MEL
monitoring
evaluation and
learning

Overview

Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning Platform

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Partners

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At a Glance

Monitoring, Evaluation & Learning (MEL)

MEL is an online platform for organizations, programs and projects to plan, manage, monitor, evaluate, report and share their activities and results. By allowing all these actions to be completed in one organized space, and by semi-automating many features, it saves both time and resources while reducing the risk of error. Now in use by eight CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs) and centers, it also allows for faster and more informed decision-making both inside an organization and across its partners.

MEL was launched in 2016 as a **collaborative infrastructure** between the now-concluded CGIAR Research Program on Dryland Systems, led by the International Center for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA), and quickly grew to include the CRPs on Roots, Tubers and Bananas, Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereals, and Fish. Due to its **flexibility** and the capacity to **manage multiple frameworks** at the same time, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, the International Potato Center, and the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture also adopted MEL as a solution for the portfolio of their projects. The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics and the World Agroforestry Center are also using specific modules and features. The platform was born out of necessity as the available software at the time, and traditional monitoring and evaluation tools, could not provide MEL partners with a much-needed master overview of their projects and has evolved in a flexible and adaptive tool.

Since its launch, over 600 projects have been mapped or carried out through MEL and more than 200 are currently being managed – **saving hundreds of hours of staff time** in paperwork, administrative steps and internal communication. A major appeal of the open source platform is its ability to process flat data and transform it into scalable evaluation and learning information through indicators, graphics and networks visuals.

Repositories have been integrated to achieve the **best data quality and full interoperability,** meaning that datasets, publications, reports and presentations are easily retrievable. These features, combined with the platform's **open access and open data** policy, ensure that MEL aligns with CGIAR's principles of making research outputs F.A.I.R., or Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable.

Key features

- **Knowledge Sharing hub:** a common system for accessing and disseminating knowledge across CRPs, CGIAR centers and par tners. The hub accommodates success stories, resource packs for capacity development and more.
- **Planning hub:** a full project and CGIAR activities planning module, including various tools for risk management, capacity development, intellectual property, gender strategy development, communications and more. The hub includes guidance and alerts.
- **Reporting hub:** multiple levels of reporting that can be customized according to institutional and CGIAR needs, such as customization to serve donor requirements and milestones.
- **Indicators** are standardized across CRPs and CGIAR centers to reduce the burden of data collection and facilitate comparison and analysis across interventions. Indicators can be adapted to non-CGIAR centers.
- **Plan of Work and Budget and Annual Reports** can be generated and exported for CGIAR centers, adaptable to non-CGIAR institutions as well.
- **Open access** information and knowledge is enabled through international metadata standards such as Dublin Core, available on public overviews and the integrated MELSpace repository.
- **Interoperability** with different institutional systems (data and information sharing) such as Dataverse and DSpace repositories.
- **Limited access** and sensitive information are safe-guarded through customizable workflows and user permissions and responsibilities.
- **General Data Protection Regulation** (GDPR) and F.A.I.R. designed solutions for data management.
- **Evaluation of knowledge** produced by partners and users.
- **Evaluation of capacity development** activities through a dedicated module, with customizable surveys and reports exports.
- Access to the **Geo-informatics Options by Context web-GIS**, providing geo-data generated at country level with indicators and graphics based on the desired collections of datasets available or provided.
- **Online chat function** for real-time technical support, a User Guide and a wide range of guidance videos available on YouTube.

Partnerships are strengthened through the collaborative nature of the platform. With platform access and roles based on actual user responsibilities, colleagues can find common ground. By providing aggregated data by country, it also allows national and international partners to synchronize interventions. These features coupled with an online discussion forum mean that greater engagement is supported between scientists and partners that are working on similar projects or research topics across CRPs and centers.

MEL by the numbers

800+
CGIAR activities managed

600+
Projects mapped or carried out

200+
Projects currently being managed

9,000+
Information products reported

3,500+
Information products openly accessible through MELSpace

900+
Information products with limited access, but fully credited

2,000+
Partners such as research institutions and funding agencies fully credited for their outputs

2,000+
Users engaged in research and policy making

13,000+
Average monthly views

Cost sharing

MEL is available to CRPs, centers and other partner institutions free of charge for adoption in its current structure. However, partners are encouraged to design new features and refine existing ones, helping to further enrich the MEL community. The platform is cloud-hosted by Amazon Web Services and the current annual server hosting cost is approximately USD 1,500 for three terabytes, while the technical support is USD 2,640 for one day per month of server maintenance. These costs are shared among all partners who adopt the platform, and hence are continually reduced as more participants join. Any costs for new developments are also shared among partners.

Acknowledgement

MEL is the result of the synergic efforts by the CGIAR Research Program on Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereals (GLDC), CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB), CGIAR Research Program on Fish Agri-food Systems (FISH), the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), the International Potato Center (CIP), the World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF), the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), ICARDA GeoAgro, and is powered by iMMAP, Codeobia, D-Space and Amazon Web Services.

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For more details
Please see the Frequently Asked Questions about MEL