

## KEA GUIDELINES ON FRAMING TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR) FOR EVALUATION STUDIES

**Introduction:** An evaluation study is planned and carried out in response to management's need for information about the development results and its impact. It is germane to the development process. Development programs are often evaluated mid-way during implementation to understand how well a program or scheme is working; to check if there are any unintended consequences, and to examine the scope to improve the performance. Sometimes evaluation is undertaken towards the end of the program implementation to understand the overall impact. Key question for such ex-post evaluation is to find the difference between what happened with the program and what would have happened without it and whether it was efficient in delivery. Because of this fundamental difference, evaluations are broadly classified into program evaluation and Impact evaluation.

**What is ToR?** Who should frame it? Framing the Terms of Reference (ToR) is the starting point for any evaluation. It sets the context, defines the scope, requirements and expectations of the evaluation study. ToR is a list of expectations of the funder which the Consultants will have to take into account while planning the study and quoting the costs. Therefore, initial draft of the ToR is the responsibility of the commissioning office. The officer handling the program or the scheme in the head office is considered as the Nodal Officer for initiating, supervising and taking the evaluation to its logical conclusion. He/she should have a good understanding of the reasons for the evaluation, issues to be addressed, available resources, likely cost, expertise required, time frame, expected deliverables, ways to utilize the findings etc. Consulting KEA right from the beginning will be helpful in framing an effective ToR.

**Key elements of ToR:** ToR is a short and concise document - typically about 5-10 pages in length at best. It must contain the following sections:

- 1. Title:** Every evaluation study must bear an appropriate title depending upon the central focus of the study/program/scheme that is being evaluated. A good abbreviated acronym renders the title easy to remember.
- 2. Background and the context:** This brief opening section of ToR describes the history and current status of the program such as its legislative mandate, objectives, major activities and duration, investment made till date, short term outputs, medium term outcomes and long term impacts. It should explain why, when and how the program came into being and what its achievements are. If it is a thematic or sector evaluation, its importance and relevance is described. Results of past evaluations, rationale for the present evaluations and expectations are furnished. Length of this section should not be more than a page.
- 3. Evaluation scope, purpose and objectives:** An evaluation can take any number of directions. Hence the first step in the study design is to define its scope and objectives like - what aspects of the intervention/which issues are to be covered, reference time period, geographic coverage, target groups, outputs/outcomes that are to be considered etc. This section should also explain why the evaluation is being undertaken now; is it a project appraisal, mid-term or ex-post evaluation; what are the objectives of the evaluation; and how will the evaluation process and/or results be used? Ideal length of this section is two paragraphs.

- 4. Evaluation questions:** Evaluations are essentially answers to a set of key questions that the departments/organizations may have. There are two types of questions. First are the program specific questions, related directly to the program content and delivery. They address questions like:
- a. Are the anticipated outcomes of the program achieved overall?
  - b. To what extent can the improvements be attributed to the program?
  - c. Are the prescribed quality standards of deliverables maintained?
  - d. How satisfied are the citizens with the program/activities?
  - e. What is the effect size of the program intervention on different segment of the target population?
  - f. What factors contributed to achieving/not achieving intended outcomes?
  - g. Are there any unintended consequences and if so what are they?
  - h. Is there any overlap or duplication of with any other program?
  - i. How the program could be implemented better in the future? And so on.

The second set of questions is common or generic to any evaluation related to program conceptualization. Typical examples are - did the program aim for the right objectives? Do the activities included address the problems adequately? Are the outcomes sustainable? How do the results compare with an alternative intervention to achieve the same objectives? These are external to the program.

The type of questions to emphasize depends on the stage of the program implementation. Mid-term evaluations focus on the processes and implementation related problems whereas end term assessments focus on the outcome/impact. While constructing the list of evaluation questions, it is important to prioritize the areas of inquiry and keep the list to the minimum – ideally 5-6 major questions. It is good to explore a few important concerns in greater depth in the evaluation rather than to examine a broad set of issues superficially. Hence, ToR will only frame the main questions. It must avoid a long list of minor questions, because they blur the focus and purpose.

- 5. Evaluation methodology:** This important section prescribes the overarching methodological framework. It deals with the indicators to be used, their measurement methodology, identifying data sources, prescribing data collection and analysis methods, fixing sample size and design, fixing threshold values for drawing inferences, triangulating the findings etc. Nodal Officers who are not conversant with such issues may find this section too daunting to write. In practice, methodological nuances emerge initially from the external consultant's proposals at the time of evaluating the tenders and finally from the KEA approval to the Inception Report. Detailing this section helps in estimating the cost of the study and for this purpose KEA guidance can be availed.
- 6. Deliverables and time schedule:** ToR specifies at least three primary deliverables – (1) an Inception Report / Evaluation Work Plan, (2) Draft Evaluation Report for review, and (3) a Final Evaluation Report. General timelines for these deliverables are as follows:
- a. Within one month from the date of release of first installment of money, the successful external consultant should submit an Inception Report / Evaluation Work Plan to KEA and get it approved. The evaluator will then proceed to collect the data. Depending upon the sample size, geographic spread and volume of data to be collected, 2-3 months of time is allowed for field work.
  - b. Draft Evaluation Report should be submitted within month from the date of completing the field work. It will again be reviewed jointly by the KEA Technical Committee and officers of the Line Department.

- Within one month from the date of review of the Draft Evaluation Report, the consultant should submit a Final Evaluation Report incorporating the suggestions on the draft.

Thus, normal time for finalizing and submitting an evaluation report is about six months. Bigger and more intensive studies might take a couple of months more. Other deliverables may include number of soft and hard copies of reports to be submitted, translated version of the final report, policy briefs, write up for bulletins/newsletters, power point presentations and other knowledge products for dissemination.

- 7. Procedure for selecting the consultant:** ToR should specify what kinds of Consultants are preferred for undertaking the evaluation study. It should list the essential and desirable academic and technical qualifications, experience, skill sets and other special qualifications required of the consultant. It will also briefly mention the procedure for short listing the Consultants, issuing the Request for Proposal (RFP) and selecting the successful consultant.

- 8. Defining the cost limits and schedule of budget releases:** An approximate estimate of the cost of the proposed study and the budget provision available in the current year are sometimes indicated in the TOR. But, it is not very essential to do so. Cost of the study is generally determined through competitive tender process or through negotiations conducted jointly by the sponsor and KEA with the consultant. However, ToR should indicate the schedule of payments along with the terms and conditions.

- 9. Administrative arrangements for the study:** This section will briefly identify the logistical and administrative arrangements available for supporting the study.

- 10. Proposal Submission Guidelines:** ToR is expected to provide instructions to the Consultants regarding the proposal submission format, submission process, dead line dates, criteria and timeline for judging proposals, method of seeking clarifications and if planned, a schedule for bidders' conference and so on such that the entire process is kept transparent. However such details are not necessary if a separate Request for Proposal (RFP) is being issued. Model RFP formats can be availed from KEA. It contains all the details mentioned above.

**Conclusion:** ToR offers the first substantive overview and conceptual framework for the evaluation study. Minimally, it should fulfill the key function of setting and communicating the expectations of the sponsor upfront and guide the process of selecting a suitable consultant and even thereafter until the Inception Report / Evaluation Work Plan takes over as the primary control document. Approved Work Plan brings greater specificity and precision to evaluation planning – refining and elaborating on what was set out in the ToR. Thereafter ToR has no role. Nevertheless, ToR has to be furnished in the final evaluation report as the first annexure to check whether the final report is compliant with the initial design of the evaluation study.

It is now mandatory for the Line Departments and other Government Agencies to take advice from the KEA on ToR, methodology, data collection tools, cost, vendor outsourcing etc. KEA will extend necessary assistance on request. ToRs of all future evaluation studies should be modeled on the above lines and evaluation studies should be taken up only the basis of approved To Rs.