Guidance in Support of the Operationalization of the Evaluation Policy

Inception Report

Technical Evaluation Reference Group
ADAPTATION FUND

This guidance note is part of a series of technical guidance from the Technical Evaluation Reference Group of the Adaptation Fund (AF-TERG) supporting reliable, useful, and ethical evaluations aligned with the Adaptation Fund's Evaluation Policy. AF-TERG guidance documents are intended to be succinct, but with sufficient information to practically guide users, pointing to additional resources when appropriate. Additional AF-TERG evaluation resources on various topics can be accessed at the online AF-TERG Evaluation Resource Webpage. Feedback is welcome and can be sent to AF-TERG-SEC@adaptation-fund.org.

The Adaptation Fund was established through decisions by the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change and its Kyoto Protocol to finance concrete adaptation projects and programmes in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. At the Katowice Climate Conference in December 2018, the Parties to the Paris Agreement decided that the Adaptation Fund shall also serve the Paris Agreement. The Fund supports country-driven projects and programmes, innovation, and global learning for effective adaptation. All of the Fund's activities are designed to build national and local adaptive capacities while reaching and engaging the most vulnerable groups, and to integrate gender consideration to provide equal opportunity to access and benefit from the Fund's resources. They are also aimed at enhancing synergies with other sources of climate finance, while creating models that can be replicated or scaled up. www.adaptation-fund.org

The Technical Evaluation Reference Group of the Adaptation Fund (AF-TERG) is an independent evaluation advisory group accountable to the Fund Board. It was established in 2018 to ensure the independent implementation of the Fund's evaluation framework, which will be succeeded by the new evaluation policy from October 2023 onwards. The AF-TERG, which is headed by a chair, provides an evaluative advisory role through performing evaluative, advisory and oversight functions. The group is comprised of independent experts in evaluation, called the AF-TERG members. A small secretariat provides support for the implementation of evaluative and advisory activities as part of the work programme.

While independent of the operations of the Adaptation Fund, the aim of the AF-TERG is to add value to the Fund's work through independent monitoring, evaluation, and learning, www.adaptation-fund.org/about/evaluation/

AF-TERG, [2022]. [Title of the Report]. Adaptation Fund Technical Evaluation Reference Group (AF-TERG),

Washington, DC.

The unedited [type] report was finished [Date].

Table of Contents

Acronyms

AF-TERG	Technical Evaluation Reference Group of the Adaptation Fund
Fund	Adaptation Fund
IEs	Implementing Entities
ToR	Terms of Reference

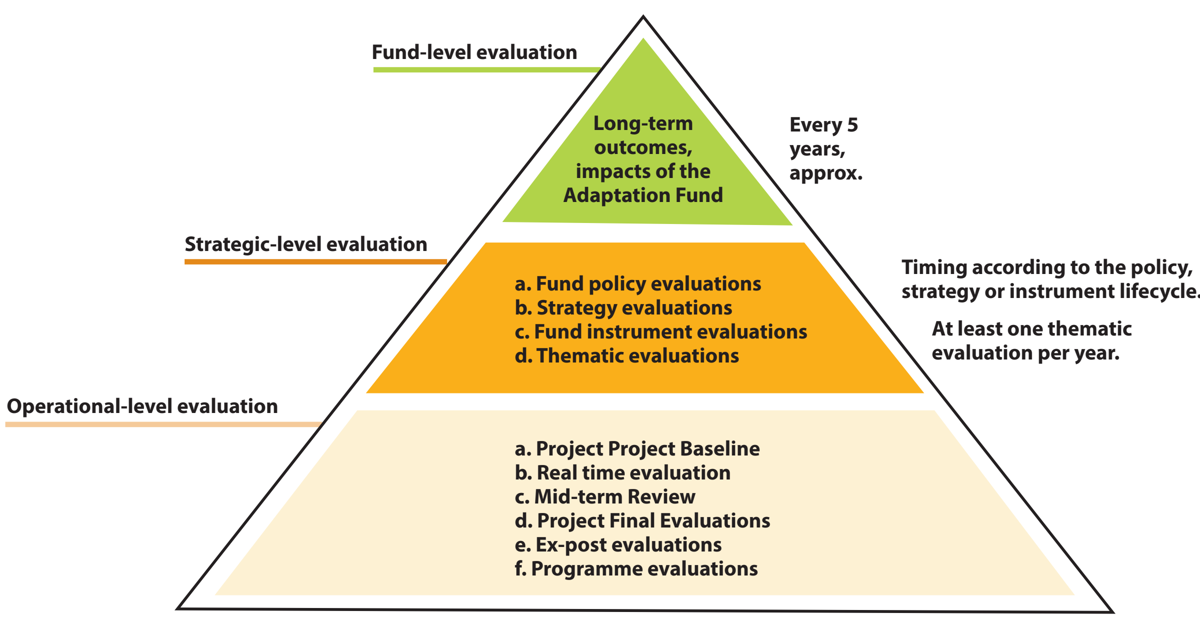
1. What is this guidance note?

The purpose of this guidance note is to support the development of a project or programme evaluation inception report in accordance with the Adaptation Fund's Evaluation Policy. It provides an overview of inception reports to inform and be tailored to all levels and types of evaluations outlined in the Fund's Evaluation Policy, including baseline studies and mid-term reviews – see **Figure 1**.

The intended audience for this guidance note are people who are conducting or managing a Fund evaluation, primarily within Fund Implementing Entities (IEs), the Technical Evaluation Reference Group of the Adaptation Fund (AF-TERG), or the Fund secretariat and Board. However, this guidance note may also be useful to others in the climate change adaptation community who are conducting evaluations or are interested in the topic of evaluation.

The remainder of this guidance note is structured by five intuitive questions answering what inception reports are, what their benefits are, and when and how should they be written. **Annex 1** provides an outline and checklist of the recommended sections for Fund Evaluation Inception Reports, and **Annex 2** provides an illustrative evaluation matrix to be included in Fund evaluation inception reports. It is important to acknowledge that the note is not exhaustive, and additional recommended resources are provided in **Annex 3**.

Figure 1: Fund-evaluation levels and indicative types



2. What is an evaluation inception report?

An evaluation inception report is a document used to plan an evaluation or assessment of or for a project, programme, or other Fund intervention. It I used to demonstrate a clear understanding and realistic plan of work for the evaluation, checking that the evaluation plan is in agreement with the TOR, or if changes are proposed, that they are in agreement with the evaluation commissioners and other stakeholders. **Box 1** summarizes key elements of an evaluation inception report reflected in the illustrated outline discussed in Section 6 below and elaborated in Annex 1 and Annex 2.

BOX 1: Key elements of an evaluation inception report

1. Title page
2. Optional front material (Preface and Acknowledgements)
3. Table of contents
4. Acronyms
5. Executive summary
6. Evaluation background
7. Evaluation criteria and questions
8. Evaluation approach and methods
9. Evaluation work plan and management
10. Annexes

3. What are the benefits of an evaluation inception report?

A well-prepared evaluation inception report is critical and can make the difference between the success and failure of an evaluative activity. A thoughtful and collaborative planning process can:

✓ **Enable all parties to reach a common understanding of the evaluation design and process.**

✓ **Establishes and manages clear expectations for the evaluation,** serving as a reference document to avoid and clarify misunderstandings and ensure the evaluation stays on track.

✓ **Supports evaluation transparency and accountability** by sharing evaluation details, such as the timeline and budget.

✓ **Reinforces ownership and support for the evaluation.** Strategic consultation during the inception phase and dissemination of the inception report helps to socializes the evaluation, creating a shared understanding and buy-in to sustain and support the evaluation.

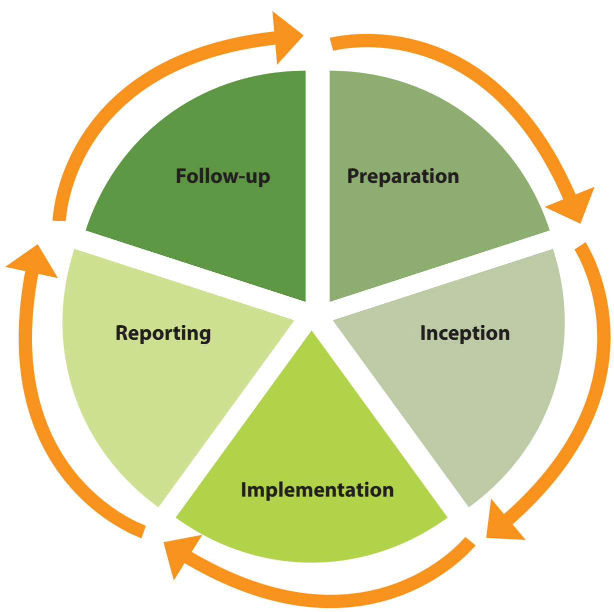
✓ **Supports efficient resource utilization,** by detailing out practical evaluations aspects such as the evaluation's roles and responsibilities, timeline, and budget.

✓ **Avoids implementation delays** by identifying potential risks and issues, sting the evaluator(s) and evaluation manager to take appropriate action.

4. When to write an evaluation inception report?

The evaluation inception report is a key deliverable during the inception phase of the evaluation (**Figure 2**). It is the culmination of the inception phase, completed following the review of secondary/background documents, meetings with select senior project or programme staff and other relevant stakeholders, and preliminary data analysis. Its approval is a significant evaluation milestone, representing a transition from the inception to the implementation phase. Completing this milestone may take considerable time and should be planned accordingly.

Figure 2: The key phases of evaluation



5. Who is involved in writing an evaluation inception report?

While **an evaluation inception report is prepared by the evaluator(s)**, the process for arriving at a finalized evaluation inception report is sometimes described as a **“co-creative journey” that can involve a number of evaluation stakeholders** (see **Table 1**) depending on the evaluation context. Of particular importance is the engagement of the evaluator(s) and the evaluation manager appointed by the commissioning entity to discuss and plan for practicalities that are realistic to the evaluation’s given time and resources, and to identify potential obstacles (assumptions) to best plan beforehand how to avoid the, or to resolve or mitigate them if they should arise. When the inception phase meaningfully engages others and the draft report is disseminated to and reviewed by key stakeholder groups, it reduces the potential for misunderstandings later during the evaluation exercise and helps set realistic expectations (see Section 3).

Table 1: Responsibilities during the evaluation inception phase

Role	Description
Evaluation Manager (or Management Team)	The person(s) appointed by the commissioning entity (e.g., the IE, AF-TERG, AF Board) to oversee and coordinate the evaluation. This includes facilitating introductions and consultations for the evaluation, and the review of deliverables (like the inception report) and quality assurance.
Advisory Committee	Sometimes referred to as an Evaluation Reference Group, this is a representative body of individuals from key stakeholder groups who review and comment on the evaluation’s key deliverables, such as the ToR and Inception Report. Members typically bring subject matter experience, practical knowledge and insights from the operational context, understanding of the policy and institutional context, and more to support and advise the evaluation process.
Stakeholders	Individual(s) or organization(s) that have an interest in or are affected by the evaluation and/or its results, (whether or not they directly particate in the evaluation)
Lead Evaluator (or Evaluation Team Leader)	Responsible for directly conducting the evaluation, with oversight of the timely and quality preparation of its deliverables, such as the Inception Report. Works with and reports to the Evaluation Manager or Evaluation Management Team.
Evaluation Team	The composition of any evaluation team will be context specific according to the evaluation purpose, scope, and related needs. Evaluation team member roles vary from Team Lead to Senior Advisory, Evaluation Methods Specialist, Data Collector, Data Analysts, etc. Typically, the evaluation team members contribute to the development of the inception report by preparing different sections that are then consolidated and reviewed by the Team Lead for quality assurance.

6. How to write an evaluation inception report?

There is no standard formula or template for writing an evaluation inception report, and ultimately each report should be tailored according to the evaluation's specific purpose and need. When prepared well, sections of the Inception Report, (i.e., the evaluation's background, approach, and methods), can be recycled and used in the Final Evaluation Report. **Annex 1** provides an outline and checklist of the recommended sections for Fund Evaluation Inception Reports, which are described in more detail below:

Box 2: Inception Report Examples

The Fund has assembled a Library of Example Inception Reports accessed on the online at the AF-TERG Evaluation Resource Webpage. which also has a Word version of an illustrative evaluation inception report template using the sections discussed below.

1) Title Page

The title page should state the name and type of evaluation, which is typically based on the ToR title; refer to Figure 1 for the names of Fund evaluation types. It is also useful to include on the title page the evaluation timeframe and date of the report, the countries of the evaluation intervention, the names of commissioning and any partner organizations, and the name(s) of the evaluator(s) or evaluating firm.

2) Optional front material

This section can provide a Preface introducing the importance and relevance of the evaluation, often authored by a prominent sponsor or leader in the funding or commissioning entity, and any Acknowledgements to recognize and thank individuals and entities that sponsored, contributed to, supported, and/or participated in the evaluation inception phase.

3) Table of Contents

This section provides an accurate and coherent overview of report sections and lists of tables, boxes, figures, charts, and annexes, each aligned with respective page numbers.

4) Acronyms

This section lists acronyms or abbreviations only for names and phrases that occur more than once in the report.

5) Executive summary

The section provides a standalone, concise overview of the essential parts of a inception report in two to five pages. It is critically important for senior decision makers and others who do not have time to read the full report and should be written to highlight key take-away messages. Key elements include an explanation of evaluation's background purpose, scope (time period, geographic coverage, population groups), audience and intended uses; a brief overview of the object of evaluation (i.e., project(s), programme(s), strategy); and a brief description of any key aspect of the evaluation approach, methods, and limitations if appropriate (as this will fully be presented separately). The Executive Summary should also introduce the report's structure and contents so the reader understands how the report will meet the purpose of the evaluation and how to best navigate the contents of the report.

6) Evaluation Background

Following the ToR, this section clearly describes the implementation context (evaluand) and establishes what will be evaluated. Both the object and scope of the evaluation must be clearly defined to manage evaluation resources and expectations. The scope of the evaluation is elaborated in both geographic and temporal dimensions. In defining an evaluation's scope, it is crucial to consider cross-cutting dimensions, such as gender, capacity development, partnerships, and climate change considerations. This section should also provide a justification if the scope of the evaluation is constrained or narrowed than initially framed in the ToR.

The discussion of the object of evaluation should include a description of:

✓ The intervention's funding arrangements and resources, including human resources and budget.

✓ The intervention's institutional setting and management structure.

✓ A stakeholder or landscape analysis of key implementing partners and other relevant actors, (which may include a visual stakeholder map or conceptual diagram).

✓ The Intervention's design and activities, including the specific objectives and the expected contribution to the Fund's Strategic Results Framework, any implementing entity's strategic goals, climate change adaptation goals, etc. This may include or signpost in an annex a results framework (e.g., results chain, logic model, theory of change), as well as any key assumptions underlying the strategy.

✓ An initial summary of any relevant budget information, quantitative or qualitative monitoring and reporting data, or other secondary data relevant for the evaluation.

✓ The intervention's implementation status, including its phase implementation (e.g., ongoing, finishing, or completed), and any significant milestones, events, constraints, and changes over time and their implications.

✓ Any key risks associated with the object of evaluation (e.g., project) that can affect the evaluation.

The discussion of the implementation context includes any relevant aspects of the larger human and natural landscape in which the intervention is being implemented that may affect the intervention and its evaluation, including:

✓ Social, cultural, political, and economic factors, i.e., such as civil unrest, economic recession, political change, etc., that can affect the implementation of both the intervention and its evaluation.

✓ Geographical or natural factors, i.e., remoteness of location, natural disaster, drought or large-scale whether events that may affect access to target populations and the implementation of both the intervention and its evaluation.

✓ Any map or conceptual diagram to convey the above two aspects of the implementation context.

✓ Any key risks associated with the implementation context that can affect the evaluation.

7) Evaluation criteria and questions

This section provides a clear explanation of the evaluation's scope, criteria, and questions in relation to the evaluation's purpose and key issues to explore to inform decision making and meet the needs and intended use of the evaluation. It goes beyond the Executive Summary to detail the **evaluation's scope**, clearly delineating what is and is not to be included in the evaluation, i.e., thematic focus, a single or cluster of workstreams or objectives, the time period, geographic locations, and population groups.

Central to this section is the discussion of the **evaluation criteria** that specify the standards that provide the basis for evaluative judgment. The Fund's nine evaluation criteria are identified in its Evaluation Policy and elaborated in its Evaluation Criteria Guidance Note. The evaluation questions elaborate the evaluation criteria, specifying what is to be assessed and information generated from the evaluation, and the discussion should explain how the answers to the questions address the information needs of users.

This section should utilize an ***Evaluation Matrix*** to organized and support the presentation and discussion of the evaluation criteria, aligned with the evaluation questions, indicators, sources, and methods – see the illustrative template in **Annex 2**.

Any deviation in any way from the evaluation criteria and questions outlined in the ToR should be explicitly acknowledged. The inception phase of the evaluation frequently leads to refinement of the evaluation questions; however, in line with the Fund's Evaluation Policy, if an evaluation commissioner or evaluator considers any of the Fund's nine evaluation criteria inapplicable, this must be justified in the inception report presented to the AF-TERG.

8) Evaluation approach and methods

While the ToR may suggest an appropriate evaluative methodology, the evaluator(s) will ultimately recommend the most appropriate evaluation approach and methodology based on the information collected during the inception phase. This section of the report should explain why the chosen approach and method(s) are appropriate and how it will generate credible and robust evaluative evidence (Fund Evaluation Principle #2). Key elements to explain in this section include:

✓ **Evaluation principles** - The Fund's seven evaluation principles are central to its evaluation function, and therefore should be identified in this section, with an explanation of their relevance to the particular evaluation (as appropriate). The evaluation principles can be found in the Fund's Evaluation Policy and are elaborated in its Evaluation Principles Guidance Note.

✓ **Evaluation data sources** – This includes secondary data (i.e., background documents or reports not collected directly by evaluators) and primary data (i.e., interviews or surveys conducted by evaluators), and the rationale for their selection to address the evaluation questions/criteria. It is often useful to list data sources in a table, which can be included as an annex to the inception report.

✓ **Evaluation data collection methods** – At the Fund, there is a preference for the use of **mixed methods** when possible, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to provide a richer picture of the object of evaluation. The discussion explain the rational for the selection data collection methods in relation to reliability and validity. For example, it may include a description of any: remote versus in-person data collection; individual interview protocol and group workshop facilitation; survey design and enumeration; sample size, process, and representation of the entire population or specific population groups (e.g., single women, under 45); etc. This section may include any description of data collection technologies, and may signpost annexed examples of data collection instruments.

✓ **Evaluation data analysis** – It is important to go beyond explaining the data collection methods, but to also describe the analytical framework or approach that will be used to synthesize and interpret collected data, (i.e., contribution analysis, developmental evaluation, Realist Evaluation, appreciative inquiry, etc.). This includes explaining the rationale for the given analytical approach or approaches in relation to the evaluation questions/criteria. This section may include any description of data analysis technologies, such as statistical, GPS, or social network analysis software.

✓ **Evaluation stakeholder engagement** – The level and type of stakeholder engagement in the evaluation is a key consideration for the Fund, reflected in Evaluation Principle #5 for equitable and gender-sensitive inclusivity. This discussion goes beyond the description of the data collection sources to include an explanation of any stakeholder participation in data collecting and analysis relative to the evaluation's objectives.

✓ **Ethical considerations** – It is imperative to include attention to any ethical considerations related to data collection and use, such as the rights and confidentially of informants, (i.e., the General Data Protection Regulation is a Regulation in EU law on data protection and privacy in the EU and the European Economic Area).

✓ **Methodological limitations** – All evaluation methodologies have inherent limitations, and this section should succinctly summarize the major ones, their implications for the evaluation, and any mitigation measures taken in response.

It is important to note that if any evaluability assessment was conducted, this will play an important role in the selections of the evaluation approach and methods, which should be explained in this section of the inception report.

9) Evaluation Work Plan and Management

This critical section of the evaluation inception report explains how the evaluator(s) will operationalize the evaluation approach and methodology in a manner that is appropriate to the given time, resources, and capacities for the evaluation. Key elements to include in this section include:

✓ **An evaluation workplan**[1] that focuses on the activities for which the evaluators are responsible to conduct the evaluation. This typically includes a data collection plan organized by evaluation team member (when there are more than one evaluators), location, and date. The plan should include targets for required data (e.g., the number of interviews with sub-group of stakeholders).

✓ **An Evaluation timeline and narrative that clearly identifies both the evaluation milestones and deliverables.** In addition to specifying the deliverable date, the narrative can describe each deliverable in more detail as appropriate – i.e., how it will be formatted, shared, and reviewed.

✓ **Roles and responsibilities** may be included in the evaluation workplan and data collection plan for the evaluator(s), but there may be additional people and partners participating in or supporting the evaluation that are important to identify.

1. The Evaluation Workplan prepared by the evaluator(s) in the inception report is not to be confused with the Evaluation Management Plan prepared by the evaluation manager(s). The Evaluation Management Plan is drafted during the evaluation preparation stage and serves the evaluation managers to supervise the overall evaluation exercise, from commissioning the evaluation to its conclusion and follow-up, whereas evaluation workplan focuses specifically on those activities for which the evaluators are responsible for during the evaluation implementation and reporting phases.

✓ **Quality assurance** includes the processes for the review, validation and approval of the evaluation's deliverables. This is a responsibility the evaluator(s) share with the evaluation manager(s), and therefore is closely aligned with the identified roles and responsibilities. It is important to note, that in addition to the evaluation deliverables, quality assurance also encompasses how the evaluation is conducted and the evaluator(s)'s behaviour; this can include identifying feedback looks and processes for stakeholder input into the evaluation process.

✓ **Risk management and mitigation measures** are best identified early before the evaluation implementation phase. This entails identifying the potential risks and their potential consequences if they are realized. It is useful to develop a table with columns to identify: 1) Risk; 2) Risk probability; 3) Risk impact; 4) Risk mitigation actions (including responsibilities).

✓ **An outreach and dissemination plan** may also be included to outline the strategies that will be used to communicate the evaluation's findings. Building on the stakeholder analysis, this plan can elaborate what follow-up communications will be pursued, their formats and outlets, and their intended purpose and audiences.

10) Annexes

Annexes include any additional information required to support or expand upon the text of the evaluation inception report. While the narrative of the evaluation inception report may be subject to a word limit, typically, there is no limit placed on the Annexes section of the report. In some instances, a URL link to a digital archive for annexes may be appropriate if the Annexes section is very large. See the illustrative evaluation inception report template in Annex 1 below for example items to consider for the inception report's annex section.

ANNEX 1. Checklist for Adaptation Fund Evaluation Inception Reports

This template provides an illustrative structure for an evaluation inception report for the Fund. It is intended to serve as a quick reference summary of key topics typically included in an inception report, which are explained in more detail in Section 6 above. The template should be tailored according to the evaluation contexts and needs.

Adaptation Fund Illustrative Evaluation Inception Template and Checklist
1. Title page
2. Optional front material ☐ **Preface** ☐ **Acknowledgements**
3. Table of contents
4. Acronyms
5. Executive summary – standalone, concise overview of the essential parts of the report in two to five pages. ☐ **Introductory overview** of the evaluation's purpose, scope, audience, intended use, time period, geographic coverage, and target population groups. ☐ **Summary of the report and contents** (to assist readers to navigate the document)
6. Evaluation background ☐ **Object of evaluation** – describes the intervention being evaluated (e.g., project or strategy), and why ☐ **Implementation context** – describe the larger context in which the intervention is being implemented ☐ **Stakeholder analysis** – describes the needs, expectations, and potential risks associated with relevant stakeholder groups for the evaluation
7. Evaluation criteria and questions ☐ **Evaluation purpose and scope** ☐ **Evaluation criteria** that specify the standards that provide the basis for evaluative judgment ☐ **Evaluation questions** that elaborate the evaluation criteria, specifying what is to be assessed ☐ **Evaluation Matrix** that details how each evaluation is answered, what indicators to measure and which data collection tool will be applied.
8. Evaluation approach and methods ☐ **Evaluation principles** – the Fund's seven evaluation principles are identified in its Evaluation Policy and elaborated in its Evaluation Principles Guidance Note ☐ **Evaluation data sources** – primary and secondary information sources for the evaluation ☐ **Evaluation data collection methods** – quantitative and qualitative collection methods and their procedures, including a discussion of the rational for their selection ☐ **Evaluation data analysis** – the analytical framework or approach that will be used to synthesize and interpret evaluation findings ☐ **Evaluation stakeholder engagement,** including the level and type of engagement ☐ **Ethical considerations** related to data collection and use ☐ **Methodological limitations** –, their implications for the evaluation, and any mitigation measures taken in response.

(continued)

9. Evaluation work plan and management ☐ **Evaluation work plan** ☐ **Evaluation timeline, milestones, and deliverables** ☐ **Roles and responsibilities** ☐ **Quality assurance** ☐ **Risk management and mitigation measures** ☐ **Outreach and dissemination plan**
10. Annexes ☐ **Evaluation's ToR** ☐ **Detailed timeline (if applicable)** ☐ **Detailed methodology (if applicable)** ☐ **Evaluation matrix** ☐ **Data collection tools** ☐ **Evaluation timeline** ☐ **Evaluability assessment (if applicable)** ☐ **Detailed ToC/Results Framework** ☐ **Detailed stakeholder analysis (if applicable)** ☐ **Bibliography / reference list** ☐ **Any other information relevant to the final evaluation report**

ANNEX 2. Illustrative Evaluation Matrix

The evaluation matrix (also known as evaluation framework) facilitates a systematic approach to how each evaluation question is answered. Against each evaluation question, the matrix identifies the corresponding evaluation criteria, indicators to measure, data sources that have/will be consulted and techniques of collection. The evaluation matrix is developed as part of the inception report, and it should be included in the final report with any changes/additions. An example of an evaluation matrix is presented below.

Lines of Inquiry / Sub-Question	Evaluation Criteria	Indicators / Data Points	Data Sources	Data Collection Techniques
Evaluation Question: ***Overarching Evaluation Question***				
Sub-questions that expand upon the overarching evaluation question.	*Relevant AF evaluation criteria*	*Points of data that to be analyzed as evidence in answering the question(s).*	*Sources of information, ranging from documentation to key stakeholders, that will be consulted.*	*How data will be collected, for example: literature review, key informant interview, focus group discussion.*

ANNEX 3. Additional Resources

The following resources are recommended to readers for additional guidance on inception reports.

- Adaptation Fund. 2021. Evaluation Policy of the Adaptation Fund
- Adaptation Fund. 2021. Guidance Document for Implementing Entities on Compliance with the Adaptation Fund Gender Policy
- Better Evaluation. 2016. Manager's guide to evaluation
- European Commission. 2021. Better Regulation Toolbox
- Green Climate Fund. 2020. Inception Report for the Independent Evaluation of the Relevance and Effectiveness of the Green Climate Fund's Investment in the SIDS
- International Labour Organization. 2022. Checklist 4.8: Writing the Inception Report
- Office of Evaluation and Internal Oversight Independent Evaluation Division. 2018. Evaluation Manual
- United Nations Development Programme. 2021. UNDP Evaluation Guidelines
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation. 2017. The Step-by-Step Guide to Evaluation