

► **Guidance Note 2.5:
Impact evaluation**► **Date:** June 2020, v. 3 (v.1 - 2013)This guidance note is part of Pillar 2 ► *Types of evaluation***CONTENTS (CLICK TO NAVIGATE)**

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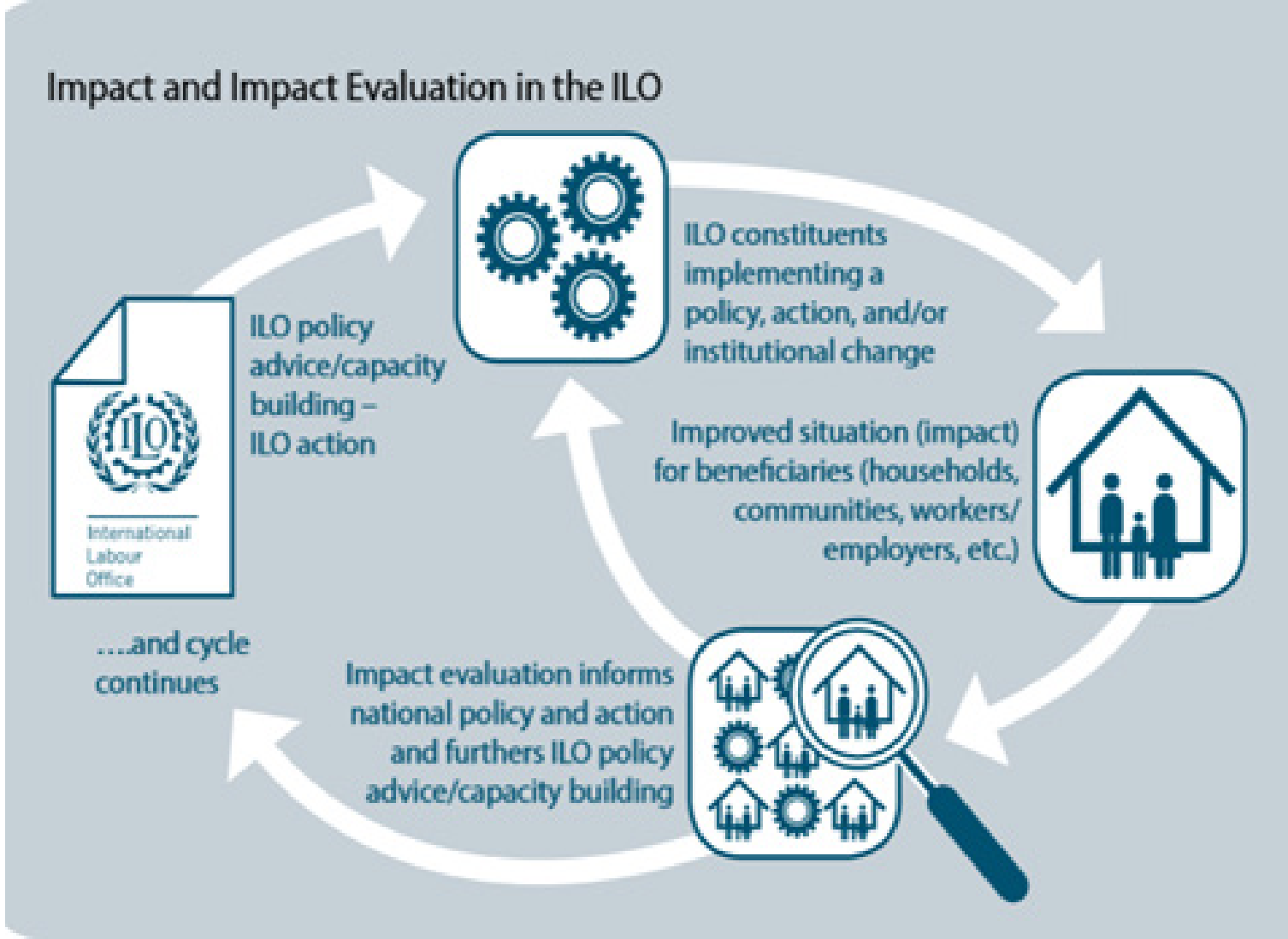
This guidance note should be used in conjunction with
✓ [Checklist 2.1 Impact Evaluation Planning](#)

*This guidance note is a living document and has not been professionally edited.
Right-click on hyperlinks and select 'Open in new tab' to access, if viewing in browser.*

► 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guidance note is to promote the use and credibility of impact evaluations being carried out by ILO and its partners. It clarifies what the meaning of ‘impact’ is in this context and what impact evaluations are, gives information on how they can contribute to achieving ILO’s objectives, where responsibility for them lies within the ILO, identifies key points to know about when using them, and points out where further assistance and support can be found. It will be useful for those planning, commissioning and managing impact evaluations, within ILO and its national partners. The starting place in the ILO for any impact evaluation is purpose of the evaluation and *the types of questions that need answering* and what evaluative approach is most appropriate. In reality, impact evaluation will often not be the most suitable approach to the questions that need answering.

The ILO carries out impact evaluations in order to build knowledge that informs policy and programme decisions and optimises future interventions. Impact evaluations identify the level of impact and explain how this has happened and the reasons why (or why not) the impact has been achieved. Impact in this context is understood as higher-level effects of interventions/policies on people’s well-being, human rights, gender equality, and the environment. An increasing number of impact evaluations have been carried out in response to support from the ILO Governing Body in addition to the demands and expectations of partners.



EVAL developed a guidance note and checklist on impact evaluation in 2013 and in 2014 carried out a study to take stock of the impact evaluations, which had been conducted in the ILO. The study highlighted diversity in the approaches taken to impact evaluation and informed a chapter on impact evaluation in the 2013-2014 Annual Evaluation Report. The Governing Body mandated EVAL to develop a strategy to support future impact evaluation work conducted in the ILO. Specifically, in November 2014 the ILO’s Governing Body made the following statement:

There is a need for office-wide impact and ex-post evaluation standards that provide sound methodological approaches. EVAL needs to work with the technical departments to ensure that they use the Office’s guidance, established definitions, and tools, in addition to conducting evaluability assessments to ensure quality and to justify investments.

There is a growing demand among ILO constituents and international partners for more credible assessment of the impact of ILO programmes and projects and the 2018 International Labour Conference resolution on effective development cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals reiterated the call for better use of results-based management tools and evaluations, including impact evaluations, to demonstrate what works, and to enhance the visibility of the Decent Work Agenda and its contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The ILO Evaluation Policy (2017) promotes the use of impact evaluations to support organisational learning and for knowledge building on effective policy interventions. This guidance note is part of the ongoing work by EVAL to provide the required support and oversight to the technical departments to enable them to carry out quality impact evaluations.

The responsibility to identify and manage impact evaluations in ILO is with the departments, regions, programmes and projects. National partners may also commission impact evaluations. There is therefore a need to support capacity development in this area across the organisation, and to provide specific technical support when required.

In 2016, EVAL launched an extensive consultation process (concept mapping exercise) within ILO to identify views of staff on the current status of impact evaluation within ILO and how its value might be enhanced¹. This guidance note draws on the findings of those consultations and sets out how the ILO will further operationalise the use of impact evaluations in order to contribute to its goals. The guidance note also gives information on the role of EVAL, promoting impact evaluations through guidance, technical review and quality appraisal of completed evaluations.

1. Further Defining, Developing and Applying Impact Evaluation for the ILO: Group Concept Mapping. Summary Report. Prepared for International Labour Office by Concept Systems, Incorporated. April 2016. Unpublished. Available from EVAL

► 2. WHERE DOES IMPACT EVALUATION CURRENTLY FIT WITHIN THE ILO

2.1 ILO POLICY ON IMPACT EVALUATION

The overall policy on evaluation is clearly presented in the [ILO Evaluation Policy \(2017\)](#) and advice on how this is to be implemented is provided in the [ILO Policy Guidelines for Evaluation: Principles, rationale, planning and managing for evaluations \(4th edition 2020\)](#). The policy guidelines document is intended to provide a complete package of guidance for ILO staff, who are tasked with planning, managing, overseeing and/or following up on an evaluation’s recommendations and are updated on a regular basis. This guidance note aims to promote and support impact evaluations by ILO and its partners.

The aim of evaluation in the ILO is to support improvements in projects, programmes, policies, and to promote accountability and learning. Impact evaluations are one of six different types of evaluation that ILO carry out. They are classified as decentralized evaluations, since their direct management and resourcing are primarily the responsibility of departments and regions, with EVAL providing support and oversight if they intend to be classified as independent. The key characteristics of impact evaluations are presented as:

Type of evaluation	Main purpose	Responsibility	Timing
Impact evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Assess effects and impact of specific policy and programme interventions on beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Technical programmes and regions to resourceEVAL to support and oversee qualityTechnical departments, other technical groups and regions to plan and manage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Based on work plans of impact evaluations and as part of technical programme implementation

2.2 PURPOSE OF IMPACT EVALUATIONS IN THE ILO

Impact evaluations in the ILO are primarily for knowledge building on effective policy interventions. They provide credible evidence and impact information on the outcomes of interventions. This leads to learning by ILO and other development partners and should be able to guide improved policy and implementation decisions in the future. Decisions linked to replication and expansion of policies/interventions in particular need evidence of how smaller scale (pilot) initiatives have performed, and the feasibility of the results achieved holding true for a larger population.

Governments, donors and private non-governmental organizations are all accountable for optimising the effectiveness of resource use. ILO is responsible for the delivery of its annual programme. In addition to the regular performance evaluations undertaken, the results of impact evaluations can show that, in the area under assessment, that ILO’s actions have (or have not) led to the expected outcomes.

Impact evaluations are viewed by stakeholders, both within ILO and externally, as a way of producing credible evidence that meets learning needs. ILO puts a strong emphasis on organisational learning in all of its evaluation activities. Impact

evaluations can provide information on the achievement of results in terms of outcomes and goals, including the impact of policy-level changes.

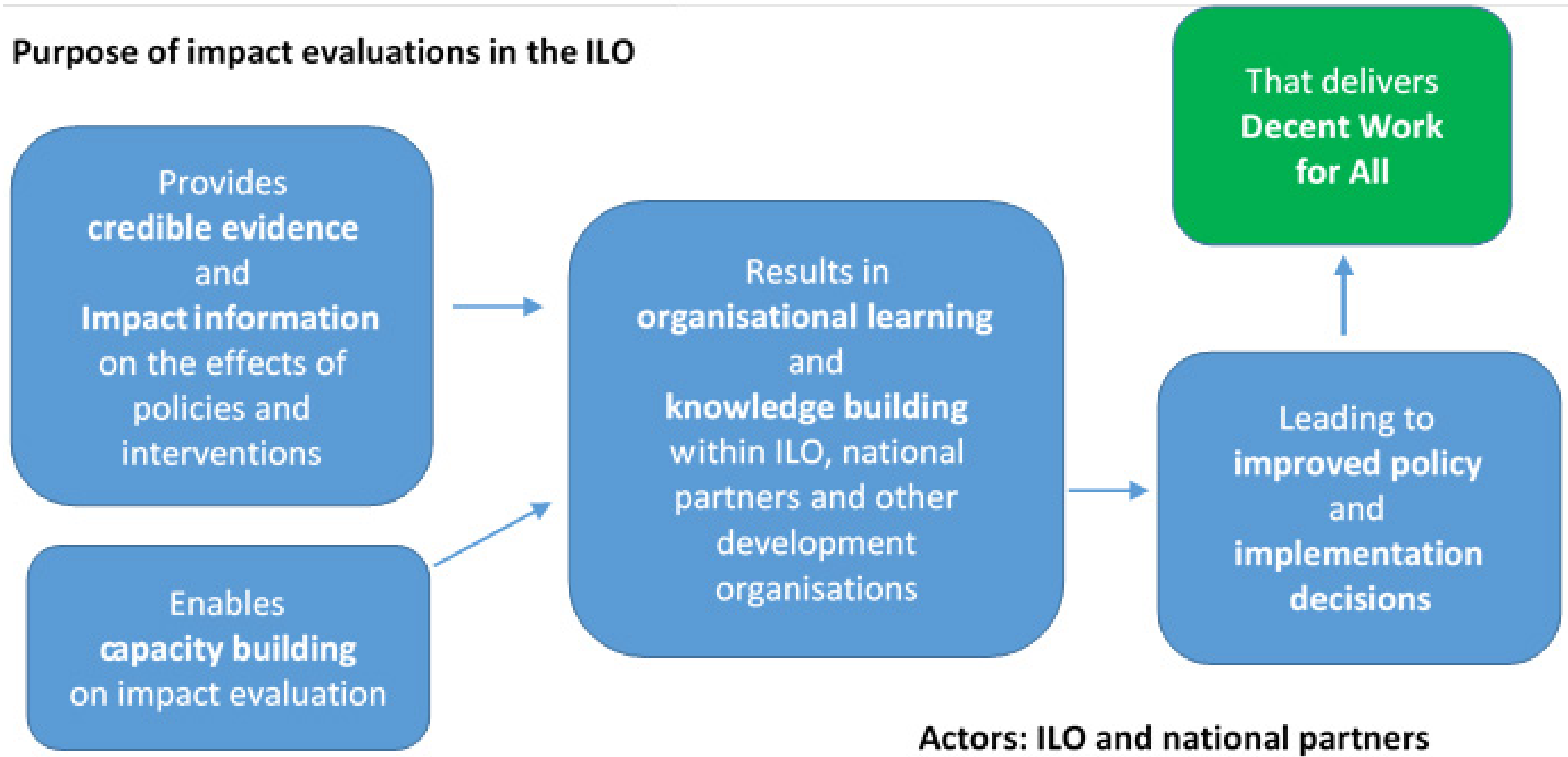
Impact evaluations in ILO are expected to look at high-level outcomes in the ILO results framework. They will seek to provide credible evidence that links interventions with ILO policy-level outcomes and their associated indicators. Section 4.3 shows how impact evaluation objectives can be integrated with the ILO results-based framework.

Impact evaluation uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to not only demonstrate the impact or change, but also the “how” and “why.” This enables ILO to provide evidence about the impact of policy changes, the contribution of ILO, and the important work done by other partners. Demonstrating such impact is part of validating the development effectiveness of ILO’s work, its contribution to achieving the Decent Work Agenda and towards the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets.

Impact evaluation is not generally being used to meet accountability needs at the project level, but rather it is expected to contribute to overall organisational accountability by demonstrating that ILO is advocating for or supporting policies and interventions that are relevant and feasible. An impact evaluation may complement a programme performance evaluation, but it does not replace one – the evaluation questions will be significantly different.

Impact evaluations carried out in collaboration with national partners provides an opportunity to strengthen national level capacity to commission such work themselves.

The purpose of impact evaluations in the ILO is summarised in the diagram below.



As the ILO policy guidelines for evaluation show, different types of evaluation are used in different circumstances and to answer different questions. Impact evaluation is one of the methods available to gather information on intervention strategies and only a selected number of interventions will be subject to impact evaluation. The factors which will determine if an impact evaluation is the correct choice include; the purpose of the evaluation, the question(s) to be asked, the timing, the budget and the availability of expertise.

An impact evaluation may be appropriate when the answer to the evaluation question provides methodologically rigorous evidence to help decide the best way in the future to invest limited resources and whether policies, programmes and interventions should continue, or be ended and resources used elsewhere. An example of such a question is given in the box for a project aiming to address child labour through livelihood and education interventions in Peru²:

Combating Exploitative Rural Child Labour in Peru

The Evaluation Questions on which the study focuses concern whether the livelihoods intervention increases agricultural production, economic diversification, access to markets and household income. On the educational achievements the Evaluation Questions concern whether the MG [multigrade education] intervention reduced school dropouts and improved the academic scores of children. In terms of child labor, the Evaluation Question concerned whether the Semilla intervention reduced the number of hours children spend in agricultural work.

The evaluation also intended to explore the added value of the MG intervention, conditional to the livelihood intervention, in order to determine whether the whole project package has a greater value than each intervention as a stand-alone.

Impact evaluations can provide credible evidence that interventions that have been demonstrated to work in one country are likely to work in others. Theories of change can then be used in subsequent result frameworks with greater confidence.

2.3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The ILO policy guidelines for evaluation state that it is the responsibility of the technical departments and regions to plan, manage and resource impact evaluations. EVAL’s role is to support the delivery of credible, relevant and useful impact evaluations that ILO’s programme departments/units are engaged in, and maintain oversight of the overall quality of impact evaluations produced.

It has been recognised that within ILO, in general, ILO staff have neither the time nor the financial resources required to actually do impact evaluations. The priority is for ILO,

2. [Impact Evaluation Report on Livelihoods and Multi-Grade interventions of the Project “Combating Exploitative Rural Child Labour in Peru”, ILO, 2017. pages v, vi](#)

within its departments and regions, to ensure that concerned programme staff have the knowledge to identify when it may add value and to be aware of the support available from EVAL. EVAL can provide guidance on how to access the required expertise to carry out the detailed planning and implementation of impact evaluations.

Section 6 of this guidance note provides more details on the support services available from EVAL.

► **3. THE MEANING OF IMPACT AND IMPACT EVALUATION IN THE ILO**

3.1 THE MEANING OF IMPACT

The UN Evaluation Group’s (UNEG) guidance on impact evaluation³ notes that the majority of UN agencies have adopted the DAC definition of impact and apply it to impact evaluation. The DAC updated their definition of impact in December 2019⁴ and it is understood that the ILO evaluation policy will be revised in line with this in 2021. The revised DAC definition is used in these guidelines. The revised definition and explanatory note are as follows;

“The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.”

The definition and explanatory note focus on ‘higher-level effects’, recognising that more immediate effects (outcomes) have played some part in the generation of “higher-level effects” (impacts).

This definition is deliberately broad, to accommodate differing

Note: Impact addresses the ultimate significance and potentially transformative effects of the intervention. It seeks to identify social, environmental and economic effects of the intervention that are longer term or broader in scope than those already captured under the effectiveness criterion. Beyond the immediate results, this criterion seeks to capture the indirect, secondary and potential consequences of the intervention. It does so by examining the holistic and enduring changes in systems or norms, and potential effects on people’s well-being, human rights, gender equality, and the environment.

understanding of what an impact is, and the differing contexts within which the term is used. Experience would suggest that focusing on trying to ensure one consistent understanding of impact within the ILO and with external partners may not be a wise investment of time or energy. It is important to bear in mind that concerns over precise and consistent understanding of the terms impact and impact evaluation are not shared by the vast majority of government policy makers and other stakeholders with whom the ILO works.

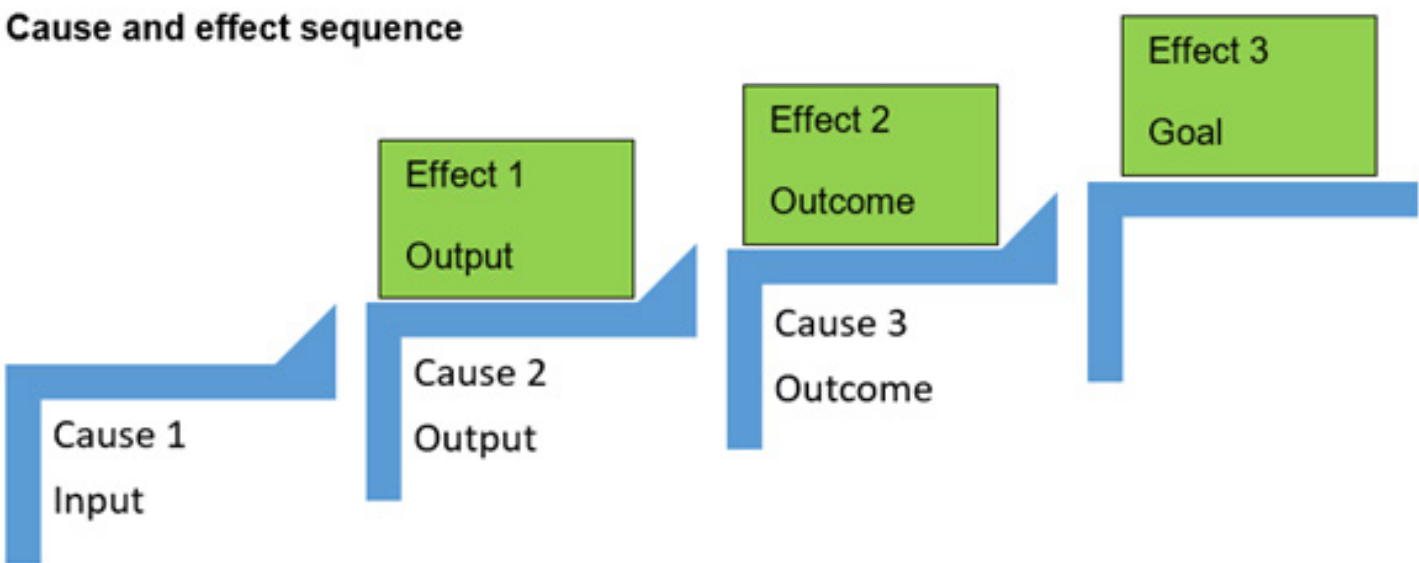
3.2 THE MEANING OF IMPACT EVALUATION

The UNEG Guidance Note on impact evaluation does not explicitly define ‘impact evaluation’. It is expected that the ILO Evaluation Policy will shortly be revised in line with the DAC definition to state:

Impact evaluations aim to assess “The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.”

– and this can be understood as the ILO’s definition of impact evaluation.

A fundamental element of impact evaluation is establishing cause and effect chains to show if an intervention has worked and, if so, how. It aims to determine the level of attribution that can be given to specific factors – including policies, programmes or other interventions, for observed and measured changes. It aims to answer the fundamental question of how cause C influences effect E. There is usually a sequence of ‘cause and effect’ mechanisms, so effect 1 becomes cause 2 resulting in effect 2 and so on. This can also be expressed as the sequence; input, output, outcome, goal. This is illustrated below.



3. [Impact Evaluation Report on Livelihoods and Multi-Grade interventions of the Project “Combating Exploitative Rural Child Labour in Peru”, ILO, 2017. pages v, vi](#)
4. <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

One of the toughest challenges related to establishing this causal impact is to distinguish between what was a direct result of a particular factor and what would have happened had this factor not existed. To address this, impact evaluations typically establish a means by which to compare these two situations either through a counterfactual or comparison group. The World Food Programme defines the counterfactual as estimating what would have happened in the absence of the intervention – or, establishing that outcomes for the beneficiaries would not be present without the intervention⁵. A complementary or alternative approach is to use a theory of change approach, mapping the anticipated causes and effects, and testing those links.

Different impact evaluation designs provide varying approaches to establishing how and to what extent, interventions have caused anticipated and/or unanticipated effects. A “mixed method” approach utilizing quantitative, qualitative, participatory and blended (e.g. quantifying qualitative data) approaches is now widely accepted as advisable to address the types of interventions that are now predominant in international development⁶.

To illustrate this, we can look as an example at the ILO Programme and Budget of 2020-21 (P&B)⁷. The P&B identifies result indicators at the output, outcome and goal levels, which will be used to measure progress throughout the chain of results to which the ILO intends to contribute. An impact evaluation may be able to use these same indicators, linking the evaluation closely to the ILO results framework, but it will also

link these result indicators with specific interventions, providing credible information that demonstrates a plausible link between the intervention and the change in the results. This information may be quantitative or qualitative (often a combination) and as well as identifying the link between input and output, will also provide information on the mechanism, the ‘how’ and the ‘why’.

Impact evaluation of ILO normative work needs to go beyond establishing institutional impact, it needs to identify subsequent changes in people’s lives. The ILO long-term (goal) impact indicators are expressed in such terms, for example; *Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities*⁸. This increases the complexity of impact evaluations, since there will be an increasing number and types of factors influencing observed impact the further up the results chain one looks for it.

► 4. USE OF IMPACT EVALUATION IN ILO

4.1 QUESTIONS THAT IMPACT EVALUATIONS CAN ADDRESS

Impact evaluation is not the only means of generating evidence of causal links between intervention or treatment and effect. In fact, a range of evaluation methods may be more practical, useful, less costly and less time-consuming. Therefore, the decision to conduct an impact evaluation as opposed to a less complex evaluation should be based on careful consideration of all relevant factors.

In order to ensure that an impact evaluation is appropriate, it is essential that the starting place is a question that needs answering – not an impact evaluation that needs to be done. The question can then be reviewed and assessed at two levels:

- i. Is this a question that it is appropriate to try and answer with an impact evaluation? Impact evaluations are best suited to where the objective is to identify if certain interventions are an effective way of achieving some specified results, and what the mechanism in achieving (or not achieving) these results is. Usually these questions are similar to the following:

Question	Similar questions often raised in impact evaluations
1. What works and what does not work?	1.1 To what extent can a specific impact be attributed to an intervention or policy? 1.2 Did the intervention or policy actually make a difference?
2. Under what circumstances does something work?	2.1 How has the intervention or policy made a difference? 2.2 Will the intervention or policy work elsewhere?

5. [WFP Impact Evaluation Strategy: 2019-2026. WFP Office of Evaluation 2019, page 8.](#)
6. [Impact Evaluation in UN Agency Evaluation Systems: Guidance on Selection, Planning and Management; UNEG, Guidance Document, August 2013](#)
7. [Programme and Budget for 2020–21: Programme of work and results framework. ILO 2019.](#)
8. [Programme and Budget for 2020–21: Programme of work and results framework. ILO 2019, page 70.](#)

If the issue to be assessed is a different evaluative question, then other evaluation approaches can be considered. In many cases, these are carried out as a matter of good practice, and therefore can also complement and technically feed into an impact evaluation. [The ILO Policy Guidelines for Evaluation \(2020\)](#) gives a good introduction to the range of evaluation methods that ILO use, and the main purpose of each.

- ii. If the issue/question is similar to the above, it is then necessary to consider what impact evaluation methodology should be used to assess this question. Different methodologies should be used for different types of question and different contexts. Guidance on this is provided in section 5.3 on methodological approaches.

4.2 THE USERS OF IMPACT EVALUATION RESULTS

Impact evaluations in ILO are able to provide evidence that can be used to build knowledge that will assist two main stakeholder groups:

- i. The members of the ILO Governing Body and others in ILO who plan development interventions and oversee performance. Impact evaluations can be used to provide supporting evidence to help understand what changes at policy outcome level reported in the ILO’s own programme and budget results framework actually imply, and confidence that ILO has made a significant contribution to those changes.

Another benefit of impact evaluations is that they can provide credible evidence that interventions advocated and implemented in one country, where evidence from impact

evaluations demonstrate that they have worked, are likely to have also worked in other countries where implemented, despite differences in the contexts of the countries.

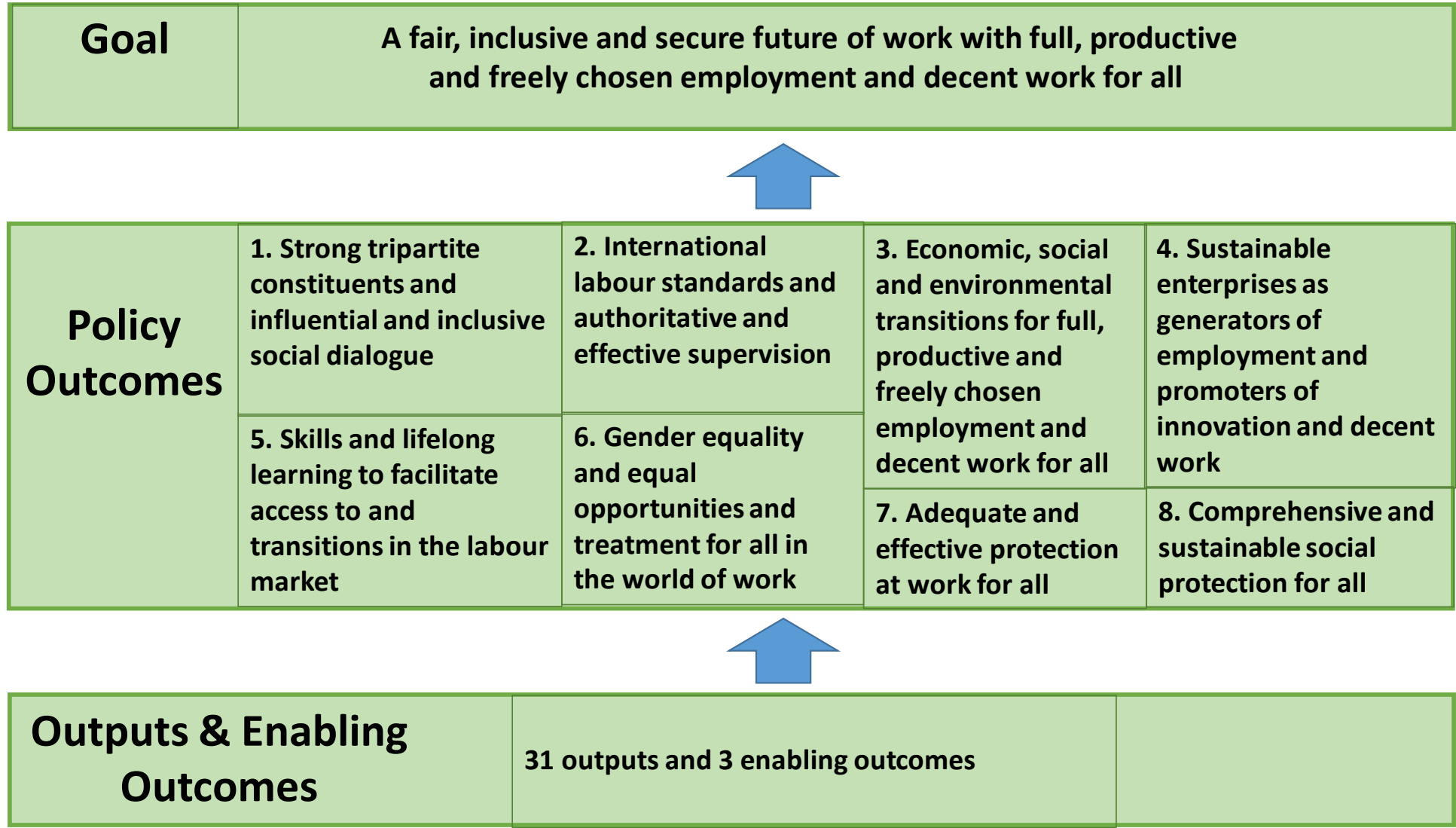
- ii. Those responsible for policy formulation and implementation in member states. Providing credible evidence to support the needs of ILO’s constituents and other stakeholders in their planning and programming is a recurring theme in ILO’s programme.

Donors may require that an impact evaluation should be carried out as part of an externally-funded project, but it is likely that the questions to be addressed would be the same as those posed by the above two groups.

4.3 MEASURING IMPACT AT DIFFERENT LEVELS IN THE ILO RESULTS FRAMEWORK

Results frameworks feature outcomes at different levels and evaluations can assess the achievement of the expected outcomes at these different levels. Impact evaluations in ILO are expected to look at high-level outcomes in the results framework. Looking at the ILO Programme and Budget (P&B) results framework, an impact evaluation could evaluate impacts at the policy outcomes level or at the goal level. These outcomes are presented in the diagram below for the 2020-21 P&B.

The ILO corporate results framework (2020-21)



Indicators at the output level often measure immediate results in terms of the capacity of the ILO’s constituents to make improvements in the policy, normative and institutional frameworks at the country level. Indicators at the outcome and goal levels measure how effective these policies and frameworks are at delivering decent work for all, with the long-term impact indicators measuring levels of poverty and employment.

There are good opportunities to link the indicators used in the ILO results framework with those measured in impact evaluations.

The ILO has identified that there is currently a lack of recognised outcome and impact indicators that can fully capture expected changes in relation to results of work promoting social dialogue and tripartism. Impact evaluations of these interventions will have similar challenges.

The ILO Evaluation Office maintains an inventory of completed, ongoing and planned impact evaluations and studies based on information from regions, country offices and technical departments and EVAL will use the inventory to identify and present examples of typical impact evaluations and studies done in ILO.

► **5. KEY CONSIDERATION WHEN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING AN IMPACT EVALUATION**

5.1 DEMAND AND OWNERSHIP

In the context of ILO, an impact evaluation should only be carried out if there is a clearly identified demand to measure and understand the expected impacts that have been produced and it is clear how the evaluation’s results will be used and useful for all of the stakeholders involved in the development

activity; the participants, the implementers and the policy makers (ILO and national partners).

The expectations behind the demand need to be realistic – are the questions of interest ones that can be answered, or are best answered, through an impact evaluation. Section 4.1 clearly identifies the kinds of questions that an impact evaluation can answer. If the question or issue to be assessed is a different evaluative question, then other evaluation approaches need to be used.

It is also important that there is strong organisational support for the impact evaluation – implementation managers are usually resistant to additional requirements for monitoring and surveys, and to an external ‘evaluator’ looking in detail at the project intervention. Impact evaluations should not be considered as an ‘add on’ to an existing programme.

Within ILO, demand for impact evaluations is a combination of a generic demand for greater accountability from the Governing Body, and initiatives from the Departments when they want to learn more about specific areas of intervention and their results in order to address identified knowledge gaps.

5.2 OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Timing

The best time to plan an impact evaluation is when a project or programme is being developed. The requirements for an effective impact evaluation can then be integrated into the project, including a clear theory of change that explains how the inputs will lead to the expected results. Impact evaluations can then be considered, planned, designed and implemented from the outset and not as an afterthought.

Most impact evaluation methodologies need to be established before implementation has started. There needs to be controlled targeting or phasing of interventions (participants will need to be assigned to different treatment groups); and robust baselines, monitoring systems and end line assessments prepared. Planning for impact evaluations at the time that the programme is being developed will strengthen the evaluability of impact evaluations leading to enhanced quality and credibility of the results.

The duration of the impact evaluation needs to fit with the timing of the expected impact. The theory of change should include a time-scale for the various cause and effect linkages. The final measurement of the impact evaluation should be carried out no earlier than the latest causal link that is being tested/questioned in the study.

Tracing studies are carried out sometime after interventions have been completed in order to identify longer term effects of an intervention.

Financing

Consultations within ILO emphasised the need to identify sources of additional funding for impact evaluations⁹. These funds could come from the same source of funding at that for the intervention, or it may come for a separate organisation with a specific focus on learning, research and providing evidence of development effectiveness.

9. Further Defining, Developing and Applying Impact Evaluation for the ILO: Group Concept Mapping. Summary Report. Prepared for International Labour Office by Concept Systems, Incorporated. April 2016. Unpublished. Available from EVAL6.

Before committing to an impact evaluation, departments should ensure that there are adequate resources to both implement the project/policy as envisaged and also undertake a sufficiently comprehensive and rigorous impact evaluation, including the availability of existing, good quality data and additional time and money to collect more.

In 2011 the Australian Agency for International Development¹⁰ (AusAID) estimated that the average 3ie-funded impact evaluation cost USD 250,000, and in 2012 the Independent Evaluation Group¹¹ (IEG) reported that the average World Bank impact evaluation costs USD 500,000. Currently, within ILO, impact evaluations have usually cost in excess of USD 150,000¹² but in certain contexts there may be the possibility to reduce costs if there is the possibility to piggy back indicators of interest to ILO on an existing planned impact evaluation. However, this requires that the counterpart is willing to agree to this and also that ILO identifies the opportunity before the overall design is completed.

Capacity and expertise

The responsibility to plan, manage and resource impact evaluations in ILO is with the technical departments and regions. Relevant capacity to do this also needs to be decentralised and available in these departments.

It is unlikely that ILO departments will have the necessary expertise and/or time to carry out the detailed planning, surveying and statistical analysis that is required for most impact evaluations. It is therefore important to identify and involve credible, qualified external partners as soon as possible in the process of designing an impact evaluation. EVAL is able to provide assistance with identifying appropriate organisations or consultants.

The needs of stakeholders: Evaluation questions and methods

- Different people involved – for example government stakeholders, donors, those responsible for implementation and intended beneficiaries – may find different aspects of the impact evaluation interesting and useful. These differences need to be understood and reconciled before finalising the evaluation questions.
- Donors contributing extra-budgetary funding for an impact evaluation may specify to some degree the methods to be used, reflecting their need for methods that are seen as credible for meeting accountability within their own organisation.
- If the purpose of the evaluation is to influence other stakeholders, such as country level policy makers or provide information that can better inform advocacy, then the methods will need to be accepted as credible for those stakeholders. Consider what is the best way to ensure that the evaluation results will influence decision-making?
- • Many of the experts advising on evaluation design are academics or consultants with experience in particular evaluation methods. The interests of academics, and the level of academic rigor, may not align totally with those of ILO and in-country stakeholders.

Ensuring quality and credibility

Quality standards are specific to methods used. ILO practice has been that quality assurance is done through peer review by other experts. This reflects more general practice in impact evaluation, as it is normally the only affordable option. In practice there is considerable evidence that suggests that peer reviews are not always an effective way of ensuring quality and identifying mistakes. Rigorous quality assurance would actually require a second analyst to replicate the analysis based on the data used to see whether the same results are produced. It is important to consider ex-ante who will fulfil this role and whether it has cost implications.

5.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

The broad types of questions where impact evaluation can provide useful and credible evidence are identified in section 4.1. If the study fits within these criteria, with the purpose of identifying if certain interventions are an effective way of achieving the expected results, and to determine what the mechanisms are in achieving those results is, then it is necessary to consider what impact evaluation methodology is best suited.

An important contextual issue is the needs of the other stakeholders involved. Some key points on how their needs may affect the evaluation questions and the methods are presented in the box.

10. AusAID, 2011. 3ie and the funding of impact evaluations: a discussion paper for 3ie’s members.
11. IEG 2012. World Bank Group impact evaluations: relevance and effectiveness, Independent Evaluation Group.
12. http://www.ilo.org/eval/Evaluationguidance/WCMS_165974/lang--en/index.htm

Annex 1 identifies which types of methods are likely to be most suitable for answering each of the four key questions which can be addressed by an impact evaluation – as identified in section 4.1. The method will vary depending on the main questions to be answered by the evaluation, on the context and on the resources available. The annex identifies the variety of methods that can be used and provides assistance in considering which methods might be most appropriate in relation to the context and the information needs. It is likely that additional advice and expertise will be required in order to finally select the methodology and to follow through with the implementation of an impact evaluation.

5.4 LINKAGE WITH M&E

It is important to ensure that there is an effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system in place to measure the inputs and outputs of the intervention. In order to demonstrate a link between interventions and impacts, it is just as important to carefully measure the inputs as well as the results. This means that the interventions need to be delivered as described and planned, and that careful monitoring of the quantity and quality of these inputs is carried out. This level of monitoring of inputs is likely to be more rigorous than that required for usual project monitoring.

If the impact evaluation shows that the intervention or policy has not worked, there are two explanations. First, the intervention (or policy) is truly ineffective or it may have failed because it was not implemented properly. Except under highly controlled conditions, implementers almost always implement an intervention (or policy) differently to the way it was initially planned, so you cannot assume that what has happened was what was planned.

5.5 DISSEMINATION AND USE

From the beginning there should be a clear idea of how the results will be used and who the expected users are. This should include some initial ideas of how this will be communicated to the concerned stakeholders and is likely to include both technical presentations and more easily accessible summaries.

5.6 VALUABILITY CHECK

One way of ensuring that the impact evaluation has been prepared sufficiently is to carry out an evaluability assessment before the impact evaluation commences and preferably before the intervention or policy being assessed has started. A checklist of points to review is in annex 2.

► 6. EVAL SUPPORT TO IMPACT EVALUATION IN ILO

EVAL has developed a number of resources in order to support ILO departments and partners in their use of impact evaluations. This support includes guidance, technical review and quality appraisal in order to meet UNEG standards and to achieve good quality impact evaluations.

6.1 IMPACT EVALUATION REVIEW FACILITY

EVAL has developed an Impact Evaluation Review Facility (IERF) to offer support to those in the ILO who are considering, beginning or are in the process of implementing impact evaluations. The IERF is able to provide feedback, ideas and suggestions for proposed and ongoing work on impact evaluation. It is also able to suggest relevant consultants, further technical support and relevant technical resources.



Guidance:

In addition to the present guidance note, EVAL has developed a checklist for evaluation focal points and EVAL officials to appraise the quality of impact evaluations proposals and plan. It may also be useful as a guidance tool for impact evaluation designers and those approving design¹³.

13. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_mas/---eval/documents/publication/wcms_181283.pdf

Support is available in response to differing needs at different stages of an impact evaluation. There is a briefing note on the operation of the IERF¹⁴. The main services available are:

- Help desk within EVAL. Requests for assistance should first be sent to EVAL_IMPACT@ilo.org. The help desk will review the request, looking to ensure that the information provided in the request is thorough and complete enough for a review. The facility will return suggestions and feedback, including possible requests for further information. The help desk is set up to provide assistance in situations such as:
 - You are unsure whether an impact evaluation makes sense in your context.
 - You have a question that you would like to answer with an impact evaluation, but you are not sure what methodology is best suited to answering that question.
 - You have a general idea of what you would like your impact evaluation to look like, but you need feedback on your ideas and next steps.
 - You have a (fairly) complete plan for your impact evaluation, and you would like an expert to review it for issues before you implement.
 - You are ready to implement and you are working on staffing and training personnel, and you would like input on your staffing and training plan.
 - You have a tentative plan for managing data quality, and you want an expert to provide input to strengthen it.
 - You have been collecting data for your impact evaluation, and you want suggestions to address issues you have encountered
 - You have a plan for project monitoring, and you want feedback on any additional features that should be considered.
 - You have conducted preliminary data analysis, and you would like an expert to review it for some level of quality assurance
 - You have drafted an evaluation report, and you would like it reviewed for quality assurance
 - You have a completed report and a plan for dissemination, and you would like suggestions to increase the use and influence of the evaluation.
- Link with technical review consultants. As appropriate, the review requests will be passed along to technical review consultants, who will issue a more detailed response. The consultant's feedback will go through the help desk to ensure quality before reaching the requester.
- Inclusion of completed impact evaluations in the inventory. Once the impact evaluation report is complete, it should be sent to EVAL_IMPACT@ilo.org so it may be added to the new inventory of impact evaluations.

The IERF was established in 2016 and has provided support to a number of impact evaluations.

6.2 EX-POST QUALITY APPRAISALS

EVAL will be carrying out regular appraisals of the ILO's completed impact evaluations. The purpose of this is to learn about the strengths and weaknesses of different impact evaluation designs, the extent to which designs are adhered to in practice, their appropriateness to the context, and how well the evaluation questions are addressed.

14.  [Technical review facility for impact evaluation. Geneva: ILO. \(Internal\), ILO, 2016.](#)

These appraisals will be used to enhance the quality of the ILO's knowledge base and technical support role. The assumption is that building on lessons learned from past experiences will mean that future impact evaluations are better designed and implemented.

6.3 COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

ILO has an informal impact evaluation network: This is an informal group of colleagues involved and interested in impact evaluations who meet on a regular basis. The purposes are to:

- Support the application of impact evaluations in the ILO,
- Share experiences on and from impact evaluations. Presentations and discussions are held concerning planned, ongoing and completed impact evaluations,
- Peer review proposals and reports, functioning as an Institutional Review Board.

6.4 KNOWLEDGE BASE-RELATED SUPPORT

EVAL maintains a number of resources and these can be accessed by contacting EVAL_IMPACT@ilo.org These include:

- An inventory of impact evaluations conducted at the ILO: The inventory allows easier access to institutional knowledge in a variety of intervention areas. The inventory, which can be accessed [here](#) by ILO Officials is organised by methods (evaluation design), type of interventions, thematic areas, intended outcomes of the impact evaluations or study, country coverage, study time-frame, whether it covers ILO implemented intervention or non ILO intervention, institutional context (programme, project, department), responsibility and funding, and source of expertise. The inventory can be a source of reference for the range of impact analysis in ILO and will be regularly updated. The inventory

will also be the basis for the selection of the sample of impact evaluations and studies that will be subject of the ex-post quality appraisal.

- A bibliography of documents and presentations on impact evaluations. A selected list of resources is in annex 3 of this guideline providing quick access for ILO Officials to more detailed instructions on carrying out impact evaluations. This list of resources will be updated regularly through a dedicated [link](#).

6.5 THE VISION FOR FURTHER SUPPORT TO IMPACT EVALUATION IN ILO

EVAL will continue to explore its role in enhancing the organisation's ability to draw on evidence from impact evaluations in order to report credible evidence on its corporate performance and contribution. The Community of Practice on impact evaluation will be further strengthened with a particular focus on strengthening the ability of staff to identify credible and reliable expertise to support the design and implementation of individual impact evaluations and broaden their awareness of the range of methods available under the umbrella of impact evaluations.

ANNEX I: EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND APPROPRIATE IMPACT EVALUATION METHODS

What type of evaluation question? (This refers to the types of questions that IEs can answer. See section 4.1 for more information)	Related evaluation questions	What methodology is most appropriate?	Important criteria and other issues	Useful for answering the question on whether something works in this place at this time (internal validity) or whether something might work elsewhere or at another time (external validity)
1. What works and what does not work? 1.1 To what extent can a specific impact be attributed to an intervention or policy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What is the extent of the perceived impact?What are other causal or mitigating factors?How much of the impact can be attributed to the intervention?What would have happened without the intervention?	<p>Experimental methods: The most common form is the randomised control trial (RCT). A single experimental evaluation is very credible for assessing whether something (a single factor) or which particular combination of factors works in terms of a positive impact.</p> <p>Alternative/additional methodologies are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Quasi experimental methods.Statistical studies.The addition of Case-based designs (eg Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)) can add qualitative information.	<p>Criteria/issues for Experimental methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Requires controlling the environment and the intervention, so shouldn't be used to directly assert that just because the trial result finds that a treatment or combination of treatments is effective under experimental conditions, it will be effective when implemented as a policy.Requires sufficient numbers of participants/households for statistical analysis.Poor in terms of identifying unintended impacts, since these aren't measured.When used to support policy development, these methods are best combined with an assessment of the cost implications, since to be a viable policy option, something needs to both work and be affordable.	<p>Experimental methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Useful for answering the question on whether something works in this place at this time (internal validity).Tells one little about whether you will get the same effect in a different context or at a different time (external validity).

What type of evaluation question? (This refers to the types of questions that IEs can answer. See section 4.1 for more information)	Related evaluation questions	What methodology is most appropriate?	Important criteria and other issues	Useful for answering the question on whether something works in this place at this time (internal validity) or whether something might work elsewhere or at another time (external validity)
1. What works and what does not work? 1.2 Did the intervention or policy actually make a difference?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">What causes are necessary or sufficient for the effect?Was the intervention needed to produce the effect?Would these impacts have happened anyhow?	<p>Quasi-experimental methods provide strong evidence that an intervention or policy worked or did not.</p> <p>Alternative/additional methodologies are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Experimental methodsTheory-based evaluation (eg contribution analysis)The addition of ‘Case’ based methods	<p>Criteria/issues for Quasi-experimental methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Requires comparable cases where a common set of causes are present. Interventions are just one part of a causal package.Since quasi-experimental methods are applied to either a project or policy that has been implemented, it actually provides stronger evidence than an experimental trial, since it tests results in a context when implementation is closer to the real-world conditions.Poor in terms of identifying unintended impacts, since these aren’t measured.	<p>Quasi-experimental methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Useful for answering the question of whether something worked in this place at this time (internal validity) although less robust than experimental methods as it does not allow for true randomisation.Shares same weaknesses with experimental trials that a single quasi-experimental evaluation tells one little about whether the intervention will work elsewhere or at a different time (external validity).

What type of evaluation question? (This refers to the types of questions that IEs can answer. See section 4.1 for more information)	Related evaluation questions	What methodology is most appropriate?	Important criteria and other issues	Useful for answering the question on whether something works in this place at this time (internal validity) or whether something might work elsewhere or at another time (external validity)
2. Under what circumstances does something work? 2.1 How has the intervention or policy made a difference?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How and why have the impacts come about? What causal factors have resulted in the observed impacts? Has the intervention resulted in any unintended impacts? For whom has the intervention made a difference? 	Theory based methods <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represents the causal process through which the interventions make a difference. When used in combination of quasi-experimental and theory-based methods (but one can combine theory and RCT methods), combines the strengths of experimental/quasi-experimental methods and covers the weaknesses. 	Criteria/issues for Theory-based methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dependent on a clear theory of change. The evaluation design should incorporate analysis of the causal chain from inputs to impacts. Allows assessment of unintended impacts. 	Theory-based methods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides the opportunity to identify key contextual factors that need to be in place and hence provides more evidence for considering whether the intervention might work in a different place or conditions (external validity). Policy relevance is enhanced as the study can address questions of why - or why not - an intervention had the intended impact, not just whether it did
2. Under what circumstances does something work? 2.2 Will the intervention or policy work elsewhere?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can this 'pilot' be transferred elsewhere and scaled up? Is the intervention sustainable? What generalizable lessons have we learned about impact? 	Synthesis studies (normally either some form of comparative case studies or systematic reviews). Alternative/additional methodologies are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participatory approaches Natural experiments 	Criteria/issues for Synthesis studies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very useful for showing that an agency such as ILO can provide relevant advice and support that is likely to work in the specific context of individual member states. 	Synthesis studies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong evidence for learning about what works where. The strongest methods for addressing external validity.


ANNEX II: CHECKLIST FOR EVALUABILITY CHECK

- i. Have the evaluation questions been presented clearly?
- ii. Are the questions appropriate for an impact evaluation to assess?
- iii. Is there adequate demand and ownership of the impact evaluation?
- iv. Are partners who control access and services to participants, and non-participants (control group members) in agreement?
- v. Is the intervention defined clearly enough with a logical presentation of how the expected results will be achieved from the planned inputs (a theory of change with a time-line)?
- vi. Is it anticipated that the expected results will be measurable within the time-frame of the impact evaluation (using the time-line of the theory of change)?
- vii. Are the objectives of the intervention clearly defined and are the expected results measurable?
- viii. Is the selected methodology appropriate?
- ix. Will it be possible to carry out the required level of monitoring of the delivery of the planned inputs?
- x. Does the timetable allow for the preparatory work of the impact evaluation before implementation starts?
- xi. Are there adequate human resources (skills and time) to plan and manage the impact evaluation and separately to carry it out?
- xii. Have sufficient financial resources been identified?
- xiii. Is there is a strategy to ensure the required quality and credibility?
- xiv. Is there a clear plan for the dissemination of the results?
- xv. Have risks to the completion of the impact evaluation been identified and assessed?

ANNEX III: KEY RESOURCES


ILO RESOURCES (PLEASE SEE [HERE](#) FOR UPDATED LIST)


 [ILO Evaluation Policy \(2017\)](#)


 [ILO Policy Guidelines for Evaluation: Principles, rationale, planning and managing for evaluations, 4th edition, 2020](#)

Technical review facility for impact evaluation. Geneva: ILO. (Internal), ILO, 2016


 [Impact evaluation in the ILO: Stock-taking of current practice, Think Piece no. 6, Dr Achim Engelhardt, October 2014](#)


 [Guidance Note 19: Adapting evaluation methods to the ILO's normative and tripartite mandate, September 2019](#)

 [Improving Impact Assessment of the Effects of Trade on Employment: Study on Qualitative and Mixed Method Approaches, ILO](#)

 [The Tracer Study Manual: Book 1 Methodology, Book 2 Training manual, Book 3 Model questionnaires, ILO, 2011](#)

GUIDANCE AND OVERVIEW

 [Impact Evaluation in UN Agency Evaluation Systems: Guidance on Selection, Planning and Management; UNEG, Guidance Document, August 2013.](#)

 [WFP Impact Evaluation Strategy: 2019-2026. WFP Office of Evaluation. 2019.](#)

 [NONIE. Impact Evaluations and Development. Nonie Guidance on Impact Evaluation. \(Leeuw, F. and J. Vaessen, J.\) 2009.](#)

 [Using Mixed Methods in Monitoring and Evaluation: Experiences from International Development. Bamberger, Michael; Rao, Vijayendra; Woolcock, Michael. 2010. Policy Research working paper; no. WPS 5245. World Bank.](#)

 [Matching impact evaluation design to the nature of the intervention and the purpose of the evaluation, Patricia Rogers, 2009](#)

MANUALS (SEE ALSO UNDER NETWORKS)


 [Guide on Measuring Decent Jobs for Youth Monitoring, evaluation and learning in labour market programmes. Note 6: A step-by-step guide to impact evaluation, ILO](#)

 [Vocational Training Institutions' Network Skills Development impact evaluation. A practical guide Montevideo: ILO/Cinterfor, 2011.](#)

[Better Evaluation](#)

NETWORKS


The ILO collaborates with several international evaluation networks that also provide guidance on impact evaluation.

The Network of Networks on Impact Evaluation (NONIE) focuses on sharing of methods and learning-by-doing to promote the practice of impact evaluation.  [Impact evaluations and development](#)


The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) is a professional network that brings together the units responsible for evaluation in the UN system including the specialized agencies, funds, programmes and affiliated organizations. UNEG currently has 46 such members.

The Asian Development Bank has a quick reference that provides an overview of methods available for evaluating impacts of development programs, and addresses some common operational concerns about their practical application. It is tailored for staff and consultants of the Asian Development Bank and their counterparts in developing member countries, although equally useful for those in similar institutional settings.

 [Impact Evaluation: Methodological and Operational Issues](#)


The World Bank published in 2011 an interactive textbook, which offers an introduction to the topic of impact evaluation and its practice in development.  [Impact evaluation in practice](#)


SPECIFIC IMPACT EVALUATION METHODOLOGIES

 [The Tracer Study Manual: Book 1 Methodology, Book 2 Training manual, Book 3 Model questionnaires, ILO, 2011](#)

 [DFID. Broadening the Range of Designs and Methods for Impact Evaluation. Working Paper No. 38, April 2012.](#) (Stern, E. Stame, N. Mayne, J. Forss, K. Davies, R. Befani, B.)

 [Methodological Briefs Impact Evaluation No. 6 Overview: Strategies for Causal Attribution. UNICEF 2014](#)


 [An introduction to the use of randomized control trials to evaluate development interventions. International Initiative for Impact Evaluation Howard White \(2011\)](#)

 [Quasi-Experimental Design and Methods. Methodological Briefs Impact Evaluation No. 8 Howard White and Shagun Sabarwal \(2014\)](#)

 [Quasi-experimental methods for impact evaluations,](#) Video lecture given by Dr Jyotsna Puri, 2014

 [The theory of change.](#) Video lecture given by Howard White, 2014

 [Better Evaluation](#)

 [Addressing attribution through contribution analysis: using performance measures sensibly, John Mayne, 2001](#)