MONITORING, EVALUATION, ACCOUNTABILITY & LEARNING (MEAL) POLICY

Evidence | Accountability | Inclusion | Learning | Results

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1. Purpose, Scope and Policy Statement

Purpose

This Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Policy establishes minimum standards for planning, monitoring, evaluating and learning from all programmes and projects implemented or supported by Silent Cry Foundation (SCF). It helps SCF assess relevance, effectiveness, inclusion, safety, efficiency and sustainability, and improve results for communities.

Policy statement and scope

SCF will use credible evidence, meaningful community participation and results-based management throughout the project cycle. MEAL is a management responsibility and must be resourced from project design. This Policy applies to all SCF offices, programmes, projects, emergency responses, staff, volunteers, consultants and relevant implementing partners.

Policy hierarchy

Applicable law, donor agreements, safeguarding obligations, data-protection requirements and signed partnership agreements apply alongside this Policy. Where requirements differ, SCF must follow the stricter applicable requirement unless it conflicts with law. The Executive Director and MEAL Lead must resolve material conflicts before implementation.

Core principles

Results orientation; participation and inclusion; impartiality; transparency; accuracy and proportionality; accountability; do-no-harm; confidentiality and data minimisation; gender, age and disability sensitivity; conflict sensitivity; learning and adaptive management; and value for money.

2. Definitions and Results-Based Management

Key terms

Monitoring is the routine collection and review of information on activities, outputs, outcomes, resources, risks and progress. Evaluation is a systematic assessment of an intervention’s design, implementation and results against defined criteria. Accountability means explaining decisions and results to stakeholders and providing accessible feedback channels. Learning is the use of evidence to improve decisions and future programming.

Results chain and theory of change

Project designs should distinguish inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and intended impact. Each project should explain how activities are expected to produce outputs and outcomes, identify assumptions and external factors, and consider possible unintended consequences. Review the theory of change when evidence shows the original logic is no longer valid.

Indicators and evaluation criteria

Indicators should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART). Each indicator needs a definition, unit, disaggregation, baseline, target, source, collection frequency, responsible person and calculation method. Where appropriate, evaluations should assess relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

3. Governance, Roles and Responsibilities

Board of Directors

Approves this Policy, reviews organisational results and significant evaluation findings, and oversees accountability, risk and learning. It should preserve evaluation independence where its own decisions are under review.

Director General

Ensures adequate resources, assigns responsibility, reviews significant performance concerns, requires corrective action and ensures findings inform strategic and operational decisions.

MEAL Lead / Officer

Maintains MEAL standards and tools; supports theories of change, logframes and MEAL plans; provides training; checks data quality; coordinates evaluations; consolidates reports; supports learning; and escalates data-integrity, ethical or safeguarding concerns.

Programme and project managers

Are accountable for project results, timely data collection, reporting accuracy, budgeted MEAL activities and corrective actions. They must ensure staff and partners understand indicators and reporting schedules.

Field staff, partners and support functions

Collect data using approved tools, maintain source records, obtain consent where required and protect confidentiality. Partnership agreements must define reporting, verification and data-protection duties.

Finance reconciles expenditure where relevant; safeguarding focal points handle sensitive complaints through protected pathways.

Independence and separation of duties

Where feasible, the person delivering an activity should not be the sole verifier of its results. Use independent or external evaluators for high-value, complex, sensitive or strategically important evaluations where resources permit.

4. Project Design and MEAL Planning

Needs assessment and baseline

Projects should be based on documented needs, context and stakeholder analysis, including perspectives of groups that may face barriers. Establish baseline values before or early in implementation where feasible; document limitations where this is not possible.

Project MEAL plan

Every project must have an approved MEAL plan proportionate to its scale, duration, risk and donor requirements. At minimum include: theory of change/results framework; indicator tracking table; baseline and targets; data sources and methods; frequency and responsibilities; disaggregation; data-quality checks; feedback channels; evaluation/review milestones; learning questions; reporting schedule; data-protection arrangements; and a costed MEAL budget.

Indicator Tracking Table

For each indicator, record definition, result level, calculation, unit, baseline, targets by period, source, method, disaggregation, frequency, responsible person and actual result. Changes to definitions or targets require documented approval and an explanation of effects on comparability.

Budgeting and feasibility

Budget for assessments, studies where appropriate, field visits, translation, accessible tools, enumerators, secure data systems, analysis, evaluations, community feedback and learning. Assess security, respondent burden, risks to children and vulnerable people, privacy, language and accessibility before data collection.

5. Routine Monitoring and Field Verification

Monitoring schedule and reviews

Maintain a calendar for activity tracking, outputs, outcomes, expenditure, risks, partner performance, beneficiary feedback and field verification. Project teams should review progress at least monthly where the project duration and context allow.

Monitoring visits

Use approved checklists and include observation, document review and safe, voluntary consultation with stakeholders. Distinguish verified facts from perceptions and recommendations. Do not expose respondents or staff to retaliation or protection risks.

Output and outcome monitoring

Output monitoring confirms what was delivered, to whom, where, when and at what quality. Outcome monitoring examines whether intended changes are occurring and for whom. Use multiple sources to test important findings where feasible.

Adaptive and emergency monitoring

When results are off track, assumptions change or harm may occur, document the issue, consider options, approve changes at the correct level and update plans and risks. During emergencies or access constraints, simplified or remote methods may be used when safe; record verification gaps and limitations.

6. Data Collection, Quality and Management

Tools and data quality

Use standardised, tested tools and written protocols, with plain language and local languages where appropriate. Check validity, accuracy, completeness, consistency, timeliness, integrity and appropriate disaggregation.

Verification and corrections

Conduct documented checks proportionate to risk, including source verification, sample re-counts, consistency checks, duplicate detection and spot checks. Do not silently overwrite reported data. Record corrections, author, date, reason and approval; communicate material errors where reporting obligations require it.

Digital security and access

Limit database, device and folder access to authorised personnel. Use secure storage, approved transfer methods and backups. Do not store sensitive beneficiary data on unapproved personal devices or share it through insecure channels.

Retention and disposal

Follow a retention schedule aligned with law, donor contracts and SCF requirements. Securely delete or destroy records after the retention period unless a legal hold or legitimate requirement applies. Retain aggregated or anonymized data were useful and safe.

7. Evaluation, Reviews and Studies

Planning and terms of reference

Identify appropriate baseline, midline, endline, outcome, impact or other studies in the MEAL plan. Terms of reference should state purpose, users, scope, questions, criteria, methodology, sampling, disaggregation, ethical safeguards, deliverables, timeline, budget and dissemination plan.

Evaluator selection and methodology

Select evaluators based on competence, context knowledge, methodological quality, impartiality, safeguarding competence and value for money. Disclose conflicts of interest. Use quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods appropriate to the questions and make limitations transparent. Do not attribute change to SCF without a design that supports causal claims.

Management response and dissemination

After an evaluation, management must document which recommendations are accepted, partially accepted or declined, with rationale, action owner, deadline and resources. Track significant recommendations to closure. Share findings in accessible formats, subject to safety, confidentiality, consent and contractual obligations.

8. Accountability to Affected People and Safeguarding

Participation and feedback

Communities should have meaningful opportunities to influence assessment, design, monitoring, evaluation and learning. Each project must communicate accessible channels for feedback, suggestions and complaints, explain response arrangements and record actions taken.

Sensitive complaints

Allegations involving sexual exploitation and abuse, harassment, child safeguarding, fraud, threats or serious misconduct must be referred promptly through designated safeguarding, whistleblowing or incident-reporting procedures. Do not investigate sensitive cases through routine MEAL surveys or place identifiable details in routine datasets.

Consent and do-no-harm

Explain the purpose of data collection, intended use, confidentiality limits and the right to decline without losing assistance. Obtain informed consent or appropriate assent/guardian consent where required. Assess risks from questions, photos, locations and published stories. Assistance must never depend on participation or positive feedback.

9. Inclusion, Gender and Conflict Sensitivity

Disaggregation and accessibility

Where safe, relevant and feasible, disaggregate data by sex, age, disability and other relevant characteristics. Collect only data needed for a legitimate purpose and avoid identifying or exposing individuals or small groups. Account for barriers related to language, literacy, disability, gender, age, displacement, security and access.

Equity and conflict sensitivity

Review who is reached, who is excluded, the quality of assistance and whether outcomes differ across groups. Analyse how targeting, staff conduct and resource distribution may affect tensions and perceptions of fairness. Use findings to improve programming without stigmatising participants.

10. Reporting, Learning and Use of Evidence

Reporting

Submit reports according to approved internal calendars and donor deadlines. Reports should cover progress against outputs and outcomes, expenditure where relevant, variance from targets, challenges, risks, feedback, lessons and corrective actions.

Report quality

Reported figures must be traceable to approved sources and reconciled with the Indicator Tracking Table. Distinguish activities delivered, outputs achieved, outcomes observed and longer-term impact to which SCF may have contributed.

Learning and knowledge management

Hold periodic reflection sessions and after-action reviews at major milestones or emergencies. Record what was expected, what happened, why, the evidence, and what will change. Store reports, tools, evaluations and learning notes in a controlled repository with access permissions.

Organisational review

The MEAL Lead should prepare periodic summaries for management and the Board on performance trends, data quality, inclusion, feedback themes, significant risks, evaluation recommendations and outstanding actions.

11. Ethics, Confidentiality and Research Integrity

Ethical review and data minimisation

Sensitive research, work involving children or high-risk groups, or data collection that creates material risk should receive appropriate ethical and safeguarding review before fieldwork. Collect only information necessary for a defined purpose.

Data sharing and personal stories

Share identifiable data only where lawful, necessary, authorised and protected by appropriate agreements and security. Obtain specific, informed permission for identifiable photos, recordings, quotations or stories intended for communications. Consent must be voluntary and separate from access to assistance.

Data incidents

Report suspected loss, unauthorised access, disclosure, fabrication or manipulation promptly to the designated manager and data-protection/safeguarding focal point. Preserve records and follow SCF incident-response procedures.

12. Capacity, Compliance and Review

Capacity development

Provide role-appropriate training on results frameworks, indicators, data collection, data quality, consent, safeguarding, feedback, analysis, reporting and learning. Review training needs annually.

Compliance and breaches

SCF may review project files, indicator tables, source records, feedback logs, data controls and action plans. Fabrication, deliberate manipulation, unauthorised disclosure, coercive data collection or retaliation may lead to corrective action, disciplinary measures, contract remedies or referral, consistent with law and SCF policies.

Effective date and review

This Policy becomes effective only after Board approval and communication to staff. Review it at least every two years, or sooner after material legal, donor, organizational or operational changes.

Approved Date: July 2020