

# **M**onitoring and **E**valuation Toolkit for Programme Managers

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Office of Oversight and Evaluation

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## **Planning and Managing an Evaluation**

### **Part II: Defining Evaluation Questions and Measurement 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 programme management. It is also useful for other programme managers at headquarters and national levels. Many of the approaches described in this toolkit can be used as well for programme<sup>1</sup> strategy development.

This part II of tool number 5 discusses the “what” of evaluation: steps to define evaluation questions and measurement standards. The content is based on a review of evaluation literature from bilateral and other development agencies such as such as Danida, ILO, Management Sciences for Health as well as documentation from UNFPA project evaluations.

#### **2. Defining Evaluation Questions**

Most evaluations are concerned with issues of programme design, delivery and performance. Design and delivery issues refer to factors affecting results. These factors appear during programme implementation.

Performance issues relate to the actual programme results **(see Box 1)**

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of brevity “programme” will be used throughout the tool kit to refer to a country programme as well as its sub-programme and project components.

Each of these issues is explained in greater detail below.

### Box 1. What do we mean by Result?

*A result is a describable or measurable change in state that is derived from a cause and effect relationship. Results are the effects generated by a programme.*

There are *three different types* of results:

*Outputs*:.....products delivered

*Outcomes* (Purpose level).....short to medium-term changes in peoples conditions, values and attitudes, organizational systems, policies and plans

*Impacts* (Goal level).....long-term planned or unplanned, positive or negative changes in peoples conditions, institutions or in the development environment

*Source*: Tool Number 1: Glossary of Terms.

## Validity of design

A good programme design guides the implementation process, facilitates monitoring of implementation and provides a solid base for performance evaluation. In UNFPA, issues of programme design are assessed by using the programme logical framework.

Some key questions related to design include<sup>2</sup>:

- **Outputs, purposes and goals (the aims)**: are they clearly stated, describing solutions to identified problems and needs?
- **Inputs and strategies**: are they identified and are they realistic, appropriate and adequate to achieve the aims?
- **Objectively verifiable indicators**: are they direct, objective, practical and adequate (DOPA)<sup>3</sup>? Is responsibility for tracking them clearly identified?

<sup>2</sup> These questions are illustrative and should not be used as a “blue print”.

<sup>3</sup> A **Direct** Indicator closely tracks the result it is intended to measure; an **Objective** Indicator is unambiguous about: 1) what is being measured and data being collected; 2) has a clear operational definition that is independent of the person measuring the indicator; a **Practical** Indicator can be gathered at reasonable cost and frequency, and can be available in time for use in decision-making; an **Adequate** indicator constitutes the minimum necessary to ensure that progress towards results is sufficiently well captured. Further details on indicators are provided in Tool Number 6.

- **External factors and risks:** have factors external to the programme that could affect implementation been identified and have the assumptions about such risk factors been validated?
- **Execution, implementation, monitoring and evaluation responsibilities:** have they been clearly identified?
- **Gender sensitivity:** does the programme design address the prevailing gender situation? Are the expected gender related changes adequately described in the outputs? Are the identified gender indicators adequate?
- **Capacity building:** does the programme include strategies to promote national capacity building?
- **Programme approach:**
  1. In the case of a programme evaluation, does the design clearly establish linkages among sub-programmes?
  2. In the case of a sub-programme evaluation, are linkages among its component projects clearly established to ensure synergy in achievement of sub-programme aims?

## Delivery process

An assessment of the delivery process focuses on how the programme is being/was implemented to determine if the programme has remained on the right track towards the achievement of its aims and if not, what were the influencing factors.

Some key questions related to the delivery process include:

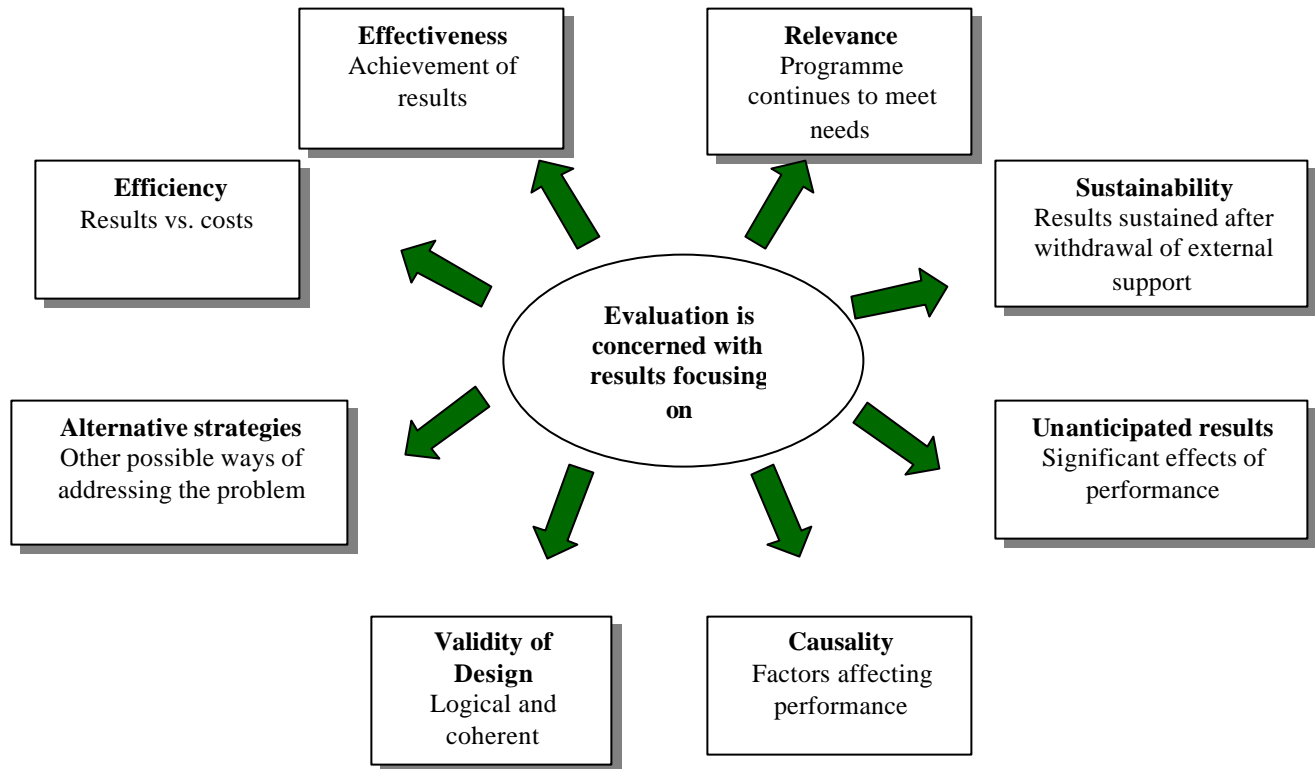
- **Activities:** how were they implemented?
- **Outputs:** were the planned outputs achieved? Were they achieved within the planned time frame? Were they of adequate quality? If not, why?
- **Programme management:**
  1. Did the executors and implementers of the programme discharge their respective roles in a cost-effective and cost-efficient manner? If not, why not?
  2. Were sound financial and equipment management procedures practised? Were the financial, human and material resources managed responsibly and efficiently?
  3. Was the technical assistance provided appropriate and of good quality?
  4. Did the monitoring and evaluation systems and processes allow for adequate assessment of changes in risks and opportunities in the internal and external environments? Did they contribute to effective decision-making in the course of programme implementation?

## Performance

When assessing programme performance, evaluations look beyond the delivery process and focus on the results of inputs delivered and the work done. The outcome of this assessment determines whether or not the programme has achieved or is likely to achieve its outputs and contribute to achieving programme purposes and goals.

The core evaluation concerns to assess programme performance are illustrated in **Figure 1** and described below.

**Figure 1: Core Evaluation Concerns**



*Source: ILO, 1997.*

## Relevance

An assessment of programme relevance examines the appropriateness of aims in relation to: the national needs, policies, and priorities; the needs and priorities of programme target groups (the local programme context); UNFPA's policies and priorities and its comparative advantage vis à vis other UN agencies and development partners. The analysis ascertains whether the programme continues to make sense and identifies any changes that may have occurred in its context during implementation. The initial problems and needs may no longer exist and policies and priorities may have changed as a result of political, economic, social and other factors, or even because of programme activities. Ultimately, the analysis determines whether the aims are still valid or should be reformulated.

Some key questions related to relevance include:

- **Needs, mandates, policies and priorities:** Do the programme aims address the national needs? Are they in line with the government's priorities and policies? Are they in line with UNFPA's mandate? Are they considered useful by the target population? Are they complementary to other donor interventions? Should aims be adjusted, eliminated or new ones added in light of new needs, priorities and policies?

## Effectiveness

An assessment of programme effectiveness focuses on the extent to which the outputs have been or will be achieved and whether the programme is likely to contribute to the stated purposes and goals. If not, the evaluation will identify whether the statements of aims should be modified (in case of a mid-term evaluation) or the programme be extended (in case of a final evaluation) in order to enable achievement of stated aims.

Some key questions related to effectiveness include:

- **Outputs:** to what extent have planned outputs been or will be achieved? What is the quality of the outputs?
- **Data on indicators :** have data been collected on the indicators of achievement? Do they provide adequate evidence regarding achievement of programme outputs and contribution to purposes and goals? Is it necessary to collect additional data?
- **Gender:** what were the achievements in terms of promoting gender equity and equality (planned/unplanned)?
- **Capacity building:** what were the achievements in terms of capacity building (planned/unplanned)?

## Efficiency

An assessment of programme efficiency measures the “productivity” of the programme interventions. It assesses the results obtained in relation to the expenditure incurred and resources used by the programme during a given period of time. The analysis focuses on the relationship between the quantity, quality, and timeliness of inputs, including personnel, consultants, travel, training, equipment and miscellaneous costs, and the quantity, quality, and timeliness of the outputs produced and delivered. It ascertains whether there was adequate justification for the expenditure incurred and examines whether the resources were spent as economically as possible.

Some key questions related to efficiency include:

- **Costs:** did the actual or expected outputs justify the costs incurred? Have the resources been spent as economically as possible?
- **Duplication:** did programme activities overlap and duplicate other similar interventions (funded nationally and/or by other donors)?
- **Alternative options:** are there more efficient ways and means of delivering more and better outputs with the available inputs?

## Sustainability

An assessment of programme sustainability ascertains the extent to which the programme results have had or are likely to have lasting results after programme termination and the withdrawal of external resources. The factors affecting sustainability are examined on the basis of the priority assigned to the programme by stakeholders. Their readiness to continue supporting or carrying out specific activities, or even replicate the activities in other regions or sectors of the country, is

particularly relevant. The analysis also assesses the availability of local management, financial and human resources that would be needed to maintain the programme results in the long run.

Some key questions related to sustainability include:

- **Likely sustainability:** is it likely that programme achievements will be sustained after the withdrawal of external support? Are involved counterparts willing and able to continue programme activities on their own? Have programme activities been integrated into current practices of counterpart institutions and/or the target population?
- **Resources:** have they been allocated by the implementing/executing counterparts to continue programme activities?

### Causality

An assessment of causality examines the factors or events that have affected the programme results. If the inputs needed to carry out the planned activities and deliver the expected outputs were available on time, the implementation and performance would be successful. If, on the other hand, there were significant deviations from the planned schedules, the analysis would determine the reasons for such changes. The assessment should also analyse the effect of other factors such as technical, administrative or managerial constraints, inadequate inputs, failed commitment by programme counterparts, insufficient funds, faulty assumptions or the effect of unexpected external factors.

Some key questions related to causality include:

- **What factors :** what particular factors or events have affected the programme results?
- **Internal/external factors :** were these factors internal or external to the programme?

### Unanticipated results

A programme evaluation may find significant unforeseen positive or negative results of programme activities. Once identified, appropriate action can be taken to enhance or mitigate them for a greater overall impact.

Some key questions related to unanticipated results include:

- **Were there any** unexpected positive and/or negative results of the programme?
- **How to address them:** can they be either enhanced or mitigated to achieve the desired impact?

### Alternative strategies

Evaluations examine whether alternative approaches might have had greater impact or might have been more cost-effective, particularly if the original strategies turn out to be inappropriate. This analysis is especially valuable when follow-up programmes are planned.

Some key questions related to alternative strategies include:

- **More effective approaches:** is there, or would there have been, a more effective way of addressing the problem(s) and satisfying the needs in order to achieve the outputs and contribute to higher level aims?

- **Relevance:** are programme strategies still valid or should they be reformulated?

Not all of the above evaluation concerns have to be examined in every evaluation. The final choice will depend on the purpose of each evaluation<sup>4</sup>. For instance, a formative evaluation undertaken in the course of programme implementation with the aim of taking decisions to improve its design and/or implementation would typically emphasise concerns of design, delivery process, efficiency, causality, unanticipated results, and alternative strategies.

A summative evaluation, undertaken at the end of programme implementation to judge its effectiveness, would typically concentrate on concerns of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, alternative strategies and sustainability.

An evaluation, which aims at extracting lessons learned and best practices or defining policy options would assess design, delivery processes, causality and efficiency in order to extract those characteristics which can effectively and efficiently deliver the desired results.

### 3. Methodological Challenges

Evaluator(s) face a number of methodological challenges with respect to the standards<sup>5</sup> they use to measure relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. These standards and methodological challenges are summarized in **Table 1** and further discussed below.

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<sup>4</sup> For a discussion on the issue of evaluation purpose, consult Tool Number 3: Purposes of Evaluation

<sup>5</sup> A standard is a level of performance according to specified criteria or achievement dimensions.

**Table 1: Performance related Evaluation Concerns: measurement standards and methodological challenges.**

Evaluation Concern	Measurement Standards	Methodological Challenge
<b>Relevance</b>	Needs, priorities and policies of programme target population, counterparts; UNFPA’s policies, priorities, comparative advantage.	Lack of consensus on or incorrect assessment of needs and country priorities and lack of clear policies.  Incorrect assessment of and/or lack of consensus on UNFPA’s comparative advantage.
<b>Effectiveness</b>	Agreed outputs, purposes and goals (aims).  Status of affected institutions, target population, and infrastructure prior to the programme interventions.	Unclear, multiple, confusing or changing aims.  Poorly defined aims indicators.  Lack of baseline information on the affected institutions, people, infrastructure.  Poor knowledge of cause /effect linkages.  Difficulty in attributing results to the particular programme due to intervening variables.
<b>Efficiency</b>	Similar interventions/best practices; criteria for what is considered reasonable.	What standards to use as a reference.
<b>Sustainability</b>	Sustainability factors (see box 5.)	Long term sustainability is a hypothetical, projected situation. Not all intervening factors which can compromise sustainability can be foreseen.

*Source: Adapted from Danida, 1999.*

With respect to the *relevance* of programme strategies, it requires in-depth field analysis by evaluator(s) to adequately determine the continued relevance of programme aims if the context (needs, priorities and policies) were not clearly defined at the time of programme design or in the course of implementation. **Box 2** provides an example of such a situation from a UNFPA commissioned evaluation.



### Box 2. The importance of using contextual information for programme design and adjustment.

The report of an evaluation of the Jenin Community-Based RH project in Palestine concluded the following:

“The second objective stated in the project proposal was that “18,000 new users of family planning will have been recruited and continuation rates will be improved.

The problem with this objective is twofold. First of all, the target population was overestimated and the target recruitment numbers were too ambitious. The number of target population does not appear to be based on the available scientific evidence (estimates of the district population published by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics). Secondly, the manner in which the numbers were determined is not clear from the proposal document. Furthermore, the project staff did not seem to be aware of this target and were unable to explain it. Still, the unrealistically high expectations seemed to put pressure on the staff to generate high numbers of new users and to reflect the numbers in their reported statistics, to the exclusion of other important activities that were being carried out.

As for the objective of improving continuation rates, it was not clear how that would be verified, since no baseline figure for continuation rates in those communities existed.

As a consequence of lack of proper initial situation analysis and adjustment in the course of project implementation, a large proportion of the budget (80,000 USD) was allotted to the purchase of contraceptives many of which eventually expired on the shelf due to lack of demand.”

*Source: Halabi, January 2000.*

Standards to determine a programme’s *effectiveness* often have to be reconstructed by evaluator(s) when UNFPA programme aims are too ambitious in relation to the resources and time frame available. Additionally, the UNFPA logical framework output OVIs are frequently poorly or incorrectly defined thus hampering a sound assessment of achievement of programme outputs. The failure of programme implementers to gather baseline data at the beginning of the implementation process against which progress can be measured, constrains the evaluator(s) ability to assess results. To facilitate the objective evaluation of results achievement, the OVIs, particularly those related to output, should be adjusted and refined in the early phase of programme implementation based on collection of baseline data and the accumulated knowledge of the programme context.

An additional difficulty is that long-term results can usually only be determined with certainty a significant period of time after programme completion. During that time, developments external

to the programme such as economic and social development factors, (for instance increase in age at marriage) could have influenced the programme targets thereby making it difficult to ascribe improvements to the programme interventions.

Defining objective *efficiency* standards is a major challenge for evaluators of UNFPA's programmes and projects. In practice the evaluator(s) frequently rely on their expert judgment, which can be subjective. However, approaches are available to define standards, among others in the health field. The Continuous Quality Improvement tool to strengthen FP programmes is one such approach, which, if used in the course of programme implementation, greatly facilitates monitoring and evaluation of programme efficiency (see Box 3). Another good approach for identifying efficiency standards is "benchmarking", analysing the performance of organizations, which excel in areas of work relevant to UNFPA.

### Box 3: Using the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) approach to define efficiency standards

CQI is performed by teams of staff at RH service delivery points. The CQI team implements the 7 step CQI cycle:

**Step 1: Identify an area** where opportunities for improvement exist

**Step 2: Define a problem** within that area, and **outline the sequence of activities (the process)** that occurs in that problem area

**Step 3: Establish the desired outcomes** of the process and the **requirements needed** to achieve them

**Step 4: Select specific steps** in the process to study and for each step, list the factors that prevent the achievement of the desired outcome

**Step 5: Collect and analyze data** about the factors that are preventing the achievement of the desired outcomes of the specific step being studied, and quantify the outcomes of that step

**Step 6: Take corrective action** to improve the process

**Step 7: Monitor the results** of the actions taken.

**In step 3** the CQI team **defines the standards** of efficiency against which services will be monitored and evaluated. The following is an example of such a standard:

"The client registration process is completed within 30 minutes of client's arrival at the clinic"

*Source: The Family Planning Manager, Volume II, Number 1, January/February 1993.*

Long-term programme *sustainability* is hard to foresee as many factors intervene over time. For instance, governments change and so may policies that are critical to support certain programmes originally funded by UNFPA. With a government change, key administrators also change and with them the institutional memory so necessary to keep particular approaches and programmes

running. A severe economic crisis may appear, jeopardizing funding for the programme. However, programme designers must ensure that the sustainability factors listed in **Box 4** are fully considered at the time of situation analysis and programme design. Evaluator(s) assess the likelihood of sustaining programme activities using the same standards.

#### **Box 4. Factors which influence sustainability of programme/project activities**

1. **Policy Support Measures**, priorities and commitments of programme implementers and target groups
2. **Choice of Technology** (for instance contraceptives) is appropriate to existing socio-cultural and economic conditions.
3. **Environmental aspects** such as management of population growth and distribution in relation to available land, water, fuel. Management of their living conditions such as housing, waste disposal, drinking water supply in order to avoid epidemics.
4. **Socio-cultural** integration. Acceptance of interventions because they are consistent with local traditions of groups (gender, ethnic, religious)
5. **Institutional capacity** to manage programme activities.
6. **Economic** viability and **financial** sustainability.

*Source: Danida, 1999.*

## Sources

Halabi, Hanan; Salem, Ruwaida; Wick, Laura: **“Jenin Community Based RH Education Project”**. Project-end Evaluation for UNFPA. Birzeit University, Institute of Community and Public Health. January 2000.

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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:*

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