



► Guidance Note 4.3: Data collection methods

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This guidance note is part of Pillar 4 ► *Managing and conducting evaluations*

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Methodology refers to the types of activities used to collect information in an effort to answer the evaluation questions. Common types of data collection methods used in ILO project evaluations include document analysis, interviews, direct observation and surveys.

The choice of methods depends upon many factors including information needs, sources of information and budget. The Evaluation Office (EVAL) recommends the use of multiple methods of information collection during project evaluation. This permits findings derived from one method to be verified against a different method or source.

The description of the evaluation's methodology should include:

- information needs and sources of information;
- the proposed information collection activity;
- the conditions under which information is to be collected and the capacities needed to collect it; and
- the involvement of the tripartite constituents, partners and stakeholders in the implementation of the evaluation.

Planning the evaluation's methodology and including it in the Terms of Reference (TOR) ensures transparency. The evaluator may adapt the methodology, but any changes to it should be agreed between the evaluation manager and the evaluator.

*This guidance note is a living document and has not been professionally edited.
Right-click on hyperlinks and select 'Open in new tab' to access, if viewing in browser.*

► 1. PRIOR CONSTRAINTS ON METHODS

It should be recognized, that choices regarding methodology are influenced by the manner in which an evaluation designer views the world—or in other words, the paradigm to which she/he ascribes. The rationalistic paradigm, accepts a single tangible reality that can be subdivided and precisely measured while maintaining a discreet distance from the object of evaluation. The naturalistic paradigm, accepts that there are multiple, intangible realities which can only be studied holistically. The paradigm to which an evaluation designer ascribes, to a large measure, determines the types of methods that she/he will use.

► 2. QUANTITATIVE VS. QUALITATIVE

Methods are often placed into one of two categories that roughly correspond to the paradigms described above. Quantitative methods correspond to the rationalistic paradigm. These methods are often used with research designs to objectively measure the object of evaluation by means of experiments and surveys. Qualitative methods correspond to the naturalistic paradigm. They emphasize understanding the object of evaluation from various perspectives through the holistic analysis of non-numeric data collected through interviews, document analysis and direct observation.

► 3. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Quantitative and qualitative methods each have their own strengths and weaknesses. The strength of quantitative methods is that, because it is assumed that the evaluator is able to maintain a discreet distance from the object of evaluation, they are often seen as yielding propositions that are objective and, thus, may be perceived by some as being more credible. The weakness of quantitative methods is that contextual information that could provide insights into interpretation is often omitted.

Qualitative methods, on the other hand, includes intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit that is often seen as promoting a deep understanding of the object of evaluation. The weakness of qualitative methods is that they are often seen as yielding propositions that are subjective and, thus, prone to bias.

The astute reader will notice that the strengths of one type of method compensates for the weakness of the other and vice-versa. As such, they can be seen as complementary opposites. Therefore, it is often advisable to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, to the extent possible. This is known as a mixed-methods approach.

► 4. PLANNING FOR DATA COLLECTION

Data collection can be a resource intensive undertaking. Therefore, it is prudent to plan accordingly. Planning for data collection usually involves answering three questions:

- What types of data are needed to answer the evaluation questions?
- What data might be already available and from whom? And,
- What data will we need to collect?

In order to help answer the above questions, it is advisable to construct a Data Collection Planning matrix like the one found in Annex 1. Methods are placed on the X-axis. Criteria and questions are placed on the Y-axis. The intersection of the X and Y-axes indicates the criteria and questions that each method can address. In the cells, one can include details about the specific sources of information.

► 5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

In addition to careful planning, there are other things that can be done to manage costs. Consider the following three questions: **Do we really need to collect all of this information?** It is expensive to collect, clean and store data. Collecting data that would be “nice to have,” but which is not going to be analysed and reported is a waste of resources.

Does the information we need already exist? Secondary data is pre-existing data that were collected by somebody else for a purpose unrelated to the evaluation. Analysing secondary data sets is a great way to economise on data collection.

Is there a less expensive way to collect the information we need? Seemingly like everything else, these days, technology is helping to drive down the cost of collecting data. From computer-assisted telephone surveys, web-based surveys, data collection with the help of mobile devices, video-conference interviews all have the potential to make data collection less costly and more efficient.

► 6. VALIDITY & RELIABILITY

Methods, per se, cannot be valid or reliable—only the propositions that are derived from the methods. However, there are some things that can be done in order to ensure that methods lead to valid and reliable propositions. For example, the methods selected should permit information to be collected that address pertinent questions that stakeholders want the evaluation to answer. In addition, the methods selected should be appropriate for the sources from which information will be collected. For example, in Muslim cultures, it may not be appropriate for a man to interview an unaccompanied woman. Generally when interviewing children, especially those that are vulnerable or those that have been exposed to traumatic event safeguards need to be built into the process as well. Finally, use of mixed of methods to collect data rather than relying on one source or one piece of evidence helps to ensure validity. For example, triangulating the evidence from once source (such as the group interview) with other evidence is good practice. Annex 2 contains a checklist for establishing the methodological soundness of an evaluation proposal.

► 7. ETHICS



The [Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation](#) were formally approved by UNEG members at the UNEG Annual General Meeting 2008. The UNEG ethical guidelines for evaluation are based on commonly held and internationally recognized professional ideals. ILO Evaluation consultants need to abide by the [Template 3.1 Code of Conduct for Evaluation in the ILO](#) signed and returned along with the contract. Among other things, the code of conduct stresses the need for evaluators to respect people's right to provide information in confidence and to make participants aware of the scope and limits of confidentiality, while ensuring that sensitive information cannot be traced to its source. When consent is being sought, consent forms should be made accessible to all including persons with disabilities that may be involved in the evaluation. It is important note to disclose information on a person's disability without their agreement to disclose and only when it is relevant to the evaluation.

Guideline 24F states *"Describe the methodology, procedures and information sources of the evaluation in enough detail so they can be identified and assessed."*

In EVAL's view, the above guideline does not go far enough. Evaluation designers have an obligation to not only describe, but to ensure that their methodological choices do no harm.

For example, earlier, reference was made to quantitative methods that are used with research designs. Sometimes, these methods involve giving a treatment to one group of beneficiaries and withholding it from a similar group to see if there was a difference between the two groups that could be attributed to the intervention.

The cartoon found below points out the moral dilemma involved in using such methods to evaluate child labour, forced labour and ILO/AIDS projects.

Further reading:

[Guidance note 3.5: Mainstreaming just transition towards environmental sustainability in ILO evaluations](#)

ANNEX I. DATA COLLECTION PLANNING MATRIX

TITLE OF EVALUATION		DATA SOURCES				
		Document review	Literature review	Interviews	Case studies	Survey / questionnaire
Evaluation criteria	Evaluation question					
1. Relevance						
The extent to which the objectives of a development intervention are consistent with beneficiaries’ requirements, country needs, global priorities and partners’ and donor’ policies.	Question A	x	x	x	x	x
	Question B			x	x	x
The extent to which the approach is strategic and the ILO uses its comparative advantage.	Question C			x	x	x
2. Validity of intervention design						
The extent to which the design is logical and coherent.	Question D	x	x	x		
	Question E			x	x	x
3. Intervention progress and effectiveness						
The extent to which the intervention’s immediate objectives were achieved, or are expected to be achieved, taking into account their relative importance.	Question F	x	x	x	x	x
	Question G	x	x	x	x	x
4. Efficiency of resource use						
A measure of how economically resources/inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) are converted to results.	Question H	x		x	x	x
	Question I	x		x	x	x
5. Effectiveness of management arrangements						
The extent to which management capacities and arrangements put in place support the achievement of results.	Question J	x		x	x	
	Question K	x			x	
6. Impact orientation and sustainability of the intervention						
The strategic orientation of the project towards making a significant contribution to broader, long-term, sustainable development changes.	Question L			x	x	x
The likelihood that the results of the intervention are durable and can be maintained or even scaled up and replicated by intervention partners after major assistance has been completed.	Question M			x	x	x

 CHECKLIST 4.1 VALIDATING METHODOLOGIES¹

The information contained in this checklist can guide evaluation managers on how to establish methodological soundness of an evaluation proposal.

☐ **Clear Project Description**

Having a clear description of the project being evaluated is important because it permits stakeholders to determine if the proposed methods are appropriate.

☐ **Described Purposes and Procedures**

Clearly stated purposes and procedures permit stakeholders to determine if there is good alignment between the purpose of the evaluation and the proposed methods. In the ILO, evaluations are usually conducted in order to demonstrate accountability to donors for funding received and in order to promote organizational learning.

☐ **Evaluation Criteria**

The evaluation design should clearly spell out the criteria against which the project to be evaluated will be assessed. The OECD DAC Criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability guides evaluations in the ILO.

 **Cross-cutting issues:** evaluation methods take into account and discuss how cross-cutting issues such as disability inclusion and gender equality are incorporated.

☐ **Methods Answer Evaluation Questions**

The methods selected should permit information to be collected that address pertinent questions that stakeholders want the evaluation to answer.

☐ **Valid and reliable evaluation methods**

Valid and reliable evaluation methods are free from a consistent alignment with one point of view that results in a lack of objectivity, fairness, or impartiality. To ensure validity and reliability, a combination of methods such as document review, interviews and direct observation are often used.

☐ **Methods are Appropriate for the Sources of Information**

The evaluation methods selected should be appropriate for the sources from which information will be collected. For example, in Muslim cultures, it may not be appropriate for a man to interview an unaccompanied woman.

☐ **Complete and Fair Assessment**

Evaluation methods should be implemented in a rigorous manner to permit strengths and weaknesses of the project to be identified in complete, fair and unbiased manner.

☐ **Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis**

The techniques for analyzing quantitative information include descriptive and/or inferential statistics. The techniques for analyzing qualitative information include content analysis (i.e., determining patterns, categories, taxonomies, themes, etc.)

☐ **Cost-effectiveness**

The methods selected should be efficient and produce information of sufficient value that the outlay of resources can be justified.

1. This checklist (4.1) is based on information contained in the Joint Committee on Educational Evaluation Standards, the UN Evaluation Groups Standards and the OECD DAC Evaluation Quality Standards.