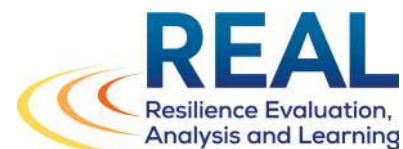




RMS

RECURRENT MONITORING SYSTEM (RMS) DESIGN TOOLKIT



Start here.  



RECURRENT MONITORING SYSTEM (RMS) DESIGN TOOLKIT

Welcome.

Measuring resilience requires methods that can capture how individuals, households, and communities anticipate, cope, and respond to shocks and stresses and how this affects their wellbeing over time. A key resilience measurement tool for capturing these dynamics is the recurrent monitoring system (RMS).

This guidance describes what decisions need to be made when designing an RMS and provides practical tools to aid the RMS design process.



RECURRENT MONITORING SYSTEM (RMS) DESIGN TOOLKIT

RMS Definition

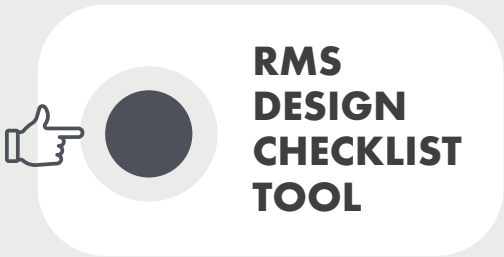
Recurrent monitoring systems come in all shapes and sizes. However, there are a few characteristics that distinguish RMSs from other monitoring activities, namely that they:

- Collect frequent quantitative/qualitative data from the same individuals, households, and/or communities during program implementation.
- Measure resilience capacities, shock exposure, and wellbeing outcomes.
- Collect data on populations benefiting from humanitarian, development, and/or peacebuilding interventions in a defined area.

How to Use this Guide

RMS designs vary based on purpose, resources, and unique circumstances. This guide walks RMS designers through a series of decisions they will need to make as they design their RMS. The guide is organized around the **six primary design decisions below** and describes the key considerations the designer must weigh when making each decision. It also provides complementary tools to support the RMS design process.

DESIGN CHECKLIST



The RMS Design Checklist Tool provides a list of key outputs that are required to effectively design an RMS and should be used as a quick reference throughout the design process.



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DECISION 1

Influencing How RMS Data Is Used

Thinking about how the RMS data will be used at the beginning of the RMS design process will help ensure that the RMS objectives, learning question analysis, data collection, and sampling strategies are designed with the primary audience(s) in mind. The first step in this process is to develop audience profiles to identify the key RMS audiences, how you intend to influence them with the RMS data, and what enablers and barriers may encourage or discourage your key audiences from using the RMS data as intended. The audience profiles can also help you determine how to package the RMS findings (e.g., policy brief) to tailor the RMS findings to your audience.

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DECISION 1.1

Do you know who your primary audiences are that you want to influence with the RMS results?

Primary audiences are stakeholders to whom you are accountable and/or whom you want to influence with the RMS results. Typical primary audiences include the donor, implementing partners, program managers and/or leadership, local government, and local communities. It is important at this stage to describe the primary audiences of the RMS and to be as specific as possible.

✱ *It is also important to identify any potential barriers and enablers that would affect the RMS primary audiences' ability to use the RMS data.*

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DECISION 1.2

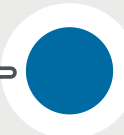
Do you know how you want to influence each RMS audience with the RMS results?

The next step after identifying the primary audiences is to identify how you want to influence them with the RMS results. Some examples include using the RMS data to:

- refine the targeting strategy of the program;
- inform the sequencing, layering, and integration approach for the program;
- influence government planning and policy;
- influence the design of future programs; or
- support local communities to prepare for respond to, and mitigate the effects of shocks and stresses.

RMS TOOL

To develop audience profiles for your RMS, you will use RMS Tool 1.

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DECISION 2

Choosing the Primary
RMS Objective

One of the key challenges identified in the [RMS Landscape Review](#)  was having too many or competing objectives within an RMS, affecting its ability to influence its key audiences. To address this challenge, this toolkit prompts RMS designers to select a primary objective to guide all subsequent design decisions. Other (secondary) objectives can be considered, but should not drive major design decisions. This toolkit focuses on three primary RMS objectives on the following page.¹

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¹ The RMS objectives in this toolkit were modified from the RMS objectives identified in the RMS Landscape Review after testing the RMS Design Toolkit in several programs.

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DECISION 2.1

What objective will lead to the RMS data being used to influence your primary audience?

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RMS OBJECTIVE 1

Produce actionable data that can be used to inform program decisions on an ongoing and frequent basis.

This objective focuses on using RMS data to promote adaptive management (i.e., an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context) with the goal of improving program quality and outcomes.

RMS OBJECTIVE 2

Increase understanding of resilience dynamics by testing relationships in the theory of change.

This objective is concerned with exploring the relationships between shock exposure, severity, and effects (both immediate and downstream), resilience capacities, and wellbeing outcomes. The goal of this objective is typically to use RMS data to test the assumptions and hypothesized relationships in the theory of change of the programs and/or to answer learning questions.

RMS OBJECTIVE 3

Evaluate the contribution of interventions to improved resilience capacities and wellbeing outcomes over time.

This objective seeks to determine the extent to which the program’s interventions lead to changes in participants’ resilience capacities and wellbeing outcomes. This objective often requires an “impact evaluation design” but other evaluation methods may be used.

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Do all the RMS stakeholders agree on the primary RMS objective?

When selecting the primary objective, you need to ensure that all stakeholders in the RMS design process (e.g., donor focal points, management team, implementing partners) are on board with the purpose of the RMS. This can be achieved through a co-creation workshop or meeting. A lack of consensus on the primary RMS objectives at the beginning of the design phase can delay the RMS and lead to dissatisfaction with the results.

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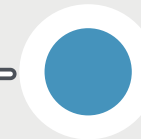
Do you want to use an impact evaluation design to achieve this RMS objective?

This decision is only relevant if you have selected RMS Objective 3 (Evaluate the contribution of interventions to improved resilience capacities and wellbeing outcomes over time).

If you intend to use an “impact evaluation design” that includes a control or comparison group, there are some additional considerations you need to weigh before investing in this objective. This RMS design will have many implications for the sampling strategy, the RMS budget, and the timeline for when results will be available. Before proceeding with an impact evaluation design, it is recommended that you read USAID’s [Technical Note on Impact Evaluations](#). If an impact evaluation design is not feasible or desired, you should return to Decision 2.1 and select an alternative primary RMS objective.

RMS TOOL

For more guidance on planning and conducting an RMS objective co-creation workshop, you will use RMS Tool 2, Objective Co-Creation Workshop Agenda.



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DECISION 3

Choosing the Primary
RMS Learning Questions

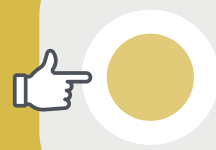
There are many types of questions that an RMS can explore. This toolkit will cover the most common questions explored in relation to the three primary RMS objectives.

You will also find that one of the main challenges in developing learning questions for an RMS is that, given the broad scope of many resilience-focused activities, teams tend to come up with a lot of learning questions.

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RMS TOOL

For tips on how to narrow down the number of questions for your RMS, see RMS Tool 3, Prioritizing Learning Questions

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DECISION 3.1

What types of questions are related to your primary objective?

RMS OBJECTIVE 1

Produce actionable data that can be used to inform program decisions on an ongoing and frequent basis.

Questions related to trends in key resilience indicators tend to be the most useful for achieving RMS Objective 1. Trend data can help determine what the “normal” range of results is for program participants and make it easier for team members to identify unexpected patterns. This can facilitate their ability to adapt program interventions to address gaps in results. It can also help teams anticipate and predict future trends.

Some examples of questions related to identifying trends include:

- Are there seasonal differences in how households use their household expenditures to anticipate, cope with, and respond to shocks and stresses?
- Are there differences in household diet diversity by the head of household’s age or gender?

RMS OBJECTIVE 2

Increase understanding of resilience dynamics by testing relationships in the theory of change.

Testing hypothesized relationships in the program’s theory of change typically requires RMS designers to determine whether one indicator of resilience is related to or leads to another. The theory of change will indicate the hypothesized temporal/causal relationship (i.e., the direction of the relationship), and it is up to the RMS designer to identify the most important relationships to test based on the strategic priorities of the program.

Examples of questions that test relationships include:

- Does increased fodder production lead to increased availability of milk in households?
- Does sustained access to financial services lead to greater livelihood diversity?

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DECISION 3.1

What types of questions are related to your primary objective?

RMS OBJECTIVE 3

Evaluate the contribution of interventions to improved resilience capacities and wellbeing outcomes over time.

To understand whether the program's implementation approach is leading to the expected changes in resilience indicators, RMS designers typically focus on learning questions that compare results between intervention groups.

Examples of questions that compare results between two groups include:

- Are households in high-intensity villages more likely to use early warning system information to destock livestock in drought conditions than households in low-intensity villages?
- Are individuals participating in financial services interventions more likely to access and use emergency savings to maintain access to food during a shock than households not participating in financial services interventions?

Another type of learning question that can be related to all three RMS objectives is the explanatory learning question. Explanatory questions answer the “why” and “how” of the trend, relationship, or comparison. Although these types of questions could be answered quantitatively in an RMS, they are more often explored qualitatively.

Examples of explanatory questions include:

- Why do nutritional outcomes remain worse for participants living in a particular region?
- How does the effect of a direct intervention at the individual level spill over indirectly to other members of the individual's household?

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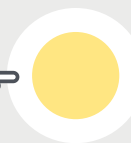
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Determining the RMS Analysis Method

The data analysis method you want to use for your RMS is primarily determined by the type of data your RMS has collected. Quantitative analysis options include descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Qualitative options include thematic analysis, positive deviance analysis, and life history analysis. Many RMSs include both quantitative and qualitative data. For more information on quantitative analysis, see REAL's [Practical Guidance Note 4](#). For more information on qualitative analysis, see IDEAL's [Qualitative Design Toolkit](#).

RMS TOOL

For more information on quantitative analysis, see RMS Tool 4, Analysis Options



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DECISION 5

Determining the RMS Data Collection Strategy

The next RMS design decision focuses on the RMS data collection strategy, specifically how (methodology), when (initiation strategy), and how often (frequency) data will be collected for the RMS.

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DECISION 5.1

What is the primary consideration in initiating data collection?

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SEASONALITY OF
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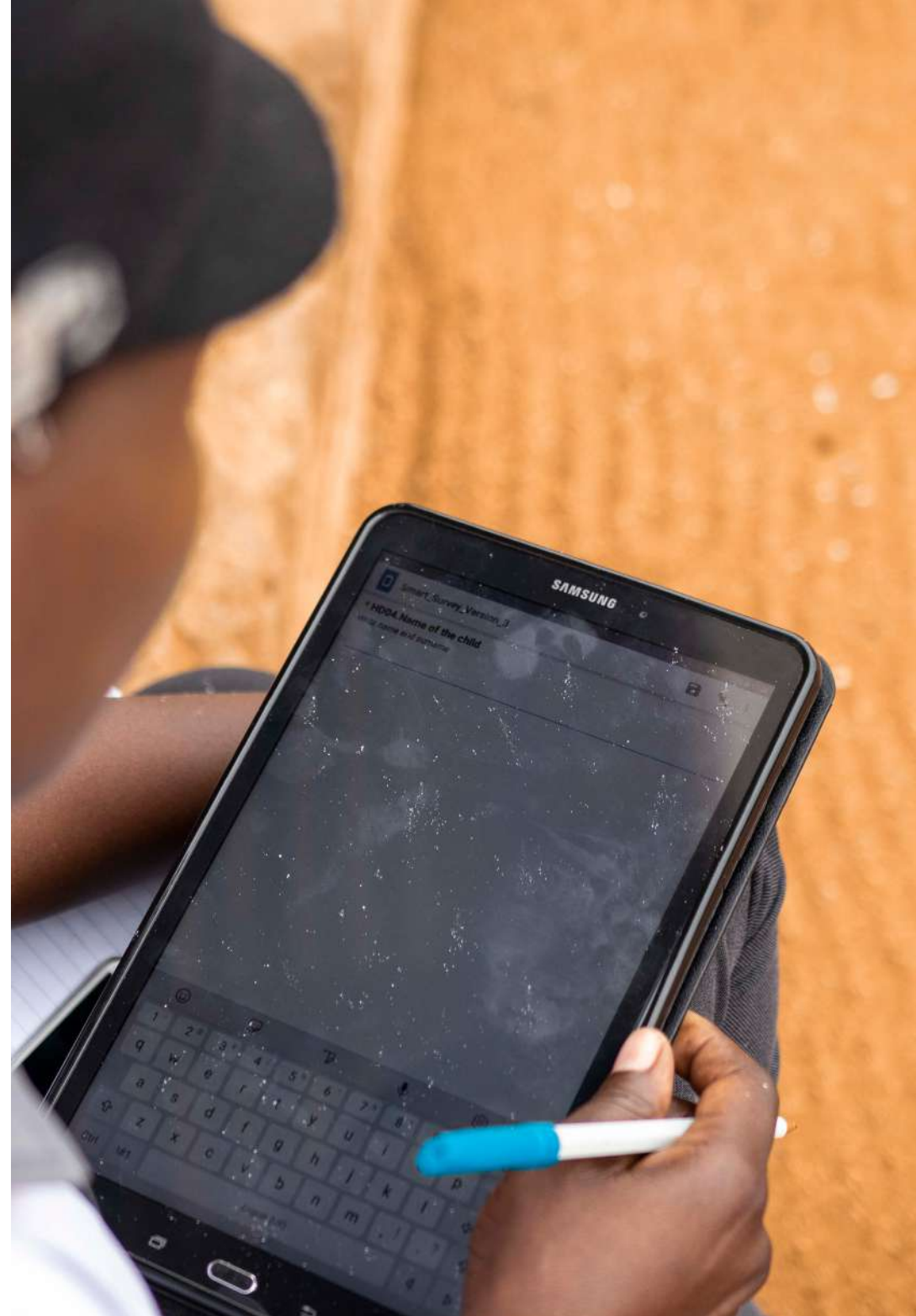
LEARN MORE >

DATA COLLECTION AT
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DECISION 5.1

What is the primary consideration in initiating data collection?

SEASONALITY OF SHOCKS
AND STRESSES

In your implementation context, shocks and stresses may cluster around agricultural and/or livestock lean seasons, monsoon seasons, during or around religious holidays and festivals, or political cycles. If your intervention strategy and/or theory of change is driven by these seasonal cycles, consider this in your strategy for initiating RMS data collection.

This data collection initiation strategy is only viable if the program is designed around shocks that are somewhat predictable. If this is the case, then you need to decide which time(s) of the year are most prone to multiple shocks or stresses in your program context. The first step is to understand what the shocks and stresses are in your implementation context by facilitating a “resilience to what?” discussion. The next step is to create a timeline, either based on your organization’s calendar or fiscal year, and map when these shocks and stresses tend to occur.

COLLECTING DATA AT REGULAR INTERVALS THAT
ALIGN WITH OTHER DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES

This data collection strategy is a good option if your primary RMS objective is to use the RMS results for adaptive management (RMS Objective 1), or if shocks and stresses are unpredictable in your implementation context. For this data collection strategy, it is important to know when key implementation, CLA (collaboration, learning, and adaptation) and M&E (monitoring and evaluation) activities happen in a typical fiscal or calendar year in the program. It is especially important for RMS Objective 1 to know when there are opportunities to influence key programmatic decisions throughout the program cycle. Matching this information with the RMS audience profiles will help the RMS to produce the right information to make the right decisions at the right time. A resilience CLA System Map is one tool that can help you visualize how all program, CLA, and M&E activities align in a typical year.

RMS TOOL

For guidance on how to visualize the alignment of program design and implementation, reflection, and M&E activities with the RMS, see Tool 5, CLA System Map.

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DECISION 5.1**What is the primary consideration in initiating data collection?****COLLECTING DATA IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING A MAJOR SHOCK OR STRESS EVENT**

This data collection strategy, also referred to as a “shock-triggered” RMS, may be appropriate when a major covariate shock (e.g., drought or earthquake) occurs or is predicted to occur and has or will have a major impact on participants in the implementation area of your program.

Do you already have baseline data on the population affected by the shock or stress?

The first important consideration for this RMS data collection strategy is whether you have or will have baseline data on the affected population prior to the shock or stress. If you do not have baseline data, any “before and after” comparisons would have to rely heavily on retrospective information (i.e., asking respondents to think back to before the shock or stress began). We often rely on retrospective data in resilience survey modules (e.g., What shocks and stresses have you experienced in the past 3 or 12 months?). However, because shock-triggered RMS data collection models attempt to have a more objective and definitive measure of a single shock or stress event, having the “before” data on key resilience indicators is especially important; therefore, this toolkit recommends choosing a different RMS data collection initiation strategy if you don’t have baseline data on key resilience indicators.

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DECISION 5.2**What frequency of data collection will support the RMS objective and data collection strategy?**

The decision about data collection frequency is relevant to all RMS objectives. This decision may be driven by when there are opportunities in the program cycle each year to influence key programmatic decisions (most relevant to RMS Objective 1) and/or by the available budget, the length of your program or other more operational decisions. RMS data collection frequencies include, but are not limited to, monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, or annually.

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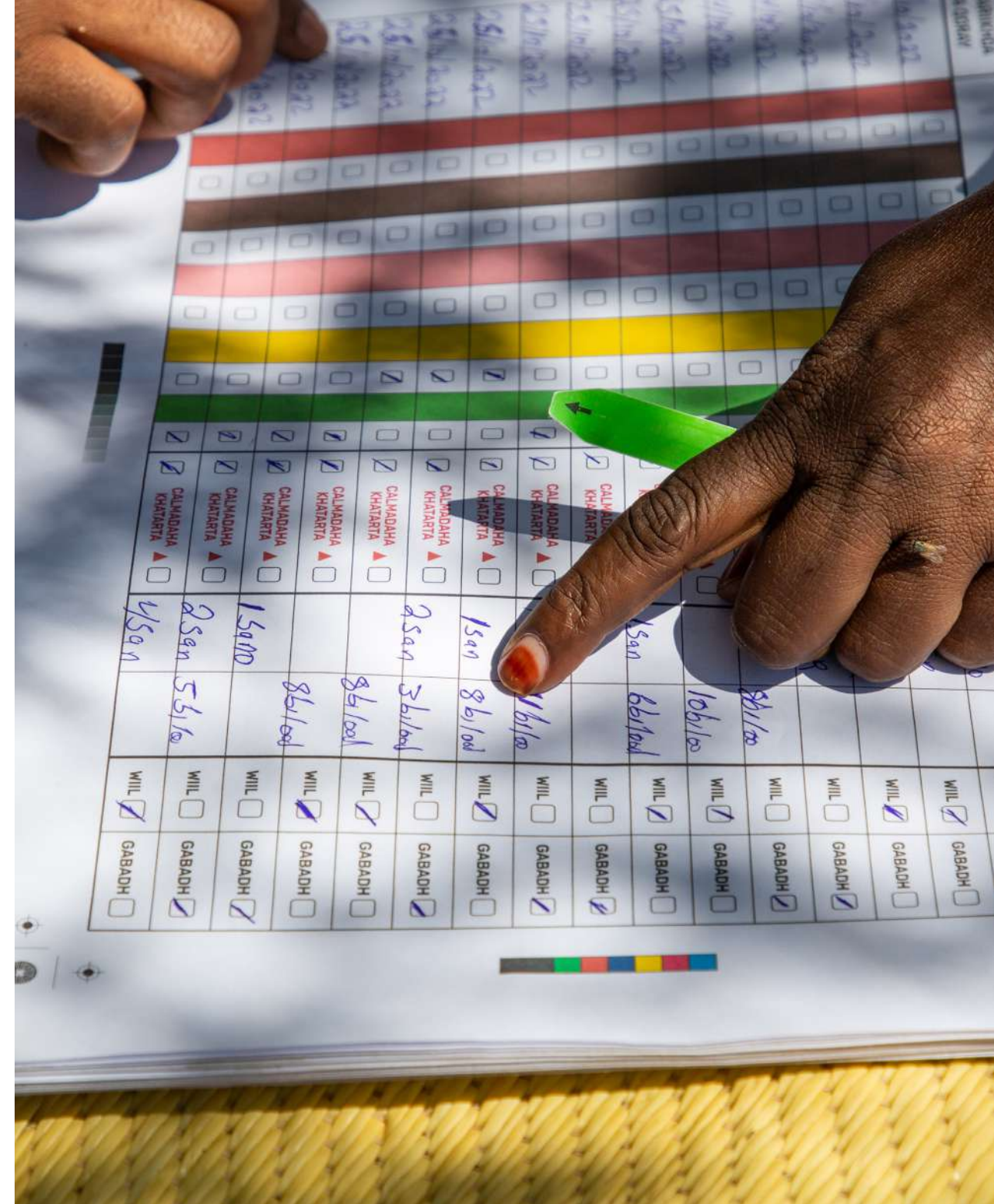
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DECISION 6**Defining the RMS
Sampling Strategy**

The first question RMS designers should ask when determining their sampling strategy is “To whom will the RMS results be generalized?”

The considerations on the following pages will help RMS designers determine whether they want a participant-based or population-level sampling strategy (the two most common populations in humanitarian and development programs).

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DECISION 6.1

Are most interventions implemented directly or indirectly with individuals and households in the implementation area?

If your program engages both direct and indirect participants, you will need to decide which population to build your RMS sample frame around. It is typically easier to have a participant-based sample if your program primarily has direct participants. **Direct participants** receive tangible benefits from a program, either as actual participants or as intended recipients of such benefits. These include individuals (e.g., cash-for-work laborers, farmers, livestock owners) or communities that benefit from infrastructure programs (e.g., water systems, roads, health facilities). **Indirect participants** receive tangible benefits through proximity or contact with programs or program participants. In a market systems program, the direct participants are the market actors, and the indirect participants are the community members who access goods and services from the market actors. In cash-for-work or other income-generating activities, family members may be indirect participants.



DECISION 6.1.1

Do you have a way of knowing who the individuals and households are that will be targeted by indirect interventions?

If most program participants are indirect participants, your sampling strategy will depend on your ability to identify your participants prior to data collection. The answer to this question may be yes if you have criteria for identifying indirect participants or are tracking them in some other way. If you do not have a process for identifying indirect participants, or if your implementation approach is intended to benefit the broader community through indirect interventions, then you will need to draw your sample from the general population in the implementation area.



DECISION 6.1.2

Will a representative group of program participants be registered by the time of the first RMS round?

If you have a way to identify your direct or indirect participants, the next question you need to consider is whether you will have a representative group of participants from which to sample by the first round of the RMS. For example, if the program has only registered male lead farmers in Year 1, but you plan to engage a more diverse range of marginalized groups as part of your intervention approach, you will either need to wait until you have registered a more representative group of participants or sample from the general population in the implementation area. This is mainly due to the RMS design, which requires you to follow the same individuals, households, and/or communities over time. If you have a way to identify your direct or indirect participants prior to data collection, you may consider sampling from the participant population.

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Participant-based sampling approach

RMS designers often choose a participant-based sampling approach if most of their participants directly benefit from the program interventions, and they have a way to track them over time (prior to the first round of the RMS).

Population-based sampling approach

RMS designers often choose a population-based sampling approach if the program primarily benefits indirect participants and/or they do not have a way of knowing or tracking who will benefit from the indirect interventions. This is often the case with programs that work at the system level (e.g., market system or ecological systems). RMS designers may also choose a population-based sampling approach if a representative sample of participants is not registered by the first RMS wave.

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DECISION 6.2**Do you want to be able to disaggregate results by any subgroups?**

The other consideration that will affect your RMS sampling strategy is whether and to what extent you want to disaggregate (i.e., break down data into smaller units of data) your results by different subgroups (e.g., gender, age, region). Users of RMS data often want to disaggregate results by different subgroups to highlight any differences in outcomes among different groups and/or to inform the design and targeting of program interventions.

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DECISION 6.2.1**Will you have enough statistical power to detect differences between each subgroup?**

A general rule of thumb for disaggregation is that the more subgroups you want to disaggregate your data by, the larger your sample size will need to be. Having enough “statistical power” to conduct a subgroup analysis is necessary to generalize the survey findings to the larger population. If you do not have enough statistical power to disaggregate data by different subgroups, the results may be inaccurate and unreliable. Considering whether your sample has the power to disaggregate RMS results is relevant for both participant-based and population-based sampling strategies. Determining your optimal sample size may require hiring a statistician.

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CONSIDERATIONS

Other Operational Considerations Affecting RMS Design

Having gone through all six RMS design decisions, you now have enough information to begin designing your RMS. Other important design and implementation considerations that will affect the RMS are detailed below.

Do you have a formal agreement for sign-off on key documents (e.g., concept note, work plan, budget) and a process for updating documents over time?

A formal agreement on the design of the RMS with key stakeholders (e.g., agreement officer, research and implementing partners) can help you manage requests for additional analyses and avoid misunderstandings about the purpose and focus of the RMS.

Do you have the internal capacity to design and implement the RMS?

It is important to consider from the outset what skills and knowledge will be required to design and implement the RMS, including the following aspects of RMS design and implementation: calculating sample size, collecting data, analyzing results, writing up results, and designing communication products.

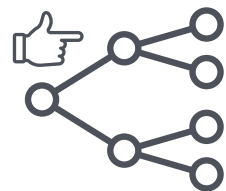
Do you have the budget to conduct the RMS?

Once you have a good understanding of which aspects of RMS design and implementation you will carry out in-house, you need to consider whether you have sufficient budget to cover the costs associated with outsourcing aspects of RMS design and implementation. The budget available will also greatly influence the sample size and frequency of data collection.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



[RMS Design Decision Tree:](#)
a Visual representation of the six RMS design decisions



[REAL Practical Guidance Note 6:](#)
Recurrent Monitoring Surveys: a guidance on RMS published in 2019



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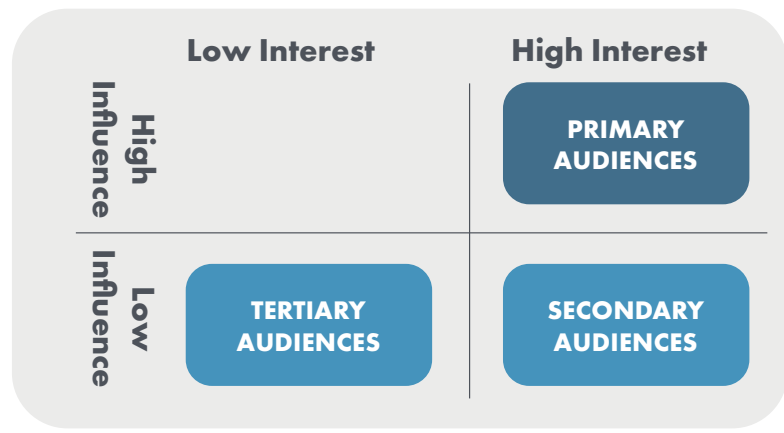
RMS TOOL 1
Audience Profiles

This tool outlines the steps to developing profiles of the different audiences that will interact with the RMS results. RMS audience profiles describe each audience, how you want to influence them using the RMS, and any implications for how the RMS products are packaged.

Audience Profile Steps

STEP 1 IDENTIFY THE TYPES OF AUDIENCES

RMS audiences can also be thought of as the program’s stakeholders that you want to influence with the RMS results. Common audience types are: donor(s), implementing partners, government agencies, and local communities. If you have a lot of audience types, use an influence/interest matrix to help prioritize the primary audiences (see the figure above).



STEP 2 DESCRIBE EACH AUDIENCE TYPE

Once you have prioritized the primary RMS audiences, the next step is to provide more specific details on whom within that audience you are trying to influence with the RMS results. See below for an example.



- **USAID Mission in Kenya** (RMS Consumer RMS Designer in a limited way)
- **Regional BHA** (RMS Designer)
- **BHA Washington** (RMS Consumer RMS Designer)
- **Center for Resilience** (RMS Consumer)
- **Health Population and nutrition department** (RMS Consumer)
- **Office of Economic Growth** (RMS Consumer)

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STEP 3

DESCRIBE HOW YOU WANT TO USE THE RMS TO INFLUENCE EACH AUDIENCE

Think about what you want each audience or stakeholder group to do with the RMS results. Common influence categories include using the RMS results for: program adaptation, influencing investment in resilience programming, policy and advocacy, and government/community decision-making.

STEP 4

IDENTIFY THE KEY ENABLERS
AND BARRIERS THAT COULD
PROMOTE OR PREVENT THE
PRIMARY AUDIENCES FROM
USING THE RMS

Enablers and barriers could be external factors or related to the RMS itself (e.g., how the results are reported). The enablers and barriers could also be more directly related to what the incentives/disincentives are for each primary audience to use the RMS.

ENABLERS

Clarity on the purpose
in advance and
clear articulation/
presentation of
findings and results

Shared agreement
on what the study
can and can't do

Regular
communication on
process and results

BARRIERS

Findings don't
appropriately tell the
story the program
wants to tell

Complexity of RMS
results and outputs

Exclusion in the
design and rollout
of the RMS

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TO STEP 5



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STEP 5

IDENTIFY HOW THE RMS RESULTS SHOULD BE PACKAGED FOR EACH AUDIENCE

The presentation of the RMS results should be tailored to the audience you are trying to reach or influence. Some examples of different RMS products are: short reports, policy briefs, interactive dashboards, short videos, and presentations.

STEP 6

DEVELOP THE AUDIENCE PROFILE NARRATIVE

Enablers and barriers could be external factors or related to the RMS itself (e.g., how the results are reported). The enablers and barriers could also be more directly related to what the incentives/disincentives are for each primary audience to use the RMS.



Audience Profile Example

STAKEHOLDER DESCRIPTION: This stakeholder group consists of BHA (Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance) Regional, BHA Washington, the Center for Resilience, and USAID Mission in Kenya including the Health Population and Nutrition Department and the Office of Economic Growth.

HOW THE PROGRAM WANTS TO INFLUENCE USAID BHA WITH THE RMS: The program would like to use the RMS to make the case that more funding should go towards multi-year resilience-focused programming in Kenya and globally. This will be achieved through clearly articulating and presenting evidence of whether and how integrated intervention packages increase access and use of resilience capacities and wellbeing in the face of shocks and stresses. The program should be prepared for the possibility that the RMS will show unexpected results and be able to draw lessons for BHA even if the results are not completely aligned with the program’s objectives. Specifically for the Regional BHA team and departments, the program would like to use the RMS to identify opportunities for layering with other BHA programs in Kenya and to provide evidence for BHA to be able to influence Government of Kenya policies on ending drought emergencies and strengthening resilience/social protection/nutrition/health/livestock.

RMS PRODUCT PACKAGING: For this audience, the RMS products should come in the form of short reports, policy briefs, or videos that combine key findings from the RMS, compelling graphics, and clear recommendations. The recommendations should touch on the design of future resilience food security activities and ways to improve the integration of humanitarian and development assistance in arid and semi-arid lands and beyond.



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RMS TOOL 2
Objective Co-Creation
Workshop Agenda

This tool provides a template for the RMS Objective Co-Creation Workshop Agenda and suggested facilitation techniques for each session.

Participants

It is important to have the right decision-makers in the workshop to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are involved in setting the RMS objectives and are on the same page. At a minimum, this workshop should include the program leadership team, technical teams, monitoring and evaluation team, and/or the lead RMS designer(s).

Co-Creation Workshop Agenda

Day 1 Session Overview			
Time	Session	Description	Method
Setting the Stage			
(15 min.)	Agenda & Objectives	- Welcome message and intention setting (5 min) - Workshop objectives and agenda (5 min) - Questions (5 minutes)	WHO: Chief of Party /Program Director HOW: Discussion
(15 min.)	Participant Introductions	Name, organization, role	WHO: Everyone HOW: Round robin
(30 min.)	RMS Overview	- What is an RMS? - How does it differ from and complement other MEL (Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning) activities? - Lessons learned: Benefits and challenges associated with RMS from the RMS Landscape Review	WHO: Lead RMS designer HOW: Presentation

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For more Co-Creation Workshop Agenda



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Co-Creation Workshop Agenda (Continued)

Time	Session	Description	Method
(45 min.)	Overview of Common RMS Objectives and Examples	• Divide participants into 3 - 4 groups • Participants will go to 3 - 4 stations to hear short presentations on different RMS objectives with examples from the RMS Landscape Review	WHO: Lead RMS designers HOW: World Cafe
(15 min.)	BREAK	• Coffee and refreshments	
Who Are the RMS Audiences?			
(60 min.)	Presentation and Validation of RMS Audience Profiles	• Presentation of RMS audience profiles • Individual reflection and writing on the RMS audience profiles: 1) Which audiences do you think are most important for the RMS? 2) What would you change about the profiles? • Discuss reflections in pairs, then in groups of 4 (depending on time available) • Share key insights from discussions in plenary	WHO: Lead RMS designers HOW: Presentation, 1-2-4-All
(90 min.)	RMS Data Use Visioning	• Now that participants have reflected on how they want to influence their audiences / stakeholders to use the RMS, this session will allow participants to do some visioning on how they can use the RMS in their roles/work • Review technical area approach/work plan for each technical team (20 min.) • Discuss and document how the RMS could: • Facilitate adaptive management • Support activity/intervention design • Choose 1 member of the group to present the key points of the discussion • Other non-presenting group members rotate to another group to hear what that group discussed and to ask questions • First rotation and presentation (15 min.) • Second rotation and presentation (15 min.) • Each group reports on the commonalities that emerged from each group (20 min.)	WHO: Lead RMS designers HOW: World Cafe

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Co-Creation Workshop Agenda (Continued)

Time	Session	Description	Method
(60 min.)	Lunch		
Setting the RMS Objectives			
(60 min.)	RMS Objective Brainstorming	- Individually brainstorm RMS objectives based on RMS audience profiles - Discuss individually brainstormed objectives with another person and edit and/or merge objectives - Discuss, edit, and/or merge objectives with a group of 4 participants - Write final objectives on cards or pieces of paper	WHO: Lead RMS designer HOW: 1-2-4-All reflection exercise
(60 min)	RMS Objective Voting	- Post objectives on a wall in the workshop space - Take 10 minutes to read objectives individually - Give each participant 3 dot stickers - Give participants 5 minutes to vote on 3 RMS objectives - Review the RMS objective with the most votes	WHO: Lead RMS designers HOW: Dot Voting
(30 min.)	Wrap-up and next steps	- What was agreed on? - Areas still needing clarification or consensus - Provide details on how the work from the meeting will be written up and how it will be used to inform the draft RMS concept note.	WHO: Lead RMS designer HOW: Presentation or discussion



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RMS TOOL 3

Prioritizing Learning
Questions

Learning questions are specific, answerable, need-to-know questions that can be answered through monitoring, evaluation, research, or other analysis to address learning priorities incrementally.

One challenge with developing learning questions for an RMS is narrowing down the questions to a manageable list. This RMS tool will summarize strategies for prioritizing learning questions as part of your RMS.

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Additional Resources

The USAID Learning Lab has published many great resources on developing a learning agenda and learning questions.



The Learning Questions Tipsheet and Checklist provides some criteria for evaluating whether the learning question is useful, focused, feasible, and inclusive.



The INFORMED: Learning Question Formation in Eight Steps guide has a specific step focused on reviewing and reducing learning questions.

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Prioritizing Learning
Questions

Types of Learning Questions Relevant to RMS

There are many types of learning questions that are relevant to development and humanitarian programs. The types of questions that are most relevant to RMS are described in the table on the right:

Learning Question Type	Question Example
Quantitative	
Descriptive	What trends are we seeing in the participant population?
Comparative	Is there a difference between Group A and Group B?
Relational	Is X related to Y?
Qualitative	
Explanatory	Why did X happen? How does Y work?

Learning questions can also be categorized into three levels:

- 1. Macro-Level Learning Questions:** Questions that explore trends, relationships or comparisons between broad groups, systems and/or intervention approaches. These types of questions are also referred to as “global learning questions.” For example, *“Are program interventions having the intended effects on program participants, local actors, and local systems?”*
- 2. Meso-Level Learning Questions:** Question that focus on trends, relationships or comparisons among more defined groups, systems and/or intervention approaches than the macro-level questions. For example, *“Do we observe expected changes in access and use of resilience capacities and nutrition behaviors among high- versus low-intensity intervention villages over time?”*
- 3. Micro-Level Learning Questions:** These learning questions focus on the most specific trends, relationships and comparisons between groups, systems and/or intervention approaches. For example, *“Are households living in high-intensity villages more likely to purchase and consume nutritious foods than households living in low-intensity villages?”*

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RMS TOOL 3

Prioritizing Learning Questions

Criteria to Prioritize RMS Learning Questions

- Prioritize questions that are most closely related to the primary RMS objective and relevant to the primary RMS audiences.**
 This will help you to identify questions that are either out of the scope of the RMS or a lower priority to answer.
- Prioritize questions that are testing the most direct relationships in your program theory of change.**
 A direct relationship is a connection between two variables where a change in one variable causes the other variable to also change. Results that are close together in the program theory of change are usually the most direct. Indirect relationships are difficult to test since they typically involve a mediating or intervening variable that is outside the control of the program and/or not being measured.
- Prioritize questions that are important for multiple technical teams within the program.**
 Questions that cut across many different technical sectors tend to be the most useful for a program’s learning.
- Prioritize questions that are filling a knowledge gap.**
 Conducting a quick scan of the evidence that already exists on the RMS’s key areas of inquiry will help you narrow your questions to those that are filling an important knowledge gap. The [international initiative for impact evaluations \(3iE\) evidence gap maps](#) are a good source for identifying evidence gaps.



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RMS TOOL 4
 Analysis Options

This RMS tool summarizes the main analysis methods used with RMS data.

QUANTITATIVE

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis summarizes the results (i.e., produces averages and percentages) of key indicators across your RMS population (including analysis by RMS subgroups) at one or more points in time and is most associated with learning questions that explore trends.

Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis shows whether there is a relationship between two variables and can quantify how strong that relationship is (and is therefore most relevant to learning questions that test relationships but can also be relevant to comparison questions). This type of analysis can show whether the relationship is positive (an increase in one variable is associated with an increase in the other) or negative (an increase in one variable is associated with a decrease in the other), but it cannot tell you which variable is causing the change in the other variable.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis estimates the relationship between an independent variable (i.e., explanatory variable) and a dependent variable (i.e., outcome). When the analysis looks only at the relationship between two variables, it is called correlation analysis. If the regression also controls for other factors (i.e., confounding variables) that may affect this relationship, it is called “multivariate regression analysis.” As with correlation analysis, regression analysis is most relevant to learning questions that test relationships or compare results between intervention groups. The different types of regression analysis methods are explained in more detail in [REAL Practical Guidance Note 4](#).

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QUALITATIVE

Basic Qualitative Analysis

Basic qualitative analysis methods consist of approaches to quantify the presence of certain words or themes in a dataset and/or to analyze and interpret patterns in the dataset. This is usually done using qualitative analysis software or by “coding” transcripts of interviews or focus group discussions.

Positive Deviance Analysis

Positive deviance analysis is used to describe the strategies by which certain “positive deviant” individuals, households, or communities maintain or improve their wellbeing in the face of shocks and stresses. Positive deviants may be identified initially through quantitative analysis or through stakeholder consultation.

Life History Analysis

Life history analysis produces a rich narrative of a respondent’s life. Resilience storytelling is a form of this qualitative analysis approach that combines life history interviews with contextual and programmatic data to create a rich narrative of how individuals, households, and communities cope with and respond to shocks and stresses.

For more information on qualitative analysis methods, see the [Qualitative Design Toolkit: Qualitative Methods for Monitoring Food Security Activities Funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance](#).

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RMS TOOL 5 CLA System Map

Understanding how RMS data can support learning and decision-making is important to achieving RMS objectives. To use RMS data to make actionable decisions, you need to know when there are opportunities in the program cycle each fiscal or calendar year to influence key programmatic decisions.

You also need to know who the decision makers are and what types of decisions they need to make at any given time during program planning/design, implementation, and monitoring & evaluation. This will ensure that the RMS produces the right information to make the right decision at the right time.

Evidence-Informed Adaptive Management

According to a recent paper on evidence-informed adaptive management,¹ using evidence to adaptively manage your program requires you to answer three broad questions:

Why do you need to adapt?

Are there changes in the context or new information that support or challenge the assumptions and hypotheses in your theory of change that require you to change or correct course?

What do you need to adapt?

What are the specific elements of an intervention or approach that your program is implementing that need to change?

How should you adapt?

Do decision makers have the ability, incentives, and authority to make adaptations? Have all stakeholders been consulted and agree on the decisions to be made?

CONTINUE

¹ Hernandez, K., Ramalingam, B., and Wild, L. (2019). Towards evidence-informed adaptive management: A roadmap for development and humanitarian organizations. Working paper 565. Retrieved from <https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/12985.pdf>



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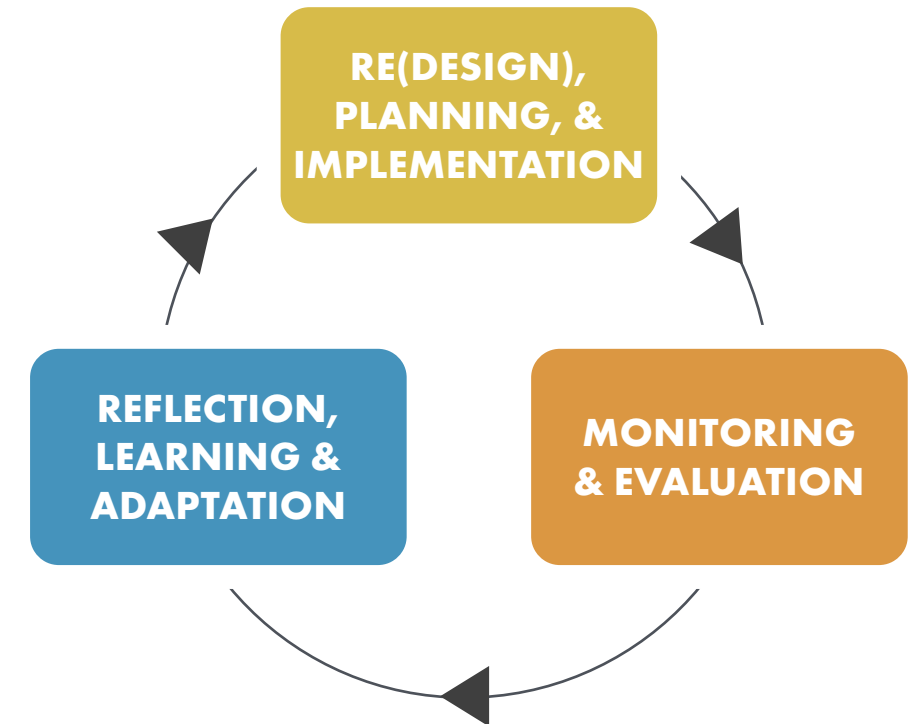
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USAID'S Collaboration, Learning, and Adaptation (CLA) Approach

CLA is a set of systematic and intentional practices that help improve development effectiveness. Strategic collaboration, continuous learning, and adaptive management link all components of the program cycle. Integrating CLA into our work helps ensure that our programs are coordinated with others, grounded in a strong evidence base, and iteratively adapted to remain relevant throughout implementation.

CLA System Map

One tool that can help you identify opportunities where RMS data can be used to inform programmatic decisions along a fiscal or calendar year is the CLA System Map. This tool guides you through mapping out the major M&E, reflection and (re)design/planning and implementation activities along the fiscal or calendar year for your program. It also helps you identify key decision gates (i.e., program events or milestones where a decision is made to continue the program and release its next phase) and reporting periods. Finally, the tool prompts you to draw connections between M&E, reflection and (re) design, planning and implementation activities, so that it is clear whether these activities are sequenced effectively to promote data-driven decision-making.



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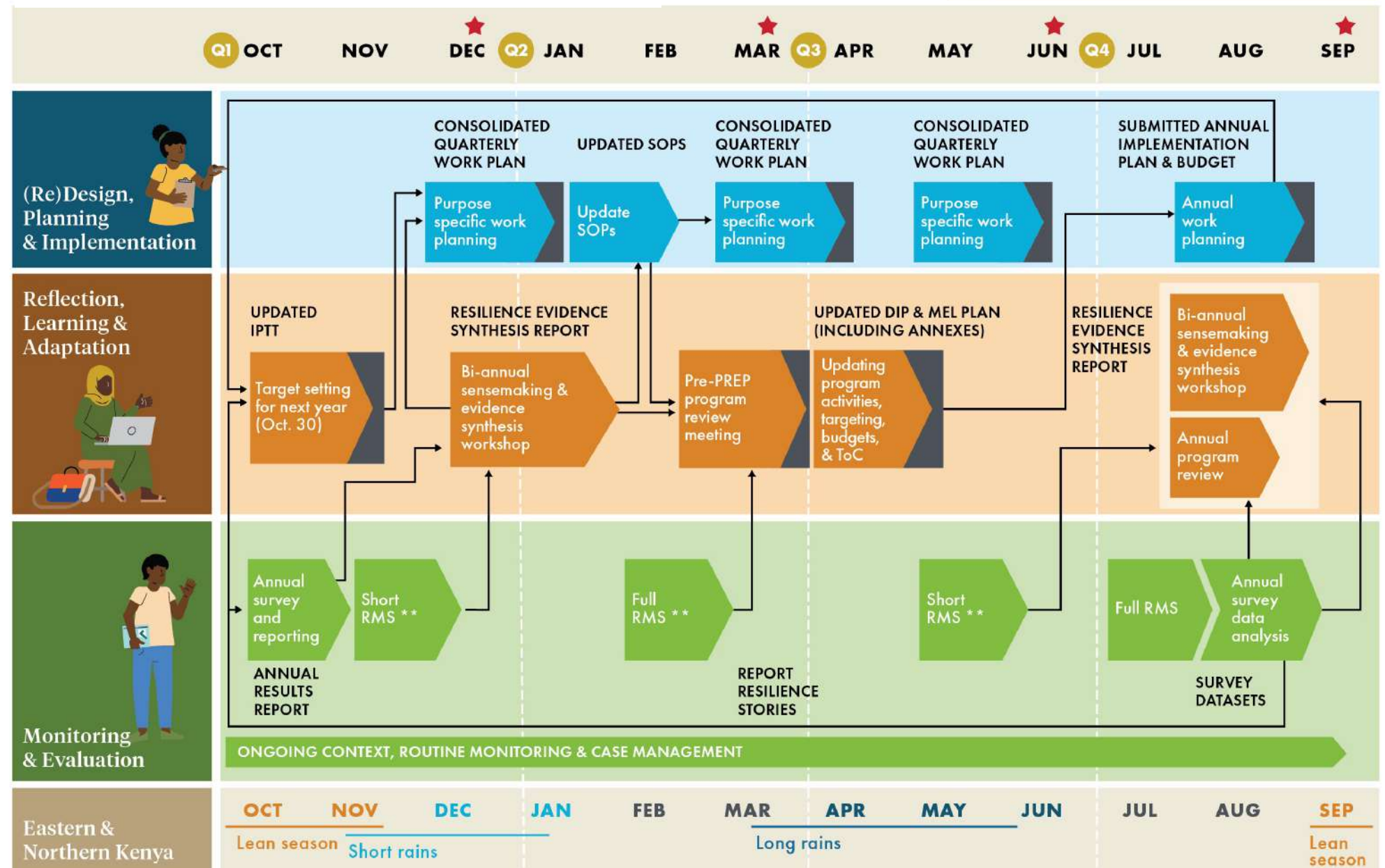
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CLA SYSTEM MAP EXAMPLE

KEY

Decision
Gates★ Reports
DueTEXT IN BLACK
IS AN OUTPUT

*The **Full RMS** will occur at the same time as the participant-based annual survey, have a longer survey tool, and collect data from individuals from the Nawiri intervention and comparison groups

****Short RMSs** will be shorter than the annual RMS data collection tool and only collect data from participants in the Nawiri intervention groups

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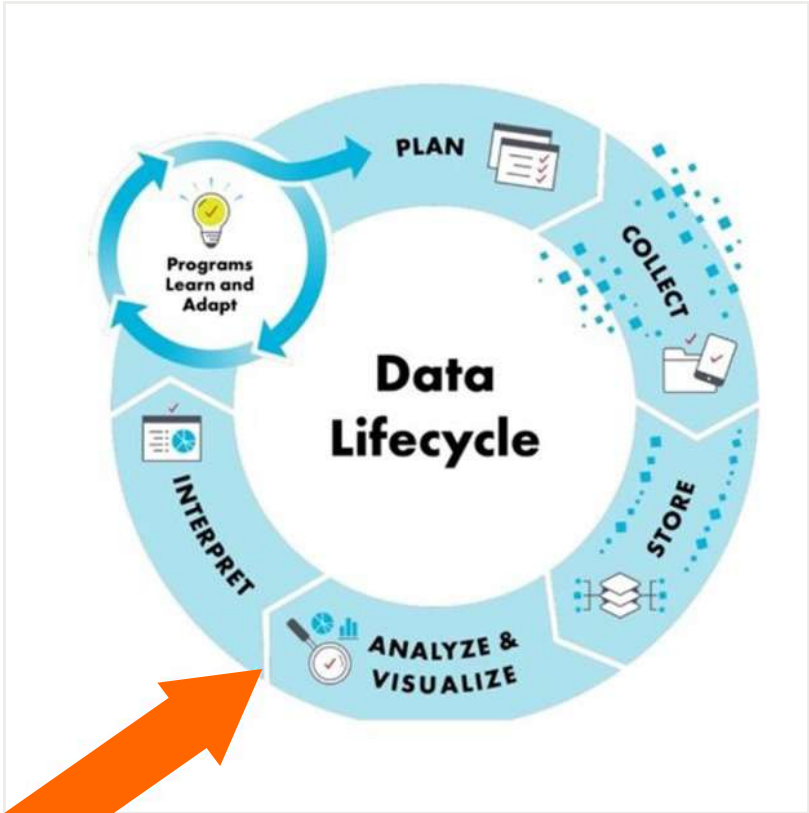
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One of the main objectives of resilience measurement is to understand what makes individuals, households, communities, and systems resilient to inform program design and adaptive management. Lessons learned from implementing resilience measurement activities have shown that “resilience data” is often complex and requires teams to unpack and make sense of the results before they can be understood and applied to improve program design and implementation.

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Sensemaking

“Sensemaking” is a pause and reflect methodology that can help teams make sense of complex data to facilitate program decision-making. The goal of sensemaking is to unpack the meaning behind data and develop interpretations that are rooted in the context in which the program is implemented.



Sensemaking Workshop
Sensemaking Workshop

Sensemaking uses three main questions to guide teams through the sensemaking process:

1. Were the results expected? Are they consistent with or different from the theory of change?
2. Why were the results different than expected? What evidence supports these explanations?
3. What actions should we take?



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Objective Co-Creation Workshop Agenda



RMS TOOL 3
Prioritizing Learning Questions



RMS TOOL 4
Analysis Options



RMS TOOL 5
CLA System Map



RMS TOOL 6
Sensemaking Workshops



RMS DESIGN
CHECKLIST
TOOL



1	DATA USE
2	PRIMARY OBJECTIVES
3	LEARNING QUESTIONS
4	ANALYSIS METHOD
5	DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY
6	SAMPLING STRATEGY

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- Considerations
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- Acknowledgements



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When to Conduct a Sensemaking Workshop

Sensemaking workshops are most effective when conducted after data analysis but before data reporting, giving teams an opportunity to create interpretations of the data that can be included in reports, learning briefs, etc. Sensemaking workshops can be held after a single data collection event or after multiple data collection events. Finally, it is also important to time sensemaking sessions around program work planning so that recommendations can be incorporated directly into implementation plans. The CLA System Map Tool can help teams plan the timing of sensemaking workshops around M&E and work planning activities.

Workshop Preparation Steps

1) DEVELOP SIMPLE RESULTS HANDOUTS

The handouts could include summary statistics and visuals like:

- The average number of livelihoods per participant was 1.9.
- Of the 15 possible livelihood activities in the project districts, most respondents were dependent on crop production (77%) (See figure on the right.)

Prompts for generating insights:

- Is it expected that the main livelihood sources are farming and livestock production, and that casual labor, handicrafts, and remittances are not as common?
- To what extent are livelihoods diversified to cope with climatic shocks? Which on-farm and off-farm activities should the program scale up and scale down, and why?

CONTINUE

Farm/Cropping Production



Livestock Production



Casual/Daily Labor



Remittance/relative



Handcraft materials



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2) DEVELOP WORKSHOP AGENDA AND FACILITATION PLAN

Sensemaking workshop can take 1–3 days, depending on the amount of data that needs to be interpreted. The example agenda below is for a 1-day workshop.

1 Day Sensemaking Workshop Agenda

Time	Session	Description	Method
20 min.	Session 1 Setting the Stage	This session consists of 5 parts: 1. Welcome & workshop objectives 2. Exercise on unpacking the feelings around the results 3. Overview of “what is sensemaking” 4. Brief discussion/overview of external factors affecting the results	WHO: Program leadership HOW: Presentation
20 min.	Session 2 RMS Overview	Overview of the RMS objectives, learning questions, and design	WHO: RMS designer HOW: Presentation
60 min.	Session 3 Key Insights from Theme 1 Analysis	Step 1: Break into small groups, either randomly or by program component, intermediate result, or technical team. Assign a note taker and facilitator. Step 2: Review results handout individually Step 3: Discuss prompts for generating insights: - Were the results expected? Are they consistent with or different from the theory of change? - Why were the results different than expected? What evidence supports these explanations? 1) Are the results meaningful? 2) If so, what explains the results we are seeing? Step 4: Document 1) Big “aha” insights and 2) Outstanding concerns/lingering questions.	WHO: Everyone HOW: Small group Individual reflection Plenary discussion

CONTINUE

For more Sensemaking Workshop Agenda

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One-Day Sensemaking Workshop Agenda (Continued)

BREAK (20 min.)			
60 min.	Session 3 Key Insights from Theme 2 Analysis	Repeat steps from Session 3	
60 min.	Session 3 Key Insights from Theme 3 Analysis	Repeat steps from Session 3	
60 min.	Session 4 Plenary Report	Aha insights Each group reports the top 3 key insights and writes them on cards. Remaining questions 1. Quickly group insights on what is still unclear into themes based on similarity during Session 4. 2. Present themes to the plenary and make sure they have captured everything. 3. Facilitate discussion and document what additional data may be needed.	WHO: Everyone HOW: Plenary discussion Cards (Insights) Flipchart (Remaining questions)
LUNCH (60 min.)			
90 min.	Session 5 Programmatic Actions	This session will focus on answering: How should our insights inform programming? Step 1: Break into the same groups as in 3. Assign a group facilitator and note taker. Step 2: Discuss prompts. Example prompts: 1. How should the results inform the layering of interventions? 2. Which interventions should be scaled up or down? 3. Are there new interventions that we should prioritize? Step 3: Document key actions in an action plan or work plan.	WHO: Program leadership introduce activity HOW: Small group work Plenary discussion

CONTINUE

For more Sensemaking Workshop Agenda



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1 Day Sensemaking Workshop Agenda (Continued)

60 min.	Session 6 Programmatic Actions Plenary Report	Actions Step 1: Each group should report their top 3 actions and write them on cards. Step 2: Post key insights from Session 4 on the wall. Step 3: Map the “top actions” to each key insight.	WHO: Everyone HOW: Plenary discussion Cards (Actions)
30 min.	Wrap-Up and Next Steps	Explain the process for reviewing and synthesizing the themes from Session 3 (insights) and how the “evidence-based actions” (i.e., actions linked to data insights) will be reported after the workshop.	WHO: Program leadership

POST-WORKSHOP STEPS

1. Capture workshop outputs (e.g., Word document, spreadsheet, Miro board).
2. Integrate workshop insights into final data collection report.

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Sensemaking Workshops

Common Sensemaking Workshop Challenges and Solutions

Challenges	Solutions
Workshop facilitators sometimes lack the facilitation skills needed to support workshop participants in generating sensemaking insights.	Select a facilitation team with diverse skills and experience in facilitating the sensemaking process. Use interactive and participatory facilitation techniques. (See https://www.liberatingstructures.com/ .)
Teams find conflicting and unexpected results difficult to interpret.	Triangulating results by synthesizing data from multiple sources can help you create a stronger and clearer evidence picture for teams. Create workshop norms that address overcoming confirmation bias (i.e., the tendency to seek out, interpret, favor, and selectively recall information that confirms already held beliefs, while avoiding or ignoring information that contradicts those beliefs). First, build awareness of what confirmation bias is by providing some examples , and then have an open discussion about how the workshop group can overcome it.
Difficulty translating insights into action	Sensemaking is most effective when there is already a culture of adaptive management and learning in a program, and when there is trust in and ownership of the results.

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RMS
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The Recurrent Monitoring System (RMS) Design Checklist is a quick reference for individuals and organizations that are ready to design an RMS.

The checklist items are listed in the order in which decisions are typically made; however, items later in the checklist may require you to revisit earlier design decisions.

RETURN TO HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

- DECISION 1** INFLUENCING HOW RMS DATA IS USED

 - ☐ The RMS audience profiling exercise is completed, approved, and documented in the RMS concept note.
- DECISION 2** CHOOSING THE PRIMARY RMS OBJECTIVE

 - ☐ The RMS objective co-creation workshop is completed.
 - ☐ The primary and secondary objectives are approved and documented in the RMS concept note.
- DECISION 3** CHOOSING THE PRIMARY RMS LEARNING QUESTIONS

 - ☐ RMS learning questions are developed based on the RMS objectives and audience profiles and are approved and documented in the RMS concept note.
- DECISION 4** DETERMINING THE RMS ANALYSIS METHOD

 - ☐ A data analysis plan based on the RMS objectives and learning questions is completed, approved, and documented in the RMS concept note.
- DECISION 5** DETERMINING THE RMS DATA COLLECTION STRATEGY

 - ☐ A data collection methodology based on the RMS objectives and learning questions is determined and documented in the RMS concept note.
 - ☐ A data collection frequency based on the primary RMS objective and budget is completed, approved, and documented in the RMS concept note.
- DECISION 6** DETERMINING THE RMS SAMPLING STRATEGY

 - ☐ A sampling strategy based on the primary RMS objective, subgroup analysis plan, and RMS budget is completed, approved, and documented in the RMS concept note.
- OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS**

 - ☐ The RMS concept note is completed and approved.
 - ☐ The RMS work plan is completed and approved.
 - ☐ The RMS budget is completed and approved.
 - ☐ RMS roles and responsibilities are defined for internal and external personnel.



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About The Resilience Evaluation, Analysis and Learning (REAL) Award

REAL is a consortium-led effort funded by the USAID Center for Resilience. It was established to respond to growing demand among USAID Missions, host governments, implementing organizations, and other key stakeholders for rigorous, yet practical, monitoring, evaluation, strategic analysis, and capacity building support. Led by Save the Children, REAL draws on the expertise of its partners: Mercy Corps and TANGO International.

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Contact Information

The REAL Award
c/o Save the Children
899 North Capitol Street NE, Suite #900, Washington, D.C. 20002
REAL@savechildren.org
<https://www.fsnnetwork.org/REAL>