LEARNING-ORIENTED REAL-TIME IMPACT ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME: PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2020

BACKGROUND

In 2020, the Learning-Oriented Real-Time Impact Assessment (LORTA) programme continued to embed real-time impact evaluations into approved Green Climate Fund (GCF) projects. LORTA is a technical assistance programme that aims to build capacity, help projects and investments create high-quality data sets, and support real-time learning on implementation and the likelihood of causal impact. LORTA uses a theory-based approach to assessing impact that includes experimental and quasi-experimental designs, with two to three waves of survey data from beneficiaries and, where relevant, comparison populations. In 2020, LORTA continued the partnership with staff of accredited entities (AEs) and project teams to provide advice on and build the capacity for theory-based impact evaluations. The LORTA programme also worked with the GCF Secretariat to understand capacity building efforts provided by the GCF Secretariat. The Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) works hard to build relationships with key actors who, in turn, can advocate, build and budget for theory-based impact evaluations within investment proposals.

LORTA VIRTUAL DESIGN WORKSHOP

LORTA has three phases of work. Phase I involves formative engagement and design. Here, project teams and AEs are onboarded into the programme through initial engagements – participatory and inclusive two-day inception workshops attended by a wide range of stakeholders – and are provided with a number of evaluation options in a three-page design brief for each project. Phase I ends with the delivery of an impact evaluation design report to the AE and the project team. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all these activities were conducted online.

In 2020, the third cohort of projects entered the LORTA programme. The LORTA design workshop that had initially been scheduled for May 2020 at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome was conducted virtually via an online learning module. The virtual workshop, which started on 21 September 2020 and concluded on 16 November 2020, had over 70 participants, including representatives of 16 GCF-funded projects.

The virtual design workshop consisted of eight

Damaged coral reef with coral rubble. ©cdelacy/ShutterStock

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webinars, each of which was preceded by an online learning video on the GCF's iLearn platform. Project teams participated in weekly breakout sessions before each webinar. Breakout groups were formed of team members from two different projects, led by at least one impact evaluation specialist and in some cases supported by a behavioural science specialist. During the sessions, the topic of the week was discussed in general as well as for the particular project. These small group sessions allowed project team members to explore different impact assessment designs alongside established evaluation experts. A midline survey of participants showed a very positive appraisal of the workshop.

PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA

Participant projects were assessed to determine their eligibility for LORTA by taking into account the following strategic criteria and guiding principles:

- Feasibility of impact evaluation design: The project, or at least a subcomponent of the project, had to have the potential to be rigorously evaluated.

- Buy-in from AE: Project selection took into account commitment from the AE to conduct a theory-based, rigorous impact evaluation. Support from the AE and the project team is essential during all phases of LORTA.

- Budget: Participants were aware of the budget implications of an impact evaluation and were willing to make sufficient budget available to collect data on a representative scale.

- Level of innovation for LORTA: Innovative projects were sought for the overall LORTA portfolio in 2020 to complement the projects that were already part of the programme.

- Level of innovation for the GCF and the climate change space: The projects needed to be sufficiently innovative to enhance learning within the GCF and global evidence on climate change.

Following the workshop, the IEU consulted with relevant divisions of the GCF Secretariat to understand their views with respect to appropriateness of projects for LORTA. Representatives of the Secretariat were invited to attend selection meetings. The selection of projects was completed according to LORTA programme criteria mentioned above.

NEW PROJECTS IN THE LORTA PORTFOLIO

In the first half of 2021, five projects were undergoing Phase I of LORTA (formative engagement and design). Inception workshops took place with AEs and project teams in Belize, Ecuador, Pakistan and the Philippines. As of June 2021, the delivery of Phase I technical assistance to Kyrgyzstan is pending completion of the funded activity agreement. The details of the five 2020 projects that are currently in Phase I are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. *Projects that joined the LORTA programme in 2020*

Country	Project name	Accredited entity	Theme / Sector	Evaluation design options
Belize	Resilient rural Belize (Be-Resilient)	International accredited entity: International Fund for Agricultural Development	Adaptation / public	A matching grant fund that will introduce smallholder participation in selected value chains (difference-in-differences with matching) Backyard garden interventions targeting rural, low-income households to foster food security (phase-in experimental design)
Ecuador	Ecuador REDD+ RBP for results Period 2014	International accredited entity: United Nations Development Programme	Mitigation / public	The transition to sustainable agricultural production systems (difference-in-differences with matching)
Kyrgyzstan	Carbon sequestration through climate investment in forests and rangelands in the Kyrgyz Republic	International accredited entity: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Cross-cutting / public	*Pending funded activity agreement*
Pakistan	Transforming the Indus basin with climate resilient agriculture and water management	International accredited entity: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	Adaptation / public	Farmer training, which will take place in the form of farmer field schools, including women-only schools (phase-in experimental design) Climate extension messages for farmers (encouragement experimental design)
Philippines	Multi-hazard impact-based forecasting and early warning system for the Philippines	National direct access entity: Land Bank	Adaptation / public	Use of mobile applications and awareness-raising to increase the effectiveness of implementing people-centred forecast and early action warning systems

Progress in existing LORTA portfolio

Phases II and III of LORTA focus on impact assessment and data analysis. Activities in these phases were influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic and changing windows of opportunity for data collection in different contexts. Nevertheless, LORTA successfully collected baseline data in Rwanda and Zambia and end line data in Malawi. During 2020, LORTA activities have continued to emphasize the importance of the three foundations on which the programme is based. First, the importance of creating equal partnerships and mutual trust with AEs and project teams. Second, the importance of flexibility. This foundation has been especially important in 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the landscape for all countries, including how technical assistance is offered and received. Third, the importance of learning, uptake and use, which ensure that LORTA can help inform the evidence needs of the GCF and, most importantly, the climate needs of developing countries.