



## **MONITORING, EVALUATION RESEARCH AND LEARNING INNOVATIONS PROGRAM (MERLIN)**

### **DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION PILOT ACTIVITY (DEPA-MERL)**

*The Developmental Evaluation Pilot Activity (DEPA-MERL) will test the effectiveness of a developmental evaluation (DE) approach, as well as accompanying monitoring and evaluation tools and flexible contracting mechanisms, in achieving effective programming for innovative interventions, untested theories of change, and/or implementation in complex contexts.*

### **THE CHALLENGE**

For complex interventions or new innovations, traditional midterm and end line evaluations can occur too late to aid in programmatic fine tuning; and often help interventions reach their pre-defined outcomes, rather than work on systems change that may require the redefinition of outputs and outcomes.

### **THE INNOVATION**

Traditional approaches to monitoring and evaluation focus on making existing processes, structures and systems more effective. DE seeks to improve not only program design, but takes into account the entire complex dynamic system in which the program, project or activity is taking place. DE provides an approach to evaluation that is quick, ongoing, and takes an iterative approach to data collection, analysis and feedback that contributes to timely changes throughout the project cycle and allows for system changes as well as changes in targeted outcomes.

### **THE APPROACH**

DE evaluators are “embedded” within the program, project or activity to contribute to modifications in program design and targeted outcomes throughout implementation. DE does not prescribe a single methodological design, tool, or framework – the evaluation approach taken is based on emerging needs. Methods might include network and outcome mapping, contribution analysis, or other approaches based on information needs.



DE is a highly flexible approach and is well-suited for projects under flexible contracting mechanisms in which implementation is likely to change in response to emerging conditions on the ground. DE is particularly useful in projects with untested or incomplete theories of change and where implementers and/or program managers are "building the plane in the air."

## **QUICK FACTS**

- **Tools:** Embedded evaluators, emerging needs tailoring, network mapping, outcome mapping, contribution analysis
- **Funding mechanism:** Contract (buy-in option for USAID operating units)
- **Partners:** Social Impact (prime), Search for Common Ground, The William Davidson Institute at the University
- **Period of Performance:** 10/01/2015 – 9/30/2019

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