IEA Guidance Note G4

Guidance on Evaluation Inception Reports

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Independent
Evaluation
Arrangement

CGIAR

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List of Abbreviations

CCEE	CRP-Commissioned External Evaluation
CCER	Center-Commissioned External Reviews (superseded)
CRP	CGIAR Research Programs
IEA	Independent Evaluation Arrangement of the CGIAR
ToR	Terms of Reference

Introduction

1. This document provides guidance on how to develop an evaluation Inception Report and its core contents, namely the evaluation purpose, focus, design and conduct.

2. The Inception Report is primarily the responsibility of the team leader, with inputs from the evaluation team. It is prepared in consultation with the evaluation manager at IEA, whose task it is to check the completeness and quality of the report and adequate consistency across CGIAR evaluations. Key stakeholders (for instance program management or a reference group) are consulted during the preparation of the Inception Report to provide feed-back. This document clarifies what responsibilities lie with the team leader and members and with the IEA, and how other stakeholders are involved.

3. This note provides guidance for preparing an Inception Report. It applies to evaluations in the CGIAR in general, including programs, themes, program components and units. Annex 1 provides an annotated outline for an IR for a CRP evaluation, and indicates the primary responsibilities for the evaluation team leader and team and the IEA.

General guidelines

4. The main purpose of the Inception Report is to provide an agreed, appropriate and clear evaluation design, building on the evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR). The Inception Report is a roadmap for the conduct of the evaluation for guiding the evaluation team. It is also intended to inform the evaluation stakeholders. Preparation of an Inception Report helps the team leader and members to focus the evaluation and the set of evaluation questions according to context and expectations, choose credible and defensible methods and tools given the evaluation's purpose and scope, choose the evaluation questions to be addressed and resources available, and set up itineraries and communication plans that best serve the requirements of data and information gathering, consultation and learning. While the Inception Report is an important reference document for the evaluation team and stakeholders, its development is equally important for the team to reach common understanding of the design and processes, which the quality of the evaluation ultimately depends on.

5. The Inception Report includes the following content:

- a brief analysis of the context in which the evaluation is taking place, as a basis for the evaluation design;
- the conceptual frameworks for evaluation of the key evaluation criteria;
- a refined list of evaluation questions that build on the evaluation TOR and preliminary stakeholder consultation and analysis during the inception phase;
- details of the evaluation methodology and tools to be used and analysis to be done, including sampling frames, site selection and consultation plans;

- a workplan with division of duties among the team.
- explanation of any major deviations from the evaluation TOR.

Content

6. This section describes the key elements that an Inception Report should normally cover.

Opening pages

Cover and Title page

- Title of the Evaluation
- Date of the report
- Names of report authors
- Commissioners of the evaluation
- Citation information

Table of Contents

7. This should include the report's main sections/sub-sections all tables, figures, and charts and the annexes.

Acronyms

8. This should include all acronyms mentioned in the report.

Body of the report

9. The body of the Inception Report should be in line with the TOR. Common section headings and standard content for the main report are described hereafter. More detailed annotation is provided in Annex 1.

Executive Summary

10. While the Inception Report is mainly intended for the use of the evaluation team, its Executive Summary is intended to provide the evaluation stakeholders an easy reference to the evaluation methodology and schedule. It should be no more than one page and focus on the main aspects of the methodology on sources of evidence, data collection and analysis, and include the evaluation itinerary and timeline.

Introduction

11. The introduction is a brief section about the origins, purpose and structure of the report.

- ✓ ***Origins, purpose and users of the Evaluation*** - Summarize the impetus behind the evaluation and the mandate of the commissioning agency. With reference to the evaluation TOR, add any information about the purpose, objectives or clients that may influence the evaluation design.
- ✓ ***Purpose and structure of the Inception Report*** - Briefly introduce the report and its purpose, and guide the reader through the forthcoming content.

Background on the Evaluation

12. The general description of the unit, organization or theme being evaluated needs to provide sufficient detail from which the purpose of the evaluation and logic of its design can be derived.

- ✓ ***The CGIAR institutional context*** - Describe aspects of the CGIAR context that have consequences to the evaluation, including update on the CGIAR reform and CRP planning cycle and main System-level decisions in the near future.
- ✓ ***Context of the topic/issue*** - Describe the *context* of the evaluation in terms of the main sector(s) or issue(s) that influence the evaluation and its expected outcomes. When useful, for instance in program evaluation, briefly outline the social, political, economic and institutional factors, and the geographical landscape to be taken into account by the evaluation, and explain the effects (challenges and opportunities) those factors present for the subject of the evaluation.
- ✓ ***Background information on the evaluand*** -This information should include key aspects of the structure, objectives, governance and finances relevant to the evaluand (the CRP, unit, research line, research project or themes being evaluated), including key stakeholders as applicable.

Evaluation Scope

13. Most CGIAR evaluations have a relatively broad scope as given[1]. The CRP evaluation (as well as thematic and System-wide evaluation) span broad time scales from past performance to likely future success, and cover a set of standard evaluation criteria: relevance, quality of science, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability (see

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[1] Outlined in the foundational documents of the CGIAR Reform and the Evaluation Policy.

Evaluation Standards - Annex 2[2]). They include both programmatic and organizational performance components, the latter often having its own sub-set of criteria.

14. Within these boundaries, it is nevertheless important that the scope of an evaluation is clearly defined, so as to manage both resources and expectation. The parameters to be considered include the following.

- ✓ timing of the evaluation in terms of the life cycle of the program or research done and major decisions to which the evaluation is expected to contribute;
- ✓ evaluability of the subject of the evaluation or its components in terms of its maturity (for example extent to which theories of Change have been developed), which may influence the adequacy of data, information and experiences needed for evaluation;
- ✓ emphasis to be given to different evaluation criteria and, overall, summative or formative dimensions of enquiry, and time frames considered for each criterion;
- ✓ inclusion and emphasis given to topics that cut across criteria and program components, such as gender, capacity development and partnerships, or other topics emerging in the CGIAR dialogues, such as incorporation of climate change considerations;
- ✓ the boundaries of the unit of analysis which may be determined on basis of funding source (core-type Window 1/2, bilateral) or institutions (CGIAR Centers with varying degrees of involvement; non-CGIAR), or demarcation of the program (within CRP or related but outside of CRP), which are also influenced by the ease or difficulty in obtaining necessary data;
- ✓ geographic scope that has considerable influence on the resources needed for evaluation;
- ✓ availability of prior evaluative information and evidence and the strength of the monitoring data.

Evaluation Criteria and Questions

15. The Inception Report should provide a clear explanation of the analytical dimensions of the evaluation in terms of its primary objectives, and the main questions examined with reference to the six main evaluation criteria (see Guidance Note on TOR).

[2] http://iea.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/Standards.pdf

16. While the six primary evaluation criteria apply generally to all evaluations in the CGIAR, the emphasis given to each criterion need to be clarified providing rationale for the choices. In CRP evaluations, the CGIAR is aiming to a degree of consistency across all evaluations. This is enforced by adopting consistent interpretation of the criteria as given in the Evaluation Standards – Annex 2[3] and by adopting similar frameworks for some of the criteria.

17. In each evaluation, however, a set of overarching evaluation questions should be determined, which fall not under any specific evaluation criterion but cut across them and may reflect specific program/research objectives, concerns or expectations. A task during the inception phase is to arrive to such overarching questions on basis of an analysis of background documentation central to the subject of evaluation and the CGIAR context, and preliminary interviews with program/research stakeholders.

18. Where already possible, issues that are emerging from consultation and review of background data and information should be discussed. Elaboration of these issues allows the evaluation team not only to identify the main overarching questions and formulate the evaluation questions, but also to focus its efforts on areas where data and information needs will be particularly pertinent, or where main limitations may be expected.

19. A set of evaluation questions specific to each criterion and at the overarching level need to be defined, building on the preliminary evaluation questions given in the TOR. The Inception Report will include the evaluation questions elaborated, prioritized and focused to reflect the program evaluability, the evaluation scope and preliminary analysis conducted during the inception phase. Significant deviation from the TOR needs to be explained.

20. An **Evaluation Matrix** should be included as an annex. The evaluation matrix provides a detailed plan for how each evaluation question is to be addressed in terms of methodology, data and information needed and analysis to be done. The overarching evaluation questions are typically synthesis of analysis deriving from criteria-specific questions.

Evaluation Approach and Methodology

21. The Inception Report should describe the evaluation approach to be used. It should present in detail the methods to be used, specific tools for data and information acquisition, and analysis to be conducted. It should be explained how, within the constraints of time and budget, the approaches and methods employed will yield data and analysis to answer the evaluation questions. The methods and tools should be selected so as to be the most appropriate for addressing specific evaluation questions, or groups of questions, and allowing for triangulation of several sources of evidence. The report should present the

[3] http://iea.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/Standards.pdf

merits of the methods used in the evaluation, assuring the credibility of the findings, conclusions and recommendations. The description on methodology should include discussion of each of the following, as applicable to the particular type of evaluation conducted and approach used.

- ***Data collection methods and tools*** - Describe the procedures and tools used to collect data (e.g. interview guides, survey questionnaires, document/publication analysis templates, checklists) highlighting the appropriateness of chosen methods with specific evaluation questions or groups of questions, in terms of the reliability and validity of the evidence. The detail of aligning methods and tools with evaluation criteria and questions can be presented in the evaluation matrix.

- ***Information/Data sources*** - Specify the sources of information (documents and data to be reviewed, field visits and means for stakeholders engagement) in the report text in generic terms and linking specific sources of information to the evaluation questions in the evaluation matrix. The field sites to be visited should be listed explaining the criteria for selecting the sites.

- ***Sampling techniques and sample frame*** - Given the complexity of the program or topic to be evaluated, its geographic spread and the institutional diversity of the stakeholders, most evaluations will use sampling. The Inception Report should provide details on the rationale for sampling, sampling technique (i.e. random or purposeful sampling); sample size and characteristics; the sample selection criteria; and the extent to which the sample is representative of the entire target population, including discussion of the limitations of sample for generalizing results.

- ***Data Analysis methods*** - Explain the procedures for triangulating the various sources of data and analyzing the data collected to answer the evaluation questions. When relevant, plans on rating scales, indicators or benchmarks to be used should be provided. Potential weaknesses in the data analysis and gaps or limitations of the data should be discussed, including their possible influence on the way findings may be interpreted and conclusions drawn. Given that the team members conduct similar data gathering and analysis on different components of the evaluation subject, explain how particularly qualitative analyses by individual team members are calibrated and potential biases avoided.

- ***Main limitations or constraints of the evaluation*** -The main constraints of the evaluation and any limitations of the methodology should be identified and openly discussed as to their implications for evaluation, as well as steps taken to mitigate those limitations. Particular attention should be paid to methodology and sampling. Implementation constraints, such as resource limitations, should be mentioned. Conflicts of interest must be avoided: in case of potential or perceived conflict of interest, the way this is managed should be clarified.

- ***Quality Assurance*** - In the case of IEA-commissioned evaluations, the IEA exercises quality assurance throughout the evaluation process, which includes internal processes by the IEA evaluation manager and team, and engagement of external peers. In other evaluations, the measures for quality assurance used by evaluation management should be explained.

Organization and Timing of the Evaluation

22. This section includes information about the team, stakeholder involvement, timeline and itineraries, and delivery, discussed below.

- ***Evaluation Team*** - Describe the composition of the evaluation team and the specific competencies and skills required in the team (as per the TOR), the area each member will cover, providing brief bio-data of team members in an Annex. Specify the distribution of duties among the team in terms of subject matter areas to be covered and responsibilities related to the final report preparation. Identify the specific support and governance aspects that the evaluation manager (in case of IEA-commissioned evaluations, the IEA team) will be responsible for.

- ***Stakeholder involvement*** - Describe stakeholders' participation in all stages of the evaluation, and how the level of involvement contributed to the credibility and usefulness of the evaluation and its results. The report should specify the groups of stakeholders to be included and the means for consultation. It should explain the criteria for selecting stakeholders and coverage of specific stakeholder groups, explaining any anticipated inadequacy in coverage. A communication check list is included to specify the stages of the evaluation where stakeholders are to be engaged and the form of their engagement. This should include engagement both for generating information on stakeholder perceptions and for soliciting feed-back and sharing results. Stakeholders consulted during the inception phase should be listed in an Annex.

- ***Timeline and itinerary*** - Building on the evaluation TOR, develop a detailed timeline that shows the evaluation phases (data collection, data analysis, and reporting) with their key deliverables. Describe how far the work of the evaluator/evaluation team has proceeded according to the proposed timeframe (noting the activities completed to date), and specify any possible deviations and adaptation from the TORs. Include an itinerary for site visits and other travel to be conducted.

- ***Deliverables and dissemination plans*** - Indicate the expected deliverables for each evaluation phase. The main deliverables include preliminary findings and comprehensive final report. Describe how the findings will be shared as well as feedback loops.

Annexes

23. The annexes need to contain sufficient information to back up the main report, including details of methods and data sources. Supporting information, such as lists or preliminary data, should be placed in the annexes.

24. The Annexes should include the following items and any additional appropriate/relevant information. A list of mandatory Annexes for CGIAR Inception Reports as well as other common (optional) Annexes is hereafter.

a) Evaluation Matrix *(mandatory)*

b) List of literature and supporting documents reviewed *(mandatory)*

c) List of people consulted/interviewed and sites visited during planning and inception phase *(mandatory)*

d) Work Plan, with any proposed revisions *(mandatory)*

e) Summaries of any supporting studies or issues papers *(optional)*

f) Data collection tools *(optional)* → For example:

- Interview guides
- Questionnaires
- Document review templates

Annex 1

IEA CRP Evaluation
Inception Report Outline

CHAPTER	INCLUDES:	WHO?
1. Executive Summary	Brief summary with focus on Sections 5 and 6	TL
2. Introduction		
- Origins, purpose and users of the evaluation	- Who commissioned it, IEA work plan, etc - Why the evaluation is being conducted and at that particular point in time - What is expected from the evaluation given its timing and main purpose - Who will use the evaluation results - How the evaluation results will be used	Inputs IEA, from ToR
- Purpose and structure of the Inception Report	- Sets out the detailed plan for the evaluation, etc - Contents of the IR	TL
3. Background		
- The CGIAR institutional context	- Aspects of the CGIAR context that have consequences to the evaluation, including CGIAR Reform, establishment of CRPs, etc.	Inputs from IEA
- Context onthe subject of the CRP	- Main international, development and research related context and likely future changes that influence L&F operating environment now and into the future	TL with inputs from team members
- CRP program background	- Evolution of program, structure, ToC, Governance and Management, funding and expenditures	Inputs IEA, expanded from ToR
- CRP portfolio	- Description of portfolio, number of projects, budget distributions, etc	Provided by IEA
4. Scope of the evaluation		
- Setting the boundaries for what the evaluation will and will not cover	- The unit of analysis to be covered by the evaluation (bilateral projects, W1/2, different centers, etc) - What are the timeframes used to evaluate quality of science,	TL

	outcomes, impact, etc. - Geographical scope and inclusion of cross-cutting issues - Balance between summative and formative parts and emphasis among evaluation criteria - Availability of prior M and E information - Scope determined by evaluability assessment; e.g. maturity of program and completeness of Theories of Change and impact pathways as they influence evaluation scope.	
5. Evaluation criteria and questions		
- Overarching questions	- What are the main issues to be addressed, over and above the 6 evaluation criteria, derived from preliminary analyses and engagement with stakeholder, that may require cross-criteria analysis.	TL
- Criteria and questions	- Narrative of how the evaluation approaches each criterion and what are the issues considered under each criterion. - The evaluation questions under each criterion are to be elaborated in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex)	TL, to be refined and expanded if needed from ToR
- Emerging issues	- Where already possible, present the issues that are emerging in the context of the presented evaluation methodology from consultation and review of background documents and information. Elaboration on these issues allows the evaluation team to focus its efforts during the main evaluation phase on areas where data and information needs will be particularly important	TL
6. Evaluation approach and methods		
- Evaluation approach	- What type of approach will be used and why?	TL
- Evaluation methods, tools and analysis	- Describe in detail what type of data collection and analysis methods will be used (case studies, field visits, interviews, surveys, portfolio analysis, etc. with reference to Evaluation Matrix that has the detail on matching methods with evaluation criteria/questions) - This should also include clear description of sampling criteria and choice of informants as appropriate - Present choice of tools for data collection be used (questionnaires,	TL

	templates). Examples can be included in the Annexes. - Explain key aspects of data analysis, clarifying particularly triangulation from different sources and how consistency is insured given differences among evaluators and components of analysis.	
- Main limitations of the evaluation	- The main constraints of the evaluation and any limitations of the methodology should be identified and openly discussed as to their implications for evaluation	TL
- Quality assurance	- Process of quality assurance by IEA (including external peer reviewers, etc)	IEA
7. Organization and timing of the evaluation		
- Team Composition/Roles and Responsibilities	- Composition of the evaluation team - The background and skills of team members - Specify the distribution of duties and the roles and responsibilities for governance of the evaluation at each phase.	TL and IEA
- Stakeholder Involvement	- Indicate the stakeholders to be consulted, as part of specific methods (interviews, surveys, focus groups) or otherwise (communications through evaluand or meetings attended etc.), the criteria for their selection and methods of their participation - Provide a communication check list - Reference Group membership and engagement	TL, parts of it can also be taken from ToR, especially regarding the Reference Group
- Timeline	- Develop a timeline that shows the evaluation phases (data collection, field visits, data analysis, and reporting) with their key deliverables	TL
- Deliverables and Dissemination Plans	- Indicate the expected deliverables for each evaluation phase as accurately as possible. Describe how the findings will be shared and as well as feedback loops.	IEA

ANNEXES		
Evaluation Matrix	- Links main questions with sub-questions and specifies approach (if appropriate using indicators, means of verification, benchmarks), sources of information and analyses needed.	TL with support of IEA
Divergences (and reasons for) from the TORs	In case of clear departures from TOR	TL
People consulted/interviewed and sites visited during inception period		TL
Documents reviewed during inception period		TL
Workplan	- Includes evaluation tasks on a GANTT chart (or similar graph)	TL
Summaries of any supporting studies or issues papers		
Data collection instruments (as applicable): Interview guides Questionnaires Case study guide Observation protocol Etc….		TL

The IEA has issues the following Guidance Notes:

Guidance Note 1:	Guidance for Managing the Independent External Evaluation of CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs)
Guidance Note 2:	Guidance for CRP-Commissioned External Evaluations (CCEEs)
Guidance Note 3:	Guidance on Evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR)
Guidance Note 4:	Guidance on Evaluation Inception Reports
Guidance Note 5:	Guidance on Evaluation Final Reports
Guidance Note 6:	CRP Evaluation: Process for Finalization, Feedback and Decision-making