Preparation of terms of Reference

- The terms of reference (ToR) document defines all aspects of how a consultant or a team will conduct an evaluation. It defines the objectives and the scope of the evaluation, outlines the responsibilities of the consultant or team, and provides a clear description of the resources available to conduct the study.
- Developing an accurate and well-specified ToR is a critical step in managing a high-quality evaluation.
- The evaluation ToR document serves as the basis for a contractual arrangement with one or more evaluators and sets the parameters against which the success of the assignment can be measured.
- The specific content and format for a ToR will vary to some degree based on organizational requirements, local practices, and the type of assignment.
- However, a few basic principles and guidelines inform the

Definition and Function What Is a Terms of Reference?

- In its singular form, “terms of reference” refers to the document that details an assignment for an individual evaluator or team of evaluators. This same phrase can also be used in the plural (ToRs) to refer to multiple such documents.
- A specific ToR spells out an evaluation manager’s requirements and expectations related to an evaluation, review, or similar study.
- The ToR is typically developed during the planning phase for an assignment and is often used to attract and hire an evaluation consultant or team through a competitive process. The document then serves as the basis for a contractual arrangement between the commissioner of an evaluation and the external consultant(s) or in-house staff carrying out the work.

- A ToR presents an overview of the requirements and expectations of the evaluation. It provides an explicit statement of the objectives of the evaluation, roles and responsibilities of the evaluators and the evaluation client, and resources available for the evaluation.
- ToRs are needed for a broad range of evaluation-related activities, regardless of the scope of the evaluation, budget, or timeline.
- A ToR can cover an entire evaluation operation or just a subset of tasks. For example, the document might focus on the in-depth analysis prescribed to address one evaluation question.
- However, a ToR should be as brief and concise as possible. A typical length is 5–10 pages, with administrative annexes supplementing this information where appropriate, depending on the complexity and depth of the evaluation.
- Multiple functions are served by the ToR, and identifying these various purposes helps clarify what structure and content are warranted.

- The basic functions of a ToR are listed below and then explained in detail in the “Content of the Terms of Reference” section.

1)Sharing background knowledge and providing the rational for the evaluation

- The project or program being evaluated is described along with key milestones in its history. This allows the ToR to show how the evaluation or review contextualized within the broader development strategy for a sector or country/region.
- A ToR typically includes a brief review of relevant available knowledge regarding the program and its effects to inform evaluation consultants or teams.

2)Identifying the specific evaluation questions

- The ToR builds an understanding of the scope, process, and expectations for the desired tasks by presenting information about why the evaluation is being conducted, its objectives, and its intended users.

3)Defining the scope, approach, and methodology

- ToRs typically specify the scope of the evaluation (time period, depth, etc.), but vary in terms of how much flexibility consultants or in-house evaluators have to propose their own methodologies or approaches to complete the designated tasks.
- However, at least the expected broad approach is outlined clearly in the ToR to set realistic expectations among all relevant parties engaged in the study.
- The degree to which the evaluator(s) can propose additional or alternative methods for completing the task(s) should also be specified.

4)Articulating the governance and accountability arrangements

- This section highlights the governance and accountability arrangements. The ToR document can be crafted for an individual consultant or for a team.
- Various stakeholders will be engaged to facilitate or participate in the work, and parallel related tasks conducted by other consultants might be in progress.
- The ToR outlines the roles and responsibilities envisioned to carry out the assignment and the management and coordination arrangements.
- The hierarchy for accountability and the structure and resources established for support is also explicitly stated in this section.

5)Setting the guiding principles or values

- A ToR specifies research ethics or procedures that the evaluator(s) is expected to follow.

6)Identifying the professional qualifications of the individual evaluator or team

- ToRs present the expected profile of the evaluation team. This includes describing desired experience and credentials, as well as noting the minimum professional requirements or competencies.

7)Defining the deliverables and schedule

- The ToR specifies the expected deliverables, timeline, and any work plan if available. The ToR may ask the evaluator to provide a detailed timeline and milestones within the timeline specified.
- ToRs list any products that the evaluators should develop as part of their assignment. To the degree possible, this list includes details related to format, content, length, intended audience, and the expected review process.

8)Defining the budget

- The ToR states the budget (and potentially other resources) available for the evaluation and what that budget covers.
- Managers commissioning evaluations might find it difficult or impossible at times to specify all these details before an evaluation or review begins, but ToRs are most effective when they can fulfill these functions in setting and communicating expectations up front.

Content of the Terms of Reference

- The text of the ToR should provide sufficient background information related to the assignment, and then move in logical order from the evaluation objectives and intended users through to the required qualifications of the consultant or team and the resources available.
- The level of detail and ordering of specific sections will vary

- Evaluation ToR should also take into consideration the difficulties of collecting confidential data and presenting findings that might prove threatening to particular stakeholder groups. Thus, processes for the evaluator or evaluation team to check in and ask about sensitive issues should also be addressed.
- The opening section of the ToR typically provides an orientation about the overall program, project, or activity to be evaluated. Depending on the complexity of this program and the context for this evaluation, this section might be a few paragraphs or a couple of pages. Details should focus on the following as appropriate,

1) The current purpose, objectives, and intended outcomes of the program being evaluated, including the key output, outcome, and impact indicators.

2) *The rationale for the evaluation and the key overarching*

Deliverables and Schedule:

- The outputs and reporting requirements expected for the evaluation should be specified, along with the required or proposed timeline for the study. Clear guidance in this section will help ensure that the outputs from the evaluation meet expectations. Details should include the following

1. *Specific information about the types of products* (reports, presentations, and so forth), who will use them, and how they will be used. Ideally, each product will be listed separately to specify its individual requirements and timeline.
2. *The structure and format* for each product. This would include any expectations regarding length and content.
3. *The language(s) in which deliverables should be written.*
4. *Organizational standards and practices*. Any established style guide or standard formats for written documents should be referred to here. In addition, if the commissioning agency

5. *The timeframe for products, including milestones*. ToRs often specify when a project is expected to launch, when a detailed evaluation plan or inception report will be expected, and so on. If this is the case, the estimated due dates should be clearly specified for each activity and product. Alternatively, some ToRs provide an overview of the expected scope, objectives, and deliverables and request that evaluators propose a realistic timeframe.

6. *Required meetings/consultations*. This section should also note the frequency and types of meetings expected with the evaluation commissioner and other stakeholders of the evaluation.

Preparing for Writing the Terms of Reference

- Most organizations have standard rules in place for designing and publicizing consulting opportunities and requesting qualifications or proposals from evaluators.

1.Establish the need and purpose for the evaluation. Before drafting the ToR, the evaluation manager needs to first understand the investment being evaluated, including its social and economic context. This orientation will help the manager to better identify the objective(s) of the evaluation, intended uses and audience, and he evaluability of a project or program.

2. *Identify and engage stakeholders.* Parties with a vested interest in the evaluation and contracting process should be engaged throughout the process of developing the ToR; therefore, it is important to identify relevant stakeholders and their roles early on.

3. *Estimate resources available or needed for the evaluation*. The process and flexibility for establishing a budget will depend on an organization's or partnership's resources and practices. Understanding the opportunities and constraints provided by the available budget will be important for thinking through the scope and timeline of the evaluation and identifying who should

4. *Determine whether an internal or external evaluation consultant or team is needed*. Both internal and external evaluations are legitimate and each approach has advantages. Developers of the ToR should decide whether the evaluation scope of work is best suited for an individual or a team and whether the study will be conducted internally, externally, or by a mixed team.

Process of Writing and Implementing the ToR

- Once the preparatory phase is over, and the decision is to proceed with the evaluation, the following steps help ensure that ToR can help achieve the intended outcomes of the evaluation.

1. Draft the ToR. The manager or hiring team should establish agreement with all partners regarding who will prepare sections of the draft ToR. This draft should be checked, reviewed, and revised according to the agreed upon process to assure quality and conform with organizational requirements.

2. Consult with stakeholders. All parties involved in commissioning the evaluation should have ownership of the contents of the ToR, so the consultative process established for reviewing and finalizing this document is very important.

3. Adhere to the organization’s contracting and procurement procedures. Any ToR should be consistent with internal requirements for contracting, as specified in standard organizational guidelines or clarified by a contract specialist. In addition, most organizations specify steps that must be followed in the procurement process. The ToR cannot be finalized until those commissioning the evaluation have ensured that it is aligned with internal standards and practices.

4. Offer consultants the opportunity to discuss and clarify the ToR. The work agreement and contract arrangements should be based on two-way communications between the commissioner of the evaluation and potential contractors, where possible, to clarify expectations for all parties.

Thank you