Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Getting Started with Responsive Evaluation

Principles of Responsiveness

This document provides practical guidance on how to conduct responsive evaluations. The core principle of responsive evaluation is to take into account—or even place at the centre of the evaluation— the experiences, interests and views of target groups and, where relevant, policy implementers when evaluating a policy or programme, and identifying potential areas for improvement. By taking a responsive approach to evaluation, findings can contribute to more relevant and effective policies and programmes. The following sections outline practical ways to make the evaluation process more responsive.



1. Planning, Terms of Reference (ToR) and inception phase

Make the ToR, and consequently the evaluation, more responsive by involving relevant stakeholder representatives and ensuring that they can influence the evaluation design and focus.

- Composition of the External Reference Group (ERG): Ensure a balanced representation of policy stakeholders and ERG members from countries affected by the policy. These could include representatives of target groups, implementing organisations, or experts and academics from at least one of the countries concerned. Reflect on the position of these individuals and the interests they may represent.
- Conduct exploratory consultations with country experts, academics, civil society organisations, and diaspora communities in the ToR phase. These consultations can also inform the selection of countries and case studies.
- Involve researchers from the selected countries wherever possible, preferably at an early stage. For example, they could contribute to drafting the ToR and be involved during the inception phase.
- Visit one or more case study countries during the ToR or inception phase, where relevant. This helps to gain a better understanding of the context and involve target groups at an early stage. Local researchers can also carry out these visits.



Example: For an evaluation of integrated water resources management, IOB consulted country experts, stakeholders, and other relevant actors. IOB also visited one of the countries where water programmes were being implemented while drafting the ToR. This helped ensure that the evaluation better addressed stakeholders' information needs. Based on their input, aspects such as participation were more firmly embedded in the evaluation design. The evaluation team also gained a better understanding of the context in which the evaluation was conducted.

2. Commissioning and managing evaluations

Ensure that the principles of responsive evaluation are applied to commissioned evaluations.



- Take responsiveness into account when assessing proposals by incorporating it into the scoring criteria, or explain why an exception should be made.

Example: When scoring evaluation proposals, consider whether the proposed approach includes participatory research methods, allocates time to validate findings with target groups and external stakeholders, and plans to present the evaluation in an accessible format for those involved. In other words, to what extent do the proposals address the considerations outlined in this document?

- Support the evaluation team in applying the principles of responsive evaluation throughout the evaluation process

3. Conducting evaluations

Make use of context-specific knowledge during the data collection and analysis.

- Reflect on power dynamics that may influence a policy intervention or programme in the evaluation report. These may include current or historical power dynamics at the local, national, or global level, insofar as they shape the relationships, dependencies, and experiences of those involved today.
- Involve researchers from the case study countries in data collection wherever possible.

Example: For an evaluation of the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) policy, IOB worked with a local researcher in both case study countries. Their in-depth knowledge of the local context, policies, and relevant policy developments was highly valuable in determining what data to collect and how to interpret it. In addition, their ability to speak several local languages helped the team reach and engage with target groups. Finally, they were able to draw on their local networks to coordinate and plan field visits and provide the team with advice on cultural considerations.

4. Writing the report and validation

Ensure that local knowledge and expertise are reflected in evaluation reports and that the language and level of the report are accessible to the target groups.

- Involve researchers from the case study countries in the writing process wherever possible.
- Discuss and validate evaluation findings with representatives of the target groups and/or other stakeholders from the case study countries.

Example: When organising validation sessions for external stakeholders, consider the language in which the sessions are facilitated. For example, for an evaluation of the Prospects programme, IOB held validation sessions for local stakeholders in Jordan in Arabic. The sessions were facilitated by local researchers who had been involved in the evaluation. This helped ensure that participants could express themselves in their own language and that people who did not speak English were not excluded.

- Consult target groups and implementers when developing recommendations, where relevant. Ensure that there is room for critical recommendations, provided they are grounded in the evaluation findings.
- Where appropriate, include reflections from actors in the countries covered by the evaluation on the report's findings. These reflections could also incorporate recommendations put forward by external stakeholders.

5. Communication and outreach

Ensure that outreach is not focused solely on policymakers, but also informs other stakeholders and people involved, giving them the opportunity to make use of the evaluation.

- Develop accessible versions of the evaluation report for target groups in the countries covered by the evaluation.

Example: To make an evaluation report more accessible to target groups, consider using translations, visualisations of the findings, or videos. Ideally, these materials should be developed in consultation with researchers or experts from the case study countries.

- Share the evaluation findings, including critical reflections, with stakeholders in the countries where fieldwork was conducted or with whom it was carried out. These may include government institutions, research and knowledge institutions, civil society organisations, businesses, and communities.

Reach out to IOB
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