

# Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Update



USAID/BHA ME&L Advisor Dramane Mariko facilitates a conversation with RFSA beneficiaries in Mali. Photo courtesy of USAID/BHA.

## OVERVIEW

USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) integrates monitoring, evaluation, and learning (ME&L) into emergency response, early recovery, disaster risk reduction, and resilience food security activities worldwide enabling staff to track program progress and results as well as enhance program effectiveness through the generation and application of evidence. Monitoring and evaluation facilitate the systematic collection and analysis of data to generate evidence, and interventions supported by evidence improves program effectiveness and quality. Combined, monitoring, evaluation, and learning improve planning, design, and resource-allocation decisions, building a body of knowledge and understanding that can be shared and applied across countries and sectors. In FY 2021, USAID/BHA supported ME&L activities in 12 countries.

## Third-Party Monitoring in Complex Emergencies

In countries experiencing complex emergencies, access and security concerns can prevent USAID/BHA and partner organization staff from conducting regular site visits to monitor program performance and progress. To address access impediments, USAID/BHA contracts independent third-party monitors with in-depth knowledge of local customs and security conditions. These third-party monitors combine quantitative and qualitative methods—including direct observation, document reviews, focus group discussions, individual interviews, and surveys—for data collection at program sites. Detailed reports from third-party monitors assist USAID/BHA and partners in making programmatic adjustments to improve the quality of assistance and inform future program design and strategic decision making.

## Global Research Advances ME&L in Humanitarian Programs

In FY 2021, USAID/BHA supported six research awards that contributed to global best practices for monitoring and evaluation in humanitarian contexts. Through a USAID/BHA-funded research grant, the non-governmental organization (NGO) CARE is expanding its Rapid Gender Analysis (RGA) toolkit to include innovative monitoring tools that elevate women's voices and support gender-sensitive emergency responses. These data collection tools include a mobile phone application used during RGAs to record, translate, transcribe, and upload data to a storage cloud, as well as a web-based platform that provides women and girls with a safe channel through which to communicate feedback, enabling users and survey facilitators to use Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) to place calls directly to hard-to-reach respondents without access to smartphones. With USAID/BHA support, the American Refugee Committee in Colombia provided a tailored, real-time feedback system for humanitarian actors to better monitor beneficiary satisfaction and improve accountability to Venezuelan migrants and refugees in Colombia. Furthermore, with USAID/BHA funding, Mercy Corps conducted

a systematic review of reduced-access analytics methods (RAAM) and remote monitoring methods to create a toolkit that enables humanitarian staff to select RAAM options based on their needs and allows them to create, structure, and maintain a team capable of completing humanitarian program analysis despite reduced access.

## **Learning from COVID-19**

USAID/BHA's coronavirus disease (COVID-19) evaluation and learning objectives aim to support adaptive program management by understanding the impacts of COVID-19 and the degree to which programs aimed at combating the disease achieved their intended objectives, all to ensure that lessons learned can be applied to future programming. USAID/BHA funded the performance evaluation of programs receiving COVID-19 supplemental funding to assess funded partners' responses to the pandemic in humanitarian contexts and improve learning to maximize the efficacy of future programming. USAID/BHA also conducted performance reviews of emergency and non-emergency programming to identify successful approaches to COVID-19-related humanitarian programming, lessons learned, and key programmatic adaptations. Furthermore, USAID/BHA held a series of global knowledge-sharing forums that brought together more than 500 USAID/BHA partners to share experiences, challenges, and practical approaches for adapting existing humanitarian programming to the COVID-19 context.

## **Strengthening ME&L Capacity for USAID/BHA Staff and Partners**

Strengthening the capacity of USAID/BHA staff and partner organizations to understand and apply ME&L helps improve accountability and learning while also ensuring effective assistance across USAID/BHA-supported programs. USAID/BHA conducted capacity-strengthening activities for partners worldwide to strengthen ME&L systems, improve data quality and analysis, and maximize evidence-based approaches to inform program development and adaptation. Throughout FY 2021, USAID/BHA designed and implemented numerous workshops to help USAID/BHA and implementing partner staff strengthen skills in foundational learning practices—including facilitating knowledge sharing in virtual environments; after-action learning; and scenario planning to anticipate future program needs effectively. USAID/BHA also further strengthened implementing partners' ME&L capacity by facilitating data-based decision-making workshops, creating a qualitative toolkit, and imparting best practices for effective community engagement.

## **Evaluation of Agroecological Intervention Shows Positive Impact**

In West Africa's Sahel Region—a semi-arid region where tropical savannah and the Sahara Desert ecosystems converge—farmers and herders rely on scarce rainfall to sustain their livelihoods and maintain access to food and water. Moreover, climate change and desertification—the process by which fertile land becomes desert because of drought, deforestation, or other conditions—have reduced the already-limited rainfall in the Sahel and deteriorated soil health, heightening food production challenges for farming households and limiting pastures available for pastoralist communities in the region. In response to these challenges, USAID/BHA partner the UN World Food Program (WFP) implemented land rehabilitation program in Niger, constructing “half-moons”—small, semicircular ponds that enable desertified soil to better retain rainwater—on agricultural soil to increase moisture and improve growing conditions. To measure how half-moons have affected growing conditions in Niger, USAID/BHA and the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration formed a joint initiative with WFP in Asia, Africa, and the Americas to leverage satellite imagery to assess the normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI), measuring the density and health of vegetation, before and after the introduction of half-moons. The average NDVI across 18 sites in Niger increased by 50 percent during the period from 2013—when the half-moons were built—to 2020. Furthermore, half-moon sites exhibited NDVI values approximately 25 percent higher than nearby control sites without the ponds. In addition, NDVI differences for the dry months

before and after interventions were more than doubled during the months when NDVI peaked, suggesting that the half-moons also strengthened the resilience of the production system.

### **ME&L Technical Assistance Strengthens RFSAs**

USAID/BHA provides technical support to improve the quality of USAID/BHA-funded Resilience Food Security Activities (RFSAs). In FY 2021, USAID/BHA convened a series of workshops for organizations implementing two new RFSAs in Zimbabwe to improve their theories of change, develop a shared understanding of evidence gaps, identify priority research questions, prepare for mandatory gender analysis, and enhance plans for community engagement, including how local voices, needs and opportunities would be addressed in the implementation of activities. Workshops were also held in Malawi and Madagascar to support RFSAs at the end of their first year of operations in FY 2021, during which partners presented the results of initial research, revised theories of change, and updated implementation plans. In addition, USAID/BHA held workshops for RFSAs staff approaching program close-outs in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, and Niger to generate lessons learned and provide advice and recommendations regarding how communities could maintain positive results after the programs' completion. Throughout the FY, USAID/BHA also designed and implemented ME&L workshops for and provided technical assistance to RFSAs implementers in Kenya and Zimbabwe.

### **Cross-Organizational Collaboration for Improved Programming**

USAID/BHA supports country-focused collaboration efforts to bring donors, implementing partners, and local government representatives together to share knowledge on emerging evidence and best practices, set coordinated goals, plan to implement activities, and collectively respond to crises. Funding the coordination of cross-organizational dialogue and planning helps reduce siloing and duplication across sectors and assistance types, and ensures that funded programs work in a complimentary manner. For example, USAID/BHA funded the implementation of peer-to-peer activities in Kenya to facilitate collaboration between the implementing partner, donors, and local governments, allowing these organizations to overcome geographic disparities, differences in assistance modalities, and historical barriers to collaboration.

Additional information on USAID/BHA's activities can be found at: [usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work](https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/where-we-work)