

Approach note for country-based case studies in thematic evaluations

(i) Approach, rationale, and value added

There is an urgent need to strengthen the case studies in EO thematic evaluations. This note proposes a way towards generating longer term and more in-depth case study approach by building more upon country-based case studies designed to leverage the contextual and institutional knowledge on the ground. Such an approach would ensure adequate time and thoroughness for data collection and analysis in the country.

Case studies are only one method and source of information for thematic evaluations. They are used to provide in-depth analyses of the topic at hand and will help to understand in particular ‘how’ and ‘why’ certain mechanisms or impact pathways work. The case studies provide important data and illustrative examples for the evaluations, but in their usual current form their lack of depth and methodological rigour reduce their utility and credibility.

The goal is to produce comprehensive case studies that generate knowledge and lessons for the thematic evaluation, but that also function as stand-alone quality-assured studies that can be published. It is recognized that the case studies of thematic evaluations can never be used for statistical generalizations, but when they are well done they can contribute significantly to theoretical generalization and illustration of findings.

(ii) Modality

The modality will rely more on the use of national capacity for carrying out the case studies. When feasible, national capacity will be deployed to undertake such in-depth case studies instead of or to supplement inputs from international consultants. The national consultant or entity engaged to carry out the case study will be closely guided by the overall evaluation framework, design and methodology. There must be close interaction and dialogue between the international evaluation team leader and EO task manager with the national consultant/entity in providing the framework and guidance for data collection and analysis.

Adequate time and resources need to be allocated for undertaking the case study utilizing a variety of approaches and methodologies, including document review, interviews, project and field visits, surveys, and meta-analysis of existing evaluative evidence. It is foreseen that such case studies may require up to two months to undertake, depending on the nature and complexity of the theme that is the subject of the evaluation. The national consultant/entity should be contracted on a product-based contract.

The role of the international consultants would be to supervise and quality-enhance the case study work. The primary responsibility would rest with the team leader, but other core team members can assume responsibility for the supervision, especially on a regional or sub-thematic

basis when appropriate. Apart from the initial guidance, such supervision may involve supervisory or follow-up missions when needed.

(iii) The role of the international team and EO task manager

The modality has implications on the role and composition of the international evaluation team. The international team—and in particular the team leader—plays a key role in designing the case study approach and ensuring comparability and methodological consistency between the various case studies. There is thus a key role in design, supervision and quality assurance of the case studies, as well as in synthesizing the results and report writing. It is assumed that this modality will require a smaller core team of international consultants than has been the practice in the past.

The EO task manager will work closely together with the team leader in assuring the quality of the guidance to case studies and adherence with the overall approaches and methodologies practised in EO.

(iv) Key tasks in country-based case studies

The key tasks for the country-based case studies to be undertaken by the national consultant/entity in close consultation with the international consultant team leader are to:

1. Enhance “content validity” and reliability and to limit biases in the evaluation
 - Review existing background information in the evaluation website and develop a firm grasp of the issues being studied and the types of information critical for the evaluation.
 - Work together with the evaluation team leader and other team members to establish the case study approach, methodology and qualitative data collection methods.
 - Review the inception report and provide input in the design and application of the design in the country for case study and in the refinement of the evaluation criteria, and evaluation protocol to meet country situations.
 - Understand the UNEG norms and standards and the ethical guidelines for conducting an evaluation.
2. Data collection and generation and sampling
 - Collect necessary documents accessible in country (including UNDP project documents, relevant government documents/policies/publications, media information, relevant documents from donors on the ground, etc. (N.B.: Much of the documentation will already be available through EO background research.)
 - Undertake the background and portfolio analysis related to case study country and UNDP’s activities over the period covered by the evaluation.
 - Participate in fine-tuning and developing data collection instruments and methods by working together with international consultants; help identify alternative sources and

methods as necessary for country context.

- In close collaboration with the international consultants, develop a sampling frame for the key areas of investigation as needed by the evaluation design and work with the team to select the sample for data collection.
- Undertake an initial mapping of the stakeholders/key informants.
- Undertake data collection activities (secondary and primary data including, survey, interviews, etc.) according to the methods and schedule outlined in the inception period.

3. Analysis and synthesis of country case study

- Conduct substantive analysis of the information and evidence gathered to respond to key evaluation questions.
- Draft country case study following format provided and revise format following feedback from EO, other national consultants (peer-review) and the international consultants.

4. Input in the Final Evaluation Report

- Provide inputs as required by the international team leader to the final evaluation report

5. Meetings with Stakeholders in country

- Develop plans for sharing key messages and report of the country studies with key stakeholders in country.

(v) Identification and selection of national contractor

The national contractor to be engaged for a country-based case study can be an individual consultant or group of consultants, a research institute, a non-governmental organization, a private sector firm or any suitable entity with appropriate expertise, capacity and independence,

The international consultant team leader in consultation with the EO task manager will be responsible for identifying qualified and skilled contractors for the country-based case studies. The primary method for identifying consultants is for EO to launch in countries for case study an expression of interest requiring a short note of interest, background experience, CVs and list of past references and reports or publications.

This process will be complemented by drawing from the following sources to identify possible candidates whom EO may include into the pool:

- Informal and formal networks
- UNDP Regional Service Centres
- Substantive bureaux in UNDP
- Desk officers of chosen countries in regional bureaux and country offices
- Bilateral and multilateral partners

(vi) Team management: Procedures and risk mitigation

As with all evaluations, the approach of using consultants, with potentially different training, experience and background, raises some risks. This risk is proposed to be managed and mitigated via several mechanisms:

- EO, drawing on its familiarity and past experience will be responsible for identifying qualified and skilled national consultants.
- Following the thorough selection process outlined above.
- Providing all national consultants/entities with orientation to review the methodology and protocols to be used (either in person or via teleconference, etc.) toward ensuring a common understanding of concepts, procedures and benchmarks across the different case study countries.
- Organizing preparatory workshops in a region where multiple case studies are planned and in which a number of national teams could participate.
- Maintaining close interaction among all consultants, national and international including throughout the duration of the case studies, which may when necessary involve a brief country visit by an international consultant to join in the interviewing, establish details on field procedures, and to discuss preliminary findings.
- Review of the draft country-based case study reports for quality assurance.

Notwithstanding the safeguards proposed, there is the real possibility that some of the country studies cannot be completed satisfactorily through the approach outlined above. In such cases, more traditional approaches of utilizing international consultants may be required.