KEA GUIDELINES ON WRITING THE INCEPTION REPORT

I. **Introduction** : Inception report (IR) is a road map of how the evaluator will proceed with the evaluation work. It is prepared by the successful evaluator within a month of signing the MoU/contract agreement, after a good desk review, holding consultations with key officers and staff in the Client Department/Agency (i.e. the Line Department concerned) and pilot testing of the evaluation survey instruments. IR has two key purposes – first, to improve the mutual understanding between the Client Department, Karnataka Evaluation Authority (KEA) and the Evaluator on the broad conceptual issues pertaining to the study; and second, to lay down the step-by-step work plan for undertaking the evaluation work. IR informs an evaluation by identifying what procedure is to be followed, who is to do what, and in what time frame. The length of IR could vary from 15-20 pages. IR brings a closure to the planning process with a good understanding of what is feasible in a given context and seeks for a stamp of approval.

II. **Essential elements of IR:** In principle, IR should cover all the components of the initial terms of reference (ToR) framed by the sponsor (i.e. who funds the study) because once approved, it will replace the ToR as the key reference document till the evaluation is concluded. However, the emphasis will differ. No further elaboration or explanation is necessary in those sections which are clearly and specifically laid down in the ToR or the contract agreement/MoU. Remaining sections will be written in detail. Following are the essential elements of IR:

1. **Evaluation title and background information:** This section uses the title and background information as given in the ToR. It will profile the investments made so far and the likely investment in the near future and the significance of these investments to local socioeconomic development.

2. **Log Frame/Theory of Change/Program Theory:** This section describes how the program or the scheme works, its underlying intervention logic, inputs, processes, expected outputs, outcomes and sustainability of the program in the form of a flow chart. The section will highlight and explain which aspects in the flow chart are under evaluation and why. Seldom is the entire framework under evaluation focus. Only specific elements are being evaluated or investigated.

3. **Evaluation framework:** It is a very important section for discussing the following issues:

   a. What is the purpose of evaluation? Why is it being done now?

   b. What is the scope of evaluation? What reference time period it covers?

   c. Who are the stakeholders? Who are the key audience for this study?

   d. What will the study evaluate basically? Program effectiveness? Efficiency? Economy? Administrative processes? Program/scheme outputs? Outcomes? And from whose perspective?

   e. What are the specific objectives for this evaluation study? Are any refinements to the objectives listed in the ToR necessary?

   f. What is the baseline or benchmark against which evaluation will be done? Does it involve a control group or a counterfactual? How will the attribution issue be addressed?

   g. What is the precision required for the study? What is the confidence limit and statistical power?

h. What are the risks and limitations that may undermine the reliability and validity of the evaluation results?

Some of these might be appearing in ToR. They are to be reproduced here with necessary further elaboration.

4. **Evaluation questions and sub questions:** This section deliberates on the generic and specific questions which will be addressed by the study. Key questions of the ToR should be retained as they are. Changes can only be made with the permission of sponsor if there are compelling reasons. However, the Evaluator is free to add any number of sub questions to each main question for the purpose of elucidation and finding crisp answers. More and more sub questions will lead to more indicators and a corresponding increase in the data collection and processing.

Since the questions raised in ToR are broad in scope, they definitely call for framing a good number of sub questions. Once all sub questions have been identified, they are grouped in some logical manner by subject area, by the data needed to answer them, by process/outcome/impact, or in some other manner. The plan should then outline the data by its sources, region etc., and explain how the data gathered will relate to each one of the main evaluation questions.

5. **Indicators:** Indicators are meant to measure and see if the expected results are being achieved by the program/scheme. They should capture information that can demonstrate a positive change attributable to the program/scheme. Obviously there will be a baseline which relates to the pre-implementation phase or to areas not covered by the program/scheme and a target for improvement which is set under the program/scheme. Indicators should help capture the difference between the two.

Indicators may be quantitative like number, percentage, rate, ratio etc., or qualitative like compliance with...; quality of...; extent of...; level of ... etc. In some instances, data may not be available for the most ideal indicators. In such situations, proxy indicators are commonly used. Fewer but diverse indicators are good to measure the breadth and depth of changes that are happening. Generally indicators are set up through a participatory process with the sponsors so that there is better understanding of the process and ownership of the results.

In this section, the list of indicators relevant to answer each sub-question will be identified, listed and classified into three broad categories viz., output, outcome and impact indicators. Only those relevant at this point of time are to be picked up for investigation.

6. **Evaluation methods and techniques:** A credible evaluation methodology is one that directly ties results to the investment made, thereby eliminating other explanations. There are a number of quantitative and qualitative evaluation techniques to do this. Well known quantitative techniques include Randomized Selection Method, Propensity Score Matching, Double Difference Method, Regression Discontinuity Design etc. There are also many qualitative methods (socio-metric techniques) like case studies, focus groups, PRA, key informant interviews, participant observation and so on. Since there are serious limitations to both these methods, frequently mixed (qual-quant or quasi-experimental) methods are preferred. Methodologies differ by sectors and purpose of evaluation.

In this section, the evaluator has to choose the best and the most appropriate method from among the well known methods and justify the choice. The key idea is to capture the effect size of the

program/scheme through a counterfactual and also understand the spillover effects. The selection of an evaluation design determines the type of information to be collected, potential sources and the type of analysis required.

Frequently, even with the best evaluation design and with best plans and intentions, things do not go exactly as planned. Hence, a backup plan in case the chosen methodology does not work out is desired in the IR.

7. **Data and information sources:** In this section, the evaluators should identify the data and information necessary for the evaluation clearly and state from where, how and what information will be collected. Secondary sources include project/program documents, progress reports, RFD, literature searches and file reviews, prior evaluation reports etc. Primary data which is most important for evaluation is generated by a process of consultations with senior government officials, beneficiaries, civil society organizations, district level officers, local NGOs, elected members of local bodies etc., connected with the program implementation. Knowing the limitations of available data early on will allow evaluation planners to gauge the amount of effort and time needed to collect additional information.

8. **Evaluation matrix:** This important section serves as a roadmap for planning and conducting the evaluation. It links cause-and-effect questions to the design and methodologies. The purpose of the evaluation matrix is to organize the evaluation purpose and questions and to match what is to be evaluated with the appropriate data collection and analysis techniques. It displays for each of the evaluation criteria, the questions and sub-questions that the evaluation will answer, and for each question, the data that will be collected to answer that question and the methods that will be used to collect that data. Evaluation matrix is usually drawn up as a table give below:

Main evaluation issue	
Key evaluation question	
Sub-question	
Indicator(s)	
Normative /baseline value	
Success threshold	
Data sources	
Data collection method	
Data collection instrument	
Method of data analysis	
Expected results	

This table is to be repeated as many times as there are sub-questions. Consequently, a completed design matrix may run into multiple pages. It is this document that lets a decision maker understand what needs to be done and how the key evaluation questions will be finally answered. Taken together with the sample size and type, it will indicate the magnitude of the task to be accomplished.

9. **Sample and sampling design:** Unless, it is small and manageable (just a few dozen), the entire population served by a program/scheme is not expected to be surveyed for results because it is too expensive and time consuming. Sampling is a very common method of saving on time and cost without compromising on the quality. There are standardized methods like simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, cluster sampling, and so on. Literature is easily available on sampling.

For most government programs, sampling is inevitable because their coverage is large and frequently universal. Picking the correct sample size and the sample units is a complicated process. If it is not done properly, the results cannot be generalized to the participant population as a whole. There are a number of methods for fixing sample size. The Evaluator may chose any method but should make a mention of it in the IR.

10. **Data collection tools:** There are several ways to collect data. Evaluator should choose the most appropriate method(s) for the study and describe how exactly data collection will proceed for the study. Arrangements planned for field data collection should be described briefly in this section of IR. Pilot tested instruments should be furnished in the appendix. Data collection tools should be simple, brief and precise so that the data collectors' subjectivity and inter-rater variability is minimized.

11. **Method of data analysis:** This section briefly describes the arrangements in place for concurrent and accurate data entry (digitization) including translation and coding of qualitative data; what statistical tools and techniques will be used to process the data; what will be the outputs and what is the reliability rating etc.

12. **Layout of the final report:** In this part of the text, the evaluator will indicate the outline of the final text in the form of a table of contents. This is essential to make sure that all the information that is needed for the final evaluation report is thought about, planned and collected systematically during the study. Specification about the style guide to follow, paper and printing quality, number of soft and hard copies that will be submitted etc., should also be indicated in this section of IR.

13. **Work Scheduling:** Gantt chart of how all evaluation activities and the time schedule (in weeks) should be furnished in this section, keeping the overall project timeframe as agreed in the MoU/contract agreement in mind. It will fix the overall time frame and schedule for each one of the activities.

14. **Sharing of responsibilities:** Evaluation is commonly a joint venture of the sponsors, the KEA and the external evaluators. Where appropriate, provision should be made for the participation of other stakeholders. Implementation arrangements are intended to clarify expectations, eliminate ambiguities, and facilitate an efficient and effective evaluation process. This section of the IR describes the practices and procedures that will be applied in managing the evaluation. It will list the key officers on both sides who will interact frequently for managing the evaluation. General responsibilities of each one of the parties is as under:

A. Responsibilities of the sponsoring department: Sponsor should:

a. Ensure that the evaluator(s) have access to files, reports, publications, list of works, list of beneficiaries, list of other stakeholders and any other information that is relevant to evaluation.

b. Nominate nodal officer(s) at the head office and also in the districts where field work/surveys will be taken up for coordination and providing necessary administrative and logistical support for the evaluation work. IR should name the officers who could be nominated as nodal officers.

c. Respond promptly to the evaluator's requests for briefing/debriefing on contextual facts and figures, for approving changes/modifications to IR, for release of funds as per agreement, for offering comments on any drafts, for arranging meetings with stakeholders and local experts, and so on.

B. Responsibilities of KEA: KEA is responsible for standard items like:

a. Approving the inception report within two weeks from the date of submission with such modifications as may be necessary.

b. Test checking a certain percentage of the sample survey which the IR may specify for the accuracy in case of external evaluations.

c. Offering comments on the draft evaluation report within three weeks from the date of submission which the evaluators agree to incorporate, and

d. Benchmarking of the final evaluation report and dynamically grading the evaluators within one month from the date of submission of the report and informing the evaluators.

C. Responsibilities of the Evaluator: Evaluator should:

a. Adhere to the evaluation calendar laid down without any major deviations. Tentative schedule of field visits should be indicated in the IR. Any deviations from the agreed schedule should be informed to the nodal officer in advance. Invariably the nodal officer should be debriefed at the end of every field visit.

b. Engage with all the stakeholders, particularly those belonging to the deprived sections of the society. The right of such communities to participate, to air their views, to share the information, to know the evaluation findings, to respond to the findings and so on must be fully recognized and such events should be recorded. Potential places to do this survey should be identified in the IR.

c. Potential risks and practical limitations to the study should be identified beforehand and remedial measures for overcoming them should be brought out in the IR.

15. Reporting requirements: The IR should include a regime for regular progress reporting by the evaluator to the sponsor; weekly/fortnightly/monthly. The idea is to resolve any problems and unanticipated difficulties faced by the evaluators in the execution of the study in time through frequent interaction.

IR Approval Procedure: A soft copy of the IR containing detailed notes on the above fifteen sections should be submitted one week in advance to KEA for circulation among its Technical Committee Members and the Nodal Officer. The Evaluator will also make a presentation of the IR to the committee which will deliberate on the methodology, sampling size and design, and any other relevant technical detail and approve the IR with such modifications as it may deem fit. Approval will be communicated by KEA to all the concerned. Thereafter, Evaluator is free to proceed with the study.

Conclusion: Once approved, IR becomes the 'Evaluation Work Plan'. Evaluator is expected to pursue the study as per the approved plan. In doing so, the Evaluator may encounter some difficulties. Like in other planning process, the evaluation matrix and plan may need certain changes.

It should be generally allowed after discussion. Minor changes could be approved by the nodal officer. Major changes, however, require prior approval from KEA. The deviation should generally not be such that it leads to omitting key issues from the study or distorts the overall study. Within these limits the study should be completed.

Annexures to the IR

1. ToR

2. Contract agreement /MoU copy

3. Templates of all data collection instruments

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