

Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit for Programme Managers

Office of Oversight and Evaluation

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Planning and Managing an Evaluation

Part VI: Evaluation Standards

1. Introduction

The Toolkit is a supplement to the UNFPA programming guidelines. It provides guidance and options for UNFPA Country Office staff to improve monitoring and evaluation activities in the context of results-based management. It is also useful for other programme managers at headquarters and national levels.

This part VI of the tool number 5 lists evaluation standards to be applied throughout the evaluation process to ensure the quality of the evaluation product. In addition to a review of the literature from bilateral and development agencies such as OECD, DANIDA and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the content is based on *Program Evaluation Standards* developed by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Development (1994, 1999) and the adapted evaluation standards recommended by the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL).

2. Ensuring the quality of evaluations

For evaluations to be useful they should meet certain standards of quality. The international community of evaluators has established standards for sound and fair evaluation, which can be applied while planning an evaluation and throughout its implementation. Some of these standards are considered as universal while others are perhaps more unique to certain cultural settings. As such, their application should be adapted taking into account the specific situation. These standards are organized around four important attributes of evaluation:

Utility Standards

The Utility standards should ensure that an evaluation is guided by the information needs of its users. These standards are as follows:

Stakeholder Identification – Persons involved in or affected by the evaluation should be identified so that their interests and needs can be addressed. The following persons, groups, and institutions are referred to as “stakeholders” and should be consulted in the context of an evaluation:

- Those who decide upon the future of the programme (often the funding agency)
- Those who are responsible for the planning and design of the programme
- Those who are involved in the implementation of the programme
- Those who should or will be directly or indirectly affected by the programme (target groups and their social contexts)
- Other groups with an interest in the evaluation findings (e.g., decision makers who plan similar programmes, evaluators, and the general public).

Evaluator Credibility – Those conducting an evaluation should be both trustworthy and competent, so that the evaluation findings achieve maximum credibility and acceptance. To be found credible by different stakeholder groups, the following characteristics are crucial: professional competence, integrity, independence, as well as social and communication skills.

Information Selection - The information collected should be comprehensive enough to address pertinent questions about the programme and be responsive to the interests and needs of stakeholders. When planning an evaluation, it is also important to distinguish information that is essential versus information that is desirable.

Transparency of Assessment - The perspectives, rationale, and procedures used to interpret the findings should be carefully described, so that the bases for value judgments are clear.

Report Clarity - Evaluation reports should clearly describe the programme being evaluated including its context, and the purposes, questions, procedures, and findings of the evaluation. The language should be precise (e.g., clear definitions of the most important terms and consistent use of terminology) and easily understood by the intended audience.

Report Timeliness - Significant interim findings and final reports should be brought to the attention of intended users, so that they can be used in a timely fashion. Evaluations are most useful when planned to fit into the stakeholders’ decision-making processes. For many evaluations it is sensible to share interim findings with the stakeholders, especially when these results might have an impact on their future actions.

Evaluation Impact - Evaluations should be planned, conducted, and reported in ways that encourage stakeholder participation to varying degrees, so that the likelihood that evaluation results will be used is increased. The more involved stakeholders are at the different stages of the evaluation process, the greater the likelihood they will act on the evaluation recommendations.

Feasibility Standards

The Feasibility standards should ensure that an evaluation is carried out in a realistic, thoughtful, tactful, and cost-effective manner. These standards are as follows:

Practical Procedures - Evaluation methods and instruments should be practical to keep disruption to a minimum while the needed information is collected. It is crucial to discuss with stakeholders the advantages and disadvantages of chosen methods.

Political Viability - The evaluation should be planned and conducted taking into account the different positions of the various interest groups, in order to obtain a balanced presentation of different points of view. It should enlist their cooperation and avert or counteract possible attempts to curtail evaluation activities or to bias the results.

Cost Effectiveness – Evaluations should produce information of sufficient value for informed decision-making, learning and accountability so that the resources expended can be justified.

Propriety Standards

The Propriety standards should ensure that an evaluation is conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation as well as those affected by its results. These standards are as follows:

Formal Agreement - Obligations of the formal parties to an evaluation (what is to be done, how, by whom, when) should be agreed to in writing, so that they are obligated to adhere to all conditions of the agreement or to renegotiate it. Such a formal written agreement should at least regulate budget, time, personnel, design, methodology and report contents.

Protection of Individual Rights - Evaluations should be designed and conducted in a way that respects and protects the rights and welfare of human beings. If an evaluation leads to well-founded conclusions that pose a threat to the welfare of individuals, the extent to which these findings are disseminated needs to be carefully considered and justified.

Human Interactions - Evaluators should respect human dignity and worth in their interactions with other persons associated with an evaluation so that participants are not threatened or harmed. This is not only a matter of human dignity but also relates to practical considerations. It is therefore necessary to be familiar with the cultural practices (i.e. beliefs, manners and customs) of those involved.

Complete and Fair Assessment - Evaluations should be complete and fair in their examination and recording of strengths and weaknesses of the programme being evaluated, so that strengths

can be built upon and problem areas addressed. If, for whatever reason (e.g., because of time or budgetary constraints), there are issues that cause difficulties for the evaluation (e.g., it was impossible to collect certain data) these should be brought to light.

Disclosure of Findings - The formal parties to an evaluation should ensure that the full set of evaluation findings is made accessible to the persons affected by and/or interested in the evaluation.

Conflict of Interest - Conflict of interest should be dealt with openly and honestly so that it does not compromise the evaluation process and results. It is therefore crucial that evaluators be able to clarify their roles and make a distinction between facts and opinions. The integrity of the evaluation cannot be compromised just to accommodate conflicts of interest.

Accuracy Standards

The Accuracy standards should ensure that an evaluation would reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine the value of the programme being evaluated. These standards are as follows:

Programme Documentation - The Programme being evaluated should be described and documented clearly and accurately. The description should be sufficiently detailed to ensure an understanding of programme aims and strategies. It is especially crucial to note differences between the planned and the actual performance of the programme.

Context Analysis – The context in which the programme exists should be examined in enough detail so that its likely influences on the programme can be identified. Understanding the setting in which a programme functions will help in the accurate interpretation of evaluation findings and in assessing the extent to which they can be generalized.

Described Purposes and Procedures – The purposes and procedures of an evaluation should be monitored and described in enough detail so that they can be identified and assessed. It is important that the evaluation process focus on the issues of greatest concern to stakeholders while using time and resources as efficiently as possible.

Defensible Information Sources - The sources of information used in a programme evaluation should be described in enough detail so that their adequacy can be assessed. The criteria used for selecting sources should be stated clearly so that users and other stakeholders can interpret the information accurately and assess if it might be biased.

Valid and Reliable Information - The information gathering procedures implemented should provide assurance that the interpretation arrived at is valid and reliable. Validity is defined by the extent to which methodologies and instruments measure what they are intended to measure. A data collection method is reliable to the extent that it produces the same results repeatedly.

Systematic Review of Information - The information collected, analyzed, and reported in an evaluation should be systematically reviewed and any errors found should be corrected.

Analysis of Qualitative and Quantitative Data - Qualitative and quantitative data should be analyzed in an appropriate, systematic way so that the evaluation questions can be effectively answered. Data analysis should follow rules of methodological soundness.

Justified Conclusions - The conclusions reached in an evaluation should be explicitly justified so that stakeholders can assess them. Evaluation conclusions are justified when they are based on a synthesis of empirical findings derived from the information collected. Evaluation information must be interpreted to appreciate the practical significance of what has been learned. Conclusions can be both positive and negative. Controversial conclusions should be substantiated.

Impartial reporting - Reporting procedures should guard against distortion caused by personal feelings and biases of any stakeholder group. All relevant perspectives need to be fairly represented.

Meta evaluation – The evaluation itself should be subject to an assessment of the evaluation’s process and quality upon its completion using these and other pertinent standards to determine its strengths and weaknesses.

Sources

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This tool is subject to constant improvement. We welcome any comments and suggestions you may have on its content. We also encourage you to send us information on experiences from UNFPA funded and other population programmes and projects which can illustrate the issues addressed by this tool. Please send your inputs to:

**United Nations Population Fund
Office of Oversight and Evaluation**

**Daily News Building
220 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017**

Telephone: (212) 297-5213

Fax: (212) 297-4938

E-mail: mompoint@unfpa.org

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