



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United
Nations

Office of Evaluation

Quality Assurance Framework for evaluation in FAO

OED guidelines

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Office of Evaluation (OED)

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1 Introduction

1. The purposes of the OED quality assurance (QA) system are:
 - a. real-time and continuous improvement to evaluations;
 - b. accountability to FAO, its Governing Bodies and other stakeholders on the conformity of OED's work to international best practice and standards.
2. The Charter of the Office of Evaluation and the IPA provide for three types of quality assurance:
 - peer review of major evaluation reports;
 - biennial review by a small group of independent peers for conformity of evaluation work to best practice and standards;
 - independent evaluation of the evaluation function every six years.
3. In addition to these requirements, the quality assurance system includes a component on improving the evaluation process through feedback from evaluation teams. **The present guidelines cover the procedures for peer review of individual evaluations and assessment of the evaluation processes by evaluation teams.**
4. Peer review of evaluation products will be carried out by OED staff and be based on accepted practices, guidelines and standards, including the Charter for the Office of Evaluation, UNEG Norms and Standards and OED guidelines. Peer reviewers will have had no involvement in the conduct of the evaluation being reviewed. They will work in a collaborative and constructive manner in what should be seen as a mutual learning process among colleagues. Time allocated to QA process by peer reviewers will be integrated into their individual work plans.
5. The OED Director will assign peer review responsibilities and ensure that QA processes do not create undue delays in the evaluation. Without compromising the independence of the evaluation team, the Director will render advice in cases of differences of opinion between the evaluation team and the peer reviewer.
6. The QA system comprises review and checks at two different stages of the evaluation process:
 - Planning stage - terms of reference
 - Reporting stage - draft report and final report.
7. QA will include both written comments and discussion among the parties. The peer reviewer will address comments to the Evaluation Manager and the evaluation team. All written comments and records of meetings will be kept for the sake of transparency and future reference. Quality Assessment Forms will be used for each step of the QA process.
8. Two different processes of QA should be distinguished:
 - a. QA for major evaluations (thematic, strategic and country evaluations), in which OED staff is involved as both Evaluation Manager and Team Member(s); and
 - b. QA for project evaluations.

2 Quality Assurance for thematic, strategic and country evaluations

9. Strategic, thematic and country evaluations typically last 9-12 months and occasionally longer. For these large-scale evaluations, an evaluability assessment is often included prior to preparation of the terms of reference, to take stock of the background and issues as well as FAO's work in the area in question.

10. Because the technical content of work being evaluated is of paramount importance in most thematic and strategic evaluations, the QA system requires specific skills and competence. Hence, the QA system for these evaluations typically also includes Expert Panels (see 1b below),

2.1 OED Internal Peer Review

11. For all thematic, strategic and country evaluations there will be an internal peer review process at the planning and reporting stages.

- i. Planning stage: The peer reviewer will provide written comments on the TORs using as a reference the standard TOR outline for the specific type of evaluation (strategic/thematic or country). Once the TORs are finalized, the peer reviewer will complete the quality assessment sheet for the terms of reference.
- ii. Reporting stage: The peer reviewer will provide written comments on the draft report using as reference a checklist for the contents of reports. These will be considered before the documents are circulated to FAO staff and other stakeholders. Once the report is issued in final, the peer reviewer will complete the quality assessment sheet for the evaluation report.

12. In order to increase their utility and prevent delays, submission of comments by the peer reviewer must be timely. Evaluation managers will allocate adequate time to the peer review process when planning an evaluation and will inform accordingly the designated peer reviewer about planned deadlines.

2.2 Expert Panel for thematic or strategic evaluations

13. In the case of thematic or strategic evaluations with strong technical elements, internationally recognized independent panels of experts have proved useful in improving and/or validating the report's quality. Insofar as possible, technical, institutional and geographic representation criteria as well as gender balance will be used in deciding on a panel's composition.

14. Expert Panels meet to review the final draft report (i.e. a report that has been revised after comments have been received from FAO stakeholders and OED peer reviewers). The Panel assesses the relevance, comprehensiveness and appropriateness of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Evaluation and provide guidance for the finalization of the report based on the Panel members' knowledge and experience on the topic.

15. An Expert Panel may also meet at the planning stage to review the Terms of Reference and, if there is one, the Inception Report. In these cases, their contribution includes advising on whether all key issues have been taken into consideration and the methodology

proposed will allow assessing the issues in an adequate manner, as well as in identifying gaps in the scope of the evaluation and ways to address them.

Box 1. Tools for QA of thematic and strategic evaluations

Form for Quality Assessment of the TORs Form for Quality Assessment of Final Report Form for Quality Assessment of Final Report

3 Quality Assurance of project evaluations

3.1 Quality assurance of separate project evaluations

16. The OED officer backstopping a project evaluation is responsible for providing inputs to the evaluation process at the following stages:
- i. Terms of Reference: the OED officer contributes to and clears them;
 - ii. Selection of consultants: the OED officer is responsible for clearing the final selection of the team;
 - iii. Draft report: the OED officer reviews and provide comments to the evaluation Team Leader on the first draft before it is circulated for comments to FAO internal stakeholders.

3.2 QA of overall project evaluation processes

17. The evaluation of the evaluation function performed during the Independent External Evaluation of FAO (2007) assessed project evaluations as being overall of lower quality when compared to major evaluations. Therefore, in an effort to improve the quality of project evaluations, besides the backstopping processes outlined above, there will also be ex-post assessments of the overall project evaluation process.

18. A purposive sample approach will be followed, including both project evaluations where OED participated in the team and those that were only backstopped, i.e. OED did not participate directly. The OED Director will select the evaluations to be reviewed, based on their complexity, topic and taking account of regional balance. An OED officer who had no involvement in the evaluation process will be appointed as peer reviewer for each selected evaluation, and will carry out a QA on:

- the ToR;
- the draft report; and
- the overall evaluation process.

19. Interviews with project managers and LTU are envisaged to triangulate information on the evaluation process. The peer reviewer will complete a single form covering the three aspects mentioned above.

Box 2. Tools for QA of separate project evaluations

Form for Quality Assessment of separate project evaluations

4 Quality Assurance of Evaluation Process through evaluation team's assessment

20. Evaluation team members are, with the Evaluation Manager and other OED staff involved, the key players in the evaluation process. As a result, they can provide direct feedback to OED on the quality of the evaluation process followed and their contribution should be a valuable contribution to the QA mechanism of OED in general.

21. Using the evaluation team's feedback on the quality of the evaluation process in a systematic manner will enhance the transparency of the work by OED, and will generate useful lessons for improving the way evaluations are managed and conducted, in terms of process, tools, etc. The main users of these contributions will be the OED staff for learning lessons and peer reviewers/evaluators who will carry out the periodic assessments of the evaluation function in FAO as described in the Charter.

22. At the end of each strategic, thematic and country evaluation, once their contract with OED is closed, the evaluation team members will be requested fill out an assessment form on the quality of the evaluation process and on services provided by FAO. Processes will be put in place to ensure that replies remain confidential. The Director will convene a meeting with OED staff involved in the evaluation to discuss the results of the assessment.

23. The Director will compile the lessons learned from these assessments and identify areas where OED services should improve and take actions to do so. As knowledge will build over time, this may be done once a year and include all assessments made during that year. The lessons learned will be discussed with OED staff and made available to the external peer reviewers or consultants evaluating OED function.

Box 3. Tools for QA of evaluation process through evaluation team's assessment

Questionnaire for evaluation team members to provide feedback on the evaluation process
