EVAL Guidance on evaluability of ILO programmes and projects

Evaluation reports continue to flag poor monitoring approaches and practices applied in projects and programmes, thus limiting data availability, methods and questions that can be considered when evaluating higher-order development effectiveness. The Evaluation Office’s (EVAL) Evaluation Strategy and Policy Guidelines highlight the need to improve project design and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks so that evaluations can better document effectiveness and results. Evaluability assessments contribute to this objective.

**EVAL defines the term evaluability as “the extent to which an activity or a programme can be evaluated in a reliable and credible manner.”**

Evaluability assessments determine the extent a Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP), programme or project is ready for an evaluation and identifies any changes required to improve M&E components for enhanced effective performance. Results from evaluability assessments aim to improve:

- Theories of Change (ToC).
- Log frames.
- Design of monitoring systems.
- Evaluation approaches, and
- Evaluation questions.

**Figure 1: Importance of evaluability assessments to stakeholders**

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1 ILO, 2017: ILO policy guidelines for evaluation

**Guidance Notes are not professionally edited**
Evaluability assessments of a DWCP, programme or project take place during the ILO’s quality assurance process and the initial stages of implementation. The ILO’s DWCP guidelines stress the importance of evaluability assessments as a means to inform the Office and the constituents to report more comprehensively on ILO’s achievements.

The ILO’s policy guidelines for evaluation require mandatory evaluability assessments for projects with budgets over US$ 5 million. Such projects go through two levels of evaluability test: first an ‘M&E Appraisal’ at the stage of proposal development by EVAL and second an ‘Evaluability Review’ within one year of project implementation conducted by the project team, with the help of an external M&E expert. More details are found in Section 2.

EVAL recommends the conduct of evaluability assessment as a useful resource irrespective of the project size and the operational level (DWCP, programmes and projects). Figure 2 below provides an overview of the various evaluability assessments of ILO interventions that can be undertaken.

Figure 2: Evaluability assessments – When to conduct them?

1. DWCP development

- Evaluability of CPOs and results framework using the DWCP practical guidebook (Learn more)
- EVAL provides quality assurance during the QAM
- Evaluability of SDG integration into DWCPs and at country level using EVAL DWCP/SDG evaluability diagnostic instrument (Learn more)

2. Programme / Project

At design stage: M&E appraisal conducted by EVAL using the template in Annex 1.

- M&E appraisal is mandatory for projects above US$ 5 million (Learn more)

After 1 year of project start-up: Evaluability review commissioned by the project.

- Mandatory for projects over US$ 5 million following the template in Annex 2. (Learn more)

Evaluability reviews are recommended for all projects, including flagship programmes

Exception: projects using exclusive M&E frameworks

(Learn more)
1. Evaluability assessment of Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP)

The achievement of DWCP results within the context of the UN development frameworks and UN Reform requires a more judicious analysis of institutional and implementation capacity upfront. It also requires a thorough understanding of wider complementarities, i.e., the results chain linking individual projects with broader objectives for the specific sector, as well as their contribution to national development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Realistic timeframes for DWCP and project execution, as well as proactive monitoring and risk management throughout the programme and project cycles, are key factors to be heeded. From the perspective of evaluation, this strong focus on results presents important challenges and opportunities to review and strengthen/align internal programming and operational mechanisms for the development of DWCPs.

The evaluability assessment of DWCPs focuses on the quality of Country Programme Outcomes (CPOs) and its results framework so that the outputs and outcomes of interventions could be captured and verified during evaluations. Two different but complementary tools are available for this. One is the ‘Evaluability Assessment tool for DWCP’ results framework and the other is the ‘DWCP/SDG evaluability diagnostic instrument (the EDI tool)’.

- **Evaluability of DWCP CPOs and results framework**

When drafting the DWCP results framework it is important to check that CPOs and results are evaluable. Assessing the evaluability of DWCP-CPOs and results framework means examining how clearly the CPOs and their underlying logical frameworks are expressed, whether reliable metrics (indicators, baselines, milestones and targets) have been developed and/or are available and whether adequate reporting processes are in place. The evaluability assessment can also support the Office and the tripartite steering committee, allowing them to report more comprehensively on DWCP achievements, and to improve their ability to generate lessons which can be fed back into the DWCP for improvement purposes.

Before DWCPs are finalized, country and regional offices in collaboration with ILO-HQ technical departments, including EVAL, are required to revise the draft DWCP document and its appended results and monitoring framework during the quality assurance process.

Guidance and templates for the evaluability assessments of CPOs during DWCP development are found in **ILO DWCP practical guidebook**, Annex 7. The **checklist for the evaluability assessment of DWCP results framework** is included in Annex 1 of this document.

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2 ILO, 2016: DWCP guidebook
EVAL’s *DWCP/SDG evaluability diagnostic instrument* (EDI) allows the rapid assessment of SDG integration into DWCPs at country level. The EDI can serve as an ‘early warning’ mechanism to identify the strengths and weaknesses in terms of the capability to measure, monitor, evaluate and report on SDG progress at country level\(^3\), as well as on the ILO contribution to the SDGs. Results can be used as inputs to plan for the various capacity-building needs of individual countries (or for a region) insofar as DWCP-SDG implementation, evaluability and reporting are concerned. Figure 3 depicts the dimensions to measure the readiness of SDG integration in DWCPs at the country level.

The EDI can be administered by the Regional Evaluation Officer in collaboration with an external consultant during DWCP development. This tool complements the general evaluability assessment of DWCPs described in section 1 and captured in the DWCP practical guidebook, Annex 7.

2. Evaluability assessment of programmes/projects over US$ 5 million

Since 2017, as per GB decision projects with budgets over US$5 million have to undergo two mandatory evaluability assessments: 1) M&E appraisal conducted by EVAL of the project proposal prior to approval; 2) an evaluability review (ER) within one year of start-up.

2.1 M&E appraisal of projects/programmes over US$ 5 million

Since 2011, EVAL already carried out *M&E appraisal* of project proposals over US$ 5 million as part of the project appraisal process. Appraisals seek to specify, clarify and discuss the improvements needed to strengthen the project design and the M&E framework with PARDEV and the project originators.

\(^3\) Including the ILO, the national M&E systems and infrastructure as well as national stakeholders, including ILO Constituents
M&E appraisals are uploaded to the Appraisal Platform and IRIS. Results are shared with the project originators and line management for further adjustments of the proposal, as required.

### Overview of M&E appraisal process for projects over US$ 5 million

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
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<tr>
<td>M&amp;E appraisal (Go to)</td>
<td>Project proposals</td>
<td>EVAL appraises project’s results framework and M&amp;E plan of project proposals</td>
<td>M&amp;E Appraisal report uploaded in Appraisal platform and in IRIS; line management and project originators revise proposal</td>
<td>M&amp;E appraisal and revised M&amp;E plan are reference documents for M&amp;E quality check</td>
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The M&E appraisal template used by EVAL can be consulted in Annex 2.

### 2.2 Evaluability review of projects/programmes over US$ 5 million within one year of start-up

As a result of appraisals, the M&E plans and budgets of project proposals are usually improved. Major challenges, however, remain. Over the years, evaluation reports flag the need for additional M&E fine tuning during project delivery before it is too late and the project is at an advance stage of implementation. For instance, the inception phase is critical for large budget projects of over US$ 5 million to the success of monitoring and evaluation design, particularly with regard to adequate baseline measurement and the selection of data collection methodologies.

Once projects are approved, the M&E plan should be refined, and have a specific work plan for its timely implementation. Indicators, baselines and targets are to be finalized, and means of measuring results and impacts are to be decided upon. In most cases, data collection for initial measurements of project indicators should be completed within the first three months since the project’s start-up.

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**The evaluability review (ER) builds upon EVAL’s M&E appraisal results. The ER serves two purposes: i) to review the quality of the project’s M&E plan and systems in the light of implementation realities; and ii) to recommend changes in the ToC and results framework to make the project evaluable. The ER takes place within the first year of the project start-up.**

The project responsible official manages the ER. An external consultant can be contracted to undertake the review following the generic components for M&E consultants’ Terms of Reference for an evaluability review (Annex 4).
Project partners and constituents should be involved in the review process. The consultative nature of the process and explicit engagement of stakeholders serve to strengthen the ownership of the project’s M&E. While the application of the assessment tool is mainly desk-based, a field visit to the project and constituents in at least one project locations/country is recommended. The evaluability assessment is to be financed from dedicated project funds reserved for the ER under the independent evaluation budget line 16.50).

The process for the evaluability review is summarized below:

The specific outputs for the evaluability review are:

- A revised set of M&E plans, including baseline and milestone data, or a clear indication of how the project is collecting these;
- Short findings reports for each of the project outcomes including specific suggestions for improvements; and
- A summary overview of issues, with recommendation of systemic improvements for the project and office to make.

3. Evaluability review for projects using specialized M&E frameworks

In the ILO, a number of projects use comprehensive or integrated M&E systems that are specific to the thematic topic or donor they cover or work with. Examples of these include the Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation System (CMES) for USDOL projects and the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) Standard for Results Measurement. CMES and the DCED standard show process-orientation, comprehensiveness and a large overlap of criteria used in the ILO’s evaluability assessments. As such, learning obtained through CMES or the DCED standard for results measurement processes can be similar to those of mandatory
evaluability reviews after one year of project start-up. Specific details on each M&E framework are included in the subsection below.

### 3.1 Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

**CMES** emerged from an ILO-developed approach for USDOL-funded projects. The CMES is an integrated approach to project planning, monitoring and evaluation as it establishes elements allowing to track progress made towards the completion of the expected objectives. The CMES requires projects to include information on the expected results (“what happened”), the project implementation process and timeframe (“how”) and the expected causal logic (“why”) taking into account context-related factors. Hence, it promotes a stronger link between monitoring and evaluation. CMES used a *Comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation Plan* (CMEP) on a mandatory basis.

Through a multi-stakeholder process, the completion of a CMEP requires information such as:

- A full results framework
- Activities mapping to project outputs and results
- Purpose and use of the performance monitoring plan
- Selection criteria for community and participant eligibility
- Implementation evaluations
- Prevalence survey at baseline and end-line
- Pre-situation analysis as applicable
- Roles and responsibilities of CMEP implementation
- Management information system
- Data analysis plan

CMES requires a continuous process of collecting and analysing information to track progress against expected results. It also promotes a strong link between project monitoring and evaluation activities, including establishing timelines for these activities so that they inform and build on one another and provide a full feedback loop. Developing and implementing a CMEP incorporates a set of review processes for mid-course project corrections. Internal implementation review of monitoring information and the project implementation process also takes place regularly to ensure that pertinent and reliable information is available as needed for the evaluations.

### 3.2 DCED Standard for Results Measurement

The ILO projects using the **DCED Standard for Results Measurement** operate in the areas of value chain, business development services and skills development, and the budget size ranges from US$ 4m to US$ 10 m. The DCED Standard for Results Measurement is a set of control points, compliance criteria and guidance materials to help projects set up an M&E system. Its implementation comprises a multi-stakeholder process over several months.

The DCED Standard for Results Measurement contains the following elements:
1. Articulating the results chain
2. Designing indicators of change, and other information needs
3. Measuring attributable change
4. Capturing wider changes in the system or market
5. Tracking costs and impact
6. Reporting costs and results
7. Managing the system for results measurement

The DCED promotes a pragmatic approach to results measurement. As part of the results framework development, DCED offers those agencies and programmes seriously engaged in monitoring their results an optional and confidential ‘audit’ service, which can lend additional credibility to the results measurement system. An audit involves an external, objective assessment of the monitoring system in use in the programme. The monitoring system is assessed against transparent and publically available criteria, giving every programme an incentive to improve and a goal to aim for.

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4 DCED, 2017 The DCED Standard for Measuring Results in Private Sector Development