

MEAL Progress Update

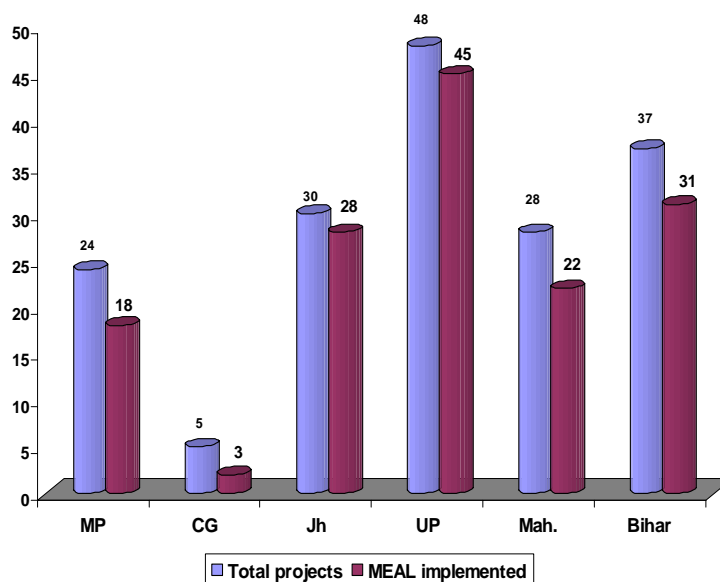
As on 31st July 06

The update presents the consolidated overview of MEAL Progress and processes in all the states and national level till July 2006. In each of the section below, progress is summarized by providing the current status, key achievements till date. Few issues of concern and observations are also highlighted in the report for better reflection, planning and follow up at RO and MC levels.

1. MEAL at CSO level -

Out of 172 projects in PACS, MEAL system (phase-1, meaning input activity, process and output monitoring systems) has been rolled out in 142 projects (85%). In Jharkhand, MEAL phase-1 has been introduced in 28 projects (93%), while in Chhattishgarh, this is seen in 40% projects. MEAL Phase-2 at CSO level is yet to pick up pace. CBIA has been done by 31 projects most of them are in Jharkhand and Maharashtra. Two projects of MP and one project of UP have done CBIA exercises. MP-CG PST has decided to develop cluster development plan based on CBIA findings. Few PSTs have also decided that community level learning forum shall be facilitated by using CBIA and Group Self assessment tool. In this quarter, OD process has been initiated in three CSOs (two at Maharashtra, and one at MP). It has been observed that smaller CSOs have frequently requested for initiating OD process at their projects. More OD exercises are planned to happen in the next quarter. It is believed that OD core group need to meet frequently with an objective to share their experiences on OD piloting in their respective states.

Fig1: Status of Phase-1 implementation of MEAL across States



By end of July 06, total of 31 CSOs Project evaluation exercises have been conducted. Maximum number of projects' evaluation had done at UP (32%) wherein least number of project evaluations has been done in MP (only two projects). All the evaluation

reports are available at respective PST offices except Samarthan. Two project evaluation (one each from UP and MP) has been planned during the next quarter.

As per State PSTs reflection on quality of MEAL implementation at CSO level, it is known that about one fourth of the PACS project have understood and applied principles of MEAL appropriately (details about project wise MEAL grading available with PST offices). Others have understood MEAL largely as a set of reporting formats for upward flow of information. This suggest that in three fourth of the projects, internalisation of MEAL is not optimal yet. Less ownership is witnessed among key stakeholders for using MEAL as performance improvement and learning enrichment device. User manual on MEAL needs to be quickly published and circulated. Data management processes needs to be strengthened. This is for first time, PSTs have played proactive role in improving quality of MEAL implementation at CSO level e.g. RO participation in key MEAL events like Output tracking workshop, CBIA analysis needs to be ensured by the ROs. At least in 40 projects, intensive MEAL support is being provided which will showcase how MEAL can improve project performance.

Box-1: Key Process Learning in MEAL Implementation

- RO facilitation in the OT workshop brought greater insight over project dynamics
- Report card methodology can be successfully applied for large Programme evaluations
- Any element of MEAL can be introduced any time based on project requirements without following the sequence followed till date
- Phy-fin. Variance report in MEAL are helping PST offices in understanding status of activities and key variances therein

2. MEAL at State/National level:

MEAL is closely tracking some the state and national level initiatives of the Programme e.g. PACS recently celebrated **NREGS week**. Questionnaires for data collection were developed, and distributed. Analysis will be presented as part of third synthesis report.

Programme Evaluation: From 6-8th June'06, National level report writing workshop has been organized at Khashid village, Mumbai where all the programme evaluation team members participated. The objective of this workshop was to consolidate the findings emerging from 21 CSO level report cards, State level parameters; brainstorming on new ideas

Box-2: Programme Evaluation focusing on outcomes and impacts

An elaborate Programme Evaluation exercise was initiated on 8th February 2006 with a launch workshop with team of 20 people. Programme Evaluation Team has representations from MC, CMS, ROs and external consultants. External consultants have led the evaluation team. A report card methodology for Programme Evaluation has been developed by PACS. The process has been completed with analysis and report writing workshop in June 2006. The final report is awaited from the external consultant.

on 7-S model as well as share the overall report structure. The final evaluation report is having four major parts. Part-1 covers “response to the elements of TOR (external consultants)”; Part 2 covers “Programme analysis (by whole team as a result of report writing workshop and based upon report cards and state reports)”; and finally, part 3 covers “conclusions and strategic directions for PACS Programme (by external consultants)”. Annexes contain report cards and links, State reports, and database compiled during the programme evaluation process at state and CSO level. It was shared that PACS has achieved a score of 4.18 out of 10 on outcomes and impacts (for all CSO and community level parameters).

Preparation for 3rd **state and national synthesis** is under progress by all State PSTs. However, it is decided that each RO shall write all chapters for the projects anchored by them as well as for state level processes initiated and nurtured by them. A small-report editing team later finalizes the chapters and the full report for submission. The SMC are providing available information for last three quarters.

Revised and simplified internal communication flows in the PACS Programme is finalized by MCG. Currently, the internal communication flow chart is with MC, which needs to be circulated to all.

Institutional Evaluation (Resource Organization Assessment pointers - **ROAP**) is a periodic performance assessment tool for ROs. The simplified version of ROAP is submitted by CMS to MC for the implementation. The tool has been circulated to sampled CSOs and ROs for the pilot.

Management consultant has initiated **Programme Progress reflection and review system** in consultation with CMS, where State anchors, State MEAL coordinators, and Programme Director presented their State progress, opportunities, challenges, future plans etc. Two rounds of meeting are completed; dated on 10th April and 26th July 2006. During this meeting, it was decided to establish formal review mechanism for ROs to assess the support mechanism process and progress. As per

Box-3: CONCERNS FOR DEMONSTRATING MEAL AS LEARNING TOOL:

- How to sustain MEAL process especially the spirit of reflection/learning's?
- The realisation of PST as information hub is progressing slowly
- Support to CSOs on maintaining quality of reflection through ROs is less than required
- Project level research, Newsletter, baseline, IEC material are not shared by the CSOs with the PSTs/MC
- CSO level reports under programme evaluation are not shared formally with CSOs
- No software solution for handling large no. of records. Found difficulty in doing comparative analysis.
- CSOs have still not taken sanction of their refined / revisited LFA.
- Baseline information based on outputs and indicators are lacking in majority of the CSO projects. Difficulty in comparing with latest changes.

this, review of two States (UP, and Maharashtra) have already been undertaken. PST as a mechanism for **Programme level reflections** and learning is gaining maturity. Monthly PST meetings and State Core group (SCG) meetings are being organized at regular interval. Till date, 15 SCG meetings and more than 126 PST meetings have happened. State Core Groups have discussed and provided guidance on issues like BPL survey campaign, NREGA, gender workshop, PEVAC, advocacy issue, State level progress and constraint analysis etc. States are now thinking of reconstituting PSTs for effective utilization of the potential that exist in a forum like this.

The **eight MCG meeting** was held in New Delhi on the 11-12 April 2006. The meeting focused on finalizing the second National Synthesis Report and providing guidance to state teams for improving quality of MEAL processes. It was decided that the MCG members need to play greater role in steering and strengthening MEAL processes at CSO and State levels. It was also decided to have RO representation in the MCG on a rotation basis to ensure broad based opportunities at this national forum. The meeting succeeded in identifying many action points for improving MEAL implementation processes.

Desktop Interactive Information System (DIIS) - Latest update of DIIS was brought out and shared with MCG members on 12th Apr.06. This is further improved version with detailed and easy access to information on national, state, and CSO pages. Uniformity and single point availability of information and analysis is the uniqueness of DIIS. Currently DIIS contain about 60% of all PACS contents.

3. Other highlights

DFID has initiated an Impact Assessment exercise for the Programme. TARU is leading the exercise, for which field work has already been completed.

CMS and MC have mutually agreed to bring CMS support to closure on 31st Dec.06. The planning for CMS withdrawal has started more than six months ahead so that processes and sustainability of key processes can be well managed. CMS and MC had a meeting in Delhi for the purpose wherein transfer protocols were discussed. CMS produced a transfer note based on the discussions in that meeting. Following captures key points from that note:

Role Maintenance:

- SMC positions will be continued by the Programme. MC will entrust the hiring of SMCs (on contractual basis -for one and half years till April 2008) to local state based agencies /ROs.
- MC requested CMS to offer to all existing SMCs the option of joining the Programme directly through a local agency.

- As Bihar position has fallen vacant, MC offered to operationally the new arrangement with Bihar SMC. CMS will do the recruitment on behalf of MC /local agency and the person will work under the local agency directly for the Programme.
- MC requested CMS to put in additional staff on consultancy basis till new recruitment take place for Bihar SMC. CMS promised to depute a consultant for a month or so as stopgap to ensuring continuity of key on-going processes e.g. synthesis.
- The new SMCs positions will be filled in by MC through a locally identified agency by Sept.06 so that proper handover and induction can be ensured by CMS team.
- Similarly, all MIS persons will be offered to work directly with the Programme. Their contractual arrangement will be same as SMCs (through a local agency).
- MC will make efforts to fill the National MEAL Co-coordinator position at Delhi office. MC could offer one existing SMCs as NMC.
- MC will perform the roles of facilitation, co-ordination, ideation and quality control, which are currently being played by CMS from Dec 06 onwards.

Concept Maintenance:

- MEAL processes and concept will be maintained by MC from 1st Jan 07. The MCG and other structures such as PST will continue.
- SCG will be renamed and repositioned as a broader body with roles of governance, management, communication and advocacy.
- The support to CSOs on MEAL will be intensive during July -Dec.06. Beyond this and once CMS withdraws, support will be slowly tapered off and will be more need based rather supply driven.
- The concept of State Core Group is an important structural intervention of MEAL. This shall be diligently followed. State Managers shall be responsible for ensuring that.

Infrastructure Maintenance:

- PST offices have become crucial for the Programme for management, dissemination and resource centre purposes. PST offices will evolve into a resource centre managed by local agencies.
- MC will takeover the infrastructure in Bihar, Jharkhand, MP and Maharashtra offices where contracts renewals for the offices are due. MC will entrust management for these offices to locally agencies, which may be ROs already working the Programme.

4. MEAL Action Plan for July-December 06:

a. CSO level -

- Demonstrate MEAL as a learning tool in few projects
- OD for two sample CSOs in all five states
- CBIA exercises will be demonstrated in few projects across all the states
- CSO User Manual publication and circulation
- CBT modules on MEAL
- CBIA analysis workshop facilitation by the ROs

b. State and national Level -

- Third Programme Synthesis - State and National level
- MCG meeting - 17 -18th August 2006
- Update the DIIS and facilitator manual
- Final Programme evaluation Report
- Follow up of MCG meeting's and other action points
- Finalize National level Basic MIS
- Developing algorithms (analysis protocols) for the users to better understand analyze and use MEAL data for their requirements
- Computerization of Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEAL) Systems of PACS Programme
