UNICEF EVALUATION TECHNICAL NOTES

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What goes into a Terms of Reference (ToR)

A Terms of Reference (ToR) — also known as a Scope of Work — is a plan or blueprint outlining the key elements of the purpose, scope, process and products of an activity, including management and technical aspects as necessary.

Developing a ToR is a critical early step in any evaluation. In the narrowest sense, it is the basis for contractual arrangements with external consultants More broadly, it should first be developed as a means of clarifying expectations, roles and responsibilities among different stakeholders, providing the plan for the overall activity, including follow-up. The time and effort spent in preparing a good ToR has big returns in terms of the quality, relevance and usefulness of the product.

***Are you reviewing a ToR?* If so, you should ask yourself the questions shown in the boxes below.**

The depth and details in the ToR will of course vary. The ToR for an externally facilitated programme evaluation involving numerous stakeholders will be quite detailed, while for an internal evaluation of an activity or an emergency rapid assessment it could be a simple outline.

ToRs are often developed in stages. In programme evaluation, stakeholders' first discussions will focus on the details on purpose and evaluation questions. A further developed version used for recruiting external consultants requires more detail on existing information sources, team composition, procedures and products, but may describe methodology and a calendar of activities only in broad terms. The ToR may be further refined once an evaluation team is on board, with a careful review of the purpose and key questions and corresponding elaboration of methodology.

ToRs are important:

For all stakeholders
- They explain the agreed expectations in terms of the parameters and process of the exercise, and are a guide to each stakeholder's specific role.

For the evaluation or assessment/survey team
- They ensure that expectations are clear. They provide a reference to check back on whether the objectives are met.
- External teams may require more detail on background context and on intended audiences and uses; internal teams may simply need to clarify the parameters of the assignment.

For managers of M/E activities
- They are a place to establish performance standards (e.g. reference to specific policies, standards).
- They are a means of building desired good practice into the process of the M/E activity (e.g. establishing a stakeholder consultation workshop in the methodology).
- They establish opportunities for quality control (e.g. presentation and review of intermediate products).

WHAT GOES INTO A PROGRAMME EVALUATION TOR?

Ask yourself:
Why evaluate?
Why now?
For whom?

The following can also be used for a project or activity-level evaluation.

Title
- Identify what is being evaluated. Use appropriate programme titles. Clarify the time period covered by the evaluation.

Background
- Briefly describe the history and current status of the programme, including objectives, logic of programme design or expected results chain, duration, budget, activities.
- Situate with reference to the organisation's overarching country programme, as well as parallel or linked national programmes.
- Situate the important stakeholders, including donors, partners, implementing agencies/organisations.

Purpose of the evaluation
- Clarify why the programme is being evaluated.
- Describe how the evaluation process and/or results will be used and what value added they will bring.
- Identify the key users/target audiences.
- Situate the timing and focus of the evaluation in relation to any particular decision-making event (e.g. review meeting, consultation, planning activity, national conference) and/or the evolution of the programme.

Scope and focus

What is being evaluated?

- An "objectives" format can be used with or instead of evaluation questions. Where both are used, one objective is usually discussed through a number of questions.
- List the major questions the evaluation should answer — they should relate to the purpose and be precisely stated so that they guide the evaluator in terms of information needs and data to collect. Group and prioritise the questions. They should be realistic and achievable.
- Specify evaluation criteria to be used given the evaluation's objectives and scope. Evaluations should use standard OECD/DAC critieria (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact) as well as additional criteria for evaluation of humanitarian response (coverage, co-ordination, coherence and protection). An explanation for the criteria selected and those considered not applicable should be given and discussed with the evaluation team.[1]
- Evaluations of UNICEF-supported programmes should include two-additional criteria – the application of human rights-based approach and results based management strategies.
- Consider including a cost analysis of the programme. Good cost analysis strengthens results-based management and increases the utility of the evaluation.[2]
- Specify key policies and performance standards or benchmarks to be referenced in evaluating the programme, including international standards.

Existing information sources

- Identify relevant information sources that exist and are available, such as monitoring systems and/or previous evaluations. Provide an appraisal of quality and reliability.

Evaluation process and methods

How?

- Describe overall flow of the evaluation process — sequence of key stages.
- Describe the overall evaluation approach and data collection methods proposed to answer the evaluation questions. An initial broad outline can be developed further with the evaluation team. Ultimately it should be appropriate and adequate providing a complete and fair analysis. The final TOR should define:
  - Information sources for new data collection
  - Sampling approaches for different methods, including area and population to be represented, procedures to be used and sampling size (where information is to be gathered from those who benefited from the programme, information should also be gathered from eligible persons not reached.)
  - The level of precision required
  - Data collection instruments
  - Types of data analysis
  - Expected measures put in place to ensure that the evaluation process is ethical and that participants in the evaluation – e.g. interviewees, sources — will be protected[3]
- Highlight any process results expected, e.g. networks strengthened, mechanisms for dialogue established, common analysis established among different groups of stakeholders.
- Specify any key intermediate tasks that evaluator(s) are responsible for carrying out, and a preliminary schedule for completion. Consider for example:
  - Meetings, consultation, workshops with different groups of stakeholders
  - Key points of interaction with a steering committee
  - Process for verification of findings with key stakeholders
  - Presentation of preliminary findings and recommendations.

Stakeholder participation

- Specify involvement of key stakeholders as appropriate providing a sound rationale — consider internal stakeholders, programme partners, donor representatives, etc. Roles might include liaison, technical advisory roles, observer roles, etc., or more active participation in planning and design, data collection and analysis, reporting and dissemination, follow-up.
- Specify expectations in terms of involvement of, or consultation with, primary stakeholders. Be clear about where they would participate, i.e. in planning and design, data collection and analysis, reporting and dissemination, and/or follow-up.

Accountabilities

- Specify the roles and responsibilities of the evaluation team leader and team members, as well as other stakeholders and advisory structures involved, e.g. steering committees. This section should clarify who is responsible for:
  - Liaison with the evaluation team
  - Providing technical guidance
  - Co-ordinating the stakeholders involved
  - Selection, orientation and training of team members, data collection assistants where applicable, interpreters
  - Approval of intermediate and final products
  - Capacity-building with stakeholders, national or other (a possible responsibility of the evaluation team).
- Specify the means to protect and limits to evaluators independence.
- Specify any concerns or restrictions related to conflicts of interest.

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[1] For more on these criteria, see "Linking evaluation criteria with evaluation questions."
[2] For more on cost analysis, see Module 6, part 2.
[3] For more on managing ethical considerations and protection of M/E participants, see "Ethical issues for field study – dealing with people" and "Children participating in research and M&E – Ethics and your responsibility as a manager"

Evaluation team composition

By whom?

- Identify the composition and competencies of the evaluation team. This should follow from the evaluation focus, methods, and analyses required. Distinguish between desired and mandatory competencies, as well as whether competencies are required by the whole team or by certain members.
- Multidisciplinary teams are often appropriate. The qualifications and skill areas to be specified could include:
  - Areas of technical competence (sector, issue areas)
  - Language proficiency
  - In-country or regional work experience
  - Evaluation methods and data-collection skills
  - Analytical skills and frameworks, such as gender analysis
  - Process management skills, such as facilitation skills
  - Gender mix (not to be confused with gender analysis skills).

Procedures and logistics

With what means?

- Specify as necessary logistical issues related to staffing and working conditions:
  - Availability and provision of services (local translators, interviewers, data processors, drivers)
  - Availability and provision of office space, cars, laptops, tape recorders, and procedures for arranging meetings, requirements for debriefings
  - Work schedule (hours, days, holidays) and special considerations such as in emergencies (e.g. often a 7-day work week is combined with R&R breaks)
  - Special procedures, for example on relations with press, security, evacuation in emergencies
  - Benefits and arrangements such as insurance (particularly in emergencies, consider hazard pay, war risk insurance)
  - Seasonal constraints, travel constraints/conditions and socio-cultural conditions that may influence data collection
  - Reporting requirements apart from products to be delivered (e.g. as accompanying invoices)

Products

In what form?

- List products to be delivered, to whom and when. Consider:
  - The evaluation report
  - Completed data sets (filled out questionnaires or surveys)
  - Dissemination materials (newsletter articles, two-page summaries, presentation materials)
  - For UNICEF, evaluation consultants should be required to provide all of the information for the UNICEF CO update to the UNICEF Evaluation Database in the required format
  - Assessment of the evaluation methodology, including a discussion of the limitations.
- Specify the format for deliverables, including software, number of hard copies, translations needed and structure of the evaluation report. (See "UNICEF Evaluation Report Standards" and UNICEF Evaluation Technical Notes Series no. 3 "Writing a good Executive Summary".

Resource requirements

- Estimate the cost and prepare a detailed budget. Note the source of funds. Link the budget to the key activities or phases in the work plan. Cost estimates may cover items including:
  - Travel: international and in-country
  - Team member cost: salaries, per diem, and expenses
  - Payments for translators, interviewers, data processors, and secretarial services.
- Estimate separately any expectations in terms of time costs for:
  - Staff (before, during, after)
  - Other stakeholders, including primary stakeholders.