

What is the state of M&E in agriculture? Findings of the ALINe online consultation survey

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Executive summary

During 2009, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Keystone Accountability, with financial support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, are considering the potential design of an Agriculture Learning and Impacts Network (ALINe). This report presents the findings of the ALINe online consultation survey that was designed and conducted to test some of the key assumptions behind the emerging ALINe Theory of Change (ToC). It identifies key priorities and challenges in current M&E (monitoring and evaluation) practice in agriculture.

The results of the survey, which included 171 complete and 100 partial responses from experts in M&E and agriculture, indicate that:

- Beneficiary accountability and empowerment are regarded as the two weakest functions of current M&E practice, whereas the ability to meet donor accountability is considered the strongest feature. Most respondents indicate that the contribution of M&E to project improvement, strategy and policy level clarification and its ability to generate wider lessons for the field is substantive, but can certainly be improved.
- M&E of agricultural projects is considered weak. Aspects of M&E that are viewed as particularly inadequate include the capacity of implementing agencies, incentives to invest resources in M&E within those agencies and in the wider field.
- The top rated suggestion on how to improve current M&E practice is the need to engage better with farmers and local partners. Improvement of initial project planning is also highly rated as was the need for capacity development of non M&E managers and M&E practitioners.
- A majority of respondents would like to see more sharing of good practice and networking. Lobbying donors and allocating more resources for quality M&E are also called for, but emphasis is placed on donors to focus on M&E approaches that favour a multi-stakeholder perspective and which are designed to support learning for projects and beneficiaries, not just accountability to donors.
- Opinions are divided on the need for new tools and models, but in line with preferred M&E approaches there is an appetite for learning how to choose and use tools and methods that are sensitive to context, support multi-stakeholder perspectives and use new technologies intelligently. In this overall context donors are seen as key to changing M&E practice, along with agencies and government.

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- Finally, the majority of respondents suggests that ALINe should not specifically focus on agriculture.

These results, which will be examined more closely during the planning phase, suggest that there is indeed a potential for an Agriculture Learning and Impacts Network that can support:

- Approaches that balance the demands of upstream accountability, to donors, with downstream accountability, to project beneficiaries
- Efforts to raise the profile of M&E and explore incentives for generating more investment in M&E
- Capacity development efforts around organisational learning and the intelligent use of methods and tools appropriate to the specific needs and contexts within agriculture
- Opportunities for stakeholders that lack access to organised networks and forums to learn from each other

As part of the examination of the potential role of ALINe, a report on the wider landscape of M&E in agriculture is being prepared. This will bring together the results of this study with the results of ALINe's other research activities, exploring potential gaps in the field and the mechanisms that are needed to fill these.

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1. Introduction

During 2009, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Keystone Accountability, with financial support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, are considering the potential design of an Agriculture Learning and Impacts Network (ALINE).

The goal of ALINE would be to connect, build up, analyse, influence, and ultimately transform how agricultural development investments are planned and assessed – with the aim of learning how to make them as successful as possible.

During 2009 we have been engaging with key stakeholders to identify needs, map capacities, and locate interest in co-developing the content and infrastructure of the network. This report presents the findings of an online consultation survey that IDS and Keystone conducted during June 2009.

The report starts with a brief introduction to the ALINE Theory of Change that we tested through the online survey. We then move on to discuss the respondent group and response rate, including issues around possible bias. Thereafter we go through the various sections of the online survey, drawing out conclusions that are summarised in a final section that details further analysis and consultation needed. We welcome comments on this report from everyone who contributed to the survey as well as other interested parties.

2. The ALINE Theory of Change

The online consultation is one of the main avenues for testing the assumptions in the initial ALINE Theory of Change and strategy. This set of ToC assumptions evolved as a result of a previous collaboration between IDS and Keystone which involved an initial analysis of existing practice in agricultural monitoring and evaluation.

Some of our assumptions as a result of that analysis were:

- M&E serves the interest of those most powerful and rarely includes the voices of those most affected in a systematic way
- M&E activities are often viewed as an additional burden by project staff rather than as a process which can make their activities more effective
- Results of M&E are not widely used to improve program performance or inform decision making processes
- M&E in agricultural development is particularly weak - characterised through poor theories of change, poor indicator selection and evaluation designs that cannot detect impact

3. Research design and sampling

The survey² was conducted during June 2009, using Zoomerang, an online survey tool. The survey included questions on respondents' professional profile, on the current practice of M&E in general and within agriculture and approaches to improve practice. It was specifically designed to test some of the assumptions in the ALINE Theory of Change. Given ALINE's purpose, the survey was aimed at experts within the fields of M&E and agriculture.

The study was based on a self-selected, convenience sample drawn from³ (a) contacts from the networks of 6 members of the ALINE team (b) contacts gathered during an earlier consultancy

² A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix 2.

³ Ideally we would have randomly sampled respondents from a population list of experts in agriculture and in M&E. No such list exists. Therefore we had to do our best to construct such a list.

conducted by IDS and Keystone for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation⁴, (c) contacts gathered at the AfrEA/NONIE/3ie Impact Evaluation Conference in Cairo in March/April 2009, (d) individuals at major organisations within the fields of M&E and agriculture that were identified through the web, and (e) members of the following online groups, where open invitations were posted:

- XCeval Yahoo Group: a listserv for persons interested in issues associated with international and cross-cultural evaluation with 820 members (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/XCeval/>)
- Impact Alliance: a global action and learning network committed to strengthening the capacity of individuals and organisations to generate deep impact within the communities they serve. It has 283 individual and 126 organisational members (http://www.impactalliance.org/ev_en.php)
- Outcome Mapping (OM) Learning Community: a virtual hub for OM practitioners to share experiences with 1773 members (<http://www.outcomemapping.ca/index.php>)
- MandE News Yahoo Group: a listserv with 1700 members where members share information with each other about monitoring and evaluation issues, especially as they relate to international development aid (<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/MandENEWS/>)
- Pelican Initiative: Platform for Evidence-based Learning & Communications for Social Change with 554 members. (<http://dgroups.org/Community.aspx?c=3c4b8b5b-d151-4c38-9e7b-7a8a1a456f20>)

It is impossible to estimate how well this aggregate list approximates a true 'population' list since that population list has not been assembled. Nevertheless we should note some obvious biases that we have introduced in constructing the aggregate list and in our survey design. First, the survey was biased toward M&E practitioners (given the focus on M&E list serves and the fact that knowledge of M&E issues was required). Second, the list of contacts was made up of personal networks so there is a risk that the views expressed by respondents are more likely to be shared by the IDS and Keystone team. Third, the electronic nature of the survey will have excluded stakeholders with weak access to bandwidth.

These biases mean that we only state with complete confidence that our conclusions reflect the opinions of those who completed the survey. While these opinions do not necessarily represent the opinions of the wider field, we are relatively confident that they do reflect the opinions of the majority of important actors in the field of M&E practice and agriculture, since we have heard from most of these (see section 4 below).

Sources a-d yielded a list of 631 valid email addresses, to which an invitation to participate in the survey was sent. From the aggregate list (a-e) we elicited 171 complete responses and 100 partial ones. We know that at least 97 of the responses were from this list of 631. The 631 list may have generated more of the responses, but we were unable to tell because only 142 of the 271 responses provided contact details. This shows a direct response rate of 15% (97/631).

We cannot say how representative our 271 responses are of the convenience sample or the aggregate list, but analyses of the organisational characteristics of the 97 suggest a similar profile to the 631 (see Appendix 3, Figure 5).

The 100 partial responses provide good coverage of questions 1-5. Question 6, a matrix, clearly discouraged further participation, with 23% of respondents (62/271) choosing to discontinue at this point. Hence the analyses of question 1-5 include data for the 271 and the 171 separately. The

⁴ Haddad, Bonbright and Lindstrom et al (2008): Agricultural Learning and Impact Assessment Strategy: Recommendations to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Unpublished Consultancy Report.

partial response rate (100 out of 271) is 37%. The number of partial responses would have been reduced if the survey were less extensive. This was a risk that we considered when designing the survey. We decided against a shorter survey accepting that this would mean fewer complete responses in return for a more complete understanding of the individuals who did respond. Section 8 provides respondent comments on the survey.

In order to disaggregate the analysis of answers to questions by respondent characteristics we used STATA to identify any statistically significant associations between respondent attributes and responses. Ordered probit regressions were performed for all the groups⁵. The sections below highlight associations that we found. Overall, there are few differences to the answers by respondent type. Where they do exist, we highlight them. This lack of differentiation points to a consensus on most questions.

4. Respondent attributes

Question 1: Type of organisation

As indicated in Table 1, the majority of respondents work for NGOs and academic institutions. We also created a 'funder' category by combining the multilateral, bilateral and other donor categories – this was used for the statistical analysis in the sections below. We do recognise that some of these responses might have come from technical specialists within 'funder' organisations.

Table 1: Type of organisation

	Full ⁶	Complete ⁷
	Frequency	Frequency
NGO	93	54
Academic	56	37
Private sector⁸	36	28
Bilateral/Government	34	20
Multilateral	33	24
Evaluation association or network	18	10
Donor (other)	17	10
Total responses	287	183

Note: Multiple answers permitted, although not many respondents chose more than one option

Looking more closely at the personal details provided (for 142 respondents) we can see that we have had respondents from majors players within the field of agriculture and M&E, including many of those identified in section 6 by respondents, such as:

- *Multilaterals and international organisations*: FAO, World Bank, IFAD, UNDP, WFP
- *Bilateral/Government*: Ministries of Agriculture in 3 African countries, IDRC
- *Private Sector*: Mathematica, Kimetrica, ITAD, Dunavant
- *Donors (other)*: GAIN, Rockefeller Foundation

⁵ Where the dependent variable is ordered as 1,2,3,4,5 and the explanatory variables, included in a non multiple way, are characteristics such as location, type of organisation and role of respondent. Only associations significant at the 95% level or greater are referred to.

⁶ This represents the full 271 sample of complete and partial responses.

⁷ This represents the 171 complete responses

⁸ This group was largely made up of independent M&E consultants.

- *NGOs:* Farm Africa, Save the Children, World Neighbours, West Africa Rural Foundation (FRAO/WARF), Heifer International, TechnoServe
- *Academia:* CGIAR Centres (ILAC, CIMMYT, ILRI, Bioversity International and others), ODI, World Resources Institute, Wageningen University, Zamarano University, University of Pretoria, Western Michigan University

Question 2: Position

As indicated by Table 2, the largest group were senior managers, probably reflecting the seniority of the ALINe co-Directors and their contacts, but otherwise the groups here were pretty spread out. However, without the roles more clearly defined it is difficult to use this data for statistical analysis – senior managers might have M&E manager roles. This attribute has therefore not been used in the regression analysis.

Table 2: Position

	Full		Complete	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Senior manager	76	28	53	31
M&E manager	54	20	33	19
Project manager	38	14	21	12
Researcher	38	14	20	12
Consultant	35	13	26	15
Other	30	11	18	11
Total responses	271	100	171	100

Question 5: Location

As indicated in Table 3, 99 of the 271 respondents are located in Africa. As this represents 37% of respondents it suggests that the survey succeeded in its aim to reach African stakeholders. The other big group represented with 41% of respondents in the study are from North America and Europe.

Table 3: Location

	Full		Complete	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Europe and North America	112	41	77	45
Africa	99	37	57	33
Asia	42	16	24	14
Latin America and the Caribbean	12	4	9	5
Global	4	1	3	2
Oceania	1	0	1	1
Total responses	270⁹	100	171	100

Question 3: M&E capacity

As indicated in Table 4 the majority of respondents were suppliers of M&E or did M&E in-house, indicating that that the survey reached many M&E practitioners and implementing agencies.

⁹ One value missing

Table 4: M&E capacity

	Full	Complete
	Frequency	Frequency
Supplier of M&E services	165	109
Do M&E in-house	120	76
Consumer of M&E services	93	58
Other	11	11
Total responses	389	254

Note: Multiple answers permitted

Questions 4: Work focus

Reflecting the large number of M&E experts, the vast majority of respondents do not work solely on agricultural M&E but have a much broader focus (Table 5). Other sectors mentioned included rural poverty, water and sanitation, gender, natural resource management, regional development, nutrition, food security, health education, compliance in procurement. We will need to consider how to balance the specific agricultural focus of ALINe with the broader interests of stakeholders – see section 7 for further discussion.

Table 5: Work focus

	Full		Complete	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Agriculture and other sectors	154	57	103	60
Other development sectors, not agriculture	54	20	32	19
Agricultural issues	49	18	30	18
Other	14	5	6	4
Total responses	271	100	171	100

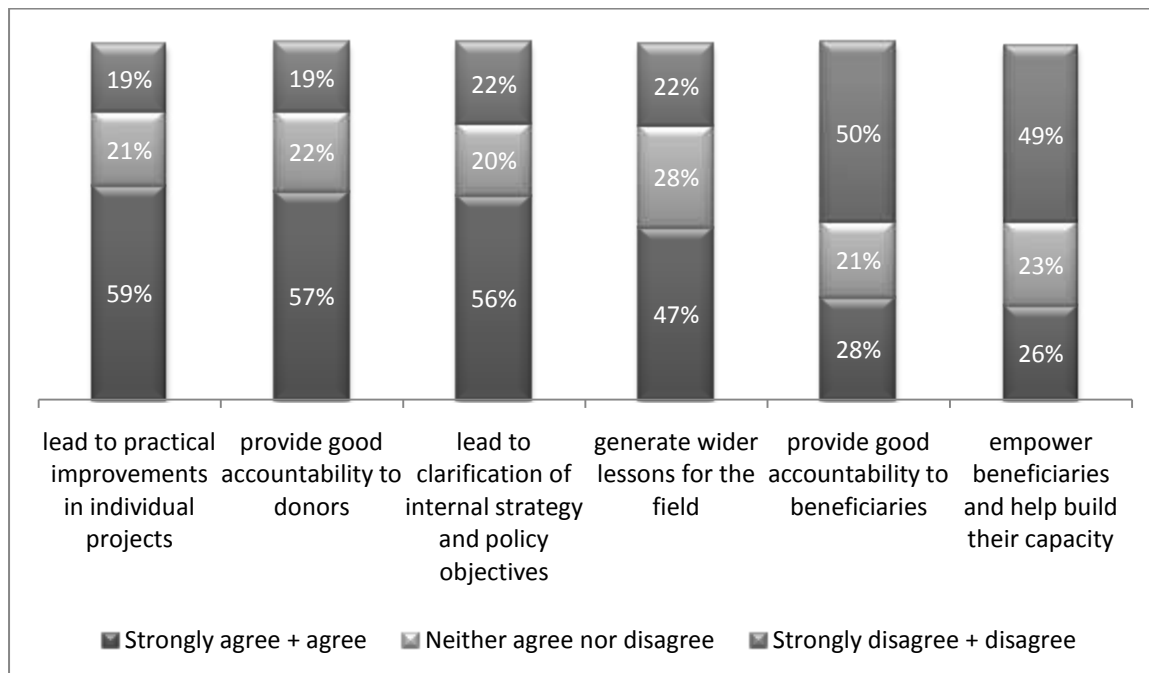
5. Strengths and weaknesses of M&E in general and in agriculture in particular

Question 6: The different functions of M&E

Figure 1 presents the results of responses around particular functions of M&E. This question allowed respondents to tick a box to agree or disagree as well as explain their answer in a text box. Quotes have been chosen to give the reader a flavour of the centre of gravity of the text responses. We have tried to minimise author bias by verifying quotes by internal review.

As we can see a majority of respondents indicated that the strongest feature of current M&E practice is the ability to lead to practical improvement in projects, closely followed by the ability to provide good accountability to donors and clarify internal strategies and policy objectives. Current practice is also good at generating wider lessons for the field, but rarely provides good accountability to beneficiaries nor empowers them and helps build their capacity.

Figure 1: Responses to statement ‘Current M&E Practice tends to’



Note: Based on 209 responses to each statement. This figure excludes the very small number of ‘don’t know’ answers – see Appendix 1, Table 9 for further details.

Project improvements

Although the majority of respondents agreed with the statement that M&E tends to lead to improvements in projects, around 50% that commented felt that it was necessary to qualify their answer, with comments such as: *“It depends how the evaluation is conducted and who is involved”, “M&E, if well done and utilization-based.”* For others, it very much depended on whom these improvements benefited. Someone, for example, indicated that: *“It [M&E] can [lead to practical improvements] and should do, but often it is seen as a requirement by the funder rather than a tool for the implementer”*. Other comments indicated that:

- M&E is too focused on donor interests
- There is not enough focus on learning, and only fudged positive results are given.
- Data is hard to collect, it cannot be utilised as either irrelevant or managers do not understand how to use it
- M&E does not provide enough feedback to stakeholders

To conclude, although project improvement seems to be one of the strongest aspects of current practice, it very much depends on the context; on the M&E approach taken and on the actors involved, particularly on key issues such as donor interests, stakeholder involvement, focus on learning and utilisation.

Donor accountability

With regards to donor accountability, a majority of respondents thought that this was a strong feature of M&E with comments such as: *“If well used M&E system provides reports for donors who support. A justification of future funding and the value for money cannot be possible without M&E.”* Even here there were a relatively large proportion of respondents that qualified their answer (38%), with comments such as: *“This depends very much on what is meant by good accountability, however. In some instances - yes - depending on how M&E is undertaken. In many instances - no - reports, for example, are viewed as a necessary burden and are often not very enlightening.”* Other comments highlighted respondent perceptions of what they thought donors wanted, stating it as the main

purpose of M&E and sometimes questioning the quality of the accountability that was provided, such as:

- Donors need to account for money spent and one of the main purposes of M&E is to do this and it does this well
- Donors should shift the purpose of M&E from accountability to them towards learning.
- Donors often have unrealistic expectations on information to be collected; targets to be met
- Focus is mostly on money spent, rather on impact and outcomes
- Current M&E can lead to double counting; problems with attribution and perverse activities to satisfy donors

The statistical analysis showed that respondents located in Asia were more likely to disagree with the statement, whereas NGOs were more likely to agree with the statement¹⁰. It is difficult to draw any conclusions on the location of respondents being of relevance, whereas the fact that NGOs tended to agree might have something to do with the fact that as implementing agencies they might see the donor accountability function of M&E most clearly.

To summarise, a clear majority of respondents agreed that M&E provides good accountability to donors and when looking at the comments, perhaps more so than M&E leading to project improvements. Statements here showed that donor accountability tends to be the main purpose of M&E, although there is some question about what 'good' accountability is. Currently, much of the focus is on money spent and outputs rather than outcomes and impact and M&E can be seen as a burden for implementing agencies. Since donors are relatively underrepresented in the survey, we cannot analyse donor views here and that should be the focus of further consultation.

Clarification of strategy and policy objectives

Similarly, although a majority agreed with the statement that M&E tends to lead to internal strategy and policy objectives, around 50% qualified their answer with comments highlighting the objectives of and interests behind the evaluation, such as: *"Can do, but typically does not unless designed specifically with this in mind"* or *"But often focusing more on strategies and policies that are relevant for the donor than the beneficiary"*. Other comments highlighted:

- Depends on higher level commitment - M&E results can be met with resistance
- It depends on the involvement of all stakeholders
- Some organisations do this better than others
- Depends whether the issue is strategy at the project or at the organisational level – project level M&E can be difficult to link to strategy at the organisational level
- The influence of monitoring vs. evaluation results can be different and strategies and policy objectives are not always influenced in the same way by M&E results.

The statistical analysis showed that those respondents that worked outside of agriculture completely tended to be more likely to agree with the statement than other groups.¹¹ This could potentially mean that M&E in agriculture is seen as less likely to lead to clarification of strategy and policy objectives.

To conclude, a majority of respondents agreed that M&E leads to clarification of internal strategies and policy objectives. However, respondents argued again that it very much depends on whether the right conditions are in place or not. It also depends on if we are talking about project level or organisation level strategy and the influence on strategy and policy objectives may be different – we could have been more specific with the question here. The statistical analysis suggests that M&E in

¹⁰ Latin American and Caribbean and academic institution respondents were used as comparators respectively.

¹¹ The comparator for this regression as those working with agriculture and other sectors.

agriculture might be less likely to lead to clarification of strategy and policy objectives, but we are hesitant about drawing any strong conclusions about this without further analysis.

Wider lessons for the field

Although slightly weaker than the previous three functions, a majority of respondents agreed that current practice is relatively good at generating wider lessons for the field. Also here a large part of comments (60%) were qualified with comments such as: *“Only to the extent that these lessons are widely shared and in a timely fashion. It is difficult to come across readily available M&E reports in the Ag sector. Donors and grantees tend to be very guarded about publicly sharing lessons learned “*. Other comments indicated that:

- More systematic distillation, aggregation and application of lessons learned is needed, since many lessons are too small and context specific to be relevant
- Some results are not shared due to sensitivity or not palatable since they relate to systemic failures
- ‘Best practices’ and ‘lessons learned’ tend to be things we already know – there is less focus on what worked, for whom, under what circumstances

To conclude, wider lessons are often generated from M&E, but not always. There are issues around context specific findings, lack of sharing of results (either due to lack of plans to do so, but also due to issues around sensitivity of M&E findings), lack of aggregation and higher level analysis of results and less focus on what worked, for whom and under what circumstances.

Beneficiary accountability

When looking at beneficiary accountability, current M&E practice fares worse. A majority argued that M&E does not provide good accountability to beneficiaries with comments such as: *“Donors say they use M&E to improve their effectiveness in serving the beneficiaries; but in reality there is a double standard. Donors do not impose the same evidence-based standards on themselves as they do on the beneficiaries”*. Other comments emphasised that:

- Accountability is mostly directed toward donors – beneficiaries are the last to be thought of and then only with token consultation/respondents
- Information is rarely shared; information is extractive
- No process, no feedback, no mutual learning
- Rarely available in a form which is usable by beneficiaries

About 43% of comments were qualified to explain, although difficult, when and how accountability to beneficiaries can be improved, highlighting the importance of:

- Participatory M&E methods
- Reporting M&E results back to beneficiaries/stakeholders
- Demand from beneficiaries

We conclude that beneficiary accountability is one of the weakest aspects of current M&E practice. It is possible but M&E needs to use participatory methods, and even though there are some good examples of this it rarely happens in practice.

Beneficiary empowerment and capacity building

Similarly, the ability of current M&E practice to empower beneficiaries and help build their capacity, was considered weak by a majority of respondents. Comments highlighted the weaknesses of current practice. Key points:

- M&E is often done by outsiders using methods that are unintelligible to beneficiaries
- The information collected is not based on beneficiaries’ goals and success indicators

- Most often they feel judged and graded rather than empowered – this is only avoided where empowerment is an explicit goal
- It adds costs and difficulties so it is not done as often as it should be. M&E tends to be done on the terms of the donor and/or the implementing organisation

About 43% of comments were qualified, highlighting when empowerment and capacity development can be a result of M&E:

- When involved from the start, suitable participatory tool, all stakeholders involved
- There is improvement with recent thrust on participation of beneficiaries in defining what success or failure looks like, and sometimes in data collection, analysis and reporting is increasingly helping increase accountability and buy-in of beneficiaries
- There needs to be a demand from beneficiaries

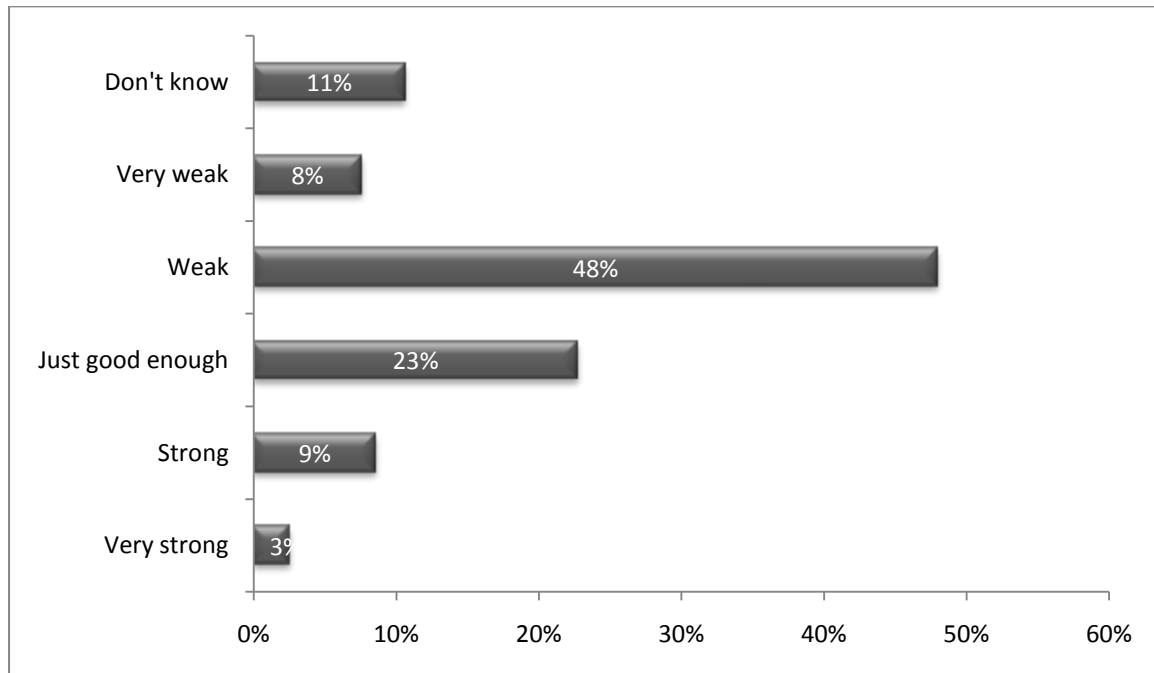
To summarise, M&E rarely empowers and builds the capacity of beneficiaries, since beneficiaries are rarely involved in M&E and when they are it can actually be disempowering to them. A few comments included questions about whether empowerment and capacity building are and should be functions of M&E and also what that would mean. We could have been clearer with what type of capacity we were referring to in this question.

Question 7: The overall strength of M&E in agriculture

As indicated in Figure 2, a majority of respondents (56%) stated that M&E in agriculture is weak or very weak, supporting one of the main assumptions behind ALiNe’s initial analysis. A relatively large group (23%) thought that it was good enough. We let the respondents self-define ‘weak’. On reflection it would have been useful to ask respondents to evaluate agricultural M&E relative to M&E in other sectors. The statistical analysis showed that NGOs as a group tended to rate M&E in agriculture more strongly than other groups¹². This question was not accompanied with a box for comments, so we do not have data to analyse the reasons for respondents’ views, although question 8 below gave respondents the opportunity to offer their opinions about our assumptions as to why M&E in agriculture is weak.

¹² Academic institutions were used as the comparator for the regression.

Figure 2: Responses (n=198) about overall strength of monitoring and evaluation in agricultural development

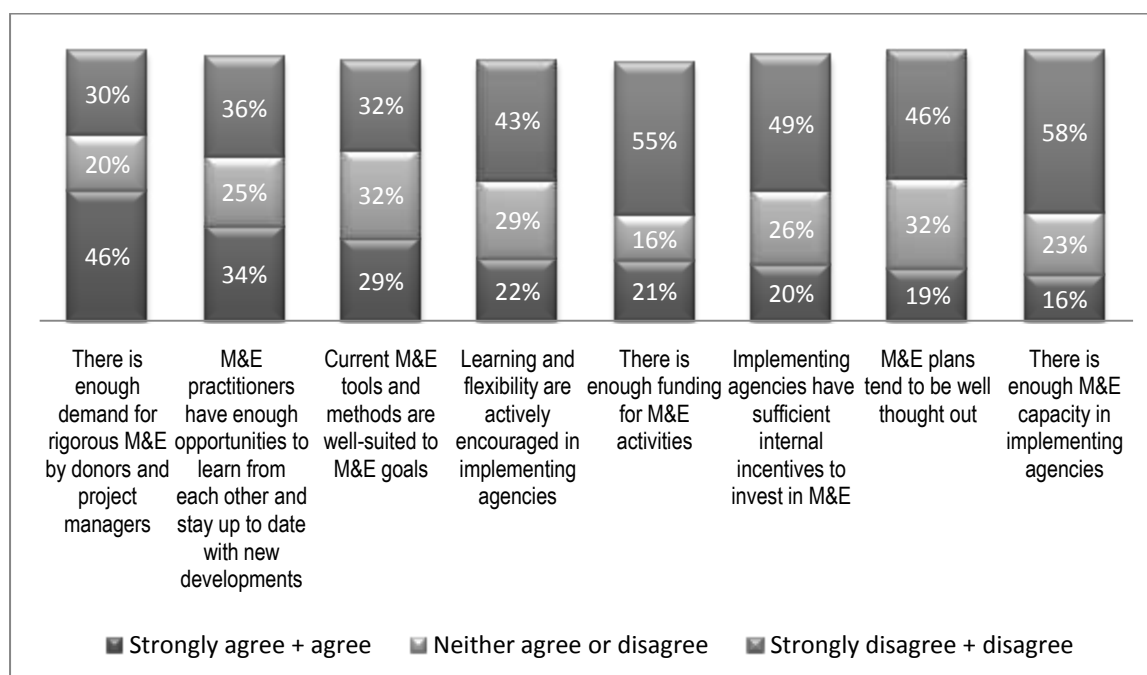


Question 8: Strengths and weaknesses of M&E in agriculture

Figure 3 presents the results of responses around the particular strengths and weaknesses in M&E. This question allowed respondents to tick a box to agree or disagree with as well as explain their answer in a text box. Quotes have been chosen to give the reader a flavour of the centre of gravity of the text responses. We have tried to minimise author bias by verifying quotes by internal review.

As we can see a majority of respondents indicated that there is enough demand for rigorous M&E by donors and implementing agencies – this was the strongest aspect identified of M&E in agriculture. Opinions were divided about the opportunities available for M&E practitioners to learn from each other and network, the availability of tools and methods suited to M&E goals and whether or not learning and flexibility was encouraged in implementing agencies. The weakest areas identified were funding for M&E, internal incentives and capacity for M&E in implementing agencies and M&E plans.

Figure 3: Responses to statements about strengths and weaknesses of agricultural M&E



Note: Based on varying number of observations per statement and excludes the ‘don’t know’ answers – see Appendix 1, Table 10 for further details.

Demand for M&E

Most respondents agreed that there is enough demand for rigorous M&E by donors and project managers with comments highlighting increased demand: *“Demand for rigorous M&E has certainly increased over the last 5 or so years, with more donors and managers allocating resources, establishing M&E policies & procedures etc.”* About 50% of all comments were qualified, particularly questioning what is actually meant by rigorous M&E – respondents tended to have different views on that. The statements mostly talked about donors as being the players to influence demand, rather than project managers. Key points:

- Some argued that there was not enough demand for so-called ‘gold standard’ approaches
- Some thought demand for such ‘rigour’ might be misplaced, with other aspects of M&E more important such as relevance for learning and changing
- Demand varies between donors and project managers with more demand from donors for accountability purposes, and project managers are in turn influenced by this
- Demand may exist but not enough resources to support the demand and demand is often coupled with pressure for short-term impact

We conclude that the majority of respondents thought that there is enough demand for M&E. The comments point to growing demand, but it is uneven – donors have more demand than project managers, it is sometimes superficial and it depends on what you mean by rigour. There is more focus on upward accountability and gold-standard econometric approaches, not so much on learning and not enough resources with this growing demand. The lack of a definition of rigour and the inclusion of both donors and project managers in the question make this analysis slightly problematic.

Opportunities for M&E practitioners to learn from each other and stay up to date with new developments

Respondents’ views were pretty evenly divided on the issue of opportunities for M&E practitioners to learn from each other and stay up to date with new developments. Typical comments of

agreement were about the type of opportunities that exist: *“More than enough - through virtual learning platforms, conferences and workshops”*. About 43% of comments were qualified in the sense that although opportunities might exist, time and resources to take advantage of them are lacking and not everyone has access to these opportunities: *“There are numerous list serves, evaluation society meetings/conferences. It depends on who gets access to these forums. Usually it is HQ staff not field staff who get the opportunities to learn from each other.”*

Comments that agreed with the statement tended to focus on M&E practitioners and the disagreeing comments seemed to refer to other types of practitioners – perhaps agricultural project staff that are involved in M&E activities, but just a small part of other duties. This seems to suggest that there is a difference between the opportunities for M&E practitioners and other types of practitioners (potentially those within agriculture). It would have been interesting if the statistical analysis had shown that those that conduct M&E in-house or those that work specifically in agriculture were more likely to disagree with the statement, but the only finding was that NGOs tended to agree with the statement in comparison to other groups. This finding is difficult to interpret without looking further into the composition of the group of NGOs.

We conclude that there are opportunities for practitioners to learn from each other, but it is less certain that they have the time and resources to engage with networks and not everyone gets access to these networks. There is a question about which practitioners this actually applies to – the qualitative data seems to suggest that M&E practitioners have access to networks and other opportunities for learning, whereas project staff have less access. Further analysis on whether this is the case is needed.

Current M&E tools and methods

Respondents were also evenly divided on the suitability of current M&E tools and methods to M&E goals. Around 55% of comments contained qualifying statements about the availability of good and improving tools in theory, but a lack of uptake or appropriate application in practice, such as *“There are risks of projects pulling M&E techniques of the web without properly understanding the situations to which they are best used. MSC and OM have become panaceas, sometimes in situations where other tools would be better suited”*. Where a lack of suitable tools was identified, respondents pointed to the need for tools and methods that can measure impacts, sustainability and learning, rather than just outputs and outcomes, and that allows for downward accountability. For instance: *“There are really no coherent tools used in the ag sector. M&E goals tend to be confused between learning and operational goals, with methods that are neither rigorous enough for learning, nor timely enough for operational decisions. Since both goals and tools are confused, they are well suited.”*

The majority view here, taking into account both the quantitative and qualitative data, seems to be that there are good tools out there and they are improving, but they are just not applied appropriately or at all. There is some scope for improvement of tools to suit complex situations and enable downwards accountability.

Encouragement of learning and flexibility in implementing agencies

A majority of respondents indicated that implementing agencies were not particularly good at encouraging learning and flexibility, with comments pointing to the tension between accountability and learning and lack of a culture that supports learning and flexibility, e.g.: *“There is generally a lack of an evaluative culture that supports self-reflection and self-examination, seeks evidence, makes time to learn and encourages experimentation and change”*. Also here about 50% of comments were qualified highlighting the following key issues:

- Implementing agencies tend to be better at this than donors

- Encouragement does not necessarily mean doing
- ‘Learning organisations’ is something of a rhetoric that has to compete with other pressures, such as resources available

Some comments made a distinction between learning and flexibility – in some cases learning was seen as lacking whereas flexibility was encouraged, and in some cases the other way around. We could have been more clear on what we meant by these concepts.

To conclude, respondents do not think that implementing agencies are particularly good at supporting learning and flexibility, but again this depends very much on the context, particularly in terms of time and funding available. There is a definite tension between accountability and learning. Further analysis is needed on what we mean by learning and flexibility and in which situations one might be possible and not the other.

Funding for M&E

Most respondents did not think that there is enough funding for M&E activities. Comments pointed to the fact that M&E funds are often the first to be cut when resources are tight, such as: *“More often, there are inadequate funds allocated; and when there are shortfalls, M&E budgets are among the first to suffer in re-allocations”*. Other comments, including some that contained qualifiers (29%), indicated that:

- There is a trend toward funds being allocated toward M&E
- Some donors are better than others
- The accountability function tends to be funded enough, but not the other aspects that are needed to understand what works, be it RCTs or M&E that is oriented towards internal learning
- Budgeting M&E can be complicated in the sense that the monitoring activities are often quite distinct from evaluation activities
- Some thought that M&E should be a percentage of project budgets, whereas others thought that funds for M&E should be more integrated into overall project budgets

To summarise, the survey shows that there is certainly not enough funding for M&E activities although this is improving, and some activities are well funded but not enough for learning about what works under what circumstances. Amount of funding also depends on the donor agency. M&E budget allocations are often what are first cut when budgets are tight. There is also a question about how to best create budgets for M&E.

Internal incentives for investment in M&E

Respondents also tended to see a lack of internal incentives to invest in M&E within implementing agencies, with comments such as: *“On the contrary the incentives are often disincentives. Accountability is seen as a threat and the opportunity to learn misunderstood.”* Other comments (about 39% qualified) indicated that:

- There is a trend toward increased incentives for internal investment in M&E
- Incentives are often seen as external from donors rather than internal
- Often there is a culture of punishment rather than reward for good performance

The statistical analysis of responses showed that NGOs tended to agree with this statement more than other groups.¹³ This might have something to do with this group consisting of implementing agencies and not wanting to admit to internal problems, but we would need to look further into this to verify – the NGO staff surveyed might not consider themselves as part of implementing agencies.

¹³ Academic institutions were used as the comparator for the regression.

The use of ‘implementing agencies’ did cause some concern about what we meant. Similarly there were some questions about the definition of incentives, with some focusing on financial incentives some seeing it in terms of donor power and others using a broader definition.

To conclude, a majority of respondents saw a lack of incentives for implementing agencies to invest in M&E. Incentives are perceived as mostly external and negative (M&E as policing) when they do exist at all, although some respondents saw this as changing and there are some organisations that focus on learning. Further investigation into the types of incentives that encourage investment in M&E is needed.

M&E plans tend to be well thought out

A majority of respondents indicated that M&E plans were not well thought out with a number of weaknesses discussed, for instance: *“Many are not. Even log frames, where they are used, are often weakly formulated so outcomes are overlooked or mis-defined.”* Other limitations and preconditions for improvement emphasised were (with 43% of comments qualified):

- Lack of planning of what to do with data collected
- Disconnect between different components of the M&E system
- M&E officer is often in charge with developing plans whereas subject matter specialists need to be involved
- Depends on quality of M&E expertise, capabilities of implementing agency, purpose of M&E
- The gradual adoption of theory-driven evaluation is improving M&E plans

The statistical analysis showed that NGOs again tended to agree with the statement in comparison to other groups.¹⁴ It is not clear what the reason for this might be without further study.

Again whether or not M&E plans are well thought out seems to depend on the situation and the actors involved – some do it well and others not. A lot of statements pointed to weak capacity in this area. Although a majority indicated that this is an area where improvements are needed, some pointed to the increased use of theory-based evaluation approaches as a way forward.

M&E capacity in implementing agencies

The weakest area of current M&E in agriculture was the M&E capacity of implementing agencies: *“Many seem to have barely enough resources to implement innovative programs and serve more stakeholders. Building evaluation capacity seems far down the list of priorities, especially when the benefits mainly accrue to donors.”* Others areas highlighted:

- Capacity varies, but there tends to be lack of up-to-date skills to design M&E systems that are both oriented towards donor and beneficiary accountability, aimed at improving practices and learning. In some areas there is also a lack of capacity to conduct basic M&E.
- Too much focus on using outside experts to conduct M&E
- Lack of skills to evaluate crops that take years before it can give farmers the benefits
- Lack of skills to capture the role of gender in program participation, implementation, and impact

31% of comments were qualified, with some discussing the definition of implementing agencies.

The statistical analysis of responses showed that NGOs tended to agree with this statement more than other groups.¹⁵ This might have something to do with this group consisting of implementing agencies and not wanting to admit to lack of capacity – a conclusion that would need further

¹⁴ Academic institutions were used as the comparator for the regression.

¹⁵ Academic institutions were used as the comparator for the regression.

verification since the NGO staff surveyed might not consider themselves as part of implementing agencies.

Most respondents saw a lack of capacity in implementing agencies for M&E, although it varied across agencies. Particularly there was a lack of capacity for M&E that enables impact planning and learning with a multi-stakeholder perspective, although lack of basic M&E skills were also highlighted by some respondents.

Other challenges

We also gave respondents the opportunity to suggest other challenges in current agricultural M&E. Most of the comments were similar to those reported above, but some worth noting:

- *“The conceptual understanding of the nature of development IN RELATION to M&E is very poor.”*
- *“There is a strong risk that the demand for 'good news stories' from communications people simplifies M&E to the generation of these type of good news nuggets.”*
- *“Incentives and compensations of M&E practitioners working in house for the project are not really attractive thus many opted for free lance consulting where they can earn more. Thus many projects are not getting the best person to work as M&E”*

Question 9: Examples of successful and effective M&E in agriculture

For this question we asked respondents for examples of successful and effective examples of M&E in agriculture and we received 59 suggestions that we are looking at in our analysis of the landscape of M&E in agriculture.

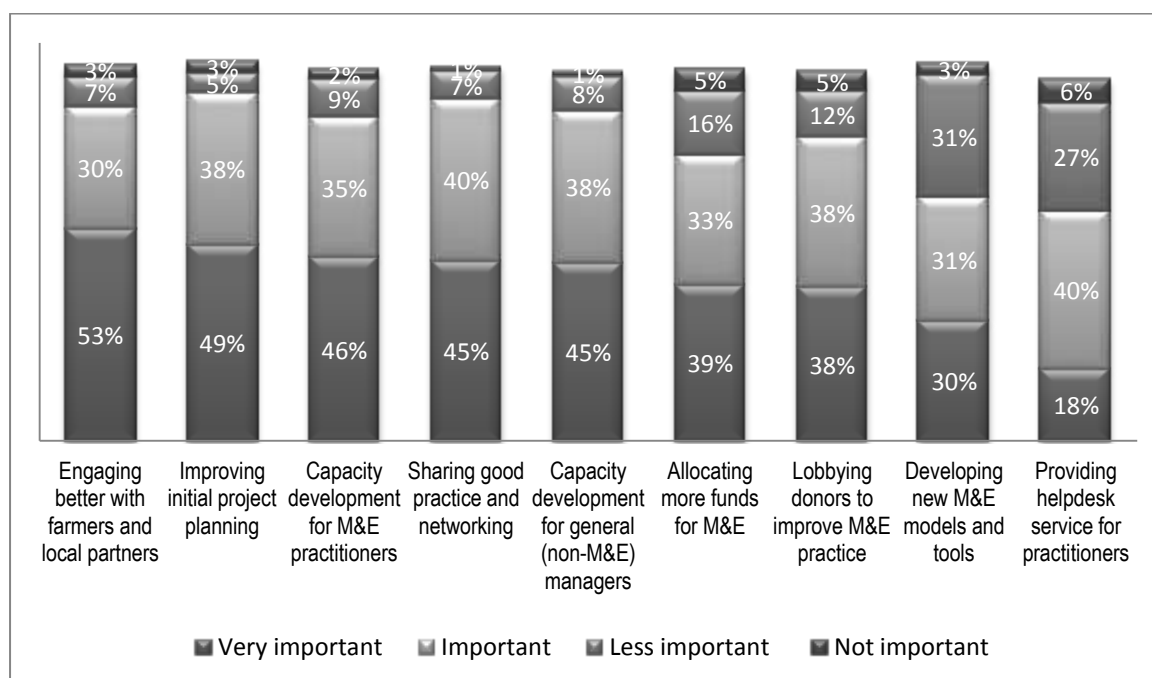
Question 10: Importance of different approaches to improving M&E in agriculture

Figure 4 presents the results of responses around particular approaches to improving in agricultural M&E. This question allowed respondents to tick a box to rate¹⁶ the importance of different approaches as well as explain their answer in a text box. Quotes have been chosen to give the reader a flavour of the centre of gravity of the text responses. We have tried to minimise author bias by verifying quotes by internal review.

Although all the suggested approaches to improving M&E in agriculture were seen as important, some were rated more important than others. The top rated statement was the need to engage better with farmers and local partners. Improvement of initial project planning was also highly rated as was the need for capacity development of non M&E managers and M&E practitioners. A majority of respondents also saw sharing good practice and networking as a key need. Lobbying donors and allocating more resources for quality M&E were also called for. Opinions are divided on the need for new tools and models. Least important was the need to a helpdesk facility for M&E practitioners.

¹⁶ There was a misprint in the survey – the question asked them to rank, rather than rate, statements. A ranking system would have been useful, but it was unfortunately not supported by the survey tool.

Figure 4: Ratings of different approaches to improving M&E in agriculture



Note: Based on varying number of observations per statement and excludes the 'don't know' answers – see Appendix 1, Table 11 for further details.

Engaging better with farmers and local partners

Engaging better with farmers and local partners was the approach seen as most important for improving M&E in agriculture. Comments indicated the need for participatory M&E, such as: *“No project can achieve the above “improved initial project planning” without being well-aware of farmers’ and the realities impinging on local organizations.”* Other comments emphasised, a few more hesitant than others, included:

- Fundamental at the pre-design stage and throughout the project cycle - interventions must be demand-driven
- There is no objectivity outside of the perceptions of these groups
- Crucial for legitimacy and sustainability of interventions
- Important, but a lot of capacity is needed to do this right

The respondents strongly agreed on the need to engage better with farmers and local partners, seeing it as crucial for M&E to improve in agriculture context. The survey did not specify only engagement during specific M&E activities and comments highlighted the need for beneficiary engagement during planning, implementation and evaluation.

Improving initial project planning

The need to improve initial project planning was highly rated with comments emphasising the importance of this for the success of the whole project, particularly in agriculture, e.g.: *“Skills of planning in ‘real life situations’ and modifying those plans as one finds resistance and innovates dynamically on the spot, are very useful for agriculture sector, as the situation seems to vary across geographies, markets and enabling or disabling governance environments”*. Other key points:

- Evaluators must be present at project design stage
- Community participation should have inputs in this planning
- Previous M&E results should be taken into account
- Although important, adaptive management is also important – allowing for re-planning as M&E results come in.

- Some mentioned different tools to use/not use in good project planning

Improving initial project planning was seen as one of the most important ways of improving M&E in agriculture – project planning that includes project stakeholders, people with M&E skills and provides for flexibility to re-plan during the implementation phase.

Capacity development for M&E practitioners

Capacity development for M&E practitioners was also seen as very important, with comments highlighting the type of capacity needed and where, for instance: *“There is quite a dearth of skills in M&E across the continent (Africa). There is a conspicuous need for sustained Evaluation Capacity Development of M&E practitioners - requiring multi-pronged approaches including long and short trainings, mentorship, formal education course eg at post-graduate level in M&E, web-based support etc.”* Other types of capacity stressed:

- Up-to-date knowledge of current M&E staff with new technologies
- Experience of working in the field
- Participatory approaches and focus on learning
- Cost-effectiveness of projects
- Practical approaches that allow for creativity

The majority of respondents saw the need for capacity development of M&E practitioners, which is also backed up by the qualitative data. Comments highlighted the need for capacity development in Africa, for practical and field level skills, multi-stakeholder perspectives and with new technologies that do not stifle creativity.

Sharing good practice and networking

Sharing good practice and networking was seen as a key need, with comments such as: *“It's good not to reinvent the wheel. Sharing good practice, peer review processes are great ways of supporting good practice”*. Other key points included:

- Crucial for building confidence and learning new tools
- A number of ways of sharing good practice and networking were suggested: membership of evaluation associations and networks, online listservs, conferences
- Not only important for M&E practitioners, but also for project managers
- There is lack of funding to do this
- Important, but the specific context in which people work also has to be taking into account

The statistical analysis show that Asian respondents were more likely to see the need for networking and sharing good practice, whereas the private sector see this as less important. One possible reason might be that Asian respondents are less connected to M&E networks and have less opportunities to attend networking events, but this would have to be verified by further analysis. Private sector, mostly M&E consultants, are probably more connected to the existing M&E networks and see improvement in this area as less important¹⁷.

To conclude, the majority of respondents saw sharing good practice and networking as a key need, although this varied across groups. Sharing good practice is needed to ensure that the same mistakes are not made and the wheel not reinvented, although the context of lessons need to be considered. Looking at responses to question 8 on existing opportunities to network shows that these exist – problems are mostly around access which seems to vary across groups as well.

¹⁷ Comparators for the groups were Latin America and Caribbean (location) and academic (type of organisation).

Capacity development for general (non-M&E) managers

Capacity development for non-M&E managers was similarly highly rated, particularly to ensure that there is demand for M&E, e.g.: *“The Non-M&E managers form the demand side for good analytics out of M&E. Cultivating the demand side will make a case for M&E”*. Other issues highlighted were:

- M&E should be everyone’s responsibility, including managers
- M&E is foremost a management tool
- Needed in order to ensure that M&E because central part of adaptive management process and understand relevance of M&E findings
- Depends on what type of capacity – better if this capacity development supports increased incentives for investments in M&E within organisations

The capacity development of non-M&E manager is seen as crucial for creating sustained demand for, and interest in, quality M&E, with a majority of respondents highlighting this as very important or important. Further consideration of what such capacity building efforts might constitute is needed and how that links to getting incentives right.

Allocating more funds for M&E

Seen as slightly less important in comparison to the suggestions above was the need to allocate more funds to M&E, e.g.: *“The current funding levels are too low to create any meaningful M&E impact. There is need for increased funding for agricultural surveys, development of M&E tools and monitoring of impact, and evaluations”*. More funds are needed, but comments also highlighted other issues, including:

- If M&E is done well, increased funds will pay for themselves
- Sometimes current funds are not used well
- It depends on the type of M&E that is funded; there is no point with more investment without correct approach. M&E needs to be learning oriented and include the perspectives of all stakeholders

The respondents broadly agreed on the need for more funding for M&E, although it was not rated as important as some other aspects. New funding needs to go to the right type of M&E and current funds can also be put to better use.

Lobbying donors to improve M&E practice

Similarly, although seen as important, lobbying donors was not as highly rated as some of the other suggestions with comments emphasising the importance of donors in the M&E chain, for instance: *“Yes, as long as donors insist on accountability only, it is difficult for implementing agencies to improve.”* Other key issues indicated were:

- Lobbying not only for increased resources, but for the right type of M&E
- May be difficult considering competition for donor resources
- Clear messages and a collective voice are needed for influence
- Donors should not be seen as a homogenous group – there is variation within and between donors

There was broad agreement on the need to influence donors, not only for increased resources, but the type of M&E that includes multi-stakeholder perspectives and is focused on learning, not just accountability. The qualitative statements identify donors as key actors that need influencing in order to change current practice. However, donors should not be seen as a homogenous group – they all have different approaches and incentives and donors consist of different staff groups with different approaches and incentives. More analysis of donor approaches is needed as well as further consultation with donors themselves.

Developing new models and tools

Developing new tools and models was considered of slightly less importance. Comments focused on what type of tools were needed, e.g.: *“New tools and method are very important as they have to adapted with the area, and actual realities such as the climate change, poverty reduction and result based management”*. Other key issues highlighted included:

- The need for new technologies for M&E, such as GIS, mobile phones
- Tools and methods need to incorporate the broader goals of evaluation: strategic planning, organisational learning and the perspectives of all stakeholders
- Good tools are available, but they are often not used appropriately
- Continuously developing more tools can be counterproductive – better to adapt existing tools to new contexts
- Tools are not as important as investment in people, time and resources

There was significant variation in responses here. Asian respondents saw the need for new models and tools, whereas funders, private sector and evaluation associations and those working on agriculture exclusively saw this as less important than their comparators¹⁸. The fact that the private sector, which includes many consultants, and evaluation associations do not see tools as that important is perhaps not surprising as M&E practitioners probably know better than others about the tools and methods that already exist. It is difficult to draw any conclusions about the variation in the other groups without further analysis.

Here the analysis seems to suggest that there is some appetite for new tools and methods. Tools and models need to be sensitive to context, use multi-stakeholder perspectives and new technologies and focus on the wider picture of M&E. There was also a strong indication that good tools exist, they are just not being used and are perhaps not known by those that do not work on M&E exclusively. This was also verified by responses to question 8 on the suitability of current tools and methods to M&E goals.

Providing helpdesk service for M&E practitioners

Providing a helpdesk service for M&E practitioners was the approach that was seen as least important. Many comments looked at possible alternatives, for instance: *“It would be more useful to mentor practitioners. Helpdesks are only useful if the problems are generic, e.g. in the banking or IT field”*. Other comments indicated that:

- It might be useful for M&E practitioners that work in remote places and rarely get an opportunity to discuss with colleagues
- Might be useful for more specific questions, e.g. calculating sample sizes
- Needs to be properly resourced and independent in order to work
- Networking could provide the same service
- Depends on what is means

There seemed to be some appetite for a helpdesk facility for the M&E practitioners, but this is the issue that was seen as least important. This might have something to do with some respondents commenting that they did not understand what it would entail. Some comments pointed out that this could be done through knowledge networks, with a lot of information available on websites and through list serves already, or mentoring instead.

¹⁸ Comparators for the groups were Latin America and Caribbean (location), academic (type of organisation), agriculture and other sectors (work focus).

Other solutions suggested

We also gave respondents the opportunity to suggest other solutions. Most were similar to those reported above, but there a few worth noting:

- *“Bringing together M&E practitioners and establishing a code of conduct for practices. Perhaps giving M&E Practitioners a professional identity by which defend values and practices”*
- *“Supporting local and regional M&E associations as a mean to strengthen civil society in the ‘M&E sector’ that will play a catalyst role in promoting a culture of evaluation and effectiveness in the society”*
- *“Political will is most required”*

6. Key actors

Question 11 was an open-ended question that asked about the key actors in the field of agricultural M&E. We received 125 answers ranging from the type of organisation that was most important to mentions of several specific organisations.

Table 6: Key actors

	Frequency
Donors	33
Agencies (unspecified)	29
Governments	29
World Bank	22
NGOs	16
IFAD	14
CGIAR	12
FAO	10
Research	10
USAID	8
UN	7
DFID	6
BMGF	5
Care	5
Farmers	5
IDRC	4

Donors are seen as key to changing M&E practice, along with agencies (although not clear what type of agencies are meant) and governments. In terms of specific actors, the World Bank, IFAD, CGIAR and FAO were mentioned frequently, which is not surprising considering the focus on agriculture. This data is being used to inform a further analysis of specific actors in the M&E field.

7. Demand for and focus of ALINE

Question 12: Demand for ALINE

This question was open-ended and we received 170 replies of varying length. Table 7 below shows the functions grouped according to ‘no’, ‘don’t know’, ‘potentially’ and ‘yes’ (with a role identified) with some representative quotes. It is difficult to draw conclusions based on this table due to the fact that very few respondents had any concept of what ALINE might look like and do, and we did not receive enough responses in any category to make major strategic decisions about possible ALINE functions.

Table 7: Demand and role for ALINe

Demand	Quotes
No (9)	Just build on existing initiatives
	Not really. I think this is already happening in other doses around the world. Look at IDRC, ODI, SIDA, the CG system, etc, etc, etc, Everyone is doing something.
Don't know (13)	
Potentially (49)	
Depends on approach (40)	It all depends on ALINe's orientation and methodology. I fear that it will about impacts much, much more than learning. Impacts as a word carries with it a lot of dysfunctional baggage, as we saw at the Cairo conference
	Possibly, but not if a highly theoretical rigorous approach is assumed to be the solution in all cases. One useful thing would be to ensure greater availability of M&E designs and results.
	Not certain - sound like it could be self-serving or serving the evaluation field but not based in practice and implementation.
Concern about overlap (9)	Concerned about overlap, unless it can devise a simple, easy to apply system
	The focus of the initiative need be very clear and not redundant with that of existing initiatives (NONIE; 3ie; MfDR; etc.). This sectoral specialization can be useful as well as harmful
	There is probably nothing wrong with the idea. What is needed, though, is a thorough analysis of potentially similar initiatives and the upfront definition of what is the added value to existing initiatives
Yes (99)	
Information / knowledge sharing (19)	There is a role for the new initiative; I believe it will add value to the current efforts to share M&E info
	Yes, this network can help share practices and experiences in the agricultural programmes/projects M&E
	Yes, exchange on M&E and sharing 'good ideas' is very helpful. It is difficult now to find good examples that are based on field experience
Influence best practice (7)	But better to debunk the current practice than doing case studies of learning cases. They all use the learning rhetoric but don't actually foster learning.
	Documenting and propagating good M&E practices; simplifying tools and techniques of M&E.
	Yes, ALINe community can support each other in agriculture M&E, develop a resource /knowledge base and be a proactive forum seeking to address the issues and gaps as this survey will highlight
Networking (2)	Yes: develop networking among Researches, Practitioners and Community Based Organisations
	Facilitation, networking on existent networks
Influence donor agencies (4)	Yes. To both provide space for creating a different focus on M&E to target populations...by working with donors and implementers
	Yes - to support what is already starting to happen in terms of formation of communities of practice, lobbying for more resources for M&E, and increasing engagement of agricultural M&E practitioners in professional organizations
Capacity building (6)	Yes if it leads to building capacity in some tangible way. Tailored short courses would be very helpful.
	Yes, but an inclusive one... to use it as a platform for capacity building in the

	countries!!!
	A role for new initiative: capacity-building and experience sharing
Capture / share methodological innovation (3)	Yes, it is important to have ALINe and other platforms and localized nodes at regional and national levels, because we need to learn from the experiences of others, see what new tools and methods are being tested and how it works and what is not working?
	yes in sharing of best practices and improve M & E tools
Standards/ guidelines (2)	Yes, we need a pre-competitive network of practitioners for setting new standards and for designing and further developing hands-on tools that are duly embedded in project approaches.
	Yes - especially if it is to link more practitioners and spearhead harmonization on interpretation of concepts, approaches, simplification of tools, etc
Constituent engagement (3)	If it focuses on farmers as the main learners/commissioners of M&E
	Influential role to establish strong PM&E system and allocation adequate fund for M&E activities
Support learning (6)	Yes, need emphasis on learning
	Yes - new platform for learning and innovation
	A network on this is important particularly on learning from M&E of processes

There seemed to be some demand for ALINe or at least for some kind of an initiative to address some of the issues in the survey with 58% (99 out of 170) of respondents seeing a role for ALINe. However, there is also some hesitation – 29% (49 out of 170) of respondents wanted to know more about what ALINe will do and were concerned about overlap with other initiatives. Although the information/ knowledge sharing function seems to be where most of the demand lies, with only 19 responses suggesting this it not really enough to make strategic decisions on the functions of ALINe. To allay concerns about overlap a report on the analysis of the wider field of M&E in agriculture is being prepared. This will explore potential gaps in the field and the mechanisms that are needed to fill these.

Question 13: Focus of ALINe

As indicated by Table 8, the majority of respondents thought that ALINe should focus on agriculture and a few other sectors, many of which relate to agriculture, including natural resource management, water and sanitation, nutrition, food security, health education, SME credit and microfinance, rural poverty and development, social development, eco tourism, environment, infrastructure, gender and fisheries. A few comments did not mention other sectors, such as: *“Otherwise you would at least need a new acronym”* and *“Eat the elephant in bite sizes and stay focused”*. Here, perhaps unsurprisingly, the statistical analysis showed that those with a work focus specifically on agriculture tended to think that ALINe should maintain a specific focus on agriculture¹⁹.

Table 8: Focus of ALINe

	Frequency	Percent
Agriculture and a few other sectors	89	51
Open across all sectors	47	27
Agriculture only	40	23
Total responses	176	100

¹⁹ The comparator group where those that worked on agriculture and other sectors.

The majority of respondents thought that ALINe should not specifically focus on agriculture, which is perhaps unsurprising considering that the majority of respondents do not work exclusively in the agricultural development sector. Moreover, those other sectors mentioned are large related to agriculture. A few comments also highlighted the benefits of focusing narrowly to start off with and then branching out to other sectors.

8. Comments on the survey or on ALINe

Question 14 was open-ended and invited comments on the survey and on ALINe. We received 48 comments of which 22% were positive about the prospect of ALINe: *“Good Luck. Agriculture is critical to Africa. This initiative might make a significant contribution raising awareness about importance of M&E”*. None were negative, as long as it didn’t replicate existing initiatives. We had some comments on the survey; five were positive, 4 negative, for instance: *“Good survey. Please collate information and keep us informed. Will be happy to join”* and *“Longer than stated, gave up”*. Other comments were more general and often containing recommendations about issues already covered in the survey.

The survey seems to have been generally well received. Since we are in the business of M&E and survey design, we take the negative comments about the survey seriously and will take them into account in further work. As stated previously, we decided against a shorter survey accepting that this would mean fewer complete responses in return for a more complete understanding of the individuals who did respond. We could perhaps have been more precise with regards to the length of the survey.

9. Conclusions and implications for ALINe

This report presents the findings of the ALINe online consultation survey that was designed and conducted to test some of the key assumptions behind the emerging ALINe Theory of Change. The survey was targeted at experts in M&E and agriculture and had 171 complete and 100 partial responses with M&E practitioners as the largest group. The survey indicates that:

Beneficiary accountability and beneficiary empowerment are regarded as the two weakest functions of current M&E practice. Mechanisms for accountability to beneficiaries are seen to require some more participatory M&E approaches. These, it is recognised, are not easy to implement. The project improvement function is seen as a relatively unproblematic area of M&E, but only if done in certain ways. Similarly, the strategy and policy level contributions from M&E are relatively well regarded, but can be improved. The ability of M&E to meet donor accountability is the purpose most strongly signalled by respondents. There are some issues around what ‘good’ accountability to donors actually means – survey respondents called for more focus on outcomes and impacts.

A majority of respondents agrees that M&E in agriculture is weak, although we did not ask about strength relative to other sectors and should have done so. Some areas of M&E in agriculture are signalled as weaker than others. The principal reasons for this are weak capacity and evaluative culture in implementing agencies combined with weak incentives to invest funding in M&E within those agencies, a perception of a general lack of overall investment in M&E and a lack of well thought out M&E plans.

Although all the approaches to strengthening M&E in agriculture are seen as important, respondents see some as more important than others. The top rated response was the need to engage better with farmers and local partners. Improvement of initial project planning, particularly in the agricultural context, is nearly as highly rated. Capacity development is also seen as crucial – both the capacity of non M&E managers (to create sustained demand for quality M&E) as well as the capacity

of M&E practitioners (focusing on updating knowledge specifically looking at learning and new technologies).

The majority of respondents sees sharing good practice and networking as a further need, although this varies across groups. The major problem is access to existing networks for those that do not exclusively work on M&E. There seems to be weak appetite for a helpdesk facility to provide support for M&E practitioners; this is the approach that was seen as least important, with respondents suggesting that networking or mentoring can provide alternatives.

Donors are seen as key to changing M&E practice, along with implementing agencies and governments. Lobbying donors and allocating more resources for quality M&E are called for, but ensuring that the focus is on M&E that include the perspectives of all stakeholders and enables learning, not just accountability. It should also be recognised that donors have different approaches and incentives, and even within donors different staff groups have diverse approaches and incentives.

Opinions are divided on the need for new tools and models, but in line with preferred M&E approaches there is an appetite for learning how to choose and use tools and methods that are sensitive to context, support multi-stakeholder perspectives and use new technologies intelligently.

Finally, the majority of respondents suggests that ALINe should not specifically focus on agriculture – that is perhaps unsurprising considering that the majority of respondents do not work exclusively in the agricultural development sector.

Without respondents having much of a concept of what ALINe might look like or do, the survey results suggest that there is indeed demand for a potential Agriculture Learning and Impacts Network that can support:

- Approaches that balance the demands of upstream accountability, to donors, with downstream accountability, to project beneficiaries
- Efforts to raise the profile of M&E and explore incentives for generating more investment in M&E
- Capacity development efforts around organisational learning and the intelligent use of methods and tools appropriate to the specific needs and contexts within agriculture
- Opportunities for stakeholders that lack access to organised networks and forums to learn from each other

The survey results will be examined closely during the ALINe planning phase and feed into the emerging Theory of Change. Generally, the results have confirmed our assumptions, but also thrown up some questions for further analysis and consultation. Activities planned include:

- A synthesis of ALINe's analysis of M&E in agriculture. This will bring together the results of this study with the results of ALINe's other research activities, exploring potential gaps in the field and the mechanisms that are needed to fill these.
- Donors and primary beneficiaries (farmers) were underrepresented in the survey and we are planning further consultation with these groups.
- Research is being conducted into M&E capacity constraints – both for M&E practitioners and at an organisational level.
- Review of approaches to include excluded voices and pilots to innovate approaches to balance the demand between donor and beneficiary accountability are underway.

Appendix 1: Data for questions 6, 8 and 10

Table 9: Responses to statement 'Current M&E Practice tends to'

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total	Explanatory statements
lead to practical improvements in individual projects	43 (21 %)	80 (38 %)	43 (21 %)	31 (15 %)	8 (4 %)	4 (2 %)	209 (100 %)	136
lead to clarification of internal strategy and policy objectives	38 (18 %)	80 (38 %)	41 (20 %)	39 (19 %)	8 (4 %)	3 (1 %)	209 (100 %)	126
provide good accountability to donors	45 (22 %)	75 (36 %)	46 (22 %)	32 (15 %)	8 (4 %)	3 (1 %)	209 (100 %)	119
provide good accountability to beneficiaries	18 (9 %)	41 (20 %)	43 (21 %)	63 (30 %)	41 (20 %)	3 (1 %)	209 (100 %)	126
empower beneficiaries and help build their capacity	20 (10 %)	34 (16 %)	48 (23 %)	61 (29 %)	41 (20 %)	5 (2 %)	209 (100 %)	115
generate wider lessons for the field	27 (13 %)	72 (34 %)	59 (28 %)	36 (17 %)	11 (5 %)	4 (2 %)	209 (100 %)	115

Table 10: Responses to statements about strengths and weaknesses of agricultural M&E

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total	Explanatory statements
There is enough demand for rigorous M&E by donors and project managers	20 (10 %)	70 (36 %)	39 (20 %)	46 (24 %)	13 (7 %)	6 (3 %)	194 (100 %)	105
There is enough M&E capacity in implementing agencies	2 (1 %)	29 (15 %)	44 (23 %)	88 (46 %)	23 (12 %)	6 (3 %)	192 (100 %)	98
Implementing agencies have sufficient internal incentives to invest in M&E	6 (3 %)	33 (17 %)	51 (26 %)	65 (34 %)	30 (15 %)	9 (5 %)	194 (100 %)	96
M&E plans tend to be well thought out	7 (4 %)	29 (15 %)	62 (32 %)	70 (36 %)	18 (9 %)	6 (3 %)	192 (100 %)	94
Learning and flexibility are actively encouraged in implementing agencies	6 (3 %)	36 (19 %)	55 (29 %)	62 (32 %)	21 (11 %)	12 (6 %)	192 (100 %)	90
Current M&E tools and methods are well-suited to M&E goals	9 (5 %)	46 (24 %)	61 (32 %)	51 (27 %)	11 (6 %)	11 (6 %)	189 (100 %)	90
M&E practitioners have enough opportunities to learn from each other and stay up to date with new developments	15 (8 %)	49 (26 %)	47 (25 %)	52 (28 %)	16 (8 %)	10 (5 %)	189 (100 %)	93
There is enough funding for M&E activities	3 (2 %)	38 (20 %)	31 (16 %)	65 (34 %)	40 (21 %)	14 (7 %)	191 (100 %)	91
Other challenges								24

Table 11: Ratings of different approaches to improving M&E in agriculture

	Very important	Important	Less important	Not important	Don't know	Total	Explanatory statements
Developing new models and tools	51 (30 %)	53 (31 %)	52 (31 %)	5 (3 %)	9 (5 %)	170 (100 %)	66
Sharing good practice and networking	76 (45 %)	68 (40 %)	12 (7 %)	2 (1 %)	10 (6 %)	168 (100 %)	60
Capacity development for general (non-M&E) managers	74 (45 %)	63 (38 %)	14 (8 %)	2 (1 %)	12 (7 %)	165 (100 %)	60
Capacity development for M&E practitioners	74 (46 %)	57 (35 %)	15 (9 %)	4 (2 %)	11 (7 %)	161 (100 %)	53
Providing helpdesk service for M&E practitioners	29 (18 %)	64 (40 %)	44 (27 %)	9 (6 %)	15 (9 %)	161 (100 %)	45
Allocating more funds for M&E	65 (39 %)	54 (33 %)	27 (16 %)	9 (5 %)	11 (7 %)	166 (100 %)	57
Improving initial project planning	82 (49 %)	63 (38 %)	8 (5 %)	5 (3 %)	8 (5 %)	166 (100 %)	64
Engaging better with farmers and local partners	86 (53 %)	49 (30 %)	12 (7 %)	5 (3 %)	9 (6 %)	161 (100 %)	59
Lobbying donors to improve M&E practice	63 (38 %)	62 (38 %)	19 (12 %)	8 (5 %)	12 (7 %)	164 (100 %)	56
Other suggestions							13

Appendix 2: Survey

Page 1 - Question 1 - Choice - Multiple Answers (Bullets)

[Mandatory]

Which category best describes your organisation? (click all that apply)

- Multilateral agency
- Bilateral/national government
- Academic
- NGO
- Private sector
- Evaluation association or network
- Donor (other)
- Other, please specify

Page 1 - Question 2 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)

[Mandatory]

What is your position?

- Senior manager
- Consultant
- M&E manager
- Project manager
- Researcher
- Other, please specify

Page 1 - Question 3 - Choice - Multiple Answers (Bullets)

[Mandatory]

Do you consider yourself as: (click all that apply)

- A supplier of M&E services
- A consumer of M&E services
- Do M&E in-house
- Other, please specify

Page 1 - Question 4 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets)

[Mandatory]

Do you work specifically on:

- Agricultural issues
- Other development sectors (health, education etc)
- Agriculture and other sectors
- Other, please specify

Page 1 - Question 5 - Open Ended - One Line

[Mandatory]

What country are you located in?

Page 2 - Question 6 - Rating Scale - Matrix

[Mandatory]

Successful M&E fulfils various functions. Based on your experience, how much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	A g r e e	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Current M&E practice tends to lead to practical improvements in individual projects Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Current M&E practice tends to lead to clarification of internal strategy and policy objectives Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Current M&E practice tends to provide good accountability to donors Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Current M&E practice tends to provide good accountability to beneficiaries Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Current M&E practice tends to empower beneficiaries and help build their capacity Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Current M&E tends to generate wider lessons for the field Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Overall, how would you rate the strength of monitoring and evaluation in agricultural development at the moment?

- Very strong
- Strong
- Just good enough
- Weak
- Very weak
- Don't know

Page 3 - Question 8 - Rating Scale - Matrix

Please help us analyse the strengths and weaknesses of M&E in agriculture further. Based on your experience, how much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree	A g r e e	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
There is enough demand for rigorous M&E by donors and project managers Please explain your answer briefly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is enough M&E capacity in implementing agencies Please explain your answer briefly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Implementing agencies have sufficient internal incentives to invest in M&E Please explain your answer briefly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
M&E plans and activities tend to be well thought out Please explain your answer briefly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning and flexibility are actively encouraged in implementing agencies Please explain your answer briefly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Current M&E tools and methods are well-suited to M&E goals Please explain your answer briefly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
M&E practitioners have enough opportunities to learn from each other and stay up to date with new developments Please explain your answer briefly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There is enough funding for M&E activities Please explain your answer briefly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other, please specify Please explain your answer briefly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page 4 - Question 9 - Open Ended - Comments Box

Do you know any examples of particularly successful and effective M&E in agriculture? Please describe them and provide weblinks

Page 4 - Question 10 - Rating Scale - Matrix

How would you rank these approaches to improving monitoring and evaluation in agriculture?

	Very important	Important	Less important	Not important	Don't know
Developing new M&E models and tools Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sharing good practice and networking Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Capacity development for general (non-M&E) managers Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Capacity development for M&E practitioners Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Providing helpdesk service for practitioners Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Allocating more funds for M&E Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improving initial project planning Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Engaging better with farmers and local partners Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Lobbying donors to improve M&E practice Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other, please specify Please briefly explain your answer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page 5 - Question 11 - Open Ended - Comments Box

Who are the key actors in the field of agricultural M&E that could change the current situation - for better or worse? (E.g. which donors, implementing agencies, NGOs, governments, multilateral agencies, existing initiatives etc.?)

Page 5 - Question 12 - Open Ended - Comments Box [Mandatory]

Do you see a role for a new initiative, such as the proposed Agriculture Learning and Impacts Network (ALINe)? If not, please explain why. Do you see a role for another new initiative?

Page 5 - Question 13 - Choice - One Answer (Bullets) [Mandatory]

Should the proposed Agriculture Learning and Impacts Network (ALINe) maintain a specific focus on agriculture, or consider also working with other sectors?

- Just focus on agriculture
- Be open across all sectors
- Focus on agriculture and a few other sectors. Please specify which

Page 5 - Question 14 - Open Ended - Comments Box

Please use this space to provide further comments on this survey or on ALINe

Page 6 - Question 15 - Choice - Multiple Answers (Bullets)

Please provide your details below if you would like to: (click all that apply)

- Receive results from this survey directly to your email
- Stay engaged with ALINe and be informed of future developments
- Register on our list of M&E service providers
- Participate in a study mapping M&E services

Page 6 - Question 16 - Name and Address (General)

Your details:

- Name
- Company
- Address
- City/Town and Zip Code
- Country
- Email Address
- Website
- Telephone/Mobile
- Instant Messenger ID (MSN, Skype)

Appendix 3: Comparison between contact list and respondent list

Figure 5: Composition of convenience sample (n=631) compared to respondent list (n=97)

