



DFID Nepal Rural Access Programme
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Component

INCEPTION REPORT

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In association with: Development Consultancy Centre

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1. Purpose

The MEL component Inception Phase will finish at the end of May 2014. Many key pieces of work are maturing and there is a stronger, clearer sense of what the component can achieve in the coming years. The purpose of this report is to provide an assessment of progress to date. A second document presents options and proposals (and associated budgets) for the Implementation Phase for consideration by DFID. It is anticipated that these two documents will provide useful material and discussion points for DFID's upcoming Annual Review of the component.

In addition to reporting on actual progress, this paper also seeks to track useful learning points, and moments where important decisions were made.

A separate document of annexes is provided separately which contains:

- Notes from the RCA Scoping Study.
- Baseline Maps.
- Feeder road process flow and areas of enquiry.
- Sampling and analytical domains for household survey.
- Component Process Monitoring Section B Transport surveying: draft for comments.
- Trail Bridge Study design.

2. Summary of progress to date

The table below summarises progress with the deliverables set out in the original Inception Phase plan and identifies additional deliverables that have been achieved as the Inception Phase has proceeded. Further narrative on progress against the key deliverables follows the table. Associated documents on these have been provided for the annual review process.

The Inception Phase has been extended by two months due to factors largely beyond the control of the MEL component that have delayed progress with the completion of key deliverables. In particular:

- Details of RAP beneficiary groups required for the baseline survey sampling were not available until April.
- Contributing to the above, adverse weather conditions during the winter months have limited opportunities to conduct fieldwork, beneficiary group identification etc.

Deliverable	Progress Update
Cross-programme activities	
Revised logframe & TOC	MEL provided technical advice on proposed changes to the logframe and on how indicators can best be measured. TOC included in the draft evaluation framework & strategy. Specific indicators for integration of the MEL component in the overall logframe will be proposed for the annual review discussions.
VFM diagnostic framework	Completed in December and included in evaluation framework.

Deliverable	Progress Update
Draft evaluation framework & strategy	Completed in December. Revision of this, supplemented by additional annexes with other deliverables outlined below will be completed by the end of May.
Component 1: Impact assessment	
Impact assessment design document	Completed in December and included in evaluation framework.
Data collection plan	Completed in February.
Survey questionnaire	Completed in April.
Baseline survey report	Baseline will be completed by end of May. Report will be completed in June.
Component 2: Thematic studies	
Thematic study report	<p>Pilot Reality Check completed in November.</p> <p>Full RCA now underway in four districts during May.</p> <p>TOR developed for two additional thematic reviews:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trail bridge study • Migration study
Component 3: Response & Innovation Window	
ME&L capacity assessment and plan	<p>Progress has been delayed by the family illness of the lead consultant, and the need for the project to develop some 'presence' to enable it to develop the relationships and understanding required to complete the study effectively.</p> <p>Plans for 'institutionalisation' will be developed early in the Implementation Phase.</p>
Additional deliverables not originally planned	
Process monitoring	<p>Methodology and guidance note completed.</p> <p>Training for DOs provided.</p> <p>Report on the initial test completed.</p> <p>First process monitoring report to be completed by end June.</p>
Recruitment and mobilisation of District Learning Coordinators	Three have been recruited. One more will be recruited early in the Implementation Phase.

The strands of work are arranged in four packages containing related pieces as detailed below.

2.1 MEL Design

MEL Framework

This was completed in December and serves as the main guiding document for the project. It includes a theory of change for RAP, which was developed collaboratively with RAP and other stakeholders. Feedback from main stakeholders (RAP and DFID) was largely positive and useful for revisions which will be made at the end of the Inception Phase to update and incorporate other processes as set out below. Major notable aspects of this are in the placing of the RAP3 programme in the broader development context, and

designing a full range of evaluation and learning methods and processes that will assess progress on RAP3 but also track change in the broader environment.

Logframe revision

This took considerable time to work through as it required the reconciliation of the RAP and DFID logframe versions (RAP had developed a version that would be useful in their management and reporting, whilst DFID had to go through various sign-off procedures before their version could be amended). However, this was a productive discussion. The MEL role was largely in technical advice on proposing changes on and how the resulting indicators could be best measured.

2.2 Quantitative impact assessment

Baseline Household Survey

This has been the most challenging single task to design and get underway for reasons mentioned above. As a general point on this, and at times other work, it has sometimes been difficult to obtain required information from RAP when they have been completely occupied with programme start-up – quite simply, and understandably, what have been major priorities for ME&L have not always been high up on RAP's list. On a more positive note, full advantage was taken from the delays to design, and redesign the baseline content and approach.

The enumerator training has taken place and the baseline survey exercise is around half way through, to be completed by early June. There are some notable aspects of the baseline development worth documenting here:

- **Consistency with government approaches.** A key working principle was that the survey sought to build on, and be consistent with, existing data sets and approaches such as the NLSS. The next NLSS will be due around a year before the RAP3 End-Line evaluation. The survey borrowed heavily from NLSS, with careful consideration on leaving out sections not relevant to RAP MEL priorities, augmenting certain sections where we want more detailed data such as on migration flows. NLSS datasets and other materials from the Central Bureau of Statistics were obtained with assistance from DFID, as were shape files from the Department of Survey that were a base resource for the development of the sample mapping. The design therefore drew on quite a range of different government and RAP data sources and it was a major task to convert all these into a single dataset from which the sample was designed
- **Investing in a large scale survey.** Considering that many national surveys have a similar number of sample households (in this case 3,200), the level of rigour applied, and the detail and specificity on the eight Districts that the survey can provide will be a knowledge asset that will be very useful for any development actors working in this area of the country
- **Building qualitative enquiry into the baseline.** The “Reality Check Approach” was adopted as a method for generating in-depth qualitative insight in the districts. An initial pilot was carried out in Kalikot and Dailekh. Findings from this informed the development of the Household Quantitative survey in areas such as inclusion and decision making, and unintended / potential negative impacts. A larger exercise has started up covering communities in Humla, Bajura, Doti and Achham. Ideally this would have taken place after the household survey so that particular trends, issues or surprises identified in this could have been looked at in more depth but this was not possible due to delays in the household survey start up. MEL will produce a Household Survey report, an RCA report, and an overall summary document that draws on both the qualitative and quantitative insights that arise.
- **Deciding on the most appropriate methods for comparison and on analytical domains.** The original intention was to carry out the survey over the eight core districts along with two additional comparison

districts neighbouring the eight (Jajarkot and Bajhang). It was quickly recognised that any attempt to identify credible “control” areas in this way was going to be extremely difficult (for instance there is major investment in wage based infrastructure being carried out by multiple actors in this area of the country) and the costs involved were not justifiable. At the same time the diverse mix of RAP3 interventions (programmatically and context/geographically) presented an unusually rich opportunity to design and impact assessment that would compare between and within the RAP programme interventions. The design therefore focused on these comparisons within the RAP3 districts. The idea of “corridors” around the roads was developed by RAP and this proved a useful starting point for designing the sample (see below for a summary on final analytical domains and data sources).

- **Coping with incomplete direct beneficiary datasets.** The RBG beneficiary groups were by far the most straightforward groups to factor into the sample design – a large number of participating households were clearly identified and relatively stable, with the intention that these households will continue to carry out this work until road completion. The process of forming the Road Maintenance Groups has taken much longer than anticipated and this meant that RMG direct beneficiary households could not be identified in time for the sample. In addition to this, there were more significant differences between RMG and RBG modus operandi than we had initially understood. RMG groups are smaller and employ lower numbers of people, and will have a more evolutionary approach for maintenance with certain road stretches prioritised for this year and others to be added each subsequent year. Similarly, the SED components have adopted a more evolutionary approach, so reach and nature of interventions will change over the programme period, but beneficiary data was available on these. It was therefore decided to adopt a random cluster sample approach for villages in the RMG areas. A small specific household RMG sample is proposed for later in the year, when these households are known, to add to the datasets from the main baseline. The Department of Survey data proved useful in constructing the maps from which the samples could be based but these files were produced around four years ago, meaning that with RAP’s assistance road network data had to be checked and updated.
- **Trail bridges.** It was decided to treat the trail bridges separately. This was partly a practical consideration to reduce the number of analytical domains and be able to allow a good representative sample of remaining domains within the resources available. It was also recognised that the timescales for observable change, and opportunities for “before and after” comparisons are very different for trail bridge initiatives compared to the longer time frames of road works and other SED activities. See Additional Annex for how Trail Bridges will be assessed.
- **Use of Open Data Kit (ODK).** The survey has been contracted out to an experienced Survey Manager and his team of Supervisors has been trained by the Itad international expert on the questionnaire and the use of ODK on mobile phones. Whilst this approach is gradually becoming more common, this is a particularly innovative aspect of the baseline and presents a considerable opportunity for improving efficiencies and accuracy of the survey, and a tested approach that contributes to local skills development and can be used in regular monitoring and borrowed by other actors (including RAP who are interested in their field staff using this approach). However, this approach brings a different set of risks (technology / equipment failure; the increased skill sets required of enumerators; practical issues such as recharging phones in remote areas; and considerable time needed for testing and fixing bugs) compared to traditional paper-based surveys. But we are confident that this investment will prove worthwhile and this baseline will have a long shelf life, and indeed is an essential platform for baseline to mid and end line evaluation processes.

Summary of Sampling and Analytical Domains

The road building and road maintenance schemes, along with associated social economic development activities, present a set of contrasting cohorts of households which will be sampled with equal precision. These sampling domains are spread across two programme implementation areas – those 4 districts where new RAP roads are being built, and those 4 districts where existing district network roads will be maintained. Representative statistics for each of the domains below are collected at either the 4 road-building district level or the 4 road maintenance district level and not for individual districts. The 7 sampling domains and the source of the sample frame for these sampling domains are outlined below:

Sampling domain description	Sample frame source/description
Road building group (RBG) households with one or more household members participating in road construction groups. These households are expected to fall within 1.5 hours walking time of the RAP road to be constructed. [1 sampling domain]	Primary sample unit = RBG, which consists of 20 households (with some exceptions) often drawn from a single ward, but in the significant minority of cases drawn from two or three wards. Hence sampling frame constructed from RBG rather than wards. Household members of each RBG were provided by RAP, hence providing opportunity to sample to household level.
Households living within 1.5 hours walking time of RAP new construction roads, and households living >1.5 hours and <5 hours walking time from RAP construction road. Where 1.5 and 5 hours has been translated into distance taking into account up and down slopes traversed between village and RAP road. The buffers were created taking the mean of the estimated distance walking from village to road and vice versa. Where villages were closer to a non-RAP road than the RAP road they were excluded from the inner and outer buffers samples. The same methodology as applied for the inner and outer buffers in the 4 road maintenance districts. [4 sampling domains]	GIS layers for villages, existing roads and proposed RAP construction roads acquired. Inner and outer buffers generated. A GIS layer for villages was coded for whether villages were inside the inner buffer, inside the outer buffer or outside both. Where buffers extend beyond the district boundaries of the 8 core districts, samples households will not be taken. The ward population sample frame, the only one available from the CBS, could not be used as the inner and outer buffers transect ward boundaries and there is no population data available for villages within wards. Therefore it will not be possible to select the primary sampling units probability of selection (PSU) size, as the PSU is village within ward. As estimates of indicators across multiple sampling domains are not anticipated, the issue of inappropriate weighting is not expected to arise. Villages in the inner and outer buffers are ordered within district spatially and have sampled using a linear systematic sampling scheme with random start. Household listings will take place within these sampled villages and 10 households within village randomly selected with a linear systematic sample with random start. This will ensure a selection across the entire buffer, but obviously where there is a greater concentration of villages that would be a greater concentration of the sample with this procedure.
Households with one or more members participating in social economic development activities within the 4 road- building districts, and separately for the 4 road maintenance districts. [2 sampling domains]	RAP has provided lists of SED project groups with households registered within each group in both construction and maintenance districts, which become the sample frame with the primary sampling units being an SED group. The sample frame will be ordered by District/VDC /SED group/SED household and then a linear systematic sample scheme with random start applied.

2.3 Thematic Reviews

Completed thematic review

Reality Check Assessments (pilot and baseline)

An experienced team from the Foundation for Development Management (FDM) was contracted and their findings and insights fed into the design of the household baseline survey as intended. As noted above, the main RCA exercise has started. The close interaction between the quantitative and qualitative specialists involved has been encouraging and noteworthy in successfully influencing each other's designs (and this is often not the case). A recent agreement to assign the RCA as the first Thematic Review was practical and welcome.

The RCA report will be completed in June 2014 and will be linked to the baseline household survey in an overall summary report drawing on these two. Taken together, this Baseline package stands to be one of the most comprehensive and rigorous data sets ever carried out in this area of the country.

Development of terms of reference for thematic reviews

Trail Bridges study

See above and additional Annex draft.

Migration Thematic Study

ToR were developed and circulated to explore the links between out-migration and public works programmes. This has been put on hold until the Implementation Phase to allow more considered time for researching current knowledge and options on suitable actors that could undertake this work. The core concept around migration and public works has proved popular. Key tasks will be in ensuring that the right local consultants / research organisation is engaged to take this on, and that the study is properly field-led (i.e. not repeating known wisdom on the subject but engaging in intensive field work in different RAP Districts and seeking the specificity there).

Other Thematic study areas

Multiple options have arisen for consideration for Thematic Reviews and these will be set out and consulted on to select and schedule these. DFID are keen on MEL developing a future Thematic Review focusing on the Karnali Employment Programme (KEP) and there is the shared theme of public works programmes that could be usefully explored. This will be discussed in the coming months. Another valuable study would focus on the maintenance programme, given this is significantly different from previous RAP programmes and carries such strategic importance in seeking to build the case for investment in road maintenance across the SWAP districts and beyond. This could be done through a longitudinal study over the coming two – three years (with the benefits of tracking change over time), or as a specific study after one year of the start-up to check progress and advise on changes needed for further phases.

2.4 Staffing, establishing ME&L field capacity and regular monitoring exercises

Recruiting, mobilising and training the Field Team

Three District Officers (DOs) have been recruited to be based in Humla; Doti-Bajura, Kalikot-Achham (sharing some coverage of Dailekh with the Field Coordinator), with one remaining post for Jumla-Mugu to be filled. Training and orientation to date has involved taking part in the first process monitoring field visits to Doti and Achham and they have contributed to the development of this and the Transport and Market survey designs. DOs have been trained in the RCA methods and are part of the current RCA exercise (working outside their "home" district). The DOs have also been trained on process monitoring toolkit and approaches, and attended the baseline Enumerator training to learn about the survey content and ODK data capture. The core duties of the DOs are noted in the Implementation Plan.

Process Monitoring and accompanying regular field monitoring activities

The Process Monitoring has had an early test in Doti and Achham RMG/SED areas. Due to the fact that work had only started up and RMG groups were only recently formed / not yet formed, the test was assessing expectations and clarity so far rather than actual progress to date. A report on findings from this will be produced soon. In the meantime, work has progressed on the toolkit and training of DOs – see above, and in designing simple monthly exercises on transport and local markets as below. One of the most useful developments has been designing the a) process monitoring, b) transport surveying and c) market surveying as a single package that DOs will undertake as their regular main work.

a) Process monitoring participatory toolkit: This provides guidance and tools for DOs in a range of approaches for carrying out regular field monitoring, along with, importantly, how to go about this. Note that this is a menu from which they can choose an appropriate exercise for various stakeholders. This work will be conducted alongside regular transport and marketing surveying on a monthly basis.

b) Transport surveying: *What changes can be observed in transport movements of people and goods along selected RAP3 roads, and what changes are evident on the availability and costs of transport?* A draft describing the aims and approaches of a simple monthly survey has been developed (included in briefing pack) for consultation with RAP and DFID. In addition to meeting MEL monitoring needs on this subject, this should be a useful update for RAP on transport trends along key road stretches

c) Market surveying: *What changes can be observed in the local economy in terms of economic infrastructure, prices and availability of key goods in RAP3 intervention areas? What evidence is there of increased quality and quantity of local production and marketing of goods outwards from target communities?* The intention is to identify sub market centres – the next level below the district centre – for monthly assessment. Such a sub market centre would likely be a sizeable village at the heart of the RAP road network and SED activity areas, a market centre that services several surrounding VDCs and provides the link between district level and more localised small scale markets. Like the transport survey this would adopt a sentinel approach, and these sites should be in close proximity to the transport survey sites. At these market sites, one would anticipate that regular monthly observation on change should be most noticeable. The intention is to track prices of essential commodities, and changes in facilities that are necessary for, and indicative of, local economic growth (shops, restaurants, guest houses, repair shops, food processing services). It is assumed that changes in prices and economic facilities will be subject to seasonal fluctuation, meaning that overall changes and discernible trends will be only possible to detect with year to year analysis. Knowledgeable key informants such as the main shopkeepers / traders will be interviewed as part of this survey to learn more on trends, reasons for changes and insight into external forces affecting this local market. A further important checking in will be in linking findings to the data and reporting of the RAP SED projects.

Recruitment of Team Leader

Two rounds of interviews have taken place and a new Team Leader has been selected to start at the beginning of June.