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**MONITORING EVALUATION ACCOUNTABILITY LEARNING POLICY (MEAL)**

**VERSION 3**

March 2025

1. **Introduction**

With almost 45 years of commitment to education for all, Action Education has developed recognized expertise in the implementation of educational projects and programs worldwide. This Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) policy marks a key stage in our approach to program QUALITY, consolidating/structuring ACTEI's ambition with regard to MEAL and formalizing the organization's commitments to anchor the MEAL culture within the organization's teams and stakeholders.

Drawing on the lessons learned from our operations and the standards of the international solidarity sector, this policy aims to guarantee the quality, effectiveness and impact of our actions. It provides a framework for reinforcing Change-Oriented Approaches (COAs), fostering organizational learning and facilitating our accountability to communities, stakeholders, partners and donors.

By harmonizing our practices and capitalizing on our know-how, this policy represents a major achievement in our commitment to maximize the impact of our educational interventions. It reflects our determination to respond ever more effectively to the challenges of education and to contribute, in a rigorous and transparent way, to the improvement of education systems and the emancipation of the populations we support.

This policy applies to the entire organization, and is therefore binding on all the departments that contribute to its application. It must encourage cross-functionality and collaboration between departments, in particular between programs and support services.

1. **Definition**

By policy we mean a reference document, comprising all the principles, systems, processes and tools to be respected and used when dealing with a specific theme. In this case, the present policy targets the issues of Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning and includes:

* this general policy document
* The system itself consists of:
* User Guide
* Monitoring and evaluation phases and stages
* Action Education's catalog of indicators designed to facilitate project formulation and monitoring, based on clear, structured frames of reference.
* Monitoring and evaluation tools (dashboards, reports, participatory assessments, GPMF, interim and final evaluations)
* Information path by tool
* The budget preparation and monitoring system managed by the Department of Administration, Finance and IT

1. **Purpose and scope of the policy**

**3.1. Purpose**

This policy aims to affirm and commit the entire organization to a qualitative approach to the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning of our projects and programs. To this end, and in order to ensure vertical and horizontal consistency within the organization, it affirms the mandatory nature of the use of and compliance with Action Education's Monitoring & Evaluation system. This system is mandatory for all projects, and replaces the processes and tools that may have been developed by regions and/or countries. This policy is therefore an integral part of the organization's operational management, and reflects the values of transparency in decision-making and accountability to the people we serve, as well as to our partners and donors of all kinds.

The policy contributes to the structured and harmonized management of projects and programs by guaranteeing quality, compliance with budget commitments, stakeholder participation, and the systematic application of lessons learned and best practices. More specifically, the MEAL policy aims to :

* Provide an organization-wide MEAL reference framework
* Display strategic orientations, guiding principles and key references for ACTEI
* Define the MEAL institutional framework by presenting the minimum MEAL requirements for all ACTEI projects.
* Develop and strengthen the MEAL culture and the use of information and knowledge for evidence-based decision-making at all levels.
* Promote continuous learning and innovation based on the analysis of our operational practices and results.
* Strengthen commitment to MEAL functions at all levels of the organization

This policy therefore serves as the basis for the project Monitoring - Evaluation - Accountability - Learning System, which specifies the MEAL tools and methodologies. By adopting the MEAL policy and system, the organization ensures that its operations meet community needs and are implemented efficiently.

**3.2 Scope of application**

**a/ Operations :**

This policy applies to all the projects of the International Programs and Technical Resources Department, regardless of the context, geographical area, sectors or methods of intervention.

It is therefore the reference point for the International Programs and Technical Resources Department:

* project management methods: definition, steering, monitoring, results measurement, impact and lessons learned, cost control and budget-operations correlations. The organization's strategic orientations and plans, covering its defined theory of change
* The technical quality of the projects implemented: through the principles, approaches and tools defined and presented in this policy, Action Education guarantees that the MEAL methodology adopted requires constant questioning of the technical approaches applied within the projects, as well as references to the norms and standards guiding the intervention.
* Intervention methods: the policy monitors and controls compliance with ACTEI's intervention logic as defined in its strategic orientations. In particular, it affirms the importance of the participatory approach, community involvement and working in partnership, ensuring that we support and strengthen the empowerment and protection of the people concerned.

At a more global organizational level, the MEAL policy affirms the need to compile all the results achieved by the association, in order to measure globally and collectively the achievement of our strategic objectives and operational commitments.

The MEAL policy contributes to the reliability of this information through the harmonization of data collection and processing tools and the link between the different levels of intervention (local - national - regional - international).

**b/ Stakeholders targeted by this policy:**

* **Internal** Action Education actors: this policy applies to all Action Education teams. While it is endorsed by operational teams, such as those in the International Programs and Technical Resources Department, it also applies to support function teams.
* **External** actors :
  + **partners** with whom Action Education implements its projects and with whom ACTEI has a partnership agreement (direct partners).
  + **those affected** by projects and programs: through data collection, dialogue on results, implementation of recommendations, capacity building, lessons learned, capitalization, etc.
  + **strategic partners** in coordination and activities

1. **Defining key concepts**

Monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning are synergistic and must be implemented simultaneously. For the purposes of this policy, the following concepts are defined for our common understanding:

* **Monitoring**: Action Education defines monitoring as a regular and continuous process of collecting and analyzing data on project/program activities and results. This includes feedback from stakeholders, in order to provide relevant information on the state of progress, progress in achieving results, the quality of technical approaches and partnership relations. Monitoring also makes it possible to measure the state of budget consumption and the proper use of earmarked and non-earmarked funding.
* **Evaluation:** Action Education defines evaluation as an in-depth examination of a project/program or policy, covering its design, implementation, outcomes and impact, in order to determine the effectiveness and sustainability of interventions. Evaluation involves the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, and incorporates feedback from key stakeholders.

The evaluation at Action Education includes the following elements:

* Relevance: the extent to which interventions and their implementation approaches are adapted to the needs, priorities and policies of the people and communities who benefit from them.
* Efficiency: the extent to which financial resources have been used economically and effectively.
* Effectiveness: the extent to which the objectives of the project or program have been achieved (or not) and the reasons why, and whether these objectives lead to unintended consequences (positive or negative) for anyone involved in or affected by the interventions.
* Sustainability: the possibility of continuing and extending long-term benefits for target populations after the project or program has been completed.
* Children's rights, gender and inclusion: the extent to which the project or program applies gender-sensitive and inclusive approaches with the aim of improving the rights of children and disadvantaged people and gender equality.
* Action Education departments and all countries plan and implement evaluations, internal or external, at least once during the project/program period. The size and scope of the project/program determine the scope of the evaluation, and one evaluation may be used for several projects/programs.

**Accountability**: Action Education defines accountability as the responsibility to ensure that work is carried out in accordance with agreed rules and standards, and to report clearly and accurately on progress, performance and results in relation to the initial framework defined. It is also the responsibility to ensure that interventions are carried out in an ethical, transparent and participatory manner, with the involvement of communities and other stakeholders.

Action Education is committed to being accountable to its target groups, partners, government authorities, donors and the general public. MEAL's systems must, as a minimum, include a feedback mechanism to collect the opinions of supported populations, partners and relevant stakeholders on our interventions, as well as an information system on the results of our programs to enable adaptation and continuous improvement.

**Learning (and sharing):** Action Education defines learning as a continuous process of critical reflection, adaptation and improvement of knowledge, attitudes, skills and practices, based on data collected as part of monitoring and evaluation, as well as the experience and knowledge of those involved. Learning aims to improve the design, implementation and results of projects/programs on the basis of feedback and evidence.

Learning activities must be planned and implemented in all programs and work, including the monitoring of learning outcomes. This may involve sharing MEAL program results with program stakeholders, encouraging feedback and contribution, and creating opportunities for learning and knowledge exchange. The process of learning and knowledge management is essential to the continuous improvement of the organization's actions, and will form an integral part of the management of the programming cycle, whatever the duration of the project and the type of funding.

1. **Guiding principles and key references :**

**5.1. Strategic orientations**

The MEAL policy is guided by Action Education's 2030 Strategic Orientations, within which each project and program fits and contributes to their implementation, in particular:

* Our values: dignity, inclusion, integrity
* Our principles: solidarity, transparency and responsibility
* Thematic priorities :
  + Priority themes :
* Early childhood care and education
* Access and quality of education
* Lifelong learning
  + Cross-cutting themes :
* Gender approach
* Migrations
* Peace and citizenship education
* Environment and climate change
* The principles of our intervention logic :
* "Experiment-Value-Deploy", which consists of (i) experimenting with solutions to educational issues, (ii) learning from these experiments, notably through research and capitalization, and (iii) disseminating these lessons within the organization and externally.
* Partnership and collaboration between the various actors in education around shared objectives to produce lasting change.
* A rights-based approach
* A participative, community-based approach that turns those who are primarily concerned by the projects into actors in their own development.
* A territorial approach
* An approach geared to social change
* Commitment to becoming a learning organization and to undertaking processes of continuous improvement in quality, integrity and transparency.

**5.2 Key references**

This policy complements and builds on a body of reference documents (guides, procedures, manuals, policies, etc.) that guide all our actions.

* The International Program Manual: includes emerging priorities, tools and systems. It also incorporates the commitments and criteria of the Core Humanitarian Standard Alliance (CHS), of which Action Education is a member. Section V of the manual deals with monitoring & evaluation and learning.
* The CHS Standard: It contains several tools, including: i) the quality and accountability reference framework, with reference to the 9 quality commitments and 9 quality criteria; iii) process mapping; iv) job descriptions and mission letters; v) project analysis tools, notably the Internal Control Reference Framework (ICRF) and the checklist; the ICRF matrix between the territory or country and the Program Department, a mapping of the organization's risks in relation to the orientations of the strategic plan, and a process mapping.
* Monitoring and evaluation system (M&E): The M&E system is made up of various tools and aids: an M&E plan (a word document to be completed by project teams to plan and explain the various operating procedures for M&E activities); a bank of indicators (a list and precise definitions of essential indicators at project and international management level); a dashboard (adapted from tools developed by Humanity and Inclusion for Action Education; used to monitor projects via exchanges between the field and international management, notably on the basis of the operational monitoring tool. This tool includes several tabs and enables indicators to be filled in); an M&E guide; a training guidebook (a training program to support project teams in implementing their monitoring-evaluation).
* GPMF (Global Program Monitoring and Follow-up): this is a unique global Excel tool developed in 2021 with SP 2020-2024 to track basic information on all country projects and programs. The table contains links to project documents for more detailed information on each project in the central portfolio of ACTEI. It includes general information, budget, targets achieved annually and timeline tracking.
* The organization's gender policy
* The budget preparation and monitoring framework of which it is the operational corollary

1. **Minimum commitments and implementation**

**6.1: Mandatory MEAL steps in the project cycle related to this policy**

1. Every project must define its logical framework and measure it at least during the course of the project:

* 1 effect indicator, to monitor the changes expected as a result of the intervention
* qualitative and quantitative indicators for objectives and expected results
* 1 accountability indicator, linked to the satisfaction of beneficiaries and people involved

2. All projects must include an induction phase lasting 1 to 3 months, depending on the duration of the project. This induction phase should enable the necessary recruitment to be carried out if it has not been possible to anticipate this; define the project's steering tools and organize an inclusive launch phase with the project's stakeholders, enabling detailed planning of the implementation of activities, and the project's monitoring, evaluation and learning procedures.

3. All projects/programs must hold regular interdepartmental (project/support) project reviews (at least **every 4 months, and necessarily aligned with the budget preparation and review cycle**) to analyze and record the latest project information, identify areas of concern, and decide on any necessary changes.

Every month, the project/program manager and a member of the finance team review progress on the basis of operational and budgetary monitoring tools.

At least 3 times a year, a project review is carried out with direct partners.

4. All projects must include a final evaluation, at least internal for projects of less than 2 years and external for projects of more than 2 years (subject to donor requirements).

5. All projects must formalize and share lessons learned so that they can be taken into account in future interventions.

6. All projects must ensure that they deploy feedback and complaint mechanisms specific to their areas of intervention, in line with Action Education's protection and safeguarding policy.

**6.1. Roles and responsibilities**

The MEAL policy applies to all Action Education staff. The International Programs and Technical Resources Department is responsible for controlling and monitoring compliance with the policy.

Responsibilities of the International Programs and Technical Resources Department :

* Disseminate the MEAL policy and ensure its appropriation by project/program teams
* Ensure compliance with the MEAL policy and system, from project definition through to final evaluation.
* Compile country data for the annual report and ensure the organization's overall accountability.
* Promote and support the development of monitoring and evaluation capabilities throughout the organization
* Ensure that adequate resources are allocated to MEAL activities
* Leading the sharing of learning from projects

***National level :***

* Country Director (CD):
* Ensure that the policy is applied and that the necessary resources, adapted to the program's organizational structure, are in place.
* Ensure that national projects/programs have adequate staff with the necessary M&E skills and competencies;
* Ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to monitoring and evaluation activities at project and country level
* Ensure effective collaboration and coordination between departments and their active participation in the MEAL system
* Country operational coordination (Failing this, will be provided by the CD):
* Lead the development and implementation of the country's MEAL system;
* Training and ongoing supervision of project teams in monitoring and evaluation;
* Coordinate and monitor monitoring and evaluation activities across the national program, and report on these activities in regular national reports.
* Finance Manager

- Ensure that budget data specific to ongoing projects are produced and made available to project teams in a timely manner

- Participate in project review sessions for support services

**Project level :**

The Project Manager (PM) plays a leading role in project M&E and the coordination of project M&E activities, including the reporting of these activities in regular project reports. More specifically, the PM is responsible for :

* In collaboration with the MEAL team or, failing that, the Operational Coordinator or CD, the PM develops the MEAL tools for the project for which he/she is responsible.
* Ensure application of key principles and milestones
* Ensure that monitoring and evaluation data is produced and integrated in a timely and accurate manner;
* Collaborate regularly with the person(s) responsible for MEAL (either the in-country MEAL manager or international staff supporting MEAL ) to (1) keep abreast of MEAL requirements/changes, and (2) provide MEAL capacity building for project and partner staff.
* Ensure that project stakeholders are involved in the project's MEAL and that MEAL data/information is shared regularly and transparently.

**6.2. Human resources**

All country programs must have staff assigned to MEAL activities, either dedicated to MEAL, or with explicit MEAL responsibilities built into their job descriptions, serving as MEAL focal points in addition to their other duties.

It is also necessary to clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of MEAL staff and partners from the outset of the project. Project staff and partners must receive training, ongoing coaching and support to implement the system effectively and consistently.

**6.2.2 Capacity building**

Action Education's MEAL policy is part of an internal and external dynamic of learning and continuous improvement of the organization's practices, particularly in the management of the performance and results of our projects and programs.

Action Education constantly adjusts needs and capacities in terms of tools, processes and practices for monitoring-evaluation, accountability and learning. The aim is to support teams and local players in developing their skills, so that they can sustainably and autonomously manage the MEAL systems of projects and programs, while adapting to new technological changes and to the organization's needs in terms of improving the system in place.

To this end, Action Education will equip itself with sufficient, qualified staff, consider appropriate incentive mechanisms, and plan how to store and share information.

**6.3. Resources**

The budget allocated to MEAL depends on the size and complexity of the project or program. In general, it is recommended to allocate between 5% and 10% of the total project budget. This percentage covers the costs of data collection, analysis, reporting and continuous process improvement. But many of the monitoring and supervision activities carried out in the field by school management committees, communes and technical services that are charged to operations should be well planned to contribute to MEAL without being charged to the budget.

1. **Policy update and revision :**

The implementation of this policy and the MEAL projects/programs will be evaluated after a 2-year period. This evaluation will enable us to analyze the need and relevance of a revision.