PSF Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning: Partner Guidance during COVID-19

April 22nd, 2020

This guidance is for our existing partners and new applicants, including 'Prevent and Prepare' grants.

The COVID-19 pandemic is creating a lot of uncertainty for peacebuilding. PSF will continue to accompany partners and properly fund MEL during this time. We need to ensure our projects do no harm and contribute to a COVID-19 response which builds social cohesion. For that we may need different questions, methods and measures. The political, social and economic implications of this pandemic will affect Myanmar for many months, which means we may need to practice a different MEL approach for some time.

During this time, focusing on monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) becomes more difficult, but also more important. We expect you will make changes to your projects, and possibly starting some new initiatives. Many of those may be short but targeted initiatives, where quick learning and adaptation will be crucial. The good news is that there are many MEL approaches we can use (see question 4); and PSF will be support our partners to learn from each other and global experiences (see question 6 and 7).

1. What are the COVID-19 MEL challenges?

The current situation is creating many challenges, but many of them are ones we've experienced before:

- **Data collection is more challenging**: staff cannot travel or organize public activities; any access is heavily scrutinized so needs to be small numbers; people are worried to say their honest opinions
- **Difficult to measure progress**: the kind of changes we want to see (e.g. collaborative COVID response) might not be easy to understand and track.
- **Project plans change**: when the context changes, so must activities, which creates challenges for MEL; previously agreed measures and indicators are not as important anymore
- **Leadership deprioritizes MEL**: during a crisis, most organizations want to get stuff done. They assume what the organization is doing will help, and therefore don't see the need for MEL

2. What are PSF's requirements during this time?

An overriding message from the PSF MEL team is to *do no harm*. Follow the World Health Organisation (WHO), Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS) and/or ethnic health providers guidelines. As part of your MEL activities, build on the sources of trust, hope and collaboration within and between communities and authorities, especially where this is related to health and conflict.

PSF works with all partners to have a flexible approach to MEL. During this time, we will support you to **adapt your MEL plans**, trackers and tools. Each of our partners may have different needs, but here is our overview guidance. This is a challenging time for everyone so PSF will be as understanding as possible on due dates for changes. Please note that the principle of 'do no harm', from both a health and conflict sensitivity perspective, is critical within your activities, including MEL.

Project stage	MEL Guidance
If you are continuing with activities…	- Review your **theory of change** (and if adjustments are needed, provide an update in your next quarterly report) - Use the **activity tracker** and **quarterly reporting** template as per normal

	- Adapt your MEL methods and timeframe to be COVID-sensitive (e.g moving them online) - Add learning questions related to COVID and social cohesion
If you are adapting some activities…	- Same as above, plus: - Adapt your learning questions, measures, timeframe, methods and tools in your MEL tracker
If you are starting new activities…	- Same as above, plus: - Consider adapting your **theory of change** for any major workstreams (fill in **Annex 1** if changes are substantial) - Integrate new learning questions, measures, timeframe, methods and tools in your MEL tracker
If you are designing a new project that is both under 5000 USD and 3 months in duration	- As part of proposal process, develop a clear **theory of change** - Ensure your MEL methods are COVID-sensitive (e.g. moving them online) - Use the activity tracker and PSF quarterly reporting template
If you are designing a new project that is either over 5000 USD or 3 months in duration	Same as above, plus: - Develop a **MEL tracker**, which includes learning questions, measures, timeframe, methods and tools. - PSF is flexible on precise format, and will work with partners to co-design

3. How can we adapt current PSF tools and templates?

All our partners are required to do activity tracking and quarterly reporting, but beyond this they use a diverse range of tools. Below is our guidance for how to adapt the most common ones during COVID-19.

Templates and Tools	MEL Guidance
Theories of Change	Has COVID-19 changed the problems, actions or assumptions for your project? For example, in a gender principled project on domestic violence, we might see the following **additions**: **Problem statement**: Domestic violence is increasing in project areas due to stay at home order during COVID-19. **Theory of action**: Increase COVID-19 and domestic violence messaging campaign, provide online and offline reporting options **Assumptions**: Women may be unable to report violence as much during COVID-19, so alternative online and offline reporting is required
Learning Questions	Many of our partners base their MEL tracker on questions, linked to their theory of change. Some new questions may be required. For example, in a community dialogue project: - **If the dialogues cannot continue:** What will be the impact on the groups progress so far? Why? - **If alternative dialogue spaces are created online:** What differences in group relationships are emerging online? Why? Is anyone more excluded using different spaces?
Progress Standards	Progress standards normally set out future scenarios that are scored, such as harmful (1) to excellent (5). Different methods are then used to assess this

	progress quarterly. In a new set of activities promoting positive messaging online about COVID-19, we might see the following: **Harmful:** Messaging campaign is viewed as an outside imposition, which itself fuel ongoing nationalistic hate speech **Poor**: Messaging campaign has very little take up, with only close organizational networks sharing posts and materials **Adequate**: Messaging campaign has an average take up relative to experience, provoking an overall positive response online **Good**: Messaging campaign goes viral on Facebook, with a diversity of users across Myanmar's states/regions posting **Excellent**: Messaging campaign goes viral on Facebook, and leads to a range of spin off campaigns and practical action (e.g. donations for COVID-19) Where projects are adapting activities, this may be a useful tool to assess different scenarios depending on the impact of COVID-19.
Logframes (or) Key Change Tracker	- Ensure outcomes, outputs (or) key changes and indicators are still relevant - Ensure the data can still be collected, and if not, adapt (also see question 4) For example, if the activity was to host a training session on civic education for private school teachers, but these have moved to be online or in another format, the logframe (or) key change tracker might be adapted as follows: **Output/key changes**: Private school teachers demonstrate improved knowledge of civic education curriculum **Indicator**: % of teachers who can recall key elements of curriculum **Previous means of verification or method**: Pre and posttest questionnaire conducted in person; observation of teaching **New means of verification or method**: Pre and posttest questionnaire conducted online; short video recordings of classes provided for review
Activity Tracking	- Note in the activity tracker where activities took place (offline or online) and which format (e.g. conference call, Skype, Zoom) used.
Quarterly Reporting	Report on the implications of COVID-19 across key questions. For example: Q1: **Context**: How has COVID-19 influenced social cohesion in your project locations? Q2-3: **Project progress**: How has COVID-19 led to project adaptations? Have there been any new opportunities? Q4-7: **MEL:** What has your project contributed to COVID-19 response and social cohesion? Are there any significant changes you've contributed to? Q8: **Finance**: How has COVID-19 led to budget changes? Q9-10: **Conflict sensitivity and risk**: How have you ensuring do no harm during this time? What new risks do you face? How will/did you mitigate? Q11-12: **GESI**: Are you seeing new COVID-19 related risks and opportunities in relation to women, ethnic groups, people with disabilities, or other?

4. What MEL methods are appropriate under COVID-19?

MEL methods during COVID-19 will depend on whether you are postponing, adjusting or creating some new activities. If you're unable to undertake activities as planned, this may be a good chance to review existing literature and data that you have. In order to continue data collection, below we suggest some simple adaptations to traditional methods.

Method	Options during COVID-19
Interviews	**Phone call:** as per usual **Video call:** using Facetime, Viber Video, Skype, Zoom **Text messenger**: Structured interviews can be done over text, Viber, Facebook
Focus groups	**Conference call**: Dial-in call, Viber, Facebook, Skype, or Zoom
Workshops	**Online workshops:** Zoom to host workshops, using breakout rooms.
Questionnaires	**Online questionnaire**: Google forms or survey monkey to conduct survey
Surveys	**Online survey**: As above, but consider using Kobo Toolbox for larger sample size
Observation	**Video observation**: Where activities are ongoing, you can be called in using apps **Facilitated discussion:** Some participants could be invited to be part of a private Facebook group, and their participation moderated
Personal case study	**Diaries:** Ask participants to submit regular written, audio or video reflections

Using these methods well requires some planning, and sometimes training. For that reason, PSF will shortly be offering online facilitation training for partners who need it.

5. What are the risks to be mitigated?

Ensure you are doing no harm, including from a conflict and GESI perspective. When conducting MEL activities virtually, you may not see the impact you have on individuals and communities. For example:

- If it is perceived that INGOs are calling only one minority group for interviews, a rumour may start that another group is being discriminated against;
- If you are conducting phone surveys in remote areas, often it is men who most often have access to technology, so your data may be biased and women may be excluded;
- If you are conducting interviews on sensitive topics, people are likely speaking to you within their home, which makes them less willing to speak openly and possibly increases risk against them.

Furthermore, any online data collection needs to be usefully organized and secure. For example:

- Data is available to those who need it immediately, using reliable platforms (such as OneDrive, Dropbox or Google Drive);
- Data stored online should be kept safe using complex passwords and two factor authentication;
- Only those who need access to data should be able to view it online, so that data cannot be downloaded and shared in error;
- Online discussions need to be password protected, with randomized meeting ID's and only authorized persons able to join (e.g. on Zoom)

6. How can we learn from each other during COVID-19?

PSF will facilitate discussions online, both about broader project learning and on MEL specifically. Please watch your inboxes for this. There are many questions we can discuss. For example:

- How are local peacebuilders adapting their work during COVID-19?
- What are the appropriate questions and tools to track our work during COVID-19?
- What tools are best suited to remote MEL in Myanmar?
- What are the approaches and tools we can continue, once the COVID-19 pandemic is over?

We encourage you to include questions like these within your reporting frameworks, so that we continually improve and take away important lessons from this difficult time.

7. Support

Guidance and templates on MEL, theories of change, logframes and activity tracking are on our website. If you'd like any guidance on learning questions, progress standards or key changes, please contact us.

We are available to support you with guidance and trainings if needed. If you prefer to speak in Myanmar, please contact Khin Zar Hline (kzh@paungsiefacility.org). If you prefer to speak in English, please contact Craig Valters (cv@paungsiefacility.org)

Annex 1: Theories of Change Review Template

For those adjusting current projects, please use the below simplified theory of change review template.

Theory of Change review		
Summary of Changes	Degree of Change	Why was the change made?
Problem Statement Previous: New:	High/ Medium/ Low	
Theory of action Previous: New:		
Assumptions Previous: New:		