



Programme Manager's Planning Monitoring & Evaluation Toolkit

Division for Oversight Services

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Tool Number 3: Purposes of Evaluation

I. Introduction

The toolkit is a supplement to the UNFPA programming guidelines. It provides guidance and options for UNFPA Country Office staff to improve planning, monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) activities in the context of results based programme management. It is also useful for programme managers at headquarters and for national programme managers and counterparts.

This tool provides an overview of the most frequent reasons for undertaking programme evaluations. The content is based on a review of evaluation literature from academia and international development agencies such as UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF.

II. Why define the evaluation purpose?

Before evaluating a programme, the reasons for the evaluation should be clearly defined. If the purpose is not clear, there is a risk that the evaluation will focus on the wrong concerns, draw the wrong conclusions and provide recommendations which will not be useful for the intended users of evaluation results.

Experience has shown that when the evaluation manager determines the main purpose of the evaluation together with the intended users of evaluation findings, the chance that the findings will be used for decision-making is greatly increased.

When planning for an evaluation, the evaluation manager should therefore always ask the following questions: Who wants the evaluation? Why do they want it? How do they intend to use it?

III. Three common evaluation purposes

Box 1 highlights the three most common evaluation purposes and a sample of evaluation questions typically asked by the intended users.

¹ This tool was first published in November 2000.

Box 1. Three Common Evaluation Purposes

To improve the design and performance of an ongoing programme – A formative evaluation.

- What are the programme's strengths and weaknesses? What kinds of implementation problems have emerged and how are they being addressed?
- What is the progress towards achieving the desired outputs and outcomes? Are the activities planned sufficient (in quantity and quality) to achieve the outputs?
- Are the selected indicators pertinent and specific enough to measure the outputs? Do they need to be revised? Has it been feasible to collect data on selected indicators? Have the indicators been used for monitoring?
- Why are some implementers not implementing activities as well as others?
- What is happening that was not expected?
- How are staff and clients interacting? What are implementers' and target groups' perception of the programme? What do they like? Dislike? Want to change?
- How are funds being used compared to initial expectations? Where can efficiencies be realized?
- How is the external environment affecting internal operations of the programme? Are the originally identified assumptions still valid? Does the programme include strategies to reduce the impact of identified risks?
- What new ideas are emerging that can be tried out and tested?

To make an overall judgment about the effectiveness of a completed programme, often to ensure accountability – A summative evaluation.

- Did the programme work? Did it contribute towards the stated goals and outcomes? Were the desired outputs achieved?
- Was implementation in compliance with funding mandates? Were funds used appropriately for the intended purposes?
- Should the programme be continued or terminated? Expanded? Replicated?

To generate knowledge about good practices.

- What is the assumed logic through which it is expected that inputs and activities will produce outputs, which will result in outcomes, which will ultimately change the status of the target population or situation (also called the programme theory)?
- What types of interventions are successful under what conditions?
- How can outputs/outcomes best be measured?
- What lessons were learned?
- What policy options are available as a result of programme activities?

IV. Who uses what kind of evaluation findings?

Certain evaluation findings are particularly suited for decision-making by specific users. For example, programme managers and staff of implementing partners need evaluation findings related to the delivery process and progress towards achieving aims. This type of information will help them choose more effective implementation strategies.

Decision-makers who oversee programmes such as policy makers, senior managers and donors, require evaluation findings related to effectiveness, impact and sustainability. This type of information will enable them to decide whether to continue, modify, or cancel the programme or projects.

Data generated through evaluations, which highlight good practices and lessons learned is essential for those engaged in overall policy and programme design.

It is essential to note that *one type of evaluation findings usually constitutes an essential input to produce other types of findings*. For instance, data on programme implementation processes gathered through a formative evaluation, or through monitoring and review activities, is a necessary input to enable analysis of programme impact and to generate knowledge of good practices. When no impact of activities is found, process data can indicate if this occurred because of implementation failure (i.e. services were not provided hence the expected benefit could not have occurred) or theory failure (i.e. the programme was implemented as intended but failed to produce the expected results). Data on implementation processes enable an analysis of which approaches work or do not work and under what conditions. **Box 2** highlights an example of theory failure which has affected the impact of UNFPA's interventions to reduce maternal mortality rates.

Box 2. Programme Theory for Reducing Maternal Mortality

A Thematic Evaluation conducted in 1997-1998 of 7 Safe Motherhood projects supported by UNFPA illustrates that the assumptions or programme theories underlying the strategies adopted were insufficient to achieve project objectives. All of the projects promoted antenatal care (ANC), and four of the projects included training programmes for TBAs. The underlying programme theory was thus that ANC and TBA training are essential strategies to reduce maternal mortality. However, research evidence shows that antenatal care to detect pregnancy-related complications and training of TBAs without appropriate linkages to the formal health system cannot bring about significant reduction in maternal mortality.

The Evaluation therefore concluded that strategies selected to prevent maternal deaths must be based on the most up-to-date technical information. Several basic premises are now widely known with regard to safe motherhood:

- Every pregnancy faces risks;
- A skilled attendant should be present at every delivery;
- Emergency obstetric care should be accessible; and
- More emphasis is needed on care during birth and immediately afterwards. Post-partum care should include the prevention and early detection of complications in both the mother and the new-born.

Source: UNFPA, 1999.

Box 3 illustrates how important it is that managers of UNFPA funded programmes ensure that different types of evaluation findings are produced during a country programme cycle in order to improve the quality of programme related decisions and enable organizational learning.

Box 3. Evaluation findings produced by UNFPA – the present and future requirements.

During the period 1998/1999, **77%** of evaluations undertaken by UNFPA's country offices were **project evaluations** the purpose of which were **to pass overall judgment on project relevance and performance**. They took place at the completion of project implementation and were usually conducted by independent, mostly national consultants. CST experts also participated in a fair number of evaluations.

The remaining **23%** of project **evaluations aimed at improving project design and performance mid-stream**.

During the same period, the Office of Oversight and Evaluation (OOE) conducted four **Thematic Evaluations and studies** in key strategic areas for the Fund such as Safe Motherhood, UNFPA support to HIV/AIDS –related interventions, Implementing the RH vision: Progress and New Directions for UNFPA; and the Impact of Government Decentralization on UNFPA's programming process. These evaluations **aimed mainly at generating knowledge** to enable the Fund to frame overall policies and strategies, which adequately address the varying local contexts in key programme areas.

As the **results-based approach** to programming becomes well established in UNFPA, **process related data** typically collected through continuous programme monitoring, formative evaluations and operations research², as well as data on **good practices and lessons learned**, generated through analysis of results from many evaluations, **will take on increased importance** for providing the critical answers as to what works, what doesn't and why.

Source: Adapted from DP/FPA/2000/10 of 5 May, 2000: Periodic Report of the Executive Director to the Executive Board on Evaluation.

² Operations Research analyses a problem and identifies and then tests possible solutions. The goal is to arrive at models of programme/project implementation that can be replicated elsewhere.

Sources

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This tool is subject to constant improvement. We welcome any comments and suggestions you may have on its content. We also encourage you to send us information on experiences from UNFPA funded and other population programmes which can illustrate the issues addressed by this tool. Please send your inputs to:

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