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PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

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**Terms of reference for the independent evaluation of FAO's evaluation
function (draft)**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Evaluation is an integral element of a functioning results-based management (RBM) system. It provides accountability to Members and to the Director-General.
- In line with the provisions made in the Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED), an independent evaluation of the evaluation function in FAO should be conducted every six years.
- The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the contribution of the evaluation function to the achievement of FAO's goals at the global, regional and national levels and to establish a baseline for future evaluations. Building on the previous evaluation (2016), this exercise seeks to assess adherence to critical principles of OED's work (independence, impartiality, credibility transparency, and usefulness), and provide recommendations that will inform the development of the new evaluation policy and reforms of the evaluation function.
- The document *Terms of reference for the independent evaluation of FAO's evaluation function (draft)* (PC135/4) was presented to the 135th Session of the Programme Committee.
- This document is developed with integration of the feedback from the Programme Committee and FAO Evaluation Committee with an updated draft of terms of reference for the independent evaluation of FAO's evaluation function (*Annex*).

GUIDANCE SOUGHT FROM THE PROGRAMME COMMITTEE

- The Programme Committee is invited to review the content of this document and make recommendations to the Council as deemed appropriate.

I. Introduction

1. The FAO Evaluation Service was established in 1968 to assure the effective operation of evaluation in the Organization. The evaluation function is one part of the oversight regime of FAO, which also includes external audit, internal audit, inspection and investigation, and the Oversight Advisory Committee. Evaluation is an integral element of a functioning results-based management (RBM) system. It provides accountability to Members and to the Director-General.
2. The mandate and activities for evaluation in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) are set out in the Organization's Basic Texts, Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED),¹ which requires an “*independent evaluation of the evaluation function every six years.*”²
3. FAO is launching an independent evaluation of its evaluation function to be carried out in 2023-2024. The terms of reference (TOR) provide guidance in seeking to identify an external, independent team to conduct this evaluation.
4. The document *Terms of reference for the independent evaluation of FAO's evaluation function (draft)* (PC135/4)³ was presented to the 135th Session of the Programme Committee in March 2023, which provided background information (section 2); outlined the purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation (section 3); presented the questions to be answered (section 4), deliverables to be submitted (section 5) and timeline (section 6); and described the management of this evaluation (section 7) and recruitment and profile of the evaluation team (section 8).
5. The main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the contribution of the evaluation function to the achievement of FAO's goals at the global, regional and national levels and to establish a baseline for future evaluations. Building on the previous evaluation (2016), this exercise seeks to assess adherence to critical principles of OED's work (independence, impartiality, credibility, transparency, and usefulness), and provide recommendations that will inform the development of the new evaluation policy and reforms of the evaluation function.
6. The Programme Committee reviewed the *Terms of reference for the independent evaluation of FAO's evaluation function(draft)* (PC135/4), and provided its guidance as follows:⁴
 - a) acknowledged the importance of having a formative evaluation that informs the development of the new FAO evaluation policy and serves as a baseline for future assessments of the evaluation function;
 - b) highlighted the oversight role of the Programme Committee and Management in the independent evaluation of FAO's evaluation function;
 - c) looked forward to finalizing the terms of reference, including the oversight structure, under the leadership of the Chairperson of the Programme Committee, including representation of Management, Members of the Programme Committee and other stakeholders;
 - d) highlighted the importance of the independence of the evaluation, and stressed the need to revise the language and terminology utilized in the key questions in the terms of reference to ensure clarity and uniform meaning for all readers, in order to avoid different interpretations;
 - e) encouraged gender and geographic balance when establishing the oversight structures as well as the evaluation team;
 - f) highlighted the importance of taking into account the Programme Committee membership transitional period during this process; and

¹ FAO. 2017. Basic Texts, Vol. II.H Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation, VI. *Quality Assurance* (paragraph 30.c) <https://www.fao.org/3/mp046e/mp046e.pdf>

² The previous evaluation took place in 2016, and therefore it is timely to conduct another one in 2023.

³ PC135/4 <https://www.fao.org/3/nl202en/nl202en.pdf>

⁴ CL 172/8 *Report of the 135th Session of the Programme Committee (Rome, 13-17 March 2023)* <https://www.fao.org/3/nl654en/nl654en.pdf>

- g) recommended the Programme Committee convene a special session to finalize the terms of reference for the Evaluation of FAO evaluation function, under the leadership of the Chairperson of the Programme Committee, with a view to submitting a recommendation to Council as soon as possible.

II. Proposal for the oversight structure

7. The evaluation will be conducted by an external team that will be identified and recruited under the oversight of a Steering Committee. OED will not be involved in the evaluation's direction or management to ensure the credibility and impartiality of this exercise.

8. The findings and recommendations of the evaluation will be presented to FAO Governing Bodies and to the Director-General. To ensure the independence and facilitate the conduct of the evaluation, while improving the efficiency of the process, the proposal of the Steering Committee contains a manageable number of six members with the proposed composition:

- Two Members representatives: the Chairperson and the Vice-Chairperson of the Programme Committee;
- Two Management representatives: the Chairperson of the FAO Evaluation Committee and the ADG/Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific; and
- Two external experts who are well-positioned to participate in this panel based on their expertise and experience in building robust evaluation functions of similar organizations.

9. The Members representatives and Management representatives can designate two alternate representatives, respectively, to substitute them when they are not able to attend. Should changes in the Programme Committee composition affect the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, the responsibilities for the Members representatives will be properly handed over to the newly appointed Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson.

III. Other proposed changes to the draft TOR

10. Other proposed changes to the draft TOR concern the evaluation questions and the timeline. Concerning the evaluation questions, FAO's five primary principles are coherent with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards which guide the independent evaluation. The five principles listed in the question box remain those critical as per the Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation. Sub-questions serve to illustrate the focus of interest to FAO and shall not be interpreted as being mandatory areas of inquiry for this assessment.

11. The evaluation timeline has been updated to enable achievement of all activities within the agreed time period, 2023-2024.

IV. Suggested action by the Programme Committee

12. The Programme Committee is invited to review the updated TOR which incorporates guidance from the Programme Committee, as well as feedback from FAO Evaluation Committee, and recommend the Council endorse the terms of reference for the independent evaluation of FAO's evaluation function contained in the *Annex* of this document.

Annex: Terms of Reference for the Independent Evaluation of FAO's Evaluation Function

I. Introduction

1. As endorsed by its Governing Bodies, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is launching an independent evaluation of its evaluation function to be carried out in 2023-2024. The mandate and activities for evaluation in FAO are set out in the Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation (OED),⁵ which requires an “*independent evaluation of the evaluation function every six years.*”⁶ FAO is releasing terms of reference in seeking to identify an external, independent team to conduct this evaluation.
2. This document provides background information (section 2); outlines the purpose, scope and objectives of the evaluation (section 3); presents the questions to be answered (section 4), deliverables to be submitted (section 5) and timeline (section 6); and describes the management of this evaluation (section 7) and recruitment and profile of the evaluation team (section 8).
3. OED will not be involved in the evaluation's direction or management to ensure the credibility and impartiality of this exercise. The main users of the findings and recommendations from this evaluation are the FAO Governing Bodies, in particular the Programme Committee which is “*the direct recipient of evaluation reports for the governing bodies*”⁷ and to whom the Director of OED reports, as well as the Director-General of FAO to whom the OED Director also reports, and the OED Director and senior personnel in support of ongoing reform efforts. Other key stakeholders include FAO personnel at large, OED personnel, development partners, Members and the evaluation community in general.

II. Background

4. FAO is a specialized agency leading international efforts to defeat hunger. Its goal is to achieve food security for all and make sure that people have regular access to enough high-quality food to lead active, healthy lives. With 195 Members, FAO works in over 150 countries worldwide.
5. OED conducts and supports evaluations of FAO programmes and projects to assess whether interventions align strategically with the needs of the Organization and its stakeholders and produce the desired results. As described in OED's Charter, the primary principles underpinning evaluation in FAO are: independence, impartiality, credibility, transparency, and usefulness.
6. FAO's evaluation function is led by OED in coordination with an Evaluation Committee⁸ and in consultation with the Programme Committee⁹ and FAO Director-General. The work of OED follows a four-year rolling work plan. Performance against this work plan is reported at Programme Committee meetings and every two years through a Programme Evaluation Report¹⁰ that is submitted to the Conference. The work plan of evaluations includes centralized and decentralized evaluations.

⁵ FAO. 2017. Basic Texts, Vol. II.H Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation, VI. *Quality Assurance* (paragraph 30.c) <https://www.fao.org/3/mp046e/mp046e.pdf>

⁶ The previous evaluation took place in 2016, and therefore it is timely to conduct another one in 2023.

⁷ FAO. 2017. Basic Texts, Vol. II.H Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation, VII.B. *Role of the Governing Bodies in Evaluation* (paragraph 35) <https://www.fao.org/3/mp046e/mp046e.pdf>

⁸ The Evaluation Committee (Internal) was created to advise the Director-General and OED on matters pertaining to evaluation in FAO with respect to the Organization as a whole. It assists FAO in implementing an evaluation regime which is efficient and responsive to the needs of both the Organization's Members and its Management. FAO. 2017. Basic Texts, Vol. II.H Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation, VII.D. *The Evaluation Committee (Internal)* (paragraph 38) <https://www.fao.org/3/mp046e/mp046e.pdf>

⁹ The Programme Committee assists the Council in carrying out its duties regarding the development and implementation of the Organization's programme activities.

¹⁰ FAO. 2022. Evaluation at FAO. <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/about-us/spotlight/en>

7. Centralized evaluations are conducted by OED. The focus of these evaluations is identified with Senior Management and in consultation with the Programme Committee, which endorses them through the evaluation work plan and recommends their approval by the Council. Evaluations follow the OED Evaluation Manual (2015)¹¹ and are published on the FAO Evaluation website.

8. Decentralized evaluations are conducted by regional evaluation specialists and budget holders, in most cases with OED support. These evaluations are guided by OED's project evaluation manual for Decentralized Offices (2019).¹² Developing evaluation capacities at decentralized level was a key recommendation of the Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function (2016)¹³ (see Box 1).

Box 1. Key findings and recommendations of past evaluations

- a) The Independent External Evaluation (IEE) of FAO completed in 2007 led to a process of reform, which included a strengthened role for evaluation in FAO. The IEE found that FAO's evaluation service functioned well with regard to comparable organizations but required greater independence and resources to ensure responsiveness to the needs of both the Governing Bodies and Management. In January 2010, the evaluation service became the Office of Evaluation "reporting to the Director-General and to the Council through the Programme Committee."¹⁴ The Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation, providing the policy framework for the evaluation function, was approved at the 129th Session of the Council in May 2010 and is included in Volume II of the Basic Texts (2017 edition).
- b) The Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function of 2016 found that OED had made significant progress to improve its usefulness: it became more aligned with FAO's strategic approach, systematized its practice in guidelines, implemented a training/learning programme for its personnel, and started to implement a communication plan for better dissemination of its evaluations. On the other hand, it found that OED met the needs of FAO Members to a higher degree than those of other evaluation stakeholders (such as Senior Management and development partners). It also found that the quality of OED evaluations was uneven across the different evaluation types. Shortcomings in the methodology (such as insufficient use of quantitative data and ratings) and the limited consideration of gender and human rights were areas of concern.
- c) This Evaluation also found that OED's independence was limited, particularly its behavioural independence, and that FAO did not have a system to ensure coverage of decentralized evaluations nor a mandate and resources for evaluation capacity development. The Evaluation recommended the development of a strategy and an action plan for enhancing learning and accountability (Recommendation 1), that the evaluation plan be prepared with the participation of the Programme Committee (Recommendation 4) and that FAO engage in evaluation capacity development (Recommendation 5). In addition, it recommended that FAO strengthen OED's independence and credibility (Recommendation 2); develop a programme of decentralized evaluations (Recommendation 3); and replace the evaluation charter for OED with an evaluation policy for FAO (Recommendation 6). In its response,¹⁵ FAO accepted to fully implement recommendations 1, 4 and 5, and partially accepted to implement recommendations 2, 3 and 6.

¹¹ FAO. 2015. OED Evaluation Manual. April 2015. <https://www.fao.org/3/cc1302en/cc1302en.pdf>

¹² FAO. 2019. OED project evaluation manual for decentralized offices. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/ca4821en/ca4821en.pdf>

¹³ FAO. 2016. Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function. PC 120/05. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/mr742e/mr742e.pdf>

¹⁴ FAO. 2017. Basic Texts, Vol. II.H Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation, VII. *Institutional Arrangements* (paragraph 33) <https://www.fao.org/3/mp046e/mp046e.pdf>

¹⁵ FAO. 2016. Evaluation of FAO's evaluation function. Management observations. PC 120/05. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/mr743e/mr743e.pdf>

The Follow-up report to the Evaluation (November 2018)¹⁶ and the proposal for strengthening evaluation in Decentralized Offices (May 2020)¹⁷ provides detailed information on the progress made implementing the accepted recommendations.

9. In late May 2022, a new Director of Evaluation was appointed and started to introduce reform measures that respond to the issues raised by the 2016 Independent External Evaluation. Under the guidance of the new Director, OED established transition teams to conduct critical background work needed to support the development of a new strategy – including a new internal structure, intake and selection processes to determine OED’s work plan, and an approach to monitoring progress with a view to better align OED’s work to its new vision and guiding principles (see Box 2).

Box 2. Office of Evaluation’s new vision (2022)

The Office of Evaluation:

- Generates evidence that informs decisions made by FAO or its Members.
- Makes potentially transformative recommendations to FAO stakeholders.
- Contributes knowledge to the field(s) in which FAO operates.

10. This internal reform of the evaluation function is taking place within a broader FAO transformational process to improve the Organization’s support to Members’ needs through, among others, revisions to priorities and structures to implement the FAO Strategic Framework,¹⁸ which includes strengthening of country-level capacities, increasing mobilization of resources and knowledge, and improving programmatic alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

III. Purpose, scope and objectives

11. Guided by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation,¹⁹ the main purpose of this evaluation is to assess the contribution of the evaluation function to the achievement of FAO’s goals at the global, regional and national levels, with a forward-looking view to making suggestions for improvement.

12. The assessment will cover evaluations carried out in the period 2017-2022, analysing them overall and by relevant subgroups - such as pre-pandemic (2017-2019) and since-pandemic (2020-2022) and evaluation type²⁰ - to consider the effects of the pandemic and the different goals and methodological approaches used in different types of evaluations.²¹ It will also take account of the recommendations of past evaluations and audits,²² as well as the new OED’s evaluation strategy (March 2023).²³

¹⁶ FAO. 2018. Follow-up report to the evaluation of FAO’s evaluation function. PC 120/5. Rome <https://www.fao.org/3/mx379en/mx379en.pdf>

¹⁷ FAO. 2020. Enhancing FAO’s capacity to evaluate contributions at country level: Proposal for Strengthening Evaluation in Decentralized Offices. PC 128/6. Rome <https://www.fao.org/3/nc856en/nc856en.pdf>

¹⁸ FAO. 2021. Strategic Framework 2022-31. October 2021. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/cb7099en/cb7099en.pdf>

¹⁹ UNEG. 2016. Norms and Standards for Evaluation. <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>

²⁰ Portfolio (such as thematic or country programme evaluations which group different intervention approaches under a single cluster), programme (grouping of different projects that share common characteristics, such as intervention approaches), and projects (single interventions).

²¹ FAO. 2020. Risk analysis and guidance for the management and conduct of evaluations during international and national level COVID-19 crisis and restrictions. OED Guidelines Series. 05/2020. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/ca8796en/ca8796en.pdf>

²² There is an ongoing internal audit of OED; an external audit was carried out in 2016.

²³ FAO. 2023. FAO Evaluation Strategy 2023-2025: An Interim Strategy for the Office of Evaluation to build an architecture for excellence in supporting Management and Members’ culture of evidence in decision-making. PC 135/3. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/nl201en/nl201en.pdf>

13. Building on the previous evaluation (2016), this exercise has the following objectives:
- i. Assess adherence to critical principles of OED's work (including independence, impartiality, credibility, transparency, and usefulness);
 - ii. Provide recommendations that will inform the development of the new evaluation policy and reforms of the evaluation function.

IV. Evaluation questions

14. The evaluation will respond to the five primary questions in Box 3 which reflect the five primary principles underpinning evaluation in FAO²⁴. Consideration of the "leaving no-one behind" principle will be an integral part of the analysis, as defined in UNEG norms²⁵. Sub-questions serve to illustrate the focus of interest to FAO and shall not be interpreted as being mandatory areas of inquiry for this assessment. The evaluation is expected to propose appropriate methods to answer these questions and will receive full cooperation from OED in terms of access to information and personnel.

Box 3. Evaluation questions

Primary questions	Sub-questions
1. Independence	
1. To what extent is the evaluation function currently set up to promote independence, objectivity and adequate coverage of evaluations in FAO?	<p>1.1 To what extent are critical decisions made by OED with independence and objectivity? Critical decisions include hiring of personnel, allocating funding and selecting evaluations to be conducted.</p> <p>1.2 To what extent do current FAO and OED policies, procedures and practices promote the independence and objectivity of evaluations conducted by FAO?</p>
2. Impartiality	
2. To what extent are evaluations unbiased?	<p>2.1 To what extent are evaluations credibly demonstrating that the findings, conclusions and recommendations are unbiased?</p> <p>2.2 To what extent do evaluations document efforts to prevent and/or address potential bias, or present limitations to facilitate the interpretation of findings, conclusions, and recommendations?</p>
3. Credibility	
3. To what extent do evaluations result in credible findings and influential conclusions and recommendations?	<p>3.1 To what extent are the evaluations of high professional quality and result in robust findings and well-supported conclusions and recommendations?</p> <p>3.2 To what extent do evaluations use innovative, as well as validated approaches, methods or tools that advance the work of the Organization?</p> <p>3.3 To what extent do evaluations propose feasible recommendations?</p>

²⁴ FAO. 2017. Basic Texts, Vol. II.H Charter for the FAO Office of Evaluation, *II.B. Principles of Evaluation* (paragraphs 8-12) <https://www.fao.org/3/mp046e/mp046e.pdf>

²⁵ UNEG. 2016. Norms and Standards for Evaluation, Standard 4.7, Norm 8 <http://www.unevaluation.org/document/detail/1914>

Primary questions	Sub-questions
4. Transparency	
4. To what extent have evaluations used approaches to promote transparency?	4.1 To what extent do evaluations follow a consultative process? 4.2 To what extent are consultative processes appropriate for the population, especially for Indigenous Peoples? 4.3 To what extent do evaluations provide sufficient details to promote adequate interpretation and use (such as limitations) by different addressees?
5. Usefulness	
5. To what extent do evaluations respond to the needs of and are being used by FAO stakeholders?	5.1 To what extent do evaluations, regardless of the intervention size (small, medium or large), contribute to FAO's strategic direction, and meet the needs of FAO stakeholders*? 5.2 To what extent have evaluations been conducted in an efficient manner and generated evidence that informed decisions made by FAO stakeholders*? 5.3 Which types of evaluations have been more impactful, and why? 5.4 To what extent have existing follow-up procedures led to greater uptake?

Note: *Stakeholders include FAO Management, Governing Bodies and others at FAO requesting or participating in evaluations.

V. Deliverables

15. The evaluators will produce the following outputs:
- i. An inception report detailing the analytical framework and proposed methodology for responding to the evaluation questions. The draft version of this report will be reviewed by the Steering Committee and based on their comments, shall be revised and resubmitted for approval.
 - ii. A draft summary report (including an executive summary and not exceeding 5 000 words) and a draft evaluation report (including an executive summary and not exceeding 50 pages) with preliminary findings, conclusions and recommendations based on robust analysis and evidence generated by the evaluation. These reports will be circulated to internal stakeholders, in particular OED, for comments and review of factual accuracy before being revised and submitted to the Steering Committee for review.
 - iii. A presentation on the draft findings, conclusions and recommendations for use during a stakeholder workshop.
 - iv. A stakeholder workshop facilitated by the evaluation team to validate findings. Participants will include representatives of FAO Management, including from OED, and others identified during this evaluation and by the Steering Committee.
 - v. A final summary report (including an executive summary and not exceeding 5 000 words) and a final evaluation report (including an executive summary and not exceeding 50 pages) to be presented to the Director-General and the Council together with the recommendations of the Programme Committee, disseminated to other key stakeholders and published on the FAO website.

VI. Roles and responsibilities

16. **Programme Committee and FAO Management.** The evaluation will be undertaken under the oversight of the FAO Programme Committee and FAO Management. **A Steering Committee will be established** in an ad hoc governance structure to ensure the independence and facilitate the conduct of the evaluation while improving the efficiency of the process.

17. The Steering Committee contains a manageable number of six members with the composition of:

- Two Members representatives: the Chairperson and the Vice-Chairperson of the Programme Committee;
- Two Management representatives: the Chairperson of the FAO Evaluation Committee and an ADG/Regional Representative; and
- Two external experts: These shall be senior representatives of the evaluation community who have experience developing robust evaluation functions

18. The Members representatives and Management representatives can designate two alternate representatives respectively to participate in the Steering Committee in their place when they are not able to attend. Should changes in the Programme Committee composition affect the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, the responsibilities for the Members representatives will be properly handed over to the newly appointed Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson.

19. **OED role.** OED will support this evaluation by providing to the evaluation team information about the evaluation function (such as statistics on evaluations conducted) and documents needed and participating in interviews or focus groups as requested by the evaluation team. OED will strive to facilitate the evaluation process in other ways as requested by the Steering Committee. OED will also facilitate access to evaluation networks to identify consultants/vendors to conduct this evaluation and members of the expert panel.

VII. Recruitment and profile of the evaluation team

20. The evaluation team will be responsible for the evaluation's findings and will report to the Steering Committee. It may be recruited either by releasing vacancy announcements or by outsourcing it to pre-qualified potential vendors. The team selected shall have the following skills and experience:

- i. Proven experience in evaluating the evaluation function of other UN agencies or similar international development and/or humanitarian organizations;
- ii. Proven understanding of the UN development and humanitarian system, particularly for teams with experience in evaluating evaluation functions outside the UN context;
- iii. Demonstrated expertise in conducting different types of evaluations;
- iv. Demonstrated understanding of the work of FAO and context in which FAO operates.

VIII. Evaluation timeline

21. The tentative timeline for this evaluation may be as follows:

Activity	Responsible party	Date
Approve terms of reference	Steering Committee	May 2023
Release vacancy announcements to recruit the evaluation team	Steering Committee	May 2023
Hold the evaluation kick-off meeting	Steering Committee	July 2023
Submit the inception report	Evaluation team	September 2023
Submit quality assurance reviews of inception report	Steering Committee	October 2023
Submit the revised inception report Conduct data collection	Evaluation team	October-November 2023
Complete data analysis	Evaluation team	December 2023
Submit the draft evaluation report	Evaluation team	January-February 2024
Conduct quality assurance reviews of draft evaluation report	Steering Committee	March 2024
Facilitate the validation workshop	Evaluation team	April 2024
An update of the evaluation to the Programme Committee	Steering Committee	May 2024
Submit the final evaluation report	Evaluation team	June 2024
Prepare documents for the Programme Committee meeting	Steering Committee	July-September 2024
Present the report to the Programme Committee	Steering Committee	November 2024