International Labour Organization

Evaluation Office

CHECKLIST 4.6 WRITING THE INCEPTION REPORT

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This checklist is to be read in conjunction with *Guidance Note 4.1*

CONTENTS (CLICK TO NAVIGATE)

1. ADHERENCE TO THE TOR 2
2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY 2
3. WORK PLAN 2
4. MATRIX OF EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND DATA SOURCES 2
5. ADHERENCE TO ILO GUIDANCE AND FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS 4

This checklist provides guidance to evaluation managers, evaluation focal points, and evaluation consultants. Not all evaluations require inception reports, but for complex and high-budget projects, it ensures that there is common understanding on the Terms of Reference (TOR) and that there is a clarity on scope and approach of the evaluation. The inception report is a means of ensuring mutual understanding of the consultant's plan of action and timeline for conducting the evaluation. It also provides additional guarantee of adherence to, and interpretation of the TOR.

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. ADHERENCE TO THE TOR

The inception report should describe the conceptual framework planned for undertaking the evaluation in line with the scope and purpose described in the evaluation ToR. The conceptual framework should be consistent with ILO's Results-Based Management (RBM) system and should address the evaluation criteria proposed by the OECD: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact. If the TOR did not include cross-cutting issues such as gender equality and disability inclusion sufficiently, the evaluation team should consider them in the scoping phase of the evaluation and include it in the inception report as relevant.

The main source of the evaluation questions, resulting from consultation with the tripartite constituents, partners and stakeholders, are questions about the project that the client(s) want the evaluation to answer. For each of the above-mentioned criteria, the evaluation manager should have included two or three evaluation specific questions in the TOR.

2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The consultant should adequately describe the way that the chosen **data collection methods, data sources, sampling and indicators** will support the evaluation questions.[1]

The inception report should include the **Evaluation Question Matrix (EQM)**, a short description of which is given in section 4, below.

It is important to check that methods draw on both **subjective and objective sources** of data, which can provide a balanced and insightful report.

The methodology must propose the measures being taken to ensure how the project's contribution to cross cutting policy drivers, notably on gender equality and non-discrimination, norms and social dialogue, environmental sustainability, disability inclusion and medium and long-term effects of capacity development initiatives. Key guidance available on this include:

- Guidance note 3.1 on Integrating gender equality in monitoring & evaluation of projects
- Guidance Note 3.2 on Integrating social dialogue and International Labour Standards in monitoring and evaluation of projects
- Guidance Note 3.4 on Evaluation of capacity development in ILO programmes and projects
- Guidance note 3.5 - Mainstreaming a just transition towards environmental sustainability in ILO evaluations

The methodology should include examining the project Theory of Change and/or design, in the light of the intervention strategy and approach, including identified risks and assumptions, the logical connect between levels of results and how the desired change contributes to Agenda 2030, particularly to the goals, targets and indicators ILO is custodian of SDG related reference materials are available at EVAL website.

In some cases where the ToR of the evaluation asks the evaluators to reconstruct the Theory of Change, the proposed methodology should include this element.

Choice of any **site visits** within a country by the evaluator, who is entitled to select locations based on selection criteria, should be specified in the report. Any workshops planned for data collection, interviews or discussions and debriefing should also be documented.
The methodology section should also note the anticipated risks/limitations and should propose possible measures to overcome them.

3. WORK PLAN

The inception report must contain a work plan, which indicates the phases of the evaluation, the timing, key deliverables and milestones. A timeline, Gantt Chart or standard work process flow chart should be used. This helps in communicating the work plan and time lines and in keeping track of the evaluation's progress. Any changes in the timelines proposed in the inception report should be formally communicated and agreed upon by the Evaluation Manager and the Evaluator(s).

4. MATRIX OF EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND DATA SOURCES

As mentioned before, evaluation ToRs typically list the key evaluation questions. An inception report is an opportunity to take a closer view of these questions, add and/or modify based on the initial review of documents and briefings. Evaluator(s) should also identify the evaluation questions (as in the ToR) that seem to be inconsistent with the scope of the evaluation or for which data sources seem to be inadequate and discuss them with the evaluation manager in advance.

The questions should be organised in the form of Evaluation Question Matrix (EQM) and presented as part of the inception report. EQM is a tool that organizes the evaluation questions and plans for collecting information to answer them by means of appropriate data collection techniques. The matrix helps plan the evaluation throughout the conceptualization, stakeholder identification, fieldwork, data analysis and report writing phases.

Where AI will play a substantive methodological role, the inception report should transparently identify its purpose, how outputs will be validated, relevant safeguards and limitations. This reflects UNEG's emphasis on transparency, explainability and human oversight in AI-enabled evaluations.

1. Approval of the inception report by the evaluation manager constitutes an acceptance by the ILO of the results generated through the proposed methodology. See also Guidance Note 4.1: The Evaluation Manager: Role and Function.

The core components of an EQM are specified below:

- The evaluation questions to be answered, which are found in the Terms of Reference. In preparing the EQM, the evaluation team can decide to break down the questions into sub-question to better address the overall objectives of the evaluation;
- How judgment will be formed (frequently called indicators);
- The data sources and the data collection instruments;
- The key stakeholders or informants to engage with to gather the information needed; and
- A brief explanation of how the analysis of the data will be carried out.

The structure of the EQM is presented below (Illustrative):

Question/Sub Question (if any)	Measure(s) or indicator(s)	Data sources	Data collection method	Stakeholders /Informants	Analysis and assessment
RELEVANCE					
Relevance To what extent was the project relevant to the national development priorities?	• Objectives and strategy of the project support national priorities • The project supports priorities identified in the Decent Work Programme (DWCP) of the country	• National development plan/relevant policy • DWCP document • Project partners and stakeholders	• Desk review • Structured interviews	• Representatives of tripartite constituents • Project advisory committee members, Project staff and technical specialists	• Identification of relevant plan & policies, including UN Development Cooperation Framework and DWCP • Triangulation based on different data sources
To what extent are project's results sustainable? **SQ:** Did the project develop appropriate partnerships that could sustain the gains beyond the project?	• The partnership strategy considered sustainability potential • The project partners are in a position to effectively work on the project theme beyond the project life	• Project document and progress reports • Project partners and stakeholders	• Desk review • • • Structured interviews	• Representatives of partner- organizations • Representatives of constituents • Project management team	• Analyse project design for assessing the sustainability consideration in design phase • Assess measures taken for sustaining project results

Interview protocols, survey outlines and other data collection protocols may be added to the inception report to supplement the details included in the EQM. The EQM is an evolving document like any other planning tool and is subject to updates as the evaluation progresses.

5. ADHERENCE TO ILO GUIDANCE AND FORMATTING REQUIREMENTS

The ToRs usually make clear references to formatting requirements. These requirements are part of EVAL's Checklist 4.2 on Preparing the evaluation report. The Inception Report should include the consultant's acknowledgement of the formatting requirements, especially with regard to:

- Formulating and presenting recommendations;
- Identifying and presenting lessons learned, and filling in the appropriate templates; and
- Identifying and presenting emerging good practices, and filling in the relevant templates.

The evaluation manager should discuss the inception report with the evaluator until all points are mutually understood and agreed upon. The following supplemental documentation issues should be verified:

- Checklist 3.1: Documents for the evaluator, should be finalized and signed by the evaluation consultant which confirms that all necessary documentation has been received; and
- Acceptance of the terns noted in Checklist 4.2: Preparing the evaluation report.

TEMPLATE: TIMELINE

SAMPLE TEMPLATE 1

Evaluation Title: ..... **Date:** .....

ACTIVITIES AND DELIVERABLES	MONTH I				MONTH II				MONTH III	
	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Week 9	Week 10
1. INCEPTION PHASE										
1.1 Inception Meeting										
1.2 Secondary Research										
1.3 Development of data collection tools										
1.4 Draft Inception Report (Deliverable 1): dd.mm.yy										
1.5 Final inception report										
2. DATA COLLECTION PHASE										
2.1 Data collection/ field visits										
2.2 Debriefing										
3. REPORT WRITING PHASE										
3.1 Data collation and drafting of the report										
3.2 Submission of draft report (Deliverable 2): dd.mm.yy										
3.3 Submission of final report after feedback (Deliverable 3): dd.mm.yy										

TEMPLATE: TIMELINE

SAMPLE TEMPLATE 2

Evaluation Title: ..... **Date:** .....

