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**Progress in the implementation of the Action Plan of the Office of
Evaluation**

Queries on the substantive content of the document may be addressed to:

Masahiro Igarashi
Director, Office of Evaluation
Tel. +39 06570-53903

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Background

1. The 120th session of the Programme Committee held in November 2016, in discussing the *Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function* and accompanying Management Observations,¹ requested that the Office of Evaluation (OED) develop a strategy and an action plan for 2017-19 to enhance evaluation learning and accountability. Responding to this request, OED has developed a Strategy and Action Plan, which address two major focus areas (pillars): i) enhancing accountability and learning from FAO evaluation; and ii) supporting greater integration of gender considerations in FAO evaluations. The proposed OED's Strategy and Action Plan was endorsed at the 121st session of the Programme Committee in March 2017. This document presents an update on the status of implementation of the OED's Strategy and Action Plan to enhance evaluation learning and accountability for information.

I. Progress in the implementation of OED Strategy and Action Plan

2. The OED Strategy and Action plan contained eight key actions, and as of 31 January 2018, all of these actions have been in progress. The activities carried out by OED in support of implementing the Strategy and Action plan are highlighted below.

A. Revision and development of guidance materials

3. As per Recommendation 1 of the *Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function*, OED has initiated the revision of the guidelines for FAO evaluations to ensure methodological rigor and quality of evaluations. As a result, the following sets of guidelines have been updated and/or revised.

- a) The *Country programme evaluation guidelines* were revised in 2018, aiming to reflect increased focus of country programme evaluations on assessing FAO's strategic positioning and key contributions to national development goals in the context of FAO country programming frameworks (CPFs).
- b) The *Project evaluations manual* was revised in 2018, consolidating relevant OED guidelines, and outlining key steps from the project evaluation design phase to the completion of the evaluation process. The manual also makes the distinction between evaluations managed by OED and project evaluations managed by decentralized offices, clarifying roles and responsibilities related to the two modalities.
- c) OED has also developed specific guidance, including tools and detailed templates, for *evaluations of projects funded by the Global Environment Facility*. This guidance aims at assisting decentralized offices in managing mid-term GEF project evaluations (as per Recommendation 1.d of the *Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function*).

4. In order to strengthen the quality of evaluations, starting from 2016 OED has organized specialized training workshops for its staff members and consultants. Two workshops aimed at promoting the use of quantitative methods in FAO evaluations: i) Quantitative Data Analysis using STATA (February 2017); and ii) application of remote sensing in evaluation using CollectEarth methodology (June 2017). In May 2017, a workshop was organized for OED staff to learn the methodology of the Evaluation Framework for Knowledge Sharing Programs. In January 2019, OED staff were engaged in a Practice Exchange on Theories of Change, which also included learning session to increase OED's collective understanding FAO's support to countries on the SDGs.

B. Evaluation supervisory system

5. Following Recommendations 1.i and 1.v of the *Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function*, OED has institutionalized a new supervisory system, whereby senior-level professional staff serve as supervisors of the evaluations conducted by middle- and junior-level staff and consultants. Evaluation supervisors are assigned to each evaluation and provide necessary advisory support and mentoring throughout the evaluation process. The new system has been applied to all thematic, country programme and project evaluations since 2017.

¹ PC 120/5; PC 120/5 Sup.1

C. Evaluation Quality Assurance System

6. In relation to Recommendations 1.iv and 1.viii of the *Evaluation of the FAO's evaluation function*, OED has introduced an enhanced quality assurance system to ensure that country programme and project evaluations adhere to the established guidelines and apply most relevant methodological approaches. As part of the system implementation, OED staff conduct peer review assessments of key evaluation processes and products against quality criteria and checklists, which are based on evaluation principles applied within the United Nations system (UN Evaluation Group norms and standards).

D. OED staffing

7. Following guidance in Recommendation 1.i of the *Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function*, the remaining OED Regular Programme professional post (category P4) was filled as of end-2017. Subsequent change in OED professional staffing occurred at the end of December 31, 2018, in connection with an OED staff member return to the releasing UN organization upon the end of the secondment period and the departure of another senior staff (P4 level) to another UN agency through a lateral transfer. One vacancy has already been filled as of January 10, 2019.

E. System for analysing and reporting on evaluation findings

8. As per Recommendation 1.iii of the *Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function*, OED has carried out the synthetic presentation of evaluation findings, revamping the structure and contents of the biennial Programme Evaluation Report. Synthesis of findings across evaluations were incorporated in the biennial Programme Evaluation Report presented at 40th session of FAO Conference on themes of strategic relevance, strategic focus and coherence, partnerships and coordination, comparative advantages, key achievements, capacity development, gender dimension and nutrition. OED is now developing the next issue of the biennial Programme Evaluation Report to be presented to the 41st session of the FAO Conference, which will include meta-analysis of thematic, country and project evaluations completed in the 2017-2018 period.

F. Community of Practice

9. Following Recommendations 1 and 5 of the *Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function*, OED, in collaboration with the other Rome-based agencies, has launched an evaluation capacity development (ECD) initiative, through establishing a global Community of Practice Eval-Forward² (evaluation for food security, agriculture and rural development). EVAL-Forward was launched in September 2018 at the event "The role of Evaluation in the public sector: how best to support national capacities" organized by the FAO, IFAD and WFP Directors of Evaluation, in conjunction with the EvalColombo2018 forum to promote the use of evaluation held in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The main target of the Eval-Forward initiative is to promote evaluation capacity development, particularly of those involved in evaluation in ministries and public sector agencies, and to engage national evaluation professionals in the public discourse on the ways to evaluate progress towards achievement of national development goals and Sustainable Development Goals.

10. The Community of Practice offers an interactive platform for exchange of information and ideas among members; promoting peer-to-peer learning and collaboration; presenting guidance, methods and best practices related to evaluation for agriculture, food security and rural development; sharing information about relevant global events and training opportunities; and promoting professional development opportunities through webinars and workshops.

² <http://www.evalforward.org>

G. New guidelines for integrating gender dimensions in evaluations

11. As per recommendation 1.viii of the *Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function*, and based on the assessment of integration of gender equality perspectives in the evaluations (“gender-stock taking exercise”) conducted in 2016, OED is ensuring a higher involvement of OED staff in mainstreaming gender into FAO evaluations through the internal peer-review mechanism. To support this process, OED developed a framework for harmonizing gender analysis in its thematic evaluations and published guidelines for mainstreaming gender equality in its programme and project evaluations (December 2017).

Annex 1. Action Plan in support of implementing the OED Strategy (at 31 January 2018)

Action	Indicator	Target and timeframe	Baseline (2016)	Status	Comments
Revise guidance materials for thematic, country and project evaluations for use by OED staff and evaluators (Rec 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance materials revised to reflect state-of-the-art and appropriate methodologies, including emphasis on the use of quantitative data collection tools Staff training is provided on new methodologies, quantitative data collection protocols and tools OED evaluations are conducted applying the revised guidance materials 	100% of evaluations are conducted applying the revised guidance (by end-2019)	5/40 (12.5%) of evaluations apply revised guidance	<p>In progress</p> <p>100 % of evaluations managed by OED apply revised guidance</p>	The revision of OED guidance materials and formulation of specific guidelines for Project Evaluations (including GEF) were initiated in June 2017 and completed in 2018. OED conducted training workshops to promote use of quantitative data collection and analysis its evaluations.
Institute evaluation supervisory system to enhance quality and utility of evaluations (Rec 1.i; 1.v)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines for the new evaluation supervisory system are developed and applied 	100% evaluation supervisory function is applied in all evaluations (by end-2017).	10/100 % (new evaluation supervisory function was defined and tested and being rolled out for all evaluations)	<p>Completed</p> <p>100 % of evaluations managed by OED apply new supervisory system</p>	Guidelines for the new evaluation supervisory system were developed in early 2017 and were applied to each forthcoming OED evaluation. Under this supervisory system, senior-level professional staff serve as supervisors of the evaluations conducted by middle and junior level staff and consultants, and provide necessary advisory support and mentoring throughout the evaluation process.
Set-up a comprehensive quality assurance system for evaluations (Rec. 1.iv; 1. viii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality checklists are updated on the basis of new UNEG norms and standards Quality control is systematically undertaken at design and final draft stages of OED evaluations 	100% of evaluations are subject to comprehensive quality assurance (by end-2018)	35/40 (90%) of evaluation are subject to quality assurance	<p>Completed</p> <p>100 % of evaluations managed by OED apply quality assurance system</p>	OED has established a new evaluation quality assurance system to ensure quality control at all stages of the evaluations. Quality checklists were updated on the basis of new UNEG norms and standards. Quality control is systematically undertaken at design and final draft stages of OED evaluations
OED is fully staffed (Rec 1.i)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OED posts are filled by end-2017 	100% of staff posts filled (by end-2017)	8/10 (80%) of staff posts filled	<p>In progress</p> <p>9/10 (90%) of staff posts filled</p>	All OED professional vacant posts have been filled as of June 2017. Subsequent two vacancies occurred in late 2018, and one was filled in January 2019, while OED proposes to upgrade the remaining vacancy (P4 level) to a Deputy Director position (D1 level).

Action	Indicator	Target and timeframe	Baseline (2016)	Status	Comments
Establish a system for analyzing and reporting on common evaluation findings (Rec. 1.iii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mechanism to systematically collect and analyze evaluation findings and identify recurrent issues and lessons learned is in place 	Biennial Programme Evaluation Reports highlight synthesis on recurrent issues and lessons learned from evaluations (starting from the PER 2015-2016 issued in 2017)	0/1 (0%) Biennial Programme Evaluation Report 2013-2014 focused on findings from individual evaluations	In progress 1/1 (100%) 1 Biennial Programme Evaluation Report 2015-2016 focused on findings from individual evaluations	Synthesis of evaluation findings from thematic, country programme and project evaluations completed in 2015-2106 were incorporated in the biennial Programme Evaluation Report presented at 40th session of FAO Conference (3-8 July 2017). OED is now developing the next issue of the biennial Programme Evaluation Report to be presented at 41th session of FAO Conference (June 2019).
Establish community of practice for relevant national counterparts and evaluation practitioners (Rec 1; 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation community of practice is established to support evaluation capacity development as a basis for alignment of OED evaluation with national processes for the achievement of relevant national goals and SDGs 	Evaluation community of practice is established with participation in 20 countries from at least 3 regions (by end-2018)	0/20 (0%) of countries	Completed 20/20 (100%) (129 participants from over 40 countries in 5 regions)	OED, in collaboration with the UN Rome based agencies, has established a global community of practice Eval-ForWARD (evaluation for food security, agriculture and rural development) in September 2018.
Develop new guidelines with context-based methodologies for integrating gender dimension in evaluations (Rec. 1.viii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidelines with context-based methodologies for integrating gender dimension in evaluations are developed on the basis of 2016 gender assessment framework 	The new guidelines and methodologies are developed (by end-2017)	Gender assessment framework developed (November 2016)	Completed New guidelines for integrating gender dimension in evaluations developed	Based on the assessment of integration of gender equality perspectives in the evaluations, OED has developed a Framework for Harmonizing Gender Analysis in FAO evaluations (December 2017).
Application of new guidelines in thematic, country and project evaluations (Rec. 1.viii)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The new guidelines are applied to all types of evaluations 	100% of evaluations apply new guidelines (by end-2018)	8/28 (29%): While all 28 evaluations conducted in 2015 included gender analysis, the full framework was used in 8 evaluations among them	Completed 100 % of evaluations managed by OED apply new guidelines	New guidelines are applied to all OED evaluations.