WHO South-East Asia Regional Framework for **Strengthening Evaluation for Learning and Development**

World Health Organization

Regional Office for South-East Asia

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1. Introduction

The WHO South-East Asia Region's Framework for Strengthening Evaluation for Learning and Development (FSELD) has been formulated to guide the Regional Office and WHO country offices in their evaluation work. Its provisions are consistent with the WHO Evaluation Policy 2012, *Evaluation practice handbook* 2013,[1] and *A framework for strengthening evaluation and organizational learning in WHO,* 2015 (the "global framework").[2] The FSELD mirrors the structure of the global framework, and builds on a working paper that was developed after a series of consultations with regional departments and WHO country offices.

WHO defines evaluation as "an assessment, as systematic and impartial as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area, institutional performance" (adapted from the United Nations Evaluation Group [UNEG]). The institutional performance is that of WHO; not of any government or other stakeholder; just WHO's contribution. Evaluation focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments, examining the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality, to understand and learn from achievements or the lack thereof. In a mature learning organization, it is an integral part of each stage of the strategic planning and programmatic cycle, and not just an end-of-programme activity. Other kinds of assessments, audits, reviews and evaluations undertaken at different levels of WHO for a variety of purposes are listed and briefly defined at Annex 1.

The FSELD follows the three key criteria (*see* Annex 2 for the five evaluation principles)[2] set out in the Global Framework for the evaluation function and its products to be considered of high quality:

- **Independence** of evaluations and evaluation systems. The evaluation process should be impartial and independent in its function from the processes of policy-making, and delivering and managing programmatic and administrative work.

- **Credibility** of evaluations. The credibility of evaluation depends on the expertise and independence of evaluators, the clarity and appropriateness of the evaluation methods used, and the degree of transparency of the evaluation process.

- **Utility** of evaluations. To have an impact on decision-making, evaluation findings must be perceived as relevant and useful, and be presented in a clear and concise way. Findings must contribute to organizational learning and performance improvement.

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1   Evaluation practice handbook. Geneva: WHO; 2013 (http://apps.who.int/iris/ bitstream/10665/96311/1/9789241548687_eng.pdf, accessed 18 May 2017).

2   A framework for strengthening evaluation and organizational learning in WHO. Geneva: WHO; 2015 (http://www. who.int/about/who_reform/documents/framework-strengthening-evaluation-organizational-learning.pdf, accessed 18 May 2017).

Satisfying these criteria will go a long way towards building the confidence of Member States and other stakeholders, both in our evaluation function and in the overall work of WHO. It will be noted that there is a degree of tension between two of these criteria – independence and utility. A set of fully objective recommendations, paying no heed to the current context, might fail the utility test. Conversely, a report written with too great a degree of adjustment to that context might fail the independence test. The evaluation team, with guidance, as necessary from the technical group (TG), must strike the right balance, and use the objectivity of its observations to inform valid and useful recommendations.

2. Objective

The objective of this FSELD is to strengthen the current decentralized evaluation function in the WHO South-East Asia Region, and further mainstream its activities. This will nurture the "culture of evaluation" and ensure that evaluation plays a critical role in improving performance, increasing accountability for results, and promoting organizational learning and development.

3. Establishing governance and an enabling environment

3.1 Governance

The evaluation policy stipulates evaluation as an essential function of all levels of the Organization, with each budget centre serving as the hub for the culture of evaluation.

Focal points. The budget centre focal points for planning of WHO country offices and regional offices may also serve as the focal points for evaluation. In budget centres with dedicated monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officers, they will be the primary focal points. The focal points will be responsible for coordinating evaluation activities and promoting a culture of evaluation.

At the Regional Office, the Programme Planning and Coordination unit (PPC) is mandated to work collaboratively and systematically with WHO representatives, regional office directors, other budget centre heads, and headquarters. The Planning Officer (PLN) will be responsible for managing a budgeted biennial workplan for evaluation. The PLN will serve as the secretariat to all TGs established for evaluation, and also proactively coordinate with relevant networks such as the Global Network on Evaluation (GNE) and United Nations Development Group (UNDG) Peer Review.

Technical group. For each evaluation, a TG will be established to review and recommend evaluation themes and questions; propose evaluators shortlisted from a roster; and provide guidance on the overall process of a particular evaluation – from planning to dissemination. The TG will comprise the following:

- Director Programme Management (DPM) (Chair)

- Department Director/Regional officer in charge of the evaluation topic;

- Planning Officer (TG Secretariat),

- Technical Officer for Research Policy and Cooperation (RPC)

- WHO country office representative

- Technical expert in data/statistical analysis

- Programme Management Officer (PMO) (alternate TG Secretariat).

It is also good practice to include one or two "lay members", i.e. individuals with no connection whatsoever to the area being evaluated or the evaluation team. This helps signal the objectivity of the evaluation steering function, and also helps spread organizational learning, as more and more people gradually become involved in the process.

Enabling process. Evaluations may be initiated and organized by the regional office, headquarters, WHO country offices, or other budget centres in the region. For an evaluation initiated and/or organized by the regional office, the checklist in Annex 4 can be used to guide the process. WHO country offices may wish to develop more detailed process checklists or flowcharts, taking the country context into account. If a country office initiates a self-evaluation, it may request the regional office to oversee the conduct of the evaluation.

Evaluations organized by WHO headquarters are managed by the Evaluation Office in headquarters, with the regional office and country offices playing a collaborative and cooperative role.

Enabling tool. A software application is available as a tracking tool to facilitate registration of evaluations, follow up the actions taken on the recommendations of the evaluation, document lessons learned, and generate reports for management.

4. Evaluation capacity and resources

4.1 Capacity-building

To increase the capacity and capability of the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia in conducting, managing and using evaluation, we propose the following actions should be done:

- briefings for Planning and M&E focal points, National Professional Officers (NPOs) and new staff joining the organization;

- staff development and learning (SDL) programme training in general principles and methods (e.g. based on the WHO Handbook) is useful, but much more useful when applied to a specific evaluation plan;

- opportunities for staff to join TGs as lay members;
- opportunities for staff to observe evaluation teams in action;
- holding technical seminars as a platform for both capacity-building and dissemination;
- establishing a South-East Asia Regional Network on Evaluation (SEARNE), with terms of reference (ToRs, *see* Annex 3 for draft ToRs) based on the ToRs of the GNE.

4.2 Resources

The Regional Director considers evaluation a priority and has increased the budget for this by a significant amount in the proposed 2018–2019 budget for the WHO South-East Asia Region. This is reflected under the programme area "Transparency, accountability and risk management", and will enable country offices and/or departments who are initiating an evaluation to be partly or fully funded from available funding. Departments and country offices are also encouraged to set aside in their own budgets funds for independent evaluations. Like some United Nations (UN) agencies, the Regional Office is also keen to see evaluation become an integral component of all major projects and be funded by the project funder/donor as a requirement.

A prequalified roster of evaluation experts and institutions (public/private) to support the evaluation work of the organization will be maintained. The DPM's office will regularly review and update the roster.

5. Planning and carrying out an evaluation

5.1 Workplan

The biennial workplan for evaluation will be drafted by the PLN in consultation with the DPM, technical departments and country offices of the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia. The aim will be to link evaluation with the process for planning the programme budget. The twice-yearly meeting of the Regional Director with WHO representatives is a good opportunity to discuss and identify topics for evaluation and finalize the evaluation workplan. It is proposed that evaluation be a standing agenda item in the meeting of the Regional Director with the WHO representatives.

The workplan will be refined by the Executive Management Committee of the WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia and presented to the Regional Director for review and approval. The first workplan will be available for discussion at the Seventieth Regional Committee in September 2017.

5.2 Planning for a particular evaluation (refer to Annexes 1 and 2)

Based on the experience of the PPC in coordinating evaluations in the Region, the box on this page shows the key steps in planning and completing an evaluation. The steps could be tailored to the needs and context of country offices but, in order to achieve coherence and harmonization across the Organization, adherence to the guidance provided by the WHO *Evaluation practice handbook* and to the core principles outlined in this framework is recommended.

Box 1: Steps in the evaluation process

- Identify topic area.

- Constitute and convene Technical Group to agree on the precise focus of evaluation.

- The Regional Director signs off, including on funding approval.

- Reconvene Technical Group:

    – to develop a request for proposal (RFP);

    – to identify evaluation criteria;

    – to choose the methodology;

    – to prepare the terms of reference;

    – to identify and estimate resources;

    – to agree on the evaluation time frame.

- Conduct a bidding process to appoint the evaluation team.

- Evaluate through:

    – document review

    – issue of surveys/self-assessments

    – key interviews.

- Debrief the TG on emerging findings (by the evaluation team).

- Send a draft report to the TG to check for factual accuracy and oversee the management's response to the recommendations.

- Dissemination of final report for organizational learning and development.

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6. Reports

The draft report of a decentralized evaluation will be reviewed initially for factual accuracy by the PLN and/or PMO. It will be circulated for comments (again, to check for factual accuracy) to the TG; relevant budget centres; senior management and also to SEARNE, once the network is fully functional. The draft report will be refined based on the feedback, and the final report along with a set of recommendations will be submitted to the DPM and Regional Director prior to publication.

An executive summary of each report will be made available on the evaluation website.

7. Management response

The engagement of senior management is crucially important in deciding how best to respond to the evaluation findings, and whether and how to adopt the recommendations. The PLN and PMO will ensure a corresponding management response for each recommendation arising from the evaluation (typically, management responses are either "accepted"; "partially accepted" or "not accepted"; and will set out key actions with timelines and responsible individuals, offices or units. The ownership of the management response, including ensuring implementation of the recommendations, will be with the Regional Director, DPM, WHO representatives and directors of technical departments, depending on the type of evaluation and who initiated it.

8. Organizational learning and development

Organizational learning from the evaluation findings will be achieved through both formal and informal mechanisms. The first step is the informal debriefing of TG members on the evaluation findings (shown in Box 1) to ensure that important points are well understood by all, and well captured in the report. Issues that need further attention can be discussed in this debriefing meeting and fully captured in the final report. Other aids to organizational learning include the following:

- Feedback to senior management will be provided through the Executive Management Committee meetings and Regional Director's meetings with WHO representatives and country office staff as relevant.

- Opportunities will be sought to provide feedback to all staff, both those involved in the area under evaluation, and the wider staff across the Region.

- The PLN will ensure reflection of evaluation recommendations in the operational planning process, and other policy development processes.

- The Regional Director's annual report will include a section on evaluation work and organizational learning.

- An online tool will be available to aid learning and development from evaluation.

It is proposed that the overall approach to evaluation in the Region be reviewed after the first four to six evaluations have been conducted or after 2 years (whichever is sooner). A special TG will be convened to oversee discussions and compile recommendations.

9. Communicating evaluation work more widely

The process and outcomes of evaluation will normally be shared widely across the Region, and with key partners, including Member States and donors, as they demonstrate the Organization's determination to manage itself well and learn from its experiences. A number of dissemination strategies are appropriate:

- sharing the final report with the relevant technical department and country offices;

- disseminating the report to ministries of health, other relevant offices and development partners;

- holding a technical seminar/webinar for all staff of the Regional Office;

- publishing the report for dissemination at the Regional Committee;

- sharing the report with other WHO regional offices as well as with the WHO headquarters, the Evaluation Office, and relevant clusters and departments;

- publishing the report in the WHO *Bulletin* and other peer-reviewed publications;

- presenting the evaluation findings at international conferences as relevant;

- uploading the full report or executive summary to the Intranet and/or Internet;

- developing and updating the evaluation website and portal for information dissemination.

In addition, to promote the culture of evaluation, the Regional Director will report on evaluation activities to the Regional Committee every alternate year. The annual report of the Regional Director will have a dedicated section on evaluation and organizational learning. The Regional Director may additionally brief the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the WHO Executive Board (PBAC) in the context of the standing agenda item on evaluation.

Annex 1

Other types of assessment in WHO

Many other types of performance assessment are routinely used within and across WHO. Some of the more common ones are listed below. Many of these could provide input and evidence to an evaluation; but they are not themselves evaluations.

Performance assessment. This includes mid-term and end-of-biennium reviews of the WHO programme budget, which are corporate requirements. The findings of performance assessment may inform the evaluation if relevant.

Routine assessment of programme activities. This is done in the Global Management System (GSM) and will contribute to performance assessment of the programme budget, annual reports and programme reports, where findings are presented based on analysis of data from activities undertaken by the units and budget centres.

Global surveys. These are often ad hoc exercises where technical units collect information from countries or a region on specific programme. The findings of the global surveys can be used for internal and external advocacy.

Ad hoc consultations. This is a mechanism in WHO whereby technical programmes build evidence for policies and strategies, and obtain feedback on performance. Meetings of expert committees, advisory groups and technical consultations are some examples.

Programme reviews. This is a periodic assessment of the performance of an intervention. These reviews are structured to the ToRs, and examine the technical and managerial issues of a programme, with the objective of identifying gaps to take corrective actions. Often, the programme review does not apply as rigorous a methodology as an evaluation.

Audits. An audit focuses on compliance while evaluation focuses on results and on understanding as to what works – the "whys" and "hows".

Annex 2

The five evaluation principles

Impartiality: this is the absence of bias at all stages of the evaluation. Impartiality is important for the credibility of the evaluation. For this reason, a technical group is established for every evaluation to ensure oversight of the evaluation process.

Independence: this means freedom from control or any undue influence. Independence provides legitimacy to an evaluation and reduces the potential for conflicts of interest. Towards this end, engagement of reputable external evaluators is encouraged.

Utility: this refers to the impact of the evaluation at the organizational level, on programme and project management, and on decision-making. Evaluation should be designed to provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful, enabling the timely incorporation of findings, recommendations and lessons learned into the decision-making and management processes of the Organization.

Quality: this relates to the appropriate and accurate use of evaluation criteria and rigorous methodology. At least five evaluation criteria guide the framing of the evaluation question – relevance, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the interventions – and contributions of the Organization.

Transparency: this requires stakeholders to be aware of the purpose and objectives of the evaluation, the criteria, process, methodology and purposes for which the findings will be applied. The Evaluation Policy stipulates that the results of evaluation be disclosed and disseminated to stakeholders.

Terms of reference:
South-East Asia Regional Network on Evaluation

Purpose

As indicated in the governance and capacity-building section of this framework, there is a need to establish and maintain a regional network on evaluation to institutionalize and promote a culture of evaluation. The South-East Asia Regional Network on Evaluation (SEARNE) is an internal network of staff acting to facilitate the sharing of information and knowledge management, and strengthen the practice of evaluation at WHO by

- participating in the preparation of the biennial evaluation workplan and its annual update;

- submitting relevant evaluation reports to the evaluation inventory;

- following up on the status of management responses to evaluation recommendations;

- acting as focal points for evaluation in their respective areas;

- advising WHO country offices, programmes, departments and budget centres on evaluation issues, as needed.

Composition and method of work

SEARNE is chaired by the DPM and the support structure for the network will be provided by the PPC. The focal points on evaluation matters in each of the budget centres (country offices, departments and/or programmes) will be members of SEARNE.

SEARNE members are expected:

- to participate in face-to-face meetings of SEARNE;

- contribute to preparation of the plan of work for the Region, the detailed method of work and the composition of the ad hoc working groups for the identified evaluations;

- contribute to matters such as the quality control approach, selection criteria for prioritization of individual evaluations; assessment of evaluation material and capacity-building.

The current estimated commitment is 5–10% of the professional time and effort of each focal point.

Focal points are expected to discuss with their supervisors the appropriate reflection of their role as focal points to SEARNE in the Performance Management Development System (PMDS).

For its regular business, SEARNE will perform its tasks virtually through electronic communications (messaging, teleconferences). However, it will consider face-to-face meetings when circumstances permit, such as taking advantage of meetings of other networks.

The SEARNE secretariat is the responsibility of the PPC, which ensures the smooth functioning of SEARNE by providing the following:

- logistics for conducting regular business, including managing the SEARNE agenda and ensuring that the deliverables are achieved on time, in particular, proposing the timing of meetings and ensuring their calling, identifying agenda items, drafting minutes and following up on what has been agreed;

- administrative support for the work of SEARNE, including administration of the modalities of information dissemination and management of the evaluation inventory and the database of experts;

- technical back-up as needed on evaluation issues, including ensuring linkages with other networks such as GNE and United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG);

- dissemination of information on the work of SEARNE and evaluation issues in accordance with the this Framework and WHO's evaluation policy.

Deliverables

Outputs of SEARNE will be submitted to the governing bodies of the South-East Asia Region in accordance with this framework. This includes:

- Regional biennial evaluation workplan

- annual evaluation report

- evaluation registry

- database of evaluation experts

- quality control and quality assurance system

- building the capacity and inculcating the practice of evaluation across the Region, including building competencies of staff to implement the WHO evaluation policy and this regional framework

- synthesizing the lessons learned from evaluations and disseminating the information.
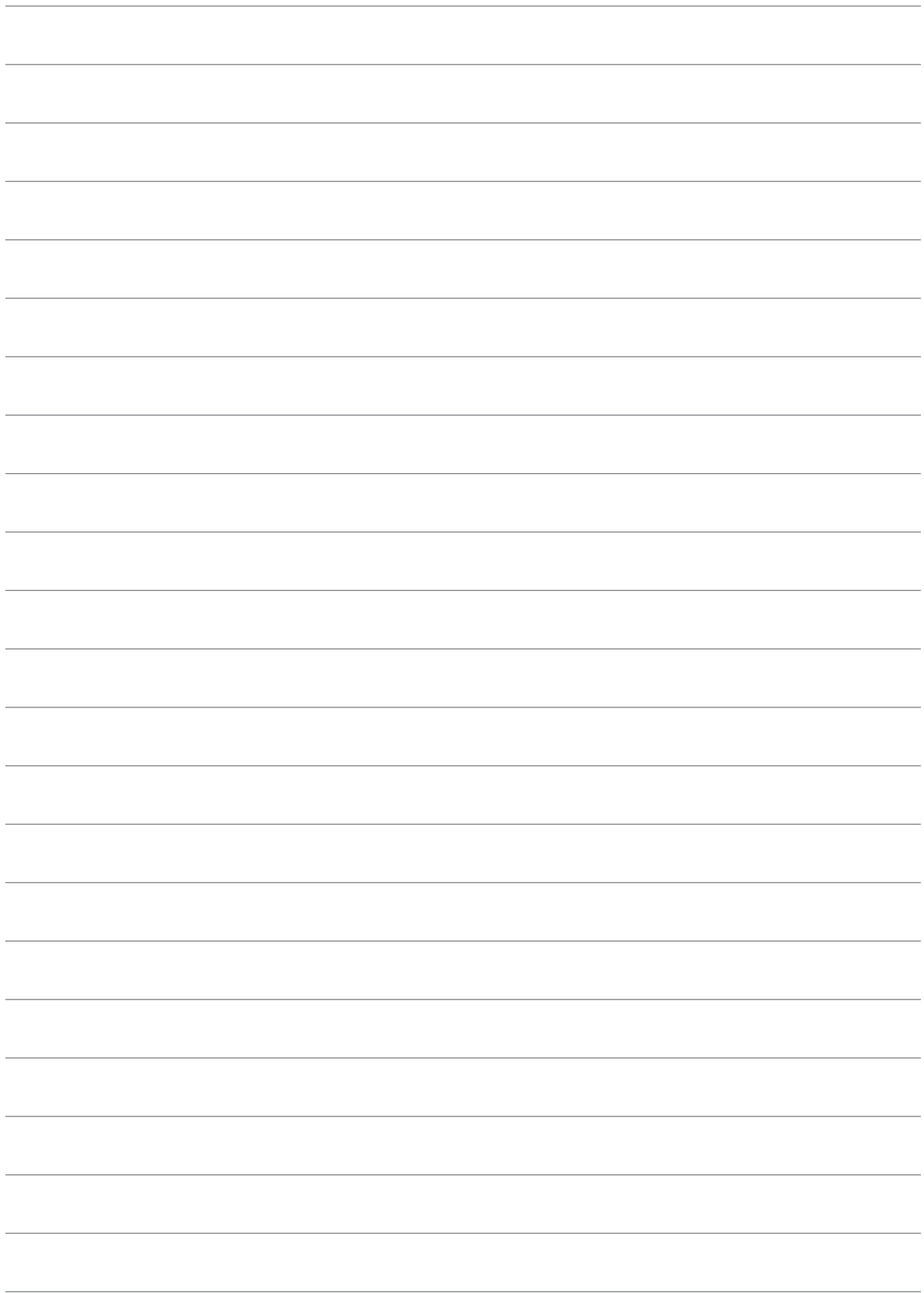
Annex 4

Checklist for the Regional Office evaluation process

S. no.	Key items	Responsible person/ office
Pre-evaluation (initiating an evaluation)		
1	Identify topic	PLN/PMO with technical unit (TU)
2	Constitute Technical Group for specific evaluation work	PLN/PMO
3	Agree on the topic for evaluation	PLN/PMO with TU
4	Convene a technical group (TG)	PLN/PMO
5	Get approval from the senior management to conduct the evaluation	PLN/PMO
6	Develop an RFP in consultation with Purchasing and Contract Services (PCS)	TU/PLN/PMO/PCS
7	Identify the evaluation question	TU/PLN/PMO
8	Set the criteria for evaluation	TU/PLN/PMO
9	Choose a method	TU/PLN/PMO
10	Prepare terms of reference	TU/PLN/PMO
11	Identify and estimate resources	TU/PLN/PMO
13	Establish an evaluation time frame	TU/PLN/PMO
14	Finalize the RFP draft and get it approved by the TG	TU/PLN/PMO
(Initiating an Agreement for Performance of Work (APW)/contract) – process under review, guidance awaited from DAF		
15	Send RFP to shortlisted evaluators with 2 weeks' timeline	PLN/PMO
16	Review proposals and select the evaluator	TG
17	Approve the shortlisted agencies	PLN/PMO/PCS
18	Obtain a detailed proposal with budget, timeline, etc. – 1 week	PLN/PMO and TU
19	Agreement for Performance of Work (APW) with the evaluator	PLN/PMO/PCS
Starting/Tracking ongoing evaluation		
20	Identify needs/data collection/briefing note	PLN/PMO
21	Send an information memo/email to WHO representatives to facilitate evaluation at country level	DPM/PLN/PMO
22	Carry out evaluation	Evaluator
23	Ensure quality assurance and control	Evaluator
24	Obtain an interim progress report	TU and PLN/PMO
Post-evaluation finalization of the report and recommendations		
25	Review draft report by the TG	PLN/PMO to Facilitate
26	Submit near-final report to the DPM/Regional Director for review and comments:	PLN/PMO
27	Obtain final report along with recommendations and lessons learnt:	TU and PLN/PMO
28	Approval of final report by Technical Advisory Group (TAG)	PLN/PMO

S. no.	Key items	Responsible person/office
Post-evaluation report dissemination		
29	Submit the final report for approval to the Regional Director/DPM along with modalities of dissemination	PLN/PMO
30	Plan for dissemination as per guidance from DPM/Regional Director in consultation with the TU	PLN/PMO
31	Publish the report on the Intranet/Internet	PLN/PMO
Tracking the recommendations		
32	Develop a proposed management action for recommendations	PLN/PMO
33	Submit the proposed management action to the DPM and Regional Director for approval	PLN/PMO
34	Develop an action plan with a timeline and allocate a responsible person based on final management action	PLN/PMO
35	Upload the final list of recommendations, management actions, action points, timeline and responsible person in the enabling tool	PLN/PMO/TU/ICT
36	Track implementation of the recommendations	PLN/PMO/TU

[1] For procurement/services of a technical nature
[2] For procurement/services of an administrative nature