Headlight
CONSULTING SERVICES

Adaptive Action Planning Workshop

FACILITATORS' GUIDE
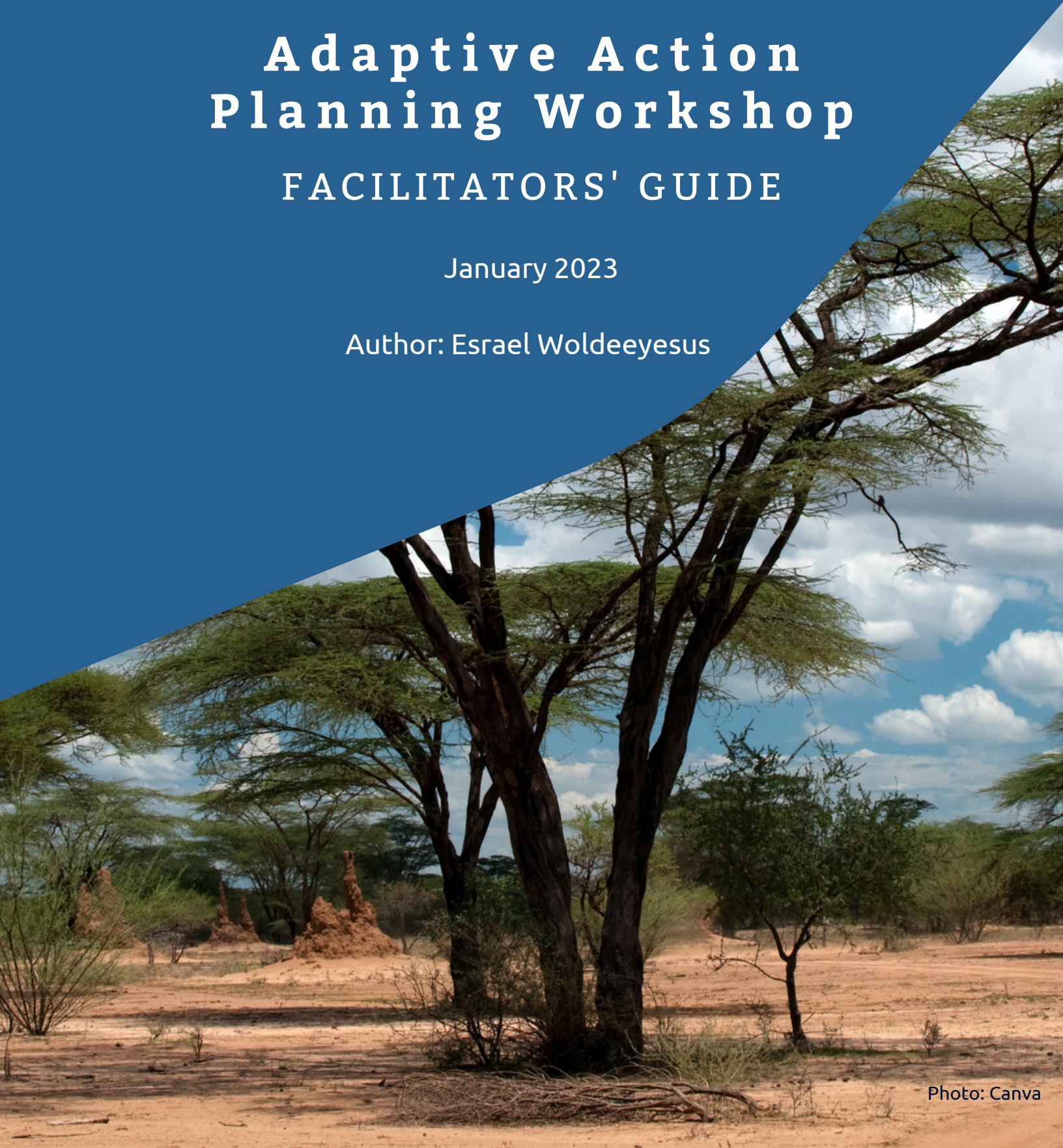
January 2023

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Photo: Canva

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INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS AN ADAPTIVE ACTION PLANNING WORKSHOP?

At Headlight Consulting Services LLC (Headlight), one of our offerings to clients is implementing Developmental Evaluations (DE), an evaluation approach well-suited to complex environments and used to facilitate continuous and data-driven collaboration, learning, and adaptation (CLA). Our recent blog on DEs explains the fundamentals of this approach, including the process of evidence building, identification of use-focused analysis and products, and facilitation of adaptations.

As we facilitate adaptations, conducting an Adaptive Action Planning Workshop is an approach that brings stakeholders together to prioritize recommendations, contextualize adaptations, identify deliverables, share roles and responsibilities, and determine next steps and follow-up items to identify further support and implement chosen adaptive actions.

PURPOSE: WHY IS AN ADAPTIVE ACTION PLANNING WORKSHOP USEFUL?

Humanitarian and development projects, specifically projects funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Ethiopia, are implemented in an increasingly volatile and complex operating environment characterized by multiple shocks such as conflict, disease outbreaks (e.g. COVID-19), flooding, drought, and desert locust. These shocks can impact current projects and threaten the development gains made by previous interventions. The Center for Disaster Philanthropy states that humanitarian responses have become more complicated in recent decades. The complexity of problems and fluid operating contexts affect project assumptions, time, budget, and scope, which requires the flexibility of projects to identify, design, and adapt alternative solutions throughout implementation with informed decisions and adjustments. This complexity and the need for flexibility have increased the importance of Adaptive Management.[1] The question is how to intentionally and effectively implement adaptations.

An Adaptive Action Planning Workshop is a powerful approach to improving intentionality toward Adaptive Management in a systematic fashion. This guide is built based on successful practices and lessons that we have drawn from our adaptation support to USAID/Ethiopia and its implementing partners. The guide explains essential steps and important considerations to support stakeholders in organizing effective adaptation workshops as they operate in a complex environment, implement innovations or recommendations and manage changes.

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1 The USAID ADS 201.6, defines adaptive management as, "an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context."

PROTOCOL: HOW TO FACILITATE AN EFFECTIVE ADAPTIVE ACTION PLANNING WORKSHOP?

We can categorize the key steps of organizing and facilitating an Adaptive Action Planning Workshop into three phases: before, during, and after the workshop. The protocol below provides a step-by-step process for each phase.

Phase 1: Before the Workshop

1   Before the Adaptive Action Planning Workshop, share the evidence (e.g., evaluation report) that explains the findings, conclusions, and recommendations to relevant stakeholders. In your email (see Annex 1 for a sample), request a meeting to brief them on the report. The meeting might take one hour or more, depending on the size of the evidence generated and the engagement during the Q&A session. At the end of the meeting, it is good to briefly explain the upcoming adaptation workshop needed to take recommendations into action.

2   A week or two after the briefing with partners, send a follow-up email (sample in Annex 2) and request to organize an Adaptive Action Planning Workshop for targeted participants, those who are best suited to act on the recommendations. You may need to conduct multiple workshops for a single evaluation report if it serves different audiences who would prioritize and act on different adaptive strategies in response to the findings. To avoid any possible misunderstanding, it is good to re-share the evidence that has the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. In your email, you should propose or request the best date and time for participants. The adaptation workshop needs at least a half day (four hours). If there are detailed discussions and active participation, even a half day might not allow sufficient time to plan adaptation actions for more than two recommendations.

   a.   Request partners' interest if they want to have the workshop virtually (e.g., via Google Meet, Skype, or Microsoft teams) or in-person. If in-person, do they prefer to come to your office, or would they like to host the workshop? You can include such options when you reply (sample email in Annex 3) to partners' emails as they confirm their interest in the adaptation workshop.

   b.   Create a filing system to store files and workshop-related documents in one place, preferably that is accessible by all relevant team members. For instance, consider using a cloud storage system such as Google Drive or Dropbox.

   c.   After you get adequate clarity on the workshop details, such as the number of participants and logistics, send a calendar invite mentioning the workshop topic, date, time, and venue. Please note that, even if the workshop is in-person, the calendar invites help participants add the event to their calendar and get a notification.

d. If your company is the host, clearly communicate how many people your conference room can accommodate and reserve the room in advance. If the host is the partner, communicate with them how many people from your company will participate and who will be facilitating the workshop. Usually, the host will provide the refreshment, but confirm with the partner if that is the case or if there is a different expectation.

3 After you fix the date and time for the workshop, support participants to reflect on the key recommendations before the workshop by sharing a pre-workshop adaptation tool. Annex 4 includes a sample tool that can help participants quickly review recommendations, read the details of findings based on the page numbers provided, and reflect on the recommendations' importance and feasibility to their context. It is good to share a pre-workshop adaptation guide or the sample tool so everyone in the workshop comes with a prior understanding of the evidence and recommendations that are most applicable to their work and possible actions needed.

4 If all adaptation workshop participants attended a prior briefing and are familiar with the evaluation report, it might seem feasible to dive into recommendation prioritization and then an adaptation planning session. However, it is good to check if there is any person who missed the previous meeting or if those who attended the last meeting would like a short refresher presentation at the beginning of the adaptation workshop. If requested, limit the presentation of the report to less than 30 minutes to dedicate the remaining time to the main agenda of the workshop, which is adaptation planning.

a. If participants are interested in getting an evidence refresh presentation, you should check if they have any preference for a particular topic, finding, or recommendation that they would like to look deeper into. For example, partners might be interested in discussing the methodology, sampling size, specific context, or a particular finding and recommendation. These preferences will help you know which topic you should spend more time on for explanation and Q&A. The presentation might contain agenda items such as an introduction of participants, details of the evidence report, Q&A, and adaptive action planning.

5 Prepare and share a schedule/agenda (example in Annex 5) of the workshop, which clearly shows topics, timing, and role of workshop facilitators. An agenda should be sent to the participants ahead of time, ideally at least a few days before the workshop. And separately, a facilitator's guide should be developed by the facilitator/team with guidance on how they will lead and conduct each session, roles and responsibilities, etc. (Annex 6 includes an example). This second document should be internal.

6 **If in-person**: Prepare workshop materials such as sticky notes, flip charts, a projector, scotch tape, and markers. Print any relevant document for the workshop, such as the workshop schedule and list of recommendations (ideally print it on color papers that match the exercise sticky notes color that you will use to prioritize recommendations).

7   **If virtual**: make a copy of the <u>Mural template</u> and customize it for the workshop. <u>Mural</u> is an online platform that connects teams in real-time with a digital whiteboard and collaboration features.

8   Prepare your presentation and ensure it is not too long for the allotted time. Please allow enough time for the recommendation prioritization and actual adaptation planning since that is the main objective of the meeting.

9   Install the <u>Post-it</u> app on your mobile to take pictures of sticky notes from the in-person workshop. It helps to convert notes taken on sticky notes to a copyable PDF format. But do not rely on it only, as sometimes you may find unreadable content. Therefore, it is advisable to take quality pictures as a backup.

Phase 2: During the Workshop ● ● ● ● ●

1   Set aside three to five minutes to let participants introduce each other. Ask participants to share their name, organization, position, and expectation for the workshop.

2   Present your evidence report, including findings, conclusions, and recommendations if the participants requested an evidence refresh discussion.

3   Set aside 10 minutes for questions and another 10 minutes for discussion or reflection. The discussion questions might include:

   • What findings felt unclear? What additional information will help make the evidence accessible and useful to you?

   • What findings/conclusions were surprising or unexpected, if any?

   • What other actions or recommendations do you all see as useful that we did not propose?

4   Facilitate recommendation prioritization using the importance vs. feasibility graph at the top of the <u>Mural template</u>. Here you can ask participants to discuss and place their sticky notes to show which recommendations they think are the most important and most feasible; most important and least feasible; least important and most feasible; and least important and least feasible. It would help if you organized your recommendations with separate colors to make it easy for participants to use the corresponding color sticky notes for their prioritization. For instance, if your first recommendation is on a green sticky note, and if a participant thinks that is the most important and the most feasible, they will place their green sticky note on the **top right** corner of the graph. Before moving to the adaptation exercise, you will let the participants discuss and agree on the prioritized recommendations. This discussion allows participants to debate on a recommendation that might be more important but less feasible and to ensure that it is prioritized due to its significance for the project. As a result, they could opt to discuss different avenues that make it work.

5 Next, discuss one prioritized recommendation at a time to identify a feasible adaptation implementation plan. For each prioritized recommendation, you will want to discuss all the adaptive action details, which are:

- **Adaptive Actions Identified**: Help participants to break down a recommendation into manageable smaller tasks. You can ask what actions they can think of to realize the recommendation or the intended improvement. What do they need to change? What do they need to start doing? What are the details of actions to make this recommendation happen? If participants are silent, ask if they need clarification, pick an icebreaker, give examples, or ask them to think again about the details that made them prioritize this recommendation.

- **How Will We Know If the Adaptation Worked**: Ask what kind of deliverables or results they would like to see after acting on the recommendations. These might be changes expressed quantitatively (number, percent, etc.) or qualitatively (updated, functional, certified, etc.). For instance, if the adaptation is to improve the quality of monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) by adding outcome-level indicators, the key result could be, "number of outcome-level indicators added to the MEL system and reported on for at least two quarters." Another example could be a recommendation related to improving internal coordination. We would know this adaptation worked if there is an increased percentage of coordination meetings attended and participated by different teams.

    - In terms of improving the quality of reporting on such adaptations, stakeholders can consider reports (e.g., annual reports) as having better quality if substantiated with Emergent Outcome Harvesting results, Most Significant Change stories, and/or other learning activities such as findings from After Action Reviews and Pause and Reflect Sessions.

- **Who Will Need to Participate**: It is essential to identify which actors or individuals need to be involved to make the adaptive actions happen. Those might include technical specialists to lead the activity or to be consulted, decision-makers or approvers, and people that need to be informed. The facilitator(s) can ask participants who should do what and with whom.

- **What Resources Do We Currently Have or What Is Missing**: The facilitator(s) should help workshop participants brainstorm if the team has the resources (time, funding, tools, etc.) needed to implement the recommended adaptations or if additional resources are required. The facilitator(s) may ask what resources do the participants need to take action. Is it planned/budgeted? Are there alternative sources to increase budget, such as redirection of funds?

- **What are Potential Obstacles**: Are there any potential challenges that could affect the adaptation effort? For instance, insecurity, lack of technical knowledge, shortage of logistics, poor infrastructure, and political will. The facilitator(s) can start the discussion by asking if the participants can begin working on agreed actions tomorrow, next week, or next month. If not, why not? Here it is good to focus on the challenges/obstacles for the adaptation implementation, not overall project implementation, though there are cases where the obstacles/challenges may be the same.

- **Taking Action and Accountability**: This is a continuation of the activity you did under "who will need to participate." At this stage, you can build a Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, and Informed (RACI) matrix in the workshop, if you have time, or you can draft that after the workshop, add the information in the Adaptive Action Plan, and share it with the team for their review.

- **Project Planning**: Ideally, it is good to focus on the actions that the participants can implement in a short-term period for quick adaptation, such as actions within three months. But actions that must take more than three months can also be noted and added to the plan. After the workshop, you can transfer the timeline discussion from the Mural or flip chart to the Adaptive Action Plan.

6   Take pictures of the workshop activities and take group photos if participants are willing.

Phase 3: After the Workshop

1   Finalize the Adaptive Action Plan by adding information or refining the list of agreed steps with deliverables, due dates/timeline, and RACI.

2   Check if all relevant files are saved in the associated folder, for instance, Google Drive.

3   Write a follow-up email in two to three days to appreciate participants for attending, share a draft refined Adaptive Action Plan for their review, and revert with the final one for documentation and supportive follow-up.

4   Write follow-up emails (sample in Annex 9) to check the progress of agreed action items in a month, two months, and three months and check if partners need more support. Sometimes, the recommendations might not work as anticipated or need modifications due to context changes, and the partner may need to readapt, which is fine. The column "Adaptation Progress Update as of DD MM YYYY" is a space to note such changes and additional support needed will be noted in column "Any further support needed from DE, MEL Manager, CLA Team Lead" in the Adaptive Action Plan.

5   Prepare an Adaptive Action Plan and Progress Update (template in Annex 10) and share them with relevant stakeholders as needed.

6   The facilitator(s) should keep track of adaptations by developing and regularly updating an Adaptations Tracker (sample template in Annex 11). This tool is especially important if you have more than one adaptation workshop with several adaptations to follow up on, so you can consolidate all action items in one document.

Resources

For in-person workshop

- **What**: Flip charts, marker, sticky notes, projector, PowerPoint presentation/slide, photo camera, Post-it app on your mobile

- **Who**: At least one facilitator and one note taker

For virtual or remote workshop

- **What**: Mural, PowerPoint presentation/slide, virtual meeting platform (video-communication service) such as Google Meet, Skype, or Microsoft teams

- **Who**: At least one facilitator and one note taker

Annexes

Annex 1: Email to Request Partners to Organize a Briefing and Discuss the Evidence Report

Subject: (Title) Evaluation Report

Dear_____,

We are excited to share the (title) Evaluation Final Report. Thank you to everyone who participated in this evaluation by sharing secondary documents with our team, participating in key informant interviews, etc. Please feel free to share this more broadly across your organization, and do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or comments on the report.

We are happy to organize a one-and-a-half-hour meeting to discuss the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Could we plan this meeting for next week? Please let us know which date and time work best for you. (Alternatively, you can also propose dates and times)

We are looking forward to continued adaptation support!

Best regards,

Email Signature

Annex 2: Email to Organize Adaptive Action Planning Workshop

Subject: Scheduling for Adaptive Action Planning Workshop

Dear_____

Thank you for participating during the briefing on the (title) evaluation report (link or attach the document). As we mentioned at the end of the meeting, we would like to find a time to have an Adaptive Action Planning Workshop with your organization (alternatively, you can mention a team) to reflect on this new evidence and identify any beneficial adaptations to put evidence into action. A half-day session (three to four hours) is enough to do adaptation action planning for the major prioritized recommendations.

If this is of interest, please let us know the date and timing that works for you. (You can also suggest some options)

We are looking forward to continued adaptation support!

Best regards,

Email Signature

Annex 3: Follow-up Email for Detailed Workshop Planning

Subject: Scheduling for Adaptive Action Planning Workshop

Dear_____

Thanks for getting back to me and for making time for the workshop.

June 30th (next week) in the morning works for us. Let's say from 9:00am - 12:00pm. Do you prefer to have the workshop in-person or virtually?

If in-person, depending on your preference, we can have the workshop in our office at (address), or we can come to your office.

Please let me know your preference.

Best regards,

Email Signature

Annex 4: Pre-Workshop Adaptation Guide

The Pre-Workshop Adaptation Guide is intended to inform and guide the participants on what steps we need to use when conducting an Adaptive Action Planning Workshop. The facilitator should provide the report's executive summary that explains the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Then, in a separate spreadsheet tab (as shown below), list the recommendations, include the link to the full report, and indicate the relevant pages for each recommendation. Sharing this information in advance of the workshop will help orient participants to the material and enable them to fill out the columns with their reflections on the recommendations (from the fourth to the seventh column).

	Completed by DE team or workshop facilitator		Completed by participants before the workshop			
Instructions	What are the recommendations proposed for adaptation? Briefly explain the recommendations in this column.	In this column, specify page numbers where the details of findings and conclusions to the respective recommendation is found. Link the full report here.	What is the initial reflection of the participants on the recommendations? How relevant are they to the context? What more information do they have?	Participants rate importance of recommendations: low, medium, or high.	Participants rate how feasible the recommendation is to implement (in terms of money, human resources, technical capacity, etc.): low, medium, or high.	Participants rate the recommendations as low, medium, or high based on both perceived impact/importance and feasibility. A recommendation with "highest" impact and "highest" feasibility will be prioritized first.
S.N	List of recommendations	Base Findings & Conclusion [page #]	Workshop participant reflection on the recommendation	Impact / Importance	Feasibility of Adaptation	Prioritization (Order/rank of prioritized recommendations)
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						

Annex 5: Adaptive Action Planning Workshop Agenda

(Organization/Project Name) Team Adaptive Action Planning Workshop

Objectives:
- Familiarize participants with the evaluation
  - Findings
  - Conclusions
  - Recommendations
- Respond to Clarifying Questions
- Identify Best-Fit Recommendations and Adaptations Support

(Organization/Project Name) Team Adaptive Action Planning Workshop: Thursday, July 7, 1-5pm EAT	
Time (EAT)	**Session**
1:00-1:05pm	Team Member A: Introduction of participants
1:05-1:15pm	Team Member A: Introduction and Approach
1:15-1:45pm	Team Member A: Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations
1:45-1:55pm	Team Member B: Q&A
1:55-2:05pm	Team Member B: Discussion
2:05 - 4:55pm	Team Member A: Recommendations Prioritization and Adaptation
4:55 - 5:00pm	Team Member B: Next Steps

Resources:
- Evidence slides
- Recommendation prioritization and Adaptation Action Guide
- Mural Board
- Evaluation Report

Annex 6: Workshop Facilitation Guide

(Organization/Project Name) Team Adaptive Action Planning Workshop Facilitation Guide

Objectives:
- Familiarize participants with the evaluation
  - Findings
  - Conclusions
  - Recommendations
- Respond to Clarifying Questions
- Identify Best-Fit Recommendations and Adaptations Support

Target Audience:
- Description and number of participants

Materials needed:
- In-person workshop
  - E.g., two Flipcharts (sticky preferable), 15 black sharpies, 15 colored sharpies, 30 sticky pads of various colors (regular size), one package cardstock (colored preferable), voting sticky dots (three colors at least; 90 dots of each color), one roll of double-sided tape, 35 name tags, and any relevant printed materials.

- Virtual workshop
  - E.g., Internet, Mural template with recommendation bank, PowerPoint presentation, laptop, and quiet and bright meeting room.

Room Setup (in-person):
- Team member A: Test PowerPoint presentation and screen
- Team member B: Arrange tables and chairs
- Team member B: Make feasibility/importance rating exercise flipchart
- Team member A&B: Make sure we have all materials lined up
- Team member B: Prepare Ground Rules and feedback flipcharts
- Team member A: Set up supply table and organize handouts
- Team member A: Ensure each table has agendas, sharpies, sticky notes, and voting sticky dots

Resources:
- Evidence slides
- Recommendation prioritization and Adaptation Action Guide
- Mural Board
- Evaluation Report

(Organization/Project Name) Team Adaptive Action Planning Workshop: Thursday, July 7, 1-5pm EAT			
Time (EAT)	**Activity**	**Facilitation Guidance**	**Notes for team**
12:00-1:00pm	Set-up	Team members A&B will test the PowerPoint presentation and screen, set up tables, chairs, and flipcharts (including the importance/feasibility diagram, ground rules, etc.).	Team members A&B arrive at 11:30am.
1:00-1:05pm	Introduction of participants	Team Member A welcomes everyone to the workshop and introduces him/herself. Asks if people have any issues with note-taking, pictures, or recording of interactive exercises. For introductions, go round robin and ask everyone to give their name, team/organization, and position.	
1:05-1:15pm	Introduction and Approach	Team Member A provides an overview of the workshop agenda and overall approach to the workshop.	
1:15-1:45pm	Key Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations	Team Member A presents key findings, conclusions, and recommendations from the evaluation report.	
1:45-1:55pm	Q&A	Team Member B facilitates Q&A.	If virtual, remember to check the chat box for any questions or comments placed there.
1:55-2:05pm	Discussion	Team Member B leads the group in a discussion on the presentation and transitions into the next phase of the workshop.	
2:05 - 4:55pm	Recommendations Prioritization and Adaptation	Team Member A facilitates the prioritization and adaptation planning by following the steps in this facilitation guide – beginning with the recommendation bank and prioritization exercise, then moving through the action planning for the prioritized recommendations.	E.g., Have a standing flipchart with recommendation bank and importance vs. feasibility chart with markers set up for this.
4:55 - 5:00pm	Next Steps	Team Member B shares the next steps including what the participants can expect for follow-up.	

Annex 7: Mural Template to Facilitate Recommendation Prioritization and Adaptation

The Mural template depicted in the screenshot below can be found <u>here</u> and copied for future use.
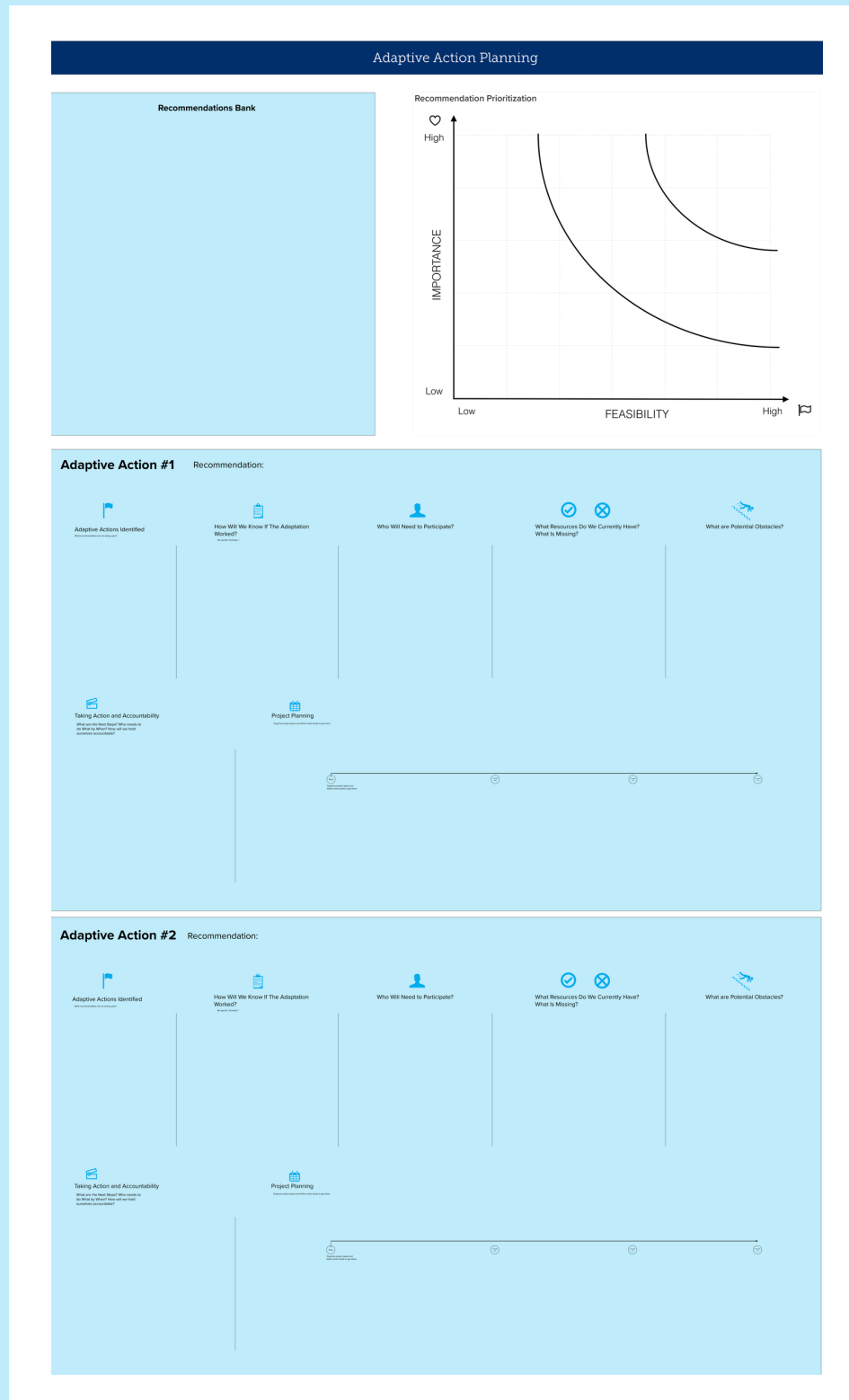
Annex 8: Detailed Adaptive Action Plan Template

After the Adaptive Action Planning Workshop, this Adaptive Action Plan tool can help you organize the prioritized recommendations with agreed actions (e.g., review MEL plan), deliverables (e.g., updated indicator tracking table), due dates, and who will do what. You can also note any progress updates, where more support is needed for the adaptation to work, and supporting evidence. If the context changes and stakeholders identify a need to revisit recommendations, you can note that change in the last column.

Adaptive Action Plan														
Prioritized Recommendation	Agreed Actions	Agreed Deliverables	Due Date	Timeline			Responsible	Accountable	Consulted	Informed	Progress Update as of DD MM YYYY	Further support needed from DE, MEL manager, etc.?	Documents or evidence shared	Does the recommendation need to be revisited? If yes, explain
				Now	1 month	3 months								

Annex 9: Follow-up Email on the Progress of Adaptive Action Plan Implementation

Subject: Follow-up: Progress on Adaptive Action Plan Implementation

Dear_____,

I hope all is well with you.

It has been a month/2 months/3 months since we had the Adaptive Action Planning Workshop and it is a good time to share updates. Additionally, we would like to know if any support or further adaptations are needed. Please fill out the updates you have in the Adaptive Action Plan table (share the table you have created based on the example in Annex 8) and revert to me.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Email Signature

Annex 10: Adaptive Action Plan and Progress Update Reporting Template

<u>Title of the Evaluation</u>

<u>Project Name</u>: Adaptive Action Plan and Progress Update

Overview

What to include:
- Purpose of the report
- Link for the evaluation report full document
- Brief introduction of the Adaptive Action Planning Workshop conducted
- What is included in the report/update

References:
- E.g., Mural link, flip chart photo, evaluation report, PowerPoint presentation

Adaptation #1: Write the first prioritized recommendation

Description of Adaptation:
- What were the details of the recommendations provided?

Recent Supportive Evidence:
- E.g., page numbers from the evaluation report or presentation slide

Action Steps:
- List the steps agreed upon to take each recommendation into action (link to the <u>Adaptive Action Plan</u>).

Timeline:

Planned Action	Deliverables	Updates by Project Team Name (as of MM, YYYY)
Month		
Month		
Month		

Annex 11: Sample Adaptation Tracker

The Sample Adaptation Tracker tool is intended to help you keep organized and track the progress of each adaptive action, especially when there are multiple adaptive actions. You can include all the adaptive actions in this table or spreadsheet and track the progress in one document. The main information to track includes the status of adaptations, the results due to the adaptation, and the evidence of adaptation.

What are the identified and agreed upon adaptive actions?	What is the justification for this adaptation? Why is this important?	Who will lead the implementation?	When this adaptation will be completed?	What is the status? (i.e., not yet started, progressing, completed, etc.)	What results are achieved due to the adaptation?	How do you know the adaptation is implemented and worked?	Additional information	Add dates and updates here as they come
Adaptive Actions	**Rationale for Adaptations**	**Responsible Party**	**Anticipated Timeline**	**Status**	**Output/Outcomes**	**Evidence of Adaptation**	**Notes**	**MM, YYYY Updates**

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