

Measuring Impact For Learning and Empowerment (MILE)

**A Practical Manual for Participatory Monitoring,
Evaluation and Learning (MEL) and Forward
Accountability (FA) for VSO Programmes**

Revised Edition, June 2023



**Lasting change
through volunteering**

Acronyms

ASRP	Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health
CoP	Chief of Party
CLM	Community Led Monitoring
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematic Assessment
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ETE	End-term Evaluation
FA	Forward Accountability
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GP	Global Programmes
GRF	Global Resource Framework
IP	Implementing Partners
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning
MELFA	Monitoring Evaluation Learning & Forward Accountability
MILE	Measuring Indicators for Learning and Empowerment
MTE	Mid-term Evaluation
NPS	Net Promoter Score
OCA	Organisational Capacity Assessment
PA	Practice Areas
PF	People First
PILs	Programme Implementation Leads
PM	Programme Manager
PMLT	Partnership Monitoring and Learning Tool
PO	Project Officer
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
VFD	Volunteering for Development
VSO	Voluntary Services Overseas

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How it all began!

VSO's People First Strategy:

VSO's 'People First' strategy, launched in 2010 and reframed in 2015, includes among other components, six People First Principles namely: People-Centred, Evidence Based, Effective & Appropriate, Reflective Practice, Collaboration & Knowledge Sharing, and Accountability, applied to its the programme cycle including design, implementation and evidence building. Around this time, conversations also took place on how to align VSO's MEL practice to the People First Principles, particularly make it 'people-centred'.

Visioning in Uganda:

During this time, the programme team in Uganda experimented a participatory MEL approach deriving from other existing participatory M&E tools and methods, both within and outside VSO. Working with, local partners and primary actors (marginalised vulnerable people), the Uganda programme team including volunteers, came up with the initial concept of MILE (Measuring Impact for Learning & Empowerment) at the start of 2018. Following that, in collaboration with then Global MER team, the first MILE Manual was drafted which was tested in an education project called 'A-PLUS' in the least developed Karamoja region of Uganda. During this first pilot, the envisaged child participatory methodologies of using play and art was tested. Being the first ever pilot, significant lessons emerged which were applied in a second pilot under the STEP-UP youth livelihood project in Karamoja. The second pilot also captured more lessons that led to further improvements to the MILE manual. MILE Piloting in more Countries: Buoyed by the encouraging and inspiring feedback from primary actor groups such as children and youth, MILE piloting was extended in 2019 and 2020, to projects in few other VSO country programmes such as Bangladesh, Kenya, Nepal, Thailand, Myanmar, Mozambique and Malawi. Rolling out MILE in each of these projects provided critical lessons that were used to further strengthen and improve the MILE methodology and the MILE manual.



COVID-19 pandemic:

In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the physical roll out of MILE process in new projects presented a challenge. This forced adaptation of a virtual collaboration method between the global and project teams to understand how primary actors might be participating in the COVID-19 response and influencing access to essential public services.

After the COVID-19 Pandemic eased in 2022 and allowed for in-person interaction between project teams and primary actors, the KEL team carried out a learning study on MILE practice covering projects in Uganda, Kenya, Thailand, Nepal and Malawi significant progress in MILE implementation had taken place. The learning study captured a several lessons showcasing both strengths and improvement areas to advance the MILE practice. One key recommendation the MILE learning study made was to simplify the Manual to make it more user friendly amongst practitioners in projects. In later half of 2022, the KEL team together with Programme Design team and some experienced MILE practitioners from VSO country programmes, met in Nairobi to go through a revision of the MILE manual based on the recommendations from the MILE Learning Study and feedback received from project teams implementing MILE from quarterly MILE learning reflection sessions. This latest version of MILE manual is the outcome of a robust bottom-up learning process, ready to be used not only across VSO projects but also by other agencies keen on using people-centric approaches to designing, implementing and evidencing project outcomes.

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgement is due to the the following VSO people (current and former), for their contributions in the visioning, design and development of the MILE methodology and manual: Dr.Alok Rath, Alfred Kuma, Joseph Orem, Gratian Masindi, Lilian Viko, Robert Okeny, Upendranadh Choragudi, and Gilbert Muyumbu. Gratitude goes to the enormous, inspiring feedback by the primary actors, volunteers, and partners that VSO works with, in shaping the MILE manual.

Measuring Impact for Learning and Empowerment (MILE)

What is it?

MILE is the practice of participatory monitoring evaluation and learning (PMEL) and Forward Accountability (FA) in VSO projects and grants. MILE, as a participatory practice, provides the space, opportunity and mechanism for primary actors, implementing partners, VSO project staff and volunteers to be actively engaged in the review, validation and/or co-creation of project/grants design, MEL & FA framework; joint monitoring and mutual learning; influencing program, MEL & FA design, practice; and knowledge creation in VSO projects and grants. MILE recognises that primary actors, particularly the most marginalised, excluded, and vulnerable, have a central stake in the MEL cycle of every project and grant that is meant to change their lives and well-being. Aided by VSO's defined M&E Standards, Quality Evidence Principles, tools and methods, MILE is standardised and structured to help programme teams maintain coherence and consistency of MEL practice across VSO's global programme portfolio.

Why MILE?

MILE aims to bring in three distinct and unique value additions to VSO's existing MEL & FA practice: (i) MILE helps put people (primary actors), particularly the poorest, the excluded, most marginalised, and vulnerable, at the centre of planning and execution of MEL & FA in VSO programmes, making it participatory, accountable, and empowering for people involved; (ii) MILE aims to ensure the accountability of VSO to primary actors through Forward Accountability processes; and (iii) MILE processes aim at being the means for generating data and evidence required for different levels of project reporting requirements such as scale & reach, quarterly impact & learning report, and donor reporting for each project/grant, triangulated and validated by primary actors and the implementing partners.

How does it work?

As currently designed, MILE has four phases, each with a number of tasks and steps to be accomplished. The phases include: (i) Phase 1: Co-creation of project MEL & Forward accountability (FA) plans; (ii) Phase 2: Co-evidencing (periodic and routine data collection & validation); (iii) Phase 3: Co-learning from the data collected through the quarterly learning reflections and the learning circles; and (iv) Phase 4 : Co-influencing design and practice improvement through adaptive management.

To enable country programme staff to better understand and apply the MILE methodology in projects/grants, a detailed Manual has been developed to provide a step by step guidance on how to carry out all the 4 major phases of MILE, including the methodology and tools to use and who takes responsibility for different tasks and steps depending on the type and nature of project/grant, category of primary actors and other stakeholders. The manual provides guidance on how to work with primary actors, implementing partners and other key project stakeholders to review, validate and or co-create project MEL framework; jointly implement it; co-learn and take learning forward through adaptive programming.

Scaling up

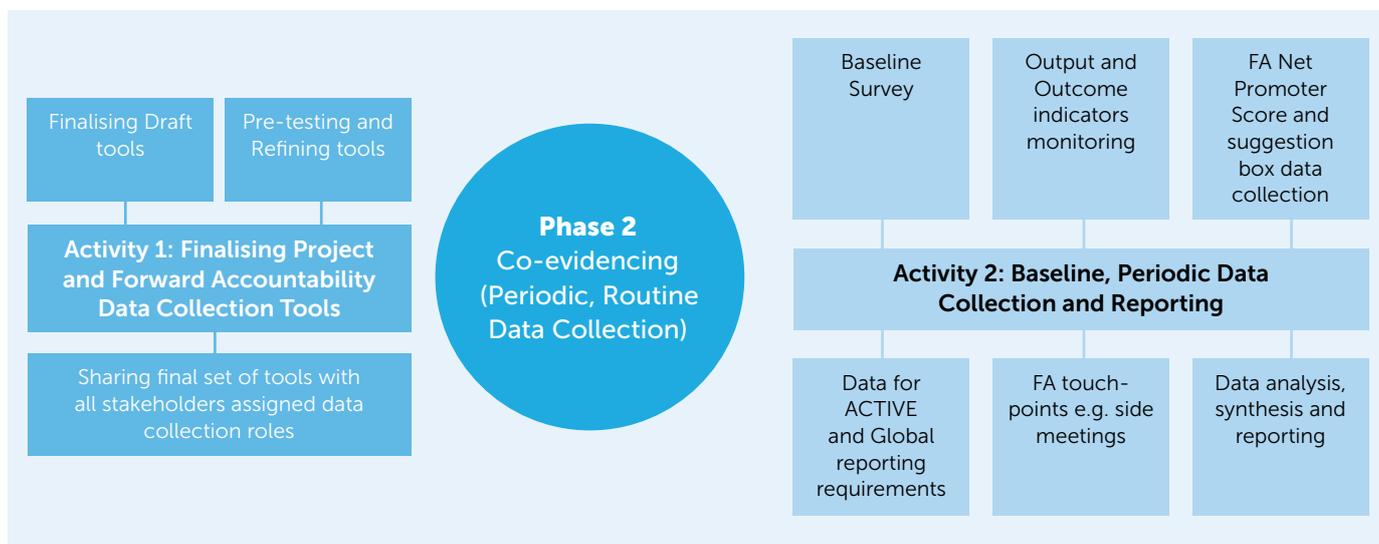
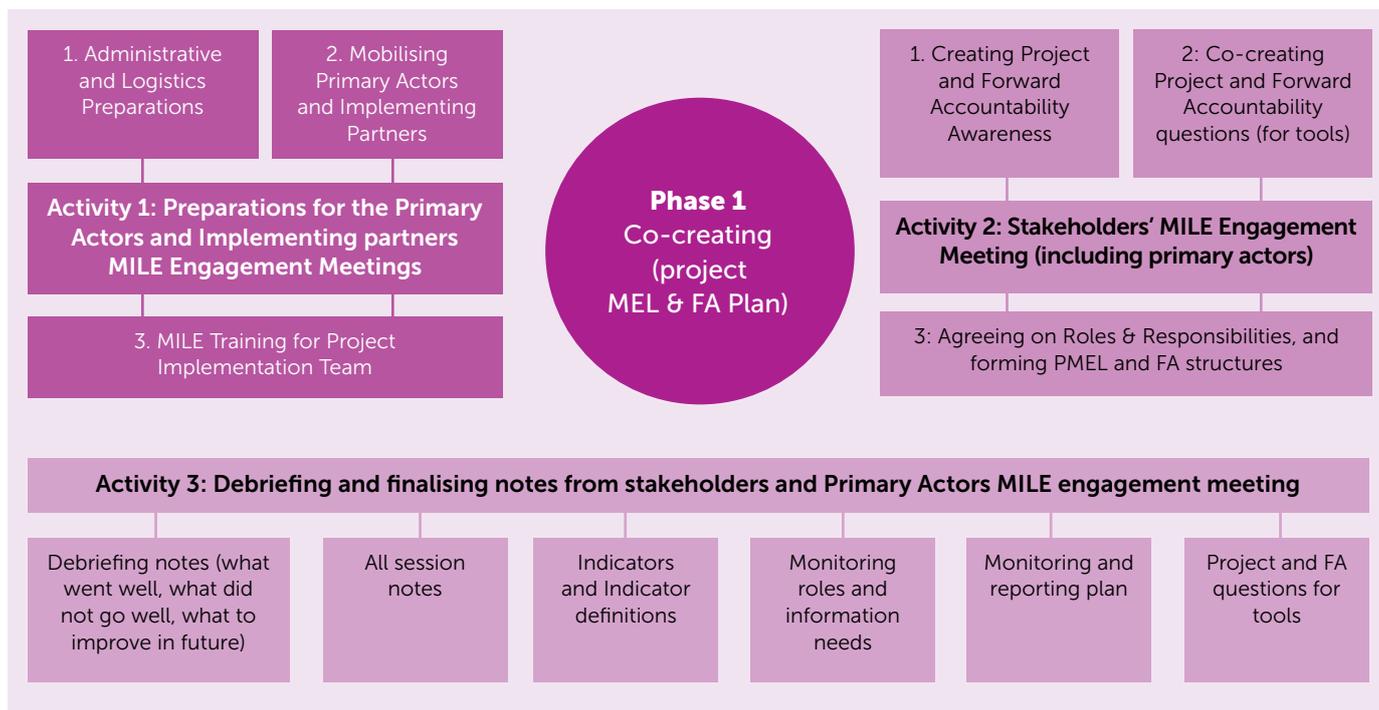
MILE has so far been adopted in 15 countries in more than 40 projects. The learning from each of these countries have contributed to further improvements in the MILE methodology as outlined in this revised MILE Manual. Through a bottom-up and co-creation process with project teams, MILE methodology has been strengthened as the over-arching MEL approach for all VSO projects and grants. MILE is therefore VSO's over-arching people-centric methodology for MEL & FA planning, evidence gathering, monitoring and lessons learning. MILE is expected to contribute significantly to improving the quality of VSO global programmes and realising our global value in VfD Pathways. Scaling up MILE will strengthen decision making at programme management as well as programme strategy levels through the adaptive programming processes in embedded.

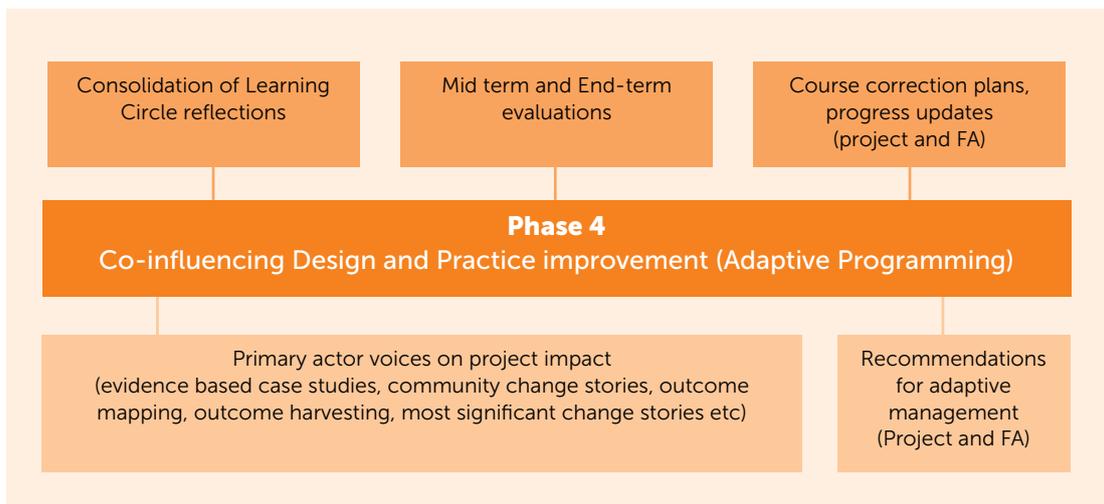
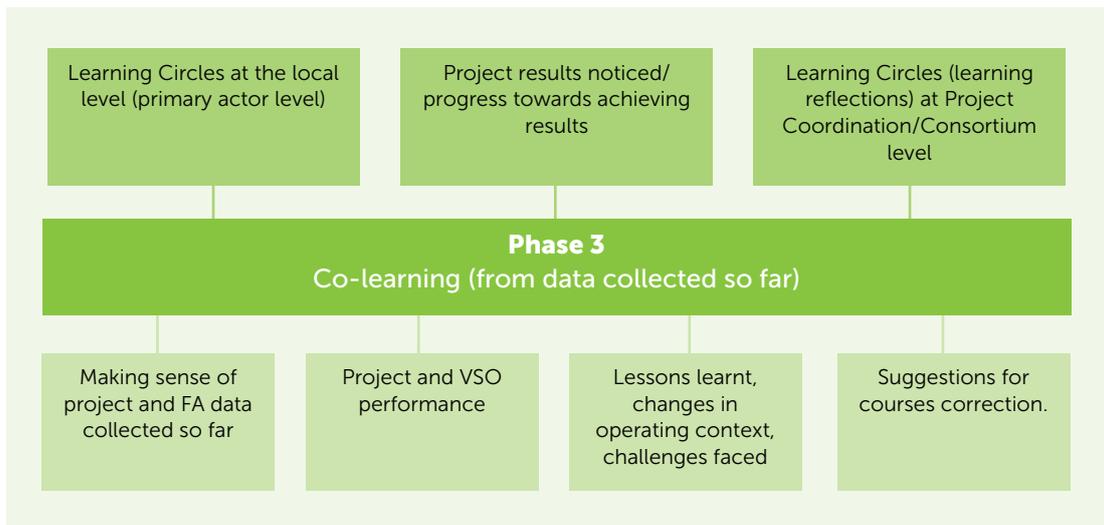
The following diagrams are illustrations of the MILE process and its steps:

Measuring Impact for Learning and Empowerment (MILE) Process

Phase	Key Actions and Participants
<p>Phase 1 Co-creating project Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL) & Forward Accountability (FA) Plan</p>	<p>A 2 days participatory engagement meeting that brings together key project stakeholders (primary actors, VSO project team, Implementing Partners, and VSO volunteers) to review validate and/or co-create:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project design (interventions, results framework, and monitoring and reporting plan. • Forward Accountability framework. • Project Indicator definitions and questions for project MEL and FA (MELFA). • Monitoring, learning and documentation structures, roles and expectations (i.e. learning circles and stakeholder groups).
<p>Phase 2 Co-evidencing (periodic data collection & validation, synthesis & reporting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic data collection for routine monitoring of the project by the group of stakeholders assigned specific data collection roles. • This involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Baseline (internal, external), – Output and outcome indicators monitoring, – Data for ACTIVE Grant & Global reporting, – Data from FA touchpoints during implementation – Data analysis, synthesis & reporting (periodic reports).
<p>Phase 3 Co-learning (from the data collected so far)</p>	<p>Quarterly learning reflections on the project performance and making sense from the data collected so far, generate learning, and suggesting courses corrections.</p> <p>This involves :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community reflection meetings (learning circles). • Project reflection/co-ordination meetings. • Mid-term evaluations. • End-Term evaluations.
<p>Phase 4 Co-influencing Design & Practice improvement (Adaptive Programming)</p>	<p>Quarterly stakeholders meetings to compile and act on the reflections and recommendations from the learning circles by primary actors & other project stakeholders. The process involves :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing course correction plans • tracking progress on implementing the agreed course corrections • in addition to tracking the contribution of the project to the achievement of outcomes and impact

Measuring Impact for Learning and Empowerment (MILE) Process





1. Introduction

1.1 Measuring Impact for Learning & Empowerment (MILE)

1.1.1 What is MILE

Measuring Impact for Learning & Empowerment (MILE) as a practice is an innovative and systematic process of designing, setting up and practising Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (PMEL) and Forward Accountability (FA) in all VSO projects & grants. MILE is strategically and innovatively designed to deepen the active and authentic participation of primary actors in project MEL, and to advance the accountability of VSO towards primary actors and their organizations (Forward accountability). In essence MILE seeks to actively engage the primary actors and implementing partners using appropriate people-centred approaches and methodologies to review, validate and/or co-create project design, MEL & FA framework, jointly implement it, co-learn from it and take learning forward (PMEL) in real time through an adaptive management process. In addition, MILE promotes the accountability of VSO as an organization to primary actors by providing simple people centric methodologies and processes for primary actors to provide feedback to VSO on its performance and actions as an organization based on VSO project delivery commitments to primary actors. This process is called Forward Accountability (FA).

MILE, as a participatory practice therefore, help bring coherence and consistency to participatory monitoring evaluation & learning (PMEL) and forward accountability (FA) in VSO projects and grants guided by the VSO M&E Standards and the VSO Quality Evidence Principles. MILE is in line with the VSO People First Principles, that puts emphasis on programming approaches that are: (i) people-centered; (ii) evidence based, (iii) appropriate and effective, (iv) accountable and reflective in actively seeking to engage all stakeholders, especially the primary actors, using appropriate and effective approaches and methodologies, to collaboratively generate and share programming ideas, knowledge and insights, in data gathering and evidence collection, and informed decision making in VSO programmes.

MILE as a PMEL & FA practice recognizes that primary actors, particularly the most marginalised, excluded, and vulnerable, have a central stake in VSO programmes, meant to change their lives. MILE actively engages all stakeholders, especially the primary actors, using appropriate and effective participatory and people-centred approaches and methodologies to monitor, evaluate and learn from VSO project performance. MILE enables primary actors and implementing partners to collaboratively generate and share ideas, knowledge and insights for informed decision making in VSO programmes. Through MILE, VSO builds trust and fosters the participation, of primary actors and other project stakeholders.

1.1.2 Why MILE

As a participatory practice, MILE brings primary actors into the centre of PMEL & FA practice; and also strengthens programming & design, project delivery and impact through feedback by primary. MILE provides an opportunity and mechanism for primary actors most affected by poverty and exclusion to actively participate in project/grant PMEL & FA. MILE practice is therefore a vehicle to drive the process of participatory and inclusive evidence generation and gathering for projects/grants with the full participation and contribution of all stakeholders particularly the primary actors in the entire PMEL & FA cycle, thereby building a culture of reflection, learning and feedback to improve project delivery as well as VSO and partners behaviours and performance.

1.1.3 VSO Accountability to primary Actors

Besides PMEL, MILE practice provides for a process through which VSO strengthens its accountability to primary actors and their organisations/collectives through Forward Accountability practice. This is done through providing spaces, structures and mechanisms for primary actors to generate data on VSO performance and behaviour based on the agreed VSO's commitment to primary actors for project delivery, and plan for any necessary course correction so as to improve VSO performance and accountability.

1.1.4 MILE Value Proposition

MILE aims to bring in three distinct and unique value additions to VSO's PMEL and FA practice:

- (i) MILE put primary actors, including community volunteers, particularly the poorest, the excluded, most marginalised, and vulnerable, at the centre of planning and execution of PMEL and FA in VSO programmes, making it an inclusive, participatory, accountable, and empowering process for the primary actors. MILE aims to apply participatory methods to improve primary actors' participation in evidence, knowledge and learning cycle and also in strengthening VSO forward accountability to primary actors.
- (ii) MILE directly allows for primary actors involvement in assessing project performance and accountability thereby amplifying their voice and agency of local people in the development process and in validation of project impact.
- (iii) Third, it aims to ensure that VSO as an actor is listening to the people it works with and is using feedback to improve volunteering for development (VFD) approach and its organisational behaviour through Forward Accountability (FA) and participatory MEL processes.

1.2 How MILE works

1.2.1 Planning & Budgeting for MILE

MILE being project/grant based, the planning and budgeting for MILE in projects and grants starts at the proposal design stage led VSO Bid Team, working closely with the KEL team to ensure that MILE steps and processes are adequately incorporated and resourced in grant and proposal designs to ensure that both people and financial resources will be available for MILE implementation later on. This is critical in ensuring that all MILE phases and related activities are adequately planned for and well-resourced in proposals to enable smooth implementation once the proposal is funded.

1.2.2 Phase 1: Co-creation of Project Monitoring Evaluation & Learning (PMEL) and Forward Accountability (FA) plan

Once a grant proposal is awarded (approved for funding), MILE phase 1 comes at the very beginning before the project implementation starts. MILE phase 1 involves participatory MILE engagement meetings bringing together the key project stakeholder (primary actors, implementing partners, VSO project staff & volunteers) to review, validate and/or co-create the project design, MEL & FA framework; project indicators and indicator definitions; framework of questions for project & FA; monitoring roles and responsibilities; monitoring & FA plan, formation of monitoring, learning and FA structures. Phase 1 aims at mobilization of primary actors and the implementing partners for both for project activities and PMEL & FA processes through building awareness of the project among primary actors and the implementing partners; establishing a set of questions which constitute the basic framework which primary actors will use to interrogate both project and VSO performance; forming PMEL & FA structures; and agreeing on PMEL & FA roles and responsibilities between primary actors, implementing partners & VSO.

Phase 1
Co-creating
project Monitoring,
Evaluation &
Learning (MEL)
& Forward
Accountability (FA)
Plan

A 2 days participatory engagement meeting that brings together key project stakeholders (primary actors, VSO project team, Implementing Partners, and VSO volunteers) to review validate and/or co-create:

- The project design (interventions, results framework, and monitoring and reporting plan).
- Forward Accountability framework.
- Project Indicator definitions and questions for project MEL and FA (MELFA).
- Monitoring, learning and documentation structures, roles and expectations (i.e. learning circles and stakeholder groups).

Phase 1 is critical in that it is the determinant phase determines how the subsequent phases will happen based on what has been discussed and agree upon in phase 1. Outputs from phase 1 are rolled over to phase 2 described below.

1.2.3 Phase 2: Co-Evidencing

This is closely linked to phase 1. Having reviewed and validated the project design, MEL and FA framework, indicators and indicator definitions, framework of PMEL and FA questions for tools, monitoring roles and responsibilities in phase 1, the project is now ready for baseline and routine monitoring data collection. All the outputs from phase 1 are roll-over to phase 2 which involves routine collection of project and FA data, validation, synthesis and reporting as per the monitoring plan and monitoring roles agreed in phase 1 engagements. In co-evidencing phase, the primary actors, implementing partners and VSO project staff and volunteers are engaged in periodic and routine data and evidence gathering on project and VSO performance based on roles assigned to each stakeholder and the monitoring plan agreed in phase 1.

Phase 2
Co-evidencing
(periodic data
collection and
validation, synthesis
and reporting)

- **Periodic data collection for routine monitoring of the project by the group of stakeholders assigned specific data collection roles.**
- **This involves:**
 - **Baseline (internal, external),**
 - **Output and outcome indicators monitoring,**
 - **Data for ACTIVE Grant & Global reporting,**
 - **Data from FA touchpoints during implementation**
 - **Data analysis, synthesis & reporting (periodic reports).**

The validated and or co-created set indicators and indicator definitions from phase 1 including the framework of questions for project and FA are used to finalize the data collection tools for the project. The data collection for project and FA then happens as per the monitoring roles and the monitoring plan agreed in phase 1. During baseline inception stage, the validated indicators, indicator definitions, and the framework of questions for project and FA forms part of the documents that are reviewed by the baseline team (external or internal). This ensures that views and reflections by the primary actors and the implementing partners informs the baseline study.

1.2.4 Phase 3: Co-Learning and Sense-making of the data collected so far

This phase is closely linked to phase 2. In the course of periodic data collection for routine project monitoring, the project implementation team, primary actors and implementing partners come together on quarterly basis to review and reflect on the project and VSO performance based on the project and FA data collected so far. This involves conducting participatory project learning reflections and making sense of the project and FA data collected so far, discussing observations made by different stakeholders, identifying changes in operating context and any need for changes and course corrections to improve project and VSO performance.

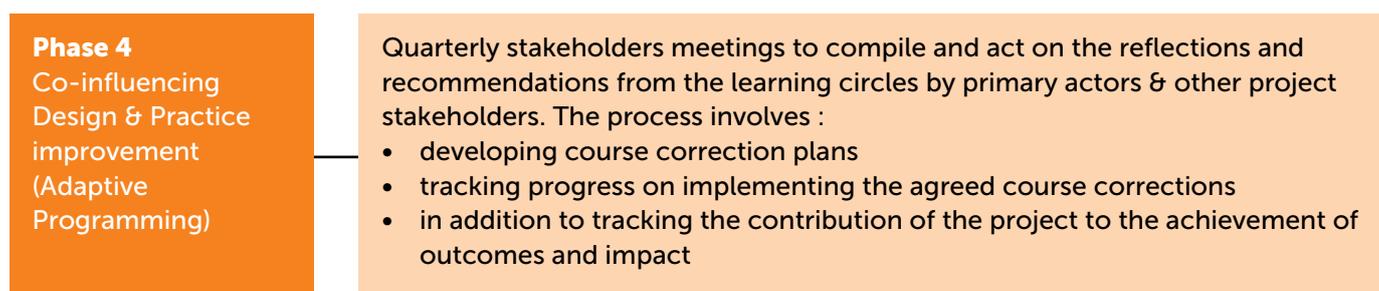
Phase 3
Co-learning (from
the data collected
so far)

- Quarterly learning reflections on the project performance and making sense from the data collected so far, generate learning, and suggesting courses corrections.**
- This involves :**
- **Community reflection meetings (learning circles).**
 - **Project reflection/co-ordination meetings.**
 - **Mid-term evaluations.**
 - **End-Term evaluations.**

The learning reflections (learning circles) both at the primary actor level and the project coordination/ consortium level focus on both the project and FA data that has so far been collected. Midterm and Endterm evaluations are also planned and carried out as part of phase 3 processes.

1.2.5 Phase 4 (Co-influencing Design & Practice improvement – adaptive programming)

This is linked to phase 3. The project implementation/coordination team or project consortium including primary actors and implementing partners come together on quarterly basis to reflect on learning at project/ consortium level; compile and act on the reflections, suggestions and recommendations from the learning circles by primary actors & other project stakeholders; developing course correction plans and assign the responsible people for the actions, track progress in implementing the agreed course corrections, track the contribution of the project to the achievement of outcomes and impact; act on recommendations from Mid term and end term evaluations; and then provide feedback to local level learning spaces in terms of actions already taken and progress based on their recommendations.

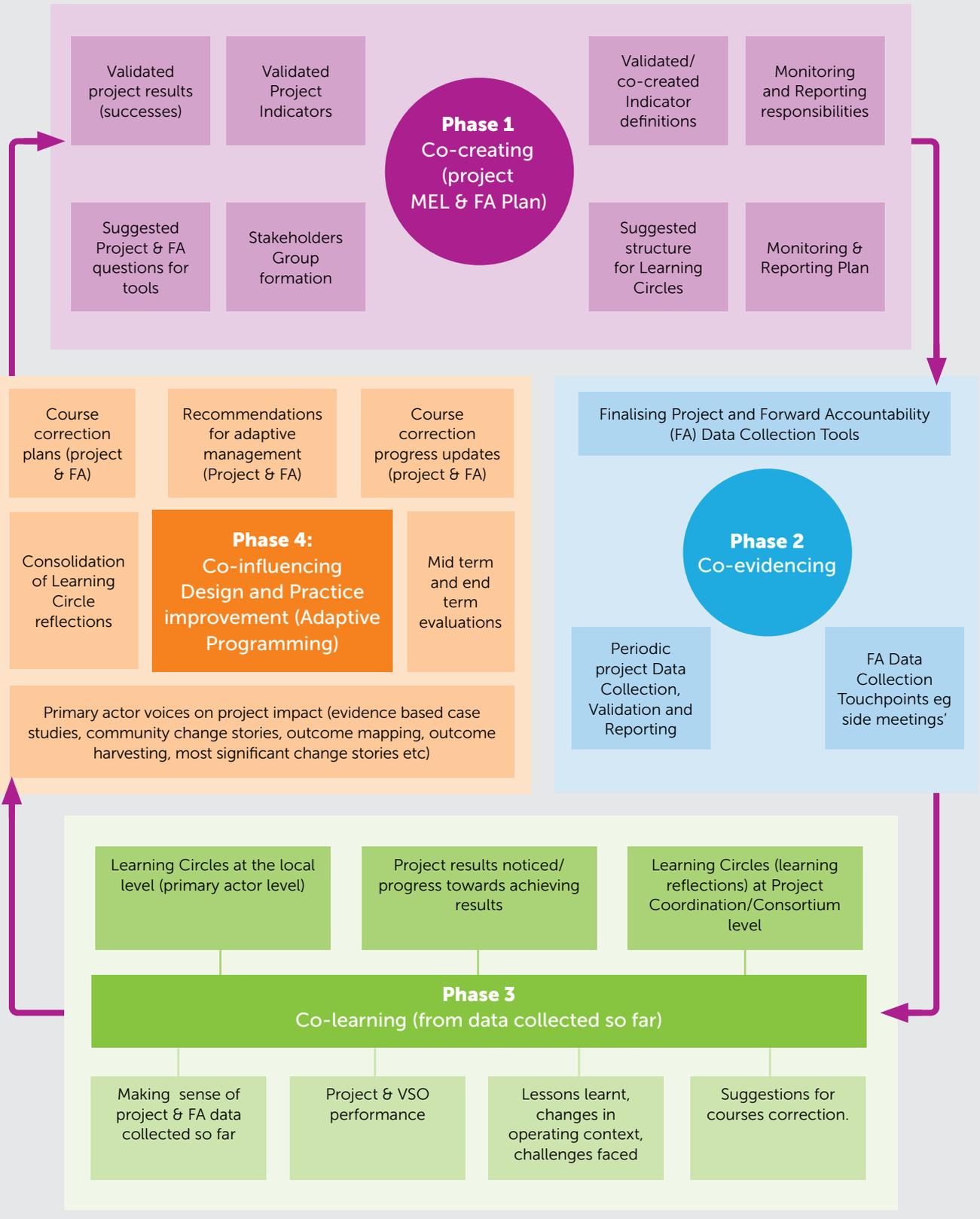


Recommendations from mid-term evaluations (MTE), end-term evaluations (ETE) evaluations, project visit reports, and other regular project progress reports are acted upon here. Phase 4 is mainly led by the project stakeholders group with the participation and contributions from the primary actors.

1.2.6 The MILE Cycle

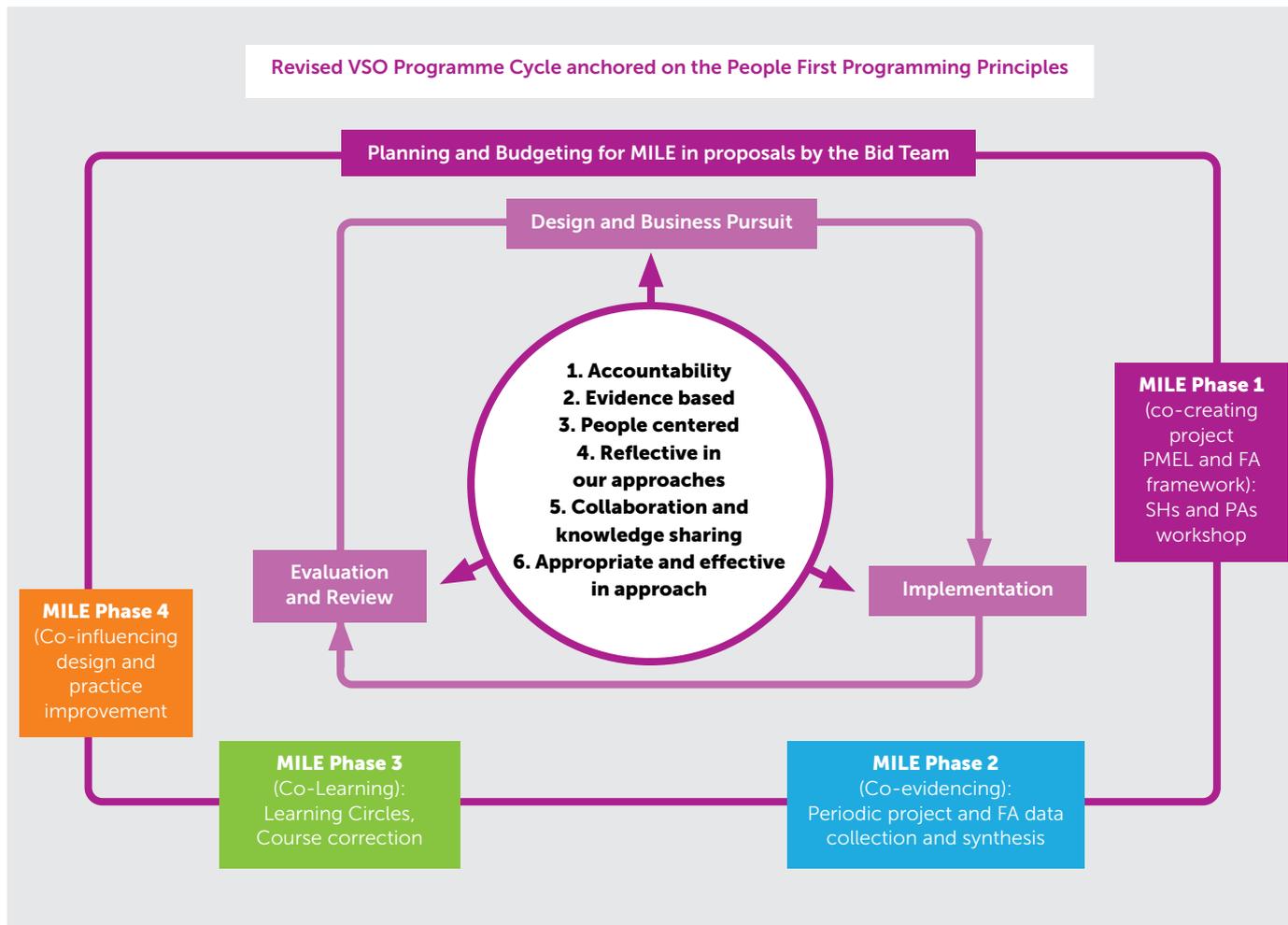
The four MILE phases described above make up the MILE cycle. Phase 1 is the most critical phase as it will determine how the subsequent phases will flow. For this reason, a lot of effort and emphasis is put on ensuring that phase 1 is done as required because the outputs from phase 1 is what will be rolled over to phase 2, which will in turn will influence phase 3 and 4. There are a number of recommended activities and steps for preparing for and carrying out all these phases. It is important to take note that phase 2, 3 & 4 and not linear, there are a lot of overlaps between phase 2, 3 & 4 all of which inform each other.

MILE Cycle



1.3 How MILE is related to the Overall Programme Cycle

MILE as PMEL and FA process is anchored on the foundation of the programme cycle (and aligned to the People First Programming Principles) that involves context analysis, design & business pursuit, implementation, and evaluation & review as shown in the diagram below:



All these stages of the programme cycle including MEL need to be accomplished with the active and authentic participation of the primary actors, implementing partners, and VSO project teams and volunteers. MILE process therefore works better if the all project stakeholders are actively involved in all the stages of programme cycle as shown in the diagram above, and not just at the Evaluation & Review stage. The processes outlined in the MILE manual makes references to things that were developed in the earlier stages of programme design e.g. the log-frame/results framework, stakeholders analysis, MEL framework, project workplan etc all of which would be better understood by the primary actors and implementing partners only if they participated in the initial stages of developing them (design stage).

1.4 MILE Support Documents

1.4.1 Revised MILE Manual

MILE Manual has been revised to further clarify and simplify the MILE phases, tasks and step by step processes based on feedback from the project teams that have so far implemented MILE since 2018 to date and the MILE learning study recommendations. In November 2018 at MILE review team met in Nairobi and revised the MILE methodology to incorporate the feedback from project teams and recommendations in the MILE Learning study report. This revised Manual therefore is intended for use by VSO Project implementation teams as a guide for facilitating, developing and setting up a functional, participatory MEL & FA practice for measuring projects/grants results for both new and on-going projects. It is expected that all project implementation teams will adopt and adapt MILE processes through the guidance articulated in this manual to improve participatory MEL and FA at project level. Accompanying this guide are facilitator notes and process guides to support facilitating of each of the steps in each phase.

The MILE Manual is therefore designed to provide guidance on a practical and participatory standard process of engaging the key project stakeholders, especially the primary actors and the implementing partners in designing and implementing participatory MEL & FA for learning, accountability, programme improvement, decision making and reporting at grant/project level. This subsequently informs learning and reporting at different levels.

1.4.2 How is the Guide organised?

The MILE Guide is organised into 3 parts. The first part is the introductory section which clarifies what MILE is all about, and the purpose of MILE as a participatory practice of establishing and implementing participatory MEL & FA for VSO programmes. In Part two of the manual, all the four (4) MILE phases are elaborated and described in details including the steps for the various activities in each phase. Part three (3) includes the detailed step by step guides for carrying out the different MILE activities, tasks and steps. These include the facilitator guides for different sessions in the MILE phases, process notes, roles and responsibilities for conducting and managing the engagements with primary actors and implementing partners and the expected outputs from each of the steps and sessions.

1.4.3 Who is this guide for?

This manual is intended for use by VSO project implementation teams based in the countries as a guide for developing and setting up a functional, participatory MEL & FA System for measuring projects/grants indicators for both new and on-going projects. It is therefore expected that all Country programmes will adopt and adapt MILE process through the guidance articulated in this manual to improve MEL at Country programme level.

1.5 Learning Circles in MILE

A Learning Circle as envisaged in phase 3 of MILE is an engagement space in which primary actors and other stakeholders in a VSO project interrogate project data/evidence (both quantitative and qualitative), and volunteers' and partners' contributions. A Learning Circle is envisaged to be led by primary actors at the appropriate local level (village level, safe space level, School level, ward/sector level, or health centre catchment level etc) depending on the project scope and coverage. Other project stakeholders including the implementing partners, VSO project implementation staff and volunteers can also participate in the local level learning circles. It is recommended that the learning circles are convened on quarterly basis and the feedback from the learning circles be shared project stakeholder group for further actions based on the recommendations by the learning circles

The Learning Circle can operate at project level and will meet periodically, depending on the choice made by the primary actors and stakeholders at the beginning. A suggested approach is to meet at least quarterly (with primary actors deciding to meet more frequently as they feel necessary) and at community level which can be put together for a project level review, learning, and recommendation documentation. The 'Learning Circle' adopt a root cause lens to reflect on the project to assess the extent to which the project is achieving the intended results and reaching the intended primary actors. There is a standard set of suggested questions around the VfD Pathways that guide the Learning Circles interface with project data. The MILE Manual provides guidance on the step by step process on how to facilitate the primary actors to take lead in conducting the learning circles with the participation of the other stakeholders.

1.6 Pre-requisites for MILE to work

1.6.1 Buy in by the Country Team

The country project implementation and leadership team should recognize the value proposition of MILE and subsequently embrace MILE as the process to help in working with stakeholders and primary actors to generate the data and evidence needed for learning and reporting at country level while at the same time helping in global reporting. This enables the necessary commitment by a country to the MILE process.

1.6.2 MILE Budget & workplan

For the smooth implementation of the envisaged MILE processes, it is important that MILE is planned for and adequately budgeted for in every project and grant at the design/proposal stage. Countries having embraced MILE should ensure that every project's M&E framework is implemented using MILE process, and therefore ensure that there are clear MILE budgets and workplans (see Annex 3: MILE planning & Budgeting Guide).

1.6.3 Facilitation skills (MILE Capacity Support)

The different MILE processes outlined in the MILE phases involves a lot of engagement with different categories of primary actors and implementing partners as well as other project stakeholders. For this reason, the project implementation teams and volunteers who are MILE facilitators need to be equipped with basic MILE facilitation skills, and understanding of participatory methodologies and tools to enable them to conduct the participatory processes particularly in phase 1 described in this manual. In addition the project implementation teams should be well trained to have a clear understanding of MILE and how MILE works before going out to start implementing MILE processes.

2. Mile architecture

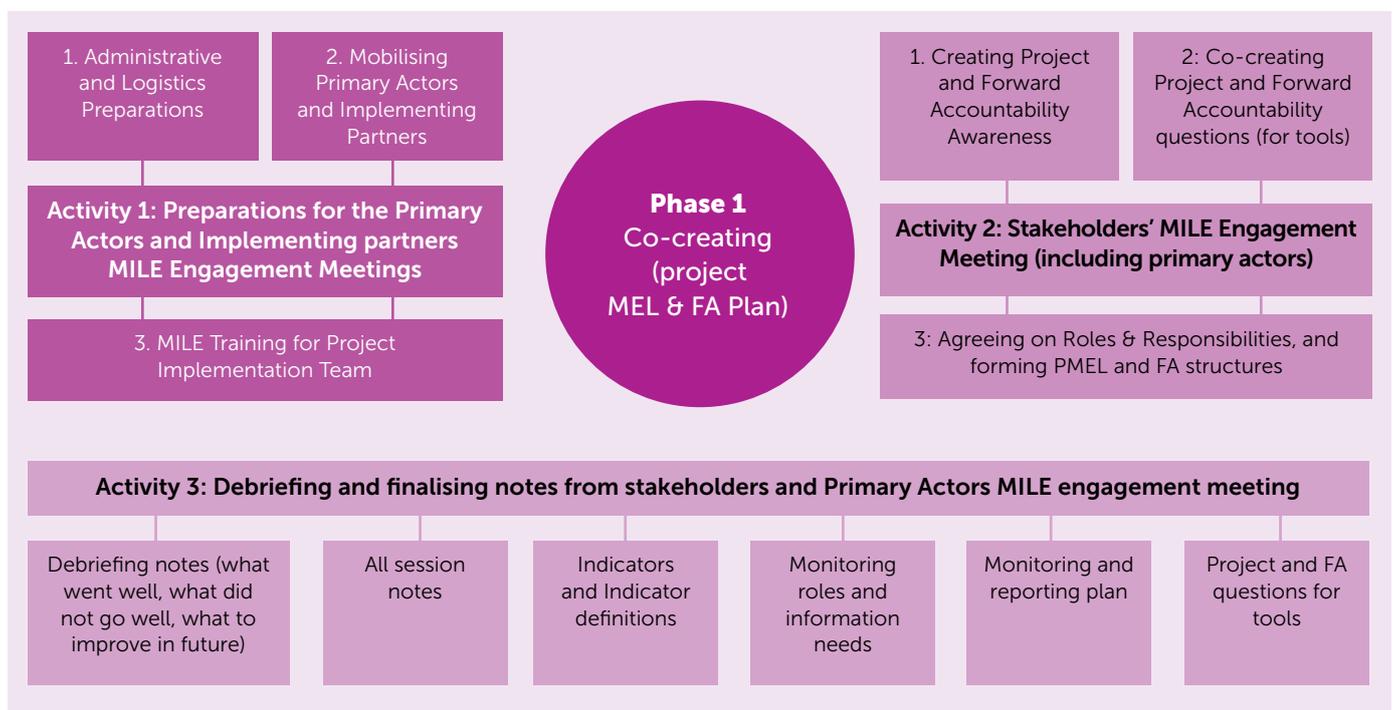
In this section is meant to explain in more details the four phases of MILE and the steps involved in each of the phases including the purpose and outcomes expected from each activity are elaborated. This part of the manual is meant to provide clarity on the key elements of the MILE practice and methodology and what is seeks to achieve for primary actors, VSO and partners.

2.1 MILE PHASE 1: Co-designing Project Monitoring Evaluation & Learning (MEL) and Forward Accountability Plans (review, validation & co-creation with primary actors)

This phase happens before project implementation begins after a submitted proposal has been approved for funding. MILE phase 1 involves a participatory MILE engagement meeting that bring together key project stakeholders including primary actors, implementing partners, VSO project implementation staff and volunteers to jointly review/validate/co-create the project design, results framework, Forward accountability (FA) framework, indicators and indicator definitions; propose questions for project and FA, allocate themselves monitoring, agree on data collection processes, develop a joint monitoring plan and form the monitoring & FA structures.

As shown in the diagram below, MILE Phase 1 is structured into 3 main activities namely:

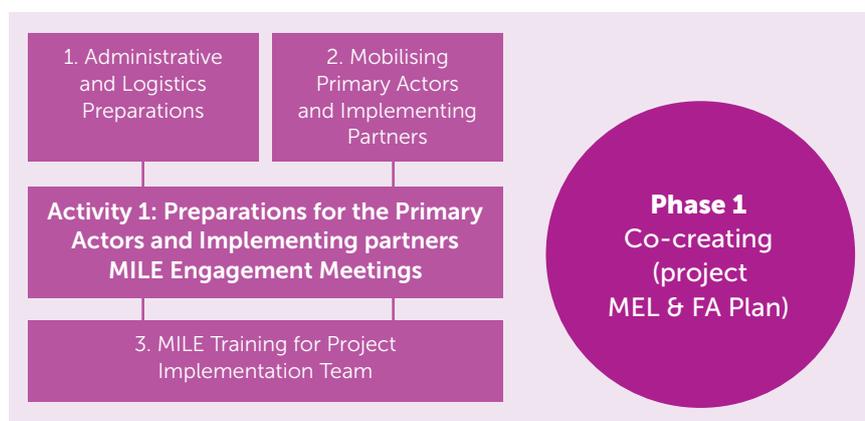
- (i) Preparations for the stakeholders (primary actors & implementing partners) MILE engagement meetings;
- (ii) Stakeholders (primary actors & implementing partners) MILE engagement meetings; and
- (iii) Debriefing and finalizing notes from the primary actors and implementing partners MILE engagement meetings.



Under phase 1, the Forward Accountability (FA) framework is developed through either net promoter score, feedback mechanism or FA questions. The FA tool and responsibilities are agreed on between all the project stakeholders. Phase 1 is important in enabling the primary actors and the implementing partners to clearly understand the project and to trigger their interest and agency to participate in project activities as well as MEL & FA processes thereby starting to build project ownership from the very beginning.

2.1.1 Preparations for the stakeholders & primary actors MILE engagement meetings:

These are the necessary pre-liminary activities undertaken by the Project implementation teams to prepare for the MILE engagement meetings with primary actors and implementing partners. This ensures that the project implementation teams are adequately prepared and organized in terms of putting in place all the necessary arrangements and logistics needed for the MILE engagement meetings with primary actors and implementing partners and other stakeholders.



As shown in the diagram above the preparations for the stakeholders & primary actors MILE engagement meetings are grouped into 3 key sub-activities:

- a) **Administrative and logistics preparations:** To enable the Project implementation team to be adequately organized and prepared in terms of all the necessary arrangements, logistics and approvals needed for the MILE engagement meeting with primary actors and other stakeholders. The project implementation team ensures that:
 - all relevant documents for MILE training for the project staff and volunteers (i.e. project proposal, log-frame, MEL plan, workplan, Theory of Change, results framework, project budget, MILE manual, etc) are assembled and shared out.
 - All meeting/workshop materials (stationery, flip charts, marker pens, masking tapes, note books, pens) procured.
 - The venues for the MILE engagement meetings and training for staff & volunteers are identified and booked where necessary.
 - All the necessary budget approvals for travel, meetings, meals & refreshments, vehicle hire, accommodation booking, purchase of stationery etc are obtained.
- b) **Mobilising primary actors, implementing partners and other project stakeholders to attend the MILE engagement meetings:** Once the venue for the meeting has been identified and all the approvals obtained, the project implementation team reviews the list of all the key project stakeholders identified during the proposal/ design stage and add any one that could be missing. A decision is then made on the number of each category of stakeholders to invite for MILE engagement meetings. The most appropriate means of communication is used invite to invite all the identified primary actors, implementing partners and other key stakeholders to the MILE engagement meeting.
- c) **MILE training for the project implementation team and volunteers:** Before going out to conduct the MILE engagement meetings with primary actors and the other stakeholders, it is important that the project implementation team and volunteers are first trained to clearly understand the MILE methodology and how to facilitate different MILE session particularly phases 1 MILE sessions for the category of primary actors and the implementing partners they are going to engage with. The training in collaboration with the KEL team. At times depending on the project it becomes necessary that the MILE phase 1 sessions are facilitated by either volunteers or the implementing partners after undergoing a comprehensive MILE training. During the MILE training, all the MILE engagement meetings sessions are assigned specific project team members and/or volunteers to lead in the facilitation. All in all the training ensures that all session facilitators clearly understand their facilitation roles.

2.1 2 MILE engagement meetings with primary actors, implementing partners and other project stakeholders

This is a 2 – 3 days participatory engagement meeting that brings together key project stakeholders including primary actors, VSO project team staff and volunteers, implementing partners and other stakeholders to review, validate and/or co-create: the project design, results framework, FA framework, indicators and indicators definitions, frameworks of questions for data collections tools for project and FA, stakeholders monitoring roles, MEL & FA plan and form the monitoring and FA structures such the stakeholders group, learning circles. It is recommended that MILE phase 1 is carried out before the actual project implementation begins including baseline survey. This phase can also double up as the project inception phase and can be carried out with the support of community volunteers where available and the implementing partners.

As shown in the diagram below, the MILE engagement meetings for primary actors and stakeholders are grouped into three key sessions :

- (i) Creating project & forward accountability awareness
- (ii) Reviewing & validating project & forward accountability tools
- (iii) Agreeing on roles and responsibilities, and forming structures



Session 1: Creating project & forward accountability (FA) awareness: The primary actors are engaged in tailored and category appropriate processes to review, validate and further co-create the project design, the results framework, the FA framework, project indicators and indicator definition. These sessions are meant to enable the primary actors to understand the project from the point of view of how it is designed to address the challenges they face as primary actors. This is important in triggering the interest and the agency of primary actor to not only participate in project activities but also the subsequent MEL processes. This session focuses on the following:-

- Challenges faced by primary actors.
- Solutions to the challenges.
- Summary of project interventions as VSO's contribution in addressing some of the challenges.
- Roles Primary actors, implementing partners and other actors in addressing the challenges.
- Success if challenges are solved (project results)
- Summary of the project results.
- Forward Accountability framework.
- What will show successes have happened, and how to confirm (indicators & indicator definitions)
- Summary of the project indicators.

Uganda example

In 2018 during the first ever MILE pilot in Uganda under the A-PLUS education project during the MILE engagement meetings, the pupils as the primary actors were engaged to identify the challenges they face in accessing education through the use of play and art. The pupils were divided into two groups where one group was requested to think about something that happens or they see in school which they don't like and prepare a short role play on it. The other group of pupils was provided with drawing papers and coloured pens and requested to draw the things that happen or they see in school that they don't like. The first group choose to perform a role play dramatization of the bad teaching practices and behaviours by the teachers. The second group drew different things that happen in school e.g. corporal punishment, pupils relieving themselves in bushes to show lack of toilets in school, pupils siting on the floor to show lack of furniture in school etc. The drawings and the role play provided insights into some of the challenges the pupils faced in accessing education and validated the A-PLUS project key intervention that focused on teachers continuous professional development through in service training for the teachers among other interventions. The two groups were then requested to do a role play on how teachers should teach them for them to be happy, and draw the things they would like to see in school for them to be happy. These were largely a mix of project successes/results (impact, outcome and outputs), indicators and indicator definitions, and validated the project results, indicators and indicator definitions for the A-PLUS project.

Session 2: Suggesting questions for project & Forward Accountability (FA) tools: The primary actors and other stakeholders are engaged in a process of formulating project and FA related questions that will later on inform the final set of tools for data collection for the project and FA. The primary actors are engaged to suggest some questions that they can ask in order to confirm if the mentioned successes have happened, and who they think can be asked those questions. Likewise the primary actors also suggest some FA questions that they will ask in order to hold VSO accountable for project delivery commitments and VSO's behaviour as an organization.

Example from Malawi MILE engagement meeting with the youth & adolescents on SRHR issues

Success if challenge is solved	What will tell or show success has happened	What will you see, hear, count to confirm the success has happened	Who to ask to confirm	Questions to ask to confirm successes have happened
Youth friendly SRH services in health facilities, Youth friendly HWs in facilities	Youth/ PWD friendly corners in available in health facilities HWs in facilities are trained on youth friendly services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separate private space set aside for consulting youth Youth friendly materials e.g. pamphlets available HWs have positive attitude towards the youth who visit facilities (do not discriminate) High level of confidentiality 	The youth, HWs Also observe health facilities	Questions for Health workers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you been trained on youth friendly services? Where does consultation with the youth happen in this facility? Is there a separate private space set aside for consulting youth in this facility? What kind of SRHR education & information materials do you have for the youth, e.g. pamphlets, posters, cards etc What measures have been put in place to ensure high level of confidentiality?

Session 3: Agreeing on roles and responsibilities, and forming monitoring & learning structures: The primary actors and other stakeholders are facilitated to identify and allocate themselves monitoring roles based on the validated and defined project and FA indicators and then jointly prepare a MEL plan. This ensures that project monitoring will be a shared responsibilities and primary actors will identify their monitoring interest and engage within the monitoring space. Having collectively put together a plan for monitoring, the primary actors and others stakeholders would then form the learning circles and the learning circles leadership together with the other stakeholders MEL group and look into the aspect of beginning to form the learning spaces.

2.1.3 Activity 3: Debriefing & finalization of notes from the MILE engagement meetings

At the end of the MILE engagement workshop with primary actors and stakeholders, the project implementation team that facilitated the meetings convene a meeting to reflect on how the whole process went right from how the preparations were done to how the engagement meetings were conducted.

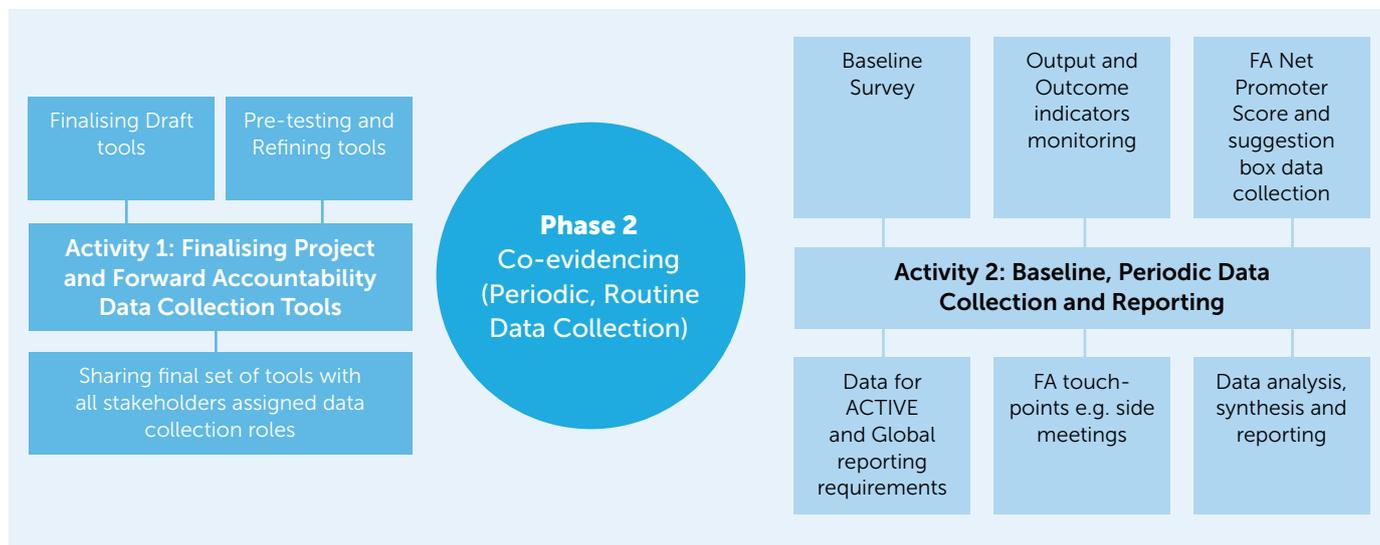


The project team reflects on what went well and what did not go well that needs to be improved in future.



The team then discusses how the notes from the MILE engagement meeting sessions by the different note takers will be completed and submitted to be used for preparing the MILE engagement meeting report for sharing. These notes are very important as they will be the reference points when transitioning to phase 2 of MILE.

2.2 MILE PHASE 2: Co-evidencing (Periodic & Routine Monitoring Data Collection Validation, Synthesis & Reporting)



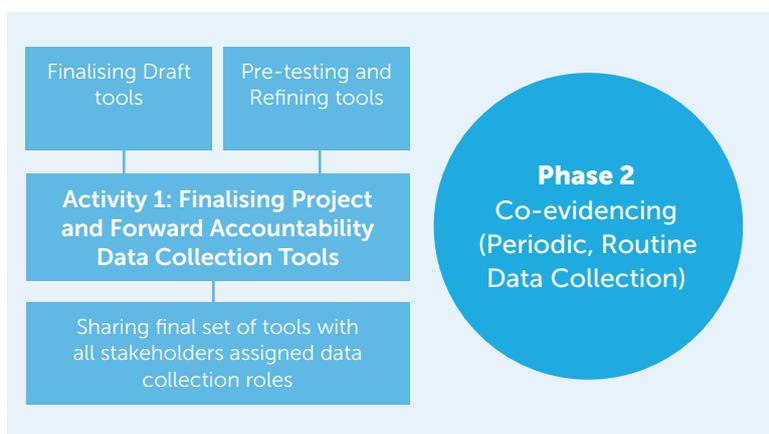
This is closely linked to MILE phase 1 where the primary actors and other stakeholders reviewed, validated and/or co-created the project design, MEL & FA framework, indicators & indicator definitions, project & FA questions, monitoring roles and the monitoring plan. After this the project is now ready for baseline (external or internal) and periodic & routine monitoring data collection by the group of stakeholders assigned specific data collection roles in phase 1, and coordinated by the Project Stakeholders Group. In phase 2, the primary actors, implementing partners and other stakeholders are involved in routine collection and both project & FA data based on the monitoring plan and the monitoring responsibilities jointly discussed and agreed on in phase 1. This helps to ensure that project monitoring is shared-out among the project stakeholders and primary actors and acts as the first level of data validation.

Phase 2 is largely informed by the following outputs from phase 1:

- validated and/or co-created project indicators,
- indicator definitions,
- framework of project & FA questions,
- monitoring roles and responsibilities,
- monitoring plan,
- monitoring structures.

2.2.1 Finalising Project & Forward Accountability (FA) Data Collection Tools

Before any data collection can be done, the tools for data collection need to be prepared and finalised. It is important that the same framework of tools is used during all points of data collection from baseline, MTE, ETE, routine monitoring field visits etc. This is critical for ensuring reliability and validity of the data collected at different points, and provides a good basis for comparison of data collected at different points in time by different people. Data required for scale & reach reporting, Quarterly Impact & Learning Reporting, donor reporting, case studied etc is generated during this phase.



In finalizing project and FA tools, there are three key tasks to be accomplished under the leadership of the project implementation:

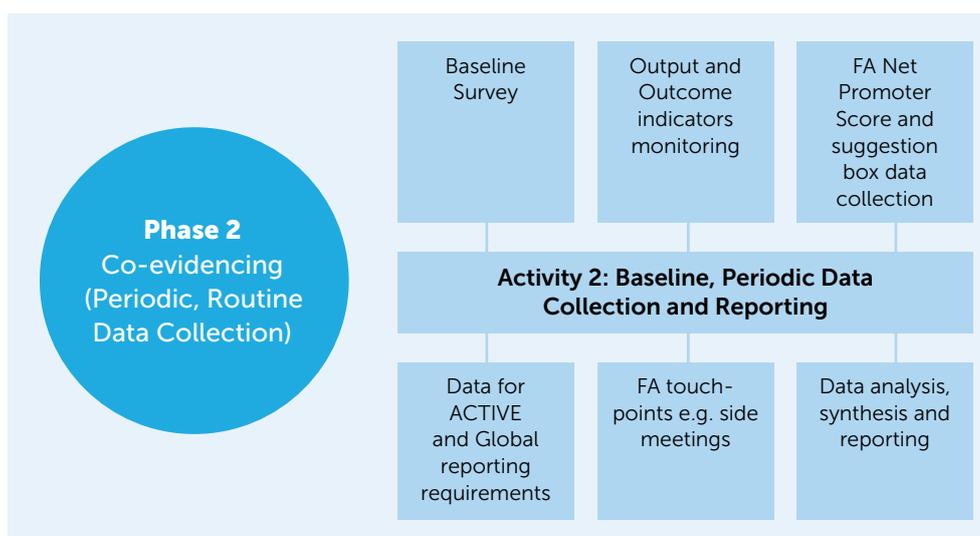
- (i) Finalizing draft tools
- (ii) Pre-testing and refining tools.
- (iii) Sharing the tools with all the relevant stakeholder assigned data collection roles.

(i) Finalising Draft tools: This process picks from the successes, indicators & indicator definitions, and the framework of project and FA questions suggested during the MILE engagement meetings in phase 1. These are all used to either revise existing tools or as the basis for designing the tools where an initial set of tools does not exist. This ensures that the final set of draft tools will have the inputs of the primary actors, implementing partners as well as VSO project staff and volunteers. This framework of tools will be used during baseline, routine monitoring, mid term and end term evaluations for the projects to ensure that results from assessments done at different points in time will have a good basis for comparison. As part of FA, Feedback and Response Mechanism (FRM) are established to ensure that primary actors and community members have right to complain/feedback to VSO if in their views VSO is not fulfilling the commitments made for project delivery.

(ii) Pre-testing tools: Before the project and FA tools are deployed for data collection, it is important to organise for some field level pretesting of the finalised draft tools to ascertain the validity and reliability of the tools. This is done with the full participation of the primary actors and the implementing partners and co-ordinated with Project Stakeholders Group. The feedback from the pre-testing of the tools is used to refine the tools and come up with the final set of tools.

(iii) Sharing the tools: Once the tools have been pre-tested and refined, the final set of the tools are then shared with the relevant stakeholders who were assigned data collection roles during MILE engagement meetings in Phase 1. Stakeholders meeting can be arranged to disseminate the final set of tools to the relevant stakeholders. During the tools dissemination meeting, the stakeholders can also reflect on the appropriateness and practicality of the tools, and review the MEL plan agreed during phase 1.

2.2.2 Activity 2: Baseline, Periodic & Routine Data Collection, Validation, Synthesis and Reporting



Levels of data collection

1. Baseline Data
2. Routine monitoring data
3. Evaluation data (Mid-term & End-term Evaluations)

(i) Baseline Data : Decision on whether the baseline will be done internally or externally is determined by the project implementation team (taking into consideration donor requirements). Whether external or internal, the baseline at the inception phase will be informed by the outputs from phase 1 particularly the indicators and the indicator definitions, and the framework of questions for project and FA. Project baseline will cover the identified indicators (agreed in phase 1) as well as data on the current situation vis a vis VfD pathways, and core approaches. Information on safeguarding and duty of care will also be collected at this stage. Further to this, framework and processes for baseline shall also be informed by VSOs Evaluations guide shared by KEL. See the guidance on how to conduct project baseline.

(ii) Routine & periodic Implementation data collection: The type of data to be collected, the frequency of data collection and the roles and responsibilities for data collection will be informed by the indicators, indicator definitions and the framework of questions for project and FA, and guided by the monitoring plan developed in phase 1. This will be coordinated by the Project Stakeholders Group under the supervision and leadership by the VSO project implementation team. It is important that there is synchronization of frequency and timeline for data collection for donor reporting and VSO internal reporting requirements.

(iii) Forward Accountability data: the collection and consolidation of FA data is done through the:

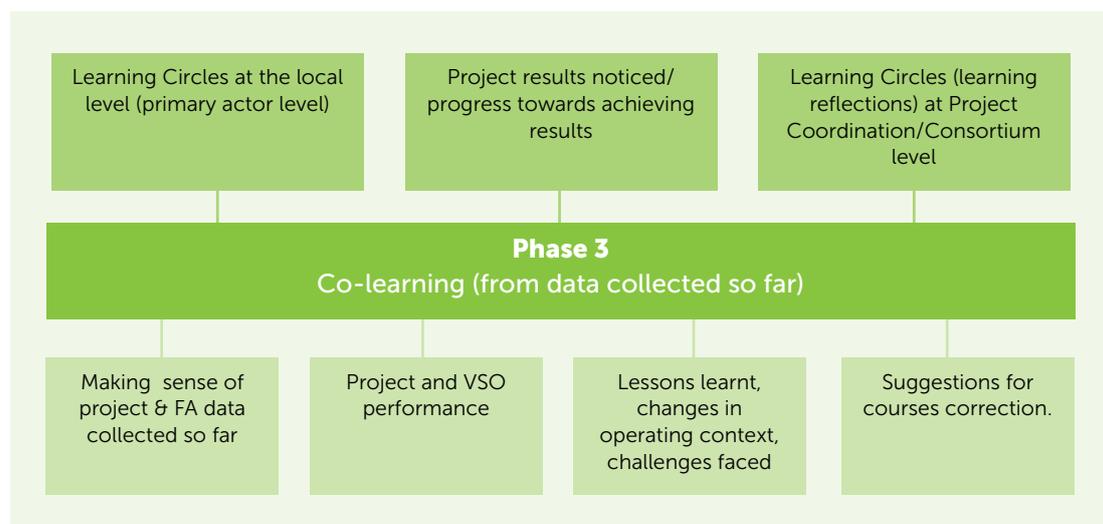
- FA touch points e.g. feedback collected from participants at the end of a training or meeting
- Net promoter score questions e.g. how preferred is VSO as implementer -on a scale 1-10), or on a scale of 1 – 10 how satisfied are you with the way VSO is treating you, or with the way VSO is delivering this project?
- Feedback mechanism (or complaint response mechanism) e.g suggestion box, email, SMS.

The frequency of collecting and consolidating FA data and sharing can be determined by Project Stakeholders Group.

(iv) Evaluation Data: Mid-term and End-line evaluations are done as per donor requirements. See the guidance for baseline & evaluations.

2.3 MILE PHASE 3: Co-learning (from the project & FA data collected so far)

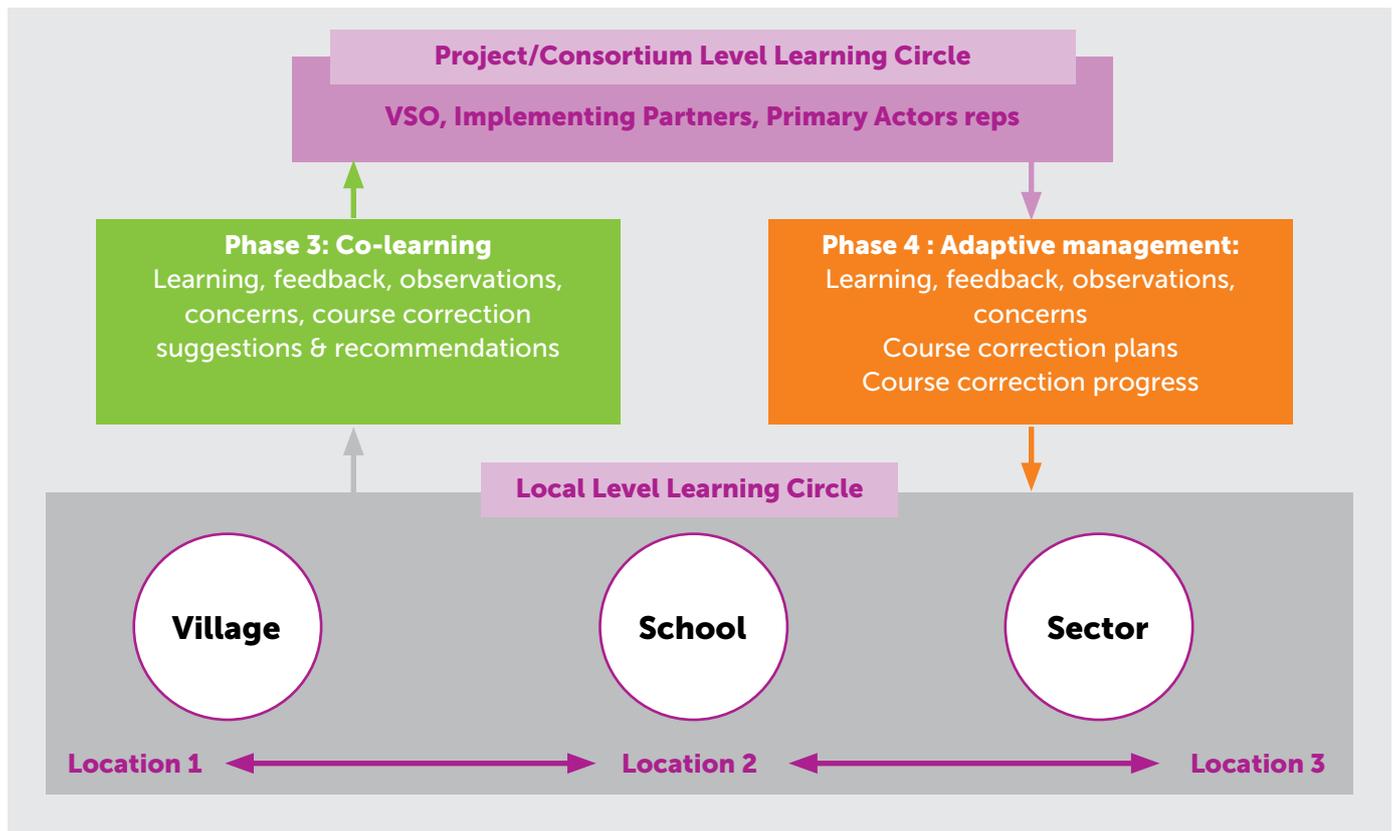
This is closely linked to and overlaps with phase 2 (co-evidencing). Phase 3 of MILE involves co-learning through learning reflections meetings by primary actors and the Project Stakeholders Group.



In the process of periodic and routine data collection synthesis & reporting in phase 2, the primary actors, implementing partners, VSO project staff and volunteers and other stakeholders come together on quarterly basis to reflect on and make sense of the data collected so far, generate learning from the project & FA data and observations made so far, review changes in operating context, identify challenges and barriers, suggest any changes or course correction necessary to ensure effective delivery of the project.

2.3.1 Learning Circles Primary Actors Level

The local level learning reflections (learning circles) are held at the local level led by primary actors in a school, village, ward, woreda, sector, as appropriate and led by primary actors after capacity support by VSO. However at the beginning, the local level learning circles can be led or facilitated by either VSO volunteers (community volunteers), VSO staff or implementing partners as way of hand holding the primary actors to build their capacity to lead the local level learning circles. Once the primary actors understand the learning circles that they lead them going forward. In the learning circles the primary actors review project performance based on project & FA data collected so far, generate learning from the data, discuss changes in operating context, discuss observations made so far, discuss any changes noticed, identify any challenges faced and then make suggestions for courses correction. The reflections and recommendations from the local level learning circles are fed back to the project coordination/consortium level learning circles.



Here the focus is on community level 'learning circles' led by primary actors undertaking collective learning reflections on quarterly on the basis of the data that is generated during Phase 2. The purpose of the learning circles is to identify learnings and course corrections required. The Learning Circle (LC) is an engagement space where a group of primary actors regularly come together to reflect on the project and VSO performance based on the project and the forward accountability (FA) data collected so far, and undertake sense making of the data and identify learning and propose need for course correction.

At the community level, it is a group of (15- 20 or more) primary actors representatives who convene on quarterly basis to review the project progress as well as FA data on VSO performance. At the local level the learning circles can be convened at school catchment level, village level, word level, etc depending on the project context and coverage. The implementing partners and VSO project implementation team including volunteers can as well be invited and convene the local level circles to present the data collected so far and its implications and also provide feedback to the primary actors on actions taken and progress with implementing course corrections. It is recommended that where available the community volunteers can take up the responsibility of convening and leading the local level learning circles and ensure that the proceedings and the recommendations from the oval level community learning circles are fed-back to the project stakeholders group, for action.

The community learning circles will be convened in places in the community from where project data is collected on indicators and FA. The primary actors who participate in the community learning circle will be those who are aware of the project interventions and the data collected. It would be better if some of them have been engaged in collecting some of the data reviewed in the learning circles.

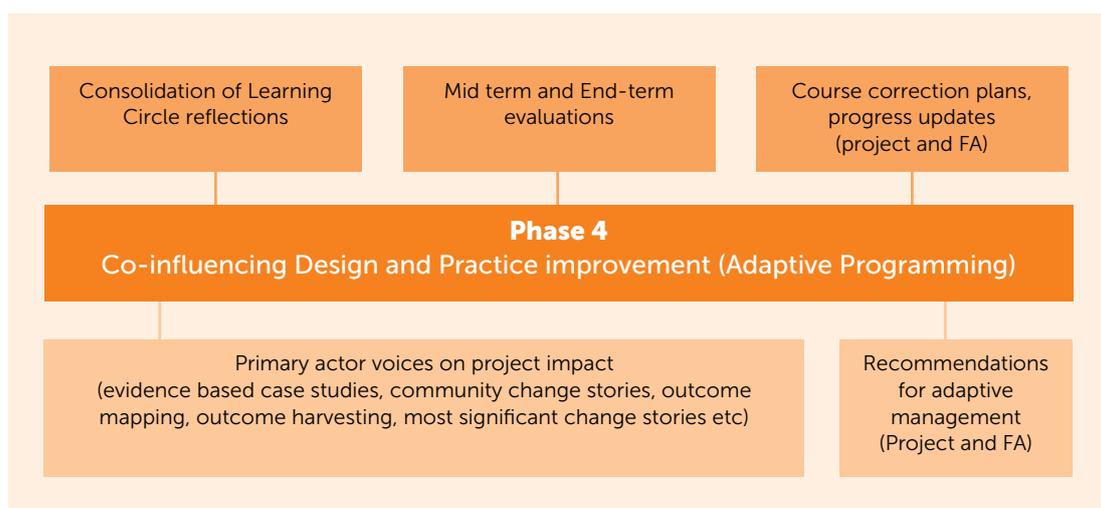
If in any community there already exists community groups facilitated by the project/or govt agencies (for example, parent teacher association, farmers group, women group etc), they can be oriented by the PIT on the learning circle concept, mandate and functions so that they can function as learning circle. Learning circles can take place in all the communities where project intervenes and those circles are organized/facilitated by community and national volunteers in coordination with PIT and Partners.

2.3.2 Learning Circle at Project Coordination Level by the Project Stakeholder Group

These are learning reflections held by the project coordination level or consortium level on quarterly basis to reflect on learning at project/consortium level; compile and reflect on learning feedback shared from the primary actors learning circles including FA feedback, and make suggestions and recommendations for course correction. Mid term and end term evaluations will also be planned for and conducted in as part of phase 3. At the project coordination level or consortium level the project stakeholders group as an apex body (with representation from primary actors and all other stakeholders) will function as a learning circle, undertaking review and reflection on the project progress as well as VSOs forward accountability feedback received from the primary actor level learning circles.

2.4 MILE PHASE 4: Co-influencing Design & Practice Improvements (Adaptive Programming)

As part of the learning reflections held by the project coordination level or consortium level on quarterly basis, project project stakeholders group (PSG) or consortium compile and act on the suggestions and recommendations for course corrections from the learning circles by primary actors, the project implementation team and other project stakeholders; develop course correction plans and assign the responsible people for the course correction actions, track progress in implementing the agreed course corrections, track the contribution of the project to the achievement of outcomes and impact; act on recommendations from Mid term and end term evaluations; and then provide feedback to local level learning spaces in terms of actions already taken and progress based on their recommendations. This phase intends to inform the Project Stakeholders Group, and the Project Implementation Team on the progress of implementation of the course correction recommendations from the community primary actor level learning reflections from the local level Learning Circles.



The reflections, learnings and course correction recommendations coming from the primary actor learning circles and the project implementation team are fed-back to the Project Stakeholder Group and the VSO project implementation team for action and follow up. These reflections contain primary actor voices, views and perspectives on the performance of the project and how the is project contributing to changes in their community. The periodic course corrections as informed by the input of all project stakeholders will inform the adaptive management practices in the project over time.

Under phase 4, knowledge generation is undertaken using these learnings from phase 3 for the purposes of influencing the implementation and MEL practice as well as new project designs and proposal development in the future. Any recommendations from evaluations (MTE, ETE), research, project field visits reports, donor feedback, and other regular project reports are reviewed and acted upon in real time by the project stakeholder group and the project implementation team in phase 4.

A number of knowledge products can be envisaged at this phase, which will be prepared by the project implementation team and will be disseminated through various platforms including VSOs knowledge hub.

Phase 4 mainly involves the following activities:

- Consolidation of learning circle reflections as knowledge products
- Collation and compilation of recommendations for adaptive management practices (including course correction plan) to strengthen forward accountability
- Preparing course correction plans based on phase 3 reflections and recommendations from evaluations reports and other regular project reports.
- Following up progress on implementation of the course correction
- Compilation and Documentation of Primary actor voices on project impact through various communication medium

3. Mile step by step user guides

To enable Project Implementation Team to effectively facilitate and implement the MILE process described in this manual, a number of step by step guides have been prepared to be used on need basis depending on the stage of MILE implementation that is being undertaken in individual projects. It is important the appropriate user step by step guide that is relevant to the MILE activity to be undertaken, is retrieved and downloaded and/or printed to inform the MILE implementation of that particular MILE activity.

In this revised manual, the user step by step guides have been separated from the main MILE manual and also from each other for ease of access and use. This is meant to make it easy to retrieve and download and/or print only the relevant step by step guide individually instead of the downloading and/or printing one big document that has all the step by step guides yet only one is needed to be used.

The step by step guides, together with the revised manual and the powerpoint slides for MILE training are contained in this folder. The step by step guides are labelled as below:-

1. Guide 1: Facilitators Guide (MILE Engagement Meeting for Primary Actors)
2. Guide 2: Facilitators Guide (MILE Engagement for pupils above 6 years of age)
3. Guide 3: Facilitators Guide (MILE Engagement for Early Grade Learners)
4. Guide 4: Facilitators Guide (MILE Engagement Meeting with Implementing Partners)
5. Guide 5: Administrative & logistics preparations for MILE engagement meetings
6. Guide 6: Mobilising primary actors and implementing partners to attend MILE engagement meetings (Primary Actors).
7. Guide 7: MILE training for Project Implementation team.
8. Guide 8: Debriefing & finalizing noted from the MILE engagement meeting sessions.
9. Guide 9: Finalising project & FA data collection tools.
10. Guide 10: How to conduct project baseline.
11. Guide 11: Periodic project & FA data collection.
12. Guide 12: Co-learning (quarterly learning reflections)
13. Guide 13 : How to conduct project level learning circles
14. Guide 14: Adaptive management



VSO International
2 Putney Hill
London
SW15 6AB
UK

+44 (0)20 8780 7500
enquiry@vsoint.org
www.vsointernational.org

Voluntary Service Overseas is registered
in England (number 00703509). Charity
Registration 313757 (England and Wales)
SCO39117 (Scotland).