



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the United
Nations

Office of Evaluation

Guidance Note for the Conduct of Country Evaluations

OED Guidelines

November 2011

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Office of Evaluation (OED)

This report is available in electronic format at: <http://www.fao.org/evaluation>

Permission to make copy, download or print copies of part or all of this work for private study and limited classroom use is hereby granted, free of charge, provided that an accurate citation and suitable acknowledgement of FAO as the source and copyright owner is given. Where copyright holders other than FAO are indicated, please refer to the original copyright holder for terms and conditions of reuse. All requests for systematic copying and electronic distribution, including to list servers, translation rights and commercial reuse should be addressed to copyright@fao.org.

For further information, please contact:

Director, OED
Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 1, 00153
Rome, Italy
Email: evaluation@fao.org

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of FAO concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The mention of specific companies or products of manufacturers, whether or not these have been patented, does not imply that these have been endorsed or recommended by FAO in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned.

Guidance Note for the Conduct of Country Evaluations

Purpose of this Guidance Note: to promote a systematic approach by OED evaluation managers to the planning and implementation of country evaluations, building on experience to date. The Note is also intended to inform evaluation teams undertaking country evaluations and FAORs who will need to have a clear understanding of the evaluation scope and process

1. Purpose and scope

Since 2005, FAO has been carrying out evaluations of the entirety of its work in individual countries. Country evaluations aim to improve the relevance and performance of FAO's interventions, providing accountability and deriving lessons for better formulation and implementation of country-level policies, strategies and activities in the future. Country evaluations look at FAO's work from the standpoint of its utility to the country. They provide FAO's stakeholders with a systematic and objective assessment of the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impacts and sustainability of the programmes and interventions undertaken by FAO in the country. In countries where there is a large portfolio of emergency and rehabilitation activities, evaluations consider the extent to which FAO's work links relief efforts to development, and FAO's operational capacity for timely delivery is a key element of the evaluation's scope.

Country evaluations should serve as important inputs into the formulation and review of the Country Programming Framework and FAO contributions to the UNDAF. As such, they will consider FAO cooperation at country level with respect to how FAO interventions best promote the Organization's comparative advantages and are related to its global strategic objectives and core functions.

Country evaluations examine:

- All nationally-based projects, including TCPs;
- Global and regional projects in which the country is included;
- Normative work used or generated at country level;
- Work at national level financed by the Net Appropriation (FAO Regular Budget) including technical assistance for national resource mobilization provided by TCI;
- National participation in FAO's global and regional normative initiatives, including statutory bodies;
- Work, role and management of the FAO Country Office including advice provided by the FAO Representation to the member state.

Country evaluations consider all of FAO's work providing direct support to the country, irrespective of the source of funding (Net Appropriation or Voluntary-Funded) or from where they are managed (HQs, Regional Office or the FAOR) and generally cover a period of 5 to 6 years.

The primary audience for country evaluations are the national government and FAO staff, whether posted in the country, or dealing with the country from sub-regional, regional or headquarters offices. Other target audiences are donors in the country, the UN country team and national civil society organizations.

Country evaluations are complex and lengthy exercises, comparable to thematic and strategic evaluations. So far, country evaluations have been presented to the Programme Committee in the form of periodic synthesis reports that have brought together common findings and recommendations of evaluations in countries that have some similar characteristics. Between 2007 and 2011 synthesis reports were prepared covering nine countries¹ grouped in three different categories, namely low-income food-deficit countries; countries emerging from complex emergency situations and large emergency programs; and large, rapidly developing countries.

2. Selection of countries

The Programme Committee endorses the types of countries to be reviewed in its periodic examinations of the rolling work plan of OED. Countries are then selected for evaluation on the basis of a set of weighted criteria developed by OED. The criteria are largely based on the size of the FAO programme in the country and development indicators, particularly those related to the importance of agriculture in the overall economy. Other factors taken into consideration include the context (i.e. where significant changes in the country might signal a need for an external review), FAO planning processes (i.e. countries in which FAO is preparing a new cooperation framework), and other triggers such as the turn-over of an FAO Representative or a sudden increase in the country portfolio such as may occur following a large scale disaster.

In addition, OED's current procedures for the Evaluation of FAO's Work on Emergency and Rehabilitation state that large country E&R portfolios (representing more than 50% of the total country portfolio and annual E&R funding over US\$ 10 million) are subject to evaluation. Such evaluations are broadened to include all FAO's work, in order to give a full perspective. Six country evaluations carried out so far have been selected on that basis².

3. Evaluation process

The main steps in a country evaluation are: preparatory phase including a portfolio analysis; an inception visit in the country and drafting of terms of reference; organization of the evaluation; conduct of impact evaluation(s)/beneficiary assessments; multi-disciplinary country evaluation mission; and report writing.

- 3.1 Preparatory phase

¹Brazil, Cambodia, DR Congo, Honduras, India, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Tajikistan. In 2011, evaluations were also completed in Ethiopia, Haiti and Zimbabwe.

²DR Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, Sudan, Tajikistan and Zimbabwe

Portfolio Analysis and Collection/Review of Relevant Documentation

For each country evaluation, an Evaluation Manager is assigned by the Director, OED. The first task of the Evaluation Manager is to assemble information available. This includes:

- An in-depth search of information in FAO's corporate information systems (FPMIS, COIN, FAO Representation Web site, Briefs-On-Line, etc.) about FAO's work in the country;
- Project information downloaded from FPMIS in Excel format will establish a project database. At this stage, likely projects for separate evaluations during the overall country evaluations will be identified;
- identification of actual and potential normative work used by or of interest to the country;
- general information about the country and the agricultural sector, including policies and strategies;
- development issues facing the country.

Identifying key stakeholders in FAO and in the country

Key informants within FAO are identified through a review of COIN and FPMIS (budget holders, lead technical unit officers, project Task Force members) and initial interviews are held to the extent possible with those in headquarters. Interviews at this point in time are useful to map out in more detail FAO's work in the country, collect information on projects and programmes and canvass suggestions on key issues and questions for the evaluation.

In close collaboration with the FAO Representation, a list of interlocutors in the country is compiled and a plan of work is organized for the preparatory mission (see below). FAO officers in HQ and regional/sub-regional offices and recent Back-to-Office-Reports are good sources of suggestions for identifying key people in the country in the different areas of work.

Typical stakeholders for country evaluations will include:

- FAO staff in HQ and at the Regional and/or Sub-regional Office to which the FAO Representation in the country reports to;
- FAO Representation staff;
- FAO project staff;
- Government officials at decision-making and implementation level;
- UNCT members;
- Resource Partners (donors);
- NGOs and civil society organisations, and
- beneficiaries at community/household level.

Preparatory Mission

During the preparatory phase, the Evaluation Manager and the Team Leader (if identified) visit the country and possibly the relevant regional and/or sub-regional office. This mission normally takes place at least four months before the final multi-disciplinary evaluation mission. The

purpose of the preparatory mission is to collect further information on the country context (timelines, priorities) and FAO's work in the country, to inform FAO and key national stakeholders and other partners (civil society organizations, donors and the UN country team) about the evaluation, achieve their buy-in to the process and canvass their opinions on the main evaluation issues and questions. The mission will also advocate with the FAOR and key Government stakeholders setting-up a consultative group to act as focal point for the evaluation, to facilitate coordination and ownership of the evaluation process and eventual use of the report within the country. The preparatory mission is also an opportunity to identify and conduct face-to-face interviews with national experts who may participate in the evaluation team.

The FAO Country Office is contacted well in advance and is responsible for providing logistical support to the preparatory mission and for setting up meetings with FAO staff and other stakeholders. The FAOR is a key informant at this stage of the evaluation as it is often only s/he that can identify non-project based FAO assistance provided through the Representation. The FAOR should also help to identify any normative work that has been of particular relevance to the programme.

The mission will also assess the potential for undertaking an in-depth assessment of impact in one or several areas (see below). This is discussed with stakeholders and a final decision should be made in agreement with the FAO Representation and the Government during the mission. Finally, the mission will begin to define appropriate methodologies for the evaluation and initiate preparation of a programme for the main evaluation mission.

At the conclusion of this phase, a Preparatory Phase Report is prepared, which brings together all the information gathered so far, including the portfolio analysis, the information collected with FAO and other stakeholders, etc. This report is validated by FAO stakeholders, but will remain a working document for internal use by the evaluation team.

- 3.2 Terms of Reference and organization of the evaluation

On the basis of the Preparatory Phase Report, OED prepares the draft Terms of Reference for the evaluation and if required, for the impact evaluation/beneficiary assessment (see 3.3.)

The ToR will identify key projects that are deemed particularly significant for the overall country evaluation and will have individual reports as part of the country evaluation process. These may include projects that will go through a separate project evaluation because of budget size (such evaluations normally take place outside the time frame of the final multi-disciplinary evaluation mission) and projects that have particular reporting requirements, such as TCPs and CERF-funded initiatives.

The ToR briefly describes the context, scope and nature of FAO's work in the country, key evaluation questions and methodologies and tools to be used. It is important to explicitly define in the ToR the evaluation framework against which FAO's performance will be assessed. This is ideally the Country Programming Framework whenever available, but other sources (e.g. the Government rural development strategy, UNDAF) may be used. The evaluation should also

assess to the extent possible the contributions of FAO's work in the country to the core functions of the Organization³.

The ToR define the competences required in the multi-disciplinary evaluation team, on the basis of which OED, in close consultation with the Team Leader, selects and recruits consultants to be members of the evaluation team. The ToR should also contain a tentative final report outline that will be discussed and finalized by the evaluation team. The draft Terms of Reference are circulated for comment within FAO and to Consultative Groups, if established.

The evaluation team usually comprises national and international consultants, whose skill mix covers the competencies required to carry out the evaluation, including an expert in management and administration, to assess the functioning of the FAO Representation. It should be gender-balanced to the extent possible. Team members receive individual Terms of Reference that specify in detail the scope of their assignment.

Documentation to be prepared for the evaluation team includes a database of projects and portfolio analysis, the Preparatory phase report, key context and sectoral analysis (Government, UN and donor strategies and reviews), existing evaluations of FAO work in the country, descriptions of relevant FAO normative work, project-related documentation (project agreements/documents, reports, outputs, technical backstopping reports, financial delivery analysis), FAOR inception and end-of-assignment reports, and lists of stakeholders to be met and the team's programme of work in the country⁴. As appropriate, the team also receives practical information for the mission including key contacts, security information, FAO country staff lists, visa requirements, maps, etc.

- 3.3 Conduct of impact evaluations/beneficiary assessments

During the preparatory phase of the evaluation, OED will identify an area or areas of work where FAO has had significant involvement during the review period and where changes brought about by FAO's work at community and household level can be reasonably expected. Topics covered in country evaluations so far have included farmers' field schools, provision of veterinary services, policies and support for community management of forestry and fishery resources, emergency input distribution and household food security interventions. Studies have also examined organizational and institutional development support.

³ The eight Core Functions of FAO are: monitoring and assessment of long-term and medium-term trends and perspectives; assembly and provision of information, knowledge and statistics; development of international instruments, norms and standards; policy and strategy options and advice; technical support to promote technology transfer and build capacity; advocacy and communication; interdisciplinarity and innovation; partnerships and alliances.

⁴ The list of stakeholders and programme of work are indicative and may be amended by the evaluation team.

As soon as the topic for the study is agreed upon, OED drafts the Terms of Reference which are discussed with the Team Leader and FAO units concerned. OED identifies, recruits and fields the consultants who will carry out the work.

Impact evaluations and/or beneficiary assessments should be completed before the multi-disciplinary evaluation mission, so that the evaluators can use the findings to probe further the contribution of FAO to the country's developmental goals. The report appears as an Annex to the main evaluation report.

- 3.4 Approach and methods of the multi-disciplinary evaluation mission

A multi-disciplinary country evaluation mission will typically last three to five weeks, depending on the scope, geographical dispersion of the initiatives to be assessed, logistics, etc.

The Mission may begin at FAO headquarters, regional/sub-regional office or directly in-country. In all cases, the Team Leader and Evaluation Manager will brief the team on issues reflected in the TOR and the evaluation process and deliverables. If the evaluation starts in HQ or a regional/sub-regional office, the team will interview stakeholders who have been involved in the FAO country work⁵. To avoid duplication in data gathering, the team will make reference to the information contained in the Preparatory Phase Report.

When the team arrives in country, after the initial briefing on the evaluation, the mission will meet with the FAO Representative and country-based FAO staff on the work carried out, key achievements and constraints, and meetings with appropriate senior Government officials. If there is an in-country Consultative Group, a meeting is held with it in the first days of the mission.

After the initial joint meetings, team members may need to disperse to have other meetings and make field visits to projects. Insofar as possible, team members should attend meetings with one or more of their colleagues (groups should be varied), so as to ensure cross-fertilization of ideas among team members. Internal team meetings should be organized throughout the mission period to share initial findings and discuss new issues/questions for the evaluation. At the end of the data gathering and field visit phase, the team will re-assemble and spend some time (normally two to three days) to share findings, discuss and agree on preliminary conclusions and recommendations.

The assessment of the use of FAO normative work is usually done through analysis of references to FAO Global Public Goods in national policies and strategies, and through interviews with

⁵ It is not always necessary for all team members to interview at HQ and regional/sub-regional levels. The key themes and stakeholders will be defined during evaluation scoping and the relevant team members for those themes should attend the interviews. Cost of bringing the whole team to different locations may be a consideration. Where the whole team is not together, 1-2 preparatory days will need to be organized at country level prior to the launch of the mission.

informants on their potential and actual use in the country, for policy, capacity development, and design and implementation of interventions (e.g. projects), whether by the Government, FAO or others.

Two debriefing sessions, organized sufficiently in advance to ensure participation by stakeholders, will take place in the country at appropriate venues. The first is with FAO internal stakeholders. This initial sharing of findings and conclusions should serve to enrich the discussion on ways forward, feeding into the development of actionable and specific recommendations.

The second is a general debriefing, an opportunity for the team to validate its preliminary conclusions and recommendations with key stakeholders, including in addition to FAO staff, the Government, civil society, partners among bilateral and sister UN agencies, and if appropriate, representatives of community level beneficiaries.

Subsequent to the debriefings, an internal meeting of the evaluation team takes place to discuss feedback from the debriefings and organize the report writing phase.

Sharing of the initial findings with FAO regional/sub-regional offices and headquarters may take various forms. The country level debriefing may be broadened to these other stakeholders using video-conferencing. Alternatively, the Team Leader may debrief other stakeholders at the regional/sub-regional office and/or headquarters immediately after the multi-disciplinary mission – or else present a fully-elaborated draft report at sessions taking place some time after the mission concludes.

- 3.5 Finalization of the evaluation report

The draft report, after quality assurance by OED, is circulated to FAO stakeholders for comments and suggestions. As soon as the evaluation report is finalized and distributed to all stakeholders⁶, the FAO Representative normally coordinates the preparation of the Management Response to the evaluation. Close consultation with other stakeholders (e.g. Government, other FAO units) takes place in preparing the Management Response. The final report and the Management Response may be presented formally to Consultative Groups where established. The Country Evaluation report should be seen as an important opportunity to strengthen the dialogue and partnership between FAO and the member country.

The evaluation report and management response are in the public domain through the FAO Evaluation website. One year after the finalization of the Management Response, the FAO Representation coordinates the preparation of a Follow-up report on the state of implementation of the recommendations with the Government and the relevant units in FAO.

⁶ The FAO Representative is responsible for ensuring adequate dissemination of the final evaluation report at country level.

Guidance Note for the Conduct of Country Evaluations

