



OED Evaluation Manual

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OED Evaluation Manual

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A. INITIATING THE EVALUATION

1. *Designating an OED evaluation manager*

OED initiates an evaluation by designating an evaluation manager and other supporting members among its staff. Below are those in OED who are normally involved in an evaluation.

The Evaluation manager

OED Director¹ designates one evaluation manager (EM) for each evaluation. The EM is responsible for overseeing the whole evaluation process and delivering an evaluation report of high quality.

The Associate evaluation manager

An associate evaluation manager (AEM) may be designated to support the EM throughout the process. While the EM has the overall responsibility, the AEM may act on his/her behalf, or be delegated to undertake certain parts of the evaluation. For larger evaluations, OED may recruit AEMs specifically for those evaluations. The AEM however is not a hired or delegated evaluation manager whom the EM supervises². Specific roles and tasks for AEM should be defined between the EM and the AEM.

Evaluation analyst(s)

In larger-scale evaluations, the EM is usually supported by one or more evaluation analysts, who conduct background research, assist in task management, or other tasks as agreed with the EM.

In addition, OED Director may involve other staff evaluators as team members without above designation.

2. *Defining the modality*

For each evaluation, there shall be a **lead evaluator**. The lead evaluator is the one who controls the content of the evaluation and is held accountable for it to the OED Director.³ The lead evaluator assumes the main authorship of the evaluation report.

¹ For project evaluations, the Project Evaluation Coordinator may designate EM on behalf of the Director.

² Unless it is an evaluation commissioned to an external entity, the EM must be the one who leads the evaluation and has a full overview of its contents so as to be accountable for them.

³ In turn, the OED Director is accountable for the conduct and the quality of the evaluations to the governing body. In OED-led evaluations, OED Director is also accountable for the contents.

Evaluator-led and technical expert-led evaluations

In technical organizations such as FAO, there has been a propensity to have evaluations led by external technical experts so as to ensure technical credibility of the evaluation. In recent years, this approach has been criticized as producing expert-opinion based rather than evidence based evaluations. The 2012 Peer Review of the Evaluation Function in FAO raised this issue and noted that *'OED evaluations will increasingly need to judge whether FAO is delivering results and its contribution to these,'* and that *'consistent application of methodologies that do not rely mainly on expert opinion will become more important.'*

To understand this concept, it is important to recognize that the primary role of OED evaluations is not to provide alternative technical opinions on the approach taken by FAO experts but to assess the extent to which FAO has contributed to the results that it has set out to realize, based on the evidence and the views of stakeholders as well as experts. The primary users of OED evaluations are the governing bodies and the senior managers at headquarters and decentralized offices and member countries, who would be best served by OED's advice on strategic rather than technical issues. Moreover if there is a disagreement between OED-hired experts and FAO experts on a highly-technical matter, OED would not be in a position to judge technical merits of one or the other, and it would be inappropriate to base the assessment on the views of OED-hired experts.

There can be cases where the technical approach is considered to be a major factor affecting the effectiveness of the initiative. In such cases, the lead evaluator may ask an expert to conduct a technical assessment and attribute the results of such an assessment to the expert. There can also be cases where the purpose of the evaluation is to examine the appropriateness of the technical approach (such as in some project evaluations), in which case expert-led evaluations are appropriate.

OED may ask the EM to assume the role of the lead evaluator,⁴ or commission the evaluation to an external entity (an individual consultant, a consultant company, a research institution, a non-governmental organization, etc.) to be the lead evaluator⁵. In general, OED prefers to have it led by its staff EM so that the accountability for the report remains within the division. Typically, thematic evaluations that OED conducts for the governing bodies or country-programme evaluations that are in the OED workplan are led by an OED EM. Thematic expertise will be provided through the use of external consultants to complement the evaluation expertise of OED staff evaluators as needed.

OED may choose to commission evaluations to external lead evaluators in cases such as:

⁴ The EM's lead role in evaluation is recognized in the 'Acknowledgement' in the report. For any reason, when the EM wishes not to be attributed, in consultation with OED Director, the report could be attributed more generally to the Office.

⁵ When the external entity is not an individual but an institutional entity, it normally designates one of the evaluators to be the lead evaluator (or the team leader, as traditionally termed).

- Joint evaluations where the partner's protocol or *modus operandi* makes it difficult or inappropriate to have the evaluation led by the OED EM.
- Evaluations that are conceptually simple to quality control – typically project evaluations with a straight forward programme logic.
- Evaluations requested to OED with an expectation that they would be conducted by an external entity – typically those which are not in the original OED workplan and specifically requested from an external partner with such an expectation.
- Evaluations that may be too sensitive to be conducted by staff evaluators, in the judgment of OED Director – typically evaluations that heavily relates to institutional strategy or structure with a risk of being perceived as biased if conducted by a staff evaluator.
- When the staff resources is not sufficient to initiate and lead the evaluation in a timely manner.

When OED commissions the evaluations, it still defines the evaluation, issues the terms-of-references (ToR), selects the entity to conduct the evaluation, advises on the design, facilitates the conduct of evaluation, quality-controls⁶ the drafts, and clears and issues the final report.

3. *Launching the evaluation*

At an early stage, OED Director⁷ announces the launch of the evaluation in consultation with the EM. In the launch message, the Director designates of the EM. This allows the EM to initiate a consultation process with stakeholders in defining the evaluation.

For thematic evaluations, this is typically done after some initial research by the EM so as to conduct consultations in a more effective and efficient manner. For this, the EM should prepare an early version of the concept note as the basis of consultation. For country-programme evaluations or major in-country project evaluations, the launch of the evaluation should address not only internal but also key external stakeholders, including government representatives. The EM should prepare a letter according to an appropriate protocol for this purpose. For project evaluations, the launch should address stakeholders who need to be involved in the conduct of evaluation.

4. *Conducting the background research*

Once designated, the EM should start conducting background research in preparation for the evaluation. For this, the EM should draw on, *inter alia*: strategic documents (of FAO, the

⁶ Quality control of a commissioned report implies providing specific comments on the draft to the lead evaluator, based on the OED quality criteria.

⁷ For project evaluations, the Project Evaluation Coordinator can announce the launch on behalf of the Director.

United Nations and, when applicable, the national government); programme and project documents, and subsequent reports on implementation and results achieved; past evaluation reports; other relevant documents and literature on the subject matter and/or the country; and interviews with relevant FAO staff. For country programme evaluations, the EM should also collect information and basic indicators on country development status and social, economic, environmental and political characteristics.

For larger evaluations, the Evaluation Analyst will help the EM collect such materials and information, and conduct some preliminary analyses such as project portfolio analysis, meta-analysis of existing evaluations, and an analysis of basic financial and operational data.

For evaluations that involve research and data collection at the country level, the EM should start investigating evaluation capacity in the country with a view to eventually sourcing evaluators nationally or regionally.

It is also encouraged at this stage to start ‘harvesting’ outcomes from the secondary sources, such as project and evaluation reports, and putting the outcome and contribution statements into an organized format. This will provide one of the bases for further elaboration and validation at the data collection stage.

5. *Preparing a concept note*

For thematic or other conceptually complex evaluations, a concept note should be prepared for developing the evaluation definition and methodology. The concept note is an informal document to be used for consultations with stakeholders and others who can advise on evaluation methodology or technical contents. For these evaluations, a theory of change should be developed in the concept note to explain the design of the methodology.

The concept note would be used into the next stages of defining and designing the evaluation, where the EM seeks the advice from individual stakeholders, the reference group or an expert panel in defining and designing the evaluation.

6. *Identifying key stakeholders*

It is important to identify a **management counterpart** who has the main responsibility over the **evaluand**⁸, i.e. the subject matter or programme/project to be evaluated. This would typically be the FAO Representative for country programme evaluations, the project manager for project evaluations, and DDG/ADG or a division director in case of thematic evaluations. The management counterpart would be responsible for preparing the management response

⁸ **Evaluand** normally refers to the subject of the evaluation, rather than a person or a unit responsible for it.

and the follow up report.⁹ Who will be the management counterpart should be indicated in ToR.

At an early stage, the EM could start forming a **reference group**, which includes the management counterpart. The reference group should:

- Help the EM define and design the evaluation, particularly for thematic evaluations. The EM could solicit its advice in defining the scope, understanding the evaluand, identifying information sources, validating the theory of change, and so on.
- Review the ToR of the evaluation, and the evaluation design if prepared separately (e.g. in the form of an inception report, a concept note or an evaluation plan).
- Facilitate data collection and provide the access to information sources where needed, during the data collection phase.
- Provide feed-back at key moments in the evaluation process as needed (this may happen through one-to-one or group consultations).
- Review and comment on the draft report to ensure the factual accuracy, validate the findings and analytical conclusions, and advise on the feasibility of recommendations.

Typically, the EM should start forming the reference group with key internal stakeholders to solicit their support in defining and designing the evaluation. For thematic evaluations, this is normally done with an early concept note for discussion. At a later stage, the EM could add some external stakeholders, such as national focal points or counterparts.

Some evaluations of a particularly complex nature (e.g. thematic evaluations) may also benefit from the establishment of an expert panel which can be called upon to review the ToR, the evaluation design and/or draft reports from technical perspectives.

⁹ This includes coordinating inputs from all those who are responsible for implementation of recommendations. A separate guidance note is issued for the preparation of the management response and the follow up reports.

B. DEFINING THE EVALUATION

The EM is responsible for defining the evaluation. This entails defining (a) the purpose, (b) the scope and (c) the objectives of evaluation, as well as drawing up (d) an outline of the methodology to be used.

1. *Defining the evaluation*

Defining the evaluation normally requires an evaluability assessment, preliminary portfolio analysis and a round of consultations with key stakeholders, including with those who are responsible for the programme or the subject area to be evaluated.

- (a) **Purpose:** The purpose of the evaluation states why this evaluation is conducted.¹⁰ For example, an evaluation can be conducted at the request of the governing body to conduct a strategic review of a thematic area of work, or to assess the performance of a pilot project for the management to decide on the design of successor projects. Setting an appropriate purpose is important for ensuring the use of evaluation.
- (b) **Scope:** The scope of evaluation states precisely what is evaluated, or the **evaluand**. It is often required to delineate the scope by programmes, projects, periods, geographical units and/or the funding sources. For a country-programme evaluation, for instance, the scope may involve all activities undertaken by FAO in the country during one country programme framework (CPF) period and include activities undertaken in the country by global and regional projects and initiatives. For a thematic evaluation, defining the scope usually requires more extensive research and stakeholder consultations to understand what the organization has been doing in relation to the subject area and how the evaluation can reasonably assess their contributions.¹¹ As thematic evaluations often address themes that run across traditional boundaries of programmes and projects, carefully scoping the evaluation to make it manageable is important.
- (c) **Objectives (including main evaluation questions):** The objectives of the evaluation describe what exactly the evaluation is expected to achieve. This implies defining the main evaluation questions that need to be answered for this purpose. For instance, objectives may be to assess the extent to which a pilot project has achieved its objectives and identify design and implementation issues that need to be improved in scaling up the project model; to assess the extent to which FAO has contributed to the country in addressing its challenges and the appropriateness of its strategy in light of

¹⁰ This definition of the Purpose follows UNEG Standard 3.3. It draws on the context and the rationale of conducting the evaluation.

¹¹ Given the time-consuming nature of the recruitment process, the EM may start the search process early on when a rough idea on the required expertise is developed. For instance, the EM may put up a generic advertisement with a range of expertise required early on with a view to finding an ideal combination of expertise at the time of actual recruitment.

the needs and capacity of the country, and so on. Defining appropriate objectives allows the EM to craft a well-defined set of evaluation questions which can be presented as an elaboration of the objectives.

- (d) **Outline of the methodology:** The outline of the methodology explains, in broad terms, how the evaluation questions will be answered. Depending on the size of the evaluation, each main evaluation question could be further broken down and developed into a set of sub-questions. Then, the methods to answer the sub-questions could be suggested. The evaluation can take a modular approach in which a part of the evaluation is conducted early and separately (e.g. a project evaluation, an impact assessment) or by a specialized expert (e.g. a cyber-metric analysis, a qualitative analysis of highly-technical products). In such cases, an early identification of these methodological components is clearly important.

2. *Preparing the Terms of Reference*

The end product of this stage is the ToRs of the evaluation, which are a formal document that defines the evaluation. ToR must be approved by the OED Director.¹²

The elements to be included in the ToRs need to be adapted to each evaluation. However, there are some essential components that need to be included which are.

- Context (background, etc.)
- Purpose of the evaluation (rationale, intended use, etc.)
- Scope of the evaluation (evaluand, etc.)
- Objective of the evaluation (main evaluation questions, etc.)
- Methodology (overall approach, evaluation questions and sub-questions, suggested methods, etc.)
- Roles and responsibilities (roles and responsibilities of the EM/AEM, the experts in different capacities, the management counterpart, the reference group, etc.)
- Products (the final evaluation report, sectoral/case studies, the evaluation brief, presentations, etc.)
- Workplan (process, timeframe, etc.)
- Use and dissemination (the primary use of the evaluation, dissemination strategy to broader stakeholders, etc.). The evaluation dissemination strategy should cover both the activities/products during the evaluation conduct and those after the report is finalized¹³.

¹² The OED Director may delegate the clearance of ToRs; for instance, to the Project Evaluation Coordinator for project evaluations. OED Director may also subject the ToR to the peer review process.

¹³ Specific guidance on evaluation dissemination strategies and communication is available in OED.

The ToRs should be condensed in to a two page Brief (following OED standard format) that will be used with those stakeholders who are less likely to read the full ToRs – as introduction to the evaluation.

3. Setting the initial budget

Budget management is the responsibility of the EM. Initially, based on the experience in similar evaluations, the EM should agree with a rough budget outline with the OED Director. The budget should include the pro-rated cost of evaluation analysts as well as any consultant hired specifically for the evaluation. The budget should also include estimates for travel and DSA for the whole team. For project evaluations where the budget is subject to agreement with the budget holder, on behalf of the OED Director, the Project Evaluation Coordinator can decide the budget through a discussion with the budget holder.

C. DESIGNING THE EVALUATION

Designing the evaluation is the responsibility of the lead evaluator. OED frames the evaluation as an exercise to answer evaluation questions using the methodologies of social science. The evaluation methodology is a description of how the evaluation questions will be answered in a credible manner.

When it is an EM who leads the evaluation, the EM may seek assistance from an external expert or a group of experts in designing the evaluation. This is typically the case with evaluations that are conceptually complex or address highly-technical issues. When the evaluation is commissioned to an external consultant/entity, the external lead evaluator submits the design in the form of an **inception report**.

1. *Deciding on the approach*

At this stage, the lead evaluator needs to construct the design of the evaluation, i.e. the approach and the methodology. In doing so, the lead evaluator may ask: What is the conceptual framework or the theory of change of the evaluand? What do the evaluation questions mean under this conceptual framework? Should the evaluand be divided in some way to allow different research methodologies to be applied to different components? How can we ensure sufficient triangulation? Are there any innovative methods or tools that can be used to strengthen the evaluation? If conducting case studies, what are the purpose of these case studies and the validity of their findings? Is the evaluation plan feasible and practical under the budget, time and logistical constraints?

2. *Elaborating evaluation questions*

The main evaluation questions normally need to be translated into more detailed sub-questions, sub-sub-questions and so on. There are generally three layers of such questions. First is the general level at which evaluation questions respond to the purpose and address the objectives of evaluation. At the second level, these general questions are contextualized. For instance, what does an evaluation question mean if assessing advocacy work, capacity building activities or knowledge dissemination work? It can also be contextualized for different programme components and sectors. Generally, data collection methods are identified at this level. In the third layer are the questions (or protocols) to be used in actual interviews, focus group meetings, surveys, or field visits. This level of questions will necessarily be defined for each stakeholder group (e.g. for interviews) and each data collection method (e.g. a survey on the use of a database).

3. *Recruiting evaluators*

Once the methodology is outlined and research/data collection methods identified, the EM can specify what evaluators would need to be recruited to undertake which part of the

methodology. For the policy and process of hiring consultants as evaluators, refer to OED guidelines for the recruitment of consultants.

In the past, evaluations were conducted by a dedicated evaluation team, consisting mostly of consultants, with one of them designated as the team leader. The evaluation methodology was then left to the team leader to develop. Today there is no need to first establish a dedicated team to conduct an evaluation. The structure of the evaluation team, if a team is needed, should follow the outline of the methodology. The research can be modularized, especially with complex thematic evaluations, to study different aspects of the evaluand through a variety of methods. Some parts of the evaluation can be fully commissioned to experts, for instance to conduct a technical review of outputs, or to evaluate a specific component of the evaluand.

Still, the EM may wish to establish a **core team** of evaluators to support him/her from the design stage of the evaluation to the drafting stage of the report. If needed¹⁴, the EM may

Evaluation questions and criteria

The use of evaluation questions as the drivers of the evaluation methodology does not imply discarding the widely-recognized OECD DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance, comprising: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. As professional evaluation experts, OED staff evaluators could use the DAC Criteria as a conceptual framework in defining evaluation questions and sub-questions. However, evaluators should resist using these criteria *pro forma* or mechanically: all the criteria should not be applied automatically to every evaluation, and the designer should focus only on questions relevant to the specific evaluation. What is required is to contextualize the concepts and prioritize: instead of asking the evaluators to assess the effectiveness in general, one must ask for instance whether a national system for pesticide control has been established with FAO support and, if not, why. This will allow evaluators to focus their research and come up with more relevant and precise answers. It will force the evaluation designer to think about what needs to be done to answer this question sufficiently, and design the evaluation within the means in terms of cost and time. It can also help the evaluation designer tackle complex evaluands, such as those with multiple layers of “outcomes”. It will also help non-expert readers understand the evaluation report.

With the question-driven approach, the evaluation manager/designer will engage in a thought process as follows:

- Precisely what do we want to know about the evaluand (evaluation questions)?
- To do so, what questions need to be asked in concrete terms (inquiries)?
- How can we obtain robust answers to these questions (data collection strategy)?

The evaluation manager and designer should then ask whether this would be feasible within the budget and timeframe provided and, if not, prioritize the questions or re-scope the evaluation.

¹⁴ This applies in particular to evaluation managers with less experience, or when the subject matter is highly technical that requires continued engagement of experts. However, it should be made clear that this is not the “team leader” in the traditional terms, who would be ultimately responsible for the contents of the final report.

enlist at the start, the support of a senior consultant to act as the **principal evaluator**, to help him/her in elaborating the evaluation design and consolidating the evaluation findings from various sources into the final draft of the report.

For commissioned evaluations, the external entity usually proposes a team to engage in the evaluation, based on the outline methodology described in the ToR. For evaluations commissioned to an individual consultant, the principal evaluator and the EM may collaborate to identify other evaluators, if needed, based on the outline methodology.

OED will make increasing use of national consultants who can contribute to the evidence gathering at country level over a longer period of time than the timeframe of the main evaluation missions.

4. *Conducting stakeholder analysis*

At the scoping stage, the EM has already begun identifying some key stakeholders (e.g. to form a reference group)¹⁵. The EM will also have identified types of informants in outlining the methodology (e.g. beneficiary assessments, a staff survey). At this stage, the EM must conduct a systematic stakeholder analysis to identify primary and secondary stakeholders from whom to obtain data, for each evaluation question/sub-question and for each component of the evaluand.

For practical reasons, the specific identity of individual stakeholders (e.g. the name of the person or the project site) may only be specified at a later stage. While collecting data, the evaluator may find additional stakeholders who need to be interviewed but may have been unknown at the design stage. However, at this stage, the evaluator should build a framework that allows him/her to concretely plan the data collection activities with sufficient specificity (e.g. the implementing partners of project X in the department Y, ten beneficiary villages of project Z and two comparison villages).

5. *Revising the budget estimate*

As the evaluation design is developed, the EM must revise the budget accordingly and discuss it with the OED Director for approval. The revision should reflect estimated costs of concrete activities, including travel plans, and estimated consultant fees. This must be done before making final decisions on recruitments and activity plans; the EM should be prepared to change the plans or the composition of consultants for the team if the budget is considered too high.

¹⁵ One form of stakeholder analysis, to identify the influence/power/stake in the evaluand and the interest in the evaluation, could be done during the Concept Note stage to help determine who should be part of the reference group, among internal and external actors, and how they should be involved in the evaluation.

D. COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA

Data collection and analysis is the main stage of the evaluation. The lead evaluator has the overall responsibility for this phase, while s/he may delegate some data collection and analysis to other evaluators. Once the data is collected according to the evaluation design, it is analyzed to produce findings which answer the sub-questions and inquiries and may also present other research findings. The findings are further analyzed to produce conclusions that answer the main evaluation questions.

1. *Organizing and recording data*

It is important to collect and record the data in an organized manner. Each interview or document review normally produces data related to a number of findings. Hence the data must be reorganized according to the findings to ensure that each finding is sufficiently supported by evidence (or that each finding is triangulated).

It is the responsibility of the EM to ensure that all the primary data is recorded¹⁶ and, together with references to secondary data, organized in such a manner that it collectively forms the evidence base of the evaluation report. All the data and evidence collected must be recorded and traceable to both stakeholders and evaluation questions. In other words, if a question were to be raised at a later stage on one of the findings, the EM should be able to defend it by referring to the evidence. This part of the work will not be made public but is used internally by OED to ensure the consistency of the findings and conclusions with the data.¹⁷

The EM should make this clear from the outset to all the evaluators engaged in the evaluation,¹⁸ and make the submission of the primary data record as a key deliverable on which the payments made to consultants depends on.

2. *Posing the right questions*

Whether in an interview or a focus group discussion, it is important to pose the right questions to elicit critical information. In doing so, evaluators should also include questions that test the counter-factual. The counter-factual is a “what if” scenario that, in comparison to the actual situation, allows the evaluator to gauge the degree of contribution by the evaluand.

For example, if the stated result achieved was that a national law has been drafted with the contribution from a series of workshops of government officials, one may wish to ask, “What

¹⁶ Prior to embarking in data collection, the evaluators should agree on how to record and organize primary data from interviews, focus group meetings, surveys and so on.

¹⁷ The anonymity of the sources of information is often needed, and this entails not revealing the information source to those who may ask or question it. Evaluators should submit the records to OED, which will ensure that the source is kept anonymous to external entities.

¹⁸ Unfortunately, this is not practiced in all evaluation offices, and there are consultants who do not consider it essential. Therefore the EM must explicitly confirm this with all the evaluators so that they understand this.

if there had been no workshop, would the national law still have been drafted?” If the answer is yes, then the next question would be, “Would the contents of the national law have been different if there had been no workshop?” and so on.

3. *Building and validating preliminary findings and conclusions*

Typically, the lead evaluator organizes a dedicated time with the core evaluation team to consolidate and deepen the data analysis. While the EM or the lead evaluator¹⁹ may not get involved in all data collection activities, this is an important stage of the evaluation where his/her full attention should be paid. Here, the evaluators cross-examine their findings and evidence base so that the findings are well supported and there is no incoherence among them; they agree on strategic and cross-cutting findings and consolidate a common set of preliminary findings. The team should then proceed to produce preliminary conclusions, often through a brainstorming exercise based on the preliminary findings.

The preliminary findings and conclusions should be presented to key stakeholders and/or the reference group (or, if not feasible, to a sub-set of the reference group) to strengthen their validity. For country-programme and field project evaluations, this is normally done towards the end of the country mission with the country-office team and possibly with selected national stakeholders. For thematic and global project evaluations, this is normally done with key internal stakeholders in both headquarters and decentralized offices. In small-scale evaluations in which there is no such occasion, this process could be integrated into the draft review process.

In both occasions – during the discussion within the evaluation team or with the stakeholders, it is not very uncommon to find the need to conduct some extra research/data collection to address incoherencies among the findings or questions raised by stakeholders. The EM and/or the lead evaluator should prepare for such occasions and plan the schedule accordingly.

4. *Revising the budget estimate*

Besides the consultant fees, most of the expenditure is incurred during the data collection and analysis phase. The EM is responsible for regularly updating and monitoring the expenditure, and informing and discussing with OED Director if a significant change is expected.

¹⁹ Even for commissioned evaluations, the EM might wish to be involved in the data analysis exercise to gain deeper understanding of the findings. This is subject to agreement between the EM and the lead evaluator.

E. DRAFTING AND QUALITY CONTROLLING THE REPORT

The lead evaluator has the overall responsibility for drafting the report. The EM has the overall responsibility for the quality control, including when it is subject to a peer review process. When the EM is the lead evaluator, the EM may entrust the preparation of the early draft²⁰ to a consultant but should take over the ownership at the quality control stage.

1. *Preparing the first, second and final draft*

Under the leadership of the lead evaluator, the evaluation team prepares the **first draft**. Once the consolidated report is prepared, it is subject to the internal quality control process of OED. If it is a commissioned evaluation, the EM undertakes the quality control. If it is an EM-led evaluation, it is subject to the peer review at this stage.²¹

Once it is quality controlled, the EM asks for the clearance by OED Director for external circulation.²² When it is cleared, it becomes the **second draft** for external circulation and reviews. If it is a commissioned evaluation, the EM should provide the Director with the basis for clearance, i.e. assurance that the contents were thoroughly reviewed and revised as needed. For EM-led evaluations, the peer reviewer together with the EM should assure the Director that the quality was adequately controlled according to the OED peer review criteria.

The second draft is sent to the reference group, or selected key stakeholders, including the expert panel if one was created, for review and written comments. It is a good practice, if feasible time-wise, to send it to the main internal stakeholders first to ensure factual accuracy before distributing it more broadly for comments. The OED Director may decide to send it also for review by an external expert to support the credibility of the evaluation, especially with an EM-led evaluation.

When written comments are received, the lead evaluator takes the lead in incorporating them as appropriate. As a final step of quality control, the EM or the peer reviewer checks if the comments are appropriately addressed. This becomes the **final draft**.

2. *Quality control of the drafts*

The EM is responsible for the quality control of the first draft. For an evaluation that s/he lead, the EM should enlist the support of the peer reviewer in providing the quality control. At this stage, the following elements should be looked at:

²⁰ For instance, the consultant could be tasked to coordinate, quality-control and consolidate the contribution from evaluation team members.

²¹ This includes subjecting the draft to the OED gender peer review process, in addition to the peer review for general quality control.

²² For project evaluations, the clearance is done through the Project Evaluation Coordinator.

- The structure of the report is clear and follows the logic of the evaluation (see the next section).
- The methodology is clearly presented and was appropriate in answering evaluation questions and sub-questions.
- Findings, conclusions and recommendations are clearly presented without ambiguity and subjectivity in language.
- Findings are well substantiated by evidences originating from relevant sources, triangulated, and supported by logical analysis and reasonable judgments.
- Findings on gender mainstreaming are present.
- Conclusions are supported by the findings and reflect logical analysis and reasonable judgments on underlying factors.
- Conclusions answer the main evaluation questions.
- Recommendations follow the findings and conclusions
- Recommendations are clear in terms of whom they are addressed and they are realistic and actionable.
- Lessons learnt, if any, are innovative and replicable/generalizable.

3. *Drafting with a clear logic of evaluation*

Evaluation reports should be drafted with the logic of the evaluation as defined at the outset. They must therefore contain certain elements in a set sequence. To this end, a general structure of the report is provided below and should be followed by all evaluations. More elaborate structure will be established for each type of evaluation through additional specific guidance documents.

- (a) **Introduction:** The introduction section should contain firstly the purpose, the scope and the objectives of the evaluation, including the main evaluation questions to be answered. Secondly, the approach and methodology should be explained. This part can include: evaluability issues which may have affected decisions on the methodology; the actual methodology used (e.g. if a survey was carried out, what was the scope and the response rate); and any methodological limitations faced during the research. Finally, the structure of the report should be briefly introduced.
- (b) **Background and description of the evaluand:** In this part,²³ the contextual background and the description of the evaluand are provided to enable the readers to understand the assessment. While this is essentially a descriptive part of the report, some basic analysis could already be presented in this part to help readers understand the evaluand better. However, the assessment of analytical results should be incorporated in the next part. Also, information overload should be avoided, i.e. one

²³ Depending on the nature and quantity of information, this could be done in separate sections; e.g. national context and programme descriptions can be in separate sections for country-programme evaluations.

should avoid putting all the information available regardless of its relevance to the evaluation.

- (c) **Assessment:** This is the main part of the evaluation report. In this part, the assessment of the evaluand is provided in the form of a series of findings from the evaluation. Depending on the type of evaluation, this part can be structured by sectors, theme or evaluation questions, or in a hierarchical structure. In each section, the findings should be clearly presented, each in one paragraph upfront, followed by supporting evidence sets and analysis.
- (d) **Conclusions and recommendations:** Conclusions are higher-level analytical conclusions from the findings, and should answer the main evaluation questions. Conclusions are not a summary of findings, and factual descriptions should be kept to a minimum in this part. Each conclusion should be presented upfront in one paragraph, followed by an explanation. Conclusions and evaluation questions do not need to match one-to-one: there could be multiple conclusions for one evaluation question, and also be some conclusions that emanate from unexpected findings that are not foreseen in the questions. Recommendations must naturally follow the conclusions. While it is not always necessary to have one-to-one correspondence, there must be a clear linkage from the conclusions. Each recommendation should also be presented upfront in one paragraph, followed by elaboration if necessary.

4. *Holding stakeholder consultation*

The final draft is subject to a stakeholder consultation.²⁴ For thematic and country-programme evaluations, a stakeholder workshop should be organized to present the evaluation findings and conclusions, and to discuss and calibrate recommendations so that they are realistic and implementable. This is an important step in ensuring the buy-in by key stakeholders as well as relevant decision makers, and promotes the use of evaluations.

For country-programme evaluations, involving the national stakeholders at the decision-making level is particularly important. This ensures a common understanding between the national stakeholders and the FAO country team on the strategic issues raised by the evaluation and the way forward. It is therefore a good practice to conduct the stakeholder workshop followed by a presentation of preliminary management response by the FAO country team. If the opportunity arises, it is also good practice to combine it with the discussion on the next cycle of country programme framework.

²⁴ The EM may decide to organize the stakeholder workshop with the second draft instead of the final draft. This depends on the confidence of the EM in the quality of the second draft, and the composition of desirable workshop participants (e.g. the workshop should be organized with the final draft when high-level national counterparts participate). With larger evaluations, the EM may also organize the workshop with a smaller stakeholder group with the second draft, in addition to one for the final draft, if this is desirable.

For thematic evaluations presented to the governing body, the stakeholder consultation also takes place in the internal Evaluation Committee. Depending on the subject matter addressed in the evaluation, this format may be used in lieu of a general stakeholder workshop in obtaining the feedback and calibrating the recommendations.

For small-scale evaluations and project evaluations, the consultation can be organized in a simplified format, for instance through an on-line meeting.

In all cases, it is important to obtain the feedback from all those who will be involved in the implementation of recommendations and related decisions, prior to the finalization of the report. Attention should be paid not to overlook stakeholders in decentralized offices when relevant.

Example of findings and conclusions

Findings 3.2: The integration of emergency, rehabilitation and development work in the country offices was largely recognized as a success. It resulted in stronger visibility for FAO and an integrated country office with a stronger representation in interagency and donor meetings. In country offices where no emergency team existed, however, there is still a need for capacity development and support should an emergency situation arise.

A major step in FAO's decentralization process has been the transfer of responsibility for the emergency and rehabilitation project cycle management from the headquarters-based Emergency and Rehabilitation Division to the relevant decentralized offices for Level 1 and 2 emergencies. The Regional Representatives acquired the responsibility to provide any necessary support to the country offices as needed, where responsibility for all work in the country has been assigned to FAORs. The measure went hand-in-hand with the more strategic change of approach to emergency and rehabilitation that was conceptually and programmatically ...

Conclusion 10: The strong ownership by the government of FAO-supported programmes provides a solid basis for development outcomes achieved so far to be sustainable. However, the national institutional and financial capacity is still very weak for sustaining the results without further support.

FAO-supported activities are well aligned with the priorities of the government and the manner in which FAO pursued these activities ensured the national ownership of the effort and its results. The government generally expressed its willingness to carry them forward. On the other hand, national capacity to continue necessary activities that ensure the sustainability was found to be still very weak. With a few exceptions, as in the case of support to the planning process, the projects have yet to create the national capacity for independent functioning. This implies that, without further support from development partners ...

F. FINALIZING AND PROMOTING THE USE OF THE REPORT

1. *Finalizing the report*

After the stakeholder workshop/consultation, the lead evaluator incorporates the feedback received and finalizes the report. If it is a commissioned evaluation, the EM may further adjust the draft in terms of the style, structure and format. At this point, if needed, the EM may seek to have it reviewed by a professional editor from the language and readability viewpoint.²⁵ The EM should obtain clearance by OED Director for finalizing the report.

Particular attention should be given to ensuring that the report is of a manageable length so as to support enhanced readability and subsequent utilization by major stakeholders. Only critical information of direct interest to them should be contained in the main report. Subsidiary and supporting information can be presented in the form of Annexes or accompanying studies.

When the contents are finalized, the EM²⁶ prepares the executive summary and the annexes.

Attributing the report

Attribution of the report is made in the Acknowledgements. If it is an OED-led evaluation, it could be formulated as the sample text below:

“This evaluation is conducted by the FAO Office of Evaluation, led by [name] as the evaluation manager and supported by [name] as the evaluation analyst. It is based on the extensive work of a core team of experts, comprising [names]. Country case studies were conducted by [names]. [Names] contributed as data collectors in the field research. [Names] made a valuable contribution as expert panel members. ...”

If it is a commissioned evaluation, it could be formulated as:

“This evaluation is conducted by a team of experts, led by [name] and comprising [names]. ... It is designed and managed by [name] of the FAO Office of Evaluation as the evaluation manager, and supported by [name] as the evaluation analyst. The report was subjected to standard quality control by the Office in terms of its process, methodology, factual accuracy, internal coherence, and relevance of its conclusions to evaluation questions.”

The contents should be customized to each evaluation. In case the Evaluation Manager does not wish to be identified as the lead evaluator, the report could be attributed to the Office upon consent of the Director.

²⁵ If the quality of writing was unexpectedly sub-standard the report will be sent for editing- respecting the requirement for sufficient pre-warning to the editorial manager and respecting the timing for which editorial work was booked. The budget for report editing for all report types will be managed as a centralized function.

²⁶ For commissioned evaluations, the EM may ask the lead evaluator to draft the executive summary and prepare the annexes, as well as other materials as needed.

The annexes should include, at a minimum: ToR of the evaluation, the list of people consulted, and the list of documents consulted. The Acknowledgements should explain the attribution of the report, as well as the roles played and contributions made by different contributors.

When the report is finalized, the EM is responsible for standard dissemination, including uploading it on the OED website. The report should be sent to the management counterpart for the preparation of the management response, as well as other key stakeholders and reference group members with acknowledgement. For country-programme evaluations, the EM must propose a briefing to the Permanent Representative of the country.

2. *Quality control of the final report*

The final report is subject to quality control. The EM should ask the Peer Reviewer to conduct it, using the established quality control criteria and the review sheet. The Peer Reviewer should pay attention particularly to points raised earlier when the first draft was reviewed.

The EM should address issues raised by the Peer Reviewer and indicate in the review sheet how they were addressed. In case the EM could not agree with the assessment or comment, the EM and the Peer Reviewer should ask the Director for guidance.

The report should be submitted to the Director for the final clearance, together with the review sheet.

3. *Promoting the use of the report*

Once the evaluation is completed, it should be actively shared and promoted, using the pathways identified in the dissemination strategy discussed during the initial phase of evaluation, with the support of the knowledge management officer.

The stakeholder workshop is a great opportunity to promote the buy-in of the report from stakeholders. The EM should also seek other opportunities as appropriate. For example, if a high-level decision maker could not participate in the stakeholder meeting, the EM may propose to have a brief visit to present the report separately. If the stakeholder meeting was dominated by external stakeholders, the EM may propose to organize a separate meeting with internal technical-level stakeholders to discuss the report.

The EM should contribute to the OED dissemination activities. The EM should prepare a two page final Evaluation Brief (following OED standard format) to be used in OED dissemination materials and send it to OED Knowledge Management Officer. The EM would also be asked to contribute to other OED knowledge management products, such as the annual report on evaluation or a compilation of lessons learnt. The EM and other internal OED staff are strongly encouraged to look for opportunities to present and share evaluation findings and lessons – also considering international conferences, seminars and workshops, not directly linked to the specific evaluation and not only during the time immediately following the closure of an evaluation conduct.

There must be a cross-utilization of findings among OED evaluations. Thematic evaluations must benefit from relevant country-programme and project evaluations. Country-programme evaluations should benefit from relevant project evaluations, and in turn could cover projects that are not evaluated separately.

One of the strategic objectives of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) is to promote the use of evaluations. It is expected that OED contributes and benefits from the work done by UNEG in this area.