



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

► **Date:** June 2020 (v.1)This guidance note is part of Pillar 3 ► *Planning and designing evaluations*

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► 1. INTRODUCTION

The Independent Evaluation of the ILO’s evaluation function in 2016 recommended increased use of strategic clustered evaluations to allow for more strategic focus and to reduce evaluation fatigue. ILO defined clustered evaluation as follows: “An envelope of evaluations of projects¹ combined into a single evaluation based on results or strategic, thematic or geographical area or scope”. The notion of clustering was therefore included in the GB approved [evaluation policy](#)² and [results-based strategy](#)³ with a specific sub-outcome 2.1.on advancing the “use of strategic cluster evaluations to gather evaluative information more effectively” The evaluation strategy calls explicitly for efforts by the ILO to promote this modality.

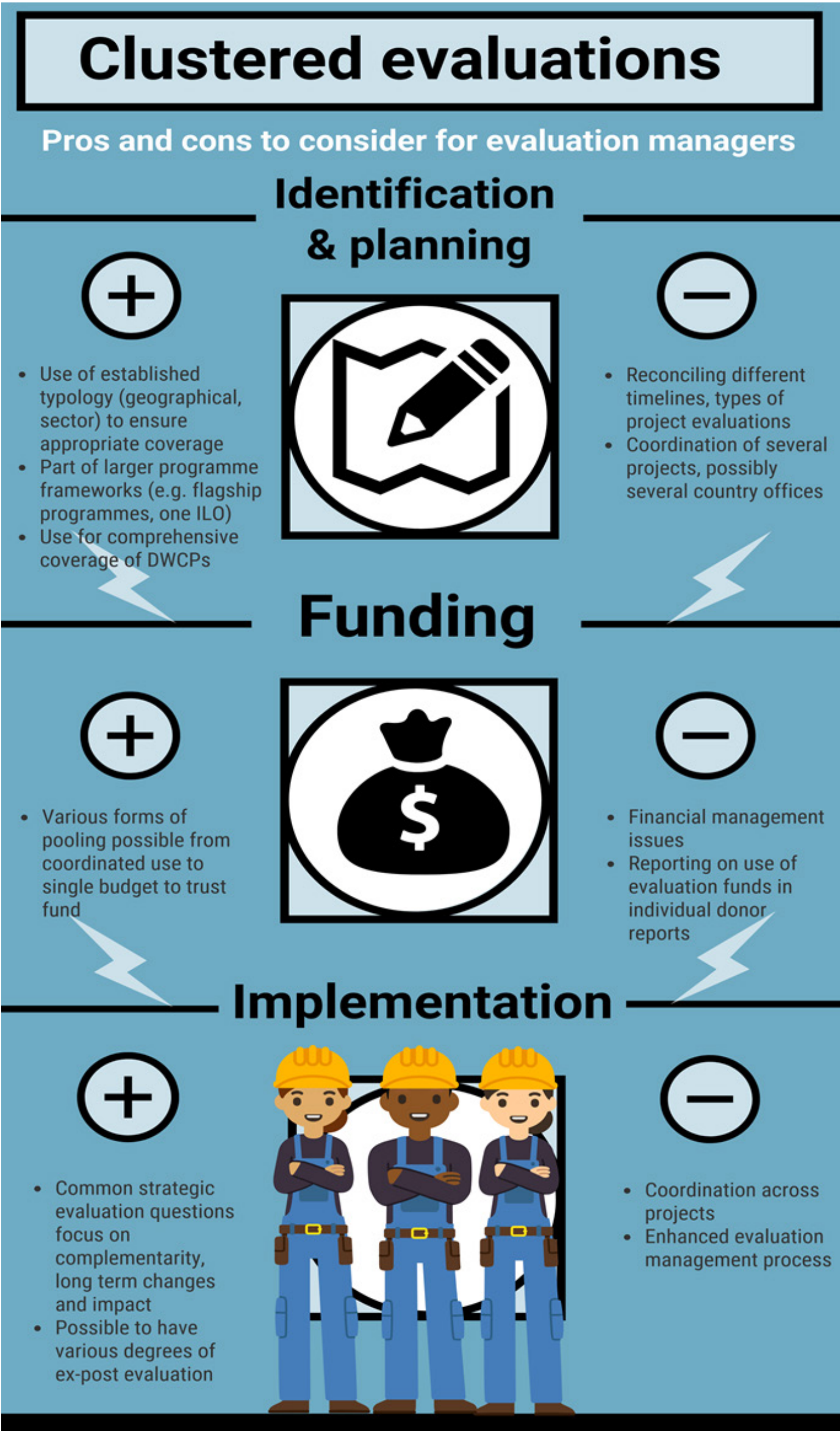
According to a recent GB recommendation (Annual Evaluation Report 2018-19), clustered evaluations are the default option for evaluation in donor agreements. This decision propels the importance of clustered evaluations for the organization to the forefront and underscores the timeliness for the present guidance note.

The advantage of clustered evaluations as the default option goes beyond a potentially increased strategic focus. Clustered evaluations can also contribute to reducing the number of

evaluations of individual projects, thus potentially leading to cost savings. Provided this is done at a large scale, it may even be able, through economies of scale, to lead to lower evaluation costs. On the other hand clustered evaluation introduced at later stage, while still desirable from a strategic perspective, may increase the administrative burden and transaction costs. The benefits for ILO constituents and development partners’ show in efficiency gains and the strategic value added by providing more impact-level information.

Explaining the benefits of clustered evaluation to donors 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.

Figure 1: Pros and cons of clustered evaluations



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. ILO Evaluation Policy (2017) http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationreports/WCMS_603265/lang--en/index.htm

3. ILO results-based Evaluation Strategy 2018–21 http://www.ilo.org/gb/GBSessions/WCMS_618296/lang--en/index.htm

► 2. WHY CLUSTERED EVALUATIONS

The rationale for clustered evaluations goes beyond that of addressing evaluation fatigue. Apart from potential efficiency gains, one of the most significant advantages of clustering several evaluations into one single evaluation is that the commonalities and differences of similar projects (for example, in a similar thematic area or geographic area) can be analysed.



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.

This can help identify critical success factors and potential risks, thus providing valuable information for the performance of future and on-going interventions. It also fits in well with the Evaluation Office’s longer-term vision to develop a more transformative approach to evaluation that will allow for a more comprehensive validation process of ILO performance at the country and global levels. Such a transformative approach to evaluations is needed in order to: better inform the ILO’s understanding of its effectiveness in delivering on its policy outcomes; allow comprehensive coverage and analysis; and reduce “evaluation fatigue” among Office officials and constituents⁴.

The Annual Evaluation Report 2018-19 included a recommendation to promote clustered evaluations as the default modality for evaluation in the ILO. [📖 The Governing Body unanimously endorsed this recommendation.](#)

4. [ILO Annual Evaluation Report 2017-18, page 37](#)

5. [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.



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.

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 direction⁵ Clustered evaluations of thematically aligned projects for example allow to address common strategic evaluation questions which otherwise would not possible in a series of individual evaluations of those projects.

► 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 donor. 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	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.
	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.
	Thematic programmes	Focus on a theme	Suitability of clustered evaluation given if a shared Theory of Change/results framework is in place.
	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

In some circumstances, a clustered evaluation may be more cost-effective and save resources. Compared, for example, to evaluations of multiple individual projects, a clustered evaluation results in a single evaluation process, bearing less administrative costs and involving only one evaluation team. It also saves time on the part of the ILO and stakeholders.

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. 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.

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
Evaluability	☒ Common strategic evaluation questions focus on complementarity, long-term changes and impact
	☒ 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
Practical considerations	☒ Common CPOs, P&B outcomes and targets
	☒ 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 donor as the default option when agreements are being signed.

The standard recommended evaluation provisions in donors' agreement are:

“All ILO Programmes and Projects under this grant will be evaluated in accordance with the [ILO Evaluation Policy \(2017\)](#) and complementary provisions in the [ILO Evaluation Policy Guidelines](#). The ILO Evaluation Office will consult with the Donor in preparation for the evaluations, including on issues of focus, use, timing, and contribution to ILO’s Programme and Budget”.

The standard donor’s agreement with ILO evaluation requirements further specifies the following choices concerning clustering:

“The [Evaluation Policy \(2017\)](#) calls for innovation that reinforces the main principles of the ILO’s Strategic Plan for 2018–21. These innovations include more strategic evaluations of projects and programme activities under the same or similar themes, programme frameworks and locations through clustering and integrated funding.

The donor agrees: *(select one item. If the donor does not agree the clustering option can be dropped)*

- ☐ Agrees with the clustering of evaluations under the grant, based on the thematic or geographic scope of the project(s) as an acceptable option to promote strategic evaluations, to enhance organizational learning and to reduce the burden on stakeholders.
- ☐ Agrees with the principle of clustering evaluations under the grant, but requests prior approval of this form of evaluation based on the thematic or geographic scope of the project(s) covered by this grant”.

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.

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 in some form of evaluability assessment. At that stage, for example any specific programme and/or donor 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

As explained above the person in charge should consider a clustered evaluation when either a geographic or thematic interrelation is present for a group of projects and components. At the same time, the implementation status or maturity of projects or components is essential when considering a clustered evaluation. Clustered evaluations could be considered if the purpose of the evaluation contains a strong learning focus, targets identifying strategic issues, synergies, and external validity. 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 donors' consent to a clustered evaluation.

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

For EVAL, the planning process is an opportunity to verify potential overlapping clusters and components between different cluster evaluations because a project or component contributes or is seen as part of several programme frameworks. 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
3. Formalization of the evaluation process

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

Figure 1: Mapping flow

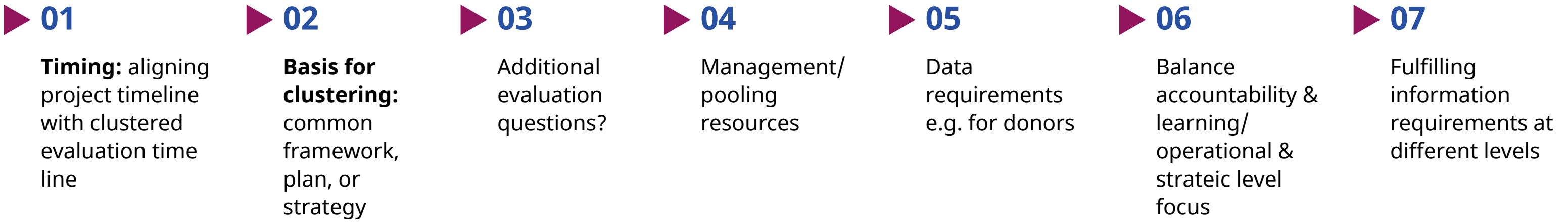


Figure 2 above outlines the main tasks for EVAL to map projects or components where clustered evaluations are feasible or proposed. The role of EVAL is to ensure mandatory evaluation requirements.

Table 3 provides a matrix to practically map projects or components for clustered evaluations, again under EVAL’s responsibility.

Table 3: Matrix to map projects or components for 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 evaluations⁶

The proposed evaluation plan for clustered evaluations contains 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 review of evaluation ToR and approval, the notification of the knowledge management officer in EVAL to reflect the evaluation on i-eval. For the formalization of the evaluation process, EVAL, the evaluation manager and the implementing teams of a project or component need to coordinate. The latter requires more time than for non-clustered evaluations. EVAL’s experience with clustered evaluation pilots shows that the coordination with implementing teams is complex, due to the lack of knowledge about each other’s projects.

In addition to EVAL’s standard support, for clustered evaluations, EVAL offers the evaluation manager assistance in the design and sharing of ToR.

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

6. Evaluation plans are dynamic documents where information might change over time for various reasons such as extension of a project; overlapping new phases granted by the donor; a donor agreeing or disagreeing to clustering of evaluations or a particular project evaluation not fitting well into clustering due to any other unanticipated factor. EVAL, through REOs and DEFPs, updates the evaluation plan at least twice a year and reflects them in its [planned evaluation database](#) on its [i-eval Discovery dashboard](#).

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 • 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 TC agreement, donors should systematically consider clustered evaluations, with clustering as the default combined with an opt-out option
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.

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. In the absence of a pooled evaluation fund, 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.

When preparing the evaluation plan, the evaluation manager in consultation 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. Unspent evaluation funds are reimbursed to donors as a standard practice.

4.7 SUCCESS FACTORS FOR GOOD CLUSTERED EVALUATIONS

Learning from clustered evaluations in the ILO, the EVAL-managed pilots in 2019/2020 and UN peers identified success factors, including the ones listed in the box below. As EVAL is piloting clustered evaluations, additional success factors might emerge or the ones listed below might change. Hence success factors should be revisited in subsequent versions of this guidance note.

EVAL’s experience with piloting clustered evaluations also shows that a trust fund or funding pool would be the optimal solution for funding clustered evaluations. In the absence of such a trust fund, charging different evaluation budgets in a proportional manner is the second-best option. However, the evaluations’ efficiency is affected due to the many transaction costs involved.

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

For successful cluster evaluations, the following aspects require attention at the planning stage:

- Careful identification of issues and projects done in a participatory and transparent manner;
- Validation of the cluster with the projects teams after initial donor consent
- Use of the clustered evaluation planning sheet (Annex III) to convince the project team about the feasibility of clustering
- 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
- Selection of advanced stages of implementation cycle to enable assessing sustainability, results, and impact during the cluster evaluation;
- 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 focal points taking on the management function. In this oversight capacity, EVAL follows a formal process on clustered evaluations with confirmation of donor approval, followed by a review of TOR to assess clustering justifications and conceptual grounds. Once

approved, EVAL ensures that i-eval Discovery shows the clustered evaluation in the system.

Besides, in the context of the integrated funding system, EVAL aims to facilitate cooperation between evaluation managers and regional evaluation focal points through a more dynamic integrated planning platform.

EVAL’s experience with clustered evaluations that are piloted in 2019/2020 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 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. The implementation processes are outlined below:

i) Clustered evaluation as a single exercise

Inception phase – at least 6 months before the evaluation
Selection of lead evaluator
Finalization of evaluation questions and evaluation approach
Development of an evaluation framework and pre-defined tools for:
Specific characteristics,
Assessing individual projects
Consider relevant level – global, regional, country, programme
Document review:
Review of monitoring data and reporting
Data collection/in-country
Use of tools
Consolidation and analysis (report writing)
Use of synthesis
Use of common framework
Cover page to address projects or components covered, evaluations covered, past evaluations undertaken and typology or clustering principle

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 PARDEV 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.

ANNEX I. TOOLS FOR CLUSTERED EVALUATION – SHARING OF EXPERIENCES

The past and current experience with clustered evaluations, including the piloting of typologies of clustered evaluation, involves the development and initial application of a number of tools. A [“clustered evaluation sharing of experiences forum”](#) has been created on the i-eval Cloud for easy updating and access to proposed tools.

Tools should be seen as broad and can include pointers, texts for TORs, templates, good practices in dialogue with partners and donor, checklists for planning and management of clustered evaluations; and tools for data collection and analysis specifically geared towards clustered evaluations.

Evaluation tools generally can be accessed through the respective guidance notes, checklist and template.

As the experiences and tools are uploaded and shared, the tools will be organized initially around the key steps in the planning, implementation and follow-up phase, with sub-categories to reflect specific focus and use of tools. Ongoing analysis of the use of the proposed tools will help in enhancing the specific applicability of the tools.

Currently the main headings for organization the experiences are proposed as follows:

- **Clustered evaluations as part of evaluation approach for the programmer/project** (clustered evaluations in the design and planning of programmes/projects)
- **Planning of specific clustered evaluations**
 - TORs: text for TORs and specific provisions related to clustered evaluation

- Evaluation Questions specific relevant for clustered evaluations
 - by evaluation criteria;
 - by particular issues addressed in clustered evaluation (comparative perspective, strategic contribution)
 - ILO specific concerns (social dialogue, labour standards)
- **Implementation of clustered evaluations**
 - For the inception phase
 - Selection of coverage – case-studies, countries, details on projects
 - For data collection
 - For analysis
 - Clustered level
 - Components
 - For reporting
 - Presentation of findings by projects, components within a cluster – to meet specific information requirements, including from donors?
 - Recommendations by cluster and component level
 - Outline of clustered evaluation reports; Report template? Or specific clustered evaluations dimensions
- **Follow-up to clustered evaluation**
- **For the use of clustered evaluation findings**

ANNEX II. REFERENCES

The “clustered evaluation sharing of experiences forum” includes a list of the references that provided the basis for the institutionalizing of the clustered evaluation approach and a list of the references that can help support the further implementation of the approach, including in specific application of the clustered evaluation approach.

The references will include:

- articles and documents on the concept of clustered evaluation and experience outside ILO
- manual and guidance on clustered evaluation approach or related to the approach
- examples of clustered evaluations by typology
- relevant guidance notes and checklist from ILO Policy Guidelines on Evaluation

Links to existing documents will be used.

References will include a dynamic list of clustered evaluations accessed from the [i-eval Discovery](#) repository of evaluation information.

The list of references can be accessed [here](#).

ANNEX III. ILO CLUSTERED EVALUATION - TEMPLATE FOR SHOWCASING THE CLUSTERED EVALUATION WORKPLAN

PRECONDITIONS & CONSTRAINTS IN A SNAPSHOT

Issue	Criteria	
Administrative clearance	☒	Agreement of donor(s)
Added value	☒	Added value for ILO and its constituents
	☒	Exemplified achievements and/or particular challenges from which potential good practices and lessons learned could be derived
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
Practical considerations	☒	Evaluation time, cost and logistics

Step 1: Mapping the projects where a clustered evaluation approach is possible/proposed

- Issues to consider: How to reconcile timelines and implementation status of different project and programme components
- What is the strategy, plan, (results) framework, ToC that is the basis for the clustering?
- What specific (additional) evaluation questions clustered evaluations can address?
- Management/pooling of funds for the evaluation
- Data requirements – for individual projects/components, donors and the clustered evaluation as a whole
- Balance/emphasis between accountability, planning and organisational learning
- How to ensure sufficient evaluation of individual components/ projects/country work while focusing on the strategic level that clustering can bring
- How clustered evaluation can provide evaluative information at required levels of components, project, country, global programme

Step 2. Proposing an evaluation plan for clustered evaluations⁷

**ILLUSTRATIVE
EXAMPLE**

An ILLUSTRATIVE example of a clustered evaluation plan

- Issues to consider: How to reconcile timelines and implementation status of different project and programme components
- What is the strategy, plan, (results) framework, ToC that is the basis for the clustering?
- What specific (additional) evaluation questions clustered evaluations can address?
- Management/pooling of funds for the evaluation
- Data requirements – for individual projects/components, donors and the clustered evaluation as a whole
- Balance/emphasis between accountability, planning and organisational learning
- How to ensure sufficient evaluation of individual components/projects/country work while focusing on the strategic level that clustering can bring
- How clustered evaluation can provide evaluative information at required levels of components, project, country, global programme

	Project code & title and project budget	Project start and end dates	Due evaluations as per donor agreements and due date	Evaluation Budget (source and amount as per agreement)	Proposed clustering	Total budget available for clustered evaluations	Remarks (logics for clustering, support from key partners)
1.	AAA/00/00/XYZ USD 3 million	January 2020 to December 2022	Mid-term independent evaluation: June 2021 Final independent evaluation: Oct 2020	MTIE: USD 30,000 FIE: USD 30,000	To be clustered with BBB/00/00/ABC and CCC/00/00/CDE	Total: USD 1,20,000 Evaluability Review: USD 15,000 Clustered mid-term: USD 40,000 Clustered final-term: USD 65,000	• MTE of project 1 and 2 to be clustered with a final evaluation of the project. The clustering is being done due to similarities in theme (link to a CPO or policy outcome) and approach across the three projects. All the three donors have consented to clustering evaluation. • Donor consent still pending for clustering project 3
2.	BBB/00/00/ABC USD 2 million	June 2020 to June 2022		MTIE: USD 20,000 FIE: USD 20,000			
3.	CCC/00/00/CDE USD 1 million	March 2020 to March 2021		FIE: USD 20,000			
4.	DDD/00/00/MNO USD 3.5 million	January 2020 to December 2021		MTIE: USD 30,000 FIE: USD 40,000	Not decided	Not decided	This was initially proposed to be clustered with Donor has not agreed to clustering. Further negotiations are underway.

7. Evaluation plans are dynamic documents where information might change over time for various reasons such as extension of a project; overlapping new phases granted by the donor; a donor agreeing or disagreeing to clustering of evaluations or a particular project evaluation not fitting well into clustering due to any other unanticipated factor. EVAL, through REOs and DEFPs, updates the evaluation plan at least twice a year and reflects them in its [planned evaluation database](#) on its [i-eval Discovery platform](#).

Remarks should include the foreseen challenges or agreed on positive arrangements, for instance:

- Issue with aligning project timeline with clustered evaluation timeline
- Donor agreement pending for clustering a particular project/(s)
- All donors have agreed to clustering, but donor X and Y also need separate exclusive reports on their contribution
- The combined value of all projects is over USD 5 million so an evaluability review will be conducted in
- Funding arrangement for clustering not worked out etc
- All projects are part of clustering-donors consent already received from all donors

Step 3: Formalize the process:

Review ToR and approve, notify KM officer, reflect in i-eval, etc.:
EVAL and Implementing teams to coordinate on these aspects.