# Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Glossary

**Why do we need a MEL glossary?**

The language of MEL can be complex, with numerous terms, many of which can be used interchangeably. These are the key ones we use at FFI with definitions of what we mean when we say them.

This glossary has been developed to assist with those engaging in MEL activities including the annual report.

## Common MEL terms

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| Accountability | Obligation to report fairly and accurately on performance results and project plans to donors, partners and communities (Adapted from OECD) |
| Activities\* | Actions that are implemented using [inputs](#_Inputs) within the project |
| [Action learning review](https://ffionline.sharepoint.com/sites/leadership/capacity/Internal%20projects/Skills%20Training%20Workshops/Good%20Grant%20Management/For%20LMS%20DO%20NOT%20ALTER/Action%20Learning%20Review.docx) | A simple process used by a team to capture the lessons learned from past performance, with the goal of improving future performance. |
| Assumptions | Factors that are accepted as true or as certain to happen. In the case of [Theories of Change](#_Theory_of_change), these are often about how change happens, for example how humans, organisations, and political systems behave or make decisions. Often these lie outside the control of the project. |
| Data | Collection of related facts, usually organized in a particular format such as a table or database and gathered for a particular purpose. (Tanner et al., 2020) |
| Data analysis | The examining and interpreting of data to draw conclusions about the information with the goal of looking for patterns, themes and making sense of and summarising the data. |
| Data management | Data management is a process to ensure that diverse data sets can be efficiently collected, integrated/processed, labelled/stored, and then easily retrieved through time by people who want to use them. |
| Data practices | Includes design of methods, planning and data management, collection, storage, validation, cleaning, processing, and analysis of information for interpretation and use of data. |
| Disaggregated data | Disaggregated data is data that is presented in sub-categories (for example by gender or education level). This is opposite to aggregated data which are clustered to represent large groups. |
| Evidence | FFI defines evidence as data that has been interpreted, verbalized, translated, or transformed to reveal the underlying meaning or context. (Tanner et al., 2020) |
| Evaluation | A periodic process of reflection on what changes are taking place, why and how they are happening, discovering unintended results, and determining how/if the project should adapt to meet its desired [impact](#_Impact). Information collected through project [monitoring](#_Monitoring) is used to inform project [evaluation](#_Evaluation).  Evaluation occurs at different scales, for example you might work to understand what a specific data set tells you about a specific element of work or you might look at datasets together to understand something more about the whole project. |
| Fund | A fund can have a number of meanings depending on the context it is used, including:   1. A set of [activities](#_Activities) funded by a donor to be implemented by a [project](#_Project) in a specific time frame 2. A sum of money awarded to a project for a specific objective/part of the [project](#_Project) to be used in a specific time frame 3. An organization administering a pool of money. E.g. Blue Action Fund   It should be noted that definition 1 is sometimes referred to as a project by other organisations. |
| Gender sensitive indicator | A Gender sensitive indicator is an [indicator](#_Indicators) that measures gender-related changes in society over time. [Here](https://www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/ml-quick-guide-to-gender-indicators-300114-en.pdf) is a useful resource on this. |
| Goal\* | The higher-order objective to which a conservation intervention is intended to contribute. Often the positive [impact](#_Impact) that a project is trying to achieve. |
| Impact\* | The positive and negative long-term changes or effects produced by a conservation intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended. |
| Impact chains | FFI uses an approach that links [outcomes](#_Outcomes) reported by individual projects to generalised conceptual models of change and impact, which we call “impact chains”.  An impact chain describes the path of change through which we would expect to see a [project](#_Project) progress on the way to achieving its long-term conservation objectives.  See [Understanding Conservation Success](https://assets.fauna-flora.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/FFI_2018_Understanding-Conservation-Success-at-Fauna-Flora-International.pdf) at FFI and [FFI’s Conservation report](https://cms.fauna-flora.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FFI_2020_Conservation-Report.pdf) for further information. |
| Impact evaluation or assessment. | A study conducted at the end of an intervention (or a phase of that intervention) to determine the extent to which anticipated [impact](#_Impact) and [outcomes](#_Outcomes) were produced.  An impact evaluation aims to understand to what extent and how an intervention corrects the problem it was intended to address. Impact assessment focuses on the effects of the intervention, whereas evaluation is likely to cover a wider range of issues such as the appropriateness of the intervention design, the cost and efficiency of the intervention, its unintended effects and how to use the experience from this intervention to improve the design of future interventions. (Adapted from OECD definition) |
| Indicators | A sign, clue or marker that helps answer our monitoring and evaluation questions and indicates if we are on the pathway to progress. |
| Inputs\* | The financial, human, and material resources used for the conservation interventions. (Adapted from OECD definition) |
| Knowledge | Internalization of information, data, and experience—this usually results in either tacit or explicit knowledge. (Tanner et al., 2020) |
| Logical framework or logframe | Management tool used to improve the design of interventions, most often at the project level. It involves identifying strategic elements ([inputs](#_Inputs), [outputs](#_Outputs), [outcomes](#_Outcomes), [impact](#_Impact)) and their causal relationships, indicators, and the assumptions or risks that may influence success and failure. (Adapted from OECD, 2010).  Logical frameworks should be built from a [Theory of Change](#_Theory_of_change) (ideally the ToC first and the logframe after) but also include other elements such as means of verification, data sources and are generally more rigid to show how indicators will signal progress in the project. |
| Learning | “The social process by which we develop knowledge, skills, insights, beliefs, values, attitudes, habits, feelings, wisdom, shared understanding and self awareness” (Britton 2005, p55).  In the context of MEL, learning is using the analysis and results from M&E for critical self-reflection and to (i) adapt your project based on evidence in order to enhance your impact (ii) strengthen conservation across the sector by sharing what has been learnt. |
| Means of Verification | The MoV is how an indicator will be measured (for example quarterly vegetation surveys or annual census data). |
| Metadata | A set of data that describes and gives information about other data. |
| Method | An information/data gathering activity, for example focus groups, semi-structured interviews, survey, participatory rapid appraisal. (SAPA guidelines) |
| Methodology | The overall package of an analytical framework, research design, methods, and an assessment process that links the methods. (SAPA guidelines) |
| Milestone\* | Sometimes also called ‘intermediate results’ or ‘benchmarks’, milestones are situations that, when achieved, indicate that the interventions are on the way to reaching the desired target. These are often defined when the overall impact will take a long time to see, but progress towards it can be measured in this way. |
| Monitoring | The collection of repeated evidence to determine progress over time on use of resources, project implementation, and the success of project interventions in bringing about desired changes. |
| Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (mel) | A structured approach of collecting and analysing data across a project’s lifecycle to help a project develop [evidence](#_Evidence) to:   * understand if their work is delivering conservation [impact](#_Impact), * learn what does and doesn’t work, and adapt project work as needed, * share learning with stakeholders, * be accountable to donors, partners and communities. |
| Objective\* | This is the collection of things that need to be achieved in order for your desired impact to be achieved (you could think of this as short-term impact which will collectively lead to the long-term impact). |
| Outcomes | The expected short (initial) or medium (interim) term changes or effects produced by a conservation intervention. |
| Outputs\* | The direct products of [activities](#_Activities) that have been implemented. They are relevant to the achievement of project outcomes and are typically tangible and easy to measure.  For example, if we were to host a training, the output would be the number of persons who would have attended the training. |
| Primary species | A species or group of species that a project is focused on protecting. |
| Programme | At FFI, the term “programme” has a number of meanings depending on the context in which it is used, including:   * Finance: in FFI’s financial systems the term programme is used to describe our regional and cross-cutting teams, for example the Eurasia programme or the Conservation Science and Design programme * Regional teams: in our regional teams we often use the term programme to describe a group of funds (sometimes projects) that have a specific, but often larger scale, focus for example Cambodia Coastal and Marine Programme or the Zarand Landscape Programme * Cross-cutting teams: in our cross-cutting teams the term programme is often used to describe work with a thematic focus for example the Marine Programme or the Conservation, Livelihoods and Governance (CLG) programme * Other uses: FFI also uses the term to describe a multi-stakeholder collaboration e.g. Conservation Leadership programme or International Gorilla Conservation Programme |
| Project | In FFI, we define a project as a body of work that seeks to achieve a specific goal or outcome - this should have a meaningful and measurable conservation result.  A project can be comprised of several [funds](#_Fund) working to achieve the same conservation result.  Please read [Project idea: Stage 1](https://ffionline.sharepoint.com/pl/SitePages/Project%20Idea.aspx) for further information on how FFI defines a project. |
| Project code | A code set up when a project is developed to represent a body of work that seeks to achieve a specific goal or [outcome](#_Outcomes). It corresponds to the first section of a FocalPoint fund code   – for example, 231, D42, 615 etc.  For further information see FFI’s Finance page on [Projects and Funds](https://ffionline.sharepoint.com/finance/SitePages/Projects%20and%20Funds.aspx). |
| Qualitative data | Data that tells us about the qualities rather than the number of something. Often, they are represented by text, and sometimes images. |
| Quantitative data | Data that can be represented as numbers including both continuous data measured along a scale & categorical data recorded in intervals or by groups. |
| Region | A geographical area that FFI works in. The main regions are Africa, Americas & Caribbean, Asia-Pacific, and Eurasia. |
| Sample | A smaller set of data that a researcher chooses or selects from a larger population using a pre-defined selection method. These elements are known as sample points, sampling units, or observations. |
| Sampling strategy | The process of identifying your population and determining how best to select a sample from it (from The Research Competition).  The approach used to select a sample representative of a larger population so that generalisations and testing hypotheses are valid, and replicable. There are many sampling strategies to choose between including simple random, semi-random, systematic, targeted, purposive, and stratified sampling. |
| Secondary species | Species additional to primary species that might directly benefit from a project’s work either through site, habitat or wider species conservation. These species are often monitored by projects through their activities. |
| Site | Area/place we directly help to protect/conserve through activities on the ground |
| Target | A target is your hoped-for end point linked to an [indicator](#_Indicators), which will show that the [objective](#_Target) is achieved (e.g. increase of 23%). |
| Theory of change | A Theory of Change (or ToC) outlines the expected story of a project and the processes of change needed to reach a long-term goal – in FFI’s case a meaningful and measurable conservation result. In doing so, it provides a framework for assessing intermediate and long-term results against. Creating the ToC for a project should ideally be the first step in development (followed by other steps such as a logframe). |
| Tool | Specific information/data gathering instrument used within a method (SAPA guidelines) |
| Variable | A value collected or measured within a survey or held within a dataset or database. A variable is any characteristics, number, or quantity that can be measured or counted. |
| Vision | A shared belief about the future a project/organisation can create if it achieves all its goals. |

*\**this term is often used differently by different donors, and it’s important to understand what they mean. See Annex 1 for guidance on what different donors mean by different terms.

*Useful guidance on common confusions between terms can be found* [*here*](https://www.intrac.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Monitoring-and-Evaluation-Series-Outcomes-Outputs-and-Impact-7.pdf) *(INTRAC, 2015).*

*For translations of certain term in French and Spanish please refer to the* [*OECD Glossary of terms*](https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/2754804.pdf)

## Common Acronyms in FFI’s MEL

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| MEL | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MEAL | Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning |
| ToC | Theory of Change |

## References:

Tanner, L., Mahajan, S.L., Becker, H., DeMello, N., Komuhangi, C., Mills, M., Masuda, Y., Wilkie, D., Glew, L. “Making better decisions: How to use evidence in a complex world” (2020) The Research People and the Alliance for Conservation Evidence and Sustainability

OECD, [What is Impact Assessment](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjL_b7t1fTyAhVHgVwKHRn3DI0QFnoECAMQAw&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.oecd.org%2Fsti%2Finno%2FWhat-is-impact-assessment-OECDImpact.pdf&usg=AOvVaw0qFCJLSwCs-_UdpeQJ3M8t).

OECD, 2010, [Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management](https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/2754804.pdf).

Annex 1

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| **FFI** | **WWF** | **DFID** | **EC** | **World Bank** | **US AID** | **MACP** | **FAO and UNDP** |
| Impact | Goal | Goal | Overall Objective | Long-term objective | Strategic Objective | Program Impact | Development Objective |
| Outcome | Objective | Purpose | Specific Objective | Short-term objective | Intermediate Results | Effects | Intermediate Objectives |
| Outputs | Outputs | Outputs | Outputs | Outputs | Outputs/Expected Results | Outputs | Outputs |
| Activities | Activities | Activities | Activities |  | Activities | Activities | Activities |
|  |  | Inputs |  | Inputs | Inputs | Inputs |  |
|  | Intermediate Results | Milestones |  |  | Benchmarks | Benchmarks | Milestones |