CHANGE LEARNINGS

UNIQUE TOOL (UT)
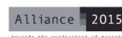

CHANGE - Improving Access to Education in Ethiopia for Most Marginalized Girls
Consortium led by People in Need

Introduction

Unique Tool (UT) was designed to collect, analyze and visualize project monitoring data using a single form, connected to cloud-based data transformation, analysis and visualization tools, which comprises eight different sections and a ninth option in case monitoring cannot take place. The eight sections can be completed either all or selectively during a single monitoring visit, depending on the number of activities that are being monitored by the user. The eight UT components are the following:

- Class & Facilitator observation (ABE, IFAL)
- Gender Clubs (GCs)
- Community Action Groups (CAGs)
- School observation
- Attendance of facilitators
- Facilitators learning cycle (FLC)
- Self Help Groups (SHGs)
- TVET / Basic vocational skills training

Each of the eight sections requires the users to record their GPS location and take photographs of specific activities. This set up has a triple advantage: remote monitoring mechanism, generation of means of verification as well as transfer of detailed information on the ground (e.g. photos of SHG or CAG meeting minutes) all the way to the project and programme management staff across the consortium.

UT is an online project monitoring system that consists of several integral parts. The first one is a KoboToolbox form, which is chiefly used by the project field staff who collect the information via a mobile based Kobo Collect app. The KoboToolbox form is also directly connected to several Excel/csv databases, which serve as sources of 'static' information, such as list of learning centers, facilitators, etc.

The collected data from the form is then extracted via API to cloud-based Power BI Service, where the data is transformed, cleaned and loaded to final datas et. The additional cleaning and analytical layers are then added to the dataset and connected to online visualization report/dashboard and application also run by Power BI. The final visualization is accessible to

selected users through web browser or mobile application, the system also sends weekly updates via email. The system is programmed to update the data visualization every 24 hours, thus providing up-to-date information on a daily basis.
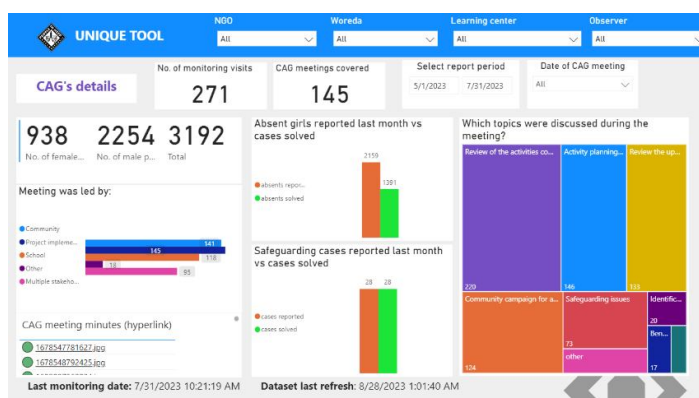
The visualization is split into 29 thematically organized slides, including general overview, analysis of three project indicators collected through UT, school observation (incl. classrooms, toilets and handwashing facilities), GCs details, facilitators observation, FLC, SHGs, girls' attendance, safeguarding/protection, project overview, indicators time series, reporting time series, and team performance overview. The filters (including, NGO, woreda, learning center, facilitator, time, SHG etc.) provided on each slide enable the users to choose the level of analysis they want to visualize – on the scale from the overall consortium data analysis to the level of a single CAG meeting, teaching

performance of a selected facilitator on a given monitoring day, or the amount of savings recorded by a specific SHG during a specific monitoring visit.

It is important to note that the UT does not provide cumulative project data, as the information it generates depends on the coverage and the frequency of usage by its users. If the users monitor the same LC several times, the information will be (at least to some extent) duplicated. This can, however, be addressed through the time filters, while the indicators calculate with the last monitoring visit in the selected time period. If the users do not use the UT to record information from some LCs, this data will not be captured. For the UT to provide the complete project data, it has to be connected to a well-organized work plan.

UT was introduced to the CHANGE project at the end of the fourth year of its implementation and started being more widely used in August 2022. The chief reason for its creation was that the consortium management was struggling with the availability of the project data. The tool provided a unified methodology and platform for project data collection to all IPs. It was translated to Amharic to enable a comfortable usage by all the field staff. By the time of writing this document (October 2023) the consortium team have conducted more than 4,300 monitoring visits with the UT's support.

Advantages

- **Triple purpose:** UT was designed to fulfill three purposes. First, as it is used by the field staff, it can be utilized as a managerial tool, which can be closely aligned with the project workplan and project staff individual workplans. If planned well, the PM can ensure that all aspects of the project are monitored at regular intervals and key activities are captured. Moreover, the information submitted by staff can instantly and comprehensively inform the PM about the activity status and can help plan further activities and support. E.g., if a performance of a certain facilitator is found not meeting the required standard, more support can be planned and provided to the concrete person. Second, UT has an M&E function. In the CHANGE project, UT was specifically designed to collect data for three complex indicators that required observation and continuous follow up. However, an abundance of other data was also collected. Third, UT also helped to discover that CAGs and GCs, entities established with the support of the project, became community-led bodies that accepted and handled protection and safeguarding issues. As such, the Safeguarding Manager could follow up with the concrete bodies if any case was registered. Moreover, UT also provides space to monitor the conduct of the facilitators, as well as record any other misconduct observed during the monitoring.
- **Unified platform & methodology:** Before the creation of the UT, some indicators were not measured in a unified manner by the IPs, as some of their activities and contexts differed. UT's purpose was therefore to present a unified methodology agreed on by all IPs and ensure that it is followed upon. Moreover, before the UT each partner collected the data by themselves at different platforms. With the introduction of the UT, a unified data storage and analysis platform was created that ensured that all the data was analyzed in the same manner, automatically and on a daily basis. Overall, the data collection and analysis were rendered much more efficient and less time consuming.
- **Up-to-date analysis & visualization:** The important advantage of the UT is its connection to the Power BI with an attractive and easy to navigate visualization. The visualization is programmed to update every 24 hours, which means that the management is provided with almost real time data analysis. Once the analysis is set up at the inception, it takes place automatically throughout the project and it requires only a minor maintenance by MEAL staff.

- **Option to adjust the level of analysis:** Another advantage of the UT is that it can provide the users with different levels of insight into the project based on the needs of each staff thanks to the provision of different filtering options. While a field staff can check the project's performance in the woreda where s/he is working in, PMs can follow the project at the regional level, and the Consortium Coordinator at the consortium level. CFRM Manager can follow which LCs are lacking an adequate CFRM set up and Safeguarding Manager can follow any protection and safeguarding cases that may be reported. In summary, the UT can provide the overall big picture but it can also zoom in to the smallest details showing you concrete meeting notes captured from a specific CAG at a specific date.
- **Remote monitoring tool:** UT was also a response to the need of having a remote monitoring mechanism in situations where access is limited. For this purpose, especially two features were added – GPS location and requirement to take photographs of project activities, such as meeting minutes, classrooms, and other learning centers' facilities. These two features are added to all eight components of the UT.
- **Generation of MoVs:** Last but not least, UT can also be used to generate projects' means of verification. For example, as it captures especially the CAG and SHG meeting minutes, it provides proof that these project-established entities remain active and are managing their activities and (in terms of SHGs) financial health well.

Challenges/Adaptation

- **Late Introduction of the UT:** UT was piloted in May 2022 but its usage picked up in August, which is at the end of the fourth year of the project implementation when the cohorts 1 and 2 were finished. This means that the UT did not capture information from the complete project.
- **Usage of the UT was not completely internalized:** Although the project management and MEAL staff were oriented on how to use the UT to oversee the project implementation at different levels, there have been indications that some of the management have rarely referred to the tool, and reminders had to be made to collect the data in some areas. On the other hand, some field staff considered the usage of the UT an additional time-consuming activity despite the fact that most of the UT components take 5 to 10 minutes to complete with the exception of the Facilitator & class observation for which the monitor has to be present during the whole class. Another challenge was the language, especially for the staff in Afar region. However, this issue was communicated to the consortium management only when queries were made about low usage of the tool in the region. To address this issue, the data collection part of the tool was translated at least to Amharic, since it was agreed that this would facilitate the data collection in Afar (and translation to Afar language would take too much time).
- **Factors influencing the data quality:** There are three factors that may have an impact on data quality. First, the UT is used by the field staff, i.e. the same staff who implement the project activities. This caveat was considered by the management but, nevertheless, it was agreed that this was the most economical, efficient and effective approach to both data collection and project management. Second, some staff faced technical difficulties in using a paperless data collection method. Third, MEAL management identified a couple of questions that seem to be confusing for the monitors. The last two factors were addressed by several rounds of training sessions, albeit more training could have been provided to further improve the data quality especially for the new and technically challenged staff.

- **Disruption of data analysis caused by changes to the UT after its deployment:** Following the logframe revision no. 4, one indicator originally measured by the UT was removed and a new indicator that had a potential to be measured through the tool was added. Consequently, new questions were added to the UT to cater for the new indicator some time after data collection had already started. This disrupted the data analysis, which then had to be restored. After this challenging experience, the MEAL Advisor refused to make any further changes to the UT, albeit the team identified a few improvements that could be made to the tool.

Learnings

- ✓ UT substantially improves the oversight and understanding of the intervention thanks to its ability to facilitate managerial and M&E functions and provide information on CFRM and protection issues, while also providing analysis and visualization at different project levels. This has an impact on the quality of the intervention as well as reporting.
- ✓ To use the full potential of the tool, it needs to be timely introduced and well aligned with the project and individual staff workplans to offer a holistic information on the intervention.
- ✓ Utilization of UT is cost effective in terms of finance and time where it is handled properly.
- ✓ UT provides a unified data collection methodology and platform for all IPs who can follow the data analysis in close to the real time.
- ✓ UT can be used as a remote monitoring tool, as it has the ability to generate project evidence and means of verification.
- ✓ Several rounds of training sessions accompanied by regular data quality checks to identify any challenges, and an ongoing on-the-job training need to take place to ensure internalization of the tool by its users as well as a high data quality.
- ✓ Management needs to be trained on how to utilize and profit from the different levels of data analysis and visualization as well as be regularly encouraged to use the UT on a daily basis.
- ✓ Several adjustments of UT design (at the level of questions) should take place based on the project team's recommendations before its future application. The data collection tool should be tested, piloted and finalized before actual usage. No adjustment should take place after it has been deployed to avoid technical challenges and to reduce time spent on additional data processing, cleaning and adjusting/creating analytical layers
- ✓ Potential for growth: if the tool was a part of the planning process, it could be planned what data would be visualized for specific target groups; the visualization could also be enriched by e.g. financial information to focus more on value for money component, etc.

UT Data model