

STRENGTHENING THE FAO EVALUATION SYSTEM

Evaluation forms part of FAO's oversight regime, maintaining close liaison with other elements, including external audit, internal audit, inspection and investigation, to ensure synergy and complementarity and to avoid potential duplication. With the introduction of the Strategic Framework and the improved programme planning approach, the evaluation system must be updated and strengthened. This bulletin sets forth the principal features of the revised evaluation system¹.

Purpose and Scope of Evaluation

Evaluation is both a management and an accountability tool. Evaluation should serve several purposes: (i) to catalyse improvements in overall planning, selection and design of programmes; (ii) to support management decision-making for in-course correction and improved execution; (iii) to provide input to management decisions regarding the future of programmes (e.g. their extension, re-orientation or termination); (iv) to promote organizational learning by highlighting lessons and issues; and (v) to contribute to enhanced management accountability and transparency, including reporting to the Governing Bodies and other stakeholders.

To ensure its effective use, evaluation must be integrated with the overall programme and project management processes at all levels so that its key findings, lessons and recommendations are fed into programme planning and execution.

The following principles will apply to evaluation work:

- i) evaluation must be credible, useful, cost-effective, marked by independent judgement supported by rigorous analysis, focus on critical issues and be a transparent process. Evaluation should be carried out by an independent team, which includes staff of the Evaluation Service and/or, where appropriate and cost-effective, external experts;
- ii) the assessment should focus on the results of programme implementation in the context of the Organization's objectives and priorities as articulated in the Strategic Framework and the Medium Term Plan (MTP). For this purpose, the criteria for assessing programmes will include: (a) conformity to the strategic objectives; (b) relevance to the needs of countries, international community and other target users of FAO services; (c) quality and coherence of programme approach and design; (d) overall performance, particularly against qualitative and quantitative targets for outputs and objectives; (e) efficiency and cost-effectiveness, including the impact of administrative processes; (f) effectiveness and impact of action, including on key corporate thematic priorities, such as the promotion of gender equality and equity; and (g) the extent to which the benefits and improvements realized are likely to be sustained in future;

- iii) evaluation findings and recommendations, including lessons and issues, must be reviewed and acted on by programme managers and other stakeholders, and should also be disseminated to a wider audience for organizational learning;
- iv) all of FAO's programmes and operations, including field projects, will be subject to evaluation in accordance with the system outlined below (see Coverage of Evaluation). While the Evaluation Service in the Office of Programme, Budget and Evaluation will continue to serve as the focal point, all units will have an active part in the revised evaluation system;
- v) results of evaluations will be reported to Management and through it periodically to the Governing Bodies in accordance with the decision of the Council at its 117th Session (see Reporting to Management, Governing Bodies and Other Stakeholders, below).

Coverage of Evaluation

All programmes and operations, irrespective of the source of resources and whether carried out at the Headquarters or Decentralized Offices, will be subject to evaluation in the context of the Strategic Framework with the main frame of reference being the MTP. Thus, evaluation will cover these at various levels of the MTP programme structure: (a) individual programme entities; (b) clusters of programme entities and/or programmes under selected subjects; (c) priority areas for interdisciplinary action and thematic topics; (d) field projects and normative projects supported by extra-budgetary resources²; and (e) overall progress towards achieving the strategic objectives. The system will comprise the following main components:

- i) pre-evaluation monitoring and assessment comprises systemic monitoring and periodic review, by programme managers, of programme implementation results to facilitate in-course correction and adjustment;
- ii) auto-evaluation for the Regular Programme of Work is also to be conducted by the managers directly responsible. Its aim is to facilitate learning and decisions on the future of the programme entities and/or programmes at critical points in the MTP process. Such in-depth auto-evaluation will be required for all technical projects prior to the end of their planned implementation period, and at least once in every three biennia for other programme entities. Clusters of related programme entities, selected by particular topic, may also be auto-evaluated within the MTP timeframe. For auto-evaluations covering significant individual programme entities or their clusters, the process should involve, to the maximum extent, external peer reviews. All auto-evaluation actions should be planned into the programme design, including their timing and costs. The Evaluation Service will receive

copy of all auto-evaluation reports. Auto-evaluation will be implemented in line with guidelines issued by the Evaluation Service (published on PBE's Web site, www.fao.org/pbe);

- iii) programme evaluation will cover selected clusters of programme entities within the programme structure, including related field components. Within the general evaluation criteria, particular focus will be on assessing their relevance, effectiveness and impact, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness, including their contribution to the Organization's strategic objectives. Programme evaluations will normally be carried out as independent exercises, involving the Evaluation Service and/or external expertise and drawing on results of the auto-evaluation;
- iv) thematic evaluation will focus on a selected thematic topic that cuts across individual programmes and/or on a strategic objective (e.g. participatory approaches, gender mainstreaming). It could also cover process-oriented themes (e.g. the implementation of cross-organizational strategies or decentralization) or service-oriented work (e.g. publications). Such evaluations will be conducted by the Evaluation Service and/or external experts, and as appropriate, in collaboration with the Office of the Inspector-General;
- v) field programme evaluation encompasses all field projects which will be subject to evaluation³. Those projects (including the Unilateral Trust Fund projects but excluding emergency projects) with substantial extra-budgetary support (US\$1.0 million or above) are subject to independent, tripartite evaluations. Projects with relatively small budgets, emergency projects and TCP projects, will be subject to cluster or thematic evaluations, covering several projects. The Evaluation Service will have overall responsibility for Field Programme evaluation procedures and will support the budget holders in the Organization and conduct of evaluations, including clearance of the terms of reference and composition of evaluation missions and quality assurance of reports (see the guidelines published on PBE's Website, www.fao.org/pbe). Project documents should indicate the timing and modality of evaluations and the project budgets should provide for their cost;
- vi) evaluation synthesis studies will be periodically undertaken by the Evaluation Service, in consultation with the units concerned, to draw lessons and to identify issues arising from various evaluations. Such studies will address concerns of corporate interest, including those relating to strategic objectives and management strategies.

Staff Participation in Evaluation Process

Programme staff as well as their managers are expected to play an active part in the evaluation process, reviewing the findings and recommendations, and in drawing lessons and issues. Their participation will be facilitated, in particular, through:

- (i) the auto-evaluation process;
- (ii) more systematic integration of evaluation into programme planning and management; and
- (iii) wider dissemination of evaluation results, including through staff meetings/seminars and the evaluation website.

Reporting to Management, Governing Bodies and Other Stakeholders

Within the Secretariat, the results of evaluations will be reported to Management at appropriate level for policy decisions, including those regarding continuation or termination of programmes, programme entities and field projects as well as for accountability. Field project evaluations will be reported to Senior Management in periodic syntheses. Such synthesis studies as well as significant individual project evaluations will be considered by the Field Programme Committee and also will be shared widely through workshops and the PBE Website. The reporting process to Management is illustrated in Table A below.

TABLE A - Internal Reporting Arrangements

REPORTING TO MANAGEMENT			
Type of Evaluation	Reporting Office	Addressees	Evaluation Service Role
Auto-evaluation	Programme Managers at each level	Service Chief Division Director ADG, Regional Reps, DDG, ODG, PBEE	Prepares biennial summary
Programme and thematic evaluation	Evaluation Service	Programme Manager Division Director ADG, Regional Reps, DDG ODG	Undertakes or manages the evaluation
Field programme evaluation (i.e.	Budget Holder	Recipient Country(ies)	Monitors and comments on

projects)		Donor Director, TCO ADG, TC FAORs (if not Budget Holder) Technical Units Responsible, PBEE	individual reports to ensure quality, prepares periodic synthesis studies, and selectively participates in evaluations
Evaluation synthesis studies	Evaluation Service	Relevant ADG, Regional Reps, FAORs and Senior Management, the Field Programme Committee on FP subjects	Undertakes or manages studies and disseminates findings

Reporting to the Governing Bodies will be on a biennial basis, through two channels. Firstly, the Programme Committee will receive individual evaluation reports that it selects. These reports will be accompanied by the response of programme managers and Management. The Programme Committee will consider these evaluations in analyzing and making recommendations with respect to the Programme of Work and Budget. For field project evaluations, individual reports will not normally be submitted to the Governing Bodies. Instead, they will receive periodic synthesis studies covering main findings, lessons and issues from a substantial number of project evaluations. Table B summarizes the reporting process.

TABLE B - Reporting to the Governing Bodies

REPORTING TO GOVERNING BODIES by the Evaluation Service	
Type of Evaluation	Addressees
Auto-evaluation - biennial summary	Programme Committee
Programme and thematic evaluation, and evaluation synthesis studies (as selected)	Programme Committee
Field project evaluations – syntheses	Programme Committee
Summaries of the above evaluations	Council and Conference via Programme Evaluation Report (PER)

¹ The Secretariat proposals on this were endorsed by the Programme Committee at its 1999 September session and the Council at its 1999 November session – see Document PC 82/4 Evaluation in the Context of the Strategic Framework and New Programme Model.

² Normative projects will be evaluated individually in accordance with the agreement with the donors as well as in the context of auto-evaluation and as part of programme or thematic evaluations covering the related topics.

³ Evaluation may be complemented by technical review by the staff directly involved in the project implementation, including technical backstopping officers. Notwithstanding the distinction between such technical review and evaluation, reviews with the purpose and scope similar to evaluation will be subsumed under evaluation, especially those reviews conducted by external teams.