# Pacific Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Capacity Strengthening Rebbilib

*For the Pacific. By the Pacific.*

*With the Pacific.*

# Pacific Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Capacity Strengthening Rebbilib

By Pacific MEL,
Strategy Performance and Learning (SPL) Unit,
Office of the Director-General, SPC

Cover photo: © Rui Camilo/Okeanos Foundation

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# Acknowledgements

As is customary in the Pacific, for the protection and guidance on this journey we acknowledge with gratitude and respect the spirit of our ancestors and of the land, sea and sky. We thank all our partners who hold a stake in monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) for sharing their ways of being, ways of knowing, ways of communicating and ways of learning; and the foundational partners – the New Zealand Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), the Pacific Community (SPC), BetterEvaluation (BE) and the University of the South Pacific (USP) – who not only provided the requisite resources, guidance and support for this MEL capacity-strengthening journey but, importantly, also ensured that our work was both contextually relevant and culturally responsive.

We, the foundation partners, acknowledge all the knowledge holders from across the Pacific working in multiple capacities and multiple sectors who graciously shared their intelligence, knowledge and wisdom on this journey. They know who they are.

We invite you to journey with us, as we share our story about Pacific MEL.



*Image 1. Pacific MEL knowledge holders contribute towards
the Pacific MEL Gallery at the 2019 Pacific MEL Convening | Talanoa | Kakala | Rebbilib*

# Foreword: The story about this *Rebbilib*

This *Rebbilib* (akin to a roadmap) is our gift to the knowledge holders of monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) in the Pacific. Just as they have gifted us with their knowledge and intelligence, we have reciprocated by fusing our knowledge with theirs, as part of the process of sense giving and sense making. And, in the true spirit of giving, we share this *rebbilib* with them to give sense to our humble attempts to document their MEL journey this far. This is the result of a trusted relationship built on Pacific values of knowledge sharing, mentoring, advising and learning through reciprocity for whole-of-community benefit.

Information presented in this publication is symbolic, as it defines the journey of this regional MEL capacity strengthening *rebbilib*. It signifies where MEL stakeholders, as master navigators of their own journey, aspire to reach and/or are destined to follow, as identified through assessing their MEL strengths and gaps, priorities and plans through *talanoa* surveys, and information and insights generously shared in interviews and storytelling over a twelve-month period.

Traditionally, priorities and plans are considered sacred, as they represent the MEL information unique to the master navigators from across the Pacific region. They reflect each individual master navigator's *rebbilib* in real time. Each *rebbilib* is based on the beliefs and understandings of each master navigator of where waves, swells and islands are positioned on the ocean. In this instance, the strengths, challenges, opportunities and risks are identified through individual surveys and *talanoa* sessions as interviews and group discussions. The priorities and plans survey is a post-convening data collection exercise, inspired by the MEL swells, waves and islands that make up the *rebbilib* that charts the voyage ahead.

Metaphorically, the information shared is unique to each master navigator's MEL situation. How they have each identified individual and organisational MEL strengths and gaps, priorities and plans is in response to each of their experiences based on the accessibility and availability of resources, including competencies and capabilities, political will and the desire to change attitudes and behaviours for enhanced MEL in the Pacific region.

Important to note is the willingness of these master navigators to generously disclose and speak the truth about their MEL strengths and gaps, priorities and plans with the foundational partners/authors of this regional MEL capacity strengthening *rebbilib,* which is indicative of the trusted relationships they share. This confidence in sharing sacred secrets signals the level of trust and reciprocity between each master navigator and the foundational partners. This unique information is aimed at:

- fellow master navigators across the Pacific region – to tell their MEL stories, knowing that they are not alone on this MEL journey, and that they need only reach out to the knowledge sharers of this *rebbilib* for support and to help achieve the Preliminary Calls to Action developed by participants at the inaugural Pacific MEL convening held in August, 2019;
- leaders and decision-makers of local, national, regional and international organisations and governments – to mobilise requisite resources to establish and/or to strengthen existing MEL systems for optimal performance at the individual and organisation levels; and
- development and implementing partners – to provide requisite resources to support these priorities and plans, and to hold true to the *Duavata* Statement – a commitment made by donors and implementing partners present at the 2019 MEL convening in Nadi.

This *rebbilib* is a collective way forward, informed by individual insight and experience across the MEL system and mindful of the level of MEL capacity maturity. By taking a systems approach and assessing the maturity of MEL capacity across 10 components of the MEL system, this regional MEL capacity strengthening *rebbilib* holds true to each MEL stakeholder navigating this journey through both chartered and unchartered Pacific waters.

*Image 2. Participants in the 2019 Pacific MEL Convening held in Nadi, Fiji*

Pacific Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Capacity Strengthening Rebbilib

# Executive summary

This *rebbilib* acts as a roadmap for the Pacific region and commits the Pacific Community (SPC), Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs), and development partners to strengthen capacity in the Pacific region for contextually and culturally appropriate monitoring, evaluation, research and learning to support improved governance and decision making.

In 2017, Pacific Leaders called on SPC to explore the purpose and feasibility of developing a multi-stakeholder Pacific hub for learning and innovation.[1] Discussions with members reinforced the need for innovation, but called for more evidence, including the capacity for evidence generation, analysis and uptake that is required to support innovation. In 2018, a proposal was put to SPC's governing council to explore partnerships that would look at strengthening monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) capacity in order to supply and increase the demand for evidence to support decision-making.[2]

By early 2019, a partnership had been formed of the New Zealand Government Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, SPC and BetterEvaluation to co-design a participatory process to assess and understand the current MEL system and opportunities for capacity strengthening. The partners agreed to a set of principles: Pacific ownership, a strengths-based approach to capacity development, adult learning, and supporting situationally appropriate choices of MEL methods and processes.

Over the subsequent twelve months the partnership extended to Pacific stakeholders from national governments, civil society, academic institutions, development partners and donors. By blending Pacific and western methodologies, rich information was gathered from 87 stakeholders across 11 countries through *talanoa*, surveys and face-to-face engagement. Fusing indigenous knowledge and information on MEL capacity at the individual, organisational and national levels has been foundational to the development of this *rebbilib*.

## Why a rebbilib and who it is for

This *rebbilib* is based on the metaphor of the Marshall Islands navigational stick chart that shows islands, swells and wave patterns. Like a road map, it outlines where we currently are with respect to MEL in the Pacific region, it shows where we want to get to (the islands), the challenges and opportunities on the way (swells and waves) and how we plan to get there. However, unlike a road map, which is based on a fixed plan over known territory, this *rebbilib* supports navigation that takes account of the dynamic nature of capacity and holds true to diverse levels of MEL capacity across the Pacific region. Instead of making recommendations based on averages or aggregates, the *rebbilib* uses a rubric format to chart multiple ways forward with plans that are appropriate along a continuum of beginning, progressing and established MEL capacity.

By charting multiple ways forward this *rebbilib* is intended as:

- documentation of the generous insight shared by the participants – a description of a MEL system at this point in time, as described by Pacific voices through individual, organisation and national assessments;
- a method guide for MEL practitioners who want to assess individual, organisational or national MEL capacity;
- a resource guide for policy makers and MEL practitioners in blending Pacific and western methodologies for evidence generation, analysis and reporting;
- a decision-making guide to support design of new plans, programmes or investments with MEL components, including those that seek to strengthen MEL capacity in the Pacific region; and
- a starting point, to be reviewed and adapted to respond to emerging priorities.

1    The Pacific Community Conference 10 70th Anniversary Declaration viii (b)
2    Outcomes of the meeting of the CRGA Subcommittee on Strategic Plan Implementation 28 November 2018

## How the *rebbilib* was developed

The *rebbilib* was developed over a period of 12 months through a process that combined Pacific concepts and methods with international approaches to MEL capacity strengthening.

The *Kakala* Research Framework served as the overarching organising framework. This Tongan research approach weaves knowledge and wisdom purposefully, like a garland with multiple parts, and emphasises values, ethics and relationships in research and evaluation practices.

The *talanoa* approach facilitated data collection, sharing and analysis through a culturally appropriate focused 'dialogic space' that is non-threatening, and may be informal or formal.

Stakeholder engagement was shaped by the metaphor of a Melanesian fish trap, which has a wide opening, narrows in the middle, and then opens out again. Similarly, engagement started with a wide group of stakeholders for an online *talanoa* survey, narrowed to a selected group for semi-structured interviews and in-person meetings, and then opened up to include input from a broader group.

A MEL self-assessment tool was developed, based on a diagnostic instrument from UNAIDS.[3] A rubric of three MEL domains: (i) people, partnerships and planning; (ii) collecting, verifying and analysing data; and (iii) using data for decision-making, and ten subdomains of a MEL system were contextualised for the Pacific. These approaches informed multiple data collection exercises: They include:

- an online *talanoa* survey, where respondents rated themselves against three scales of MEL capacity maturity – beginner, progressing or established – in relation to the ten MEL sub-domains (N = 86);
- semi-structured telephone interviews conducted by trained staff of SPC and guided by a rubric to determine successes and failures of individual MEL experiences (N = 14);

- a Pacific MEL convening over three days in Nadi, Fiji, including three *talanoa* sessions where 15 participants shared their performance stories, five action learning sessions, an individual Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis (using the metaphors of voyaging), and two group sense-making sessions of all the rich data;
- an implementing and donor partner agreement in the *Duavata* Statement (see Annex 3);
- a 'Call to Action' by convening participants; and
- a second online survey to determine individual and organisational plans and priorities for the next 12 months (N = 33).

## Where we are – and where we want to get to

There is positive demand for Pacific MEL practitioners and for strengthening capacity across the region. There is also a clear message to build on existing strengths and to contextualise MEL for the region. The MEL capacity assessments undertaken before, during and after the Pacific MEL convening demonstrate the diversity in current MEL capacity at the individual, organisational and country level across the Pacific. Across all domains of the MEL system, assessments were most frequently described as 'progressing' in the level of maturity, except the **use of monitoring, evaluation and planning**, where more respondents assessed MEL capacity as 'established'.

The average assessment and average capacity are, however, not going to be effective in informing the way forward. The diversity of MEL capacity, and the call to build on assets and agency, means that to be effective in strengthening MEL capacity, strategies need to be responsive to the assessed levels of capacity of the individual, organisation or country and to the variance of maturity across each sub-domain of the MEL system.

The rich information from the *talanoa* surveys, interviews and collective discussions demonstrates the interrelatedness of the MEL system domains. Capacity strengthening efforts in one sub-domain of the MEL system will have flow-on effect to others,

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3    https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/sub_landing/files/5_4_MERG_Guidance_HIV_ME_Capacity_Buidling.pdf [accessed 11 May, 2020]

and this interrelatedness must be considered for sustainable capacity strengthening outcomes. Common to all domains was the identification of relationships (collaborations and partnerships) as important entry points for capacity exchange and further capacity-strengthening.

**Domain One: People, partnerships and culture**: Across the region there is a need to build a MEL organisational culture and/or for a cultural shift towards MEL for the organisation's purpose, as well as being accountable to donors. The design and offering of MEL capacity strengthening modalities need to be matched with current needs and readiness, including through training, workshops, mentoring, peer learning and co-conducting evaluative activities across the region. Pacific MEL practitioners want to drive their MEL planning and implementation to influence decision-making. There is a recognition that partnerships are important to strengthening capacity and a commitment to better coordination between implementing partners will go some way to reducing the reporting burden and leveraging outcomes.

**Domain Two: Collecting, verifying and analysing data**: Data should be inclusive for all and be generated and analysed through approaches that are themselves participatory and include local skills and expertise. To be effective, there needs to be specific investment in baseline data (monitoring) for sub-national, national and regional purposes.

**Domain Three: Using data for decision-making**: Using a systems approach and through contextualisation and cultural grounding, current MEL practice could be better used to guide decision-making. There is an overwhelming desire for the utility of MEL products, although the current use of data for decision-making and/or sharing of evaluation findings and reports (including by development partner commissioners) is varied across the region. This includes how and with whom these evaluation findings and reports are shared among the commissioners and conductors of evaluative activities.

A resounding request is the need to build on what is already happening in MEL across the Pacific region.

There are Pacific approaches being developed and used, though the acknowledgement and valuing of Pacific approaches is varied. A balance must be found between the multiple tensions of: the time-bound nature of projects and the timeframes needed for true indigenous development; independence and valuing local knowledge; accountability and learning; and ownership, contextual relevance and cultural responsiveness.

## How shall we get there?

The process has confirmed the principles that have guided our journey to date and will guide our work going forward.

- Pacific-led – auspice, governance and sense of ownership
- Culturally appropriate processes – including dialogic processes to explore issues and ideas and how they might be adapted for further use
- Strengths-based – identifying and building on existing achievements in the region and in each organisation
- Iterative – involving cycles of data-gathering and reflection
- Supporting diversity – recognising different starting points, resources, priorities, constraints and opportunities that require different approaches, rather than something which will only work for the average or for the majority

When looking across the many journeys shared in the development of this *rebbilib*, there are activities and strategies that are either common or connected across subdomains to the extent that six clusters emerged. These form six interconnected components to the voyage towards strengthening contextually appropriate and culturally responsive MEL capacity in the Pacific.

**Pacific-led va'a** (or traditional canoe used to journey across the vast ocean from one destination to another) – governance for ownership, coordination and coherence of Pacific MEL strengthening through *solesolevaki* – (reciprocity, social capital, kinship and community relationships)
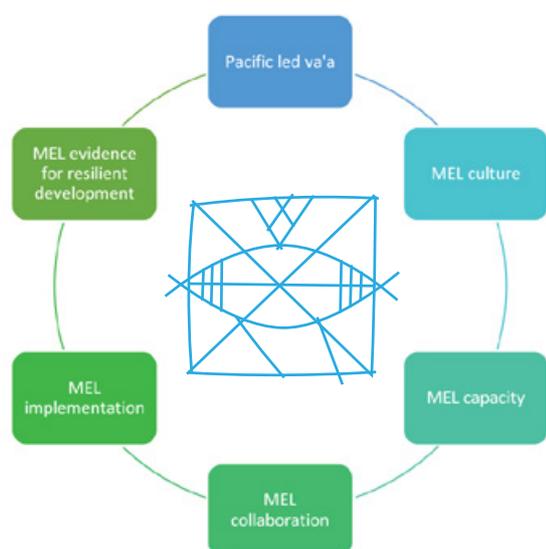
**MEL culture** – through raising awareness, promoting MEL literacy and leadership and by mainstreaming MEL into development practice

**MEL capacity** – multiple modalities to meet strengths, gaps, plans and priorities of individuals and institutions for contextually relevant and culturally responsive MEL through appropriate entry points (on the job, short courses, micro qualifications, graduate programmes, etc.) and by multiple modalities (e.g. blended learning, coaching, mentoring, peer learning, virtual)

**MEL collaboration** – through convenings (including an annual Pacific MEL convening); existing partnerships and communities of practice and forging new ones; and sharing knowledge and communicating learning across national, regional and international peers, implementing agencies, academia and practitioners

**MEL implementation** – by co-creating, developing, reviewing and strengthening tools, systems and processes and by co-conducting and accompanying local evaluative activities and Pacific approaches

**MEL evidence for resilient development** – by enhancing the application of contextually relevant and culturally responsive MEL across local, sectoral (e.g. education, fisheries) and transdisciplinary themes (e.g. climate change, pandemic crisis) to national development plans and regional and international efforts towards Pacific frameworks and connecting to global commitments, including SDGs for transformative evaluation and resilient development.

# The structure of this *rebbilib* and the methodologies: The Kakala Research Framework

This report is structured by the *Kakala* Research Framework[4] – as was the project informing this report. The framework, initially developed by Pacific academic and philosopher, Professor Konai Helu Thaman, and built on by other Pacific academics,[5] was used to ground the work for the Pacific MEL convening. It is the Tongan approach to weaving knowledge and wisdom, like a garland with multiple parts, which is why it was selected as a metaphor for the processes of the Pacific MEL Convening. Each stage has a clearly defined purpose.
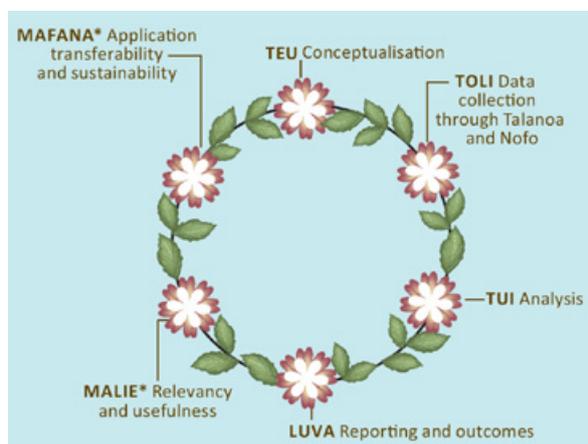


The *kakala* framework guides the reader from **teu**, project conceptualisation and blended approaches taken; to **toli**, data collection using *talanoa* (and *nofo*); through **tui**, the analysis and sense-making activities; to **luva**, an overview of the findings. Finally, this report speaks to **malie**, the relevance and usefulness to regional and global MEL efforts – and then **mafana**, the transferability and sustainability of the ways forward to navigate the Pacific towards stronger MEL systems: the Kakala Research Framework.

## *Teu* – Conceptualisation



The Pacific MEL strengthening project that informed this *rebbilib* commenced in March 2019 from a shared vision of MFAT, BetterEvaluation and SPC to improve the quality of evidence-informed decision-making, ultimately to strengthen governance and sustainable development in the Pacific. It recognised existing capacities and systems and the shortage of people with the competencies, skills and experience to undertake contextually appropriate and culturally responsive monitoring, evaluation, research and learning in the Pacific region.

The partners co-designed a project to gain greater understanding of the current MEL capacity and practice across the region. The design process was conceptualised by literature and the lived experience of the partners and guided by the insight of Pacific academic and researcher, Associate Professor Cresantia Frances Koya-Vaka'uta. Using existing stakeholder relationships, the project sought the engagement of Pacific MEL practitioners, policy makers, academics and researchers, project implementors and development partners. With a commitment to reciprocal learning, the project

4    Thaman, K.H. (1997). Kakala: A Pacific concept of teaching and learning. Paper presented at the Australian College of Education National Conference, Cairns.
5    Johansson Fua, S. (2009). *Ko hota faungamotu'a ko hota kaha'u* – A knowledge system for redesigning Tongan curriculum. In K. Sanga & K.H. Thaman (Eds.) Re-thinking education curricula in the Pacific: Challenges and prospects. Wellington: Victoria University.

sought to learn from stakeholders and provide opportunities for learning through the various engagement processes. Indigenous knowledge and methods were blended with western evaluative methodologies, described below.

## Stakeholder engagement: About the *tekuhi* – Melanesian fish trap
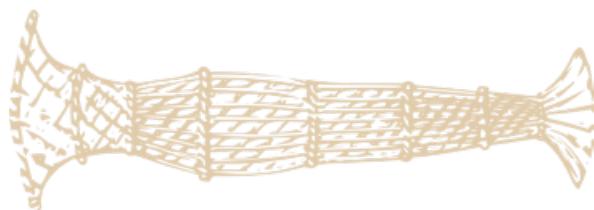


As an object for gathering, the Melanesian fish trap was adapted and used as the stakeholder engagement and management strategy. The first and widest section, which opens up, is symbolic of the connectedness of Pacific peoples. The foundational partners reached across existing networks to bring in diverse stakeholders to seek evidence and knowledge from multiple voices through survey *talanoa*. The narrow or mid-section of the net represents the safe space where partners from across the region participated in deeper *talanoa* and/or the Pacific MEL convening held in Nadi in August 2019. The third section widens outwards and is symbolic of sharing all the data obtained from respondents of the *talanoa* survey, interviewees of the *talanoa* interviews and respondents of the priorities and plans survey. The widening is not just symbolic of data-sharing but also the application of the principle of reciprocity from the perspective of the data collector, to gift something back to the respondents.

## Interviews and survey: About the *talanoa*



The *talanoa,* according to Vaioleti, refers to "a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations"[6], "allows more *mo'oni* (pure, real, authentic) information to be available for Pacific research than data derived from other research methods".[7] *Talanoa* in the context of the *kakala* metaphor offers "a cultural synthesis of the information, stories, emotions and theorising…will produce relevant knowledge and possibilities for addressing Pacific issues".[8] It was for these very reasons that the *talanoa* was selected as the dialogic tool to gather information from stakeholders in the design of the convening, in assessing MEL capacity and in plans and priorities.

## Charting ways forward: About the *rebbilib*
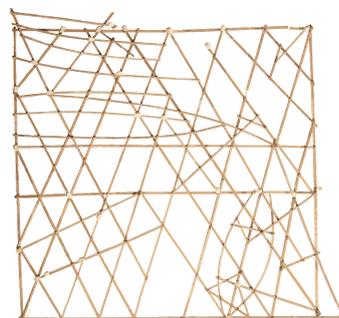
6    Vaioleti, S. L. (1999–2003). Series of *Talanoa*. Palo Alto, Oakland, San Francisco, California.
7    Vaioleti, T. M. (2006). *Talanoa* research methodology: A developing position on Pacific research. *Waikato Journal of Education* 12: 21–34.
8    ibid

According to Marshallese culture, master navigators are people for whom "the knowledge of the stars, weather, and sea conditions and the capacity for making and interpreting sea charts is reserved".[9] These charts are known to identify waves, swells and islands, making it crucial for apprentices to be knowledgeable about sea conditions, e.g. swells, choppy seas, and 'sea marks' of the atolls.[10] This is likened to the process of developing this regional MEL *rebbilib*. Each of the survey respondents, interviewees, and participants at the Nadi convening came with MEL knowledge that was unique to themselves – as individuals and as representatives of their organisations. They were the only ones who could interpret and make their own sea charts, based on their own self-assessments of where they were positioned against the MEL Framework, and their experiences.

## MEL assessment: About the MEL system framework

The MEL system framework was developed as a situation analysis tool or diagnostic tool. The rubric originally designed by UNAIDs was contextualised for the Pacific with three domains and 10 sub-domains that describe the main components that need to be in place to support the functioning of an organisational or regional MEL system.

The rubric includes a maturity focus with a description for each sub-domain of capacity as either beginning, progressing or established. The rubric was used to guide assessment, analysis and reporting and, through the process, was further contextualised with the voice of stakeholders replacing the original descriptors with responses from the *talanoa* and survey.

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9    ICHCAP (2011). Intangible cultural heritage safeguarding efforts in the Marshall Islands. In collaboration with the Historic Preservation Office, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Available online at: http://www.ichcap.org/eng/ek/sub1/pdf_file/pacific/Marshall_Islands_pdf.pdf
10    Ibid

## Table 1: MEL system framework

| Domain 1: People, partnerships and planning | | |
|---|---|---|
| **#** | **Sub-domain** | **Capacity required** |
| 1 | Organisational structures, processes and culture | Supportive structures, processes and an enabling culture where MEL is seen as relevant for all in the organisation. |
| 2 | Human capacity for MEL | Having dedicated and adequate numbers of staff with the right skills to undertake MEL-related work. |
| 3 | MEL planning | Having a costed MEL plan linked to the organisation's strategic plan and/or the national development plan and secured funding to ensure the implementation. |
| 4 | Partnerships to plan, manage or coordinate the MEL system | Various organisations work together at different levels to share the MEL work and share data. |
| **Domain 2: Collecting, verifying and analysing data** | | |
| **#** | **Sub-domain** | **Capacity required** |
| 5 | Monitoring | Staff with MEL responsibilities collect, analyse, and report on data regularly as part of the implementation of an intervention. |
| 6 | Regional, national and sub-national databases | Staff can draw on regional, national and sub-national databases to supplement data collected and analysed in their organisation. |
| 7 | Evaluation | Organisations undertake evaluations in priority areas for intervention improvement and learning. |
| 8 | Gender and equity considerations in MEL | Gender and equity are addressed in all MEL activities to understand differential effects of interventions, especially effects on those who are disadvantaged or excluded. |
| **Domain 3: Using data for decision-making** | | |
| **#** | **Sub-domain** | **Capacity required** |
| 9 | Use of MEL | MEL data is used for decision-making about interventions and investments. |
| 10 | Support use of MEL | Data are collated and presented in a way that facilitates their use at all levels within the organisation. |
| Source: Adapted from 'UNAIDS Organizing Framework for a Functional National HIV M&E System, 2008'. | | |

### Toli – Data collection through *talanoa*

A *talanoa* survey was conducted prior to the Nadi convening to identify relevant learning themes to shape the agenda. Telephone *talanoa* interviews were also conducted to seek richer information and to establish trusting relationships with stakeholders. This was key to the integrity of the data collection and for ensuring genuine engagement at the actual convening. Some participants said that by the time they met the project team in person they felt they knew them already and this helped with commitment to ascertaining permission to travel to the convening, and to swiftly shift to a sharing and learning posture during *talanoa* and plenary sessions.

**TOLI** Data collection through Talanoa
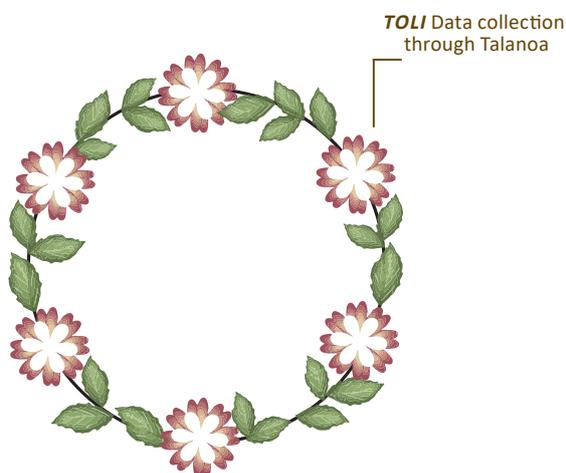
The Pacific MEL Convening celebrated the rich diversity in language and indigenous knowledge and created an enabling environment for participants to inquire, discuss and share, blending indigenous and western knowledge systems. A whole day was set aside to *talanoa*. Storytellers were selected beforehand and used a story guide to ensure the stories would 'speak' to the other participants and serve as knowledge sharing. *Talanoa* sessions were held on the *ibe* (Fijian pandanus-woven-mat) under trees. The *talanoa*, the storytellers and the setting resonated with the Pacific Islanders at the convening and introduced non-Pacific Islanders to authentic context and concept of sharing and learning.

Imagery was used to find a common language of MEL concepts. Individual SWOT analyses were conducted and shared in groups to find common challenges, to share unique solutions and identify opportunities.



*Image 3. Fiji participant, Mesake Mataitoga makes a point at the Pacific MEL Convening held in Nadi*



*Image 4. Participants representing national governments and implementing and development partners talanoa and share their stories at the Pacific MEL convening*

After the Nadi convening, conversations were extended by national communities of practice in Fiji and Vanuatu and through a country convening in Samoa. A follow-up survey was conducted with stakeholders six months after the convening to gather plans and priorities for MEL at the individual and organisational level.

## *Tui* – Analysis and sense making

MEL capacity assessment: strengths and gaps

The MEL self-assessment or *talanoa* survey was completed by 86 people working in MEL in the Pacific across 11 countries. Respondents worked in a variety of national, regional, international and non-governmental organisations. Most people worked at a national (56) or regional (46) level; people working across the region often worked in multiple countries. Twenty-eight people worked in organisations with a broad scope, working at multiple levels; it was common for those working at national level to also be working at the sub-national level.



*TUI* Analysis
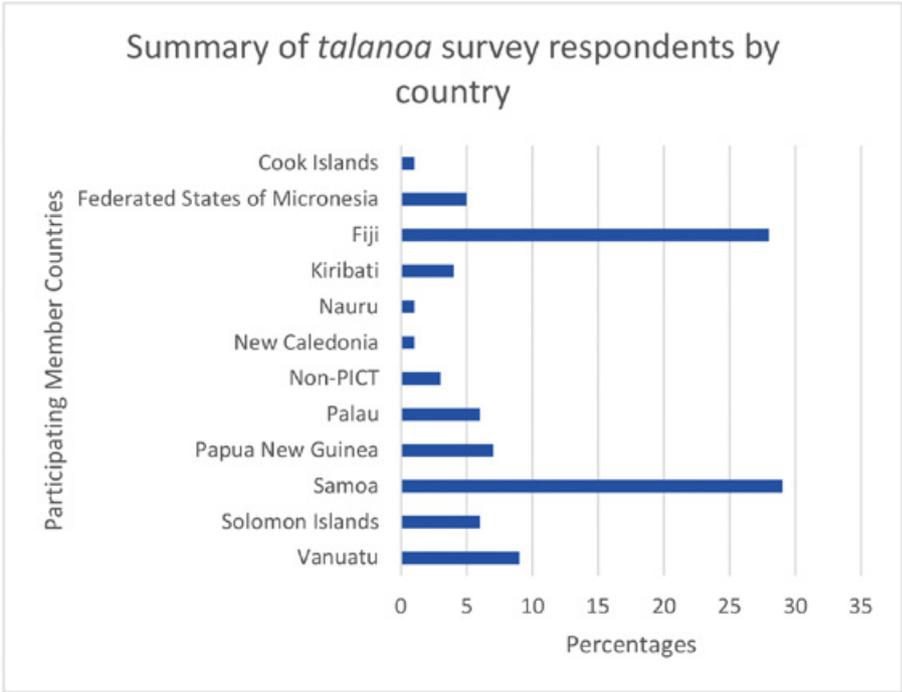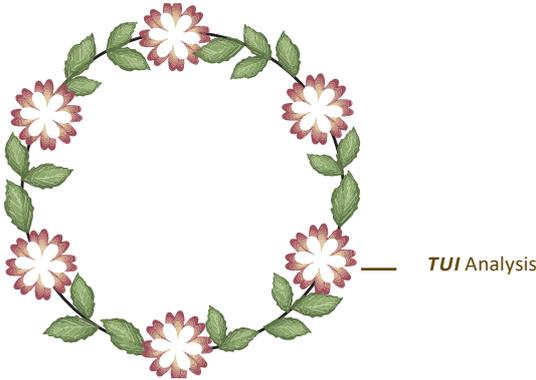


*Figure 1. Talanoa survey respondents by country and sub-region*
Note: The frequency of Fiji-based participants relates to the convening being held in Nadi. The frequency of Samoa-based respondents is high as the survey questionnaire was administered to all participants at a training workshop. A convening planned for the northern Pacific was postponed at member request.

All survey responses were analysed against each of the sub-domains in the MEL system framework. Numbers of those who rated themselves as at a beginning, progressing or established level were aggregated and illustrative quotes were selected for each level.

Based on the data from the *talanoa* survey/interviews and the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis around MEL capacities during the Nadi convening, recurring themes/issues were identified across participant responses.

Findings were also analysed by type of organisation (government/civil society; working locally/across different countries; having more/less resources where indicated in the qualitative responses) to identify potential contextual issues related to organisational MEL capacity.

The plans and priorities survey

The priorities and plans online survey was completed by 33 respondents made up of five stakeholder types: 15 representatives from six Pacific Island governments – Samoa, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Palau, Fiji and Vanuatu; seven representatives from five international, regional and national civil society organisations based in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea; nine representatives from inter-governmental organisations based in the Pacific; one private company; and one academic Institution (Figures 2 and 3).
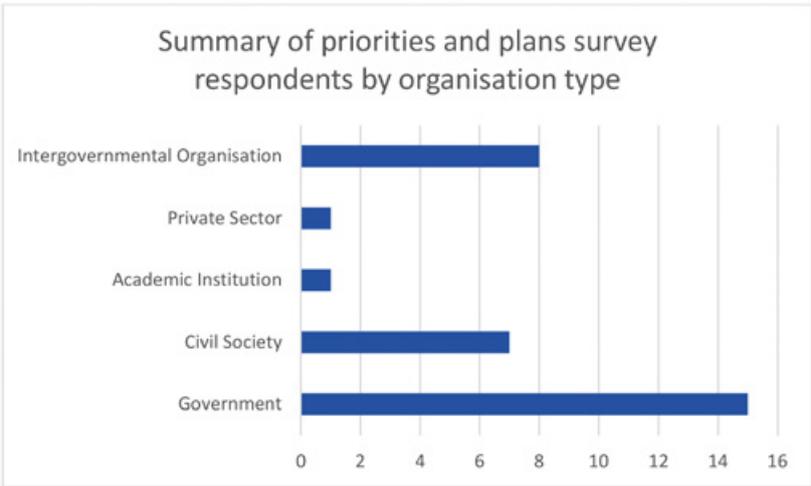


*Figure 2. Summary of priorities and plans survey respondents by organisation type*
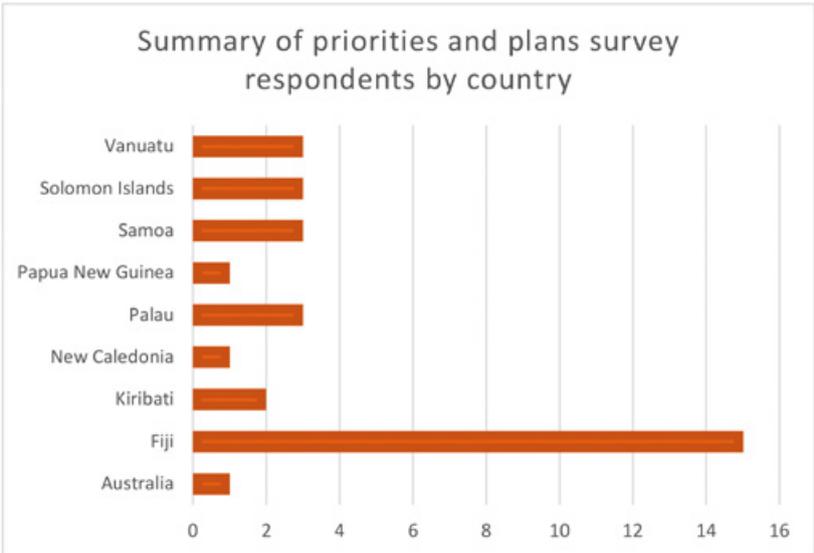


*Figure 3. Summary of priorities and plans survey respondents by country*
Note: Within this cohort, 47% of the respondents were from Fiji, representing national government, civil society organisations, the private sector and members of SPC's MEL Network (MELNet).

Nine of the Pacific Community's member countries participated in this survey.

With approximately 400 data points (averaging at least 12 priorities and plans per respondent) to the open-ended survey questions meant that a single response could be split into at least two of the 10 sub-domains, resulting in multiple analyses being conducted per response. These 400 responses were analysed using a coding system based on the MEL system framework, i.e. the three domains and ten sub-domains rubric. Notable quotes by the respondents were also used to translate the responses into actionable insights. A limitation of this analysis was the difficulty associated with establishing external validity, i.e. providing corroborating evidence that the findings are not just the opinion of the researchers[11] but those of the knowledge providers. Using triangulation methods, such as having respondents validate the findings through sense-giving and engaging peers to review both the coding system and clustering of themes, helped validate the data.

As part of the sense-making process, plans and priorities were categorised into themes for each of the ten sub-domains under the sub-title *What we heard you say*. Quotes linked to these themes were assessed and categorised under the beginning, progressing and established maturity levels and are located under the sub-title *What you said (quotes)*. This inclusion of voice allows respondents to give sense to and validate the information, adding to its authenticity. The intention is to assist the voyagers find their way, as they navigate through the list of suitable actions (refer to Annex 4) to help achieve their plans.

## *Luva* – Overview of the findings: situating Pacific MEL



**LUVA** Reporting and outcomes

The *luva* presents three separate overviews:

1. A summary of capacity assessment by level of maturity for each sub-domain of the MEL system framework is plotted below.

2. A Pacific adaptation to the original rubric of the MEL system framework that has been redeveloped using the information and insight gathered during the *toli*.

3. The plans and priorities sense-made and mapped to the MEL system framework (Figure 4).

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11    Sauro, J. (2013). Seven steps to conducting better qualitative research. Retrieved from www.measuring.com 30 April 2020.

## Domain 1: People, partnerships and planning

NOT ENOUGH INFO

BEGINNING

PROGRESSING

ESTABLISHED

1. **Organisational structures, processes and culture** │ Having supportive structures, processes and an enabling culture

9 · 18 · 33 · 26

2. **Human capacity for MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning)** │ Having specific MEL positions with sufficient skills and time

10 · 14 · 44 · 18

3. **MEL Planning** │ Comprehensive MEL plan to support national development plan or organisational strategic plan

7 · 12 · 35 · 32

4. **Partnerships to plan, manage or coordinate the MEL system** │ Effective mechanisms in place to co-ordinate or collaborate with others to support or do MEL

8 · 16 · 38 · 24

## Domain 2: Collecting, verifying and analysing data

NOT ENOUGH INFO

BEGINNING

PROGRESSING

ESTABLISHED

5. **Monitoring** │ Regular collection of key data in ways that are useful across the organisation and with other organisations

3 · 17 · 39 · 27

6. **Regional, national and sub-national database** │ With data that are useful for our organisation

10 · 12 · 48 · 16

7. **Evaluation** │ Evaluations are done in priority areas in appropriate ways, produce credible, useful findings and are used

14 · 10 · 41 · 21

8. **Gender and equity considerations in MEL** │ MEL aims to understand and address how people are disadvantaged by their gender or other types of social status

10 · 19 · 32 · 25

## Domain 3: Using data for decision making

NOT ENOUGH INFO

BEGINNING

PROGRESSING

ESTABLISHED

9. **Use of MEL:** │ Information gathered and evidence produced from MEL is used throughout the programme cycle as well as for reporting

9 · 10 · 30 · 37

10. **Supporting use of MEL** │ A systematic and active approach to supporting use of MEL

4 · 19 · 51 · 12

*Numbers represent responses

*Figure 4. Summary of capacity assessment against the 10 sub-domains of the MEL system framework*

**Table 2. The Pacific MEL system framework described by Pacific MEL practitioners**

| Domain 1: People, partnerships and planning | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Sub-domain 1: Organisational structures, processes and culture** | | |
| **What this involves** | | |
| *Supportive structures, processes and an enabling culture where MEL is seen as relevant for all in the organisation* | | |
| **What you said your organisation was like**(9/86 respondents had insufficient data to report) | | |
| **Beginning** (18/86 respondents) | **Progressing** (33/86 respondents) | **Established** (26/86 respondents) |
| **Lack** of MEL policy/organisational framework<br><br>**No** or limited MEL culture across the organisation/staff<br><br>**No** or limited MEL resourcing (human, financial, time)<br><br>**No** or limited institutional capacity for MEL<br><br>**No** or limited MEL systems, processes | **A** MEL policy/organisational framework is likely to be in place<br><br>**MEL** culture/awareness is emerging<br><br>**There** are varying degrees of MEL knowledge, acceptance and ownership across the organisation (to a lesser extent with senior managers)<br><br>**Some** MEL resourcing (mostly human)<br><br>**There** are varying degrees of capacity within MEL staff<br><br>**Some** MEL systems and processes in place | **Established** MEL policy/ organisational framework<br><br>**MEL** is prioritised by the organisation<br><br>**Senior** managers, programme managers are "well oriented" with MEL and "keen" to learn and share their experience<br><br>**Staff** "embrace" MEL<br><br>**There** are dedicated MEL positions, in some cases specific learning positions<br><br>**Established** systems, MEL minimum standards, organisational charts with MEL positions<br><br>**MEL** can be a skill requirement for all staff |
| **Example quotes** | | |
| *No process or system in place. With a recent change of management and the absence of MEL policy, our management personnel is not aware of MEL.* | *We are on our way! We are building our M&E team, but senior management attitudes towards MEL are very strong and other senior team members want to use it to inform their work.* | *There is strong support for MEL and is prioritised. Managers are keen and supportive of M&E. We do not have a programme quality unit, but each project has its own M&E staff depending on the size of the project.* |

| Sub-domain 2: Human capacity for MEL | | |
|---|---|---|
| **What this involves** | | |
| *Having dedicated and adequate numbers of staff with the right skills to undertake MEL-related work.* | | |
| **What you said your organisation was like (10/86 respondents had insufficient data to report)** | | |
| **Beginning** (14/86 respondents) | **Progressing** (44/86 respondents) | **Established** (18/86 respondents) |
| **There** are no dedicated MEL roles<br><br>**There** are limited MEL resources (human, finance, time)<br><br>**MEL** work is undertaken by non-MEL staff on top of other responsibilities | **There** are dedicated MEL roles<br><br>**The** numbers of dedicated MEL staff are not adequate to undertake MEL related work, in particular the generation of evidence<br><br>**MEL** skills levels are for the most part low and people require continuous upskilling through capacity development, coaching and mentoring and ongoing technical and advisory support<br><br>**Need** for integration of MEL skills into other roles | **There** are dedicated MEL roles<br><br>**The** numbers of dedicated MEL staff are increasing but more are needed to undertake MEL-related work<br><br>**Ongoing** MEL upskilling of existing staff is needed |
| **Example quotes** | | |
| *We don't have a dedicated MEL role; we have four sector planners of whom each is responsible for monitoring their own individual sectors.* | *There are enough people supporting MEL, but the skills required for effective oversight and management of MEL activities throughout project life is lacking and needs continuous planning to support capacity strengthening.* | *We have taken four years to develop a dedicated role of MEL advisor (or PMEL) + Planning. These are funded through various forms, core and project funding. The teams that have experienced the value are now also advocating for MEL officers to support the advisors.* |

## Sub-domain 3: MEL planning

### What this involves

Having a costed MEL plan linked to the organisation's strategic plan and/ or the national development plan and secured funding to ensure the implementation.

### What you said your organisation was like (7/86 respondents had insufficient data to report)

| Beginning (12/86 respondents) | Progressing (35/86 respondents) | Established (32/86 respondents) |
|---|---|---|
| **In** general, some confusion between MEL frameworks (more of an indicator plan) and MEL plans (with roles and responsibilities, methodologies and timeframes for data collection)<br><br>**MEL** plans might exist for projects but, even if they do, their quality and implementation are sub-standard | **To** some extent, some confusion between MEL frameworks (more of an indicator plan) and MEL plans (with roles and responsibilities, methodologies and timeframes for data collection)<br><br>**MEL** planning is emerging beyond project level<br><br>**More** resources for MEL planning and implementation are available for big projects<br><br>**There** is a disconnect between organisational MEL planning intentions and organisational MEL planning implementation, which is lagging behind<br><br>**There** is an overall need to strengthen MEL planning at all levels | **To** some extent, some confusion between MEL frameworks (more of an indicator plan) and MEL plans (with roles and responsibilities, methodologies and timeframes for data collection)<br><br>**Established** MEL frameworks (some with clear roles and responsibilities, methodologies and timeframes for data collection) at project, programme or sector level, with line of sight in some instances to organisational/whole of government frameworks<br><br>**MEL** frameworks or plans are for the most part revised regularly |

### Example quotes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *(My country) has a master plan and it is something that our (MEL plan) should make use of.* | *We have a country strategy that we have looked at developing a MEL framework for early this year. It has not been finalised at this point.* | *(Our organisation) has a strong MEL framework in place for all programmes. It contributes to the (organisational) global indicators that reflect on some of the work we do, and from this indicator, we can also link to the Vanuatu Government National Sustainable Development Plan.* |

| Sub-domain 4: Partnerships to plan, manage or coordinate the MEL system | | |
|---|---|---|
| **What this involves** | | |
| *Various organisations work together at different levels to share the MEL work and share data.* | | |
| **What you said your organisation was like (8/86 respondents had insufficient data to report)** | | |
| **Beginning** (16/86 respondents) | **Progressing** (38/86 respondents) | **Established** (24/86 respondents) |
| **No** group of MEL practitioners, or group set up but inactive | **MEL** partnerships exist at different levels to coordinate and collaborate (internal to organisations, with academia, national groups brought together based on MEL topics, groups of consortium/implementing partners)<br><br>**National** MEL partnerships emerging to coordinate MEL efforts<br><br>**Partnerships** to operationalise regional policy MEL at national level emerging<br><br>**Capacity** to nurture or coordinate MEL relationships varies from country to country and among organisations<br><br>**Some** reliance on external MEL technical assistance | **Established** MEL partnerships exist at different levels, meeting regularly to coordinate and collaborate (national coordination with governmental, non-governmental and community partners, cross-sectoral/agency steering committees, MEL networks and peer groups available at national, regional and global levels)<br><br>**Regional** policies and their MEL frameworks are guiding the MEL work of countries and sectoral partners<br><br>**Pacific** specific MEL networks are established<br><br>**Some** reliance on external MEL technical assistance |
| **Example quotes** | | |
| *None in place that I am aware of.* | *We partner with SPC SPL and FAME plus UQ for MEL oversight and planning, plus consortium partners to implement MEL, and coaches to identify stories, as well as communications practitioners to record stories. However, this can be improved by adapting the most significant change methodology to empower participants to capture and tell their own stories with their smart phones. The stories then get reviewed by a panel who analyse why each significant change is profound for them, as opposed to choosing one change to publish. This information may be more useful for practitioners and donors.* | *At the regional level, plans are governed and led by Pacific heads of health who meet annually and Pacific health ministers who meet biennially. The healthy islands monitoring framework provides a unifying MEL framework, guiding the work of countries and health partners.* |

| Domain 2: Collecting, verifying and analysing data | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Sub-domain 5: Monitoring** | | |
| **What this involves** | | |
| *Staff with MEL responsibilities collect, analyse, and report on data regularly as part of the implementation of an intervention.* | | |
| **What you said your organisation was like (3/86 respondents had insufficient data to report)** | | |
| **Beginning** (17/86 respondents) | **Progressing** (39/86 respondents) | **Established** (27/86 respondents) |
| **Monitoring** data are collected to meet external stakeholders' evidence needs<br><br>**Capacity** to analyse the data collected is a roadblock, analysis needs to be practised more | **Monitoring** data are collected (more systematically at project level)<br><br>**Monitoring** data collected are of varying quality<br><br>**Sources** of evidence when cited are of varying degrees of robustness in relation to baseline information<br><br>**Monitoring** data storage is an issue<br><br>**Monitoring** data aggregation is emerging<br><br>**Monitoring** data collected are used for reporting (on a project or programme by grantees, on national development plans within the government machinery)<br><br>**Resources** and capacity to analyse monitoring data to use for reporting and programme quality improvements lag behind | **Monitoring** data collection, analysis and reporting is viewed as important to the organisation<br><br>**Monitoring** data collected assesses implementation progress, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and learning |
| **Example quotes** | | |
| *Data are often collected to meet external stakeholder information needs.* | *Data from different projects are being collected from all ministries and organisations and consolidated to a singular database (KIVA database) to easily monitor and report on the progress of each project.* | *We do have indicators as targets but are also analysing our collected data to ascertain programme usefulness, compatibility of content with Pacific fisheries leadership capacity needs, ability to apply the same programme methodology and design in other sectors, impact of coaching on participation leadership journey, identification and confirmation of gaps and triangulation with MEL to sense-check.* |

| Sub-domain 6: Regional, national and sub-national databases | | |
|---|---|---|
| **What this involves** | | |
| *Staff can draw on regional, national and sub-national databases to supplement data collected and analysed in their organisation.* | | |
| **What you said your organisation was like (10/86 respondents had insufficient data to report)** | | |
| **Beginning** (12/86 respondents) | **Progressing** (48/86 respondents) | **Established** (16/86 respondents) |
| **Awareness** of ability to contribute to and access databases is an issue: "Data is almost like a politicised issue"<br><br>**Civil** society organisations are not recognised as data providers at national, regional and global levels | **There** are databases for projects or programmes, but they might not be consolidated<br><br>**National** databases are hard to access/not shared<br><br>**There** are sensitivities linked to data access (in particular at national level)<br><br>**National** data are not sufficiently disaggregated<br><br>**Regional** databases are emerging; they support reporting but more complex analysis to inform design and decision-making is not performed<br><br>**There** are too many databases that are not interoperable<br><br>**SPC's** Pacific Data Hub brings together different datasets | **Sectoral,** partner, civil society organisations, private sector or sub-national databases contribute to the generation of M&E reports used for decision-making and improved service delivery |
| **Example quotes** | | |
| *There is a huge disconnect between our organisation, as a civil society, and government departments/agencies that have data. We are not included – from data collection to data analyzing to data reporting. However, we are invited to sit in on meetings with donors and funders to show external stakeholders that we are "included".* | *The national data provider here in Vanuatu, the statistics office, does have data but not detailed enough to be of great use. Data are very general and so there is the challenge of having to get actual statistics from within communities that we work in as well. A great example is the community profiling work that the resilience team is currently rolling out in target areas of where the scope of programme is. This will enable a community and its leaders to prepare and respond to disasters more effectively.* | *M&E reports are generated from subnational government and development partners, the private sector and civil society organisations that are considered for decision-making and enhance improved service delivery.* |

| Sub-domain 7: Evaluation | | |
|---|---|---|
| **What this involves** | | |
| *Organisations undertake evaluations in priority areas for intervention improvement and learning.* | | |
| **What you said your organisation was like (14/86 respondents had insufficient data to report)** | | |
| **Beginning** (10/86 respondents) | **Progressing** (41/86 respondents) | **Established** (21/86 respondents) |
| **There** are no resources and capacity for evaluations<br><br>**Reviews** and evaluations are led by donor partners | **Minimum** standards or national guidelines for evaluations are emerging<br><br>**Evaluations** are well resourced at project level, to a lesser extent at programme or divisional/sectoral level<br><br>**Evaluations** are donor-led and/or conducted externally, which limits ownership to act on recommendations and apply learning<br><br>**Lack** of clear theories of change and baseline information to underpin evaluations<br><br>**Limited** impact evaluations conducted | **Minimum** evaluation standards, guidelines and systems exist (including mandatory evaluation requirements based on project size or scope, and procedures to scope, commission and manage evaluations)<br><br>**Evaluations** are planned at project or programme design phase<br><br>**Independent** evaluations are conducted for high-impact projects<br><br>**Use** of a variety of evaluators (local, government agencies, international consultants)<br><br>**Limited** co-implementation of evaluations for skills transfers to project or programme staff<br><br>**Some** use of evaluation reports to influence government decisions, policies, plans, budgets and service delivery |
| **Example quotes** | | |
| *Most reviews and evaluations are led by our donor partners (EU, Australia, ADB, etc.)* | *Evaluations are mandatory for all projects and programmes above a specific limit of budget as well as a timeframe. This is done independently, but yes, we sometimes struggle with the availability of budget and resources.* | *(The programme) and grantees deal with evaluation well. Generally, only the largest and most established grantees commission evaluations of their programmes and there are established systems for scoping and tendering out evaluations and managing these.* |

| Sub-domain 8: Gender and equity considerations in MEL | | |
|---|---|---|
| **What this involves** | | |
| *Gender and equity are addressed in all MEL activities to understand differential effects of interventions, especially effects on those who are disadvantaged or excluded.* | | |
| **What you said your organisation was like (10/86 respondents had insufficient data to report)** | | |
| **Beginning** (19/86 respondents) | **Progressing** (32/86 respondents) | **Established** (25/86 respondents) |
| **Obtaining** disaggregated data is a challenge<br><br>**Gender** is mostly understood in fixed categorical terms<br><br>**Some** gender and equity considerations at project or programme design | **Gender** equity and social inclusion policies are emerging that guide the integration of these elements in programming, including MEL<br><br>**Limited** gender and equity needs assessments<br><br>**There** are sensitivities to collecting sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression data<br><br>**Data** collected might include specific components on gender and disability<br><br>**Some** efforts made to address gender inequality through reporting disaggregated data | **Established** gender or disability inclusion frameworks that guide the integration of these elements in programming, including MEL<br><br>**There** are programmes specifically addressing gender inequality<br><br>**Other** programmes are also designed to address gender or equity considerations<br><br>**There** are specific gender or equity indicators in MEL frameworks (often called cross-cutting)<br><br>**Data** aim to identify the root causes and barriers to effect gender and equity changes<br><br>**Qualitative** analysis and reflections are used to complement quantitative data analysis |
| **Example quotes** | | |
| *We have just recruited a GESI Facilitator to support our efforts in this area. Our MELF may need rethinking to fully capture the intersecting inequalities and how it relates to the work we do, including an improvement of tools and processes. GESI is a central to our MELF but now needs practical steering on a-day-to-day basis.* | *Recently the survey done in the IVA has been modified to have women and disabilities components in it.* | *Core to (the organisation's) work is to ensure that women's and girls' rights in remote, rural and disadvantaged areas are respected in their homes and communities, and also ensure they can exercise their rights, with equal and increasing opportunities. This is contributing to (our organisation's) development goals but also to the global indicator to ensure women's voices are respected, heard and acted upon.* |

| Domain 3: Using data for decision-making | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Sub-domain 9: Use of MEL** | | |
| **What this involves** | | |
| *MEL data are used for decision-making about interventions and investments.* | | |
| **What you said your organisation was like (9/86 respondents had insufficient data to report)** | | |
| **Beginning** (10/86 respondents) | **Progressing** (30/86 respondents) | **Established** (37/86 respondents) |
| **Minimal** and basic MEL data are used for reporting<br><br>**Indicators** and theories of change are not documented for reporting | **MEL** data are used for reporting (sometimes seen as a burden)<br><br>**Other** MEL data use is dependent on the level of understanding, capabilities and leadership of potential users<br><br>**ME** data are informing the identification of problems to some extent<br><br>**Limited** learning data<br><br>**There** are systems and capacity issues in translating MEL data into decision-making and programme improvements | **Established** systems, policies, guidelines or minimum standards to support the use of MEL<br><br>**Ongoing** technical support, for instance through knowledge-sharing platforms and webinars, is provided to support implementation of the systems, policies, guidelines or minimum standards<br><br>**Potential** users appreciate the value of MEL data<br><br>**MEL** data are widely used to influence decision-making including policy formulation, programme design, planning, and monitoring service delivery, as well as reporting<br><br>**Adaptive** management is underpinned by adaptive MEL that supports programme redesign through the integration of traditional knowledge, storytelling |
| **Example quotes** | | |
| *For our NSDS, which is more the focus of our function (we also manage the Aid funds) we have mid-year and annual reports that provide very minimal and basic information. These are presented to cabinet and parliament annually. The framework for these reports as stated is not comprehensive and mainly narrative/qualitative in nature.* | *Within our organisation we have some teams that are beginning – they do not have leadership to encourage MEL so see it as a reporting burden; others have leadership, are getting resources to support MEL in various parts of the system – they can still see it at a corporate level as a reporting burden. At the corporate level, we are using MEL itself variously, monitoring is the weakest link, our evidence from evaluations is also of varied quality. We document learning from reflection, but we don't have a formal system to feed in back into design and decision making.* | *(Our organisation) has established systems, policies, guidelines & minimum standards supporting programme quality MEL. These are freely available internally within a knowledge-sharing platform with webinars for implementation, etc. that are provided periodically.* |

| Sub-domain 10: Supporting the use of MEL | | |
|---|---|---|
| **What this involves** | | |
| *Data are collated and presented in a way that facilitates their use at all levels within the organisation.* | | |
| **What you said your organisation was like (4/86 respondents had insufficient data to report)** | | |
| **Beginning** (19/86 respondents) | **Progressing** (51/86 respondents) | **Established** (12/86 respondents) |
| **Improvements** to MEL data sharing are needed | **Limited** organisational culture of sharing MEL knowledge<br><br>**Limited** knowledge systems in place to make MEL data accessible at organisational level<br><br>**Dissemination** of MEL data through knowledge products emerging but could be better tailored to different users | **Gaps** in knowledge systems to make MEL data accessible at organisational level<br><br>**Consultation** processes take place to identify information needs of different users<br><br>**Wide** dissemination of MEL data through knowledge products adapted to different users, formats and media |
| **Example quotes** | | |
| *There could be improvements to MEL data sharing and increased evidence of how results have been reported* | *We need a better searchable library* | *(The programme) has a communications strategy and shares different knowledge products in several ways – both electronically and in print. MEL findings are just beginning, and will no doubt increase after the next cohort, which will then provide adequate data for analysis and comparison of impact after design adaptation. There is also a longer-term story board being collected over the lifespan of the programme, which will be analysed and shared at the end of the fifth year. There are also regular meetings of the programme Steering Committee and between the consortium and the donor.* |

# Charting the way forward

Generally, priorities and plans at both the individual and organisational levels and across all domains relate to the absence of and/or the presence of parts of a MEL system framework that requires developing, strengthening, enhanced understanding, establishing, learning and or improving MEL in the Pacific region. This clearly shows a demand for MEL and the desire to supply MEL services, as highlighted in the summary of MEL system assessments and triangulated by the interviews, stories from the Pacific MEL convening, and in the construction of individual *rebbilibs* by participants at the convening.

An analysis of frequencies by priorities and plans by domain revealed a higher number of responses against **Domain 1: People, partnerships and planning** compared to Domains 2 and 3, which focus on **Collecting, verifying and analysing data** and **Using data for decision making** respectively. Despite this, there is an **urgency to build new and or strengthen existing structures and processes that are supportive of MEL** to create an enabling MEL culture for all staff, suggestive of enhanced MEL at the organisation[12] level. Individual priorities and plans vary by maturity level, **indicative of interest, influence, resourcing and implementation levels** of organisations, which influence motivation and confidence levels.

# Key priorities and plans

When participants were asked to document an open-ended question about their MEL plans and priorities, there were no explicit responses on priorities and plans related to Sub-domain 6: Use of regional, national and sub-national databases, and Sub-domain 8: Equity considerations in MEL. This may suggest a lack of capacity for staff to access databases to supplement data collected and analysed by their own organisations. This may also be true for Sub-domain 8, where organisations do not specifically address gender and equity in their MEL activities. Deeper analysis on these two sub-domains is required to fully understand the strengths and gaps, priorities and plans.

The following section presents individual priorities and plans, as well as organisational priorities and plans, as per direct and indirect responses.[13] Given the quantity of responses and multiple themes emanating from the data, phrases and words that are significant are captured in bold letters, making it easy to determine what the key themes are.

## Domain one: People, partnerships and planning

Individual priorities responses focused on **simplifying MEL; developing MEL tools, frameworks and systems**; and strengthening analysis capabilities for reporting and **translating data into information**, as being of relevance at the national and sectoral levels. Regarding individual plans, there are **two systems-related actions** that emanate from the responses. **At one level**, respondents plan to develop MEL tools, and **at another level**, they plan to strengthen existing systems. This includes setting goals and objectives, developing theories of change and publishing manuals. Where there is existing capacity, actions are related to **improving and strengthening existing MEL systems** by developing **robust M&E plans and analyses**, improving quality assurance compliance, and meeting donor requirements and reporting by updating and **validating data**.

Organisation priorities showed that **human resources and systems and processes existed** to support the use of MEL, systems are in place for implementation of activities and reporting, and, in a handful of organisations, MEL is mature enough to **prioritise for adaptive management** and to adopt a **culture of learning**. These demonstrate **mainstreaming MEL**, advocating MEL and influencing standards amongst partners, strengthening systems and processes and: "ensuring that systems and processes for MEL are responsive to the local context without burdening partners and programme staff with additional work".[14]

Organisation plans refer to the importance of **partner readiness** by way of capabilities and resource availability, including **MEL personnel coordination**,

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12    MEL framework rubric

13    Respondents of the Priorities and Plans Survey Questionnaire
14    Quote by Respondent 1

enhancing communication and information products, **developing and enforcing policies**, and keeping approaches simple and appropriate to readiness levels.

Individual **priorities vary by stakeholder type**. For example, a private sector company identified learning about **simple tools that work**, using more **digital storytelling** and conducting **more surveys** as individual priorities. The academic institution listed an interest in **establishing partnerships to investigate sustainability of outcomes in development**, integrating **outcomes harvesting** and **realist evaluation** and better methods for investigating mechanisms and the effects of context on mechanisms. These priorities and plans denote a well-established MEL system framework at the institution. The individuals working at the inter-governmental organisation prioritised **data visualisation**, **impact evaluation**, aligning guidelines, strengthening cohesive understanding of MEL, improving **programme and project MEL systems**, **managing evaluations** and learning more about **measuring effectiveness** and achieving outcomes, **designing infographics**, simplifying M&E requirements, providing simple and appropriate MEL tools, consistently applying MEL processes across all divisions, promoting **leadership for planning and MEL** in the Pacific, **documenting Pacific approaches** that are available in easy to access and easy to use formats, reviewing: "whether we are doing the right things to get the outcomes that we want by project and programme, is our training/ capacity development working" [15], linking MEL to programming, strengthening programme cycle management, and supporting partners to focus on outcomes.

Responses focused on **making improvements to existing systems and processes,** e.g. developing basic and advanced MEL tools. A few individuals and organisations seek to **develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks at sectoral and national levels,** suggestive of competent MEL personnel in the region and the existence of MEL strengths. Responses are focused on tools, framework and system development. **Strengthening analysis capability** for reporting and **translating data into**

**information** is relevant at sectoral and national levels. **Advocacy for MEL practice and evidence** is an important enabler for an evaluative culture.

Responses at the organisation priorities show that **human resources and systems and processes exist** to support the use of MEL; systems are in place for implementation of activities and reporting; and a handful of organisations are knowledgeable about prioritising MEL for adaptive management and adopting a culture of learning. These are useful to mainstreaming MEL, advocacy and influencing standards across partners, growing a culture of learning, strengthening systems and processes, and ensuring compliance and quality assurance.

Organisational plans include an acknowledgement of **ensuring MEL is contextual and systems and processes are developed based on readiness,** i.e. capabilities. It also shows the importance for coordination of MEL personnel; measuring development impact better; strengthening communication and development of information products; developing policies and enforcing these; and keeping approaches simple and appropriate to meet readiness levels without stretching to use complex MEL.

Responses focused on **building the MEL capacity of both internal and external stakeholders** to use simple MEL tools, how to conduct training on monitoring and reporting progress and performance, on new MEL techniques; and hiring MEL personnel to perform multiple tasks, including to implement adaptive management techniques, coordinate monitoring activities; and engage in professional development, e.g. evaluators' workshop. The responses featured capacity building, i.e. assessing capabilities, resources – including time; learning about available resources to achieve effectiveness and outcomes, such as **improving evaluation design**, analysis and reporting; re-prioritising and reflecting on ways to value add and influencing adaptive management for MEL; providing training, as well as complementing existing training conducted by stakeholders on specific systems, e.g. in the education sector and MEL techniques; **seeking out a mentor**,

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15   Respondent #2

as well as **becoming a MEL mentor**; participating in professional development activities, e.g. emerging evaluators training/ learning workshops; **developing resources,** e.g. a SOP and a programme quality manual; and recruiting MEL personnel.

Developing **strategic and operational plans**; monitoring, evaluating and learning were the key findings for MEL planning. **Using and testing MEL systems** personally and professionally requires MEL for programming, managing baseline information for record and reporting purposes, developing tools and supporting the use of lessons learned. Key themes are **setting national indicators**, aligning different level plans; and using findings and learning for improvement of existing and future MEL systems, plans, strategies and activities. Plans at the individual level are to assist and improve existing MEL practice, such as data collection (survey); developing systems to measure, evaluate and report on strategic plans, such as developing a **results framework for the new strategic plan**; and adhering to donor and organisation MEL obligations.

The key themes are to **build, grow and nurture strategic relationships with multiple partners,** i.e. to learn and implement strategic engagement plans; improve reporting requirements; and build the capacity of stakeholders; establish **expert groups**; and build stakeholder capacity, including **role modelling off other partners**. Key themes are to establish a **coordinated approach to MEL** with all stakeholders; implement systems, e.g. reporting systems; provide consistent feedback and recommendations for improved performance; grow partnerships in research and evaluation; **re-build and strengthen partnerships** with multiple partners for multiple purposes.

## Domain Two: Collecting, verifying and analysing data

Key themes were: **improving monitoring tools and strategies** and aligning activities with intended outputs and outcomes; improving monitoring of projects, plans, programmes; engaging in **research to improve strategies** and providing learning of MEL at organisational level; **comparing findings to**

**measure impact**; and improving project monitoring to **ensure national priorities are accurately identified**.

A key theme was **managing evaluations**. This included: how to conduct and manage evaluations **using data collection tools,** such as surveys, and developing knowledge tools, e.g. infographics; **evaluating plans**; upskilling with the capabilities to develop evaluation frameworks; conducting evaluations; and improving systems for **future planning**. Other themes related to evaluating strategies, public goods, programmes and projects; measuring impact; improving evaluation outcomes; and **building capacity for indigenous evaluation**.

Key themes were: reviewing existing processes and systems for improvement; **valuing reflections** to improve learning; strengthening consistency in understanding MEL; developing policies that require **accurate and relevant data** to inform these; suggesting **use of evidence**; ensuring consistent understanding of MEL through improved use of MEL processes, e.g. reflections and learning; updating KPIs; updating and confirming MEL data; using **lessons learned** to improve MEL practice; and collaborating with partners to ensure accessibility of MEL data.

At the organisation level, key themes were: developing an M&E framework; demanding the use of evidence; **tracking and measuring progress**; **demonstrating results through reporting systems**; using evidence for policy development; using **MEL for adaptive management** to achieve better outcomes through learning and improving systems for future planning; aligning the **SDGs with national M&E frameworks** for implementation; assisting ministries in assessing and evaluating sector plans; developing, implementing and ensuring oversight of policies; reporting on ministries' annual work plans with a view to improvement; promoting the **active practice of MEL across the organisation**, developing innovations in MEL; and achieving the KPIs of the four-year strategic plan.

## Domain Three: Using data for decision-making

Key themes speak to improving MEL personal capacity in the use of tools, techniques and processes for MEL: growing partnerships for **increased collaboration and promotion of MEL**; capacity development at individual and organisation levels; monitoring project staff members' understanding and effectiveness of MEL; improving learning techniques and ensuring **community feedback mechanisms** with the project, which allows communities to voice concerns; advocating the importance and practice of MEL; learning how to **incorporate MEL into the ministry's strategic and operational plans**; working with implementing partners to update and confirm MEL data; strengthening individual MEL capacities to assist the team and organisation; improving **MEL data communication**; improving process to discuss and document lessons learned; **developing policies that are informed by evidence**; **learning from past failures and successes** to improve service delivery and to report on results; collating and analysing information from corporate reports for effective use; monitoring grant compliance; increasing the **impact of data training and tools**; increasing publications; and improving the annual results report.

Building the capacity of both internal and external stakeholders at multiple levels is a key priority – from the basic levels to the advanced, including in areas, such as **statistical capacity development** (a key aim of the Nadi MEL convening); gathering data; and **using evidence for policy development** (another key aim), implementation and risk management. Aligned with the organisation's priorities, plans also feature developing the capacity of both internal and external stakeholders to use data and evidence to **increase impact** and develop **innovation projects**.

## *Malie* – Relevancy and usefulness



**MALIE\*** Relevancy and usefulness
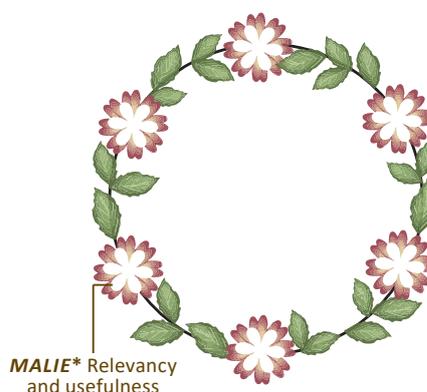
Below is an excerpt from the mission report[16] by members of the Pacific delegation who attended the 4th IDEAS Global Assembly from 30 September–4 October 2019, in Prague, Czech Republic.

Investment in Pacific MEL post-convening continued as a 12-member delegation from the Pacific actively participated in the 4th IDEAS Global Assembly, with the theme: *Evaluation for transformative change, bringing experiences of the global south to the global north* and the Third International Conference on Evaluating Environment and Development from 30 September to 4 October 2019 in Prague, Czech Republic, supported by MFAT, GIZ, USAID and SPC. Six SPC staff co-presented three conference sessions with three teams of national government representatives from Tonga, Fiji, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. The theme *"Evaluation for Transformative Change"* addresses the enormous challenge the global community is facing in ensuring significant changes for social, economic and environmental sustainability in development, as illustrated in the Sustainable Development Goals and the Agenda 2030 of the United Nations.

The **main objective** of the Pacific delegation was to present Pacific perspectives on MEL to the global community. Having a delegation meant that the Pacific presence and voice was not dominated by other regions or nations; the multiple experiences and perspectives brought by delegates was a real representation of the diversity of the region – they were able to bust myths that the Pacific is one

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16    Prague Mission Report

homogenous small island developing state; and holding the Pacific sessions using Pacific ways, e.g. *talanoa*, added to the authenticity of the presentations and the engagement with the audience.

Participation facilitated individual learning, especially for technical practitioners from Pacific national governments. Partnerships and relationships were strengthened amongst the participating Pacific island country representatives and implementing agencies, especially GEF, GCF and World Bank; evaluation specialists (particularly from the Caribbean region); national evaluation societies; and DFID and GIZ staff from the Bonn Office.

Participation and Pacific voice helped shape the Prague Declaration (refer to Annex 5) and, as a flow-on, the Pacific Community is now a partner to the International Development Evaluation Association.

Some **key highlights and insights** for the Pacific delegation (extracted from the Prague Mission Report) are shown below.

- "It is true that the Pacific is in an emergent phase with respect to its monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) capacity and practice."
- "There is much we can learn from other regions with respect to the demand and supply for evidence to support transformative change, to inform decision-making with respect to sustainable and resilient development. However, as much as we have to learn, the IDEAS Global Assembly also shone a light on what we have to offer the globe from our own learning and wisdom."
- "Despite our emergence, our practice and philosophy is grounded in national need (not independent evaluator opinion) which in itself, as a leaning towards being grounded, where possible, on the articulation of need from stakeholders, civil society and community, whose lives are affected by the decisions made or not, from the evidence generated."
- "The complex social, economic and environmental challenges facing the globe are also key sustainable development issues for the Pacific region. However, current regional actions with regard to the Framework on Resilient

Development in the Pacific, the Blue Pacific and Agenda 2030 and the associated MEL work being conducted is evidence that the issues of 'transformational change' is already key to the way forward for the Pacific region."

A number of global leaders in evaluation attended the Pacific sessions:

*"This session has restored my faith in this conference".*
- Elliott Stern,
  Professor of Evaluation Research,
  Lancaster University

*"You really hit it out of the park with that panel".*
- Megan G. Kennedy-Chouane,
  Head of Evaluation,
  Development Co-operation Directorate,
  OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)

*"I found the MEL conference in Prague to be an eye opener as we touched on the heart of global issues relating to sustainable development and the various factors that contribute to the challenges of monitoring, evaluation and learning. In addition, the conference provided a platform at a global scale to raise awareness of the Pacific context and perspectives. Currently I'm the M&E focal point for NDMO where I now work closely with consultants from the Ministry of Economy on the M&E matrix relating to Disaster Management. With respect to the 122 action items in the National Disaster Risk Reduction, I will utilise what I have learned for the conference to formulate the M&E matrix which tries to link all agencies and activities".*
- Mesake Mataitoga,
  National Disaster Management Office, Fiji; and Fiji Delegate to the 4th IDEAS Global Assembly

*Image 5. Members of the Pacific delegation, following sessions at the IDEAS Assembly in Prague*

## *Mafana* – Application, transferability and sustainability

**MAFANA\*** Application transferability and sustainability



All components come together to map the voyage ahead. The six thematic strategies and actions are relevant to individual, organisational, national, and regional demands and supply of evidence to inform decisions in the Pacific.

# The voyage ahead – the recommended strategies and actions

To inform the voyage ahead, it was important to draw from the data collected from a range of partners working in the MEL space in the Pacific region. The data collection exercises were conducted over seven months between July 2019 and January 2020, using multiple methods. The partners comprised representatives from Pacific Island governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, academic institutions, and implementing and donor partners. The methods used included pre-tested online surveys, telephone interviews and storytelling. Responses from these data collection exercises were analysed and clustered, based on the MEL system framework comprising the three domains and 10 sub-domains. This process of data triangulation reaffirms synergies between Pacific MEL strengths, opportunities, needs and challenges, and the priorities and plans at both the individual and organisational levels for MEL in the Pacific region, thereby giving credibility to the voyage ahead.

In looking across the many journeys shared in the development of this *rebbilib*, there are activities that are either common or connected to such an extent that six clusters emerged. These form six interconnected components to the voyage ahead towards strengthening contextually relevant and culturally responsive MEL capacity in the Pacific region.
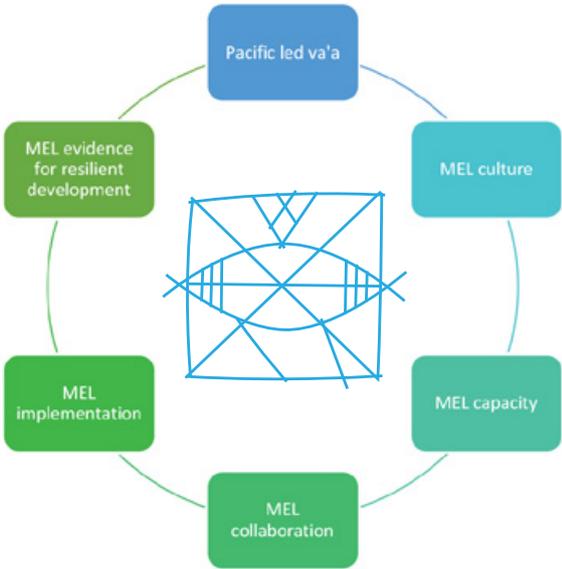


*Figure 5. Six components for the voyage ahead for Pacific MEL*

## Pacific-led *va'a* for co-ordination

Through *solesolevaki* (reciprocity, social capital, kinship and community relationships) strengthening the ownership, coordination and cohesion of MEL in the Pacific region will allow for greater impact for national and regional resilient development. The establishment of Pacific MEL governance arrangements, bringing together national governments, development partners, donors, civil society and academic institutions, was supported, both by participants to the MEL convening in subsequent calls to action (Annex 2) and by development partners (Annex 3) present at the inaugural MEL convening event. Pacific MEL governance arrangements will help ensure that all Pacific MEL stakeholders have a regular forum through which to provide direct inputs into MEL governance in the Pacific region, and to better coordinate their actions and resources in support of MEL development.

Examples of some specific needs for the Pacific MEL governance voyage ahead are found below.

- A Pacific consortium of organisations connected by agreed principles and vision
- A secretariat and consultative processes to co-ordinate and manage specific initiatives, relationships and collaborations, including negotiating priorities and arranging annual MEL convenings
- Development of a shared vision statement for Pacific MEL
- A code of conduct for external partners and consortium members

MEL culture: The rich insight from the multiple data collection exercises as part of the *Kakala* Research Framework all point to the crucial importance of building (for emerging or progressing individuals or organisations) or continuously strengthening (for more established ones) MEL organisational culture. This includes building MEL awareness, MEL literacy and MEL leadership across governments or organisations, developing MEL policies, frameworks,

guidelines, organisational charts, standards for the operationalisation of MEL, advocating for and mobilising resources to address MEL needs, and ensuring that the enabling conditions for MEL are monitored and reviewed to make adjustments where necessary.

Examples of some specific needs in relation to the MEL culture voyage ahead are found below.

- Enhancing Pacific MEL leadership
- Growing MEL literacy levels
- Practising the principles of good governance
- Mainstreaming MEL and responding to local context
- Establishing MEL units with dedicated and competent MEL officers
- Developing policies, frameworks, strategic plans, theories of change at both sectoral and national levels
- Establishing MEL standards and SOPs

MEL capacity: There is a strong recognition across the MEL convening partners of the central role that contextually relevant and culturally responsive MEL capacity development at the individual and institutional level will play in strengthening quality evidence generation in support of decision-making and accountability. The multiple data collection exercises all highlight the need to develop MEL capacity (where basic MEL capacity is currently lacking), as well as ensuring efforts are dedicated to continuously maintaining MEL knowledge and skills. MEL capacity involves not only knowledge and skills, but also the ability to apply these, including enabling organisational structures and culture. Partners emphasise that skills development is not only about trainer-led learning, but also peer learning, coaching, mentoring and self-directed learning that fit in with cultural ways of learning in the Pacific region.

Examples of some specific needs in relation to the MEL capacity voyage ahead are found below.

- Different entry points – including on the job, short courses, micro-qualifications, graduate programmes

- Directed at different users – MEL specialists, those with MEL responsibilities, senior leaders (e.g. inclusive MEL for responsible leadership)
- Blended learning support and authentic assessment/practical exercises – with follow up technical assistance, coaching, mentoring, peer learning
- Some short courses on specific topics, which include Pacific examples and presenters, run online as a trial to develop appropriate content and processes
- A graduate programme at USP (with support from partners, including ADB) – linked to resources being developed and curated
- Regional micro qualifications, using the train-the trainer approach with accredited training providers from across the Pacific region

MEL collaboration: A variety of MEL partnerships were brought to the fore by MEL convening partners that support the sharing of knowledge, collaboration and coordination efforts. Pursuing and expanding on the MEL partnerships and communities of practice already existing, as well as forging new ones, within countries across different MEL stakeholders, but also across the region and the globe, is seen as a necessary conduit for more efficient and effective MEL evidence generation, sharing and use.

Examples of some specific needs in relation to the MEL collaboration voyage ahead are found below.

- Annual MEL regional convenings to share examples, discuss emerging issues, provide some structured learning opportunities and reprioritise share knowledge and experiences and strengthen supportive networks
- Online and in-country communities of practice for sharing questions and suggestions that respond to local context, moderated and drawn on to inform the regional MEL convening and knowledge sharing
- Developing stakeholder/partnership engagement and management strategies, strengthening existing and establishing new partnerships using personal and professional networks
- Influencing and advocating cultural competence for MEL with all stakeholders and partners

- Extending partnerships in research and evaluation – with locals/nationals driving both
- Enhancing coordination and information sharing

MEL implementation: For emerging or progressing individuals and organisations that have taken part in the various data collection exercises, support is needed to develop or strengthen systems, processes and tools for MEL planning, and monitoring, evaluation and learning, and knowledge management, including data access and management. For more established partners, support is still required to enable the alignment of sometimes piecemeal MEL implementation efforts across government or organisational plans and strategies. In particular, attention to robust MEL planning (including appropriate resourcing, and the development of capacity, systems, processes and tools) should have a positive knock-on effect on monitoring, evaluation and knowledge management practice.

Examples of some specific needs in relation to the MEL implementation voyage ahead are found below.

- Utilising Pacific approaches to research and data collection methods, such as the framing of questions, who should come to the table, etc.
- Capitalising on and nurturing local, national, regional MEL expertise
- Undertaking more in-depth country-level assessments of existing MEL capacity to inform planning for country-level and regional level MEL capacity strengthening
- Developing M&E systems to track and measure progress
- Conducting and co-conducting baseline studies
- Designing and peer reviewing data collection methods and analyses
- Using and presenting data meaningfully to inform planning
- Creating and resourcing accessible databases at national level
- Developing management information systems to process data
- Designing and implementing reporting systems

- Understanding reporting requirements and writing reports (NSDP, SDG, VNR, regional sectoral frameworks)
- Developing and creating a cadre of Pacific evaluators
- Conducting and co conducting impact evaluations – transformative evaluation
- Extending indigenous evaluation
- Improving MEL data communication
- Developing or strengthening simple and advanced systems, processes and tools, e.g. digital storytelling and data visualisation products
- Exploring "better methods for investigating mechanisms and the effects of context on mechanisms"[17]
- Investigating sustainability of outcomes in development

Evidence for resilient development: While the data collected on the *rebbilib* journey shows established use of MEL evidence for reporting (more basic data at emerging or progressing levels), there is still some way to go to improve systematic use of MEL evidence for improving MEL systems and strategies, programming and decision-making. Focus on improving knowledge management and sharing, identifying the evidence needs of different users, and improving the development of tailored knowledge products, would support evidence-based decision-making for resilient development.

Examples of some specific needs in relation to the evidence for resilient development voyage ahead are found below.

- Linking MEL with integrated programming and transdisciplinary themes (e.g. climate change, pandemic crisis)
- Improving the utility of evaluation reports and recommendations for sectoral reporting, monitoring national sustainable development plans, and global commitments, including the SDGs
- Utilising national diagnostics and assessments to triangulate national needs for regional support
- Aligning country needs with regional MEL support plans and actions across implementing and donor partners

17   Respondents of the priorities and plans survey questionnaire

- Enhancing learning practices and use of lessons learned for improved performance and planning
- Consciously applying Pacific ways of being, ways of communicating, ways of learning and ways of knowing into regional MEL practice
- Creating and producing communications and knowledge products
- Contributing to the global transformative evaluation agenda[18] and the gLOCAL[19] efforts.

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18    The Prague Declaration on Evaluation for Transformational Change 2019 https://drive.google.com/file/d/145-9FBQ07fe1zjqVTgwYs19-IuhtRq8y/view [accessed 11 May 2020]
19    https://www.glocalevalweek.org/

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# Annex 1. Examples of MEL practice

The following case study examples of MEL practice are intended to showcase some of the existing MEL strengths and MEL approaches in different sectors, at different levels of a MEL system (individual, organisational, across organisations, regional) and involving individuals and organisations with different roles and responsibilities – doing it the Pacific way.

Some additional specific examples were documented, but the process of formal approval had not been completed by the time this document was released. Hence, they have not been included, in accordance with our agreements. There are many more examples we could have included and, indeed, it may be of interest to compile and share a wider range of examples from across the region over time.

## Case study 1. Developing an evidence-based culture and MEL capacity in the Pacific Community

The Pacific Community (SPC) is making significant investments in strengthening an evidence-based culture and capacity for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). An independent review of our MEL practices in 2013 recommended that we transform from predominantly short-term project-focused and activity-based reporting to assessing achievement of outcomes and lessons learned across SPC programmes.[20]

To guide our initial action, a roadmap informed increasing human resources, developing staff capacity in MEL and raising awareness about the difference we are making through our scientific and technical work – focusing on outcomes, not just activities. From these actions, we grew SPC's community of practice (MELnet) which is contributing to ownership of our results and learning and to an understanding of our organisational MEL needs.

To better understand and meet MEL needs, we have undertaken annual MEL needs surveys since 2017, trialling both strengths-based and gap identification approaches. In addition, annual MELnet capacity development workshops have been supporting the strategic direction of SPC, as well as responding to specific needs identified. Peer-to-peer learning is helping staff to develop tailored evidence-gathering approaches for programme design and monitoring. Our online MEL resources are increasingly being used by staff. Website analytics have shown spikes around mid-year reporting and when preparing for learning and results workshops. In 2019, unique page views of MEL resources increased by 33% from those in 2018.

However, at the 2018 MELnet annual workshop, it was agreed that our MEL practice could be more relevant and responsive if we leaned into our Pacific identity and shaped our MEL practices in Pacific ways of learning. This agreement was a critical first step in the process towards developing the 2019 Pacific MEL Convening. Using the Kakala Research Framework to shape the convening and grounding the sessions in Pacific approaches have been ground-breaking for SPC's own MEL practices and for the ways in which we work with our members on MEL.

The MEL diagnostic tool that was used to shape the discussions before, during and after the convening, as well as the resulting rebbilib is also providing a useful structure for SPC to consider its own MEL 'system'. It has demonstrated that we need to assess our own planning and MEL needs in a deeper and more coherent way. This learning has inspired SPC to develop a needs assessment instrument in relation to our policy framework – the Planning, Evaluation, Accountability, Reflection and Learning (PEARL) policy.

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20    Review funded by AusAID and undertaken by Rosalind David (August to December 2013).

***Case study 2. Making culturally appropriate MEL front and centre – the what and how***

The idea behind working towards culturally appropriate MEL stems from the desire to develop new and innovative approaches that are fit-for-purpose in a specific cultural context. To this end, the Pacific MEL Convening aimed to demonstrate the value of such an approach in the development space.

Key principles underlying the Pacific MEL Convening were cultural appropriateness and supporting Pacific ways of knowing and doing things. This example describes what it means to be culturally appropriate in the Pacific context and how the convening process drew on Pacific knowledge, cultures and experiences.

The biggest challenge in adopting culturally and contextually appropriate approaches and instruments remains the dominant paradigm or mindset that western ways of doing things are best and, thus all things Pacific are of marginal use or relevance. This leads to initiatives, activities and processes often requiring Pacific Islanders to adapt and blend their ways of knowing and being to fit western approaches.

The MEL convening set out some of the starting points to begin and keep Pacific cultures "front and centre", particularly in how MEL capacity was talked about, drawn on and further strengthened. Cultural appropriateness in working across the Pacific region requires a deep understanding of the nuances and contexts across the region. It demands that key partners possess a high level of cultural competence as the work entails a skilful weaving of core MEL principles and approaches with Pacific methodologies and methods.

As a new way of doing things in the MEL space, there is need for basic preparatory work that establishes a positive learning and practice environment. In the MEL convening, this meant strengthening and/or establishing relationships within the wider MEL community. In addition, assumptions needed to be unpacked, including the widely held belief that there is a lack of Pacific approaches and that Pacific MEL practitioners do not have the capacity themselves to begin to develop good blended practice approaches.

Drawing from good practice examples in Pacific education and research, the MEL convening drew on a team that brought a basket of experiences, knowledge and skills to the planning table. This involved those with expertise in western approaches to MEL, as well as Pacific Islanders versed in Pacific approaches and methods. The shared intention to establish a way of doing MEL better meant that all key stakeholders and partners worked hard to maintain respectful relationships and an open mind to trying new ways of doing MEL.

One of the concrete things that different stakeholders (donors/funders, external advisors or other external support – specifically linked to MEL capacity-strengthening support) can do to succeed in being culturally appropriate is to constantly question the contextual relevance and appropriateness of mainstream approaches. Key issues they need to consider include: (i) how to capture a more holistic understanding of what is, and what is not possible via mixed method approaches that equally value quantitative and qualitative methods and data; (ii) cultural competence and contextual awareness of needs, nuances and ways of being and doing; and (iii) creating mutually enriching spaces where Pacific and non-Pacific practitioners can come together to share experiences and engage in meaningful exchanges to enrich the development of blended Pacific-specific approaches to MEL.

### Case study 3. Donors doing things differently – supporting a locally-led, adaptive initiative

The five-year Pacific Fisheries Leadership Programme (PFLP) supports the Pacific's most prominent industry by improving the diversity and quality of leadership, management and cooperation across Pacific fisheries. It is aligned with the goals of the Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries and funded by the New Zealand Government. The programme is implemented by a consortium of partners, including the Pacific Community, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, the University of Queensland and the Centre for Adaptive Leadership. PLFP uses an adaptive programming approach, which means that its funders need to work with implementing partners and address accountability in a manner that is not business as usual. The programme is focused on real world issues and experiences and needs to adapt regularly to changing contexts and needs of the participants. The programme is set up to be modular and participants may engage in some, or all, of the modules. This example describes some of the key characteristics of relationships and processes that have made this way of working possible and the benefits of working this way.

Once partners agreed to follow an adaptive management approach, questions such as: "What are we learning from participant responses? What does this mean for improving delivery of the programme? What experiments shall we run to see if these changes improve outcomes?" are constantly asked. Data to answer those questions are obtained through consortium, coaching and facilitated reflection meetings. The data are analysed and triangulated to make evidence-based decisions about changes to the programme.

Partners also considered how best to communicate programme adaptations to MFAT representatives, recognising that changes were being made at different levels, therefore posing different risks for achieving success. For example, adaptations to how activities are undertaken are less risky than making changes to the programme's underlying theory of change. It was decided that lower risk adaptations are communicated through regular progress reports; higher risk adaptations are discussed with MFAT representatives through open, honest dialogue.

Another key element of the adaptive approach is the actively supportive role that MFAT representatives play in the programme – more as a partner than the more usual remote involvement. MFAT representatives spend time with all stakeholders and have regular conversations with the PFLP Team Leader and others in the consortium. They participated in all consortium team meetings – even when the discussion of challenges was on the agenda – and attended the Leadership for Change workshop held in Nadi in August 2019.

A crucial part of the adaptive management approach has been the embedding of responsibilities for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) in the roles of all consortium partners. As the project is implemented across multiple countries, the programme needs to be highly dynamic in different contexts. The inclusion of shared reflection processes is focused on bringing individual insights together for analysis and synthesis by all consortium members. For instance, all consortium members came together in mid-2019 for two days to reflect, learn and decide on what adaptations to make early in the programme and what small experiments could be done to trial a few different approaches to doing things. Reflections focused on the technical areas under the Leadership Programme – such as what subjects to teach and what coaching method to use – but also tackled more difficult issues –such as how to manage the loss of one consortium member, and how to communicate better as a consortium.

The adaptive management approach has included specific changes to the shape and delivery of the programme, intended to lead to improved outcomes. Some changes are small, based on course evaluations and data from coaching, e.g. changing the sequencing of modules in the course, reducing the number of external speakers, and adjusting the programme schedule. Other changes are more significant. For example, to address emerging participant recruitment issues, PFLP is experimenting with condensed workshop delivery at different times of the year. Another example, based on a survey of senior fisheries leaders, is the intention to add sample workshops and a special senior leadership team workshop to address issues of lack of participation at the most senior levels.

Putting adaptive management into practice within the PFLP consortium framework has produced both challenges and learnings. Creating a more open dialogue and partnership with the donor can feel risky because of increased visibility of potential programme failure. However, having a closer relationship has helped to build trust and a collective understanding of the programme and what it takes to implement it; it also enabled joint sharing of risks. Setbacks create opportunities for reflection and improvement – with the right mindset. Members became better in self-reflection, which generated improvements to the programme that might not have been made otherwise. Some external facilitation for joint reflection proved useful, enabling all consortium members to fully participate. At the same time, it was important to keep external facilitation minimal and focused on actions that led to improving the programme.

# Annex 2. Preliminary Calls to Action

We, the participants of the inaugural Pacific MEL Convening: Talanoa, Kakala, Rebbilib, based on discussions before and during this event, propose:

- that, in the spirit of the Solesolevaki* (reciprocity, social capital, kinship and community relationships), our talanoa continue to formalise partnerships and networks for strengthening capacity for contextually relevant and culturally responsive monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) making sure that no one is left behind;
- that, as important regional agreements, such as the Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Development, are implemented and new ones negotiated, particularly the Blue Pacific Narrative, commitment is sought from our leaders for MEL frameworks to enable collective articulation of results, monitoring and reporting on progress, and supporting local information and data use;
- that Pacific MEL capacity is valued as a key contribution to evidence generated in the Pacific, for the Pacific and by the Pacific to support our leaders' decision-making, accountability and ownership and to support our commitment to continuous improvement;
- that, as per the Duavata Statement, development partners strengthen the coordination and cohesion of MEL in the region to have greater impact for resilient regional development;
- that contextualised MEL professional development options be made available in the region to support MEL as a career pathway;
- that each participant continue to talanoa throughout the region to explore and map strengths, opportunities, challenges and needs for Pacific MEL capacity strengthening; and
- that, using the *Kakala* Research Framework, we develop a regional rebbilib for strengthening MEL capacity to be launched in early 2020.

*This is in Fijian (i-Taukei language) and we recognise that there are similar concepts in other Pacific Island countries and territories.

# Annex 3. Duavata Statement

A statement made by donor and implementing partners as an outcome of a round-table discussion during the MEL convening.

New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, World Bank, Independent Evaluation Department of the Asian Development Bank, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

- We, the development partners present at the inaugural Pacific Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Convening in Nadi, Fiji, 6-8 August 2019, agree to support monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) in the Pacific.
- We share a common vision for strengthening Pacific MEL capacity, statistics and other related capacity building activities.
- Presently, there is no structure for coordination of MEL support and we are keen to practise better information-sharing and coordination in the future among the partners.
- As such, we have discussed our current activities and will develop a process for identifying future opportunities to collaborate and coordinate to maximum impact and reduce duplication.
- As partners, we are open to learning from countries and other stakeholders on strengths and needs, and how we can continue to respond in contextually relevant and culturally responsive ways.
- We agree on the high value in this inaugural MEL convening as a useful strategy for Pacific-led MEL to support evidence-based policy and decision-making.
- We support a reconvening of this conversation: *talanoa, kakala,* and *rebbilib* and would like to have a donor and development partner round-table included in future convening.

# Annex 4. Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) options and possible actions

## 1. WHERE DO WE WANT TO BE? Our shared Vision / Mission

| Options | Possible actions |
|---|---|
| • Clarifying what our shared vision / mission is for MEL in the Pacific<br>• Clarifying how different stakeholders can contribute to the shared vision / mission for MEL in the Pacific<br>• Adopting a regional MEL agreement | • Organise a second MEL convening<br>• Widen the network of MEL contributors to include governments, CSOs, universities, etc. who adopt and commit to a shared vision / mission for MEL in the Pacific<br>• Request individual/organisational adoption of the regional MEL agreement |

## 2. WHERE ARE WE NOW? Our current situation

| Options | Possible actions |
|---|---|
| **STOCKTAKE**<br>• Clarifying where strengthening of individual skills, knowledge and attitudes (KSA) is needed<br>  ○ Self-assessment: Individual reflection on one's skills, knowledge and attitudes related to MEL competencies<br>  ○ Peer-assessment: Review of competencies or performance by peers (can be in reciprocal pairs or not)<br>• Stocktake of existing MEL capacity or MEL system performance – at organisational, national or regional level<br>  ○ Collaborative MEL assessment | • Compare, contrast and adapt tools for the Pacific context; trial and revise<br>• Establish a process/structure for 'assessments' at individual, organisational, regional levels<br>• Support and/or participate in 'assessments' (e.g. UNICEF/ADB mapping of capacity to report on SDGs) |
| **MAPPING AND SHARING OF EXISTING RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES**<br>• Calendar of MEL training events<br>• Calendar of MEL conferences and other events<br>• Inventory of organisations involved in MEL<br>• Register of experts available to provide advice/expert review – related to particular sectors, methods, challenges<br>• Toolboxes of MEL processes and methods – including when to choose them and how to use them well<br>• Examples of good practice in MEL (and examples of where it went wrong) – with information about how it was done, why it was done that way, and how it turned out | • Develop a shared calendar of training and other MEL events<br>• Develop specific toolbox for an organisation/sector/country<br>• Further develop BetterEvaluation toolbox (organised around the Rainbow Framework) to better suit MEL in the Pacific (e.g. specific methods, more Pacific examples, customised portal/entry point)<br>• Document examples of good MEL practice and use directly or in courses/learning events<br>• Organise an event to share lessons from when MEL went badly |

## 3. HOW DO WE WANT TO GET TO OUR INDIVIDUAL, ORGANISATIONAL AND REGIONAL DESTINATIONS? What to keep doing, what to stop doing, what to start doing?

### 3.1 REGIONAL / NATIONAL

| Options | Possible actions |
|---|---|
| **REFERENCE POINTS FOR PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE** | |
| • **Ethical guidelines**: An agreement on the rules of behaviour when conducting, managing and using MEL. Also referred to as a code of conduct, code of ethics, code of practice | • Share examples (with commentary on how they were developed, how they are being used) of these reference documents |
| • Ensure ethical conduct: Establish ethical procedures for MEL (e.g. review committees) in line with the national and international requirements and ensure adherence with those procedures, including complaints procedures | • Adapt existing documents (e.g. evaluation competencies) for MEL in the Pacific |
| • MEL standards: Core national or internationally agreed good practice for conducting MEL | |
| • MEL policy: Outlines the definition, concept, role and use of MEL within an organisation | |
| • MEL overview – brief explanation of what MEL is for communities and others new to MEL (e.g. project officers who collect data for MEL as part of their role) | |
| • MEL careers – establish national standards for M&E positions as well as career tracks for M&E in the public sector | |
| • MEL guidelines for those conducting or managing MEL | |
| • MEL competencies – the skills, abilities, knowledge, experience, and/or qualifications that an individual with MEL responsibilities is expected to have, depending on their role in the MEL process. | |
| • Position descriptions – for MEL-focused positions, for MEL aspects of other positions | |
| • MEL partnerships – establish formal partnerships between organisations to collaborate around MEL | |
| • Data-sharing to support MEL – develop agreements about timely access to data, including MEL data and statistical databases | |
| **QUALITY REVIEW** | |
| • Awards – for good MEL, good MEL systems, good use of MEL | • Document examples of this |
| • Expert advice – on demand as required | • Develop process/structure to do this within an organisation/sector/country/region |
| • Expert review – of evaluation plans, designs and reports | |
| • Peer review – review of MEL practice and products by a peer (can be done reciprocally in pairs) | |
| • Organisational/national MEL technical working group – to review performance and develop strategies to improve | |

## 3.2 ORGANISATIONAL

| Options | Possible actions |
|---|---|
| **ORGANISATIONAL options** | |
| • MEL resourcing – develop or adapt a MEL costing tool and train staff in the use of it; embed appropriate costing for MEL in project and organisational budgets, including covering costs of engaging in communities (*kava* ceremonies), and costs of specific technical expertise<br>• MEL infrastructure – develop budgets and strategies to secure infrastructure needed for MEL, including access to data collection technology, analytical software, databases, etc.<br>• Data-sharing to support MEL – develop agreements about timely access to data, including MEL data and statistical databases<br>• Data-sharing from MEL – Ensure that MEL includes appropriate procedures for data-sharing, including with communities | • Document examples of doing this<br>• Develop processes/structures for doing this |

## 3.3 INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES (KSA)

| Options | Possible actions |
|---|---|
| **Courses: virtual, face-to-face, blended**<br>• Self-paced learning: Viewing learning materials, such as recorded webinars, on demand.<br>• Short courses: sector specific, method specific, including 'soft skills' as well as technical skills, for those doing, managing or using MEL (including communities)<br>• Graduate programmes in MEL: certificate, masters<br>• Organisational cohort: tailored courses for particular organisations/groups within organisations integrated with other approaches to apply new knowledge to practice | • Run existing courses or adapted versions locally or virtually<br>• Develop customised courses for specific sectors, countries, sub-regions, methods, types of MEL<br>• Develop a Pacific-based graduate programme in MEL<br>• Develop a pool of MEL learning resources that can be used and adapted for use with organisations and communities |
| **Expert-led approaches: virtual, face-to-face**<br>• Coaching: Supporting an individual during training or development in order for them to reach a specific personal or professional goal.<br>• Mentoring: Supporting a less experienced colleague by sharing professional and personal experiences in order to support their development and growth<br>• Supervision of practice: A model of professional development from social work where everyone, even experienced practitioners, is expected to have regular debriefing and reflection with a senior person on issues in their work. | • Document and share examples of these<br>• Develop structures and processes to do/pilot this within an organisation/across organisations/ sectors/countries/sub-regions/region<br>• Document and share examples of good MEL practice in the Pacific region (to be used directly and through courses)<br>• Curate good examples of guidance on MEL in the Pacific region and elsewhere<br>• Translate existing materials into locally useful languages<br>• Develop locally suitable guidance on MEL |

**Peer-led approaches**

- Community of practice: Supporting a group of people with a common interest or concern to share and learn through a series of interactions, either face to face or virtually (or both), reflecting the social nature of human learning.

- Evaluation associations: voluntary professional associations for those who conduct and manage MEL

- Online groups: email discussion groups, social media groups (e.g. Viber, FaceBook, LinkedIN)

- Learning Circle: Allows a group of individuals to meet and explore a particular issue and learn from each other in the process

- Learning partnerships: Involve structured processes over several years to support learning in a defined number of organisations working on similar programmes, usually facilitated by a third-party organisation.

- Reflective practice: Involves an individual reflecting on their work, allowing them to learn from their own experiences and insights and engage in a practice of continual learning.

**Placement approaches**

- Exchange visits

- Fellowship: An extended position that provides paid employment and support for people who have completed formal coursework in MEL

- Internship: A paid or unpaid entry-level position that provides work experience and some professional development

- Secondment – short term work placement in another organisation – in same country or elsewhere

**CODE OF CONDUCT FOR EXTERNAL SUPPORT (funders, consultants/advisors)**

- Ensuring cultural competency
- Valuing Pacific knowledges
- Supporting Pacific-led approaches and ways of working
- Supporting for the longer term
- Reducing unnecessary duplication of effort; harmonising where possible

- Develop donor agreements (e.g. *Duavata* agreement)
- Hold regular donor round-table meetings to share plans and learning
- Harmonise accountability requirements to reduce reporting burden

# Annex 5. Prague Declaration on Evaluation for Transformational Change

**(Adopted on Friday 4 October 2019)**

We, the evaluators, commissioners, parliamentarians and other evaluation users, gathered in the IDEAS Global Assembly and the Third International Conference on Evaluating Environment and Development, recognise the need and urgency of systemic change from local to global levels to address the global crises endangering our future. Having discussed the role of evaluation in promoting learning, systemic and transformational change, we agree on the following statements.

**1. Promote transformational evaluation for the Sustainable Development Goals**
We commit to evaluations that help us learn, understand and support the transformational and systemic changes needed in our countries and the world, as agreed upon in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. A sustainable balance between the social, economic and environmental domains is crucial in light of the existential threats of the climate crisis, mass extinction of species, growing local and global inequity, and ultimately unsustainable use of the resources of the planet.

**2. Work in partnership**
We will promote partnerships among evaluators, based on applied ethic codes and professional standards, and on mutual trust. At the same time, we commit to engage and recognise new evaluators and collaborators from many different disciplines and fields of work, including young and emerging evaluators, students and interns in evaluation teams whenever possible, in order to promote mutual learning and to discover and leverage new views and skills.

**3. Explore power relations and promote inclusiveness**
We will deal sensitively and effectively with the unequal power relations that are apparent throughout intervention and evaluation processes. We commit to applying approaches that include the marginalised, and to respecting the need to engage local stakeholders in consultations about the purpose of evaluations, evaluations questions, and preliminary conclusions and recommendations. Looking towards a connected future of evaluation, we commit to co-designing and co-conducting evaluations that include indigenous and local ways of knowing with conventional and transformational methodologies.

# The Pacific MEL Convening
## TALANOA | KAKALA | REBBILIB
### talking, exploring and mapping