

# Evaluability Assessments in Austrian development cooperation

**Guidance Document** 

- Austrian Development Agency
- Federal Ministry
  Republic of Austria
  European and International
  Affairs

Federal Ministry
Republic of Austria
Climate Action, Environment,
Energy, Mobility,
Innovation and Technology



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### **PREFACE**

In the vast field of development cooperation, the use of evaluability assessments plays an increasingly important role. This is because evaluability assessments have proven to enhance the quality, feasibility and cost-effectiveness of subsequent evaluations. Moreover, in many instances, evaluability assessments have also shown to sharpen the intervention that is being evaluated itself - whether a strategy, a policy, a programme or a project. By scrutinising the design of an intervention, directions are given for strengthening the quality of its design, promoting a shared understanding of objectives and improving the articulation and measurement of results. As such, evaluability assessments can be effective tools to support management for sustainable development results.

The undersigned actors acknowledge the importance and potential of evaluability assessments within Austrian development cooperation and envisage their broader application and use within and across institutions. To support this ambition, the present guidance document has been developed within the overall framework of the Evaluation Policy of the Austrian development cooperation. The aim is twofold:

- to ensure a common understanding of evaluability assessments among different actors of Austrian development cooperation; and
- to provide a conceptual framework and practical tools/checklists for examining the
  evaluability of an intervention from four different angles: (i) the surrounding institutional
  and practical context, (ii) the intervention design, (iii) the demand of stakeholders and
  (iv) the availability of data.

We hope that this guidance document will contribute to promote conceptual clarity and practical use of evaluability assessments within Austrian development cooperation. We invite other development partners and stakeholders to join us in applying this guidance document to continuously enhance our evaluation practice.

Vienna, March 2022

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## **CONTENT**

PREFACE	
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	
1. INTRODUCTION	
2. WHAT ARE EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND WHY ARE THEY IMPOR	TANT7
2.1. Definition and purpose	7
2.2. Benefits of Evaluability Assessments.	
2.3. Evaluability Assessments versus evaluations	9
3. FOCUS, TIMING AND TYPES OF EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENTS	10
3.1. What to assess	10
3.2. When to assess	11
3.3. How to classify Evaluability Assessments	12
4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND USE OF CHECKLISTS	13
5. HOW TO CONDUCT AN EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT	
5.1. Planning phase	
5.1.1. Scoping	15
5.1.2. Time and cost	
5.1.3. Development of Terms of Reference	
5.1.4. Selection of experts	
5.1.5. Communication of scope and purpose	
5.2. Implementation phase	
5.2.1. Identifying and accessing sources of information	
5.2.2. Undertaking the assessment	
a. Stakeholder involvement	
b. Assessment of the four facets of evaluability	18
5.2.3. Reaching conclusions and making recommendations	19
5.3. Utilisation phase	19
6. POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS	21
7. CONCLUSION	22
ANNEXES	23
Annex 1: Definitions	
Annex 2: Checklist design	24
Annex 3: Checklist information availability	
Annex 4: Checklist stakeholder demands and interests	26
Annex 5: Checklist institutional and physical constraints	27
Annex 6: Outline Terms of Reference (ToR) for Evaluability Assessments	28
Annex 7: Bibliography and further reading	30

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADA Austrian Development Agency

ADC Austrian Development Cooperation<sup>1</sup>

AQUAHUB Education and Research Hub for Sustainable Management of Aquatic Ecosystems in

Eastern Africa

AusAID Australian Agency for International Development

BMLFUW Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management<sup>2</sup>

FMC Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy,

Mobility, Innovation, and Technology

DAC Development Assistance Committee (of the OECD)

**DFID** Department for International Development<sup>3</sup> of the Government of the United Kingdom

**EA** Evaluability Assessment

IDB Inter-American Development Bank

IDRC International Development Research Center

MFA Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs

**MoF** Federal Ministry of Finance

M&E Monitoring and Evaluation

NGOs Non-governmental organizations

NORAD Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

**ODI** Overseas Development Institute

OeEB Development Bank of Austria

**OECD** Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

**ToC** Theory of Change

ToR Terms of Reference

**UN** United Nations

**UNEG** United Nations Evaluation Group

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

UN Women United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

**USAID** United States Agency for International Development

<sup>1</sup> Note: the present document draws a distinction between the terms 'Austrian Development Cooperation' (ADC) on the one hand, and 'Austrian development cooperation' on the other. 'ADC' is used as an institutional term, comprising the two development actors MFA and ADA, whereas the term, 'Austrian development cooperation', denotes the entirety of Austrian ODA actors and contents and therefore extends beyond ADC (MFA and ADA)

<sup>2</sup> As of 2020 Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism (FMART)

<sup>3</sup> As of 2020 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The present document (hereinafter described as "module") represents the second module under the overall framework of the Evaluation Policy of the Austrian development cooperation (2019)<sup>4</sup>. It has been developed jointly by five actors of the Austrian development cooperation, namely the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), the Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs (MFA), the Development Bank of Austria (OeEB), the Federal Ministry for Climate Action, Environment, Energy, Mobility, Innovation, and Technology (FMC) and the Federal Ministry of Finance (MoF). While it is primarily targeted at these institutions, it can also be used by other actors of the Austrian development cooperation.

The purpose of the module is twofold: (i) to establish a shared understanding of Evaluability Assessments (EAs) among different actors in Austrian development cooperation; and (ii) to provide practical guidance for the implementation and use of EAs building on international good practice and lessons learned while taking into account the contextual realities and requirements of the various development actors involved. The module was developed with the support of an internationally recognized expert in evaluation and Evaluability Assessments, Dr Rick Davies.

Evaluability Assessments aim at determining the overall quality of the design of an intervention, whether a programme, a project, a strategy, or a policy. They serve as a compass for subsequent evaluations by assessing readiness for evaluation. As such, they have the potential to both pave the way for a subsequent evaluation and to contribute to deepen evaluative thinking and foster the comprehensiveness and common understanding of an intervention being examined.

Evaluability Assessments are widely used within bi- and multilateral development cooperation, with various development actors having shaped unique modalities for their application and integrated them within their overall evaluation systems. Based on those experiences, many of these agencies have developed their own EA guidance documents to inform their further use of EAs, and these documents in turn have informed the development of this module.

Within the Austrian development cooperation, there is a strong commitment to the use of EAs as articulated in the Evaluation Policy (2019), which underlines the importance and relevance of EAs.7 Building on that commitment, the strategic evaluation plan of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) 2021-20228 for the first time foresees the implementation of an EA starting 2022, notably the EA of the Austrian development cooperation contribution to combating climate change and its effects based on the Austrian Climate Finance Strategy? (2022).

The present module has been developed to support and guide these (and future) efforts to assess the evaluability of interventions supported by different actors of the Austrian development cooperation. It is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides the definition, purpose and rationale for EAs; Chapter 3 depicts what types of interventions can be object to EAs and when in the intervention cycle they can be carried out with what focus; Chapter 4 provides a conceptual framework for conducting them; Chapter 5 describes the process of planning, implementing and using EAs and provides guidance throughout; and Chapter 6 points out potential challenges and solutions.

**<sup>4</sup>** MFA (2019)

**<sup>5</sup>** Davies (2013)

<sup>6</sup> See for example UNICEF (2019) and USAID (2021)

**<sup>7</sup>** MFA (2019: 6)

<sup>8</sup> ADC (2020)

<sup>9</sup> BMLFUW (2013)

## 2. WHAT ARE EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENTS AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT

#### 2.1. Definition and purpose

Among bi- and multilateral development agencies, there is widespread agreement on the meaning of the term "evaluability". The OECD/DAC definition is widely quoted and used:

"The extent to which an activity or project can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion." 10

As will be discussed below, Evaluability Assessments can have a much wider applicability, covering not only single projects but also broader interventions <sup>11</sup> such as countrywide strategies and global policies. This wider intention is captured in the Austrian development cooperation Evaluation Policy, which defines EAs as follows:

"Assessment of how far the object of an evaluation (a measure, project, programme, instrument, strategy or organisation) can be evaluated in a reliable and plausible way. It requires an ex-ante appraisal to ascertain whether the objectives set have been appropriately defined and the results achieved can be verified." 12

For Austrian development cooperation, the purpose of EAs is to make an intervention more evaluable, and therefore, to strengthen the quality of a subsequent evaluation by making it more feasible, meaningful and cost-effective.

Evaluability Assessments do so by examining four related facets of evaluability (reflected in the four checklists, see Annexes 2–5):





- Evaluability "in practice", as seen in the availability and accessibility of data.
- The utility of an evaluation, as perceived by different stakeholders.
- The practicality of an evaluation, as bounded by the physical and the institutional context.

Chapter 4 describes the conceptual framework behind the four facets and the checklists in Annexes 2–5 list the main aspects to be scrutinised for each facet of evaluability.

<sup>10</sup> OECD (2010: 21)

<sup>11</sup> The term 'intervention' is employed in the present document to denote the diversity of potential evaluation objects beyond projects and programmes. The object of an evaluability assessment can be a project, a programme, a policy, a strategy, a theme, an institution, a financial instrument or any other form of development or humanitarian cooperation.

#### 2.2. Benefits of Evaluability Assessments

Evaluability Assessments aim at identifying specific challenges and sources of risks for a subsequent evaluation, which may lead to weak or unreliable evaluation results. These challenges can take various forms: The design of an intervention may be unclear, incomplete, or even disputed. Information necessary for its evaluation may be unavailable or inadequate in content and timing. Planned information systems may not be functioning well or may not be as practicable as originally conceived. Stakeholders' expectations of an evaluation may be unclear or in conflict. The physical environment may be challenging, and the wider social context distracting or even obstructive.

Evaluations of complex interventions, such as country/thematic strategies or policies, typically combine various challenges, as their implementation usually extends over several partner countries and/or projects and programmes, and their intervention logic/Theory of Change is oftentimes multi-faceted and complex. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct an EA before commissioning an evaluation of complex interventions:

"[...] an evaluability assessment can and should be used at higher levels of intervention such as the program, strategy or thematic area of work."<sup>13</sup>

Beyond elaborating challenges for a later evaluation, an EA will also propose adaptations which will make the intervention more evaluable, including:

- A strengthened intervention design for example, in the form of a more explicit and useful Theory of Change, about how the intervention will lead to expected outcomes in a particular context:
- Improved collection and management of data, including monitoring data, about intervention activities and results;
- A strengthened commitment to evaluation by stakeholders, including a common understanding of the purpose and use of a possible evaluation;
- Greater awareness of the wider constraints facing an evaluation and recommendations how these may be addressed.

It will rarely be the case that an EA will reach a categorical decision about whether to do an evaluation or not at all. Rather the intention will be assessed in terms of whether an intervention is evaluable *in the present circumstances*, and recommendations will be made accordingly.

In addition to paving the way for a future evaluation, an EA early in the implementation phase of an intervention can provide a quality check of its design and intervention logic, and therefore contributes to strengthening results-based management.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Vaessen (2017)

**<sup>14</sup>** UNICEF (2019)

#### 2.3. Evaluability Assessments versus evaluations

Evaluability Assessments are different from evaluations. In Evaluability Assessments, judgements are not made about the intervention and what has been achieved <sup>15</sup>, but about the possibility of making such judgements and their likely utility. In other words, it is a meta-analysis. The duration and costs of an EA are therefore considerably lower than those of an evaluation of the same initiative.

Evaluability Assessments are not expected to make recommendations about the funding of an intervention, though it may well be appropriate to make recommendations about the funding of activities, which will contribute to improvements in the evaluability of an intervention. For example, the development of improved monitoring systems.

In terms of scope, EAs typically examine the evaluability regarding all six OECD/DAC evaluation criteria, <sup>16</sup> whereas evaluations focus on selected criteria only. <sup>17</sup> While different stakeholders may seek answers to a variety of different evaluation questions, in practice there will often not be the time or resources to answer all of these in depth, and relevant data required may not be available. Therefore, one of the outcomes of EAs are recommendations on what would be the realistic scope of an evaluation.

There are two elements that both EAs and evaluations have in common: they both assess the quality of an intervention's design (relevance) and its internal consistency and contextualisation (coherence).<sup>18</sup>

In general, an intervention's quality of design and coherence must be examined at some point to allow making solid judgements on key evaluation questions. In case no EA has taken place, this analysis has to be done as part of an evaluation.

<sup>15 &</sup>quot;Achievement" is used here in the sense of its broadest meaning, not simply as the effective achievement of results as captured under the OECD/DAC Effectiveness criterion.

<sup>16</sup> OECD (2020)

<sup>17</sup> OECD (2021)

**<sup>18</sup>** OECD (2021)

## 3. FOCUS, TIMING AND TYPES OF EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENTS

#### 3.1. What to assess

Evaluability Assessments can be carried out for different types of interventions, such as a project, a programme, a policy, a strategy, a theme, an institution, a financial instrument or any other form of development or humanitarian cooperation. The Austrian development cooperation distinguishes between the following types of interventions in the context of EAs:

- Programmes and projects such as the ADA Project Market Access and Business Development Services for Kosovo Companies. Examples of EAs of programmes and projects include the EA of ADA's programme AQUAHUB Education and Research Hub for Sustainable Management of Aquatic Ecosystems in Eastern Africa<sup>19</sup> or the EA of DFID's Sub-National Governance Programme in Pakistan<sup>20</sup>.
- Policies and Strategies focussed on:

•••••

- specific themes/thematic areas such as the Evaluation Policy of the Austrian development cooperation. Examples of EAs of thematic policies/strategies include the foreseen EA of the Austrian Climate Finance Strategy (2022).
- cooperation strategies such as the ADC Cooperation Strategy in Uganda. Examples
  could not be found.
- Work Plans such as ADA Annual Programmes of Work (Arbeitsfeldprogramme). Examples of EAs from other development actors include the EA of UN Women Pacific Sub Regional Office Annual Work Plan and Programme Plans (2013).

- Partnerships such as ADC Business Partnerships. Examples of EAs from other development actors include NORAD's evaluability study of Partnership Initiatives supporting Millennium Development Goals 4 & 5 (2011).<sup>22</sup>
- Funding instruments/modalities such as Sector Budget Support. Examples of EAs from other development actors include the DFID EA on General Budget Support.<sup>23</sup>
- Common principles and approaches such as additionality or coherence. Examples of EAs
  focussed on common principles and approaches from other development actors include the
  UNEG EA of the Programme Country Pilots Delivering as One UN (2008).<sup>24</sup>

More detailed and recent information on the range of types of interventions subject to EAs undertaken by various bi- and multilateral development agencies can be found in an annually updated searchable online bibliography.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Krämer & Litvinova (2021)

<sup>20</sup> Integrity (2014)

<sup>21</sup> Daponte & Simigianis (2012)

<sup>22</sup> Plowman & Lucas (2011)

<sup>23</sup> Lawson et al. (2002)

**<sup>24</sup>** UNFG (2008)

<sup>25</sup> See https://www.zotero.org/groups/211251/evaluability\_assessments/library This bibliography contains over 200 publications, with 10 to 20 new publications being added to the list each year. However, it should be noted that this bibliography consists of published reports on Evaluability Assessments only. Evaluability Assessment carried out internally by agencies responsible for the activities that will be evaluated are much less likely to be published, similarly those carried out by consultancy firms contracted by those agencies. So, in practice, there are big gaps in what is currently "common knowledge" about the practice of Evaluability Assessment. One conspicuous gap to date is the lack of published accounts of Evaluability Assessments involving multiple agencies, either within government or across governments.

#### 3.2. When to assess

Evaluability Assessments can be undertaken at different points of time in the life-cycle of an intervention.

- During the design process and prior to its approval, the design can be assessed in terms
  of its evaluability. For example, this practice was used for projects by the Inter-American
  Development Bank for some years and was subsequently institutionalised as part of their
  quality assurance process associated with project approval.<sup>26</sup>
- Immediately after approval, EAs can inform the subsequent development of an appropriate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework, which was common practice by the Australian government aid programme in Indonesia in the last decade.<sup>27</sup>

- Prior to the commissioning of an evaluation, EAs can inform the design of the Terms of Reference (ToR) for evaluation. In terms of choice of timing, this is the most common practice.<sup>28</sup> In the event that various evaluations compete to be realised out of the same budget, the decision as to which evaluation should be carried out can be supported by an FA.
- As a first step within an evaluation, EAs during the inception phase can inform negotiations
  between a commissioner and a commissioned consultant/institution regarding revisions to
  expectations about what the evaluation will and will not be able to achieve. Many evaluations can involve basic forms of EAs, such as checking the status of the intervention's
  Theory of Change and the availability of relevant data during the inception phase of an
  evaluation.

For example, the Evaluation of Environmental and Social Impact Management at the ADA <sup>29</sup> included a brief assessment of evaluability as part of its inception phase. However, if there is any prior doubt about the appropriate timing of an evaluation, then an EA should be done by an independent party without a potential conflict-of-interest e.g. benefiting if the proposed evaluation does go ahead.

There is no generally applicable ideal time for conducting EAs. The earlier EAs are carried out, the more likely they will be able to influence the design of an intervention and the associated M&E framework. EAs carried out prior to the commissioning of evaluations will be able to have a more substantial influence on the character of that particular evaluation.

<sup>26</sup> Inter-American Development Bank (2010)

<sup>27</sup> Lowery (2012), Fiorello (2012)

<sup>28</sup> Monk (2012)

**<sup>29</sup>** ADC (2019)

#### 3.3. How to classify Evaluability Assessments

Evaluability Assessments can be carried out by staff within an institution that is implementing or funding an intervention (internal EAs) or by others outside who are contracted to do so (external EAs). In addition, EAs can take the form of short desk-based assessments (desk-based EAs) or longer field-based assignments involving stakeholder consultations (field-based EAs).

External EAs can make use of a wider pool of expertise and enable more in-depth enquiries to be carried out relative to the use of existing staff and their existing commitments. Additionally, an external team may be more willing to challenge assumptions or to take risks with more experimental approaches, relative to an internal team.

Internal EAs, however, may be given greater access to confidential or sensitive information which will not normally be available to an external team. The staff required may also be easier and quicker to mobilise at short notice. Internal EAs can be undertaken by specialist evaluation staff, programme or project managers, or various stakeholders involved in an intervention. These actors come with different levels of knowledge and independence of opinion regarding the intervention, which needs to be taken into account when planning an EA.

It is important to note that independence in the conduction of EAs does not carry as much weight as in evaluations, as EAs do not involve the evaluative judgement aspect on the intervention to be examined.

In terms of qualifications needed to conduct EAs, the experience of other bi- and multilateral development agencies<sup>30</sup> suggests that a mix of evaluation and subject matter expertise is desirable. Evaluation expertise is necessary to address methodological issues around data and its analysis while subject matter expertise is needed to assess the plausibility of the expected effects of interventions, the quality of evidence and the potential usefulness of findings. In short desk-based assessments this mix of expertise may not be possible, but in longer field-based assessments involving stakeholder consultations, it should be.

## 4. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND USE OF CHECKLISTS

When developing an Evaluability Assessment, a conceptual framework is used to organise the way in which the assessment will make its enquiries. In line with global good practice<sup>31</sup>, actors of the Austrian development cooperation are encouraged to make use of checklists when conducting EAs. These consist of a structured list of questions about the presence or absence of different attributes of an intervention, its design and implementation, and its context.

#### The importance of Checklists



Though apparently mundane, it is important to recognise that checklists are widely used in many fields beyond development cooperation, including medicine, aviation, and building construction, and their use has saved many lives. Their importance is also recognised in the Austrian development cooperation, for example, in the ADA Guidelines for Programme and Project Evaluations.<sup>32</sup>

Checklists work by systematically directing attention to a range of key issues, which might otherwise be only partially and variably attended to because of the users' current preferences, biases, preoccupations, and distractions. Their use also provides an important level of transparency to any inquiry, making it clear what was attended to, and if by omission, what was not.

Annexes 2–5 provide four different checklists for conducting an EA focussed on assessing: (i) the design of the intervention (see Annex 2), (ii) data availability (see Annex 3), (iii) stakeholders interests and demands (see Annex 4), (iv) the surrounding institutional and physical constraints that may affect the implementation of an evaluation (see Annex 5). These checklists have been developed based on international good practice and have subsequently been adapted to the specific context of the Austrian development cooperation. The four checklists should be used as one integrated package and viewed as parts of a single "jigsaw puzzle". Enquiries in each area can have implications for queries in the other areas. Their relationships are shown in Figure 1 helow

The red circles represent the four checklists. The examination that an EA will generate by using these checklists feeds into the design of evaluation plans, either at the macro-level (long-term evaluation strategies such as the strategic evaluation plan of the ADC), meso-level (M&E frameworks), or the micro-level (ToR for a forthcoming evaluation).

Findings from one area of analysis are likely to have implications on others. For example, a lack of relevant data will affect the possibility of answering questions that some stakeholders want to see answered. Other stakeholders' questions may lie outside the original intention of the intervention design. Some aspects of the design may have never been attended to when the monitoring and evaluation framework was developed. Seven broad questions about the relationships between the areas are shown in Figure 1.

In addition, an EA will need to recognise that the whole process cannot occur in a vacuum; there will be a wider context of other people, institutions, and physical environments. These will inevitably provide both opportunities and constraints, which the EA needs to consider when reaching judgements about evaluability and making recommendations about what can and cannot be done.

<sup>31</sup> See for example UNICEF (2019)

**<sup>32</sup>** ADA (2020)

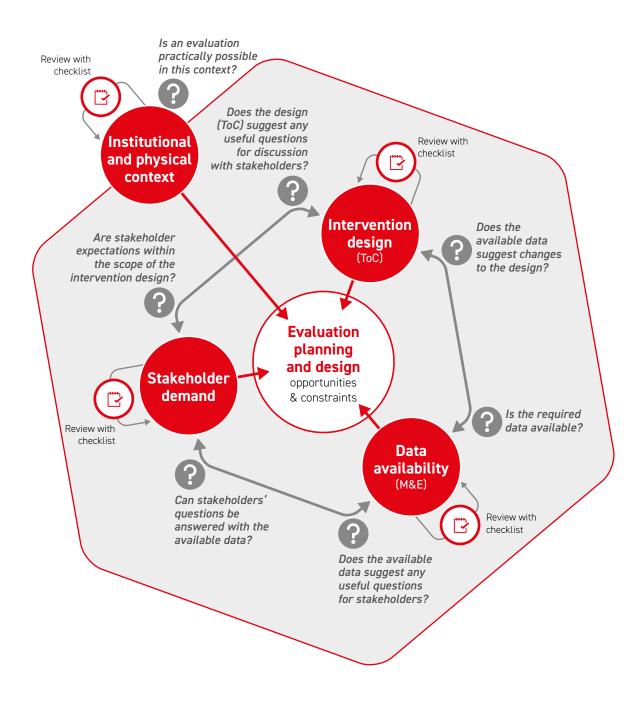
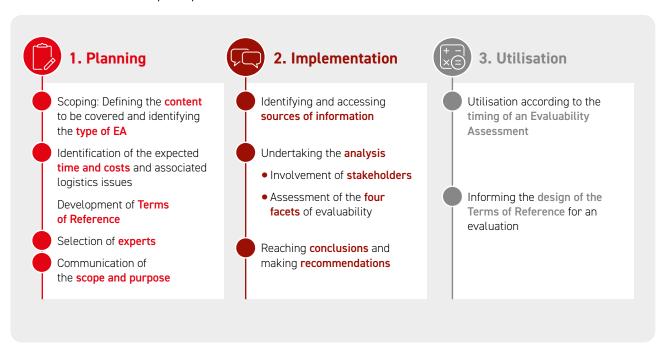


FIGURE 1: The four facets of evaluability and their associated checklists. Adapted illustration from Davies, 2013.

## 5. HOW TO CONDUCT AN EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT

As mentioned in Chapter 3.3., Evaluability Assessments can be carried out within (internal EAs) or outside of (external EAs) an institution. While external EAs require a certain degree of formalisation, internal EAs, in their simplest form, can take the form of a consultation using the checklists as part of quality assurance.

With an increasing degree of formalisation, EAs can be seen to progress through three phases and multiple steps therein as outlined below:





#### 5.1. Planning phase

#### **5.1.1.** Scoping

#### Stakeholder engagement:

As a first step, core stakeholders in the Evaluability Assessment need to be identified and engaged in the clarification of the assessment's purpose and scope.

#### Delimitation of the scope:

The type of information sought in an EA is typically and necessarily broad ranging, covering the four facets of evaluability. With larger scale and more complex programmes and policies, it may be necessary and useful to limit the scope of the EA. The scope can be defined along multiple dimensions, including the range of activities implemented, the kinds of effects of interest, the kinds of causal processes of interest, and the range of stakeholders' perspectives which are of interest.

Defining the scope of an EA of larger and more complex interventions can be challenging. Some policies, for example, can be developed independently of the design of activities, so their fit with pre-existing programmes or projects may vary considerably. In addition, many underlying interventions may be expected to address multiple policy objectives, focusing more on some rather than others, according to context.

#### Identification of the type of Evaluability Assessment:

Decisions must be made as to whether an EA should be carried out internally or externally (see Chapter 3.3.) and whether the EA can be desk-based or travels are considered necessary. The necessity of a partner-country field-based assessment will depend primarily on the priority given to local stakeholder consultations and the difficulty of doing so at a distance, i.e. by phone, email, or virtual communication platforms.

#### 5.1.2. Time and cost

A review of available evidence <sup>33</sup> suggests that internal desk-based Evaluability Assessments may take anything from two to five days. Internal field-based EAs typically take more time, with two weeks being the most common experience. In the case of external EAs, additional time needs to be factored in for the commissioning of (an) external expert(s).

Evaluability Assessments of complex interventions covering multiple countries understandably take much longer, with documented time spans ranging from 4 to 6 months for the whole EA process.

The main budget items of external EAs are the experts' costs (daily fees multiplied by the number of working days) and potential travel costs.

The costs of EAs need to be seen in relation to the costs of the potential subsequent evaluation that it may inform. Evaluations can be expensive, both in terms of absolute amounts and their cost relative to the total cost of an intervention. In addition, evaluations consume significant amounts of staff time within the commissioning organisation. A comprehensive review of EAs<sup>34</sup> found that most EAs cost only a small fraction of the cost of an evaluation while clearly having a positive effect on the quality of the evaluations.

#### 5.1.3. Development of Terms of Reference

Irrespective of whether an Evaluability Assessment is carried out internally or externally, ToR need to be developed to clarify the assignment and to ensure a common understanding. An outline of ToR for EAs can be found in Annex 6.

As part of the ToR development, the checklists can be refined along with the defined scope and interest of the EA. For example, in case the evaluability of impact is of particular interest, additional questions to this effect can be included.

<sup>33</sup> Davies, R. (2013)

<sup>34</sup> Davies, R. (2013)

#### 5.1.4. Selection of experts

In the case of an internal Evaluability Assessment, relevant staff for conducting the EA are selected, roles and responsibilities clarified, and the working time allocated to the assignment determined.

In case of an external EA, the required expertise is determined, experts are selected and

#### 5.1.5. Communication of scope and purpose

As with evaluations, Evaluability Assessments can create largely unnecessary concerns among stakeholders of an intervention being assessed. In order to manage expectations and to pave the way for the EA, the scope and purpose of the assignment and the expected outputs should be clearly communicated to relevant stakeholders concerned.

#### 5.2. Implementation phase

#### 5.2.1. Identifying and accessing sources of information

As a first step in the implementation phase, the necessary information sources that will inform the Evaluability Assessment need to be identified. These include:

- Relevant programme/project or strategy/policy documents;
- Relevant stakeholders in the proposed evaluation;
- · Relevant data from monitoring and information systems;
- Relevant information on the surrounding physical and institutional context for the evaluation.

#### 5.2.2. Undertaking the assessment

The methodology of Evaluability Assessments is qualitative and entails methods such as interviews, desk review and focus group discussions.<sup>35</sup>

The assessment itself consists of two main building blocks: (i) the engagement of stakeholders and (ii) the application of the checklists along the four facets of evaluability.

#### a. Stakeholder involvement

Stakeholder expectations should be investigated as part of an Evaluability Assessment. This is important as stakeholders' expectations can have major consequences for the usefulness of a potential subsequent evaluation. Their understandings and expectations of an intervention being examined may vary. They may or may not be aligned with the official purpose of an intervention,

and they may or may not be realistically achievable with the resources likely to be available to an evaluation period.

That investigation should include some form of stakeholder analysis for the identification of specific stakeholders and some form of typology that differentiates how they might engage with or otherwise influence a potential subsequent evaluation. For example, the two-dimensional Power – Interest Matrix, whereby the degree of influence (i.e. power) and interest of each identified stakeholder group is determined with the help of a two-dimensional grid and stakeholder involvement is planned accordingly. Some stakeholders will have understandable and justifiable questions they would like to see an evaluation address. These will need to be identified, understood, and examined for their implications for the kinds of data that may need to be collected and analysed. The plans and capacities of other stakeholders, such as local authorities, can be relevant because of their logistics implications, for how evaluator(s) may or may not be able to carry out their planned activities.

The involvement of stakeholders in EAs appears to be the weakest area of EAs in practice.<sup>37</sup> That applies to both the limited scale of their involvement and the little documentation of the involvement that does occur. Where they are geographically distant, extended involvement of stakeholders can be time-consuming compared to identifying and examining documents and will increase the cost of EAs. The comprehensive involvement of stakeholders in EAs of policies implemented in many country contexts is likely to be particularly challenging because of the vast number and types of interventions that may be involved in the expression of that policy and the wider geographic span of those policies.

#### b. Assessment of the four facets of evaluability

The checklists in Annex 2–5 serve to systematically examine the four facets of evaluability:

- Annex 2 contains the checklist with the focus on the design of the intervention.
- Annex 3 consists of the checklist regarding the availability and accessibility of data.
- Annex 4 serves to assess the demands and interests of stakeholders.
- Annex 5 contains the checklist regarding the physical an institutional context.

All checklists need to be applied and, in the process, questions need to be asked about how the findings from each of the checklists fit with each other, as findings from one area of analysis are likely to have implications on others. In practice, the process is likely to be much more cyclical and iterative. Stakeholders are likely to provide information about relevant documents, relevant documents can provide information about relevant stakeholders, both will provide information about information systems, and vice versa. Finally, the findings within each facet of evaluability and across all areas should be prioritised.

**<sup>36</sup>** Johnson & Scholes (1999)

<sup>37</sup> As seen in the limited attention given to stakeholder issues in EA checklists produced by different agencies (Davies 2013)

#### 5.2.3. Reaching conclusions and making recommendations

An Evaluability Assessment should produce a clear and actionable set of recommendations. The focus of these recommendations will depend on the timing of the EA, i.e. at what stage it took place in an intervention cycle:

• If the EA takes place at the design stage, then the recommendations are likely to be focused on necessary improvements to the articulation of the intervention design, which is likely be captured in a Theory of Change diagram, or Logical Framework.

- If the EA takes place after the approval stage but at the beginning of implementation, then the focus is likely to be on the development of appropriate M&E frameworks.
- If the EA takes place later on, in preparation for a possible evaluation, then the focus will be
  on that evaluation and in particular on the expected scope and purpose as described by the
  ToR.

Conclusions and recommendations can be structured along the four facets of an EA as reflected in the checklists (Annex 2–5):

- Intervention design/Theory of Change: Proposed revisions and any further steps necessary to improve it;
- Data availability: How quality and availability can be improved and how to make the best use
  of what is available;
- Stakeholder interests and demands: What they want to know from an evaluation, and which
  of these interests are feasible and appropriate given the overall purpose of the evaluation;
- Institutional and physical constraints: What local physical, social, political, and economic barriers exist that will limit an evaluation and how these limitations might be addressed. Suppose there are any emergent opportunities, how these might be put to best use.



#### 5.3. Utilisation phase

#### 5.3.1. Utilisation according to the timing of an Evaluability Assessment

The actual use of an Evaluability Assessment is closely connected to its timing within the life-cycle of an intervention (see Chapter 3.2.).

- Results of an EA that is conducted during the design process should feed in into the design itself. Additionally, adaptations regarding the M&E system should be planned and budgeted.
- If the EA took place immediately after approval of an initiative, the outcomes of the EA should be used to build the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework and ensure collection and availability of relevant data.

An EA that takes place prior to the commissioning of an evaluation, can include concrete ToR
for evaluation as an output in an Annex. This kind of EA is expected to provide detailed and
practical directions for the planning and implementation of the evaluation.

In case the EA is conducted as a first step within an evaluation, identified problems can be
addressed during the evaluation itself, for example, through reconstructions of a Theory of
Change and undertaking own primary data collection activities. Or, where stakeholders may
have conflicting, unrealistic or unclear expectations, the evaluator(s) can seek to resolve
these during an inception period.

#### 5.3.2. Informing the design of the Terms of Reference for an evaluation

Evaluability Assessments at all stages of the interventions' life-cycle should be used to inform the ToR for an evaluation. These will typically begin with a description of the intervention of interest and the context within which it has been developed and is operating. At this point, an EA should be able to provide supporting information on the **institutional constraints and opportunities** facing the proposed evaluation.

The list of **evaluation questions** normally found in ToR should be informed by the findings of the EA. The EA should be able to identify at least some of the questions that stakeholders are asking, how compatible they are with the programme design, and the likelihood that there will be data available to answer those questions.

A section on the intervention's Theory of Change should be informed by the EA's **findings about the existing Theory of Change**. In particular, the extent to which the ToC needs to be revised or substantially reconstructed.

Depending on the circumstances, ToR may or may not be specific about the **evaluation methods** that are to be used. An EA should at least inform expectations about **what is more versus less possible**, given what is known about the intervention's design, implementation, its monitoring, and the stakeholders involved. However, it is not normally appropriate for an EA to make strong recommendations about the particular methods that evaluator(s) should use.

## 6. POTENTIAL CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

When planning or conducting an Evaluability Assessment, it is advisable to keep in mind several types of challenges and plan for appropriate mitigation measures. These can include:

 Conflation and unclarity of purpose: Stakeholders may not understand the difference between EAs and evaluations and thus misunderstand the possible consequences. In some instances, fears of budget implications for interventions have been associated with negative EA outcomes<sup>38</sup>. This risk should be managed as early as possible by clear communication of intent in the planning phase of an EA (see Chapter 5.1.5.).

- Evaluation overload: Intervention managers may be justifiably concerned about the extra
  demands that an EA might place on their own staff and/or the communities and other
  stakeholders they must work with. As above, early communication with relevant stakeholders should address this potential concern.
- Delay: The requirement for an EA may imply a delay in the subsequent steps of the intervention or the evaluation itself, until challenges with the monitoring and evaluation system, and even the articulation of the programme design, are addressed. If the implementation has been evidently delayed, an evaluation may also need to be rescheduled. These possible consequences should inform the initial decision on whether to undertake an EA.

 Additional costs: EAs involve additional costs on top of the cost of an evaluation. Plans for an EA should not only include identification of costs but their relationship to the minimum needed for an effective EA and its relationship to the overall likely cost of an evaluation. A comprehensive review of EAs <sup>39</sup> found that most EAs cost only a small fraction of the cost of an evaluation and – given their effect on the quality of the evaluations – offered a good investment.

Problems with the implementation: Although an EA is quite explicitly not to be confused
with an evaluation, it is possible that during the EA some problems with the implementation
of the intervention will become evident. If so, it would be common-sense to draw attention
to these and what needs to be done about them.

There are some challenges that are particularly associated with the evaluability of large-scale policies/strategies involving multiple locations and responsible agencies. For example, regional strategies or whole-of-government policies. These challenges include:

- Complex or generic Theories of Change developed in response to the diversity of contexts involved;
- Diverse, incomplete and unknown data about the population of activities, which may not be clearly bounded;
- Numerous and scattered stakeholders, making sufficiently extensive consultations difficult.

It is therefore advisable in the case of complex interventions to commission an external EA and to allocate sufficient time and resources. In case challenges are already known prior to commissioning or conducting an EA, the need to solve those problems can be built into the ToR.

<sup>38</sup> See for example Holvoet (2018)

<sup>39</sup> Davies, R. (2013)

## 7. CONCLUSION

The primary purpose of an Evaluability Assessment is to increase the quality, meaningfulness and cost-effectiveness of evaluations. This can be done by:

- Identifying changes that need to be made to the design and implementation of an intervention prior to an evaluation;
- Advising on the appropriate timing of an evaluation;
- Information on the content of the ToR for an evaluation, including both risks and opportunities that need to be addressed.

Evaluability Assessments can be useful at any stage of an intervention, from design to implementation to completion. Moreover, it can be beneficial for a wide variety of interventions, such as small-scale projects, large-scale programmes, as well as strategies and policies at national, regional and international levels.

Actors of Austrian development cooperation have jointly developed this module to provide guidance and detailed checklists to help ensure that EAs are thorough and comprehensive. The transparency of those checklists will also aid the acceptance of EA findings. Acceptance of its findings will further be supported by clear communication of the purpose of an EA and how the purpose is different from that of an evaluation.

This module, and especially the attached checklists, are going to be periodically reviewed and updated in light of ongoing experiences with EAs in Austrian development cooperation.

### **ANNEXES**

#### **Annex 1: Definitions**

**Evaluability** – The extent to which an activity or project can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion (OECD, 2010: 21).

**Evaluation –** The systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed [... intervention], its design, implementation, and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. An evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learnt into the decision–making process of both recipients and donors. Evaluation also refers to the process of determining the worth or significance of an [... intervention] (OECD, 2010: 21–22).

**Theory of Change –** Explains how activities are understood to produce a series of results that contribute to achieving the final intended impacts. [...] Sometimes, the term is used generally to refer to [...] a results chain [...] from inputs to outputs, outcomes and impacts or a Logframe, which represents the same information in a matrix. Other times it is used to refer to specific types of representations – especially those that provide more detail about different levels of change, different actors and different causal pathways [...]. Sometimes these representations show the contextual factors that help or hinder this change, and the assumptions on which it is built (Rogers 2014:1–2).



## Annex 2: Checklist design

(as described in a Theory of Change, Logical Framework or narrative)

1. Clear?	1.1. Are the long-term impact and outcomes of the intervention clearly identified, and are the proposed steps towards achieving these clearly defined?	
2. Relevant?	2.1. Does the Theory of Change make verifiable/testable claims regarding relevance to specific target groups, alignment with country context and partners priorities?	
3. Diligent?	<ul><li>3.1. How well have risks and mitigation strategies and key assumptions been specified?</li><li>3.2. Have assumptions about the roles of other outside actors (e.g. government or partners) been made explicit?</li></ul>	
4. Plausible?	<ul><li>4.1. Is there a continuous causal chain connecting the inputs provided by the intervention with the final impact of concern?</li><li>4.2. Is it likely that the project objective could be achieved, given the planned interventions, within the project lifespan? Is there evidence from elsewhere that it could be achieved?and impact levels), i.e. will they capture what is expected to happen?</li></ul>	
5. SMART <sup>40</sup> and reliable indicators?	<ul><li>5.1. Are there valid indicators for each expected event (output, outcome, and impact levels), i.e. will they capture what is expected to happen?</li><li>5.2. Are they reliable indicators, i.e. will observations by different observers find the same thing?</li></ul>	
6. Consistent?	6.1. Is there consistency in the way the Theory of Change/Logic Model is described across various project documents (Design, M&E plans, work plans, progress reports, etc.)?	
7. Agreement?	7.1. To what extent are different stakeholders holding different views about the objectives and how they will be achieved?	
8. Complexity?	8.1. Are there expected to be multiple interactions between different project components (complicating attribution of causes and identification of effects)? How clearly defined are the expected interactions?	

**<sup>40</sup>** S-pecific; M-easurable; A-chievable; R-ealistic; T-ime-bound



## **Annex 3: Checklist information availability**

1. Is a complete set of documents available?	<ul> <li>1.1relative to what could have been expected? E.g. project proposal, progress reports, evaluations/impact studies, commissioned studies.</li> <li>1.2. Have provisions been made for the management of privacy and confidentiality issues?</li> <li>1.3 Which documents may not be available or accessible (e.g. because of confidentiality concerns)?</li> </ul>	
2. Do baseline measures exist?	<ul> <li>2.1. If baseline data is not yet available, are there specific plans for when baseline data would be collected and how feasible are they?</li> <li>2.2. If baseline data exists in the form of survey data, is the raw data available, or just selected currently relevant items? Is the sampling process clear? Are the survey instruments available?</li> <li>2.3. If baseline data is in the form of national or subnational statistics, how disaggregated is the data geographically and demographically? Are time-series data available for pre-project years?</li> </ul>	
3. How will causation be identified?	<ul> <li>3.1. What means have been proposed to assess causal claims?</li> <li>3.2. Is there a comparison group, and are members contactable?</li> <li>3.3. What steps have been taken to make the comparison group comparable to the intervention group and to minimise sources of bias?</li> <li>3.4. How frequently have data been collected on the status of the comparison group?</li> <li>3.5. In the case of collaboration of multiple actors, has it been made clear how a single actor's contribution can be identified?</li> <li>3.6. Have plans been made for how to identify additionality?</li> </ul>	
4. Is data being systematically collected for all the indicators?	<ul><li>4.1 Is data being collected for all the indicators with sufficient frequency?</li><li>4.2. Is there significant missing data? Have plans been made for managing missing data?</li><li>4.3. Are the measures being used reliable, i.e. is measurement error likely to be a problem?</li></ul>	
5. Is available data appro- priately inclusive?	5.1. Is data available on the engagement with and effects on identified marginalised groups of concern?	
6. Is disaggre- gated data available?	<ul><li>6.1. What plans have been made for disaggregating data (e.g. demographically, economically, geographically etc.), and how appropriate are they given the intervention's objectives?</li><li>6.2. Is gender-disaggregated data available?</li></ul>	
7. Are critical stakeholder groups identifiable?	<ul><li>7.1. Are the intended and actual target groups identifiable?</li><li>7.2. Is there a record of who was involved in which project activities and when?</li></ul>	
8. If evaluations have been carried out	<ul><li>8.1. Is the raw data available?</li><li>8.2. Is the sampling process clear?</li><li>8.3. Are the survey instruments available?</li></ul>	
9. Do existing M&E systems have the capacity to deliver?	<ul><li>9.1. Is an M&amp;E system in place with defined and appropriate responsibilities, sources and periodicities?</li><li>9.2. Is the budget adequate?</li><li>9.3. Do existing staff and systems have the capacity to provide data?</li></ul>	



## Annex 4: Checklist stakeholder demands and interests

1. Who wants an evaluation?	1.1. Who wants an evaluation, why and why now?
2. What do stakeholders want to know?	<ul> <li>2.1. Who wants to obtain what kind of information out of the evaluation?</li> <li>2.2. Are these expectations realistic, given the design, budget and likely data availability?</li> <li>2.3. How do people want to see the results used and by whom? Is this realistic?</li> </ul>
3. What sort of evaluation process do stakeholders want?	<ul><li>3.1. Have the primary users been clearly identified?</li><li>3.2. To which extend do stakeholders want to participate in the process?</li><li>3.3. Can they be involved in defining the evaluation?</li><li>3.4. Will they participate in an evaluation process?</li></ul>
4. What ethical issues exist?	<ul><li>4.1. Are they known or knowable?</li><li>4.2. Are they likely to be manageable?</li><li>4.3. What constraints will they impose?</li></ul>
5. Is the institutional learning- and evaluation culture appropriate?	<ul><li>5.1. Is there a commitment to spend sufficient resources for the evaluation?</li><li>5.2. Is the institution ready to take up results and act upon recommendations from the evaluation (including structural changes and allocation of resources)?</li></ul>
6. What are the risks relating to the likely use of the evaluation?	6.1. Are some types of findings likely to be challenged by specific stakeholders? If so, what are they and why so?



## **Annex 5: Checklist institutional and physical constraints**

1. Accessibility to and availability of stakeholders?	<ul> <li>1.1. What groups of relevant stakeholders can be identified?</li> <li>1.2. Can groups be potentially reached from off-site (through phone/virtual communication) without the introduction of selection bias?</li> <li>1.3. Are there physical security risks in reaching different types of stakeholders? Might travel / access to communities be restricted?</li> <li>1.4. Will seasonality differences make a difference to if and how an evaluation can be carried out?</li> <li>1.5. Are staff and key stakeholders likely to be present or absent?</li> <li>1.6. What implications does the non-availability of stakeholders have for an evaluation?</li> </ul>	
2. Resources available to do the evaluation?	<ul><li>2.1. How much time is available in total and in country/ies?</li><li>2.2. What budget is available?</li><li>2.3. Are people with the necessary skills available?</li></ul>	
3. Is the timing right?	<ul><li>3.1. Is there an opportunity for an evaluation to have an influence?</li><li>3.2. Has the project accumulated enough implementation experience to enable useful lessons to be extracted?</li><li>3.3. If the evaluation was planned in advance, is the evaluation still relevant?</li></ul>	
4. Coordination requirements	<ul><li>4.1. How many other donors, government departments, or NGOs need to be or want to be involved?</li><li>4.2. What forms of coordination are possible and/or required?</li></ul>	



#### Annex 6: Outline Terms of Reference (ToR) for

#### **Evaluability Assessments**

#### 1. Context and background

- The economic, social and political context in which the intervention or policy is being implemented and may be evaluated.
- The geographical, political, economic and social background of the intervention that may be evaluated.

#### 2. Purpose

- The mandate for conducting the Evaluability Assessment.
- The purpose of the Evaluability Assessment: why is the Evaluability Assessment being conducted and why now.
- The primary users of the Evaluability Assessment.

#### 3. Scope

• The span of activities that will be covered by the Evaluability Assessment, defined by geography, time period, funding and implementation partners.

#### 4. Evaluability Assessment questions

- The overall framework i.e. broad categories of questions that will be asked.
- The particular checklists that will be used, e.g. those in Annex 2 of this report.
- Explanation of any adaptations of a checklist.
- Explanation of any means of assigning priorities or weightings to different parts of the checklist.

#### 5. Design and approach

- The stage in the life-cycle of an intervention or policy in which this Evaluability Assessment will take place.
- Whether the Evaluability Assessment will be carried out by an internal team or contracted third parties and why so.
- The types of information sources that will be sought out and used.
- The types of consultation processes that are expected with which stakeholders.
- The risks that need to be considered and managed.
- The types of outputs that are expected, e.g. inception reports, draft final report and final reports, interim feedback meetings with stakeholders, summary presentations of final findings.

#### 6. Work plan

- A description of the key stages of the Evaluability Assessment.
- Estimated working days required for each deliverable.
- What deliverables are required and when.

#### 7. Co-ordination arrangements/management

#### 8. Payment modalities

#### 9. Staffing requirements

- Professional qualifications, experience and expertise required for the evaluator(s).
- Roles and responsibilities of the parties, including processes for signing off on the evaluation plan and reports.
- Ethics, standards and guidelines that may be relevant.
- Conflict of interest and eligibility constraints.

#### 10. Contracting and selection process

- Budget (if the organisation's policy allows this to be stated).
- Award criteria: How proposals will be assessed, if part of a competitive tender.

#### 11. Data and documentation available

- Existing data description, with relevant references in annex if needed.
- Key contact persons.
- Relevant policies to be referred to.

#### 12. Annexes

 $\bullet$  Essential background reading to accompany ToRs: References and essential full texts.

#### Annex 7: Bibliography and further reading

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