[PHOTO]

[Project Name]
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan

By [Authors' names]

The Nature Conservancy

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Acronyms

[ADD]

Change log

Version	Date	Changes
1	1 Jan 2022	First full draft
2	xxx	Added...
3	xxx	Changed...

Summary

[After you have completed your plan, we encourage you to complete this summary section highlighting:
1. What are the questions you are trying to answer over the next 1-3 years?
2. What is your main hypothesis for how your project will make a change in the world?
3. What are your top few indicators that you will monitor to track project implementation and outcomes?
4. How will you use this information to help manage the work, make decisions, influence others, report to donors and interested parties, etc.?
5. Who are the main people responsible for the plan and using the information?]

Introduction

This is the monitoring, evaluation and learning plan for the [Project Name] project that started on [Date] and ends on [Date]. This plan lays out the rationale, activities, and costs for the project's monitoring and evaluations and links these to the project's learning activities.

The project's stated *goal* is [Add from theory of change].

[Add a paragraph covering the project's location and problems being addressed.]

Theory of Change

A theory of change states the logic and assumptions of how the project's goal will be achieved; it shows the causal pathways and the means to the ends.

[For guidance on developing a theory of change, see the slides here in English, Spanish and Portuguese: https://tnc.box.com/s/g0n4omxa6zgz673cghtoxfbbxjoelxhp]

[For examples of theory of change visualizations in English, Spanish and Portuguese, see the folder here: https://tnc.box.com/s/s2yq3hzbj3zlh0trwol10q0qncqejcm9]

Graphic theory of change

Example Theory of Change: Tropical Peatlands

Link to TNC priorities
Climate change: Peatlands store more carbon than any other vegetation type in the world including forests, and when they are drained, they emit large amounts of CO_2. Currently, 5.6% of all anthropogenic CO_2 emissions come from peatlands.

Co-benefits (optional)		Better air quality	Increasing biodiversity	Cleaner drinking water	
Goal			By 2030, reduce CO_2 emissions from peatlands by 0.1 gigatons per year in the project area		Could be better
Outcomes	100,000 ha reforested and under improved management	100,000 ha rewetted and under improved management	50,000 ha under improved management	20,000 people benefiting from sustainable place-based economic opportunities	
Intermediate Results	Trees replanted	Artificial drainage stopped	Adaptive management of peatlands that cannot be rewetted	Carbon project established	
Activities	Restoration	Protection	Community support	Market mechanisms	
Problems	GHG emissions	Biodiversity loss	Soil erosion · Fire frequency increase	Ag expansion	Poor drinking water quality

Assumptions
A. If trees are replanted on the peatland, it will help protect the peat from erosion, boost biodiversity, and sequester CO_2.
B. If artificial drainage is stopped, it will allow the peatlands to rewet, stop emitting CO_2 and end frequent fires.
C. If communities support peatland conservation, then the peatlands that cannot be rewetted will be adaptively managed.
D. If a community-based carbon project is implemented, it will provide a financial incentive to protect the peatland.
E. Replanting 100,000 ha of trees is sufficient to stop soil erosion and increase local rainfall.
F. Blocking the drainage channels at 6 points will cause the rewetting of 100,000 ha of peatland.
G. Adaptively managing the 50,000 ha already converted to agriculture to ensure soils stay as wet as possible will make the ag more sustainable.
H. Carbon revenues will be shared equitably in the community.

Figure 1: Theory of change visualization

Narrative theory of change
[Example of narrative theory of change]
[IF we restore drained peatlands and replant trees on peatlands, THEN we will reduce GHG emissions by 0.1 gigatons per year in the project area by 2030 BECAUSE stopping artificial drainage will rewet the peatlands thereby stopping GHG emissions, and planting trees will stabilize the soil, help restore biodiversity, and sequester carbon.]

[IF we build community support for peatland management and conservation through education and a verified carbon project, THEN communities can adaptively manage the agricultural areas that cannot be rewetted, and the community will benefit from carbon payments BECAUSE

providing a financial incentive will spur the communities to effectively manage and protect the peatlands.]

Monitoring

Monitoring approach

Monitoring and evaluation are linked but do different things. Monitoring answers the questions 'what is happening' and 'is the project doing things right (correctly)?' while evaluation answers the question 'is the project doing the right things (are we achieving our desired outcome)?' Monitoring is ongoing and *describes* what is happening. Evaluation is periodic and *judges* how well activities happened and what difference they made. Monitoring is first and foremost a management tool because monitoring gives project managers the information they need to adaptively manage the project. Adaptive management is about learning as you go along and regularly making adjustments to improve project performance. The monitoring approach for this project is to monitor key performance indicators during project implementation (a.k.a. 'implementation monitoring'). This plan's monitoring approach is to collect data during implementation on key output indicators and the intermediate results in the theory of change.

Monitoring results will be used to adaptively manage project activities. The project will follow 'double-loop learning' with an adaptive management cycle of monitoring, reviewing, learning, and revising (Figure 2). Adaptive management will be done whenever the incoming implementation data show a problem with the expected outputs or intermediate results. At regular intervals, perhaps once a quarter or once a year, the project team will hold a 'pause, reflect and adapt' meeting to review each of the assumptions in the theory of change to ensure the assumption is still valid and review the learning to-date to assess if the project activities need to be adjusted.
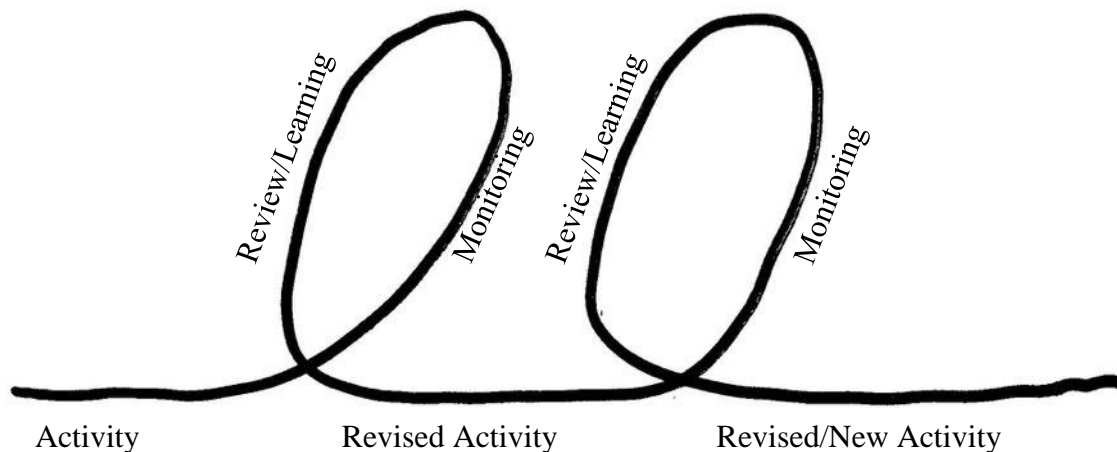

Figure 2: Adaptive management cycle

Output indicators

[Add a numbered list of output indicators. Include only the major outputs expected during the life of the project. 10 to 20 output indicators are usually sufficient. These output indicators can go directly in the project's Hub record and be used to track progress so that project progress is visible to the entire organization via the Hub.]

Examples of output indicators:
1. FPIC (free, prior and informed consent) process with community association completed
2. Mitigation assessment completed
3. Carbon project pre-feasibility study completed

4. # of local people trained on peatland management
5. % of people trained who were women
6. # of trees planted
7. # of hectares of peatland rewetted
8. # of scientific papers published
9. Sale of carbon credits completed

Data sources and methods

Data to track output indicators will come from... [field staff, partner organizations, MEL Officer, contractors, etc.] and data will be collected using... [Electronic data collection is cheaper and more accurate than paper-based data collection. KoBoToolbox is a good tool for electronic data collection (online and offline) because it is easy-to-use, free, and includes templates to get started quickly: https://www.kobotoolbox.org/]

[A 'bullseye' example of data providers and data consumers is provided below (Figure 3). Teams can use this graphic if they like (optional).]

DATA CONSUMERS

Trustees

TNC Chief
Conservation
Office

Project
Managers

DATA PROVIDERS

Frigoken
Ltd.

Green
Belt
Movement

Bezos Earth
Fund

Project Steering
Committee

Sustainable
Agriculture
Community
Development
Program

Rainforest
Alliance

MEL
STAKE-
HOLDERS

Community
Forestry
Associations

National
Government

Water Resource
Users
Associations

Water Resources
Authority

County
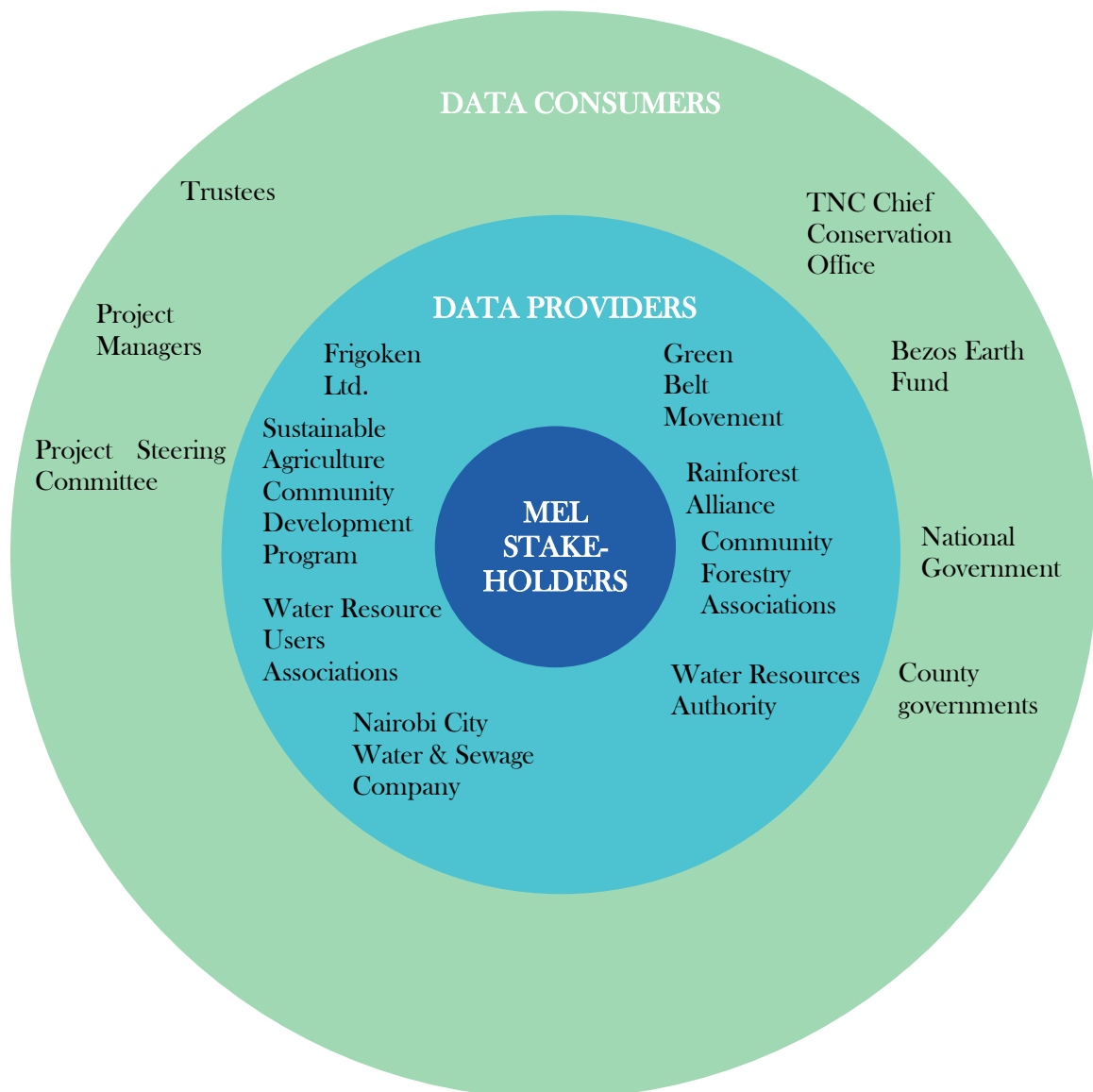governments

Nairobi City
Water & Sewage
Company

Figure 3: Stakeholder Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Roles

Data analysis frequency

Data for the output indicators will be analysed [quarterly, every six months, or annually] by the [MEL Officer, project leader, project team] and shared with the project management team.

Data quality assessments

Data quality assessments will comprise a review of data collection records and spot checks to verify the reported data. When 10% or more mistakes are found in the spot checks, a quality assurance audit of the data collection methods will be undertaken.

Data quality assessments will involve:

- Assessing the *accuracy* of the collected data by checking the correctness of the data and ensuring that deviations in data can be explained as well as ensuring measurement error is kept to a minimum. Accuracy is more likely to be high if the data are captured as close to the point of activity as possible.
- Evaluating data *validity* to ascertain that the data measure the results they are intended to measure and track trends over time.
- Appraising the *reliability* of data by analysing whether the data collected followed a systematic data collection approach and are verifiable. Data should reflect consistent data collection processes across collection points and over time.
- Assessing data *integrity* by checking that data quality assessments are integrated into data collection processes and procedures to ensure data are not erroneously reported or intentionally altered.
- Gauging *timeliness* by checking that data is captured as quickly as possible after the activity and is available for the intended use within a reasonable time period. Data should be available frequently enough to support management decisions.

Evaluation

[There are multiple reasons for doing evaluations. We may do an evaluation to assess project outcomes or to answer the question: to what degree were the expected benefits realized? We may do project evaluations to learn what worked and what did not. To decide which evaluation approach is right for a project, the question(s) to be answered by the evaluation need to be defined first.]

Evaluation question

[To define the evaluation question(s), think about who will use the evaluation and for what purpose. Think about the funding and time available and think about the most important questions you want the evaluation to answer. Brainstorm a list of possible evaluation questions, and then narrow them down to a single key evaluation question.]

[There are several different types of key evaluation questions. They can be descriptive such as 'was the project implemented as planned?' They can be qualitative such as 'was the project a success?' They can also be causal such as 'did the project activities cause an increase in CO2e sequestration?' The team should determine whether the project was implemented effectively before attempting to ask causal questions about whether the project activities led to the intended results.]

[For projects where learning is central and replication potential is high, causal key evaluation questions are preferred because then we can infer if project activities caused an observed change. Causal evaluations, however, usually require specialized skills to design and implement, and the costs are often higher than other kinds of evaluations.]

The project's key evaluation question is: ...

Examples:
- Did the project's activities cause improvements in [list of outcomes from the theory of change] in the [project location]? (suggests a causal or attribution evaluation approach)
- Did the project's activities contribute to improvements in [list of outcomes from the theory of change] in the [project location]? (suggests a contribution evaluation approach)
- Was the project implemented as planned? (suggests a performance evaluation approach)

Evaluation approach

[Given TNC's focus on nature and people, generally you want an evaluation approach that includes both ecological and socio-economic evaluations.]

[Common qualitative evaluation approaches include Outcome Mapping, Contribution Analysis, and Most Significant Change. Common quantitative evaluation approaches include Randomized Control Trials and Difference-in-Differences. Quantitative impact evaluations are rare in conservation. The challenges include spill-over and contamination in the control group, equitable benefits for the control group from participation, the high level of skill needed to design and implement many quantitative approaches, and the relatively high cost.]

The evaluation approach for this project will be... [primarily qualitative and use the xx approach] or [primarly quantitative and use xx] or [based on both qualitative and quantitative approaches and use xx and xx techniques].

Outcome indicators

[Outcome indicators should be largely based on the 17 SCA organizational metrics underlying the 2030 Goals. The list of these 17 indicators is here:
https://tnc.box.com/s/saslu5nwar7f0kdb18pwucf4ik3htg06]

Example outcome indicators:
1. # of tonnes of CO_2e avoided and/or sequestered
2. # of hectares of land under improved management
3. # of people benefitting from nature to adapt to climate change
4. % of people benefiting from nature to adapt to climate change who are women or indigenous
5. # of people with improved sustainable, place-based economic opportunities.
6. % of people with improved economic opportunities who are women or indigenous

Data sources and methods

[Here are suggestions for this section. Data for CO2e mitigation may come from 3rd-party verification by a carbon certification organization or may be estimated using the methods outlined in the NCS Handbook (www.nature.org/NCSHandbook). Data on hectares under improved

management may come from project records or GIS calculations. Data on people indicators may come from household surveys or secondary demographic data.]

Baselines

[For quantitative approaches, establish ecological and socio-economic baselines before the project starts field activities. The socio-economic baseline can be done by a contractor specializing in household surveys. The socio-economic data should be sex and age disaggregated, and free, prior and informed consent should be obtained from all survey respondents. Also, get Human Subject Research clearance from the office of the Chief Scientist before doing a household survey.]

[For qualitative approaches, baseline may or may not be required depending on the evaluation approach chosen.]

Learning

The project has a specific learning agenda to capture, document, and disseminate lessons learned. The following tools and approaches will be used to promote learning within the project area and beyond:
- Evidence-based lessons learned on successful approaches that could be adopted by others
- Publicizing results from specific project activities
- [Add others]

The dissemination channels for sharing and learning will include:
- Seminars, webinars, and workshops
- Social media
- Roundtable discussions
- White paper reports or peer-reviewed scientific articles
- National newspapers, TV and radio stations
- Peer-learning groups such as the NCS Prototyping Network or among key stakeholders.
- Annual multi-stakeholder dialogue and reviews
- [Add others]

Responsibilities

The project team will have primary responsibility for the monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) activities, and the project will have a fulltime MEL Officer to lead this work. The MEL Officer will do the data quality assessments and draft the monitoring reports. The project manager will review the draft monitoring reports before submitting them to the appropriate donor representative.

Timeline

Key monitoring, evaluation, and learning dates in the project:

1. MEL Plan reviewed by key stakeholders and finalized   [Date]
2. Baseline data collection completed   [Date]
3. Baseline report finalized   [Date]
4. 1st 'pause, reflect, and adjust' meeting   [Date]

5. MEL Plan revised (as needed)   [Date]
6. 2nd 'pause, reflect, and adjust' meeting   [Date]
7. Endline data collection completed   [Date]
8. Endline report finalized   [Date]

Budget

MEL activity	Responsible parties	Cost (US$)	Timeframe
Inception workshop	Project team	15,000	[Date]
Baseline household survey	Project team, contractors	100,000	[Date]
Etc...	Project team, contractors	xxx	[Date]