**Notes from TOPS M&E Task Force Meeting**

**September 1, 2016**

**Participants**

* Hap Carr, CRS
* Jose “TD” Thekkiniath, CRS/ Nairobi
* Diana Stukel, FANTA/ FHI 360
* Sujata Bose, FANTA/ FHI 360
* Imee Cambronero, Save the Children
* Meghan Bolden, Save the Children
* Kristi Pearson, World Vision
* Jennifer Simpson, PCI
* Jennifer Himmelstein, ACDI-VOCA
* Steve Peck, ACDI-VOCA
* Julia Crowley, TOPS
* Edith Mutalya, TOPS
* Laurie Starr, TOPS

**AGENDA**

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| **Introductions & Updates**  | 9:00 – 9:05 |
| **Highlights from 8/16 FFP ARR narrative workshop** **Reflection / comments/ questions on draft FFP ARR FY 2016 guidance.** | 9:05-9:20 |
| **Prioritize ME capacity development efforts for TOPS FY 17.**  | 9:20-9:30  |
| **Theory of Change Facilitators Guide and Curriculum*** Need TF review to determine if it will be a TF recommended document
 | 9:30- 9:40 |
| **Continued Discussion: What are best practices in linking the project theory of change to M&E systems?****Review progress from last TF meetings.** * Define what needs to be linked? What needs to be in place to link?
* Constraints and enablers
* Gaps in existing guidance to linking project ToC to M&E systems.
 | 9:40-9:50 |
| **CRS: Hap presents overview of adapting CRS's SMILER process to annually review and revise indicators in a project TOC.** | 9:50 – 10:10  |
| **ACDI VOCA shares plans for a TOC-focused working group.**  | 10:10- 10:25 |
| **Close** | 10:25- 10:30 |

**NOTES**

Notes are not verbatim. Due to the back and forth between those speaking over the phone and those typing in the chat box, some of the discussion has been re-ordered to allow for a more logical flow of dialogue.

Recording here: [**https://coregroup.adobeconnect.com/p47rodepdrv/**](https://coregroup.adobeconnect.com/p47rodepdrv/?OWASP_CSRFTOKEN=84bed101f1a510ef37459756316292782a32ccf6e62e20f00a15a2fd908f4084)

**Introduction / Updates**

New members joining Task Force.

* Steve Peck, recently joined ACDI-VOCA M&E team. Previously with DAI, NCBA CLUSA, always working on M&E, largely health projects, but also agriculture. Leading the M&E approach for ACDI-VOCA.
* Jennifer Himmelstein, ACDI-VOCA. Spearheads corporate analysis. Previously with USAID. Background primarily in agriculture.
* Jennifer Simpson, PCI. Technical Advisor for M&E. Joined PCI about 1 year ago. Works on health, education, & other development projects, mostly in Africa. Background in Public Health, Epidemiology.

Short review of history of Task Force and purpose of TF for new members.

**Highlights from 8/16 FFP ARR narrative workshop**

* FACG shared ARR FY 16 draft guidance August 19th.
* Comments due to FACG@amexdc2.com by 11:59am on October 1, 2016.
* Guidance released just a few days after the FFP TOPS-hosted workshop on improving quality of ARR narrative. Great representation from implementing partners.
* FFP highlighted in the workshop the importance of heightened analysis in the ARR. They are receiving a lot of descriptive reports, but the analysis is missing.
* Purpose of the ARR workshop was to collaboratively put in place the steps necessary to ensure quality narratives with enhanced analysis.
* Two outputs from the workshop may be valuable to M&E teams as they prepare for the ARR, due November 1st, 2016. First document is oriented toward processes for ARR development: *List of Helpful Practices for Ensuring High Quality FFP ARRs* (attached to email). Second output is the *Quality Checklist for FFP Annual Results Reports* (attached to email).
* At the workshop, FFP stated that this list will be included in the final FY 2016 guidance. They did not have time to include in the Draft that is open for public comment. The list models an effort by FANTA – *Checklist to integrate Gender in ARR*. The idea is to combine the two lists into one comprehensive quality checklist that, that allows Partner field staff, Partner HQ staff, and FFP reviewers to draft and review ARR narratives using the same standards.
* Very productive workshop. TOPS appreciates all Partner M&E representatives who attended.

**Reflection / comments/ questions on draft FFP ARR FY 2016 guidance**

New changes in the ARR draft guidance:

* Guidance to IFRP awardees
* Actuals table to allow DPs and EPs to report on the use of **cash, vouchers, and/ or local and regional procurement**.
* Analysis of direct participants who benefit from multi-sectoral approaches – nice clear guidance on calculation added. Will be helpful to remedying the problems NGOs have been experiencing with double counting.
* Required data entry for unique and direct participants
* Much more guidance on analytical expectations compared to 2015 document.
* Gender integration checklist
* IPTT checklist
* Guidance on reporting indicators in SAPQ related to major and minor changes by USDS for a number of indicators.

No-one in TF has yet given the ARR guidance a deep read or submitted comments to USAID.

Laurie: Encourage M&E Teams to dig in and ask questions to help make this document as clear as possible. Do believe FFP is taking input from the PVO community quite seriously.

Imee: Questions about new required indicators. Believe that ARR 2016 guidance is the first information there is about the new indicators. Wondering what are the FFP processes to talk to PVOs more about the indicators. When will there be a PIRS? From what I understand, many of them will be required as they are FtF indicators. What is the process to make sure we are integrating the new indicators? Is it an assumption that we are integrating these indicators into existing programs, or are they reserved for new programs moving forward?

Sujata and Laurie: Believe that typically new indicators would only be applicable to new programs, but are unsure.

Hap: How can we compare data to previous years if we are adding new indicators?

Diana: If the past is a predictor of the future, one example of FFP adding a new indicator to an existing program is when MDD-W, a variation on women’s dietary diversity score, was added. The approach FFP took on the baseline was double reporting for a number of years. Phasing out the old indicator as appropriate and phasing in the new indicator for new programs.

Laurie: Some of these questions may be answered at the FFP ARR/ SAPQSept. 6 & 7 workshop.

Meghan: On a call last week (FACG meeting) SC requested to have the IPTT and numbers done by November 1st, but to submit the ARR narrative at a later date. It would be helpful for our teams because they wait sometimes until September to do the Annual Survey and then by the time they get the numbers it is the end of September, so it is mid-October before we get the analysis done. Focusing on real analysis can only happen after the numbers are calculated and deviation narratives for the IPTT and DIP are completed.

Arif said he would consider it and get back to us because it would improve analysis.Did anyone else hear about this possibility or would anyone else benefit from this structure?

TD: And does this mean only the IPTT earlier and analysis later, or the IPTT with updated DIP early and analysis later?

Meghan: Only ARR narrative analysis at the later date.

Laurie: TOPS will check in with Arif for update on Meghan’s and TD’s questions.

* **Reminder about USAID FFP ARR/ SAPQ Training. September 6-7 Crystal City, Virginia**
* Bulk of the training focused on SAPQ data entry for FFP development programs.

Also covering:

* Submission of quality ARRs and SAPQs into the FFPMIS & common mistakes in submitting ARRs and SAPQs.
* 2016 indicator changes: guidance on indicator data entry, information on different indicators types
* New actuals table for cash and market-based activities in ARRs
* REGISTRATION: [www.surveymonkey.com/r/8MH7WZQ](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8MH7WZQ) Closes at 5 pm EDT on September 2.
* Contact Ford Tordiff at jtordiff@usaid.gov with questions.

Laurie: At the ARR workshop, Arif was adamant that even if you attended an FFPMIS data entry seminar last year, you should still go this year. FFPMIS is always changing and the workshop will talk about how to navigate changes these changes. The need for updated guidance for FFPMIS was a large concern for participants at the last PREP consultation and the ARR workshop.

Imee: Is it the assumption that the new indicators in the draft ARR 2016 guidance will be covered at this FFPMIS workshop?

Hap: Will the workshop cover just the data entry or the construction of the indicators?

Laurie: Contact Ford Tordiff at jtordiff@usaid.gov with questions.

**Theory of Change Facilitators Guide and Curriculum**

TOPS would like TF members to review the most recent version of the TOC Facilitators’ Guide—a project that has been evolving for about 4 years. The draft guide has been frequently revised as we get new information about developing theories of change, but it’s time to call it a Final version, at least for a short while, knowing it will be updated again in the future.

The 2014 draft is already a TF recommended document, but the 2016 version has substantial changes that directly respond to recent guidance on TOC development in the Technical Chapters released by FFP. This version is better oriented to FFP interpretations of TOC, where the older draft could generally be applied to any type of TOC development.

* **Criteria for a TF recommended document are**:
	+ Easy to use/field friendly
	+ Is useful and effective
	+ Successfully applied in the appropriate context
	+ Addresses a need/gap in the practitioner community
* Unless specifically noted, TF recommended resources have not been peer reviewed in any formal sense and are not officially endorsed by any institution. The contents of these resources do not represent the opinions or policy of USAID or other donors.

Diana: What is the process to get this document recognized as formal policy? Is it internally reviewed by TF members and then presented to FFP? Is it written in collaboration in FFP?

Laurie: TF-recommended documents do not represent the opinions or policy of USAID. TF-recommended documents are not considered formal USAID documents. The TOC guidance is a little different because while FFP does not consider it formal guidance, I have been told by FFP that it will be referenced in the final draft of the ME Policy and Guidance. It will be one of many TOC resources referenced.

Diana: That sounds great and it is good they are actually referencing it. What kind of consultation took place to know that the guidance is what FFP has in mind?

Laurie: FFP has reviewed the curriculum, but it was not created hand-in-hand with FFP. Co-creation with FFP is not the process for most of the documents that TOPS publishes. TOPS is not claiming that this is *the* guide that all partners should use to develop their TOC, it is a guide that lays out one approach. The curriculum attempts to incorporate all the TOC recommendations from the FFP Technical Chapters. If the TF determines it is a TF-recommended tool, it does not mean that it is a formal USAID document. This goes for all TF documents.

Edith: It will just be a document that the TF recommends, or recommends with changes, whatever the TF agrees on.

TD: a TOPS-endorsed guide.

Diana: I was not seeking to understand whether FFP has adopted it as formal policy. I was asking if an IP were to use this guide to develop the TOC, do you imagine that it would be in alignment with what FFP wants?

Laurie: I think that is for the ME TF to decide when you read and use the 2016 version. As mentioned earlier, because FFP did not release the technical chapters with TOC guidance until very recently, it was impossible for the 2014/ 2015 drafts to align to FFP guidance because there wasn’t any guidance. The 2016 version of the curriculum, to the best of its ability, aligns to published FFP TOC guidance.

Hap: Can’t speak for others, but CRS has considered this guidance to be formal guidance. If it is not, we need something else that is formal guidance.

Laurie: This TOPS curriculum has never represented itself as the formal USAID guidance on developing a TOC. Right now the TF is not trying to determine whether the new version of the TOPS TOC curriculum should be considered formal FFP guidance we are simply trying to determine if the new curriculum should be considered in the suite of TF-recommended materials.

Hap: If it covers the basics, it will help.

Laurie: The curriculum is evolving. Again, it is hard to design a curriculum that specifically guides IPs to create the TOC model that FFP wants, when details of FFP preferences were not published until recently. I think everyone is learning as FFP is learning. As FFP sees models that don’t quite represent what they want, they learn more about what they do want. We can modify the curriculum to adapt to the new information.

TD: Let us aim for a dynamic guide as we understand the TOC concept, as we learn by doing we can revise annually.

Diana: At some point it would be nice if FFP issued formal guidance on TOC. It is a really complex topic and IPs are itching for definitive guidance that doesn’t change. I really wish they WOULD adopt the TOPS guide. But I understand that is unlikely to happen.

TD: What I expect, as in the past, is FFP will provide policy guidance and information bulletins, but look for technical and operational guidance from FANTA and TOPS.

Laurie: We can pursue the possibility of having FFP endorse the TOPS ToC guide as recommended Technical and Operational Guidance. If not that curriculum, then some other set of guidance. Seems to be a clear desire for something to be endorsed by FFP as recommended guidance.

Sujata: Now that we have a better sense of what FFP wants, as TD stated, each year we can review the TOC curriculum and see to what extent it represents FFP preferences and needs. Having the terms defined so that they overlap perfectly, even include the same diagram and formats that we know FFP is looking for. We’ll have some more experience from the FANTA and PVO workshops and the kind of analytical thinking that goes on in the workshops to get the TOC into shape.

**Prioritize ME capacity development efforts for TOPS FY 17.**

TOPS ME team would like your input to prioritize the TOPS capacity development efforts for FY 17.

We need to prioritize by region and topic. We will be sending you a regional poll to share among your staff, including FS directors, field staff, etc.. Potential training topics include:

* M&E Plan training for new DFAP awardees
* TOT on M&E facilitators' guide
* Theory of change development
* Theory of change validation and modification
* Qualitative data analysis
* Other?

TOPS ME team wants to make sure we use our remaining budget wisely to respond to your requests and demands in this final year.

**CRS: Overview of adapting CRS's SMILER process to annually review and revise indicators in a project TOC.**

Hap Carr: A summary presentation of what SMILER is. See attached handouts:

* 2-page description of what SMILER is.
* Data flow map
* Facilitator’s workshop guidance
* Working group
* SMILER PROPACK III

SMILER stands for: Simple Measurement of Indicators for Learning and Evidence-based Reporting

It is a practice that CRS generally does at the beginning of a project to look at the proposed M&E system. The process lasts between 5-10 days. It is a facilitated session that involves implementing staff vs. proposal writers, and local partners and various stakeholders including government ministry representatives. A group of 6-7 people who are going to be on the ground implementing the M&E system, collecting the data for it, and really understanding why these particular pieces of information are necessary, what the data sources are, when they are to be gathered.

The group looks at proposed indicators and the proposed processes in the MEAL system, and asks “what does this really mean?” How are we going to implement this? Are these indicators really what want to look at? Do we need some other indicators that were not proposed? A chance for all who will really have their hands in the fire of the ME system to be very clear about what it is.

The output is an Operations Manual (See attached handout CRS operating Manual). This document shows all pieces of the operating manual. Very important component is the data flow map, where we explore the specific source for each indicator. Local partners have a much better sense than HQ people about a realistic source of good data for particular indicators.

SMILER is a way of identifying, clarifying, refining, and possibly adding to the indicators we will collect. Not just the outcome indicators but the IPTT indicators. Designing the data flow map and determining what reports will be due at what time in the project life, and what are the data that need to go into those reports. In the past, the discussion of how the ME system is going to be implemented may not have been discussed until month 5 or 6. SMILER is a way to jump start and put detail into the ME system.

At end of YR 1 we found it is important to reflect back on what did we learn in the past year. The operations manual tries to produce something CRS calls discussion questions—what are the kinds of questions that various actors should be asking about the data we are collecting, why it is important and when it should be used by whom.

Now CRS is trying to develop SMILER into an annual process. Each year we will look at what changed in the project, indicator definitions, what new indicators might be necessary, and incorporate that into an annual review of the TOC. We will look at what changes have happened in the TOC, what assumptions have been fulfilled or not fulfilled. What things came up that we did not expect.

Imee: Clarifications on terminology. Is your operations plan what you would submit to FFP as your M&E plan?

Hap: The operations plan is much more detailed. With staff changes, presumably the operations plan will be detailed enough that a new person can walk in and pick up where someone else left off.

Sujata: Do you submit the operations plan to the Mission or is an internal document.

Hap: CRS Internal document. Now it is required in our MEAL policies and procedures, for us to have an operations manual that follows a specific format.

Imee: Do you have recommendations on the sequencing of various steps? You win an award, you’re onboarding-- who is leading? How do you engage different people?

Hap: The team has to be mobilized quickly right after winning the award, because up until that point, the people who have been involved are not the ones who will be implementing the project. You want your local staff, implementing partner organizations. As soon as staff mobilization happens, the SMILER workshop can happen.

Steve: Is there a reason, why you would keep the two documents separate? I agree with this entire approach. This is how we [AV] think about M&E. At proposal stage you come up with a draft PMP. At award stage you start to revise it and add depth. As you go it is always a living document. The only reason we’ve kept the two together (and the document does get quite large) is that it is easier for us to manage overlap between the documents. How do you manage both documents?

Hap: The PMP is the framework within which the operations manual is prepared. All the details that are developed get folded into the operations manual. The PMP is a formal document. The operations manual is internal. The operations manual changes and expands.

TD / CRS: PMP to me is a M&E plan summary, but the operating manual is the full M&E system document pack.

Hap: In CRS audits, projects have to show they are complying to the operations manual. If we get dinged by FFP or USAID audit for something our partner is doing, we want to protect ourselves.

Sujata: If you shared your operations manual with USAID wouldn’t you also protect yourself from an external audit?

Hap: We protect our self if we are following the rules.

Sujata: What I’ve been hearing from FFP about the M&E plan, is that they see it as a document that they increasingly want projects to own and use as a repository. I would expect that a lot of what CRS is putting in the operations manual would go in the M&E plan. So perhaps this is a matter of sensitivity and there are things you don’t want to share with your AOR, but then again, they are encouraging you to share as much information as you can, and anytime you make a change to the ME plan they want you to share that with the AOR.

Hap: Agreed. All changes are shared with AOR.

Conversation truncated to allow for next discussant.

**ACDI VOCA - TOC-focused working group.**

Jennifer H.: (See email attachment). This is a call for participation in Theory of Change Adaptive Learning and Validation (TALV) working group. ACDI-VOCA recently received a grant through the TOPS small grants program and we will use this grant to form a working group that will help guide production of a guidance document on theory of change validation. The working group will primarily be a sounding board, provide ideas for the guidance document. We have a short-term consultant coming in to draft the document and we have a whole team of [ACDI-VOCA] technical staff to provide input. We are very interested in external help and input. We want to be as open as possible to cooperation and get some ideas from the ME TF. If anyone is interested in participating, we have seven tentative dates for the working group meetings. The deliverables for this effort will be the guidance document for TOC validation and we will be hosting a 1-day conference and a 4-day workshop in Ethiopia.

Anyone who is interested should contact Jennifer and/ or Steve and express their interest.

Laurie: Will disseminate ACDI VOCA’s call for interest through the ME TF list serve.

**Close**

Need to:

* Touch base with Arif regarding later delivery of ARR narrative and whether that includes later delivery as well of the DIP.
* Ask FFP if list of indicators in Annex A ARR 2016 is finalized.
* Find out from FFP where we can find tabulation guidance on new indicators in Annex A of ARR guidance.
* Pursue the possibility of having FFP endorse the TOPS TOC guide as recommended Technical and Operational Guidance, with understanding that curriculum is updated annually as we all learn more about TOC.

Next meeting 1st Thursday of November.

After online participants were disconnected, there was a request for the next meeting to be the second Thursday of November (10th), after the ARR submissions.

Agreed.