

Summary Report - ITC M&E Capacity Assessment Recommendations

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1. Purpose and overview

This report summarizes the key recommendations and related findings and conclusions from an organizational capacity assessment of ITC's project M&E system that took place between October 1 and December 31, 2020. The assessment exercise was commissioned by ITC's Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) and independently conducted by an external specialist. Its purpose is to support the ongoing development of a project M&E system to best serve organizational learning, accountability, and decision making for results-focused project management. This report is complemented by a separate slidedoc report of preliminary findings, background information and supplementary resources.

The primary audience for this report is ITC's Senior Management ITC functions directly involved in M&E systems at the corporate level (design, planning and performance and evaluation). Secondary audiences include the larger ITC, particularly those directly conducting, managing, or receiving deliverables from M&E, as well as external stakeholder external to which ITC reports, such as the UN Secretariat, the ITC Consultative Committee of ITC's Trust Fund (CCITF), the Joint Advisory Group (JAG), and bilateral or multilateral donors.

This assessment adopts a broad, systemic interpretation of M&E that encompasses interrelated processes for information generation, management and use. Monitoring, the continuous and systematic collection of data, and evaluation, the systematic assessment of the merit and worth of an intervention, do not happen in isolation but are two of many interrelated processes in project management. Therefore, the scope of this assessment is not limited to the technical definitions of "monitoring" and "evaluation," but also includes other related data collection and analysis processes, such as initial assessment, project design and data management.

Ten strategic recommendations are identified in this report for ITC's M&E system, presented below and summarized with aligned findings and conclusions informing the recommendations in Section 6 of this report.

10 Strategic Recommendations (detailed in Section 6 of this report)

1. Streamline program planning to better assemble M&E elements and prepare for project monitoring and during implementation.
2. As part of the Strategy 2022-2025 development process, reconsider the utility of the 15 Programs as an organizing/guiding function for projects.
3. Reinforce project teams' understanding, attitudes and practice to reliably measure ITC's Corporate indicators as Core indicators central to ITC's mission.
4. Adopt a broader use of 'sustainability' that goes beyond continuity, replication, and scaling up of planned impact to include, "ensuring the lasting protection of the planet and its natural and cultural resources, supporting inclusive and sustained economic growth, ending poverty in all its dimensions and enhancing human well-being," (UNSCDF Framework, 2019: p. 11).
5. Investment in and strengthen project management roles, responsibilities, understanding and capacities for timely and reliable project monitoring and reporting.
6. Accelerate efforts to strengthen ITC's data collection systems with standardized protocols, mechanisms and IT to support comprehensive, reliable and efficient processes for evidence-based data and use for M&E, and which provides a degree of adaptability to project needs and context.
7. Accelerate ITC's development of a centralized data management system to support standardized protocols, mechanisms, and IT for data collection, analysis, reporting and use.
8. Upgrade data quality control for monitoring that supports reliable and accountable project reporting.
9. Incorporate more complexity adaptive evaluation methods into IEU's strategy and practice to support more integrated, real-time, and longitudinal approaches to evaluation and use.
10. Update and streamline capacity development resources as part of an overall Project Management Toolkit that supports M&E and related functions.

2. Background and relevance of this assessment

ITC has developed its M&E system over the last decade, including the introduction of its new online project portal (NPP) in 2015, an ITC Results Framework approved in 2017, the establishment of the Project Design Team in 2017, and an assortment of guidelines, training modules, and tools for M&E and related RBM. However, M&E gaps and improvement remain a priority, evidenced by separate ITC evaluations, including the recent 2020 AESR that recommended: “*an assessment of the M&E practices across ITC project portfolio to serve results-focused project management, learning and accountability and to enhance the simplification, harmonization and effectiveness of the M&E corporate system.*” This recommendation was endorsed in the Management Response to the evaluation.

It is an opportune and strategic juncture to conduct this assessment. In addition to the above-mentioned shortcomings in M&E, additional factors that have increased the demand to assess and identify key recommendations include:

- The recent arrival of new ITC Executive Director and “stock-taking” currently underway with the development of ITC’s 2022-2025 Strategic Plan
- A steady increase in the volume and size of ITC projects that M&E supports in the last decade
- ITC’s commitment to the UNSDCF and reporting related to the SDGs
- ITC’s accountabilities to external donors for extrabudgetary resources
- New challenges created for M&E given the COVID-19 pandemic

3. Methodology overview and limitations

Given the broad scope of ITC’s M&E system and the relatively short timeframe of two months for data collection and analysis, participatory, qualitative data collection and analysis played a central role for this exercise. An 11-member **Reference Group** was identified to review and approve assignment deliverables, comprised of M&E systems and processes resource people, as well as ITC users of M&E products from different areas in the organization. An inception report was prepared to ensure a clear understanding and realistic plan of work for the assessment exercise. Six guiding principles were identified to guide this exercise: 1) Utilization focus; 2) Adaptive approach; 3) Proportionality; 4) Keep it simple; 5) Learning partnership; 6) Professional standards.

Data collection and analysis drew chiefly upon four sources: a review of background documentation provided by ITC consisting of ITC strategic, operational and guidance documents, as well as UN and other relevant external documents; remote key informant interviews (KIIs) with 22 interviewees, primarily ITC staff, apart from two consultants who conducted related research; case study review of project design and targeted interviews with project managers for two projects with the UK Trade Partnership Programme; a two 2-hour workshops with the Reference Group (see below) sharing preliminary findings and recommendations to obtain feedback.

A draft report was prepared in an 82-slidedoc format identifying 20 recommendations and related findings and conclusions. In response to feedback from the Reference Group, the recommendations were prioritized to 10 key recommendations aligned with relevant findings and conclusions as presented in this report for sharing with ITC senior management. The slidedoc was also revised to retain the detailed preliminary findings, as well as additional background information and supplementary resources.

As with any assessment exercise, it is important to note key methodological limitations. Firstly, data collection was limited to the given time period to interviews, feedback workshops, and reviewed background documents. The sample was purposeful and not statistically significant, and an organizational capacity assessment survey was not administered for staff census input to triangulate with the qualitative data.

A second challenge encountered was the truncation of planned coaching sessions per the ToR, involving 1 to 2 project teams on the use of causal models and the M&E practices to support their implementation. A six-step workplan was developed for the coaching workstream with two primary tasks/deliverables: a project design review specifically identifying the logframe and project M&E plan. The workplan was drafted in consultation with ITC's Management Committee for this assignment. However, implementation of the workplan was partial: the consultant had individual calls with each of the project managers and a joint call with the overall Project Manager, who expressed that the donor would not allow LF changes and that M&E planning was not a priority relative to other project needs. In short, the coaching sessions did not advance because the project teams selected by the ITC Management Committee were not receptive to the proposed workplan and focus approved by the ITC Management Committee. Nevertheless, the consultant's review of the project's logframes and related background documents, as well as the interviews with the project managers, provided valuable understanding of M&E at the project level. It is also worth noting that in place of this workstream, an additional 10 KIIs were added to the 12 KIIs initially identified in the ToR for the assessment exercise.

4. ITC's M&E Maturity

Based on the concept of [organizational life cycles](#), ITC's M&E maturity refers to the level of its M&E systems, practice and culture. ITC is assessed at Stage 3, Growth, in a four-stage conceptual model, underscoring that it has a developed M&E system, with existing resources in personnel, tools, platforms, guidelines and training modules, (See **Table 1**). However, there are still M&E challenges and shortcomings as outlined in the Findings of this report, (and reflected in the commissioning of this M&E assessment exercise). This is not to imply that progress has not already been made in this area: for example, the ITC results framework, the New Project Portal (NPP), M&E-related guidelines and training modules, the Project Design Task Force (PDTF) and the annual evaluation synthesis reports (AESR) substantiate why ITC is assessed beyond the Stabilize stage. However, primary and secondary data sources confirm that M&E processes can improve.

Table 1 – ITC Organizational M&E Maturity Scoring

Stage	Description
Stage 1 Initiate	M&E system has no formal strategy/protocol, and is initiated primarily ad hoc, in response to external reporting requirements; any data collection and management systems are predominantly implicit; Data verification, quality insurance, and protection is low or nonexistent; M&E culture is low or nonexistent, with M&E guidance, capacity development, budget and designated M&E personnel minimal if nonexistent.
Stage 2 Stabilize	M&E system systems established, but primarily to meet external reporting requirements; Linkages beyond strict monitoring and evaluation with related processes (e.g. context analysis, design, and reporting) is limited; Data collection and management is primarily through Excel/Word files shared by email; Data verification, quality assurance and protection remains mostly ad hoc, primarily meeting external donor/reporting needs; Organization is aware of M&E deficits and M&E culture is coalescing with M&E guidance and capacity development, but M&E budget and designated M&E personnel remain relatively low or nonexistent in comparison to other organizational functions.
Stage 3 Grow	M&E system strategy and protocol exists but is being adopted to accelerate growth and scale in programs, and to extend beyond external reporting and protocol to ownership and use; Linkages are actively pursued beyond strict monitoring and evaluation with related processes (e.g., context analysis, design, and reporting), but refinement is required. Data collection, management, and protection is practiced and partly automated, but improvement is required technologically and in human resources and culture; Increased awareness to data verification and quality assurance, but structure and protocol needs improvement; M&E culture is established, with ample M&E guidance and capacity development, but these need to be coordinated into a more coherent M&E support system. M&E budget and personnel designated, but not always practiced, and refinement is required relative to other organizational functions.
Stage 4 Amplify	M&E strategy, systems and protocol well-established and practiced, serving as a model for similar organizations; Emphasis on adaptation and flexibility to clients (target population) needs, contextual changes, and the pursuit of organizational vision. M&E is well-integrated into intervention design, implementation, and reporting; Data generation, management and use is what is necessary and sufficient to inform operational and strategic decision making, balancing organizational learning and change with accountability requirements. Adequate to ample M&E financial, human, and capacity development resources.

5. ITC M&E receptivity

Organizational M&E receptivity refers to the attitude of personnel to M&E. It is closely related to an organization’s M&E maturity and is a critical consideration for its “appetite” for changes in M&E practice, as well as the endorsement and ownership of M&E assessment findings and recommendations. Using a four-level conceptual model, ITC’s **assessment straddles levels 2 and 3**, (see **Table 2**), reflecting that there are different perceptions of M&E and its capacity development at ITC. Findings reveal that there are many that perceive M&E primarily as an accountability requirement and a burden that distracts time and resources from rather than having added value for project management. However, there are also others who see the value and utility of M&E, but express that the systems need to be improved. For this latter category of ITC personnel, the perception of M&E as compliance is tempered in that people expressed genuine interest in making improvements to simplify and streamline M&E processes, especially monitoring and reporting.

Particularly relevant for this assessment exercise, is that at Stage 3 (Grow), ITC M&E maturity is characterized by the formalization of M&E processes and procedures. As such, the people who directly helped develop or invested time in understanding how to work with M&E standards and protocol often have strong opinions on and investment in the current M&E system and are resistant to feedback on it. This dynamic was notable with certain key stakeholders in this M&E assessment of ITC.

Table 2 – ITC Organizational M&E Receptivity Scoring

Level	Description
Level 1 Resistance	Organization personnel demonstrate opposition to M&E by engaging in either open or hidden behaviors that oppose M&E and its capacity development.
Level 2 Compliance	Organization personnel demonstrate support for M&E by going along with M&E protocol and capacity development reluctantly, primarily as an accountability requirement rather than a meaningful investment of time and resources.
Level 3 Cooperation	Organization personnel demonstrate support by exerting effort for, going along with the spirit of, and being prepared to make modest sacrifices for the M&E capacity development efforts.
Level 5 Championing	Organization personnel demonstrate extreme enthusiasm for M&E and its capacity development by going above and beyond what is formally required for M&E good practice, and by promoting it to others outside the organization.

6. Summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations

Following are 10 key recommendations, aligned with relevant Findings and Conclusions. Each recommendation is also accompanied by examples of specific actions that ITC can consider for potential actioning of recommendations. These examples are NOT recommendations, but illustrative, and the merit and worth of recommendation statements should be considered independent of the specific relevance of any illustrative example of potential actions to respond to the recommendations because ultimately, there are a multiplicity of responses to the recommendation that can and should be determined by ITC.

Findings	Conclusion	Recommendation
<p>Project planning</p> <p>Project planning is used to refer to the interrelated processes of initial and baseline assessment and the project design and inception, which collectively lay the foundation for the results, KPIs, targets, and measurement methods used for M&E and related reporting. ITC has made considerable investment in supporting project planning, including the development of resources, personnel (e.g., Project Design Task Force (PDTF)), and training models. However, the assessment found the project planning challenged in the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Inconsistent understanding and practice for conducting initial assessment, collecting baseline data, and the common understanding of the inception protocol. – Challenges related to coordinating multiple stakeholder engagement, in particular: donors design expectations that straitjacket project teams’ ability to adapt the design to context, inadequate national stakeholder engagement for country intelligence (also noted in the 2020 AESR), and tension between ITC Country Managers and technical sections (Draft Review of Coordination of ITC at Country Level, 2020). – Inconsistencies in the understanding and use of outcomes, outputs, activities, indicators, and assumptions in project and program results chains, logframes, and theories of chain between projects, even within the same project, and between programs. Notable were issues with indicators not being SMART, especially with regards to relevance to intended results and unit of measurement. Inconsistencies were also noted in the elements in the M&E Plans, which notably lacked definitions of indicators. Such inconsistencies and related issues in these planning tools has a negative reinforcing tendency of misuse 	<p>The interrelated processes that comprise project planning are critical for subsequent project M&E as they underpin its relevance, operationalization, and reliability during project implementation.</p> <p>It is well substantiated by ITC evaluations and triangulated by primary data collection that indicators measurement is not getting properly operationalized to provide reliable and useful data for reporting and assessing results.</p> <p>While there is an intersection of reasons for this, an important consideration is the “set-up” that identifies what, how, when and by whom to operationalize the measurement of indicators identified monitoring during the project planning phase, and more specifically at the end of the inception period.</p> <p>Progress has been made, but the persistence of this challenge underscores key areas to improve.</p>	<p>1. <u>Streamline program planning to better assemble M&E elements and prepare for project monitoring during implementation.</u></p> <p>Examples of actions ITC can consider to improve project planning as it relates to M&E include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Formalize project initial assessment in relation to the project design and inception to ensure appropriate context analysis of needs, interest, resource, and capacity (NIRC). This includes a clear delineation of protocol, roles and responsibilities. This can be pursued through a Task Force to examine this with experienced PMs, technical unit leads, Country Managers, etc., resulting in specific protocol and guidelines merged with the Exec Dir Bulletin for ITC’s project planning process. b) Increase coordination for meaningful partner engagement to support country level detail in assessment and consensus for relevant and realistic project design: i.e., Gov officials (MoT), Beneficiaries (SME), Donors, BSOs, PMs, PDTF, Tech leads, mainstreaming focal points, etc. c) Explore the use of an upfront MOU for a donor-paid overhead during project inception based on shared understanding of project objectives to be detailed later during its inception phase. d) Streamline project design workflow, quality assurance and approval by reducing and delineating core project design quality criteria in a checklist accompanied with a rubric for consistent rating of criteria. Consider evidence for idea, theory of change, cost-effectiveness, alignment with Corporate priorities, etc. Also, allow minor changes to project design to bypass Chief and Director approval prior to PDTF review. e) As identified in the 2020 AESR, increase the uptake and use of Theories of Change to clarify how planned results will be

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<p>that affects the achievability and reliability of measurement for M&E during project implementation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Consensus was expressed to simplify where possible project design and monitoring templates and processes, but also to provide more detail in the causal linkages in the results chains through the use of Theory of Change approaches. – Informants expressed concern over challenges and delays during project inception/design due to an excessive number of actions included in the defined timeframe, and hold-ups in approval of changes to project design as fine tuning usually takes several iterations. 		<p>achieved and measured, which can also help address the issues of fragmented team implementation and related monitoring challenges by showing the relationships between different project workstreams and components (see Rec 5). Given there is not a common ITC understanding and use of ToC, this will entail articulating a recommended approach and supportive guidelines and training (and likely visualization software).</p> <p>f) Ensure that project indicators are “fit for purpose” (SMART) prior to approval, with particular attention on their relevance to the result they are to measure, and their achievability, which requires attention to realistic methods for indicator measurement. Refer to Rec 6.b for related consideration regarding the role of the M&E plan in this process.</p>
<p>ITC corporate framework and indicators</p> <p>Multiple sources confirm that ITC’s strategic plan and framework are well received and understood within the organization.</p> <p>Concern was expressed regarding the utility and coherence of the program structure in the organization, including: duplication of the organizing function of the focus areas; there are too many programs that cut across projects and other programs; many projects underlie more than one program; there is inconsistency in how the programs are categorized and implemented (some geographically, some by target population, and some by technical focus.).</p> <p>Concern was expressed that the corporate design commitments, with resistance especially noted for corporate indicators. Concerns included: the indicators distract from a bottom-up approach based on what the project are actually doing and need to measure; the indicators do not meet donor requirements and are therefore an added burden; target setting is problematic; changes to the indicators challenge measurement over time; and alignment with corporate indicators prioritizes accountability over learning.</p> <p>A review of secondary data reveals that “sustainability” is used in two related but different meanings at ITC at the corporate level, with implications for its pursuit. The primary usage and focus, especially as an evaluation criterion, is on continuity that stresses replication, and more scale of planned intervention and results, (per the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria). However, ITC also recognizes the</p>	<p>ITC’s Strategic Plan is an asset and well received in the organization, although the concern was expressed about the utility of the 15 Program areas as a guiding function for projects.</p> <p>ITC has made strides in its efforts to support the measurement of Corporate indicators, with guidance and training modules. However, project teams have expressed reluctance and misgivings about the indicators, their ability to measure them, and the indicator’s utility.</p> <p>ITC recognizes the importance of “sustainability” in relationship to the interdependence of the SDGs. However, its use of the term emphasizes a narrow interpretation on continuity that risks overlooking important spill-over and side-effects that can be either synergistic or damaging for the larger human and</p>	<p>2. <u>As part of the Strategy 2022-2025 development process, reconsider the utility of the 15 Programs as an organizing/guiding function for projects.</u></p> <p>The program documents outlining the strategic objectives and theory of change for each 15 program areas expire in 2021, and there is inconsistency in how the 15 Programs are categorized and implemented that detracts from their intended role to streamline underlying projects (which often cut across programs), especially relative to the organizing role of the Focus Areas.</p> <p>3. <u>Reinforce project teams’ understanding, attitudes and practice to reliably measure ITC’s Corporate indicators as Core indicators central to ITC’s mission.</u></p> <p>Examples of actions ITC can consider to the uptake of its Corporate indicators include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Consider referring to the “Corporate” indicators as “Core” indicators to underscore that they serve more than organizational accountability, but are central to ITC’s mission to support socially and environmentally responsible trade. b. It is good and recommended that ITC continues to limit its Corporate indicators to a minimum (i.e., under ten).

Findings	Conclusion	Recommendation
<p>UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’s three intersecting pillars of economic, environmental, and social development (as reflected in the corporate indicators).</p>	<p>natural ecosystem per the interdependence of the SDGs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> c. Streamline technical guidance on Corporate indicator measurement into a table format per the Results Monitoring Plan with detailed guidance. d. Embed not only the intrinsic value of, but practical solutions for Corporate monitoring and reporting in onboarding and ongoing training and other knowledge sharing outlets. e. Conduct targeted discussions with key donors (e.g., EU) about the centrality of ITC Corporate indicators for shared mission to reach a blanket MOU for their inclusion (see Rec 1.c). This can be prefaced by a concise and endorsed statement convincingly arguing for the inclusion of Corporate indicators targeting socially and environmentally responsible trade aligned with the 2030 Global Agenda signed by <u>all</u> countries. f. Review/revise Corporate indicators with attention to SMART criteria, especially specificity, relevance, and measurability. For example, Indicator A3 has a tri-pound unit of measurement (policies, strategies, or regulations) qualified by three additional criteria (developed or changed with business sector input and direct stakeholder consensus). Furthermore, its definition (What to Count) includes an irrelevant unit of measurement, (“# of procedural obstacles under discussion”). g. Any revision of the corporate indicators should be relative to the development of the ITC 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, and in consideration of Recs 3 and 4. h. Develop a technical guidance note on how to minimize inflating counts due to the higher risk of double counting that is inherent when aggregating counts for Corporate indicators across time and place. <p>4. <u>Adopt a broader use of ‘sustainability’ that goes beyond continuity, replication, and scaling up of planned impact to include, “ensuring the lasting protection of the planet and its natural and cultural resources, supporting inclusive and sustained economic growth, ending poverty in all its dimensions and enhancing human well-being.”</u> (UNSCDF Framework, 2019: p. 11).</p>

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		<p>Examples of actions ITC can consider to adopt a broader use of sustainability include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight a broader interpretation of “sustainability” in the development of the forthcoming development of the next 5-year strategic plan and framework. Capitalize on ITC’s efforts to incorporate sustainability through its ex-post sustainability reviews to reinforce and assess for a broader interpretation of sustained impact on human and natural systems can be incorporated.
<p>Project management for monitoring and reporting</p> <p>Roles and responsibilities for monitoring are often unclear, resulting in situations where monitoring does not occur in a timely, reliable, and useful manner, but as an afterthought to meet reporting requirements, sometimes passed onto a junior staff charged with reporting.</p> <p>The responsibility for monitoring was often perceived as bureaucratic and administrative and not part of management.</p> <p>Projects are often composed of separate workstreams and teams that challenge project manager’s authority and ability to manage overall M&E as part coherent team. For example, projects with different technical outputs are managed by appropriate technical sections, which can create tension between the country and project managers.</p> <p>As the 2020 AESR notes, project teams are overstretched, and multiple informants commented on the disproportionate amount of human resource support provided for project design versus project monitoring.</p>	<p>Project managers (PMs) are expected to manage and have oversight of project monitoring and reporting as a core responsibility, but this does not always happen.</p> <p>Interrelated challenges for project monitoring and reporting management include: the absence of direct managerial accountability between project managers and team members; an overall lack of clarity with M&E-related approval and responsibilities; limited corporate support for project monitoring relative to project design.</p>	<p>5. <u>Investment in and strengthen project management roles, responsibilities, understanding and capacities for timely and reliable project monitoring and reporting.</u></p> <p>Examples of actions ITC can consider to improve project management as it relates to M&E include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a Task Force to examine this with experienced PMs, technical unit leads, Country Managers, etc., resulting in specific protocol and guidelines, which can be incorporated into a Project Management Guide (see Rec 10). Particular attention should be given to exploring solutions for providing capacity support for project monitoring from sources outside of the project team, such as an appointed resource people at the country/regional level. Crystalize the roles and responsibilities of PMs for M&E in relevant guidance and training, with particular attention to a matrix management solution balancing PM’s management authority relative to decentralized project implementation involving technical sections and leads. Ensure project planning products reinforce understanding or roles and responsibilities for project monitoring and reporting, with particular attention to detailing the M&E plan (see Rec 6.b) and utilizing project theories of change to reinforce project managers and team understanding of the project design and relationship to M&E (see Rec 1.e). Ensure all PM job descriptions/adverts include M&E as a core capacity area.

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<p>Project Data Collection</p> <p>There is a notable ITC investment in data collection, including: results planning and monitoring templates, training modules, a delegated advisor, and survey tools. Informants noted a recent increase in the consistent application of survey tools, which was triangulated by the recent study, How Projects Measure Change, 2020. However, significant challenges remain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – One challenge area is operationalizing reliable, timely and complete data collection for indicator measurement. Underlying causes identified include instances where indicators are not SMART for data collection, insufficient project understanding and/or capacity to measure indicators, unclear roles and responsibilities for data collection and monitoring, and limited PM ability to manage those responsible for data collection (see Rec 5). – Related, instances were noted (through primary and secondary sources) where M&E plans were not completed prior to project implementation or were incomplete and inadequate to support indicator data collection. A selected review of completed project result planning and monitoring plans revealed inconsistency in the quality and completeness of M&E plan contents to support data collection, including the absence of indicator definitions to cross-check indicator relevance and specify the indicator unit of measurement. – Another challenge area identified by informants is the need for a standardized instrument for baseline assessment and monitoring. Project teams often identify separate online platform to use rather than centralized services/platform, which is less efficient, requires separate capacity building for different platforms, and limits data comparability and sharing within ITC for longitudinal research objectives. – Related, a demand was expressed for the ability of PMs to tailor and use surveys according to their specific project needs and timeframes. Theoretically, this is possible, but it was explained 	<p>While there are existing resources and progress has been made for project data collection, significant challenges remain, notably: indicator data collection that supports project M&E for results-based management; coordinating and adapting survey and assessment tools and practice for the dual needs of project M&E as well as the corporate research agenda; the utilization of information and communication technology to support data collection; and adapting data collection given limitations presented by COVID-19.</p>	<p>e) Ensure PMs itemize M&E in project budgets, and consider designating minimum budget allocations for the M&E function.</p> <p>6. <u>Accelerate efforts to strengthen ITC’s data collection systems with standardized protocols, mechanisms and IT to support comprehensive, reliable and efficient processes for evidence-based data and use for M&E, and which provides a degree of adaptability to project needs and context.</u></p> <p>Examples of actions ITC can consider to improve project data collection as it relates to M&E include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Per Rec 1.f above, ensure SMART indicators are identified early during project design, but support adaptation to improve indicators, especially pursuant to any changes during M&E planning. Related to point 1.c, this ability to revise indicators can be part of an MOU in instances involving external donors. b) Upgrade M&E planning to ensure data collection for indicators identified in a project’s design can be operationalized in practice. This includes: Ensure comprehensive detail in Results Monitoring Plan to ensure it provides sufficient guidance, including the addition of a Definitions column that clarifies ambiguous indicator terms and specifies units of measurement to support indicator understanding for consistent measurement; Utilize a participatory, inclusive process in results monitoring planning to reinforce a common understanding so people know who, how and when indicators are to be measured; Provide training at the corporate Officer/Advisor level on industry good practices for M&E that can transfer into the guidance and capacity development provided to project managers and teams for accurate, realistic and useful M&E plans. c) Ensure a standardized protocol for baseline surveys, classification of beneficiaries, and other assessments, which includes coordination with BSOs and other data collection partners for meaningful engagement supporting country level detail, and to reduce data collection duplication, competition and potential survey fatigue while encouraging efficient use of time and resources. d) Accelerate piloting a beneficiary survey tool (Enterprise Survey monkey) that is harmonized and programmed to feed into

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<p>that many projects lack the capacity to do so, and this could undermine shareability of data for corporate research objectives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Concern was also identified with regards to survey fatigue in partner countries, poor incentives leading to positive feedback bias, and poor partner capacities for survey enumeration (How Projects Measure Change, 2020). – There is general consensus that information and communication technology (ICT) can be better employed at ITC for data collection and analysis, versus, for instance, the use of paper feedback forms. – A data collection challenge not specific to ITC but across international development is that presented by COVID-19 given health risks due to face2face contact. 		<p>corporate database with a library of questions linked with any indicators.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> e) Support the adaptation of surveys to project needs and timeframes while also meeting corporate research needs by identifying a core set of required survey questions versus those that can be adapted or removed. f) Consider forming a working group or program area focal points to continuously investigate and innovate digital/virtual trends and potential solutions for ITC’s data collection, management, and analysis needs. g) Identify or adopt guidance for remote data collection and related adaptations in response to COVID-19 and any similar future disruptions.
<p>Project data management</p> <p>Closely related to data collection, data management plays a critical role in project M&E at ITC, encompassing processes related to storing, organizing, and maintaining data collected so that it can be used in a timely and reliable manner.</p> <p>ITC’s has a draft strategy paper for a corporate data management with a vision, “to build a corporate data management strategy for facilitating reporting, improving client management and strengthening ITC’s business intelligence informing corporate thought leadership initiatives and the design of trade-related technical assistance.”</p> <p>ITC’s Strategic Plan identifies a knowledge management strategy as a key priority, which would reinforce its data management. However, while some progress has been made in knowledge management, an ITC knowledge management strategy remains unachieved.</p> <p>Key informants noted that ITC has an excessive quantity of data that is siloed and not shared and used as well as it should be.</p> <p>The New Project Portal (NPP) is a huge step forward for ITC’s data management, but multiple issues were identified, including: NPP reporting requirements are heavy, time consuming and therefore a burden for project management; NPP is useful as an information</p>	<p>ITC recognizes the value of, and has invested in data management, but significant work remains.</p> <p>ITC is particularly challenged by excessive layers of nested information that can be more efficiently managed for sharing and use.</p> <p>While the NPP is an important accomplishment for ITC’s data management, it has evolved to a certain degree organically, challenging its coherency, understanding, and meaningful use for project M&E.</p>	<p>7. <u>Accelerate ITC’s development of a centralized data management system to support standardized protocols, mechanisms, and IT for data collection, analysis, reporting and use.</u></p> <p>Examples of actions ITC can consider to improve project management as it relates to M&E include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Per the Integra Review (2020), “Develop and rely on a centralized data management system instead of individual component-level approaches.” b) Review/revise the NPP with attention to streamlining elements to include only what is “necessary and sufficient” in a simple, user-friendly format. c) Build understanding for and incentivize timely and reliable data management through an overall project management guidance and capacity development program (see Rec 10). d) Complement the ITC corporate data management strategy with a knowledge management strategy, which is identified as an objective in the ITC Strategic Plan. e) Develop a data management/knowledge map to examine the organization’s explicit and tacit management/knowledge assets and deficits and inform how knowledge is being generated, managed, and used to contribute to ITC objectives. This can be

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<p>depository, but not as a project management tool; NPP organizational structure is not intuitive and user-friendly, with excessive tabs and content that overlap or duplicate at times, making content “piecemeal and redundant”; project teams often use self-generated spreadsheets with the added burden of transferring to the NPP.</p>		<p>done <i>after</i> ITC new 5-year strategic plan is developed, so that the knowledge map’s structure and content can best serve the upcoming strategic objectives.</p> <p>f) Consider engaging a Data/Knowledge Manager to lead and coordinate related strategy development and implementation for a coherent, coordinated approach to ITC’s internal and external data/knowledge management, sharing and use.</p>
<p>Project data verification and quality control</p> <p>Data verification is not formalized in ITC’s project management protocol, (i.e., data quality audits were not identified in primary data collection), but left primarily to the discretion of PMs and Section Chiefs to review and approve results.</p> <p>Primary data collection highlight challenges to verify project data due to insufficient time and procedural understanding to support validating data sources.</p> <p>Data validation was identified easier for projects with concrete deliverables, and counts of deliverables (e.g., # trainees) versus percentages (e.g., % female trainees).</p>	<p>Given the focus on the need for reliable and timely evidence-based results measurement, data quality control is a key element in the M&E system that requires more attention.</p> <p>Project data verification is ad hoc and not firmly established or practiced at ITC.</p> <p>It is worth noting that data verification can also support the improvement of, and capacity development for reliable project monitoring.</p>	<p>8. <u>Upgrade data quality control for monitoring that supports reliable and accountable project reporting.</u></p> <p>Examples of actions ITC can consider to improve project data verification and quality control include:</p> <p>a) Ensure project management roles and responsibilities clearly identify protocol for data quality and validation, supported by the Responsibilities column in the current results planning/monitoring table (related to Rec 6.b).</p> <p>b) Consider commissioning and shadowing an external project data quality exercise from which to build internal ITC capacity to conduct its own data quality audits.</p> <p>c) Lighter data quality checks can be combined with other mission purposes during country trips with appropriate ITC personnel.</p>
<p>Project Evaluation</p> <p>ITC has a notable selection of resources supporting evaluation good practice, including an evaluation policy, guidelines, work programs, and training module.</p> <p>However, it currently does not have an evaluation strategy, and its evaluation policy is over 5 years old, developed prior to the adoption of the UN’s 2030 Agenda, and other important developments, such as the arrival of the 2019 revision of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria, and the arrival of COVID-19 and its implications for evaluation.</p> <p>IEU is aware of the uptake and importance of complexity adaptive analysis, (i.e., highlighted in its 2019 AESR), and is also pursuing</p>	<p>There is general consensus that ITC’s evaluation function is useful and used, but there are areas for improvement related to meaningful use of evaluation that go beyond discrete projects and timeframes to a more holistic approach that supports evaluation use across projects for more coordinated assessment that supports corporate objectives.</p>	<p>9. <u>Incorporate more complexity adaptive evaluation methods into IEU’s strategy and practice to support more integrated, real-time, and longitudinal approaches to evaluation and use.</u></p> <p>For example, IEU can consider:</p> <p>a) Continued investment in Ex-post Sustainability Reviews so their scope extends beyond the confines of the project cycle to assess longitudinal impact, including unintended as well as intended consequences.</p> <p>b) Consider a range of complexity adaptive methods for evaluation, such as Developmental Evaluation, Realist Evaluation, Outcome Harvesting, and Contribution Analysis, (i.e. see Supporting Adaptive Management: M&E Tools and Approaches).</p>

Findings	Conclusion	Recommendation
<p>more longitudinal evaluations that can support complex systems analysis in the piloting of its Ex-post Sustainability Reviews.</p> <p>Self-evaluation and project completion reports are utilized, but evaluation is otherwise restricted to more conventional, independent exercises limited in timeframe and complexity adaptive methodologies</p>		<p>c) Update ITC’s Evaluation Policy in alignment with its forthcoming 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, incorporating new protocol related to a complex, adaptive evaluation.</p> <p>d) Articulate an evaluation strategy to map a coherent, holistic approach that identifies evaluation and research priorities that examine more challenging or longitudinal priority areas for ITC.</p>
<p>M&E Capacity Development</p> <p>ITC has a range of capacity development resource for, and related to project M&E. However, there is no overall guidance (“cockpit”) providing an overview of project management, a point underscored as a shortcoming during primary data collection.</p> <p>There is an assortment of stand-alone guidelines, training modules, and related resources, but while some linkages exist, this is more the exception than the norm, and collectively these resources do not reinforce a coherent overview of project management and M&E as a core element.</p> <p>Related, ITC has a range of training modules to support project management, but these also fall short of providing a comprehensive, coherent overview of project management and related M&E. Furthermore, the accessibility to the actual training delivery is currently limited to one medium, real-time online delivery, which restricts accessibility.</p> <p>In addition to existing M&E guidance already offered by ITC, an example of additional capacity development resource to consider with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is for adapting data collection though practices such as remote methods to maintain activities to the extent possible without taking unnecessary risks.</p>	<p>ITC has made a considerable investment into its capacity development resources, but a review of training modules and guidance complemented by informant interviews, highlights that the capacity development system can be improved, primarily through a more coherent approach organized according to the interrelated elements of project management.</p> <p>As M&E is central to project management, it is important that M&E guidance and training is not siloed from but incorporated into core PM management resources.</p>	<p>10. <u>Update and streamline capacity development resources as part of an overall Project Management Toolkit that supports M&E and related functions.</u></p> <p>This includes updating content to better consolidate existing resources to avoid overlap and duplication, reinforce a systemic understanding and approach to the interrelationships and linkages between capacity areas, and helping learners better access, navigate, and use resources.</p> <p>For example, ITC can consider:</p> <p>a) A comprehensive online Project Management Toolkit that serves as a one-stop, virtual resource with a coherent hyperlinked Table of Contents that serves as a summary of key topics and underlying resources in a user-friendly manner that facilitates systemic understanding and ability to navigate to resources.</p> <p>b) Provide a broader range of online asynchronous and synchronous training webinars, as well as face2face learning opportunities, that offers wider accessibility to accommodate different schedules, learning styles and learning purposes, (i.e., record and archive online M&E webinars for viewing at a later time, supporting self-directed, asynchronous learning that better accommodates people’s personal schedules).</p> <p>c) Per Rec 6.g, identify or adopt guidance for remote data collection and related adaptations in response to COVID-19 and any similar future disruptions.</p>