Independent Review of EvalForward Community of Practice

Annex 1.
Terms of reference

Contents

1.   Introduction

1.   These Terms of Reference (TOR) will guide the independent review of the Community of Practice (CoP) on Evaluation for Food Security, Agriculture and Rural Development (EvalForward). The document presents the key elements that will structure the review, defines the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in the process and the indicative calendar of the exercise.

1.1   Background: EvalForward Community of Practice[1]

2.   Since the adoption of the SDGs, reporting on their achievements is under the primary responsibility of national governments. Robust national capacities is necessary to assess the contributions of policy and programme results to SDGs achievements. UN Member States and other development stakeholders have underscored the need to strengthen national evaluation capacities: the General Assembly resolution 69/237 (2014) has called upon entities of the UN development system, with the collaboration of national and international stakeholders, to support efforts to strengthen the capacity of Member States for evaluation.

3.   Agricultural and food security systems are undergoing significant transformation driven by population growth, rising demand for food and changes in nutrition patterns, as well as the effects of climate change. Timely and reliable evaluations that integrate these transformations can enhance their contribution to making food production, supply and consumption more resilient, adaptive and efficient. Evaluating impact in relation to food security, nutrition, agriculture or rural development remains intrinsically complex, due in particular to the multiplicity of factors affecting it, whether biophysical, economic or social. Notwithstanding, national stakeholders working in these areas report that opportunities for strengthening their capacities in relation to evaluation are limited.

4.   To respond to a demand for reinforcing national evaluation capacities, the Evaluation Offices of the Rome-based UN Agencies (FAO, IFAD and WFP) and the Independent Evaluation Arrangement (since 2018, Evaluation function under CGIAR Advisory Services) have joined forces to create and launch a Community of Practice (CoP), called EVAL-ForwARD (Evaluation for Food security, Agriculture and Rural development), currently spelled as EvalForward. The objective of EvalForward is to *improve national capacities in conducting or using evaluations related to agriculture, rural development and food security* through the establishment of an international network (built around an interactive online platform) open to evaluators, development practitioners, policy-makers and researchers across national institutions to share evaluative information and knowledge on food security-related interventions.

5.   The EvalForward Strategy Paper (February 2018) planned for specific activities through the online platform and or face-to-face meetings:

     i.   Presentation of guidance, tools, methods and best practices related to the evaluation practice;

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[1] Source: EvalForward Strategy Paper, February 2018- hard copy.

ii. Posting information about upcoming (or past) events, conferences; members' profiles and sharing of work and training opportunities;

iii. Exchange of evaluation-generated knowledge; with referencing of evaluation reports and relevant publications;

iv. Provide tailored briefing material to further evaluation advocacy efforts;

v. Offering skill development opportunities, such as by availing e-learning courses or organizing tailored webinars.

vi. Convening thematic meetings or workshops that may respond to identified needs within the Community e.g. on specific challenges in evaluating given interventions; or experiences with SDG#2 M&E systems; and facilitating the participation of CoP members;

vii. Organizing side events within planned networking events, conferences or workshops, and facilitating the participation of CoP members, to further advocacy for evaluation to their users;

6. The Governance Structure of EvalForward is composed by:

i. The Executive Committee, formed of the heads of evaluation units from each founding agency, which has overall governance responsibility over and provide general leadership to the COP. It assists in identifying financial support for the COP and promoting the COP within the agency and externally. The Executive Committee also ensures that the development of the COP is in line with the focus and objectives initially defined, by providing regular guidance and endorsement on the CoP activities' developments.

ii. The Steering Committee, formed of representatives from each founding agency. The Steering Committee oversees the regular management, progress and actions of the COP. It collectively decides on the COP priority areas of focus, communications and operations, and follow-up on their agency resources mobilization commitments. It has regular meetings with the COP Facilitator.

iii. The CoP facilitator is the principal representative of EvalForward. The facilitator supervise the daily CoP activities, including interactions with EvalForward members; sourcing and curation of content; forecasting of new activities, etc.

7. Since its establishment in 2018, the Community of Practice has grown to have a membership of approximately 1 000 evaluators, development practitioners, decision-makers and academics over 100 countries, and facilitated knowledge exchange, awareness raising and networking among its Members. Main content of the exchanges, blogs and discussion in particular, is offered in English, French and Spanish. Topics are proposed by members and by the supporting agencies and over the years have included a wide range of aspects related to evaluation practice, methods and approaches, focusing on agriculture, food security and rural development and including cross cutting issues and priorities such as gender

8. In 2020 a members survey aimed at understanding what brings people to the Community, their motivations, and their expectations of future activities and developments. Survey participants showed a good degree of enthusiasm for being part of EvalForward and shared a sense of ownership and belonging.

9.   Survey results showed that a majority of members signed up to the community especially to find network opportunities and relevant information. However, when articulating their expectations, they tend to give more importance to the knowledge on offer and to the concrete actions that the community can promote. Also, members feel more motivated to engage if they know that their contributions can improve evaluation practice and use. The survey also highlighted opportunities for new initiatives to consider which could expand the offer of EvalForward, especially in the context of development of national evaluation capacities.

1.2   Review purpose and scope

10.   The main purpose of the independent review is to draw lessons after over 3 years of operation of the Community of Practice (2018-2021), based on assessment of its achievements to date. The results of this review will allow confirming the appropriateness and usefulness of this initiative for its members or identifying areas where it needs to adapt, to improve results in the future. The evaluation will draw lessons, as appropriate, and provide recommendations on future investments, to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of this initiative.

11.   The of this review are the evaluation offices of the agencies (FAO, IFAD, WFP and CGIAR) jointly supporting and funding this initiative. This evaluation will also serve as a learning exercise for other CoPs facilitated by these Agencies or others. Results will be shared and presented to EvalForward members and any institutions, including partners or donors immediate users showing interest in collaborating with the CoP.

12.   Scope: The review will cover all activities implemented since the establishment of the Community of Practice.

1.3   Review objectives and key questions

13.   The review will seek to measure and explain the main results achieved by the CoP to date, reflecting also on the relevance of its positioning and its coherence with existing initiatives of relevance, whether supported by its founding agencies or not. The review will also assess the sustainability of CoP achievements and the performance of management arrangements. It will identify strengths, weaknesses and lessons learned.

14.   The box below presents the key questions that will guide the review, sorted by standard evaluation criteria. The questions have been developed with the contribution of the Steering Committee members and will be discussed and fine-tuned with the consultant.

Relevance: Are EvalFoward activities and contents suitable and useful to the needs of its members? Are activities appropriate to meet the desired outcomes and overall goal of EvalForward?
Coherence: Internal: is EvalForward positioned coherently within the mandates and priorities of the supporting agencies? External**:** Is EvalForward positioned coherently with existing initiatives in the Evaluation community? Has EvalForward been able to establish synergies and complementarities?
Efficiency: to what extent does the current set up of EvalForward allow efficient delivery of its mandate?
Effectiveness and Impact: To what extend and how has EvalForward contributed to facilitate knowledge sharing and knowledge generation on evaluation in order to enhance evaluation capacities in the food security, agricultural and rural development sectors?
Management/ Sustainability: Are there mechanisms in place to ensure sustainable funding of and support to the COP by the supporting agencies? Are governance and management arrangements appropriate to facilitate engagement and ownership by the supporting agencies?

1.4   **Methodology and process**

15.   To ensure the review respond to members' needs, the TORs will be presented and discussed with representatives from EvalFoward membership to collect their views and inputs – modalities will be defined to ensure an efficient discussion. The CoP Facilitator will be required to provide the evaluator with relevant documents and information. The consultant will then present a refined evaluation scope, questions and methodology as well as the evaluation tools, including a detailed plan for data collection.

16.   The review will be conducted by an independent consultant in four phases.

17.   It will start with a scoping phase during which the consultant will conduct initial meetings with members of the Steering Committee, the CoP Facilitator and the Executive Committee and review key documents and the platform. This will allow him to familiarize with the subject, understand commissioners' expectations and refine the review focus and approach.

18.   Data collection phase will employ the following methods: i) content review of discussions, blogs, resources and events organised; and ii) remote interviews with key stakeholders; iii) surveys targeting the funding agencies, key members, partners and other global and regional evaluation networks.

19.   In the data analysis phase, after the completion of the data collection, the consultant will proceed with data aggregation, validation and analysis and will deliver a presentation of preliminary results to the Steering Committee and the Executive Committee. The consultant will then validate preliminary findings, including through additional data collection as appropriate, and proceed with the report drafting.

20.   For reporting, the consultant will share a draft report for comments with the Steering Committee and later to the Executive Committee and will incorporate comments to the extent possible in the final evaluation report. The Steering Committee will need to prepare a management response addressing recommendations. The report and the management response will be presented to the CoP members for discussion before validation.

1.5 Roles and responsibilities

21. The review will be implemented by an independent consultant with as much of the following experience:

     iv.   Experience in conducting evaluations and reviews, ideally of Communities of Practice;

     v.   Experience in facilitating multi-stakeholder participatory processes;

     vi.   Familiarity with international evaluation agenda, including in developing countries and in the UNDS.

     vii. Understanding of knowledge management and Communities of Practice;

     viii. Familiarity with institutional set-up in sectors core to EvalForward (agriculture, food security and rural development) in developing countries, and AR4D context;

     ix.   Excellent English skills and working level of French.

22. The independent consultant should not been involved in the design or implementation of activities related to the EvalForward Community of Practice, such as hosting discussions, participate in webinars. He/she will bear main responsibility for developing the methodology in consultation with the SC; conducting the review applying the methodology agreed and for producing the report. A more detailed individual TOR for the consultant is available in the annex.

23. The members of the CoP Steering Committee and the CoP Facilitator develop the first draft TOR for the Review and will share them with the Executive Committee for validation. The CoP Steering Committee and the CoP Facilitator will be responsible for the identification of the consultant and will assist in the definition of the methodology as well as during the conduct of the process as required. They will provide comments on the inception note prepared by the consultant and will collaborate to provide relevant documentation and data and to facilitate contacts with stakeholders for interviews and data collection. They will review the final draft report for Quality Assurance purposes in terms of presentation, compliance with the TOR and quality, clarity and soundness of evidence provided and of the analysis supporting conclusions and recommendations.

24. The EvalForward Executive Committee will comment and validate the evaluation TORs, clear the consultant final selection, provide inputs during the review process, and comment and validate the final report.

1.6 Review deliverables

25. The consultant will be accountable for producing the following products:

     i.   A basic inception note with a matrix elaborating the approach to data collection and analysis that is proposed to address the review questions, based on the information collected during the inception phase.

     ii. Presentation of the preliminary findings, in the form of a PowerPoint or similar product.

iii. Draft report— the draft report will illustrate the evidence found that responds to the questions listed in the TOR. The report will be prepared in English following an agreed outline. Supporting data and analysis should be annexed to the report when considered important to complement the main report. The report will be shared with the Steering Committee members and the head of Evaluation Offices for comments.

iv. The final review report, with supporting PPT slide deck and a side document presenting how comments received from stakeholders were addressed. A format for the report will be provided to the consultant upon the start of his/her assignment. The report will not be longer than 20 pages, excluding annexes.

1.7 Review timeframe

26. The assignment will be undertaken over a span of 6 months and the contract will be on a retainer basis during this period.

2.   Evaluation team leader

General Description of task(s) and objectives to be achieved

Since 2018, the offices of Evaluation of FAO, WFP, IFAD and the CGIAR have supported the running of a Community of Practice (CoP) around Evaluation for Food security, Agriculture & Rural Development, "EvalForward". EvalForward offers opportunities to people and institutions around the globe, and in particular, in developing countries, to strengthen their awareness, understanding or knowledge of evaluation as it relates to food security and agriculture. It does so via the exchange of experience and best practices, networking and knowledge sharing. The intention is to contribute to strengthen capacities in evaluation, with a focus on developing countries and thus support national systems for evaluating development progress, including towards SDGs.

Under the overall responsibility of the Steering Committee composed of representatives of all supporting offices, the consultant is responsible for conducting the review of EvalForward with the main purpose to draw lessons after over 3 years of operation (2018-2021), based on assessment of its achievements to date. The results of this review will allow confirming the appropriateness and usefulness of this initiative for its members or identifying areas where it needs to adapt and to improve results. The review will draw lessons, as appropriate, and provide recommendations on future investments, to improve the effectiveness and sustainability of EvalForward.

The consultant will ensure that the methodology foreseen in the TOR is implemented. Specific tasks will include:
- Review relevant background documentation made available by the CoP facilitator;
- Prepare a basic inception note with an evaluation matrix and the evaluation tools (questionnaires, check-lists and interview protocols as appropriate...);
- Lead interviews and meetings with EvalForward stakeholders, including Steering Group and Executive Group, partners and members of the Community as appropriate;
- Take notes and keep track of main points discussed during the meetings;
- Present the preliminary findings, in the form of a PowerPoint or similar product;
- Prepare the draft report;
- Integrate comments received;
- Finalize the report and present the findings of the evaluation to key stakeholders as required.

Expected Outputs	Required Completion Date:
Key expected outputs / milestones of the evaluation team member's work. • Inception note and evaluation design matrix; • Analysis and presentation of the preliminary findings; • First draft of the report; • Final draft of the report.	