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MENA MELS ACTIVITY

ANNUAL REPORT

FY 2020

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ANNUAL REPORT

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MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING SERVICES
ACTIVITY

DISCLAIMER

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ACRONYMS

CLA	Collaborating, learning, and adapting	MENA MELS	Middle East and North Africa Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Services Activity
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative	MERC	Middle East Regional Cooperation
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019	MSI	Management Systems International, a Tetra Tech company
FY	Fiscal year	NPI	New Partnership Initiative
IP	Implementing partner	POC	Point of contact
KaMP	Knowledge management portal	REM	Religious and ethnic minority
KII	Key informant interview	RRF	Relief and Recovery Fund
MEB	Middle East Bureau (USAID)	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation, and learning		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This annual report highlights the technical activities and results achieved during Year 1 of the Middle East and North Africa Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Services Activity (MENA MELS). Under the demand-driven contract, Management Systems International, a Tetra Tech Company, (MSI) provides high-quality technical support to the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's) Middle East Bureau (MEB) and its operating units and implementing partners (IPs) in 10 countries—Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen. Through the delivery of a wide range of MEL services, including monitoring support; evaluations, assessments, and research; data analysis and synthesis; learning and utilization; and MEL capacity building, MSI complements the work of Mission MEL platforms and supports MEB regional initiatives. USAID uses the evidence-based data and information generated through MENA MELS

activities to improve program effectiveness; deepen accountability; foster learning and knowledge management; and improve monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) capacity in the region. The contract is managed by MEB in Washington, DC.

MSI and its Jordan-based subcontractor, Integrated International, completed the first of two base years of the contract on September 22, 2020. The second base year began on September 23, 2020. Three option years are available covering the period September 23, 2021 – September 22, 2024. The Year 1 total obligation was \$2,996,950.40, which included five buy-ins and a limited budget for core funds (see Table 1 on page 2 showing coverage of the five buy-ins). MEB approved additional core funding for Year 2 to support contract management and research, special studies, and assessments to support MEB programming and emerging priorities.

TABLE 1.

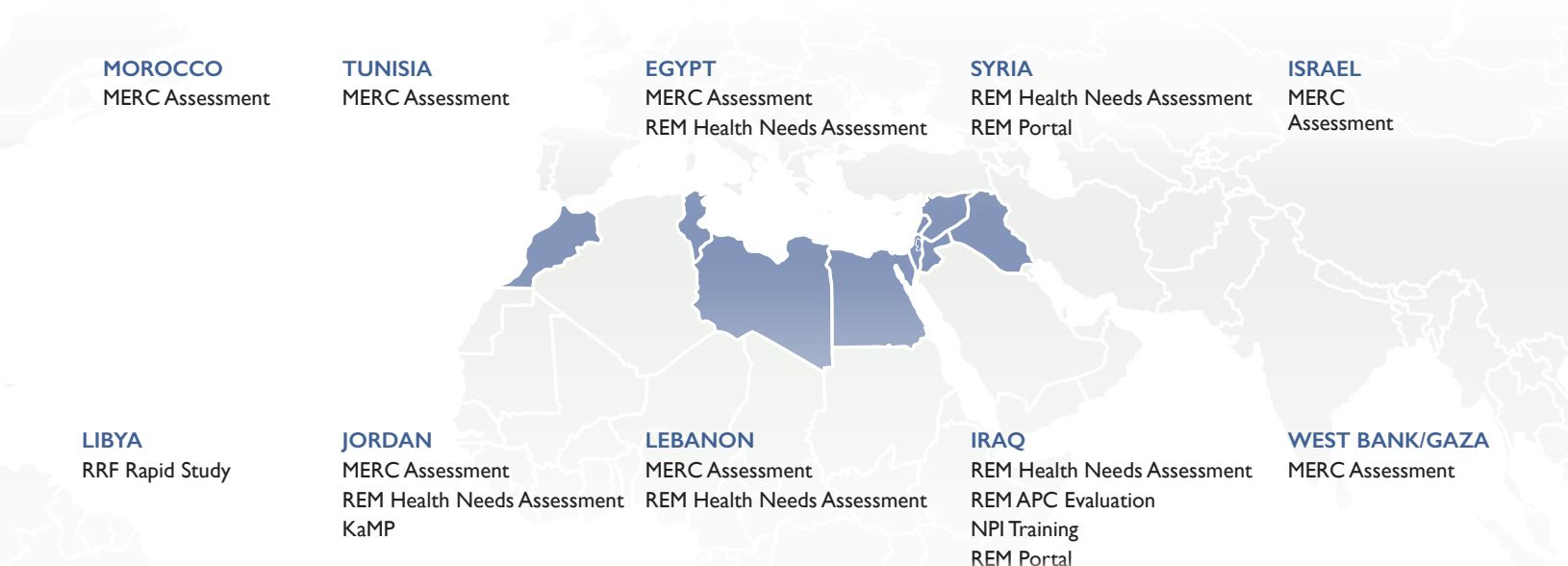
MENA MELS FY 2020 BUY-INS

Buy-In	Requesting Operating Unit	Activity Description	Timeframe	Status
Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC) Program Assessments	MEB ME/TS	Four-phased assessment of MERC's effectiveness: Phase 1, desk review of MERC grants, literature review of comparable programs, survey of MERC Principal Investigators; Phase 2, qualitative data collection; Phase 3, socialization of assessment findings and recommendations; Phase 4, follow-up data collection to assess implementation of recommendations	Sept. 2019 – Dec. 2020	Phases 1 and 2 completed. Phases 3 and 4 to be scheduled by USAID.
Religious and Ethnic Minority (REM) Health Evaluation, Health Needs Assessment, and Monitoring and Verification	MEB REM Unit	Three activities: (1) evaluation of REM health activity in Ninewa Plains, Iraq; (2) assessment of health needs and services to REM populations in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria; (3) development of a data catalog/dashboard to support REM evidence-based decision making.	Sept. 2019 – Oct. 2020	Activities 1 and 2, final report in progress; Activity 3, Phase 1 completed 9/30/20; follow-up work under new modification starts 10/01/20.

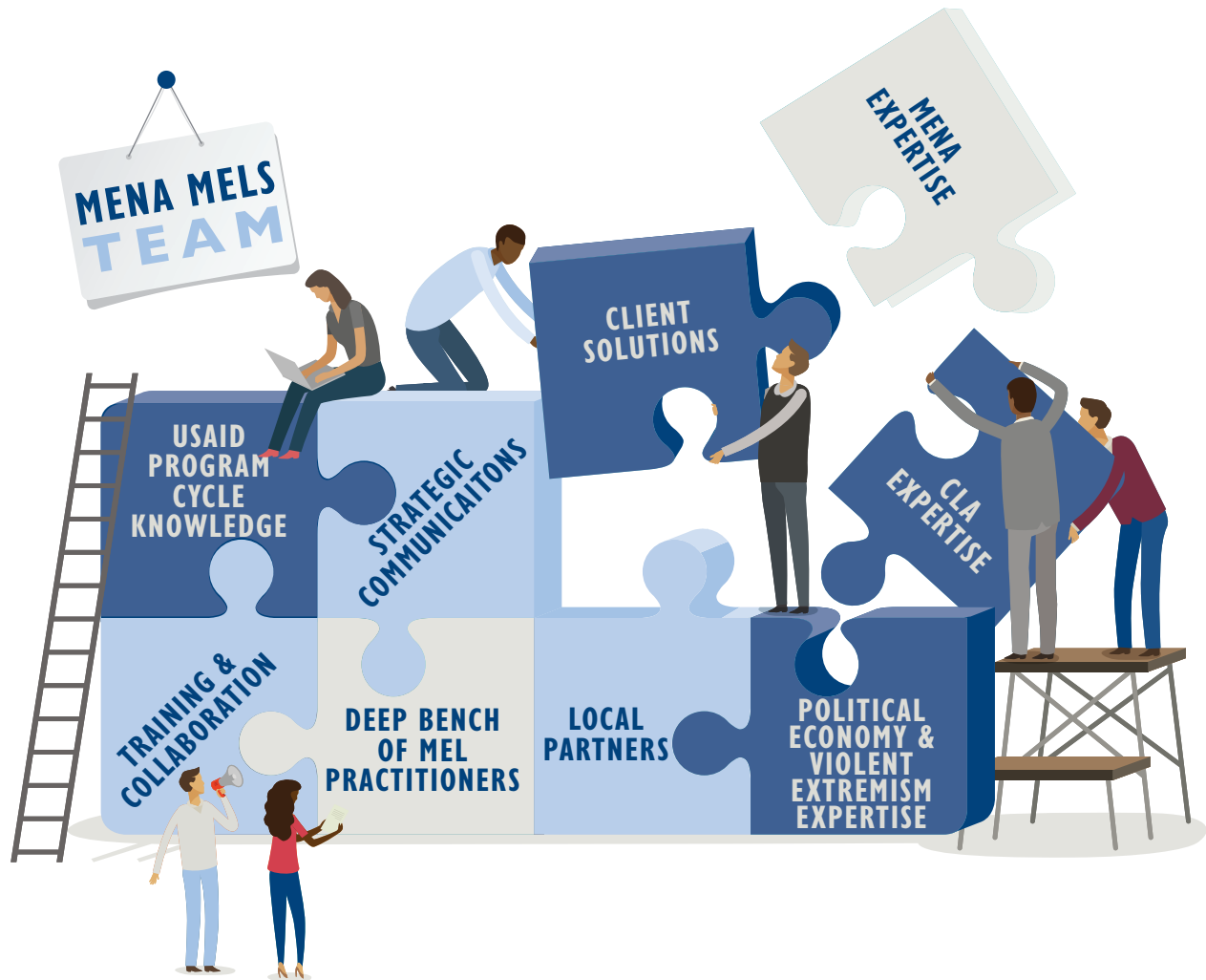
Relief and Recovery Fund (RRF); MEL support for resilience, stabilization, and good governance activities in Iraq, Libya, and Yemen.	MEB regional programming, Libya Desk, and Libya Mission	Rapid study of extremist organizations and flows of violence in and out of Libya, the surrounding north African countries, and the Sahel.	March – July 2020	Activity completed; buy-in balance will be used for new activities.
MEL Training and Technical Assistance Support to first-time USAID grantees	USAID New Partnership Initiative (NPI) Iraq addendum	MEL training/technical assistance for six local Iraqi organizations/new grantees providing support for minorities targeted for genocide.	Sept. 2019 – Sept. 2020	Activity completed, buy-in closed.
USAID/Jordan Knowledge Management Portal (KaMP) Hosting	USAID/Jordan Mission	Maintenance and technical support of KaMP for six months until start of new USAID/Jordan MEL activity.	Oct. 2019 – March 2020	Activity completed, buy-in closed.

As shown in Table I, the multitask and multiphase buy-ins (the Middle East Regional Cooperation [MERC] and Religious and Ethnic Minority [REM] activities) will carry over into FY 2021, along with the Relief and Recovery Fund (RRF) buy-in. All the activities completed by MENA MELs have received high marks from USAID. At the end of the contract's first year, MENA MELs has established a foundation

upon which to expand services with additional core funding for special studies and assessments and new funding to support REM programming. As it starts Year 2, MSI is poised to offer direct support to MENA missions without MEL platforms and to reengage with the New Partnership Initiative (NPI) to provide MEL technical assistance and training to new local partners and organizations.



INTRODUCTION



In delivering MEL services in FY 2020, the MENA MELS team drew on MSI's knowledge of the USAID program cycle and evaluation requirements, MENA regional expertise, and a deep bench of seasoned MEL practitioners built over 30 years of MEL practice worldwide. The team engaged MSI experts across a range of technical areas, including MEL practice area specialists; strategic communications and

client solutions teams; training and collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) experts; and political economy and violent extremism analysts. MSI also worked closely with its Jordan-based subcontractor, Integrated International, to provide customized training and technical assistance to new USAID MENA grantees.

YEAR 1 ACHIEVEMENTS

Year 1 achievements reflect four key attributes of the MENA MELS team's work to support MEB:

- Ability to quickly pivot to respond to the rapidly changing operational environment in the COVID-19 context
- CLA focus in all tasks
- Knowledge management support to strengthen evidence-based decision making, and
- MEL capacity building customized for MENA clients.

ADAPTING TO A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT: PIVOTING TO VIRTUAL COMMUNICATIONS, DISTANCED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, AND REMOTE DATA COLLECTION

The COVID-19 pandemic altered how USAID and IPs engage and deliver development assistance and MEL services. MSI quickly pivoted to COVID-19-related adaptations to ensure continued delivery of high-quality services. Quarantines and restrictions on face-to-face meetings, domestic and international travel, and in-person data collection required adaptive responses and approaches to MENA MELS evaluations, assessments, fieldwork, training, and individualized technical assistance. Virtual communications, distanced technical assistance, and remote data collection became the norm during the last seven months of FY 2020.

For example, for the MERC program assessment, MSI, with USAID approval, revised the planned field data collection methodology to shift from in-person focus group discussions to virtual key informant interviews (KIIs) for all target populations, including young researchers and female scientists, key groups for capacity building. By using virtual KIIs with these groups, MSI avoided internet connectivity issues arising from connecting groups of five respondents from multiple locations. This method also had the advantage of accommodating respondents who might feel uncomfortable speaking about politically sensitive topics in a virtual group setting.

Similarly, MSI and USAID agreed to forgo site visits and in-person data collection for two tasks intended to inform future programming: an evaluation of the activity, Improving Health Services and Outcomes in the Ninewa Plains, Iraq, and a larger-scale assessment of the health needs and services available to REM populations in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The evaluation examined the year-long subgrant's successes and challenges through a desk review of

Development Disrupted: Implications of COVID-19

MENA MELS, in cooperation with MEB, sponsored a reflective and thought-provoking webinar for more than 40 MEB senior leaders and staff to explore the COVID-19 pandemic's implications for the development sector and USAID. Mike Harvey, USAID assistant administrator for the Middle East, hosted the webinar. MSI founder and President Emeritus Larry Cooley presented an overview of the changing development landscape in the time of COVID-19, based on Brookings Institute research, and highlighted emerging lessons learned and implications for USAID planning, management, and development.

grantee and subgrantee materials, including IP project documents and online resources, and virtual KIIIs with the IP and Iraq Mission staff. The health needs assessment analyzed and synthesized secondary data from published research and studies, as well as data generated by IPs and research from other donors and research organizations working with vulnerable populations. The team also conducted virtual group and individual interviews with IPs and relevant staff from the Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria missions.

Although the team could not conduct the originally planned site visits, observations, and in-person interviews with local stakeholders, and notwithstanding the limitations of secondary data, the health needs assessment produced a large body of useful information. The Ninewa Plains evaluation provided programming recommendations to meet the priority health needs of REM populations in Iraq's Ninewa Plains and addressed sustainability prospects and options for REM-related health services and delivery in the region.

The typical model for these things (COVID-19) is response and then recovery. It suggests that you can return to the place you left. I think it's almost certain that the world after COVID-19 is materially different than the world before COVID. A more relevant model might be triage – transition – transformation.

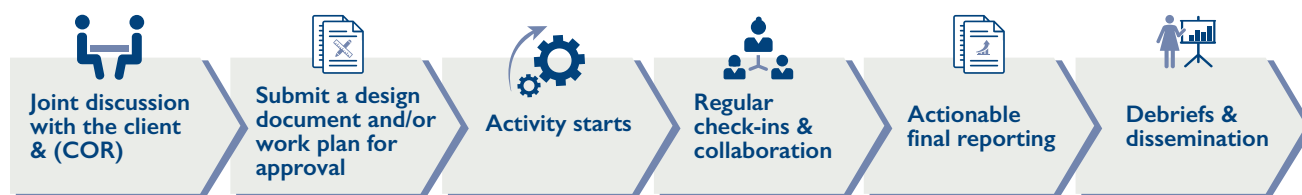
- Larry Cooley, President Emeritus - MSI



APPROACHES THAT PROMOTE COLLABORATING, LEARNING, AND ADAPTING

MSI follows a process of strategic, collaborative engagement with requesting offices for all MENA MELS activities to ensure that final deliverables meet client needs and promote learning and adapting. The MENA MELS buy-in process begins with a joint discussion with the client and the MENA MELS contracting officer's representative (COR) to review, unpack, and refine the proposed statement of work. The MENA MELS team then submits a design document and/or work plan for USAID review and approval. Once an activity starts, MSI makes a concerted effort to build in regular check-ins and

opportunities for collaboration to solicit USAID guidance and feedback. These check-ins allow the team to ground truth findings and review preliminary recommendations to ensure the recommendations in the final report are practical and actionable. MENA MELS also proposes debriefs based on the final draft report to share key findings with USAID before the report is finalized. To enhance strategic communications within USAID and among partners, MENA MELS also proposes presentations, webinars, and/or workshops to disseminate findings and lessons learned to wider audiences.





EMBEDDING CLA IN ACTIVITY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION: MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

MERC was established in 1979 following the Camp David Accords to fund joint research projects to facilitate collaboration and knowledge sharing between Egyptian and Israeli scientists. Since then, the program has expanded to include partnerships with scientists from countries throughout the region including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia. U.S. Government restrictions on aid to Palestine in FY 2019 terminated Palestinian participation in MERC along with 15 active projects with Palestinian and Israeli researchers.

MERC engaged MSI to conduct a program assessment and produce a learning product that provides recommendations about how MERC can maximize outcomes and adapt to an ever-changing political context. MENA MELS embedded a CLA approach in the MERC program assessment design, including a highly iterative approach to identifying key informants and developing data collection instruments, as well as two check-in sessions to share

“This [presentation] was very concise, informative, and accurate. I appreciate how you were able to consider the complexities of the program and its operating environment in your analysis.”

– USAID Activity Manager

findings—a facilitated midpoint strategy session and a findings debrief before submission of the draft assessment report.

The MERC program team, USAID MERC Advisor and MSI's MERC assessment team participated in a virtual midpoint strategy session, facilitated by an MSI learning professional. The assessment team shared key findings and results from three Phase I activities – a desk review of previous MERC grants; a literature review comparing four similar research cooperation programs; and results from a survey of MERC principal investigators (PIs) that gathered PI views of MERC's grant application process, capacity building, cooperation, impact, and overall experience. The

presentation and discussion helped the participants decide on key elements of Phase 2 MERC stakeholder data collection, including approaches, instruments, and timelines.

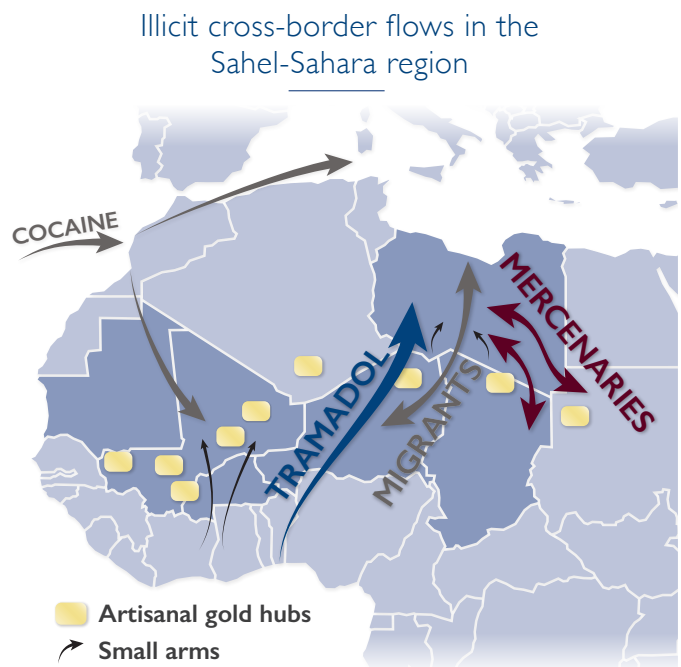
The findings and draft recommendations debrief provided USAID and the MERC program team an opportunity to provide feedback and discuss the key findings and proposed recommendations before finalization of the recommendations and design of the follow up assessment phases.

Phase 3 will include an event to socialize the assessment results and recommendations with MERC program stakeholders. In Phase 4, the final phase, the assessment team will collect data to determine whether and how MERC incorporated the assessment recommendations and what results, if any, have emerged. The latter two activities are scheduled for FY 2021.

STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT: RAPID LIBYA STUDY CROSS-BORDER INFLUENCES OF EXTREMISM

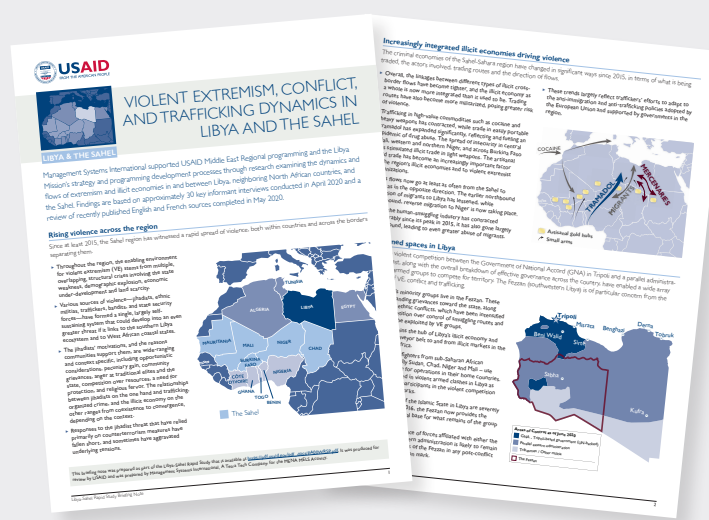
The Libya rapid study, requested by the MEB Libya Desk to support regional programming and the Libya Mission's strategy development process, examined the dynamics and flows of extremism and illicit economies in and between Libya, the Sahel, and neighboring North African countries. To complement the final report, the study team added a Libya scenarios analysis of how cross-border flows and influences may affect governance, security, and conflict mitigation in Libya over the next two years.

Throughout the reporting process, MSI's study team made a series of presentations of key findings, each with a different focus to address the interests of the specific audience. The presentations included a preliminary findings presentation at a MEB regional programming (MERP) workshop to solicit feedback before report finalization, a presentation of study findings and the scenarios analysis with a focus on the Fezzan and programming recommendations to MEB at large, a follow-up question-and-answer session with a representative of the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, and a presentation of study findings to USAID's Africa Bureau. MENA MELs's USAID clients, including MERP and the Libya Desk and Mission, confirmed the utility of the analysis, recommendations, and scenarios for their strategy and programming efforts.



“Thanks again to the research team for the fantastic analysis and analytical work that went into these two products. They're very well done, and we appreciate the effort that went into them. Rest assured that they have been and will continue to be well utilized.

- USAID Activity Manager, Middle East Regional Platform



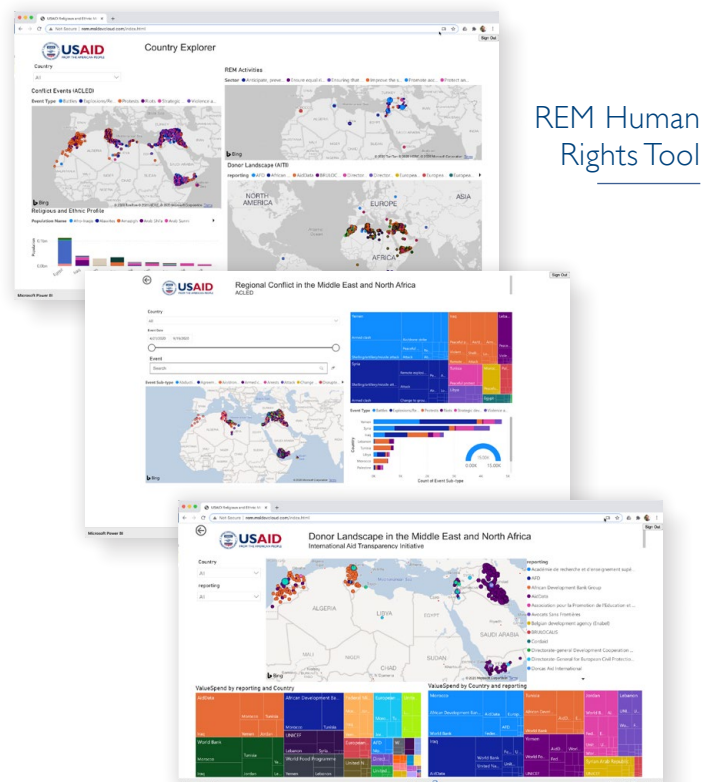
MENA MELs works closely with MSI's communications team to develop slide presentations, briefing notes, summaries, and reports using data visualizations, infographics, and graphic design techniques to communicate results that enhance information utilization and client satisfaction. For example, MENA MELs produces concise, readable, one- to two-page findings briefs for all evaluations, assessments, and studies.

ENHANCING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TO STRENGTHEN EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING

Recognizing the difficulty of identifying and readily accessing key information and knowledge resources to inform decision making and building on its experiences in creating other MEL knowledge platforms in the region and worldwide, the MENA MELs developed a data catalog and information dashboard for the USAID MENA REM team, as described below. MENA MELs also provided database maintenance support to USAID/Jordan for the knowledge management platform it had created and hosted for the mission from 2017 to 2020.

REM HUMAN RIGHTS INFORMATION DASHBOARD TO SUPPORT REM PROGRAMMING

Under Task 3 of the buy-in to support REM evidence-based decision making, MSI, in consultation with the REM team, developed a catalog of relevant data and other information resources that will support REM programming in MENA countries designated as



priorities—Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen. MSI's client solutions team also created an information dashboard that provides users with direct access to external and internal information sources identified in the data catalog. For example, dashboard users can query International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) data directly from the IATI website, conflict data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project website, and REM programming data from USAID's Google Drive. The information dashboard is currently hosted and maintained by MSI. USAID users can access the dashboard using their USAID username and password. With funds from a new REM buy-in, in Year 2 MSI will expand integration with ArcGIS data and other geo-databases so that USAID will have access to more real-time data and analytics. MSI will also migrate the information dashboard to USAID's internal system after completion of this activity.

USAID/JORDAN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT PLATFORM – MAINTENANCE

MENA MELS received a buy-in from USAID/Jordan to maintain the Knowledge Management Platform (KaMP) developed by MSI under the recently closed USAID/Jordan Monitoring and Evaluation Support Platform until the successor MEL implementer could initiate IT support services. KaMP is a web-based platform that houses a variety of knowledge resources for development practitioners in Jordan and facilitates information sharing among USAID, IP staff, and stakeholders. Over six months, a MENA MELS-supported team provided technical assistance to troubleshoot technical issues, upgrade the application, provide monthly server updates, and facilitate the transfer of the program and billing structure to the new contractor.

“We appreciate your continued support and for ensuring a seamless transition to the new contract. I'm sure the portal will be in good hands with the Kaizen team. And we appreciate your willingness to clarify or guide us in troubleshooting small matters as the Kaizen team assumes full management responsibilities over the next few weeks. Again, thank you for all your support and wish you and the MSI team all the best.”

- USAID Activity Manager, Jordan Mission



CUSTOMIZED MEL CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE REGION: STRENGTHENING MEL CAPACITY OF NEW GRANTEES AND PARTNERS

With a buy-in from USAID's NPI, Iraq Addendum, MSI designed a customized MEL training and technical assistance activity for USAID grantees in Iraq. MSI worked closely with its subcontractor, Integrated International of Jordan, to deliver a hands-on MEL training activity to six local Iraqi organizations that were first-time USAID grantees. NPI's mandate is to identify and engage new, local partners and provide training and capacity-building assistance, along with tools and resources. This activity's key components included a pretraining self-assessment by training participants to gauge their

MEL experience and inform the focus and agenda of the three-day training workshop, a post-training self-assessment, and customized remote technical assistance for each organization to continue to refine MEL tools. The participating grantee organizations varied in their development experience, the type of assistance they provide to minority populations, and their MEL experience and capacity. Below are highlights from the training and technical assistance along with recommendations for future NPI MEL capacity building.

“We found the process of [results framework] development extremely helpful, particularly as our organization works in multiple different workstreams (child care, psychosocial counseling, community spaces, etc.).”

– NPI Grantee

Training Objectives Developed in Consultation with USAID

- Understand the purpose and key components of the USAID MEL plan.
- Validate or develop grantee's theory of change.
- Refine or develop award-specific performance indicators.
- Draft or refine monitoring plan, including evaluation and learning plans for larger grantees.
- Review data collection requirements.
- Identify and plan next steps to complete the award's MEL plan.



“These [templates] are incredibly helpful - thank you so much! We will absolutely start using them.”

- NPI Grantee

LOOKING AHEAD

The MENA MELS regional platform is well positioned for a strong start to Year 2 and to expand services to more MEB stakeholders. With additional core funding for studies and assessments, MENA MELS will be better able to support MEB programming and emerging priorities, develop tools to facilitate regional information integration and sharing, offer direct support to MENA missions without MEL platforms and reengage with the New Partnership Initiative to provide MEL technical assistance and training to local partners and organizations. With the new REM buy-in to support evidence-based decision making,

MSI will continue to build out the REM regional human rights tool and support development a network of local nongovernmental organizations, civil society organizations, and faith based organizations as potential REM partners and remote context monitors to support REM programming. At the start of FY 2021, the MENA MELS COR and MSI team will develop a work plan that includes MEB requests and proposals developed by MSI for MEB consideration. The work plan will be submitted to MEB for review and approval.

