources through the learning groups, from design tools to policy guidance. Learning about new resources and tools, learning from others' experiences, and sharing their own knowledge were highlighted as top reasons for participating in the learning groups. As one respondent said: "Learning groups help us to share materials, knowledge, and experience, and prompt us to be more creative and think about other things than what we are used to." Informants also mentioned that they feel it is important to take what they learn from the groups and share their findings and resources with colleagues.

Learning group products often addressed information gaps and barriers to effective programming gleaned from MI2 experiences providing field support and addressing enabling conditions for programming best practice. For example, the Conservation Enterprise Learning Group identified the need to standardize MEL practices to inform the adaptive management of activities implementing similar strategic approaches related to conservation enterprises. "A Framework for Monitoring, Evaluating, and Learning from Conservation Enterprises" (2020) provides guidance on how to monitor conservation enterprise programs along a theory of change by applying both standard and custom indicators. This framework

informed the learning agenda and MEL plans for 15 enterprise activities that are part of the [USAID HEARTH program](#), significantly reducing the time and level of effort to produce these documents by relying on the previously synthesized evidence that informed the Conservation Enterprise MEL framework. The LAC Environment Combating Conservation Crime learning group produced a [case study](#) on the complex drivers behind artisanal and small-scale mining in Madre de Dios, Peru, that synthesized the evidence on this topic to inform USAID programming that addresses mining in Peru and other countries in the Amazon facing similar threats.

These two examples, and many others, demonstrate how learning groups played an "evidence bridging" function that reduced the burden that evidence compilation, synthesis, and translation impose on staff during adaptive management workshops.[8] In their analysis of technical assistance carried out during MI2, Dubois et al. found that evidence synthesis and translation did not routinely occur during adaptive management workshops and when it did, many evidence brokering shortcuts were used such as relying on a small set of selected studies or defaulting to expert opinion. These shortcuts can introduce bias into program decisions, particularly during activity design when external evidence, rather than activity monitoring data, is more commonly used in decision making. Evidence synthesis and translation conducted through the learning groups, however, were not subject to the same time and capacity constraints that exist during adaptive management workshops. Strengthening the dissemination of learning group products to the facilitators of adaptive management workshops should continue to be an area of focus moving forward to support evidence-based practice in USAID's biodiversity portfolio.

Intermediate Result: Learning Systems Are Strengthened

According to the *Cross-Mission Learning Synthesis*, as the biodiversity learning groups continued to mature, staff found increasing value in them. Through key informant interviews, MI2 identified that the learning groups provided all five types of "value creation" for communities and networks described by Wenger-Trayner et al., including immediate value (experiencing the value of network activities and interactions in and of themselves), potential value (acquiring knowledge from an activity or interaction that can be realized later), applied value (applying knowledge to a specific situation), realized value (improving performance and/or affecting other stakeholders as a result of applying knowledge), and reframing value (redefining success through the process of social learning. This can include new strategies, goals, values, and metrics for performance).[9] The learning groups grew to function as hubs that strengthened evidence-based practice and all four adaptive management practices and built important connections among staff. Informants shared that new knowledge and information from learning group webinars provide clarity on approaches and methods to use in the field. For example, one informant learned about and later applied new ways of engaging with partner governments. The informants were also able to adapt design tools that they learned about and accessed through the learning groups and share them with colleagues. As one key informant said, "[The learning group] has helped us have better designs. It has also helped us communicate properly to our colleagues in the Mission and with the government: how we identify drivers, how we identify results, and what we have to

---

[8] Kadykalo et al. 2021.

[9] Wenger-Trayner, E., Trayner, B., and de Laat, M. (2011). Promoting and Assessing Value Creation in Communities and Networks: A Conceptual Framework.

monitor." Likewise, the *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* found that the learning groups fostered an interest in developing and using learning agendas more broadly across USAID.

However, the *Adaptive Management Case Studies*—which included interviewees familiar with multiple activities over years in a single region or country—identified the challenge of knowledge capture and transmission *across* subsequent, related activities. The interviewees shared that they lacked the systems and the resources to ensure knowledge and learning continue beyond a single activity's life cycle. The cross-Mission learning groups can fill part of this gap but are also limited in their topical scopes.

Intermediate Result: Best Practices in Adaptive Management and Integrated Programming Included in Relevant Agency Policies and Guidance

This result is reported in Key Result 2 on enabling conditions.

Key Result 5: USAID Staff and Partners Broadly Adopt Best Practices in Biodiversity Programming

MI2's data show uneven perceptions about the *adoption* of different adaptive management practices, with higher reported use of situation models and results chains than of monitoring data and evaluation findings (Fig. 9). In the MI2 endline survey, 49 percent of respondents agreed that most biodiversity programs in their operating unit use all four adaptive management practices. Additional survey questions revealed differences in the use of the four practices, suggesting some practices may have broader uptake than others. Staff report more frequent use of the rigorous problem analysis documented in situation models (90 percent) and results chains or other logic models (78 percent) than the use of monitoring data (67 percent) or evaluation findings (65 percent) to inform decision making.
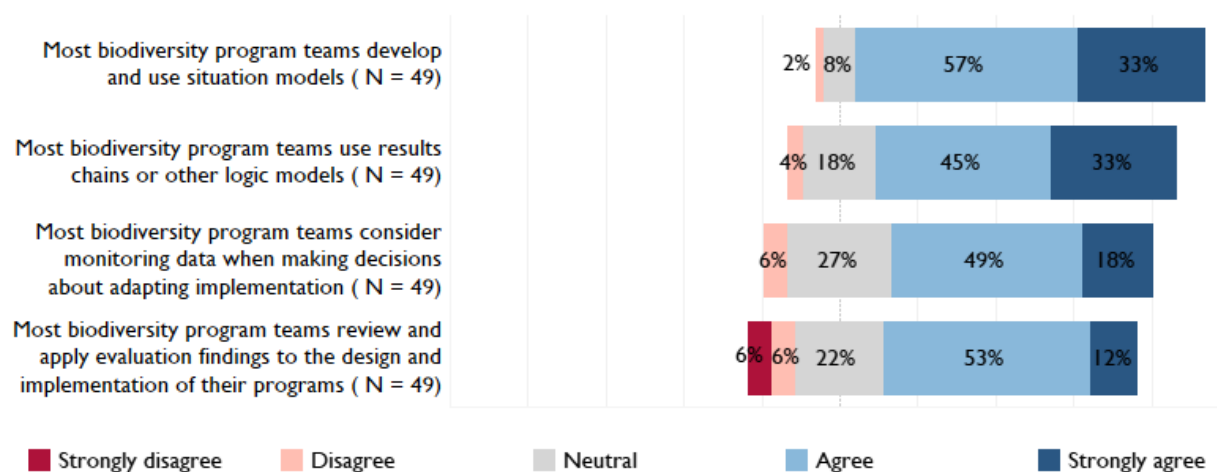
Figure 9. Perceptions of uptake of adaptive management in biodiversity programs and the use of specific practices associated with adaptive management, from the MI2 endline survey (MI2 Indicator 5.1).

Notably, these results are the inverse of responses about the *importance* of each adaptive management practice (Figure 4 in Key Result 1), in which the highest percentage of respondents cited evaluation findings as important (95 percent) and the lowest percentage cited developing situation models (88 percent)—though perceptions were still high across all practices. We might expect higher responses of importance because the practice of using monitoring and evaluation findings to assess development activities is well-established and longer standing when compared to the use of situation models and results chains. The inverse response found for adoption may result from the finding that only 16 percent of MI2's demand-driven support includes a MEL component, perhaps a result of under-resourcing. The following sections consider these differences and the factors that may be enabling the use of situation models and results chains and limiting uptake of monitoring data and evaluation findings.

Intermediate Result: Activities, Projects, and Programs Are Well Designed

In supporting activity design, the *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* found that MI2 helped USAID and partners connect diverse stakeholders to inform the development of situation models and theories of change. USAID staff and partners shared that creating a theory of change or a results chain was a critical part of understanding activity progress, and these tools were used continually for adaptive management. Learning group participants interviewed for the *Cross-Mission Learning Synthesis* reported that the learning groups made activity design more efficient: informants used examples and standard results chains (such as from the Marine Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries Library of USAID Situation Models and Results Chains) to streamline the design of similar activities.

While there were no endline survey questions about the adoption of evidence-based practice, Dubois et al. found that evidence use during activity design was a routine part of workshop facilitation. One respondent stated, "We have brought evidence into every conversation. Nothing is done without evidence in one way or another." During activity design, facilitators primarily engaged in evidence

preparation (identifying decision-relevant information needs), sourcing (e.g., accessing existing evidence, surfacing experience or knowledge from practitioners, seeking out subject matter experts), and brokering actions (curating or transforming bodies of evidence to increase its usability through evidence compilations or syntheses). The *Needs Assessment* identified using evidence during design as often challenging given restrictive time frames. Dubois et al.'s research suggests that this barrier was persistent throughout the life of MI2, with time limitations restricting the ability to synthesize existing evidence in robust ways during design to inform decisions. As one respondent noted, "I think often the best we can get is expert consultation, which may not even be the right expert… to kind of generically clarify our understanding of things or our assumptions."

Intermediate Result: Activities, Projects, and Programs Are Well Implemented

While most surveyed USAID staff considered MEL processes critical for good implementation, they were also perceived as under-resourced, as noted above. This may account for the perception that program teams used MEL processes less frequently.

The *CWT Portfolio Report* emphasized the importance of MEL capacity for adaptive management, but 80 percent of focus group participants found "the task of analyzing data to inform decision making" moderately or very challenging. The *CWT Portfolio Report* also reported that teams with a combination of technical expertise and adaptive management skills are most effective at addressing barriers to adaptive management—for example, MEL staff who can develop MEL processes and who can also facilitate learning that informs decision making. About this need for such diverse skills, one MEL specialist said, "[Monitoring and evaluation] people are now expected to be data nerds, but at the same time, be a facilitator, be a collaborator, and it's overwhelming." The interviewees noted that when their teams do not have expertise in adaptive management or the resources to hire learning specialists, they often relied on outside facilitators such as MI2. These takeaways reiterate the findings from the *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* (discussed in Key Result 2) that resources, particularly sufficient staffing, remain a significant barrier to cohesive and consistent MEL.

The *CWT Portfolio Report* also found that stakeholders reported more *tactical*, than strategic, adaptive management. Generally, technical staff adapt more frequently to changes in the operating environment, partner availability, or USAID constraints than to new information about results, further indicating a need for enhanced MEL practices that incorporate a broader range of information to inform decision making.

Dubois et al. found that activity monitoring data and practitioner experience were the primary evidence inputs during activity implementation. Only three out of 34 interviewed facilitators in the study directly filled an evidence need during implementation, suggesting third-party facilitators often have limited access to MEL data that can be appraised and applied to decisions. This finding points to an opportunity for more direct support to fill adaptive management gaps in implementation.

Intermediate Result: Activities, Projects, and Programs Integrate with Other Sectors and Partners When Appropriate

Over time, MI2 began supporting teams with more diverse partnerships and programming and funding streams (e.g., global health; democracy, rights, and governance; and climate adaptation). In the *Measuring Impact II Evaluation*, USAID staff reported that MI2 support ensured that they could work better with partners in co-creation and have process and knowledge continuity through the activity. The Conservation Standards framework provided a unifying structure and language for diverse technical sectors to design activities and revisit theories of change during implementation. By using a common design and adaptive management approach, USAID was also able to compare cross-sectoral activities in different programming contexts (see HEARTH Learning Agenda).

However, MI2 also encountered challenges in uniting cross-sectoral teams with adaptive management practices, specifically using the Conservation Standards. The *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* revealed that some tools, notably results chains, may be too complex for nontechnical stakeholders. Some respondents described challenges in integrating social, political, and climate factors into the Conservation Standards and reported difficulties bringing private sector partners into the process. Interviewees for the *Adaptive Management Case Studies* also stressed the importance of tailoring tools, like results chains, to different audiences. Future efforts should build on MI2's experience facilitating the Conservation Standards with diverse partners outside of the conservation sector.

Key Result 6: More Effective and Impactful Biodiversity Conservation and Integrated Programming

Despite persistent barriers, MI2 found that the vast majority of stakeholders perceived adaptive management as improving programs and believed MI2 strengthened adaptive management and, overall, positively affected programming.

Across the baseline and endline reports, 95 percent and 96 percent of respondents, respectively, reported that MI2 technical assistance had a moderate or large positive effect on the Program Cycle processes it supported (Fig. 10). Moreover, 81 percent of respondents to the endline survey believed that MI2 practices strengthened the adaptive management of programs, and 85 percent believed that MI2 technical assistance increased their ability to effectively do their work.
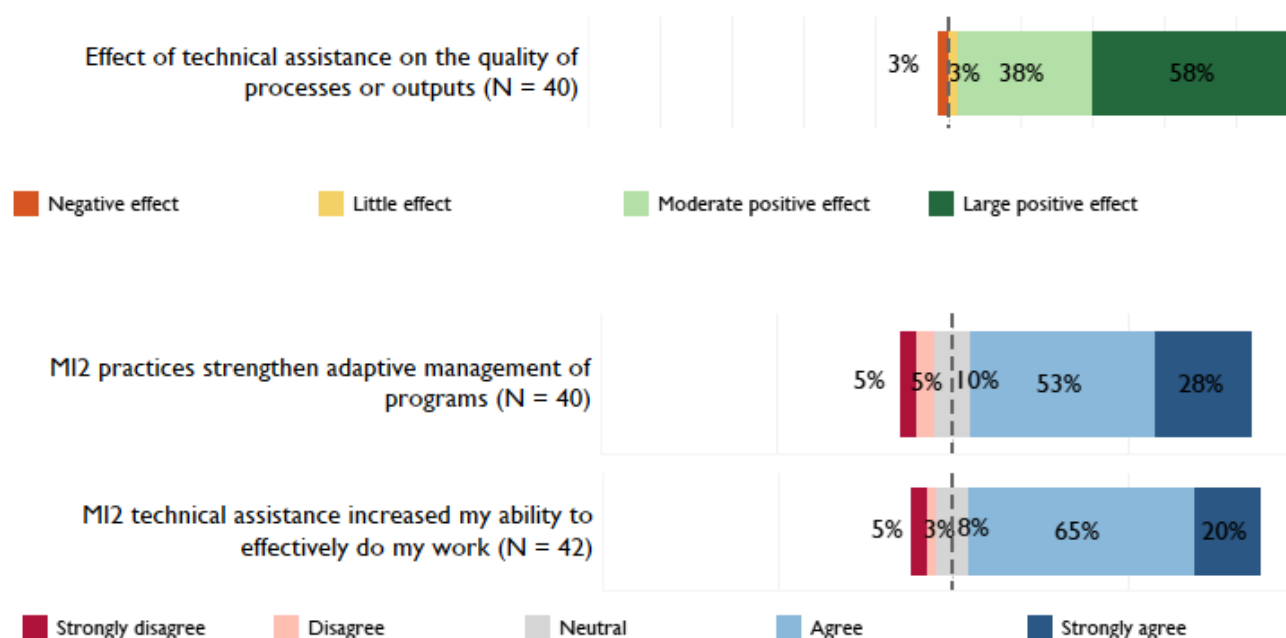
Figure 10. A) Technical assistance recipients' assessment of MI2 support on Program Cycle outputs and processes. Stacked bars are centered around the midpoint of a four-point scale (1 = negative effect, 4 = large positive effect). B) Technical assistance recipients' beliefs about the value of MI2 support. Stacked bars are centered around the midpoint of a five-point scale (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). (MI2 Indicator 6.1).

MI2 does not have independent verification of more impactful programming as a result of MI2's interventions, but the activity's case studies, reports, and assessments share important insights, including staff experience with MI2 support.

The *Adaptive Management Case Studies* included data from more than 30 interviews with staff and partners from USAID's Missions in Madagascar, Peru, and the Philippines that received support from MI and MI2. While there are differences across the Missions, interviewees broadly agreed that adaptive management had improved their programs' effectiveness and their decision making, specifically citing stronger activity logic and design, more strategic monitoring and evaluation, and an intentional approach to CLA.

The interviews also highlighted the value of convening different stakeholders across the Program Cycle to unite teams around shared assumptions and goals. In particular, some teams convened stakeholders after completing activity design to retroactively strengthen their strategic approaches, showcasing both a commitment to adaptive management and the value of consistent pause and reflect opportunities. Pause and reflect events were an important part of the Missions' adaptive management processes (a finding reflected more generally in MI2's overall workshop numbers in Annex 3). However, the report noted that, due to resource constraints, teams struggled to bring in evidence beyond what was already known. This echoes MI2's findings on the persistent resource barrier and challenges to evidence-based practice.

Interviewees stressed, though, that adaptive management helped them to identify *evidence gaps*, which some articulated as learning questions to better guide monitoring and evaluation.

The results of the *Cross-Mission Learning Synthesis* suggest that learning groups were important fora to build staff capacity for adaptive management that improved programming. Staff learned new ways to measure success within partner communities, particularly identifying differences in social versus economic outcomes. Through the learning groups, staff and partners developed a better understanding of the context-specific enabling conditions affecting their work and how these can lead to the success of different approaches. One participant said that the Cross-Mission Learning Program as a whole has "really helped create a [collaborating, learning, and adapting] culture."

Importantly, informants also highlighted that the learning groups enhanced their ability to critically assess their work and analyze reasons for mistakes and failures, emphasizing how the learning groups' activities have built skills that will translate to stronger adaptive management. Building on this, the informants stressed that learning activities should provide opportunities to discuss successes *and* challenges. Such challenges—or failures—can surface valuable lessons and can drive important adaptations in future work. Simultaneously, sharing challenges unites staff, creating a sense of camaraderie, as one informant said, "Learning isn't always about the good things, but about 'misery loves company.' It helps me relate to my peers... [and] energizes me to keep going."

Respondents to the *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* shared that third-party facilitation encouraged and supported more systematic and robust ways of approaching program logic, activity design, and implementation for biodiversity programs and built staff skills and confidence to use the Conservation Standards. Mission staff and partners reported that the tools to probe for evidence to support assumptions helped them to clarify threats and better shape their approaches and theories of change.

About half of the respondents reported that they plan to continue using the Conservation Standards tools to conduct design and adaptive management tasks. Respondents also shared that they feel more confident using adaptive management approaches without contractor support.

While MI2 did not directly compare outcomes from long-term versus short-term technical assistance, the value of teams building relationships with facilitators of adaptive management processes over time should be a strong consideration in future activities. The *Measuring Impact II Evaluation* found that long-term engagements with MI2, including consistent support from the same staff who have contextual and institutional knowledge of USAID, positively affected uptake of adaptive management, the perceived quality of outputs, and trust among stakeholders.

MI2's Impact

MI2 brings to conclusion 10 years of targeted technical assistance to improve adaptive management and evidence-based practice across Program Cycle processes in USAID biodiversity programming. Despite significant barriers identified in the *Needs Assessment*, MI2 continued to increase the commitment to

and uptake of adaptive management initiated under the predecessor MI activity. The expansion of technical assistance, discussed under Key Result 3, showcases the high demand for such support. From five pilot Missions under its predecessor project, MI2 expanded to collaborate with 40 Missions, increasing its technical assistance days by 170 percent compared to MI. At the same time, this high demand echoes the reality of resource-driven constraints, such as staffing and funding, that lead teams to rely on external assistance.

The success of the Cross-Mission Learning Program elevated USAID's place as a thought leader in facilitating communities of practice for learning and collaboration on biodiversity conservation. The learning groups were highly valued by staff and contributed to the uptake of critical skills, captured lessons across geographies, improved MEL practices, and led to more efficient design. The learning groups also fostered champions, whose value cannot be overstated. Empowered champions, holding various roles across the Agency and in partner organizations, greatly encouraged the uptake of programming best practices.

Despite broad uptake, key barriers persist. In particular, time and budget constrain staff's ability to perform some adaptive management tasks, even when staff have the understanding and capacity to do them. More extensive or in-depth MEL is not always possible, and Mission staff, in particular, may not have the bandwidth to implement best practices that are not mandated or fully funded. There are also opportunities for building more consistent evidence-based practice, including building skills to appraise the quality of available evidence and having facilitators like MI2 provide evidence early in design processes. MI2's research on bridging the evidence-to-action gap also shares how technical assistance providers may expand their role to help teams consistently access and use generated and synthesized evidence and to communicate the relevance of evidence to its intended users.

Ultimately, MI2's endline survey found that staff who have engaged with MI2 agree that the activity's technical assistance strengthened adaptive management and positively affected their programming. Some respondents to the endline survey shared specific technical skills they gained from MI2 support, such as "improved analytical ability, monitoring tools and skills, and ability to apply adaptive management more [e]ffectively." In an open-ended response, another USAID staff member emphasized skills that apply across work more broadly: "participatory approach, listening to others, critical thinking." This perspective and the other outcomes in this report capture the added value MI2 contributed to USAID's biodiversity programming by addressing the barriers to adaptive management, developing a stronger culture of learning, and building skills across Program Cycle processes.

Annex 1: MI2 Life of Project Performance Achievements

MI2 exceeded three performance targets in FY 2023 (Table 1). These include:

- Indicator 2.1: Number of USAID policies, business processes/products, and guidance MI2 provides input on
- Indicator 2.2: Number of policies, business processes/products, and guidance that include enhanced adaptive management language as a result of MI2 support
- Indicator 3.2: Number of days of U.S. government–funded technical assistance in natural resource management and/or biodiversity provided to counterparts or stakeholders
- Indicator 6.1: Percentage of technical assistance recipients reporting MI/MI2 technical assistance had a positive effect on Program Cycle outputs

Table 2: MI2 Life of Project Summary Performance Indicator Tracking Table

Outcome Statement	Performance Indicator		FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	FY 2023	Life of Project
Key Result 1: Shared understanding and commitment exist for context-appropriate actions and objectives for operationalizing best practices in adaptive management.								
By the end of MI2, most operating units will have established a shared understanding of tools, practices, and their effect on outcomes. They are committed to implementing adaptive management in biodiversity programming.	1.1 Sector-wide shared understanding index.	Target	N/A	Baseline		N/A	Endline	N/A
		Actual	N/A	13		-	12	-
Key Result 2: Enabling conditions in place for USAID staff and implementing partners to improve decision making.								
By the end of MI2, 80 USAID policies, business processes/products, and guidance include	2.1 Number of USAID policies, business processes/products,	Target	20	15	15	15	15	80

enhanced adaptive management language.	and guidance MI2 provides input on.	Actual	49	61	67	54	37	268
	2.2 Number of policies, business processes/products, and guidance that include enhanced adaptive management language as a result of MI2 support.	Target	6	7	8	9	9	39
		Actual	6	10	11	11	13	51
Key Result 3: Best practices increasingly socialized and reinforced across the Agency.								
By the end of MI2, staff and implementing partners are taking advantage of technical assistance and training support from MI2.	3.2 Number of days of U.S. government–funded technical assistance in natural resource management and/or biodiversity provided to counterparts or stakeholders.	Target	1,666	3,143	3,100	1,800	1,800	11,509
		Actual	1,666	3,143	2,913	2,973	2,816	13,511
Key Result 4: Conditions set for broader adoption of best practices for biodiversity programming.								
By the end of MI2, USAID staff managing biodiversity programs have the knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources needed to generate and apply evidence and knowledge.	4.1 Percentage of stakeholders reporting that most teams managing biodiversity programs have the enabling conditions in place for evidence-based practice.	Target	N/A	Baseline	45%	50%	Endline 60%	N/A
		Actual	N/A	N/A	35%	-	33%	-
By the end of MI2, 250 USAID staff are participating in cross-Mission learning.	4.2 Number of USAID staff participating in cross-Mission learning.	Target	100	250	500	600	700	2,150

		Actual	158	493	917	357	626 *note incomplete data	2,551

Key Result 5: USAID staff and implementing partners broadly adopt best practices in programming.

By the end of MI2, most project and activity teams use key practices supporting the adaptive management of biodiversity programs.	5.1 Percentage of stakeholders reporting that most teams engaged in biodiversity programming broadly apply key practices used for adaptive management.	Target	N/A	Baseline	N/A	N/A	Endline 60%	N/A
		Actual	N/A	N/A	58%	-	49%	-

Key Result 6: More effective and impactful biodiversity conservation and integrated programming.

USAID staff reports the use of key practices had positive effects on programming outputs.	6.1 Percentage of technical assistance recipients reporting MI/MI2 technical assistance had a positive effect on Program Cycle outputs.	Target	N/A	Baseline	>85%	>85%	Endline >85%	N/A
		Actual	N/A	N/A	95% (Oct-Feb) 97% (Mar-Apr)	93%	96%	-

Annex 2: MI2 Products

Operating Unit / Workstream	Product
Cross-Mission Learning	
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Combating Wildlife Trafficking Learning Group Website (2020)
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Adaptive Management in the USAID CWT Portfolio: Current Practice and Opportunities (2021)*
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Adaptive Management in the USAID CWT Portfolio: Assessment Summary (2021)
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Gender and Illegal Wildlife Trade: A Summary of Recent Evidence (2022)
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Transboundary Cooperation to Combat Wildlife Trafficking (2022)
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Lessons Learned from Working with the Judiciary to Combat Wildlife Trafficking (2022)
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Combating Wildlife Trafficking Learning Group: What We Have Learned (2022)
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Monitoring and Evaluating Online Wildlife Trade and Demand Reduction Campaigns (2022)
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Monitoring and Evaluating Online Wildlife Trade and Demand Reduction Campaigns Summary (2022)
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Combating Wildlife Trafficking Learning Agenda (2023)
Combating Wildlife Trafficking	Combating Wildlife Trafficking Fail Forward Video Case Competition StoryMaps Site (2023)
Conservation Enterprises	The Nature of Conservation Enterprises: A 20-Year Retrospective Evaluation of the Theory of Change Behind this Widely Used Approach to Biodiversity Conservation (2018)
Conservation Enterprises	La Naturaleza de las Empresas de Conservácion: Una evaluación retrospectiva de 20 años de la teoría del cambio detrás de este enfoque ampliamente utilizado para la conservácion de la biodiversidad (2018)
Conservation Enterprises	Global Learning and Experience Exchange: Conservation Enterprise Posters (2019)
Conservation Enterprises	Conservation Enterprises Learning Group Website (2020)

Conservation Enterprises	A Framework for Monitoring, Evaluating, and Learning from Conservation Enterprises (2020)
Conservation Enterprises	Using a Theory of Change to Learn across Conservation Enterprises Posters (2021)
Conservation Enterprises	The Misunderstood Middle: The Role of Intermediate Firms and Investors in Scaling Outcomes from Conservation Enterprises (2022)
Conservation Enterprises	Conservation Enterprises Impact Lab 2022: Using a Theory of Change to Learn across Conservation Enterprises Posters (2022)
Conservation Enterprises	Conservation Enterprises Learning Group: What We Have Learned (2022)
Conservation Enterprises	Conservation Enterprises Learning Brief: Assessing the Core Assumption that Enterprise Benefits Promote Conservation Attitudes and Behaviors—Summary of Resources (2023)
Cross-Mission Learning Coordination	Applying Cross-Mission Learning at USAID synthesis (internal) (2023)*
LAC Environment Combating Conservation Crime	Case Study: Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining in Madre de Dios, Peru (2020)
LAC Environment Combating Conservation Crime	Combating Conservation Crime Learning Agenda: Latin America and the Caribbean Environment (2020)
LAC Environment Combating Conservation Crime	Reducing Violence Against Environmental Defenders in Latin America and the Caribbean: Understanding Drivers of Violence and Strategies to Address Them (in preparation) (2023)
LAC Environment Combating Conservation Crime	Análisis de la Exclusión de la Minería Artesanal y de Pequeña Escala de la Economía Rural (2023)
LAC Environment Private Sector Engagement	Private Sector Engagement Learning Agenda: Latin America and the Caribbean Environment (2020)
LAC Environment Private Sector Engagement	Learning Brief: Lessons Engaging the Private Sector in Sustainable Cattle Practices in Latin America (2020)
LAC Environment Private Sector Engagement	Case Study: Marine Plastic Debris and Solid Waste Management in Peru (2020)
LAC Environment Private Sector Engagement	Case Study: Lessons from Engaging the Private Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean: Alianza Forestal (2022)
LAC Environment Private Sector Engagement	Case Study: Lessons from Engaging the Private Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean: Mexico LandScale (2022)

LAC Environment Private Sector Engagement	Case Study: Lessons from Engaging the Private Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean: Regional Coastal Biodiversity Project (2022)
Marine Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries	Marine Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries Learning Group Website (2020)
Marine Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries	Drivers and Impacts of Distant Water Fleets on National Fisheries and Fisherfolk in Priority USAID Geographies: A Research Agenda to Support Responsive Action (2021)
Marine Conservation and Sustainable Fisheries	Analysis of the scale, form, and impacts of [distant water fleets] on national fisheries and fisherfolk for Africa and Latin American and the Caribbean (2022)
Wild Meat	Wild Meat Learning Agenda (2021)
Wild Meat	Wild Meat Learning Group Website (2021)
Wild Meat	Reducing Demand for Wild Meat—A Compilation of Formative Research Questions and Findings across Campaigns (2022)
Wild Meat	Wild Meat Toolkit: for Integrated Design and Monitoring (in preparation) (2023)
Wild Meat	Wild Meat Case Study: CONNECTing Wildlife and Wild Meat (in preparation) (2023)
Wild Meat	Wild Meat Case Study: Empowering Cambodian Youth to Reduce Bushmeat Demand (in preparation) (2023)
Wild Meat	Wild Meat Case Study: Exploring the Connection between Poultry Production and Reduced Wild Meat Consumption (in preparation) (2023)
Field Support	
Capacity Development	Biodiversity How-To Guides, Spanish translation (2018)
Capacity Development	Interactive Biodiversity How-To Guide 3 (2021)
Capacity Development	Field Support Slide Deck updates and expansion (internal) (2023)
Capacity Development	Pause and Reflect Toolkit (2023)
Capacity Development	Pausa y Reflexión Kit de Herramientas (2023)
Capacity Development	Good Practices Guide for Pause and Reflect (2023)
Capacity Development	Guía de Buenas Prácticas para la Pausa y Reflexión en el Ciclo de Actividades (2023)

Field Support	USAID Madagascar Conservation and Communities (CCP) Project Baseline Household Survey Final Report (2020)
Field Support	USAID Madagascar Conservation and Communities (CCP) Project Midterm Evaluation Final Report (2022)
Field Support	Integrated Marine Ecosystem Management: A Learning Evaluation (2023)
Field Support	USAID Colombia Amazon Activities Performance Evaluation Final Report (2020)
Field Support	USAID Colombia Nature-based Tourism Rapid Assessment (2019)
Enabling Conditions	
Evidence-Based Practice	Bridging the Research-Implementation Gap Requires Engagement from Practitioners (2019)*
Evidence-Based Practice	Using Technical Assistance to Bridge Evidence-to-Action Gaps in Biodiversity Conservation (in clearance) (2023)*
Evidence-Based Practice	Strengthening Competencies for Evidence-Based Biodiversity Programming (2022)
Evidence-Based Practice	Untangling the Drivers of Land Conversion in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia: A Systems Approach Manuscript (pending journal publication) (2023)
Evidence-Based Practice	Untangling the Drivers of Land Conversion in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia: A Systems Approach Learning Brief (pending journal publication) (2023)
Climate and Integration	Climate-Resilient Biodiversity Programming Stocktaking (2023)
Climate and Integration	Conserving Biodiversity in a Changing Climate: A Guide to Climate Risk Management When Designing and Managing Biodiversity Programming at USAID (beta, internal) (2023)
Learning, Innovation, and Knowledge Management	
Learning, Innovation, and Knowledge Management	Assessment of Biodiversity Integration Efforts (2020)
Learning, Innovation, and Knowledge Management	An Assessment of the USAID Office of Forestry and Biodiversity and Conservation Council of Nations Partnership (2021)
Learning, Innovation, and Knowledge Management	Learn, Adapt, Repeat: Lessons from a Decade of Practicing Adaptive Management to Improve Biodiversity Conservation (2023)*

Learning, Innovation, and Knowledge Management	[Public-Private Partnerships to Address Global Biodiversity Threats: A Learning Evaluation](#) (2022)
Learning, Innovation, and Knowledge Management	Stakeholder Needs Assessment (internal) (2020)*
Learning, Innovation, and Knowledge Management	Stakeholder Engagement Strategy (internal) (2020)

* Denotes key products that informed this report's synthesis of findings.

Annex 3: MI2 Workshops by Operating Unit and Program Cycle Process

Operating Unit	Strategy & Project Design	Activity Co-Design	Activity Design	Activity Start-Up	Pause and Reflect	MEL Support	Other	Total
Africa								
Angola		1						1
Central Africa Regional	1						1	2
Democratic Republic of the Congo		1		1		1		3
East Africa Regional	2							2
Ethiopia	1			1				2
Ghana				1				1
Kenya	1							1
Liberia		1		1	1			3
Madagascar			5	5	11	1	4	26
Malawi				1	4		1	6
Mozambique	1	1	2	2				6
Rwanda		1						1
Senegal			2	1	1		1	5
Southern Africa Regional	2							2
Tanzania		1		3	1			5
Uganda							1	1
West Africa Regional		1		1				2
Zambia				2				2
Zimbabwe			3		2			5
Asia								

Bangladesh		1		1				2
India				1				1
Indonesia		1	1	2	1			5
Nepal			1		1		2	4
Pacific Islands					1			1
Philippines				1	8		1	10
Papua New Guinea			1	1	3			5
Regional Development Mission for Asia			3	1	3		2	9
Timor-Leste		1						1
Vietnam	3		2		5			10
Latin America and the Caribbean								
Brazil					1			1
Central America and Mexico Regional Program	1							1
Colombia			11	3		2	2	18
Eastern and Southern Caribbean	2		6				1	9
Ecuador	4	3		1	1			9
Guatemala				1	3			4
Honduras			1					1
Mexico	1		1					2
Paraguay				2	1			3
Peru		1		7	31	1	4	44
South America Regional	1	1	1	7	18		11	39
Washington								

Biodiversity Division	1			2	4		3	10
Total	21	15	40	49	101	5	34	**265**