

Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish

Semi-Annual Report October 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024 Cooperative Agreement 7200AA18CA003







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Prepared for:

Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR)
Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish (Fish Innovation Lab)
Bureau for Resilience, Environment and Food Security (REFS)
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

Prepared by:

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Acronyms

AOR Agreement Officer's Representative

DDL Development Data Library

DIS Development Information Solution

EMMP Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan

EAB External Advisory Board

GFSRS Global Food Security Research Strategy

GFSS Global Food Security Strategy

ME Management Entity

MSI Minority Serving Institution
MSU Mississippi State University

MEL Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

NGO Nongovernmental Organizations

PI Principal Investigator

REFS Bureau for Resilience, Environment and Food Security

RFA Request for Applications

SSA Startup and Scaling Activities

USAID U.S. Agency for International Development

Executive Summary

The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish (Fish Innovation Lab) was awarded Phase 2 funding in September 2023 after successful completion of Phase 1 activities. The geographic coverage of the Fish Innovation Lab for Phase 2 includes the following four primary focus countries: Bangladesh, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia. Other high-priority countries include Ghana, Madagascar, Nepal, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda. Fish Innovation Lab accomplishments in the first six months of Phase 2 included completion of Phase 1 closeout and final reporting; development and submission of the Phase 2 Year 1 Work Plan, the Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Plan, and the Data Management Plan; development of a plan for engagement and recruiting of U.S. Minority Serving Institutions; selection of six contingent Startup and Scaling Activities; collaborative development of the Phase 2 Request for Applications; preparation for indicator reporting for Phase 2 Year 1 activities; and engagement with USAID Missions from focus countries by virtual meetings.

Fish Innovation Lab Summary

The Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Fish (Fish Innovation Lab) is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The Fish Innovation Lab aims to alleviate poverty and improve nutrition, especially for marginalized populations, through the reliable and inclusive provision of nutrient-rich fish and other aquatic foods. In Phase 2, the Fish Innovation Lab adapted its programmatic efforts to respond to updates in the 2022–2026 U.S. Government Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS) and the Global Food Security Research Strategy (GFSRS). The targeted research areas in Phase 2 include

- 1) Climate-smart aquatic system innovations. Under this research area, the Fish Innovation Lab will develop technologies that enhance the capacity of fish farmers, fishers, and their communities to adapt to the accelerating effects of climate change while improving production systems to reduce emissions and enhance carbon storage in aquatic habitats. The Fish Innovation Lab will implement community-based and integrated research approaches to improve the productivity of aquaculture and fisheries systems and ensure social and environmental sustainability. This will facilitate improvements in farm efficiency and improve management of wild-caught fisheries that will yield social benefits and ecological savings, which are critical to improving climate adaptation.
- 2) Nutrition and food systems. This research area will generate evidence on improving human nutrition by using aquatic foods sustainably and equitably. Using a food systems approach will result in technologies, practices, and approaches that improve human nutrition by leveraging fish and other aquatic foods to enhance access to diverse diets, increasing food safety along the aquatic foods value chain, and promoting inclusive access to aquatic foods value chains.
- 3) Inclusive access to improved inputs. Access to quality and affordable seeds and feeds remains a problem for fish farmers, and the reliance on wild-caught fish for fish meal and fish oil continues to put pressure on fisheries. Therefore, the Fish Innovation Lab will prioritize research that enhances inclusive access to and benefits from quality feed and seed, including genetically improved seed. Research in this area will result in technologies and practices that improve inclusive access to inputs and help fish farmers reduce, manage, and mitigate risks to support resilient, prosperous, and well-nourished individuals, households, and communities. For fishers, this research will support the development of technologies, practices, and approaches that reduce pressure on fisheries. Fish farmers are also impacted by production losses due to poor husbandry and disease losses, an area that can be improved through research on fish health and

aquaculture biosecurity. Overall, research in this area will support income growth, improve diets, and promote natural resource conservation.

Theory of Change and Results Framework

The Fish Innovation Lab Theory of Change stipulates that: *IF* Fish Innovation Lab research and capacity strengthening activities develop scalable solutions in the areas of climate-smart aquatic system innovations, nutrition through increased consumption of safe aquatic foods (especially for marginalized groups), and inclusive access to improved inputs in the aquaculture and fisheries sectors, *AND* scaling partners facilitate adoption of these solutions, *THEN* goals of sustainable and climate-smart productivity, resilience to shocks and stress, inclusive market access, improved food security and livelihoods, and responsible aquatic resource management will be achieved.

All Fish Innovation Lab activities connect to this Theory of Change and include three approaches, as specified in the Fish Innovation Lab Results Framework:

- 1. **Research**. Impactful research results that promote sustainable and resilient aquatic resource management, contribute to carbon neutral productivity, enhance food safety and nutrition security, and improve the functionality of aquatic food systems.
- 2. **Capacity development**. Increased capacity of local partners to independently generate and transfer aquatic-foods-related knowledge, technologies, and innovations to end users (e.g., small-scale producers, fishers, and consumers).
- 3. **Adoption of innovation and scaling**. Increased adoption of innovations, technologies, and practices while expanding opportunities for scaling.

Management Entity

The Fish Innovation Lab is managed by Mississippi State University (MSU) and is housed in the Global Center for Aquatic Health and Food Security, which is affiliated with the College of Veterinary Medicine.

Members of the Management Entity

Mississippi State University:

- Mark Lawrence, Director
- Stephen Reichley, Deputy Director
- Kelly Stewart, Business Manager
- Laura Zseleczky, Communications Manager
- Masey Smith, Program Manager
- Gina Rico Mendez, Research and Learning Manager
- Alaina Dismukes, Communications Specialist

Management Entity (ME) partners support MSU in coordinating and managing Fish Innovation Lab initiatives and strategies. These partners include:

- Blue Aquaculture Consulting
 - o Gulam Hussain, Asia Regional Coordinator
- Mississippi State University
 - Peter Allen, Aquaculture Advisor
 - Mary Read-Wahidi, Gender Equity and Social Inclusion Specialist
- Pwani University
 - o Andrew Wamukota, Africa Regional Coordinator
- Texas State University

- o Madan Dey, Asia Regional Coordinator
- University of Rhode Island
 - o Glen Ricci, Capacity Development and Resilience Specialist
 - o Karen Kent, Fisheries Advisor
- Washington University in St. Louis
 - Lora Iannotti, Nutrition Advisor
- WorldFish
 - o Sunil Siriwardena, Africa Regional Coordinator

Progress Made by Fish Innovation Lab Activities During the Reporting Period

During the period of performance corresponding to this semiannual report, the Fish Innovation Lab ME worked on the identification and selection of the first group of research activities, named Startup and Scaling Activities (SSAs). However, research activities did not start during this reporting period; therefore, there are no activities to report on Objectives 1–3.

Objective 1: Climate-smart Aquatic System Innovations

Objective 2: Nutrition and Food Systems

Objective 3: Inclusive Access to Improved Inputs

Objective 4: Effectively Manage a Portfolio of Research-for-Development Activities in Aquaculture, Fisheries, and Nutrition

The Fish Innovation Lab ME manages its research-for-development portfolio to achieve knowledge and technology adoption by stakeholders, scaling, and impact. The Fish Innovation Lab ME implemented the following activities to support the launch and implementation of research-for-development activities:

Activity 4.1: Support the Fish Innovation Lab Research-for-Development Activities

Startup and Scaling Activities: In the first 6 months of Phase 2, the Fish Innovation Lab identified and contingently selected six Startup and Scaling Activities (SSAs) with consideration for effectively balancing the geographical and research-for-development areas. Based on established selection criteria, one of the selected SSAs is led by a Minority Serving Institution (MSI). The SSA evaluation rubric was developed and refined in collaboration with the ME regional coordinators, ME technical advisors, and cross-cutting theme specialists to select activities that align with the Fish Innovation Lab Theory of Change, have achievable implementation plans designed for success in the local context, and optimally incorporate crosscutting themes. These activities will investigate research questions under the three areas of inquiry and engage in strategic collaborative partnerships. The Fish Innovation Lab used ME and ME Partner feedback to guide the contingently selected SSAs through a co-creation process. This process was developed using USAID and Agreement Officer's Representative (AOR) feedback and guidance, inputs from the ME and ME Partners, and lessons learned from Phase 1 on how to best support implementing partners. The Fish Innovation Lab will seek USAID approval and finalize subawards for the six contingently selected SSAs during the second half of Phase 2, Year 1.

Request for Applications: The ME enhanced and refined the RFA process used in Phase 2 by incorporating feedback from internal pause-and-reflect moments from the Phase 1 RFA process. To inform the priorities for Fish Innovation Lab focus countries in the RFA, the ME collected reports from the regional coordinators based on stakeholder engagement and their experience and expertise in their respective focus regions. In addition, the ME met with focus country USAID Missions to incorporate their priorities into the RFA focus country priorities.

Following the first draft of the RFA, the ME developed a system to collect individual inputs from each ME Partner. Regional coordinators, technical advisors, and cross-cutting theme specialists individually submitted feedback to the ME. Then, the ME collated those inputs and reviewed for consistency. After review from all managers and directors, the ME submitted the RFA to the AOR for review. The AOR was requested to return feedback from USAID on April 1, 2024. Upon receipt of feedback from the AOR, the ME will hold an in-person review session to respond to and actively incorporate feedback from USAID.

Part of the RFA development process included the RFA dissemination plan. It incorporated dissemination strategies for the primary focus and other high-priority countries, as well as institutions of higher education in the U.S., including MSIs, and potential in-country partners. The regional coordinators each submitted dissemination lists relevant to the focus countries in their respective regions. The ME requested support from the USAID Missions in the four Fish Innovation Lab focus countries for dissemination of the RFA. The Fish Innovation Lab also promoted the anticipated RFA release at the World Fisheries Congress in Seattle, Washington, in March; the 2024 Aquaculture America conference in San Antonio, Texas, in February; and the Aquaculture Africa conference in Zambia in November 2023. Additional contacts were added to the RFA dissemination list and the Fish Innovation Lab newsletter at each of these conferences.

MSI Engagement Plan: The Fish Innovation Lab ME intentionally gathered relevant MSI contacts to disseminate the RFA. First, the ME met with other Innovation Labs for an informal consultation among the community of practice on how best to engage MSIs. The Fish Innovation Lab then contracted the Rutgers Center for Minority Serving Institutions to produce a list of MSIs with relevant capacity and potential interest to support the needs and research-for-development aims of the Fish Innovation Lab.

The ME will conduct a webinar on collaborative opportunities for MSIs to engage with the Fish Innovation Lab on April 16, 2024. The ME is actively developing the webinar content to address potential questions and concerns for researchers who have not worked with USAID or Innovation Labs. Background research was conducted to inform the webinar content, including "Current Landscape of Engagement Between USAID and Historically Black Colleges and Universities" (P. Tyson and S. Haile, Research Technical Assistance Center, 2021) and "A Consultancy Report Commission by the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture at Texas A&M University on behalf of the Feed the Future Innovation Lab for Small Scale Irrigation and submitted to the USAID Bureau for Resilience and Food Security" (L. Esters and V. Parker, Purdue University, 2020).

The Fish Innovation Lab program manager will attend the Association of 1890 Research Directors Research Symposium 2024 to engage and collaborate with 1890 Land Grant Universities, and to promote the Fish Innovation Lab RFA and MSI webinar.

These outputs are aligned with the projected outcomes to 1) actively engage MSIs in USAID and Innovation Lab work, 2) increase MSIs applying for Fish Innovation Lab opportunities, 3) increase MSIs receiving Fish Innovation Lab funding, and 4) provide equitable, inclusive pathways for the advancement and promotion of Innovation Lab opportunities.

<u>Fish Innovation Lab Meetings:</u> In Quarters 1 and 2 of Phase 2, Year 1, the ME met regularly with the AOR, alternate AOR, and USAID activity manager. The ME engaged the ME partners on specific strategic contributions. This included regional coordinator inputs to RFA preparation, ME partner review and refinement of the RFA, and ME partner input on RFA dissemination plans. The program manager and regional coordinators met in Quarter 2 to discuss the RFA dissemination plan, the anticipated SSA selection, monitoring and reporting, and

troubleshooting ideas for these anticipated activities. The program manager and the regional coordinators will meet regularly in Quarters 3 and 4. The program manager also met with the fisheries technical advisor to discuss anticipated activities for Phase 2. The research and learning manager met regularly with the cross-cutting themes specialists to brief them on the ongoing ME efforts, and to conduct strategic planning to support the implementation of the cross-cutting themes across the research-for-development portfolio. Representatives, including the director and/or deputy director, from the ME attended the World Aquaculture Society Aquaculture Africa 2023 and Aquaculture America 2024 meetings to present results from Phase 1 and disseminate plans for Phase 2. The communications manager also attended the 2024 World Fisheries Congress to promote the anticipated RFA release. These meetings provided opportunities for networking and information-sharing related to scalable technologies, and they will enable promotion of the upcoming RFA release.

External Advisory Board (EAB): The ME carefully deliberated the roles and responsibilities of the EAB across geographical, subject-matter expertise, and relevant backgrounds. The ME reviewed EAB selection and engagement during Phase 1 and outlined a detailed process for Phase 2, including consulting with USAID to determine how to best engage the EAB. The ME will select the EAB in Year 1 Quarter 3 and will hold the first EAB meeting by Year 1 Quarter 4.

<u>Phase 2 Year 2 Work Plan:</u> The ME will develop and submit the Year 2 Work Plan in Year 1, Quarters 3 and 4. SSA work plans will be included in the Year 2 Work Plan.

Fish Innovation Lab ME and ME Partner Roles: In the first quarter of Phase 2 Year 1, major efforts focused on completing the final reporting from Phase 1 of the Fish Innovation Lab and completing the preparations and planning for Phase 2. Final reporting for Phase 1 was completed by the ME and included the annual report for Phase 1 Year 5 and the 5-year summary report of Phase 1, including the overall outputs and outcomes. The final report was submitted to the USAID AOR on December 12, 2023. Annual indicator reporting was completed in the Development Information Solution (DIS) system, as well as Phase 1 Year 5 reporting for the Research Rack Up. Research datasets from Phase 1 research activities were linked to the USAID Development Data Library (DDL) and underwent review. For Phase 2, the indicators were identified following discussion and feedback from USAID. The Fish Innovation Lab Phase 2 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan and Data Management Plan were finalized and submitted to USAID on December 19, 2023.

In Quarter 2 of Phase 2 Year 1, the regional coordinators prepared and submitted reports on priorities related to aquaculture, fisheries, and nutrition in each region. As an example of the type of information received from the regional coordinators, the Bangladesh report included the following: i) genetic stock improvement and sperm banking of aquaculture species; ii) floodplain aquaculture and inland depressed waterbody management; iii) aquaculture safety issues, health management, and biosecurity; iv) application of low-cost novel aquaculture technology(s) in shrimp farming; v) development of mariculture under the concept of Blue Economy; vi) coastal aquaculture and fisheries resilience (including issues of climate change); vii) improvement of socioeconomic/livelihood and nutritional status of the coastal marginal communities through cage culture and aquaponic farming in coastal regions. Feedback from regional coordinators was reviewed, assessed, and incorporated into the RFA.

In Quarter 2 of Phase 2 Year 1, the ME solicited and received ten SSA concept notes, which were reviewed by the ME and ME Partners. The ME selected six SSAs, which then underwent an ME-managed co-creation process to refine programmatic activities and cross-cutting themes

for alignment with Fish Innovation Lab and USAID priorities. USAID approval of the six SSAs is pending.

In Quarter 1, the business manager completed USAID trainings, including "USAID Rules & Regulations: Grants & Cooperative Agreements," "USAID Subaward Management," "Assessing Your NGO Partners' Financial Health," and "Financial Management for Development Professionals," to better support the ME, ME partners, and the anticipated activities. The research and learning manager participated in a training on "Innovating and Scaling for Social Transformation in International Food Systems." The ME program manager will complete relevant USAID courses in Quarter 3.

Work toward gender and social inclusion, capacity development, and resilience with the crosscutting theme specialists in Phase 2 Year 1 included:

- Developing the strategy for internal collaboration and communication between the three cross-cutting theme areas;
- Assessing and determining context-based strategies to disseminate inclusive approaches on aquaculture and fisheries, following USAID's guidelines;
- Developing and implementing strategies to ensure research activities consider gender and social inclusion, capacity development, and resilience; and
- Assisting in the development of technical reports and policy briefs related to aquaculture and fisheries.

The research and learning manager started designing MEL and indicator training materials and modules to support activities.

Activity 4.2: Implement Plan for Engaging Missions and Attracting Associate and Buy-in Awards

Engage USAID Missions: In Quarters 1 and 2 of Phase 2 Year 1, the ME collaborated with the AOR to conduct virtual meetings with USAID Missions from Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia. During the meetings, the ME provided updates of activities, shared information on the upcoming RFA, and solicited Mission support for RFA dissemination in focus countries. The meetings also enabled Mission updates on new or revised Feed the Future country plans and zones of influence to enable alignment of Fish Innovation Lab activities. By the time of preparation of this report, the Feed the Future country plans and zones of influence in the primary focus and high-priority countries have not been released. This added a challenge to guiding the co-creation process with SSAs and finalizing the RFA due to uncertainty of the zones of influence in each country.

Activity 4.3: Undertake Communications Activities

The communications goals for Year 1 of Phase 2 are to 1) continue building awareness of the Fish Innovation Lab and its research results, and 2) facilitate internal communication among stakeholders to drive learning and networking. To achieve these goals, the Fish Innovation Lab implemented the following communications activities:

External Communications:

 Amplified key milestones via press releases, events, social media, the Fish Innovation Lab website, and other channels, including Agrilinks. Forty-two stories were posted on the Fish Innovation Lab website, including major announcements about the 5-year extension of the Fish Innovation Lab and the awarding of the BIFAD Award for Scientific Excellence to Fish Innovation Lab Nutrition Specialist Lora Iannotti. The Fish Innovation Lab also had 23 posts accepted on Agrilinks, including four posts for the Water Theme Month in January 2024.

- Showcased the Fish Innovation Lab at virtual and in-person conferences and workshops, including Aquaculture Africa (November 2023), Aquaculture America (February 2024), One Health Aquaculture Workshop in Ghana (February 2024), Eastern Fish Health Workshop (March 2024), and the World Fisheries Congress (March 2024).
- Developed and distributed electronic newsletters every other month (<u>November 2023</u>; <u>January 2024</u>; <u>March 2024</u>).
- Communicated selected lessons learned from research activities, including publication of 18 executive summaries of results and findings from Phase 1 activities and 11 presentations by the ME (see www.fishinnovationlab.msstate.edu/research/publications-presentations).
- Submitted Fish Innovation Lab contributions to Feed the Future and USAID-led learning and sharing opportunities, including two story pitches to the Feed the Future newsletter call for submissions in January 2024.

Internal Communications:

 Facilitated and managed virtual workspaces for internal communication and teambuilding.

Tools for Collecting and Sharing Data and Lessons Learned: The Fish Innovation Lab will continue to use the Piestar platform for collecting and organizing monitoring data from ME Partners and research activities in Phase 2. In Quarter 2 of Phase 2 Year 1, the ME began preparing Piestar RFx to receive RFA submissions. Piestar will also be used to collect research activity reporting on progress and achievements as well as disseminating and collecting subaward management information.

Activity 4.4: Conduct monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning

In Quarters 1 and 2, the research and learning manager updated and implemented the monitoring strategy and reporting through an updated monitoring system that includes seven performance indicators, which are consistent with the Fall 2023 updates to the Feed the Future Indicator Handbook. For the research and learning agenda, the ME initiated collaborative efforts with the cross-cutting themes specialists to determine the best strategy to support implementation of the critical cross-cutting themes among the SSAs. The ME refined Area-of-Inquiry-specific research questions and plans, specifically driving SSA review criteria and, in the future, informing RFA review criteria.

Future Work

The next steps for the ME, ME partners, and contingently selected SSAs and anticipated RFA activities are as follows:

Management Entity activities

- Support SSAs
 - Support SSA research teams in the implementation of research activities, including regular meetings to provide support and track progress.
 - Create additional guidance documents for SSA research teams, including reporting, USAID rules and regulations, and communication guidance.

- Obtain USAID approval for SSA subawards.
- Support implementation of cross-cutting themes among the SSAs by providing individualized support to the research teams through periodic consultations and assistance from the cross-cutting theme specialists.
- Collect regional coordinators' quarterly progress updates.
- Identify lessons learned from SSA selection and co-creation to refine selection and cocreation for RFA-selected activities.
- Develop and release Request for Applications (RFA) and conduct review and selection.
 - o Follow the RFA timeline and clearly communicate to applicants.
 - Conduct technical review of RFA concept notes.
 - o Move forward with selection and inviting teams to submit full proposals.
 - o Host a webinar for teams invited to submit full proposals in Quarter 3.
 - Review full proposals.
 - Contingently select full proposals.
 - Hold co-creation sessions.
- Continue with MSI Engagement Plan.
 - Disseminate information on Fish Innovation Lab activities to MSIs prior to RFA release and incorporate language in the RFA encouraging applications from MSIs.
 - Conduct informational webinar for invited MSIs to support competitiveness for the applying to the RFA; invited MSIs will be identified from the Rutgers list and contacts made at professional meetings attended by the ME.
- Conduct regular ME partner meetings.
- Hold a Fish Innovation Lab Annual Meeting.
- Finalize External Advisory Board and schedule meetings with EAB members to discuss reports and the annual meeting.
- Prepare and submit Phase 2 Year 2 Work Plan.
 - Collect SSA work plans and planned international travel.
 - Collect ME and ME partner work plans and international travel.
- Implement plan for engaging USAID Missions and attracting Associate and Buy-In awards.
 - Continue to communicate with Missions to be informed on updated Feed the Future country plans and zones of influence to ensure alignment of Fish Innovation Lab activities.
 - Disseminate research findings to Missions of focus countries and other highpriority countries.
 - Maintain active communication with Missions of focus countries and other high-priority countries to identify strategies to address their research needs on aquaculture, fisheries, and nutrition.
- Implement communications strategy.
- Implement external communications.
 - Continue to amplify key milestones via press releases, events, social media, website, and other channels including Agrilinks.
 - Continue to showcase the Fish Innovation Lab at virtual and in-person conferences and workshops, including the Africa Food Systems Forum, World Food Prize Foundation's Norman E. Borlaug International Dialogue, World Aquaculture Congress, Africa Aquaculture, Aquaculture America, and other relevant outlets.
 - Develop and distribute newsletter on a regular basis (every other month).

- Continue to communicate success stories and lessons learned from select activities via print and/or digital media, conference presentations, and webinars.
- Develop videos, webinars, and other digital media highlighting Fish Innovation Lab research activities and cross-cutting themes.
- Track and contribute to Feed the Future- and USAID-led learning and sharing opportunities as requested.
- Participate and showcase the Fish Innovation Lab in Feed the Future Innovation Lab Directors meetings and other Feed the Future events.
- Update virtual resource center on Fish Innovation Lab website.
- Implement internal communications.
 - Orient SSA subawardees to the communications strategy and expectations, branding requirements, and ethical standards for photography and videography.
 - Facilitate and manage virtual workspaces for internal communication and teambuilding.
 - Facilitate second ME Retreat in May 2024.
- Update and implement monitoring strategy for research activities.
 - Set annual MEL indicator targets.
 - Track SSA progress towards activity-level work plans and Fish Innovation Lab Theory of Change using regional coordinators, internal tracking, and Piestar.
 - o Collect semiannual research activity results (narrative reporting).
 - Collect quarterly indicator results according to the MEL Plan, including updated indicators.
- Implement research and learning agenda.
 - Design Fish Innovation Lab Phase 2 research and learning agenda strategy: refine learning questions and delivery method.
 - o Continue to refine area-of-inquiry-specific research questions and plans.
 - Continue developing strategy for effective implementation of the cross-cutting themes.
 - Conduct Phase 2 Year 1 research and learning agenda session with SSA teams.
 - Activate research and learning agenda community of practice.
- Update and submit Environmental Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (EMMP).