DATA COLLECTION METHODS FOR EVALUATION

Under construction

This Guidance Note provides an introduction to common data collection methods which may be appropriate for use in ILO evaluations.

April 2016

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Methods the tools used to collect the information used to answer the questions posed within an evaluation. This guidance note lays out two important methods related concepts, as well as a brief list of common qualitative methods used in ILO evaluations.

How data is collected is a key part to determining how sound the conclusions made from an evaluation can be. Major standard setting bodies in evaluation have recognized this by including specific standards on data collection in their guidance material[1]. The following points introduce a few broad ways to determine whether standards are sufficiently represented within an evaluation.

- **Methods answer evaluation questions.** The methods selected should permit information to be collected that address pertinent questions that stakeholders want the evaluation to answer.
- **Methods are appropriate for the sources from which they intend to collect data.** The evaluation methods selected should be appropriate for the context in which data is being collected. Instruments are developed with the intent of collecting specific forms of information. This should be taken into account when selecting instruments (if appropriating instruments from other sources) or when developing instruments for an evaluation.
- **Methods are described in enough detail to let an external reviewer assess their appropriateness and quality.** Clear articulation of methods selected, justification for their selection and the application of them should be clearly described in an evaluation so as to give the reader the opportunity to assess the quality of information being described, and the credibility of findings.

[1] See the American Evaluation Association's guiding principles, specifically Principle A. Systematic Inquiry.

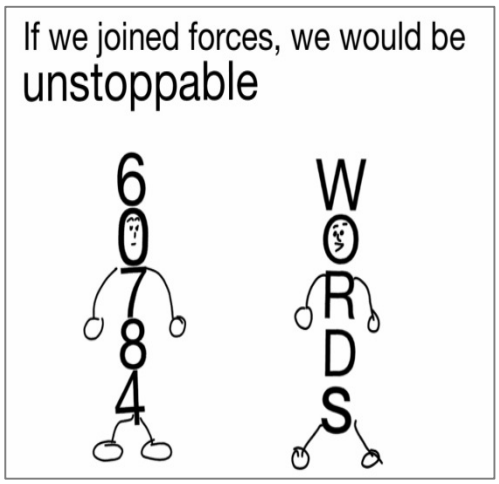
QUANTITATIVE, QUALITATIVE AND MIXED METHODS

Methods are the technical approaches to collecting data in an evaluation. In evaluation, the most important methodological consideration is whether or not a particular method or set of methods is appropriate for a particular evaluation context. Consider Evaluations set out to seek answers to a set of specific questions. Identifying the most appropriate method or set of methods to answer these questions should be the primary principle when making methodological choices in an evaluation.

Two categories of data collection methods fall into **quantitative** and **qualitative**, which are defined as follows:

> ***Quantitative methods:*** *involve the collection of data that can be presented in numerical form and that can be analyzed with statistics.*
>
> ***Qualitative methods:*** *involve the collection of data which are nonnumeric and therefore utilized different approaches for gathering, analyzing and reporting.*

These different methods are each important and informative in different ways. Quantitative data may allow an evaluator to generalize findings to a broader context, compare findings between groups, and/or conduct statistical tests based on a predetermined hypothesis. Qualitative methods allow an evaluator to look more deeply into a certain issue, or collect richer information which provides more depth than breadth.



freshspectrum.com

Quantitative and qualitative methods offer opportunities to collect different kinds of information and answer different types of questions. Often an evaluation scenario calls for a **mixed-methods approach**. A mixed-methods approach systematically applies both quantitative and qualitative methods in a purposeful and complimentary way. The use of a mixed-methods approach should be considered when particular evaluation questions need to be answered using multiple sources of data. Evaluation questions can often be quite broad, as they are intended to be an inquiry into the merit of a particular project or aspect of that project. Their breadth often demands multiple sources of information from multiple sources.

Using a mixed-methods approach to collect data from multiple sources to verify the validity of a particular claim is an example of triangulation. Triangulation is an important concept for improving the validity of evaluation findings. It is premised on the idea of drawing on multiple methods of data collection, and/or multiple sources of data to corroborate a particular finding or conclusion. By doing this, alternative explanations for a particular finding or conclusion can be ruled out. The use of triangulation is an important practice in evaluation contexts which are often complex, in which data is not easily or readily available, and which require an evaluator to pull together data from various sources to draw conclusions about the criteria of merit.

One hallmark of an evaluation question is that it usually demands multiple sources of data in

order to come up with a credible answer. In order to plan what data might be needed, and how these data will be collected, you can refer to the Matrix for Guiding the Evaluations Methodology in Checklist 4: Validating Methodologies.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Method	Description
Document review	Review of project documentation including project reports, planning documents or monitoring reports. Documents should be provided by project team.
Observations	Site visits by evaluator to all or a sampling of project or programme sites. Should use some form of observation tool designed based on evaluation questions. Also a tool for helping evaluators gain context of project or programme.
Interviews	Interviews are a key component of most evaluations. Used to obtain in depth information of a particular topic, as well as multiple perspectives which might not be knowable in a quantitative sense. Interviews can be: • Unstructured: no predetermined questions, more conversational • Semi-structured: evaluator has a set of questions they want to obtain answers for, but allow the conversation to drive direction • Structured: An evaluator asks a series of questions in the same order, and after each response moves onto the next question with little or no conversation.
Focus Groups	These are also a form of interview, but involve a group. An evaluator facilitates these groups in the scenario where interviews of individuals is not possible or too resource intensive, or if allowing individuals to engage with one another is important to obtaining the type of information needed. Group interaction can spark thoughts or ideas that may not emerge in individual interviews.
Case Studies	Case studies are an in-depth examination of a particular observation, or a limited number of observations. This might be a particular town, group, or even person. Some of the techniques presented above might be used in a particular case study. However, in a case study, the focus remains on that particular case and obtaining as much relevant information as possible about it.

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Method	Description
Surveys	Surveys are a questionnaire usually developed by the evaluator for a particular programme or project context. They ask respondents to respond to a set of questions that are designed to collect information appropriate to the evaluation context. Part of the survey administration process requires determining who should respond. Sometimes this means taking a sample of a population which is a technical task and should be done by someone with the appropriate technical expertise. In other instances, a survey might be distributed to an entire population, in which case it is a census. In the ILO surveys are a key source of quantitative data. Labour force surveys are a primary tool for collection national information about labour related issues (e.g., labor inspection, child labour etc.). It should be noted that surveys also often collect qualitative data through open-ended responses were respondents respond to a question prompt. Surveys are also often used to measure knowledge, skills or abilities. These can be conceptualized as short-term outcomes, whereby a project aims to change some of these within the target group. This may mean teaching participants how to do something differently, or improving on what they already do. Surveys can assess whether this knowledge or these new abilities have been absorbed by participants. If possible, surveys should be used at multiple stages within the project lifecycle including at the start of a project in order to determine a baseline condition. The baseline can be a point of comparison for future data analysis to investigate evidence of change within the condition of interest.
Administrative data analysis	In some cases, data is collected by governments, other multilateral organizations, national organizations or NGO's. This data might be relevant to an evaluation for use in setting a benchmark, or use for comparison. For example, Understanding Children's Work uses administrative data collected by others to analyze conditions of child labour.
Cost analysis	This includes both cost-benefit analysis and cost-effectiveness analysis. Cost-benefit looks at a measure, such as rate of return that is obtained for the money spent on a particular intervention. Cost-effectiveness analysis looks at the costs associated with achieving a particular output, or outcome. For example, how many dollars are associated with improving

	women's leadership some pre-determine amount. It can be difficult to try and quantify these outcomes, and this is one of the main challenges associated with this technique.

Systematic and random sampling techniques to determine which data will be collected are called for in most evaluation designs, even when deciding on the choice of key persons to interview, which field sites to visit, or which beneficiaries to survey. In some cases, a purposive sampling approach is more suitable. Sampling methodologies are applied to minimize selection bias. The design of appropriate sampling techniques should be determined early in the data collection design process in conjunction with the development of data collection methods. When applying data collection techniques, examination of socio-economic characteristics among respondents and sex-disaggregation of data is required. The evaluation manager is encouraged to explore other potential lines of disaggregation, such as grouping based on national livelihoods and poverty outcomes.