



► Guidance Note 3.3: Strategic clustered evaluations to gather evaluative information more effectively

► **Date:** June 2020 updated October 2025 (v.2)

This guidance note is part of Pillar 3 ► *Planning and designing evaluations*

CONTENTS (CLICK TO NAVIGATE)

1. INTRODUCTION	2	5. IMPLEMENTATION	11
2. WHY CLUSTERED EVALUATIONS	3	6. FOLLOW-UP AND USE OF CLUSTERED EVALUATIONS	12
2.1 Added value	3	6.1 Recommendations, lessons learned, and good practices particular to clustered evaluation	12
3. SCOPE AND PURPOSE – SELECTING CLUSTERED EVALUATION APPROACH	3	6.2 Follow-up and management response process	12
3.1 Typology of clustered evaluation	3	6.3 The particular use of clustered evaluations	12
3.2 Cost-effectiveness	5		
3.3 Criteria for deciding on clustered evaluation	5		
4. PLANNING	7		
4.1. Principles	7		
4.2. When to consider clustered evaluation	7		
4.3 Steps in the planning of clustered evaluation	7		
4.4 Planning of clustered evaluation approach in linked projects	10		
4.5 Conceptualization and execution of clustered evaluations	10		
4.6 Funding	10		
4.7 Success factors for good clustered evaluations	11		

*This guidance note is a living document and has not been professionally edited.
This guidance note is part of Cluster 3: Planning and designing evaluations
Right-click on hyperlinks and select 'Open in new tab' to access, if viewing in browser.*

► 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2017, the ILO’s Evaluation policy has advocated for increasing the use of strategic clustered evaluations to allow for more strategic focus, decrease the number of evaluations undertaken and to enhance and increase the absorption capacity of learning from evaluations.



ILO defined clustered evaluations as follows:
An envelope of evaluations of projects¹ combined into a single evaluation based on results or strategic, thematic or geographical area or scope.

Following the Independent Evaluation of the Evaluation Function 2022 and internal discussions of the evaluation network in its biennial workshop, a need to strengthen the mechanisms to support clustering of evaluations was identified. The  [ILO results-based evaluation strategy of 2023-25](#) introduced a planning and coordination tool, Criteria-Based Integrated Evaluation Planning (CIEPS). The CIEPS mechanism ensures appropriate coverage of evaluations while addressing knowledge gaps and needs. The CIEPS attempts to go beyond financial thresholds as triggers for evaluations and should make evaluation requirements more adapted and flexible to specific circumstances and in certain cases, based on identified criteria, clustered, postponed or waived. Sub output 1.1.1 of the Evaluation Strategy 2023-25 states, “Integrated criteria-based evaluation planning reduces the large volume of mandatory, decentralized evaluations and allows for more strategically

oriented evaluation evidence and learning opportunities. Furthermore, the Strategy continues the policy that clustered evaluations are the default option for evaluations as articulated in Output 2.1.1 which reads, “Clustered evaluations become the default modality wherever feasible and relevant.” In 2023, EVAL commissioned a study to review the approach to strategic clustered evaluations in the ILO over the period of 2017-2021.² The findings of that study, coupled with the new evaluation strategy, has provided an opportunity to review and update the present guidance note.

The 2023 Review of the Approach to Strategic Clustered Evaluation³ looked at 28 clustered evaluations as well as review of the ILO’s Annual Evaluation Reports between 2017-21 and an analysis of a survey conducted of evaluation managers who managed a clustered evaluation. The findings of that review found that 10% of ILO evaluations followed the clustered modality and this involved 43 funding partners which accounts for 48% of all ILO funding partners. This points to ILO far exceeding its target of clustering evaluations, as identified in the 2018-21 evaluation strategy.

Although the current guidance note played an important part in supporting the use of cluster evaluations, in a survey conducted in the context of the above Review, evaluation managers noted that individual evaluations need to be identified for clustering earlier than when individual evaluations are being planned and that clustering happens more opportunistically and haphazardly rather than strategically and based on identified criteria.

The review also found that 57% of the clustered evaluations were clustered on the basis of theme or topic, 46% on the basis of geography at either country or regional level and 32% based on funding source (funding partner).

The survey of evaluation managers pointed out that while clustered evaluations can contribute to reducing the number of evaluations of individual projects, thus potentially leading to cost savings and even lead to lower evaluation costs, the transactions and administrative tasks was substantial and should not be underestimated.⁴

Suitable if the benefits of clustered evaluation to funding partners from the outset i.e. when funding agreements are signed is therefore paramount. Whatever option selected, flexibility in the process is required. Special attention needs to be devoted to donor requirements for specific information when choosing a clustered evaluation approach. Besides, logistical issues and programmatic complexities need to be carefully considered as well, as they could result in diminishing the potential cost savings compared to the evaluation of individual projects or components. **Figure 1** summarizes considerations concerning the identification and planning of clustered evaluations, funding and implementation to be taken into account.

1. In principle only development corporation (DC) projects, including RBSA that have a strategic or geographical but with common concurrent and strategic focus clustered evaluations, adding perhaps some RB activities when appropriate. For example DWCP evaluations or clusters of project focused on a common theme when clustered evaluations are CPE (DWCP).

2. Review of the Approach to Strategic Clustered Evaluation, March 2023, Economistas de la Cooperacion, S.I. (Ecoper) unpublished.

3. Unpublished. Review of the Approach to Strategic Clustered Evaluation, March 2023 Economistas de la Cooperacion, S.L (ECOPER)

Figure 1: Pros and cons of clustered evaluations

Advantages of clustering	Challenges in clustering
Strategic information at higher results frameworks	Scheduling of different project timelines/budgets
Enhanced organisational learning at the systemic and systematic change	Coordination between different funding partners, stakeholders, projects, regions
Possible to focus on common strategic questions focussing on complementarities, longer term changes and impact	Reports may require further country specific or project specific annexes
Reduction of individual evaluations: less evaluation fatigue	
Reduction of evaluation costs	

► 2. WHY CLUSTERED EVALUATIONS

Some rationales/assumptions for clustering evaluations are to reduce evaluation fatigue and reduce evaluation costs. To test whether this is in fact the case for ILO, the above-mentioned Review counted the number of interviews per individual project evaluation versus cluster evaluations and calculated the number of interviews that would have taken place if individual evaluations had taken place. The review found that there was an estimated 36% reduction of interviews that took place due to clustering of the evaluations.⁵

Regarding evaluation costs, the Review found that, “...each clustered evaluation covers between three and four projects and has a total evaluation budget of over USD 11 million. This represented 0.83% of the project budgets under evaluation, which is below the 2% standard ratio and therefore confirms pre-assumptions on the efficiency gains of clustered evaluations.



Definition: clustered evaluation in the ILO

An envelope of evaluations of projects combined into a single evaluation based on results or strategic, thematic or geographical area or scope.

5. Review of the Approach to Strategic Clustered Evaluation, ECOPER Pg 22

6. ILO Annual Evaluation Report 2017-18, page 37

2.1 ADDED VALUE

Clustering evaluations to address larger programme results framework and enhance organizational learning are part of several steps EVAL has initiated. With clustered evaluations, the evaluation focus and learning can be more about systemic and systematic change that would not be possible in a single project or a series of unrelated projects.

The guiding principle of having a longer-term programmatic approach to the results and impact of development cooperation, as suggested in the resolution concerning effective ILO development cooperation in support of the SDGs, adopted at the 107th Session (2018) of the International Labour Conference, also supposes that evaluations should take a longer-term programmatic view of the ILO’s work. The clustering of evaluations is a step in this direction⁶. Clustered evaluations of thematically aligned projects for example allow to address common strategic evaluation questions which otherwise would not be possible in a series of individual evaluations of those projects.

However, the Review of Clustered Evaluations in the ILO (2023) found that the TORs of the 28 reviewed evaluations do not refer

7. Page 27 Review of the Approach to Strategic Clustered Evaluation, 2023, ECOPER

8. Page 25 Review of the Approach to Strategic Clustered Evaluation, 2023 ECOPER

in more depth to strategic frameworks than other individual project evaluations, while the TOR mention the policy outcomes of the ILO and DWCPs, there does not seem to be more elaboration of other strategic frameworks. A further review to analyse whether ILO clustered evaluations was leading to more strategic knowledge and information was conducted by taking the Decent Work Meta-Analysis (DWMA) data from 2020 and grouping the scores by evaluation type. This analysis showed that clustered evaluations scored higher in the 2020 DWMA than other types of evaluations which indicates that projects clustered for evaluation have higher strategic value⁷ nor do the evaluation reports focus more on strategic issues or frameworks⁸.



Systemic change

Clustered evaluations address strategic issues such as changes in the thematic or geographic coherence of ILO interventions, contribution to the ILO results framework at the impact level, as well as the ILO’s contribution to the UN’s cooperation framework, and SDGs.

► 3. SCOPE AND PURPOSE – SELECTING CLUSTERED EVALUATION APPROACH

This section constitutes the core of the guidance note on clustered evaluation. The section contains the typology of clustered evaluations, including the scope and focus and suitability of using each evaluation type. Issues of cost-effectiveness and the criteria for selecting a clustered evaluation follow.

3.1 TYPOLOGY OF CLUSTERED EVALUATION

Based on the distinction between geographic clustered evaluations and thematic clustered evaluations, the ILO uses the following typology for clustered evaluations, as shown

in table 1. Nine types emerge and can be distinguished by the evaluation scope: i) DWCP or similar country framework; ii) Wider/cross-cutting ILO interventions; iii) Sectoral; iv)

Programme and budget outcome-based; v) Thematic programmes; vi) Global programmes; vii) Flagship programmes; viii) RBSA projects; and ix) Projects funded by one funding

partner. All types have the common purpose of the clustered evaluations’ strategic focus, aiming to assess to what extent the “whole is greater than the sum of the parts”.

Table 1: Typology for clustered evaluations in the ILO

	Cluster type	Scope/Focus	Suitability
GEOGRAPHICAL (country/ regional)	DWCP or similar country framework (Country Programme Evaluation)	All projects contributing to DWCP/country programme outcomes; input/link to UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework	High suitability for clustered evaluations. The ‘country’ results framework is halfway between a ‘project’ and ‘global’ result framework and so more manageable;
	Wider/ cross-cutting ILO interventions	- Multiple projects at different stages - Multiple complementary intervention models or integrated service packages for a common target group	- Opportunity to assess the contribution to UN country frameworks and linking to SDGs. - Suitable if a shared Theory of Change/results framework is in place.
THEMATIC	Sectoral/thematic	All projects within a given sector in one or more countries, operating under some common strategic/ programme framework	High suitability. Technically clustered evaluations will be easier to organise across departments and countries as there will be similarities in intervention strategies. Ideally should include a shared Theory of Change/results framework.
	Programme and budget outcome-based	Projects contributing to similar outcomes	Opportunities for clustering based on interventions under similar outcomes/CCPD, and clustering of projects that are complementing broader ILO interventions, funded either by the same donor or different ones.
	Global programmes	Similar models used in different countries	Suitability of clustered evaluation given if a shared Theory of Change/results framework is in place.
	Flagship programmes	Clustered evaluation as an integral part of a global programme	- Global clustered evaluations as the global programme evaluation; covering multiple projects at different stages in different countries using a similar business model; some common KPIs - Evaluability assessment to consider cluster design - Increased suitability if departmental Theory of Change (as in IPEC) or business model (as in Better Work) are in place.
	RBSA projects	Projects funded under the RBSA modality	Suitability if the evaluation focus is more on learning about the funding modality or innovation as RBSA-funded projects are often innovative and riskier and used for seed funding.
	Projects funded by one donor	Project portfolio of specific donors	Administratively easy way to generate a clustered evaluation and provide precise strategic results but only if the projects are grouped around common outcomes. In that case, high suitability emerges.

3.2 COST-EFFECTIVENESS

As shown above by the Review of clustered evaluations, there is a general trend that clustered evaluations are more cost-effective and save resources. However, the current ILO administrative procedures may result in clustered evaluations having high administrative and transaction costs leading to procurement processes or lengthy contracting issues. The experience thus far, does seem to point to saving time for the evaluation stakeholders and reducing the burden on constituents and the projects.

While cost-effectiveness may be one rationale for using a clustered evaluation, the critical issue for choosing clustered evaluations is not reducing cost per se but improving quality and generating strategic insights.

3.3 CRITERIA FOR DECIDING ON CLUSTERED EVALUATION

For the justification of a clustered evaluation, it is paramount to identify criteria for the choice of geographic or thematic evaluations to be clustered. The identification of project evaluations to cluster should be undertaken at the bi-annual CIEPS⁹ process with your regional evaluation officer or departmental evaluation focal point. It is essential to clarify why they are being chosen and make it equally clear what the gains are in so doing concerning synergy, coherence, and clear vision of ILO’s normative and social justice mandate. The following generic criteria presented in Table 2 deserve consideration when planning a clustered evaluation.

9. See [guidance note on CIEPS](#).

Table 2: Checklist – selection criteria for clustered evaluations

Issue	Criteria
Administrative clearance	☒ Agreement of donor(s), involve EVAL and PARDEV
Strategic focus	☒ Added value for ILO and its constituents; Importance of the sector/industry/theme for constituents
	☒ Relevance for the donor(s)
	☒ Exemplified achievements and/or particular challenges from which potential good practices and lessons learned could be derived
	☒ Expand coverage of activities to be evaluated by including activities/projects that might not otherwise be evaluated because of the size of the budget
	☒ Possibility to combine geographical and thematic focus as well as various degrees of ex-post evaluation
	☒ Common strategic evaluation questions focus on complementarity, long-term changes and impact
Evaluability	☒ Availability of a shared results framework/shared objectives/theory of change
	☒ Timing of the evaluation considering the implementation status of the projects/programmes ("level of maturity," e.g., mid-term or final)
	☒ Quality of existing evaluative evidence
	Quality of monitoring and reporting
	☒ Budget size of the projects
	☒ Geographic representation
	☒ Commonalities of decent work deficits in the respective countries: based on common thematic approaches, same strategic issues
	☒ ILO’s close involvement with the UN community, contribution to UNDAF, national strategies and SDGs
	☒ Common CPOs, P&B outcomes and targets
Practical considerations	☒ If applicable, regional or sub-regional priorities set out in ILO strategy
	☒ Evaluation time, cost and logistics

The following paragraphs further describe the generic selection criteria for clustered evaluations.

3.3.1 Administrative clearance: agreement of donors with the involvement of PARDEV and EVAL

The first step in the decision-making process about whether to use the clustered evaluation approach is seeking the administrative clearance for the approach. Only if administrative clearance is given, the next steps in the planning process should be considered. Ideally, the option for clustered evaluation should be presented to the funding partner as the default option when agreements are being signed.

The standard recommended evaluation provisions in funding partners’ agreement are:



International
Labour
Organization

► Evaluation Office

► Article 7 on standard mandatory project/programme evaluations and related optional clauses to be included in agreements with Funding Partners

Article 7: Evaluation

Standard mandatory Project/Programme evaluations

The ILO shall carry out the evaluation(s) of the Project/Programme in accordance with the ILO Evaluation Policy and the applicable Evaluation Strategy, as detailed in the project document.

Option 1: Clustering of Evaluations

The Funding Partner agrees in principle to cluster the evaluation to contribute to more organizational learning and reduced evaluation burden. The decision, timing and scope of clustering the evaluation will be aligned with evolving project needs and agreed upon by EVAL following consultations with stakeholders, including the Funding Partner.

(AND / OR)

Option 2: Flexible Contribution to the ILO Evaluation Trust Fund for Organizational Learning (IETF)

The Funding Partner agrees to allocate USD XXXX (precise amount to be budgeted during project design, and equivalent to maximal 1.5% of the project budget) to the IETF to allow for a wider choice of evaluation methodologies, including impact and ex-post evaluations beyond the project duration through more flexible funding. All mandatory evaluation requirements will be taken care of by EVAL.

(OR)

The Funding Partner agrees to allocate the unspent balance of the evaluation budget to the IETF after all evaluation requirements have been completed. The topics of evaluations conducted with unspent balances will be agreed upon with EVAL.

3.3.2 Strategic focus: added value for ILO and its constituents

EVAL will consider the specific added value of the clustered evaluation for the ILO and its constituents over other evaluation approaches, for example **the strategic focus of the ILO’s contribution to the DWA and SDGs**. As such the clustered evaluation approach goes beyond the results of individual projects or components. The clustered evaluation approach is mainly steered towards learning at the strategic level, while accountability to donors at the operational level is required. As such, clustered evaluations serve particularly well for learning from strategic achievements and challenges.

Coverage is another important selection criterion. **Coverage include the possibility to combine a geographical and thematic focus through a clustered evaluation**. Another aspect of coverage is the inclusion of activities or projects in an evaluation that due their budget size would normally be below the threshold for an evaluation.

Before embarking on clustered evaluations one needs to assess whether some common **strategic evaluation questions emerge**. Those questions focus normally on aspects of complementarity of projects or components, long-term changes and ultimately impact for ILO constituents. The availability of a shared results framework, shared objectives or a common theory of change tends to determine the feasibility to formulate, *and answer*, those common strategic evaluation questions, as show in the bullet point below.

Another critical step in the decision-making process about the use of clustered evaluations is the **evaluability of projects or components**. Following the lesson learned in so many evaluations that “only what was commonly planned can be

jointly evaluated”, the evaluation manager with support from EVAL or the REO should search for a shared planning or results framework. An overarching programme framework, shared outcomes and intermediate objectives, a common theory of change or impact pathways contain the required commonalities, which enable the use of a clustered evaluation approach. In the absence of such common frameworks, a non-clustered evaluation approach of the individual projects or components should be pursued.

To have a critical mass of activities, **clustered evaluations can take on multiple evaluation types from mid-term, final, interim to internal and even ex-post**. The ex-post approach seems an interesting option when the timeframes of projects or components are not convergent. Instead of ceasing the idea of a clustered evaluation under those circumstances, the ex-post approach allows EVAL to fully benefit from a clustered evaluation approach, with evidence, learning and accountability provided after the end of project implementation, i.e. ex-post. With the development of the [ILO’s Evaluation Trust Fund \(IETF\)](#), more ex-post clustered evaluations could be envisaged.

As for each evaluation, **the quality of existing evaluative evidence** (such as a mid-term evaluation or the evaluation of a previous implementation phase) and the quality of monitoring and reporting data also determines the quality of clustered evaluations. Particularly smaller projects or components with tighter budgets might struggle to produce the quality of reporting and monitoring data required. The same applies to projects without mid-term evaluation due to the size of the project budget. As the clustered evaluation cannot substitute monitoring and reporting and undertake those tasks ex-post, sufficient quality of evaluative evidence and reporting data is a pre-requirement for clustered evaluations.

The **combined budget size of projects** or components under evaluation should be sufficient to enable a clustered evaluation with all required elements such as field visits. The clustered evaluation approach offers the ability to pool the evaluation funding, either preferably in a single budget line, or at least in terms of using the relevant budgets at the same time as part of single TORs and work plan.

► 4. PLANNING

4.1 PRINCIPLES

Clustered evaluations are part of integrated evaluation planning where options and modalities for evaluation, based on ILO evaluation policy requirement, are considered at the planning stage through CIEPS or in some form of evaluability assessment. At that stage, for example any specific programme and/or funding partner requirement, and evaluation design are considered as part of an evaluability assessment for projects with a budget above USD 5 million. The integrated evaluation planning includes a discussion about the criteria for the choice of activities for evaluation and consensus reached at an early stage. Section 2.3 of this guidance document lists specific criteria for choosing a clustered evaluation.

4.2 WHEN TO CONSIDER CLUSTERED EVALUATION

A clustered evaluation should ideally be planned for at the start of project implementation either through a thematic or geographic grouping. However, the implementation status or maturity of the projects or components is also a factor in deciding to cluster evaluations, therefore, at the latest, decisions to cluster should be taken through the CIEPS planning process.

First and foremost, however, the Programme Managers in consultation with Departmental evaluation focal points or regional evaluation officers and with EVAL approval must double-check the funding partners’ consent to a clustered evaluation, if required.

Once the checklist in Table 2 is applied for the criteria for the selection of clustered evaluations presented in the previous section evaluation planning can start.

4.3 STEPS IN THE PLANNING OF CLUSTERED EVALUATION

The planning process is an opportunity to verify potential overlapping clusters and components between different cluster evaluations. Examples are country components of a larger programme being part of other regional or global programme.

The planning of clustered evaluations consists of the following three main steps:

1. Mapping projects/components where clustered evaluation approach is possible/suggested
2. Proposing an evaluation plan for clustered evaluations through the CIEPS planning process in the Excel file
3. Draft proposals to be discussed amongst regions, departments and EVAL REOs, DEFPs with EVAL validation of the plans.

Step 1: Mapping projects/components where clustered evaluation approach is possible/suggested

Table 3: example of how to map components for a clustered evaluation

DC Code and Title of the project	Scheduled project time frame (including extensions already granted)	Project overall budget	Evaluation requirements (type and time) as per door agreement	Budget available for evaluations per project	Logic for clustering evaluation (DWCP, CPO, policy outcome links included)
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					

Step 2: Proposing an evaluation plan for clustered evaluations

In addition to including the proposal for a clustered evaluation in the CIEPS excel file, the following evaluation plan should be developed with the following categories:

- i) Project code, title and project budget
- ii) Project start and end date
- iii) Due evaluations as per donor agreement and due date
- iv) Evaluation budget (source and amount per agreement)
- v) Proposed clustering
- vi) Total budget for clustered evaluation
- vii) Remarks (logics for clustering, support from key partners)

Annex III includes an illustrative example of a clustered evaluation plan.

Step 3: Formalize the process

The final step in the planning for clustered evaluations is the formalization of the evaluation process. This step includes the confirmation of the cluster approach in CIEPS and to the EVAL knowledge management officer to reflect the evaluation in i-eval discovery/itrack, appointment of an experienced EM, review of evaluation ToR and approval.

The table below provides insights into key elements for planning clustered evaluations.

Table 4: Key elements for planning clustered evaluations

Issue	Observation
When to decide on clustering and how to plan for clustering	• Early on in the intervention stage, ideally during its design, using a participatory process. The latter includes project staff, constituents, and key stakeholders, with technical support from EVAL or during the CIEPS stage • Consider additional time requirements
Criteria assessment and identification and clustered evaluation plan	• Map projects/components using the matrix in table 3. Assemble a clustered-evaluation work plan using the EVAL template in Annex III
What specific (additional) evaluation questions clustered evaluations can address?	Focus on: • “Upstream” questions: transformational or systemic change dimension; contribution to achieving national development targets/SDG targets • The interconnectedness between projects and organisational achievements and ultimately impact on decent work at country level • Is the whole greater than the sum of its parts?
Management/pooling of funds for the evaluation	• For each new DC agreement, funding partners should be requested to clarify their position on clustering in standard agreements (see above)
Roles and Responsibilities in clustered evaluation (including evaluation management and implementation)	• Engagement of EVAL early on to verify whether criteria for clustered evaluations or fulfilled
How to ensure sufficient evaluation of individual components/projects/country work while focusing on a strategic level that clustering can bring	• When adding “upstream” evaluation questions, consider replacing some evaluation questions focused more on individual components/ projects/country work with a results fact sheet. • Results fact sheets are based on monitoring and reporting data • Overall, the number of evaluation questions should not significantly increase, but the focus should move more “upstream”
Data requirements – for individual projects/ components and the clustered evaluation	• Monitoring and reporting data must be of sufficient quality to feed into results fact sheet of individual components/ projects/country work.
Balance/emphasis between accountability, planning and organisational learning	• Replacing some evaluation questions on individual components/ projects/country work with results fact sheets should allow for space to address transformational or systemic change and the dimension of interconnectedness. • The latter open additional learning spaces which are unique to clustered evaluations
Ensuring commonality in monitoring and reporting as input to clustered evaluations	• With its early engagement the intervention stage, ideally, during its design, EVAL and PARDEV can emphasize the use of formats and quality of monitoring and reporting • Pay attention to different donor reporting requirements
Use of case studies, component/country	• The use of case studies, component/country-specific cases can provide useful qualitative data to complement results fact sheets which tend to be more quantitative
How to combine different existing/already implemented evaluations, reviews (from interim to final, to ex-post of previous phases or relevant projects)	• Existing evaluative evidence constitutes a valuable source of data • Even if the coherence concerning evaluation approaches or evaluation questions are uneven, existing evaluative evidence can always serve for case studies • In the best of cases, existing evaluative evidence can be aggregated with data captured in the clustered evaluation (if for example, logframe indicators are similar or identical)
How clustered evaluation can provide evaluative information at required levels of components, project, country, global programme	• As stated above, the focus of clustered evaluations is more upstream • Existing evaluative evidence, the use of component or country case studies and results fact sheets should provide data at the more downstream level. Separate annex detailing these may be required.

4.4 PLANNING OF CLUSTERED EVALUATION APPROACH IN LINKED PROJECTS

When planning a clustered evaluation approach in linked projects with donors, the evaluation manager should refer to the donors’ agreement with ILO evaluation requirements. In the planning process, options for clustering are marked in  [i-eval Discovery](#) subject to what has been agreed with the donor. The planning process for a clustered evaluation approach in linked projects contains the following:

- Joint evaluation planning in linked projects:
 - ensure a clustered approach shows in individual M&E plans
 - agreement on approach – using typology
 - Identify the evaluation manager and regional evaluation officer/Departmental Evaluation Focal Point with EVAL
- Initial clustered evaluation design:
 - Initial evaluation questions for clustered added value, common questions
 - By typology of clustered evaluation
 - Methods
 - Interviews
 - Grey literature review
 - Surveys
 - Focus groups
 - Post evaluation workshops.
- Evaluability
- Clustered evaluation and link to individual evaluations

4.5 CONCEPTUALIZATION AND EXECUTION OF CLUSTERED EVALUATIONS

The planning for clustered evaluations is similar to other evaluation types in ILO, with the following exceptions concerning i) the evaluation purpose and scope: ii) evaluation clients; iii) methodology; and iv) evaluation questions. Those exceptions should be reflected in the Terms of Reference for clustered evaluation (see Annex I for links to examples of TORs).

i) Evaluation purpose and scope: For clustered evaluations, the evaluation scope includes the analysis of linkages between the various initiatives to be evaluated. For each evaluation criterion, dual lenses are applied to focus on the *individual interventions* and *the interconnectedness of interventions*.

ii) Evaluation clients: Emphasis is required for close collaboration with the donor(s) during a clustered evaluation to ensure that donor requirement and information needs are met, particularly when more than more donor is involved. In this case, the clustered evaluation needs to respond to the accountability needs of each donor while still focusing on the interconnectedness of interventions.

iii) Methodology: Clustered evaluations benefit from a theory-based evaluation approach, considering the priorities of the ILO country programme or an applicable ILO thematic strategy. As such, the evaluation methodology should include examining the interventions’ Theories of Change. If no Theories of Change are in place, the evaluation should aim to reconstruct those focusing on the common components or objectives of the interventions.

iv) Evaluation questions: the following evaluation questions specific to clustered evaluations complement the standard set of ILO evaluation questions:

- **Efficiency:**
 - What were there synergies among the interventions under review? How did they mutually reinforce each other?
 - To what extent did ILO’s support in the targeted countries act as a catalyst? To what extent did ILO influence leverage additional resources in the country?
- **Relevance:**
 - To what extent are the interventions relevant for the achievement of common objectives, the achievement of a thematic strategy or an ILO country programme?
- **Project design:**
 - To what extent do the ILO interventions contribute in an integrated manner to central ILO issues such as labour norms or social dialogue?

4.6 FUNDING

While clustering evaluation may lead to efficiency gains, this is subject to flexibility in using the provision set aside for evaluation in each project to be included in the cluster. Pooled donor funding for evaluations would reduce transaction cost and is included in ILO’s evaluation policy as a longer-term goal. The ILO’s Integrated Resource Information System (IRIS) allows for the sharing of costs across projects. With all ILO staff on IRIS since 2019, one purchase order can be charged across project budgets. This can be identified as ‘evaluation’ across output tasks. Some level of coordination will be required to avoid the late arrival of funds or the possible expiry of donor funding. The financial commitment for the clustered evaluation must be established in principle prior to the completion of the projects. The utilization of the IETF for ex-post or projects that have closed should be considered.

When preparing the evaluation plan, the evaluation manager in consolation with the SEO and REO can use the matrix to map the budget for the clustered evaluation (see Table 3) to identify the available evaluation budgets per project or component.

From a funding perspective, the following applies for clustered evaluations:

- i. Pooled funding is preferable
- ii. Each project budget needs to contribute its share
- iii. IRIS roll out: charge one exercise from different sources
- iv. Awareness that evaluation funds cannot be used after project completion. A commitment is required in budgets before accounts closure, leaving two to three months for the evaluation.
- v. Upon discussion, unspent evaluation funds could be transferred to the ILO Evaluation Trust Fund or be reimbursed to donors as a standard practice.

4.7 SUCCESS FACTORS FOR GOOD CLUSTERED EVALUATIONS

Learning from clustered evaluations in the ILO, the following have been identified as success factors for a good, clustered evaluation.

EVAL expects that the body of learning will continue to grow and be reflected in subsequent versions of this guidance note.



Early planning for clustering based on an identification of issues and projects done in a participatory and transparent manner;



Manage expectations by ensuring a balanced reflection of projects or components in a context where each project team might wish to see its projects most prominently in the evaluation report (budget resources for supplementary reports or annexes



Factor in enough time for evaluation management: coordination and management, consolidation of various stakeholders inputs



Clear identification of selection criteria and methodology.

► 5. IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of clustered evaluations is similar to other evaluation approaches. Rather than repeating the generic implementation process of evaluations in ILO, this section focuses on the particularities for clustered evaluation. EVAL plays an oversight and quality assurance role in this process with evaluation managers and regional evaluation officers, departmental evaluation focal points taking on the management function as with other types of independent project evaluations.

EVAL’s experience with clustered evaluations shows an increased complexity compared to other evaluation types. The evaluation manager needs to manage the expectation from multiple evaluation clients, both donors and project teams. In this context, the evaluation manager has to agree to the evaluation scope with multiple evaluation clients which are not necessarily knowledgeable about the other projects or components to be evaluated.

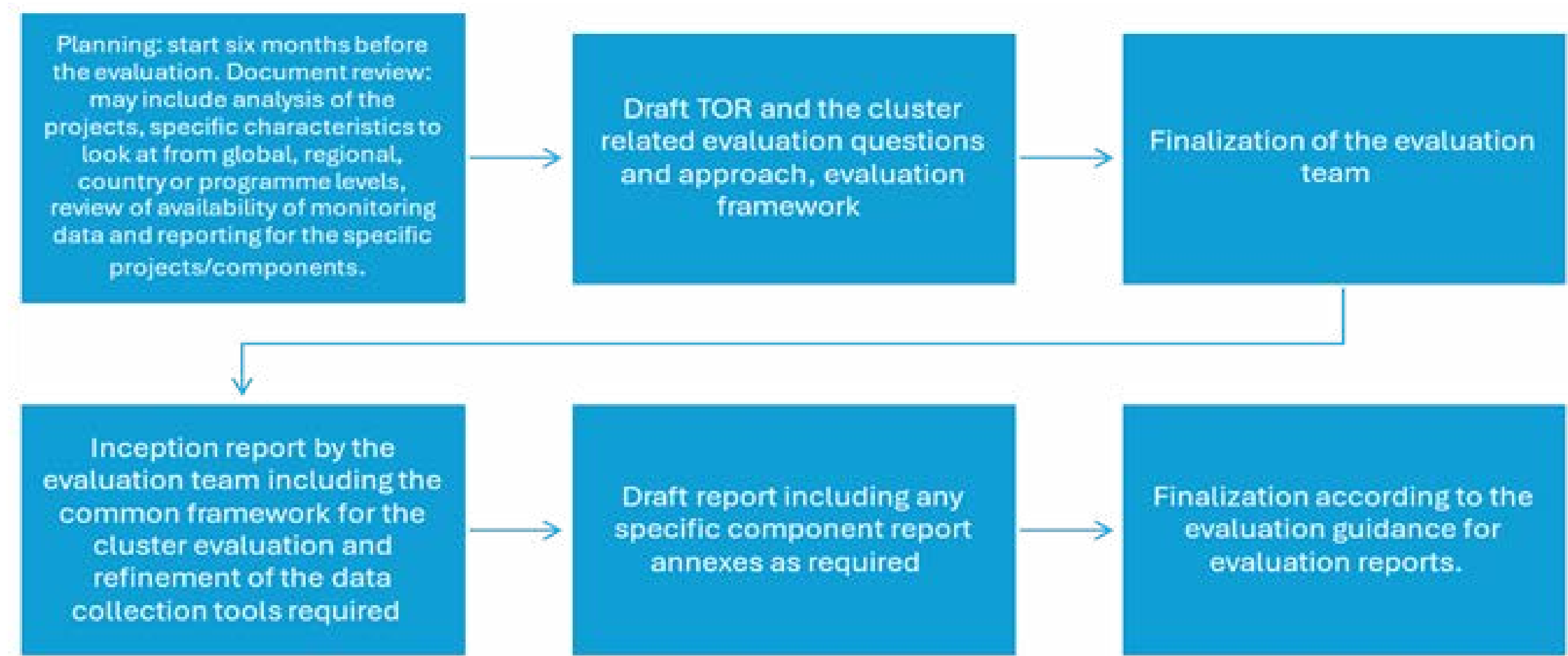
Evaluators experience similar challenges, possibly even more so as clustered evaluations aim to assess an evaluation subject which might not have benefitted from common intervention planning and governance. The evaluation manager should also discuss expectations of the donor and project stakeholders in whether there is a need for stand-alone reports of one of the clustered components or whether country specific recommendations would be required (if for a multi-country project) and subsequent budgets should be set aside to cover this additional requirement.

The evaluation manager for a clustered evaluation should have sufficient previous evaluation experience due to the complexities for clustered evaluations. More time would be required for the evaluation management, for example, the on-going management of expectations of project teams and donors.

Particularly at the inception stage, the mapping of results across clustered projects requires stakeholder agreement. As more points of consent from key stakeholders are required, the evaluation manager needs to exercise even greater engagement during the inception stage.

At the inception stage, the evaluation manager needs to allow for additional time for processes to reconstruct or validate common frameworks and objectives. The latter includes a common Theory of Change across projects or components, a country framework, thematic framework, or common results framework at strategic and objectives level. If the projects or components were not designed as a cluster, the evaluation manager should use the evaluability criteria to determine whether, e.g. monitoring frameworks are compatible. Clustered evaluation can be implemented as i) a single exercise or ii) several exercises using different timeframes but a common evaluation framework.

Implementation process for single exercise



► 6. FOLLOW-UP AND USE OF CLUSTERED EVALUATIONS

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED, AND GOOD PRACTICES PARTICULAR TO CLUSTERED EVALUATION

As for many other evaluations, recommendations in clustered evaluations are likely to be targeted at a range of implementation partners. The particularity of clustered evaluations is that a set of strategic recommendations are likely to be for the thematic or geographic cluster while other more operational recommendations will focus on its individual projects or components. Lessons learned and good practices should have a more strategic focus. (See [Guidance note 5.5 Dissemination of lessons learned & good practices](#)).

6.2 FOLLOW-UP AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE PROCESS

EVAL oversees the management response process for those evaluation recommendations while the responsible ILO official identified in the PARTNERSHIP project approval minutes needs to coordinate the management response with relevant stakeholders. Here the same process applies as in the case of non-clustered evaluations with a small difference. The responsible ILO *official of the largest project in the clustered evaluation* is tasked to coordinate a response with the other relevant responsible officers and stakeholders to whom the recommendations are addressed. The complexity of the clustered evaluations with potentially manifold stakeholders is likely to increase the workload of that responsible ILO official for that specific evaluation. This extra workload will likely be offset for the Office as a whole because multiple project evaluations are combined into one. As for non-clustered evaluations, EVAL allows three weeks for the management

response. If non-compliant, EVAL sends up to two additional reminders, extending the deadline for the management response for another two weeks. EVAL is responsible for approving the management response.

6.3 THE PARTICULAR USE OF CLUSTERED EVALUATIONS

Compared to other evaluation approaches particularly for projects, clustered evaluations serve a dual purpose. They provide learning and accountability for each project in the cluster but also the basis for the analysis of thematic trends, ILO's contribution to implementing the DWA in the UN Development Framework and ultimately ILO's contribution to the SDGs. As such, clustered evaluation results serve ILO management and its constituents as an evidence base for strategic decision-making.