

GOOD PRACTICES DURING COVID-19

OECD/DAC and IEO/UNDP
Joint Guidance Note for
Evaluation Units



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Guidance Note: Good practices during COVID-19

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CONTENTS

EMERGING EVALUATION PRIORITIES	4
INTRODUCTION	5
Implications of COVID-19 for development plans and programmes.....	5
EVALUATION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	6
Immediate response to the crisis: do no harm	6
Taking care of staff.....	6
Rethinking evaluation plans	6
Adapt evaluation methods and approaches.....	7
ICT and Remote data solutions	8
Build on and support local capacities	9
Prepare for future evaluations	9
Exploit existing evaluations, corporate data-sets and public domain material.....	10
Ensure timely dissemination of evaluation products.....	10
RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS	11

EMERGING EVALUATION PRIORITIES

The COVID-19 pandemic has compelled an immediate response by the development evaluation community. Evaluation is an important instrument for an effective development policy. Building on informal consultations in a series of knowledge sharing exchanges, consultations and webinars convened by [OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation \(EvalNet\)](#) and the [Independent Evaluation Office](#) of UNDP we have jointly prepared this guidance note capturing good practices for evaluations during COVID-19. The note suggests a framework of operational and methodological options and action areas. It also includes a set of reference material drawn from a wider professional evaluation community. Although, the guidance does not aim to represent a consensus or a prescriptive framework for COVID-19 related action, we hope you find the guidance and references useful.

We look forward to having future discussions as we go forward marshalling our evaluation functions to maximize benefits to preparedness, response, and recovery from this crisis.



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INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 is a global health crisis affecting people everywhere and bringing a halt to global and local economic activity and transport systems, as well as unprecedented disruptions to daily life that undercut the societal fabric of opportunities for human interaction. The pandemic will bring lasting fiscal, socio-economic and institutional impacts. In expectation of a global economic downturn, a \$ 1 trillion dollar stimulus package has been mounted by IMF in concert with the G20¹, and a major UN-wide effort has been launched.² OECD member countries are launching significant bilateral efforts to support developing countries, as well as responding at home.

In this context, getting onto a path to the shared global [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), decision makers at multiple levels will need to take action to course correct. The members of the OECD/DAC-Network on

Development Evaluation ([EvalNet](#)), the Independent Evaluation Office ([IEO](#)) of UNDP and other development evaluation community actors have an important role to play in enabling this course correction with credible evidence and evaluation. The goal of this guidance note is to maximize the contribution of evaluation, providing insights and suggestions for how to adapt evaluation work. It draws on insights from a series of three webinars conducted between March to April 2020.

The situation – and the understanding of how best to respond – continues to evolve. This note aims to contribute to support evaluation units by providing insights, practical examples and advise which will be continuously shared and updated.

“It will take time to evaluate the impact of the damage to our economies and societies — and to rebuild them to be more sustainable and resilient. But only five years into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, we cannot wait to take the collective action that could make a difference.

[Joint Statement of Angel Gurria, Secretary-General of OECD and Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator: [COVID-19: How to avert the worst development crisis of this century](#), 9 April]

Implications of COVID-19 for development plans and programmes

The implementation of all *previously planned* national development plans—as well as multi- and bilateral development co-operation - are currently and inevitably being revisited, put on hold or adapted to COVID-19 circumstances. Likewise, the results of *past* activities (including those already undergoing evaluation) are in jeopardy. At the same time, *fresh* programmes are rapidly being intensified specifically to respond to COVID-19 and its aftermath. Plans for implementation of SDG/2030 agendas are rapidly being revisited, with some hope that the crisis may spark a new wave of innovation and ambition in these efforts. Likewise, COVID-19 pandemic affects the range and priority among questions to be asked by evaluators for the foreseeable future. Be it in terms of its explicit focus within *programmatic action* or as relevant *context*, it will have explanatory power across development efforts at the international, national policy, programme and project levels; as mitigating circumstance of past efforts and in defining new plans.

¹ [World Economic Outlook](#), April, 2020

² UN Secretary-General Report: “[Shared responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to Socio-Economic Impacts of COVID-19](#)”, March, 2020

EVALUATION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Immediate response to the crisis: do no harm

From the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the priority of evaluation units is to ensure the well-being and safety of their staff and contractors and to ensure no harm is done to partners, communities and interlocutors. Missions and face-to-face interviews have been cancelled due to government restrictions in most countries. In the future, as official travel restrictions and bans on face-to-face contact ease, evaluation units and evaluators will need to continue to examine the ethical implications of their work to ensure that they do not place themselves or any of their interlocutors at risk. The lens of 'do no harm' should be applied to all evaluation work, as a matter of good practice, and requires attention in the current context. It may at times be preferable to not carry out evaluation work, when weighing risks with staff or partners.

Taking care of staff

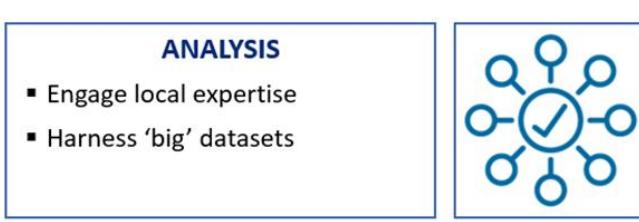
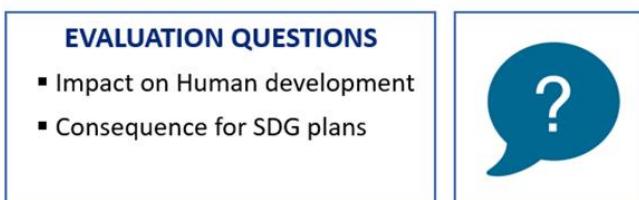
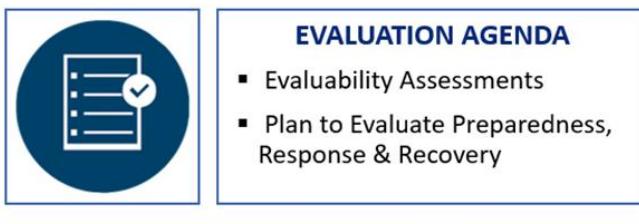
The staff of evaluation units have all been affected by the crisis – either directly by the virus or by the travel and other restrictions in place in most countries. For instance, the closures of schools and day cares in most OECD

countries has increased caregiving burdens, particularly for women. While many aspects of evaluation work can be carried out remotely, not all staff have can have online connectivity. Within Ministries of Foreign Affairs and other institutions some evaluation staff have been redeployed to other essential work or pulled in to support the strategic planning of the COVID-19 response. Evaluation units should, to the extent possible, apply evidence to managing staff and the work programme in these unique circumstances, and evaluate policies and practices – including differential effects on staff – to support improvement.

Rethinking evaluation plans

Evaluation units will need to rethink their evaluation plans to respond to immediate practical considerations, to reprioritize the most essential evaluations and evaluation questions, to respond to revised cost-benefit analyses for planned evaluations, to respond to new evaluation needs. New evaluations will need to be planned, to assess new programmatic responses to the crisis and recovery.

In the immediate term, evaluation units and evaluators will need to identify which evaluations in the current evaluation plan are still essential and feasible, and which evaluations should be postponed or cancelled. Evaluations that are still considered crucial may need to be refocused, with scope narrowed to the most critical evaluation questions. The recently updated [Evaluation Criteria](#) can be used to guide question selection and should be adapted to the current evaluation context.



Cost-benefit analyses should be conducted. While evaluations can always add value, it is important to assess the target audience's capacity to absorb and use the insights evaluation can provide them. Given the constraints of conducting evaluations during the crisis which may impact on evaluation quality and credibility, the benefits may not outweigh the costs. In some cases, it may be preferable to cancel an evaluation, postpone the evaluation, or provide support to self-evaluation or good monitoring for immediate use as well as future evaluation.

Adapt evaluation methods and approaches

The crisis brings the imperative of changing how evaluation units conduct their work and engage with policymakers, programme managers and beneficiaries as restrictions on travel and 'social distancing' are expected to last. Evaluation units are exploring the parameters of moving forward, not with business-as-usual but adapting to an ensuing new set of global and national contexts, priorities, programme management modalities, ICT constraints and opportunities. Though upholding quality standards and best practice, evaluation offices will need to rethink their modalities, products and deliverables. An example of how Norway has adapted an ongoing evaluation is shared in Box 1. Examples of UNDP's responses are illustrated in Box 2.

BOX 1: Evaluation of Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative's (NICFI) private sector initiatives (2008 – 2019) – Measures taken in response to COVID-19

The evaluation in brief: This thematic evaluation will assess the strategic approach, effectiveness and relevance of NICFI's support to private sector initiatives. These initiatives concern mainly projects that "nudges", supports or facilitates for private sector commitments to reduce deforestation and forest degradation. The main targets of these projects are companies or agricultural producers involved with the production, distribution or sales of commodities associated with high risks of deforestation, hereunder palm oil, beef, soy, cocoa and coffee. For the purposes of assessing the relevance of NICFI's support to private sector initiatives, hereunder alignment with local contexts, the evaluation will make in-depth assessments of projects in Brazil and Indonesia.

Measures to adjust to corona virus pandemic: The team was asked to propose a revised, corona-sensitive inception report planning for an evaluation using methods for data-collection and interviews that did not require travelling or physical meetings. These requirements, at the time, were aligned with the general travel restrictions for Norway and Norad. The team proposed the following solution:

- » To adhere to the principle of *do no harm*, the team will not engage in any activity, or promote engagement in any activity that may place either a team member, a stakeholder or respondent, or a third party at risk of being infected by the virus. Practically, this means that data collection efforts, team meetings, and engagement with the Norad's evaluation department and other stakeholders will be held virtually.
- » The team will capitalize on resources by relying on national consultants to support data collection through their early-on contact with local respondents. The national consultants will spend considerable time encouraging the participation of local counterparts, some of which may be less familiar with remote platforms.
- » The conduct of the case studies will be carried out within the original timeframe and by the same team members as planned, but all activities will take place via remote platforms. Verification visits by the national consultants may be carried out, but this will entirely depend on the status of the pandemic in the country/ region.
- » It is acknowledged in the inception report that, due to the corona virus, there is a higher-than-usual risk that the evaluation plan may be subject to unforeseen changes along the way. It is furthermore acknowledged that the risk of getting too little data (quantity and quality) is higher than what is normally the case due to the challenges of validation and the likely challenges posed by poor internet capacities.

Box 2: UNDP/IEO COVID-19 Strategy and Key Actions

UNDP Integrated COVID Response Strategy	UNDP Key Actions	IEO Key Actions
Prepare: UNDP is supporting countries to strengthen their health systems, including by helping them procure much-needed medical supplies, quickly leverage digital technologies and ensure health workers are paid.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » COVID-19 Rapid Response Facility launched. » TweetZero and WhatsApp media campaigns for real-time access to information and healthcare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » IEO COVID-19 response, Video (Vlog), Infographic Brief » Guidance for decentralized evaluations, Useful Links » UNEG webinar, Decentralized Evaluation Webinar, DAC webinar, etc.
Respond: UNDP is helping countries to work across sectors to slow the spread of the virus and to provide social protection for vulnerable populations, promoting a whole-of-government and whole-of-society response to complement efforts in the health sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Country offices to support national governments » BPPS Development and Service Offer » COVID-19 resource implementation and monitoring dashboards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Virtual stakeholder engagements, online collaboration protocols for staff and evaluation teams » Increased reliance on local evaluation capacities » Development of lessons learnt for and from UNDP's response in crisis settings
Recover: UNDP is supporting countries to assess the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, minimize long-term impacts and recover better, with a focus on vulnerable and marginalized groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Call to Action to also plan for recovery and post-recovery needs » CO Evaluation Plans to include support to response and recovery efforts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Revised IEO Workplan and Structure » Planned evaluations of COVID-19 impact and response » Deliberations on short- and long-term solutions to support decentralized evaluation during and after the crisis

ICT and Remote data solutions

Evaluation Units are exploring new ways to use information technologies and remote data collection to continue to implement evaluations. Online Data collection: With expectations that there will be lasting restrictions on travel and person-to-person contact, evaluation offices are rapidly exploring and new protocols for ICT use in team collaboration, data collection and storage and analysis. ICT tools including Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) such as (Skype, Zoom, Viber, Messenger, WhatsApp) are being used to conduct interviews with stakeholders. Mobile applications and online surveys are being used to complement interview data.

The COVID-19 pandemic brings added urgency to efforts by Evaluation units to explore the potential for increased use of geographical information systems (for example using tools such as ESRI Open Data Hub, Nasa Earth Observatory) and remote sensing data to provide additional data sets for analysis. Such sources are particularly useful for addressing evaluation questions related to physical status of community assets and transportation infrastructure as well as environmental (intended or un-intended) consequences of national and

internationally supported development activities. Reduced carbon emission has, for instance, been observed as an 'side-effect' of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning for Data analysis: Evaluation units are beginning to explore the potentials of using machine learning and artificial intelligence technologies to analyse data and to build models for predictive and trend analysis. Open source statistical application such as R and programming languages such

as Python have recently gained popularity in the field. However, properly using these technologies depends on the availability of relevant datasets and specialized knowledge in the field of data science and statistics in conjunction with subject matter expertise. There are other business intelligence tools such as Microsoft Power BI, Tableau and Qlik that can be used to process large quantitative datasets for analysis and visualization, whereas tools such as NVivo can be used for qualitative data analysis. Most of these tools come with a cloud version that allows evaluation teams to work collaboratively in a remote setting. Expertise from carrying out evaluations in fragile and conflict-affected contexts provide valuable insights to inform the use of remote data collection and third-party data collection, where access for staff and consultants is restricted.

“**NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND**

Using ICT to conduct virtual data collection comes with risks. Access to communication technologies is not equal across societies and social groups. Evaluators need to be conscious of who is being left out of virtual data collection, constraints or fears that interlocutors may face in interviews over the telephone or internet, and any biases that may be resulting in the data.

Build on and support local capacities

Evaluation units may also explore or expand options for using local capacities to support evaluations. National evaluators may be better placed to carry out telephone interviews with stakeholders that do not have access to internet or prefer communicating in local languages. Also, they may have better access to national statistical organizations, think tanks or academic institutions with public records of detailed context analyses, reports and other studies, or conduct new analyses of available data sets to feed into evaluations. (Note that the do no harm principle always applies: a national evaluator should not be expected to travel, risk exposure to the virus or exposing others.)

Prepare for future evaluations

Continued relevance and credibility of evaluations will depend on responsiveness to fast-evolving decision-making and learning needs. Evaluation units can use opportunities presented by change to better prepare for future evaluations, notably of crisis response and future recovery programmes. For example, within national governments, evaluation units are reporting that they see real risks related to the COVID-19 response, including a rush to disburse funds quickly which may undermine design and reduce the scope for in-depth context analysis and stakeholder consultations. Lessons learned from past crises indicated that not all good intentions will work. Therefore, speed in bringing evaluative knowledge to bear on shared learning and joint actions will be imperative.

Evaluation units can begin mapping activities and measures for real-time or future evaluations of responses to COVID-19. Evaluability assessments provide an upfront or early review of a proposed activity (policy, programme or project) in order to ascertain whether its objectives are adequately defined and results verifiable; thus, embedding prospects of conducting later evaluation, thereby helping agencies to better programme for

improved results. Drawing on [UNDP's Evaluation Guidelines](#) these are some key questions that such assessments can help to answer:

- » Do COVID-19 preparedness and response initiatives being designed have a clearly defined theory of change?
- » Are goals, outcome statements, outputs, inputs and activities clearly defined?
- » Are targets and indicators SMART? Are there baseline data and monitoring plans to inform future evaluations
- » Do the programmes embed junctures of reflection and learning; course-corrective decisions?

Evaluation units can also begin reflecting on potential evaluations such as the UN [COVID-19 Multi-party Trust Fund Facility](#) or a joint EvalNet COVID-19 Evaluation, as well as gather lessons learned from past joint evaluations such as [Evaluation of the implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness](#).

Exploit existing evaluations, corporate data-sets and public domain material

Evaluation units can also make use of existing evaluations to provide lessons from prior crisis or recovery programming, e.g. responses to health crises such as Ebola, avian influenza, or cholera, lessons on livelihoods recovery programmes (cash for work, small grants, etc.), or social protection measures. See for example, ADB's [13 Lessons from Evaluation](#).

Ensure timely dissemination of evaluation products

In times of information and content overload, traditional methods of disseminating evaluations can be unproductive. Well-structured briefs and infographics have the potential to provide concise and practical information to audiences and are associated with higher knowledge translation by increasing information retention. Disseminating evaluative evidence in accessible, engaging and user-friendly products such as briefs, synthesis, infographics and shorter reports can be more effective in communicating evaluation findings. Social media is an effective way of disseminating key messages in real time. Interim products, such as evaluation synthesis, lessons learned, emerging findings, insights on data collection tools, or evaluation frameworks, can also be useful to others facing similar evaluation challenges, and should be shared as early as possible.

RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Evaluation and COVID-19 blogs, documents and guidance (as of April 2020)

Updates will be available on these links: [IEO](#) & [OECD DAC](#)

IEO UNDP COVID-19 response

- Infographic brief: [Evaluation during crisis – COVID-19](#)
- Video (vlog): [Evaluation during crisis – COVID-19 and tips for evaluation](#)
- Guidance note: [UNDP's decentralized evaluation planning and implementation during COVID-19](#)

General COVID-19 data and monitoring

- [Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker](#)
- [COVID-19 Financial Response Tracker](#)
- [COVID-19 Data Resource Hub by data world](#)
- [OECD COVID-19 Digital Hub](#)
- Blog: [Data should drive COVID-19 mitigation strategies in lower- and middle-income countries](#)

Organisational policy responses

- UN Report: [Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the Social-Economic Impacts of COVID-19](#)
- IMF policy tracker: [International Monetary Fund. Policy Responses to COVID - 19](#)
- OECD-Development news: [Foreign Aid in Times of COVID-19](#), 16 April, 2020
- [UN System programme criticality framework](#)
- Report: [A UN framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19](#)

Reflections COVID-19 from evaluation professional community

- Blog: [Resources for evaluation in a time of crisis](#)
- Blog: [Michael Quinn Patton: Evaluation Implications of the Coronavirus Global Health Pandemic Emergency](#)
- Blog: [Michaela Raab. International Evaluation in Times of the Coronavirus](#)
- IEG World Bank Blog: [Bowling in the dark: Monitoring and evaluation during COVID-19](#)
- World Bank blog: [Impact evaluations in the time of COVID-19, part 1](#)

Evaluability assessments

- Planning Evaluability Assessments: [A synthesis of the Literature with Recommendations; DFID Working Paper 40, October 2013](#)

- CDI practice paper: [Building Evaluability Assessments into Institutional Monitoring and Evaluation \(M&E\) Frameworks. Richard Longhurst, Peter Wichmand and Burt Perrin, March 2016.](#)
- Concept Note: [Joint Evaluability Assessment of the Global Action Plan for Healthy Lives and Well Being for All \(SDG 3 GAP\)](#). 13 February 2020, WHO, et al.

Evaluation in humanitarian settings and times of crisis

- Inter-Agency Standing Committee response: [COVID-19 Outbreak Readiness and Response](#)
- [ALNAP COVID-19 Response Portal](#)
- Better Evaluation resources and papers: [Evaluating Humanitarian Action](#)

Real-time evaluation

- ALNAP Guide: [Real-time Evaluations of Humanitarian Action](#)
- Humanitarian Practice Network Magazine: [Real-time Evaluations: contributing to system-wide learning and accountability \(1999\)](#)

Technologies for data collection and analysis

- NVivo Free Webinar: [When the “field” is Online: Qualitative Data Collection](#)
- Better Evaluation blog: [A quick primer on running online events and meetings](#)
- J-PAL webinar: [Best practices for conducting phone surveys](#)
- Better Evaluation blog: [Using technologies for monitoring and evaluation in insecure settings](#)
- Better Evaluation toolkit: [Technologies for monitoring in insecure environments](#)
- IEG blog: [Digital data collection tips](#)
- Book: [Information and Communication Technologies for Development Evaluation](#), edited by Oscar A. Garcia and Prashanth Kotturi, Routledge, 2019.

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