

Learning from Title II Development Mid-Term Evaluations: Webinar Questions & Responses

IMPEL Webinar | November 9, 2020

FOLLOW-UP TO QUESTIONS RAISED IN LEARNING FROM EVALUATIONS WEBINAR

This document aims to respond to questions and comments raised during the *Learning from Title II Development Mid-Term Evaluations* webinar. Several questions were answered during the webinar and are not included in this document; please see the [webinar recording](#) and [presentation slides](#). This webinar was held by the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)-funded Implementer-Led Evaluation and Learning (IMPEL) award on November 9, 2020. In this webinar, IMPEL Learning Advisor and report author, Tim Ogborn, presented findings from his recently-published report, "[Learning from Evaluations: A Review of 16 Mid-Term Evaluations of USAID-funded Food Security Development Programs from 2015-2020.](#)"

Questions and Comments from the Webinar Q&A Box with Responses

Activity Design and Implementation

- 1. Which model/framework of "quality" did the mid-term evaluations (MTEs) use in assessing approaches to training, social and behavior change (SBC), etc.?**
 - ▶ Response: The MTE compared various interventions against their minimum standards. For example, whether social and behavior change sessions for Care Groups were designed and facilitated to change behaviors versus improve knowledge; whether a training session used adult learning techniques or it was imparted as a didactic session; did the farmer field school use the experiential learning principles and how were session topics identified? The MTE also interviewed participants to understand the learning from these interventions, and reviewed the quality assurance measures used by the activities to understand the process by, e.g., interviewing staff, reviewing guidance and processes to understand how technical and managerial staff monitored the quality of the interventions, asking about learning, asking about issues, etc.
- 2. Can you provide more detail on the shortcomings of SBC approaches? Are there recommendations on how to improve the quality of current approaches to SBC?**
 - ▶ Response: As described in the MTE Review Report, the primary issue was the limited knowledge of and skills related to effective SBC approaches among frontline staff, government representatives, and community volunteers. For those interested, the [FANTA Review of SBC Methods](#) in BHA-funded Development Food Security Activities (DFSAs) gives a far more in-depth review of SBC in DFSAs than was possible through the MTE Review.



Photo Credit: Fredrik Lemnyd / Save the Children

3. How do you interpret these results against the DFSA and BHA goal of providing long term development assistance to the most vulnerable, hardest-to-reach people?

- ▶ Response: While targeting decisions are highly context-specific, each MTE was aimed at assessing the performance of individual activities in light of the goals and objectives they were trying to achieve. Since activity designs were necessarily aligned with Requests for Applications (RFAs) and BHA's overall strategy, it is presumed that the recommendations themselves were aimed at enhancing the activity's contributions to the BHA goal of providing long term assistance to the most vulnerable, hardest-to-reach people.

4. Did the scopes of work (SOWs) for these studies explicitly ask for reviews of Theories of Change (TOCs)? Did you conclude that MTE teams felt the TOCs were not a good basis or framework for evaluating the Activities?

- ▶ Response: The author did not formally review the SOWs of the MTEs, however, the review of the recommendations carried out for this report did not provide any evidence as to whether the MTE teams felt TOCs were or were not a good basis or framework for evaluating the activities.

5. In addition to Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA), were there other common interventions that consistently performed across projects? Which recommendations were most context-dependent? What did the MTE Review learn about universal and context dependent design strategies?

- ▶ Response: VSLA was the only component that was consistently mentioned across MTEs as being successful. Assessing the relevance of individual recommendations within specific contexts was beyond the scope of the MTE Review. However, the appropriateness and quality of specific interventions in diverse contexts will be considered in subsequent discussions of MTE Review findings between BHA and implementing partners.

6. Previous efforts on the part of DFAPs/DFSAs to collect user fees for maintenance of water systems have often proven unsustainable. What recommendations can be taken from the MTE Review to ensure the sustainability of community-level water systems?

- ▶ Response: While directly relevant to ongoing BHA-funded programming, this technical question is beyond the scope of the MTE Review. Detailed insight into this question is best sought from the [Practices, Research, and Operations in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene \(PRO-WASH\) Associate Award](#).

7. Did you look at the combinations of sectoral activities used in multi-sectoral programs and layering those on front line workers? It sounds like many loaded too much on the front line worker, but did you find more feasible combinations?

- ▶ Response: The MTE Review did not find recommendations specifically related to this issue – the burden of layered, multi-sector programs on front-line workers. Many MTEs did find, however, that despite the benefits of layering and sequencing of interventions at the household level (e.g. livelihoods, nutrition education, and sanitation behavior change, etc.) – as opposed to only receiving only one intervention – many activities had difficulty providing effectively integrated household interventions.

8. What findings did you gather on accountability mechanisms? What recommendations?

- ▶ Response: There were no trends across the different MTEs that specifically addressed accountability, and so no specific findings around accountability.

Learning and Adaptation

9. Are there any recommendations on formative or operations research which are key elements in the learning plans of many BHA-funded DFSAs?

- ▶ Response: Many of the MTEs provided recommendations for further research that the MTE teams felt would be useful for the DFAPs/DFSAs to carry out. However, there was no consistent trend that could be identified as to what the different research recommendations were.

10. From BHA's perspective, how many of these common MTE recommendations could have been predicted based on the initial Activity design? Where might implementers have been able to proactively address these recommendations by adapting Activity design in the initial refinement year?

- ▶ Response: A number of the challenges identified in the MTE Review might have been foreseen, and possibly addressed, during the design stage, refinement period, and/or early in the implementation phase. To actively address common challenges, it is important that implementers prioritize interventions based on evidence, look for opportunities to layer interventions within and across activities to achieve intended outcomes, and avoid implementing too many interventions or relying too heavily on volunteers (in place of field staff) as both have a negative effect on program quality.

11. To what extent did the MTE Review identify conflicting recommendations across MTEs that inadequately reflected specific local contexts?

- ▶ Response: The review assessed MTE recommendations to draw out trends, but did not attempt to assess the quality or appropriateness of individual recommendations within the context of the activities due to the diverse nature of the contexts of the 16 different DFAPs/DFSAs included in the review.

12. What exactly can be done to strengthen the M&E system for qualitative data?

- ▶ Response: The updated version of the [Policy and Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting for Development Food Security Activities V2.0](#). In addition, the [Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning \(IDEAL\) Award](#) has relevant guidance and will soon be developing on-line technical resources specifically related to qualitative monitoring for BHA-funded Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs).

MTE Methodology and Application

13. Can BHA and IMPEL provide a standard MTE SOW – identifying core requirements for analysis – to enable greater consistency across the MTEs being conducted.

- ▶ Response: BHA provides guidance on MTEs in the [Policy and Guidance for Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting for Development Food Security Activities V2.0](#), but every MTE may be slightly different depending on the context. The evaluation questions also have to be adapted to the activity design, interventions, and the context. Following the guidance in Annex II of the Policy and Guidance document will help to achieve greater consistency in implementation of MTEs.

14. Can you speak to what actions you'd like to see taken by USAID given this report? And what actions you'd like to see taken by implementing partners given the results?

- ▶ Response: There will be follow-up small group conversations based on the report's findings including both IP and BHA staff that will provide recommendations for further USAID and IP actions.

15. Given the constraints to access and mobility of evaluation teams in the context of COVID-19, does BHA have any intention of supporting ‘light’ or virtual versions of mid-term reviews (a “mini-MTE”) for current DFSAs?

- Response: At present no, but it is something that BHA can consider.

16. Will there be subsequent phases of this MTE Review work (e.g. review of MTE SOWs, additional quantitative analysis of sector-specific findings)? Are there any plans to carry out a similar review of impact evaluations?

- Response: IMPEL plans to facilitate additional small group conversations between BHA and implementing partners on both the cross-cutting and sector-specific issues identified in the MTE Review. There are currently no plans to carry out a similar review of all impact evaluations conducted for FFP-funded DFAPs/DFSAs. BHA has only recently begun commissioning impact evaluations, and there is insufficient data at this time to begin a similar meta-review of findings.

17. What does FFP take away from this, how might future RFAs be adjusted to incorporate the results of this review? What might the high level substantive changes be in design guidance?

- Response: BHA hopes to gain better clarity on how it can help to facilitate improved programming through the upcoming small group conversations to be held between BHA and partners on cross-cutting and sector-specific recommendations identified through the MTE Review.

18. Was there, or is there a planned attempt to look at what MTE recommendations were taken up by implementing partners and whether they led to improvements in outputs or outcomes?

- Response: There was no attempt to do this through this MTE Review, and at this time additional effort is not anticipated. However, such a question may be considered for final evaluations.

Note from the author:

In developing the MTE Review Report, the author only reviewed the mid-term evaluation or review (MTE/R) recommendations, not the effect those recommendations had on activity outcomes and impact. In addition, no attempt was made to assess the recommendations as to their appropriateness to the context or state of implementation of the different development food security activities reviewed. Consequently, the MTE Review Report provides no indication whether the recommendations made sense within the context of the activities, nor whether implementing partner (IP) activity staff adjusted their programming as a consequence of the recommendations.

It was also beyond the scope of this report to review and analyze the scopes of work (SOW) for the mid-term evaluations (MTE) themselves. Accordingly, the author cannot respond to questions related to any differences in the objectives or methods used in individual MTEs.

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