4

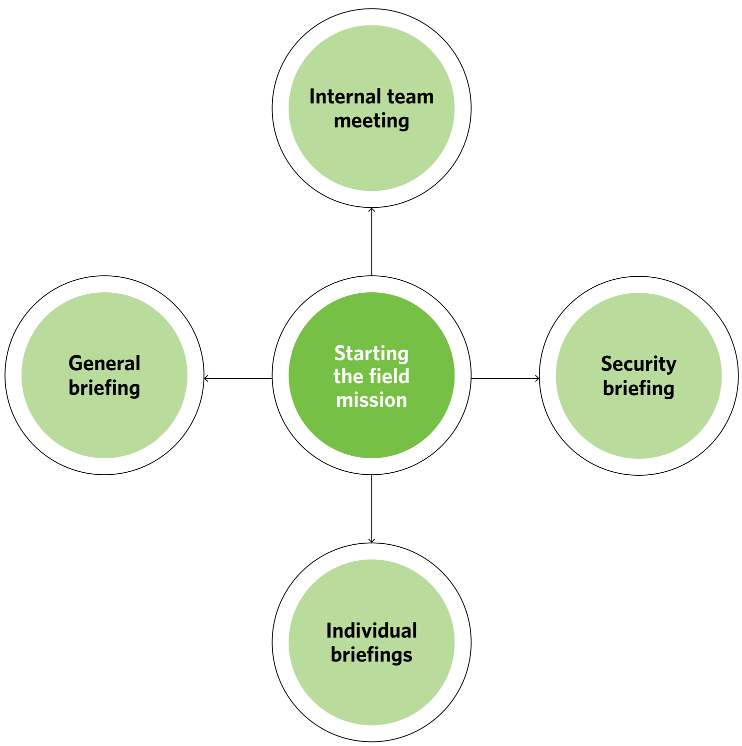
FIELD PHASE

The field phase consists of a three- to four-week mission in order to complete the data collection and proceed with the analysis. Evaluators will collect additional data through field visits.

4.1 STARTING THE FIELD PHASE

During the first two to three days at the country office premises, the evaluators should meet with relevant country office staff with a view to validating the evaluation matrix. They should also make final arrangements regarding agendas, logistics and security matters.

FIGURE 6 *Main tasks at the start of the field phase*



The evaluation team must carry out four main tasks:

- Security briefing
- Internal evaluation team meeting
- General briefing with the country office
- Individual briefings with the country office programme officers by programmatic area: overview of each programmatic area of the country programme, finalization of evaluators' individual agendas and related logistics matters.

Security briefing

The evaluation manager should organize this briefing before the evaluators travel to the field. Evaluators must be fully acquainted with all security issues and procedures prior to travelling to the field.

Evaluation team meeting

During this meeting, the team members and the evaluation manager should deal with initial aspects of the mission. The table below presents some suggestions for the agenda.

TABLE 8 *Evaluation team meeting*

Overview

The team leader should chair the meeting and go through the following issues:

- Briefly review the main objectives and goals of the evaluation exercise
- Ask if any aspect of the field phase is unclear to any of the evaluators
- Provide an overview of the main steps of the field phase
- Outline what is expected from each member of the evaluation team
- Agree the rules regarding internal communication during the field visits, and communication with the evaluation manager and other country office staff
- Explain the expected product of the field phase: a debriefing to the country office and main stakeholders on the preliminary findings and recommendations.

Tip: Before the start of data collection, it should be decided which evaluator will be responsible for each section of the final report. This will allow team members to plan their respective work. This should also facilitate coordination between team members

Methodological aspects

The team leader should ensure that all evaluators are fully familiar with the methodological framework and approach, in particular:

- How to use the evaluation matrix and its role in the evaluation exercise
- Definition of each evaluation criterion
- Selection of evaluation questions
- How to ensure that preliminary findings are supported by, and can be traced back to, the evidence.

Arrangements about sharing information of common interes

- The team should discuss how to proceed when the data to be collected are relevant for various team members
- Once common data sources are identified, the team leader should ensure that the information needs of each concerned evaluator are reflected within the interview guides and/or interview logbooks.

Agendas and logistics

- Identify within the overall agenda any activities and meetings that involve all team members
- Establish within the individual agendas which meetings still have to be arranged
- Identify any overlap in agendas – e.g., instances when two team members have a meeting with the same person – and make arrangements accordingly
- Consider logistics: review travel itineraries and arrangements (transportation, travelling permits, etc.) and ensure efficiency (e.g., team members travelling to the same region should share the same means of transport).

Aspects to be addressed in the general briefing with the country office

- The team should review the agenda of the general briefing with the country office – usually scheduled for the next day.

General briefing with the country office

Prior to the start of the field phase, the team leader should discuss a date and agenda for the general briefing meeting with the evaluation manager.

On the second day of the field phase, a general briefing should be held with the country office to present the objectives, process and deliverables of the evaluation. The aim of the meeting is to reach a common understanding on the content of the evaluation matrix and agree upon the overall agenda of the field phase.

The evaluation manager must ensure that the meeting is attended by:

- All members of the evaluation team
- The relevant country office staff: senior management, heads of the programmatic areas, heads of finance and administration, the evaluation manager, programme officers, and technical and administrative support staff
- Representative(s) of the relevant UNFPA regional office
- Members of the evaluation reference group other than UNFPA staff.[23]

23 For example: government bodies (ministries, agencies), academia, civil society organizations, other United Nations agencies, etc.

The table below suggests an outline for the briefing meeting.

TABLE 9 *Suggested outline for the general briefing meeting at the start of the field phase*

Evaluation team
The evaluation team members (and their respective responsibilities) are introduced to participants
Presentation of the scope and objectives of the evaluation
Presentation of the methodology for CPEs, including a detailed review of the evaluation matrix
Presentation by the evaluation team of planned field visits and necessary support from the country office
Country office
Briefing from the country office on the general context (including political aspects) of the programme
Presentation of country office's expectations regarding the CPE
Presentations of the programme portfolio by programmatic area
Presentation of the main challenges faced by the country programme
Main issues regarding the agenda and logistics
Joint discussion
Based on the discussion between the main stakeholders (country office and reference group), adjust and refine the evaluation matrix. This may involve, for example, the inclusion of new evaluation questions, the reformulation or deletion of existing evaluation questions, and related adjustments in the assumptions to be assessed, the sources of information and the methods and tools in the data-collection columns of the matrix (see below)
Agree on the parameters against which the assessment will be made (see below)
Validate the overall CPE agenda

Tip: It is advisable to discuss issues such as refinement of the evaluation matrix and the parameters of the assessment with senior management prior to the general briefing meeting. Such discussion could be held in the meeting with senior management, which usually takes place on the first day of the mission (see *Tool 6*, The CPE agenda).

Adjusting and refining the evaluation matrix

The evaluation matrix is the backbone of the CPE as it lists the evaluation questions and summarizes the core aspects of the exercise (what will be evaluated and how). The evaluation matrix should be validated by the evaluation manager and the reference group. This, in turn, will increase ownership of the evaluation process and ensure optimal use of its results by all parties.

The team leader must ensure that, prior to the briefing meeting, the country office and reference group have already had opportunities to provide inputs and comments on the evaluation matrix included in the design report.

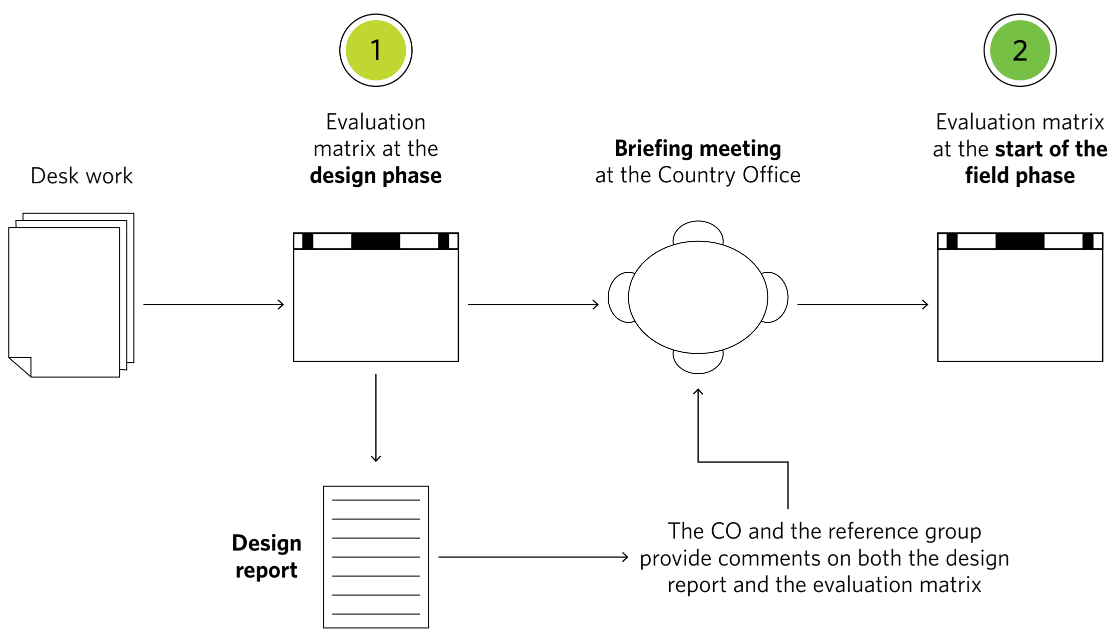
Reaching an agreement on the parameters against which the assessment will be made

When the evaluators are faced with a poor CPD results framework – e.g., when indicators are not adequately defined, targets are either absent or unrealistic and/or baselines are missing – it becomes necessary to design an alternative reference framework for the assessment of the country programme.

This implies the setting of ad-hoc proxy indicators that should be used as a reference to establish the degree of progress and success of the country programme, alternative sources of information (and, whenever possible, attempts to establish credible baselines).

The use of this alternative reference framework should be clearly explained and accounted for in the final report.

FIGURE 7 *Adjusting and refining the evaluation matrix*



The evaluation manager should encourage the reference group to provide comments on the evaluation matrix before the joint discussion.

When receiving comments, the evaluation team should avoid:

- A lack of information identified at this early stage, which leads to the exclusion of key evaluation questions. In such cases, it is advisable to keep the evaluation question(s) and look for alternative sources of information.
- Being directed to evaluation question(s) prioritized merely on the basis of the information available.

Reminder: Although the evaluation matrix should incorporate inputs from the evaluation reference group, it remains the responsibility of the evaluation team, which makes the final decisions on its content.

Individual briefings with the programme officers in country offices: individual agendas, logistics and programme overview

Each evaluator should hold an individual interview with the programme officer(s) in charge of the programmatic area to which s/he is assigned. At this point, evaluators should use the checklist provided in *Tool 8*. These meetings should cover the following aspects, identified in *Table 10*.

TABLE 10 *Aspects to be covered during the individual interviews with programme officers*

Aspects related to the individual agendas
Individual agendas should be organized prior to the beginning of the field phase. However, some key aspects need to be reviewed with the relevant programme officer in the country office: • Timing of interviews • Practical arrangements regarding field visits (should additional field visits be organized?) • Rationale for each interview and link(s) with related information needs (should additional stakeholders be consulted?).
Detailed overview of the programme and its context
• It is very important for the evaluation team to meet the relevant programme officers before undertaking field visits and meeting other stakeholders. • Programme officers can provide valuable information regarding the context information that does not appear in the CPD, AWPs, COARs or workplan progress reports. This is especially useful in highlighting potential gaps between "what is in the CPD" and "what is implemented".
Specific questions related to the evaluation
• Programme officers are also stakeholders in the UNFPA country programme as they are involved in its implementation (as such, they also appear in the sources of information column of the evaluation matrix). In order to ensure efficient use of time, the evaluators should also take advantage of this first meeting to obtain information to enable them to start filling in the information matrix.
The programme officer's expectations for the evaluation
• This first meeting should also be an opportunity for the programme officer to express his/her expectations and concerns regarding the evaluation exercise.

Tool 7, Field phase preparatory tasks checklist, provides a list of the key steps and tasks evaluators should have gone through prior to the start of collecting data.

4.2 COLLECTING AND ENSURING THE VALIDITY OF DATA

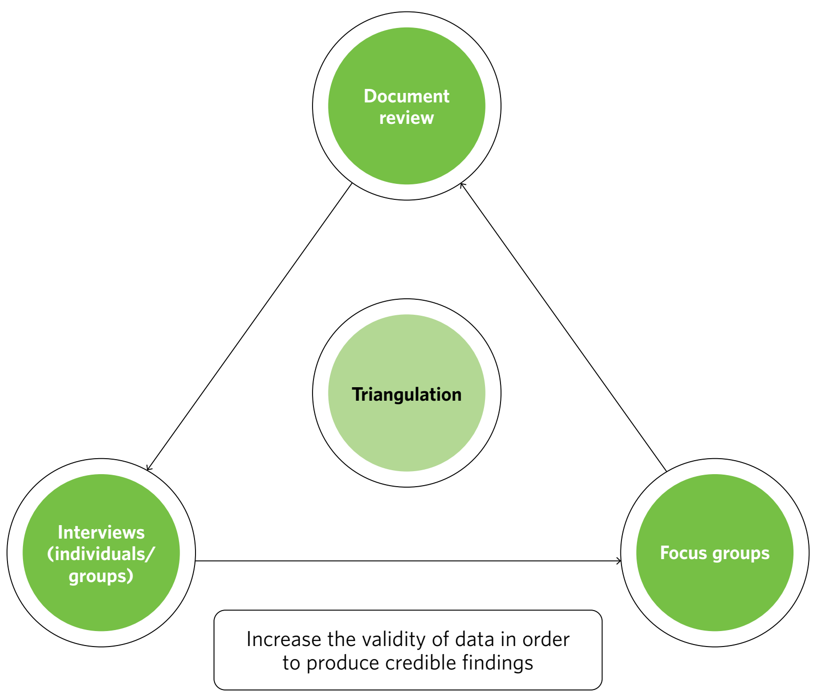
The value of the information and data collected in the field requires a rigorous preparation of interviews and focus groups.

Methods for collecting data are selected at the design phase. Optimizing the time of the field phase requires early planning (interviewees must be informed well in advance) and practical arrangements (logistics); to this end, the active role of the evaluation manager is crucial. At the start of the field phase, evaluators have access to more detailed information and need to adjust the approach to data collection accordingly.

Methodological explanations on data collection can be found in *section 3.4.2, Methods for data collection. Section 7.1.2* contains all of the tools for data collection.

Throughout the data-collection process, evaluators must ensure the validity of the data and information collected. With this aim, one of the most commonly used techniques is **triangulation**.

FIGURE 8 *Triangulating data sources and data-collection methods*



Evaluators should systematically double- or triple-check the data and information obtained through different data-collection methods (study of documentation, individual interviews, discussion groups, focus groups). Similarly, evaluators should cross-compare the data and information obtained from different sources of data – e.g., compare the data obtained through interviews with government staff with those obtained from beneficiaries.

Whenever discrepancies appear when comparing the data obtained from different methods and/or sources, evaluators should proceed as follows:

- Look for further data and/or information with a view to validating/invalidating the data/information collected
- In cases where the evaluator is faced with contradictory data/information stemming from two equally reliable sources, it is advisable to display the data/information from both sources, while highlighting subsequent limitations in their use for the purpose of the evaluation.

4.3 FIELD PHASE

After approval of the design report, the evaluation enters the field phase. Evaluators have to proceed with the strategy they devised for collecting information with a view to answering all of the evaluation questions.

Data collection for UNFPA CPEs commonly has six stages:

i. The **preparation of data collection**, often still at the home base of the evaluators
ii. The **launch of the field phase** with the UNFPA country office during a first official briefing
iii. **A first round of interviews** with key informants (the main partners and other stakeholders) of UNFPA-supported interventions in the capital of the programme country
iv. **Site visits of UNFPA-supported interventions**, often outside of the capital, including focus groups with UNFPA beneficiaries
v. A **second round of interviews with key informants in the capital**, to close possible data gaps
vi. The **finalization of data collection**, and an **official debriefing** at the UNFPA country office.

The table below provides more details on each of these stages - i.e., the main activities, the location and the typical duration of each stage.

TABLE 11 *Process for the field phase*

Main stages	Main activities	Location	Duration
Preparation	• Preparation of evaluation matrix • Preliminary interview schedule • Development of interview guides/other materials for data collection	Home base of evaluators	1 day
Launch	• United Nations security briefing • Internal meeting of evaluation team • Launch of field phase with a general briefing of country office on scope and approach of CPE • Individual briefings with UNFPA country office programme officers by outcome area: overview of each outcome area of country programme; completing the collection of documents in UNFPA country office • Finalization of evaluators' individual agendas and related logistics matters	Capital (UNFPA country office)	2 days
First round of data collection – capital	• Interviews with key informants among government, donors, civil society, research organizations in the capital; collection of additional documentation where possible	Capital (UNFPA country office, offices of main stakeholders)	5 days

Main stages	Main activities	Location	Duration
	▪ Ongoing (preliminary) analysis of key documentation to improve understanding of UNFPA country programme and to better focus interviews with key partners ▪ Finalization of the selection of site visit locations/logistical preparation of site visits ▪ Preparation of focus groups: (a) during site visits (e.g., with beneficiaries); (b) with civil society organizations, upon return to capital (second round of data collection; see below) ▪ Internal team meeting prior to departure for site visits		
Site visits	▪ Interviews with key informants at subnational level/project sites (e.g., local authorities, NGOs, health centre staff, patients, etc.) ▪ Focus groups with beneficiaries (e.g., doctors, nurses, midwives, patients, communities, patients, youth etc.) ▪ Observations at project sites/utilization of provided assets and tools	Field (sites of UNFPA-supported projects/ interventions)	6 days
Complementary data collection – capital	▪ Internal team meeting upon return from site visits; identification of data gaps (evaluation matrix); determining best use of the remaining days ▪ Focus groups with representatives of civil society organizations ▪ Complementary interviews with key informants (closing of data gaps) ▪ Complementary document reviews (closing of data gaps)	Capital (UNFPA country office, offices of main stakeholders)	5 days
Finalization and debriefing	▪ Analytical team workshop (internal); preparation of debriefing of UNFPA country office ▪ Debriefing meeting with UNFPA country office staff; presentation of preliminary findings	Capital (UNFPA country office)	2 days
Total			**21 days**

The following sections provide more details on four aspects of data collection for CPEs:

- The preparations for data collection through the set-up of the evaluation matrix
- The utilization of existing secondary information and data, in particular during the first and second rounds of data collection in the capital
- The collection of primary information through interviews and focus groups in the capital and at project sites
- The finalization of data collection, and the debriefing at the UNFPA country office.

4.3.1 Preparing for the field phase: completing the evaluation matrix

One of the most important data-collection tasks for evaluators throughout the field phase is to systematically record all of the information on a continuous basis. Throughout the field phase, document reviews, interviews, focus groups and observations during site visits generate a large amount of information. Therefore, evaluators need to continuously and systematically:

- Connect/link all incoming information with the evaluation questions and their corresponding indicators
- Assess the relevance and significance of the collected data
- Over the course of the field and analysis phases of the evaluation, identify the information that constitutes credible and compelling evidence to support the formulation of evidence-based answers to the evaluation questions.

The table below provides a summary of the main responsibilities of the evaluation manager and the evaluation team during the field phase.

TABLE 12 *Summary of responsibilities of the evaluation manager and evaluators during the field phase*

Main activities	Division of responsibilities	
	Evaluation team	Evaluation manager
Preparation of the field phase	• Complete evaluation matrix. • Develop interview guides and other tools for data collection. • Liaise with evaluation manager to develop preliminary interview schedule. • Review all available materials and documentation. • Prepare presentation and all other required materials for the launch meeting in the UNFPA country office.	• Inform partner government and other partners of impending CPE (in coordination with UNFPA country representative). • Undertake logistical preparation of field phase (accommodation, travel papers/ permits for evaluators, if applicable). • Liaise with evaluators (team leader) to help develop preliminary interview schedule. • Set up interviews for the first days of the field phase.
Launch of field phase	• First internal team briefing on the evaluation approach and scope. • Present purpose, scope and approach to country office managers and staff during launch meeting.	• Organize security briefing/other prerequisites for the safe stay and work of the evaluation team. • Set up launch meeting and ensure participation of all relevant country office managers and staff.

Main activities	Division of responsibilities	
	Evaluation team	Evaluation manager
	• Hold individual follow-up meetings with country office managers and staff; secure available documents and solicit feedback on key informants/interviewees. • Compile all available documentation received from different staff members of country office. • Reach agreement on internal division of labour between team members (e.g., role of moderator or note-taker for focus groups; finalize individual agendas of team members.	• Facilitate and support orientation of evaluators during first few days. • Follow up on preliminary interview schedule/ensure completion of schedule for first week of data collection. • Provide assistance to evaluators for arranging interviews with key informants.
Interviews (capital city) – first round	• Conduct interviews with key informants (if possible in pairs). • Collect documents from partner organizations/key informants. • Select sites for visits to UNFPA-supported facilities (typically outside of capital), in coordination with evaluation manager. • Begin preparation of focus groups at project sites (in coordination with evaluation manager; and UNFPA staff in the field). • Agree on division of labour among evaluators during site visits. • Internal team meeting towards end of first week of data collection (review of data and emerging findings). • Update evaluation matrix on ongoing basis.	• Continued support of evaluation team to arrange interviews and solve logistical challenges (for work in capital and for field visits). • Where necessary: facilitate official introduction of evaluation team to UNFPA partner organizations (in particular, government partners). • Facilitate compilation of key documents for evaluators (follow up with colleagues at country office, and in partner organizations to obtain copies of key documents). • Assist in preparation of site visits, including preparation of focus groups (site and participant selection, arranging for translators etc.).
Site visits	• Carry out and document interviews, focus groups; collect key documentation. • Ongoing review of information. • Update evaluation matrix on ongoing basis.	• Logistical support of evaluation team during site visits. • Assist evaluation team in arranging follow-up interviews (and, if applicable, focus groups) with UNFPA partners for their return to the capital.

Main activities	Division of responsibilities	
	Evaluation team	Evaluation manager
Interviews and group interviews (capital city) – second round	• Hold second and last round of interviews in capital (to provide follow-up to first interviews and to enable clarification on issues raised during the field visits and/or complete information gaps). • Collect any missing documentation.	• Ongoing logistical support of evaluation team. • Prepare for and invite participants to debriefing meeting for CPE.
Wrap-up of field phase	• Internal analytical team workshop: preliminary analysis of collected data and information; formulation of preliminary findings, first conclusions, tentative recommendations. • Prepare materials for debriefing meeting with country office (PowerPoint presentation, accompanying hand-outs summarizing key aspects of the presentation). • Provide evaluation manager with information about any outstanding issues (documentation s/he needs to collect and send to evaluators).	• Ensure broad participation of UNFPA managers and staff at debriefing meeting. • Organize consolidation of feedback from country office managers and staff to evaluators in response to their presentation of preliminary findings, conclusions and recommendations. • Ensure safe departure of evaluators.

To ensure that the collection and recording of data and information is done systematically, **UNFPA requires all evaluators to set up and maintain an evaluation matrix** (*Tool 1* and *Template 5*). This is a convenient table format that helps evaluators to consolidate in a structured manner all collected information corresponding to each evaluation question. The table also makes it easier to identify data gaps in a timely manner, and to collect all outstanding information before the end of the field phase.

i See *Tool 1* and *Template 5* for the evaluation matrix.

4.3.2 Making use of existing, secondary data and information

Evaluators need to make use of existing, secondary data and information as much as possible. As mentioned above, the opportunities and resources available for collecting primary data (through interviews or focus groups led by the evaluators themselves) are limited during a CPE. This is particularly the case for quantitative data on changes (e.g., in reproductive health outcomes) among UNFPA beneficiaries, since evaluators will not be able to carry out their own large-scale surveys.

Evaluators need to use their first internal team meeting at the start of the field phase to agree on and list the types of information they still need to collect from the UNFPA country office and UNFPA partners. This allows the team to use the official launch meeting, and the subsequent individual appointments with managers and staff of the country office, to highlight their data needs and to collect copies of the required documents.

If not already collected at the design phase, the evaluation team needs to quickly gain access to reliable macro-level data on key health outcomes related to reproductive and maternal health, as well as on the other programmatic areas of UNFPA. Results from censuses, data sets for national sexual and reproductive health surveys (e.g., Demographic and Health Survey/DHS) or Health Management Information System (HMIS) data might be available in the UNFPA country office. However, evaluators may also find it necessary to solicit information from those government agencies that had been responsible for collecting the data in the first place. Establishing the appropriate contacts, receiving the official authorization to collect the data and securing appointments with the appropriate government staff all take time and will require the evaluation manager to take an active role. It is important to start this process early in the field phase of a CPE.

Data and reports from the MEASURE Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) programme on health and population and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in most UNFPA programme countries is available online at the MEASURE DHS website (http://www.measuredhs.com) and at the MICS website (http://mics.unicef.org/). This information is a key resource for evaluators working on UNFPA CPEs and should be gathered during the design phase.

Evaluators need to be aware that secondary data from national surveys do not specifically describe the situation of UNFPA beneficiaries. Instead, the collected data is intended to represent the situation for the national population. Therefore, evaluators have to determine how they can best use this information to identify the changes that have occurred at the level of the intended beneficiaries of UNFPA-supported interventions:

- Survey results are often disaggregated by different criteria, such as age, geographic locations (states, provinces, counties, etc.), gender, rural vs urban, education, etc. This can allow evaluators to gather data for those segments of the population within which UNFPA target groups are to be found.
- When the survey reports do not provide appropriately disaggregated data, evaluators can try to extract data on specific demographic groups from the original data set.

Collecting primary data and information

Readers interested in tools and methods available to collect primary data during UNFPA CPEs should also consult the respective parts of *section 3.4*, *Planning data collection and analysis*. This section provides information on the significance, approach and limitations of different data-collection methods and tools.

Evaluators will collect primary data during interviews with UNFPA staff and managers, governmental officials, development partners and other relevant organizations in the capital, as well as by conducting interviews, focus groups and observations at project sites.

4.3.2.1 Data collection in the UNFPA country office

Positive and productive working relationships with UNFPA staff in the country office are an enabling factor for evaluators to compile all necessary information. Evaluators have to rely on the knowledge and connections of UNFPA staff to obtain documents and information:

- Managers and staff have to explain the dynamic of the country programme and play an important role in providing key insights that cannot be obtained from reviewing documents.
- The UNFPA country office also directs the evaluators to potential interviewees; in many cases the evaluation manager will have to ensure that evaluators are formally introduced to the government agency staff they need to meet.

Evaluators cannot assume that all UNFPA staff members are well-informed about the rationale, objective and approach of UNFPA CPEs. This type of exercise will likely be new for the majority of staff members in the country office. Therefore, at the start of the field phase, evaluators need to clearly explain the rationale and objective of the CPE, as well as their own mandate and role as independent evaluators. This will clarify the expectations of the evaluation team on the one hand, and of the UNFPA country office on the other, and will facilitate the smooth implementation of the field phase.

Using the launch meeting and individual briefings to establish good working relationships with UNFPA country office staff

The launch meeting and the subsequent first round of individual meetings with the managers and staff in the UNFPA country office have a number of important functions for the evaluators.

The launch meeting, typically held on the first or second day of the field phase (after the evaluators have held their first internal team meeting), allows the evaluators to introduce themselves, as well as the scope and approach of their assignment, to the country office. Managers and staff have the chance to ask questions about the mandate of the evaluators. Evaluators should also present a list of the information they require, and the UNFPA country representative or assistant country representative can delegate specific tasks in relation to the retrieval of that information to specific staff members. This process should be closely monitored by the evaluation manager so that all information is gathered and communicated to the evaluators in a timely manner.

During the first round of individual meetings with UNFPA managers, thematic officers and other staff, the evaluators can follow up on the issues agreed during the launch meeting. The team should plan to spend one to two hours with each relevant staff member. For each meeting, the main goals are:

- To learn about the portfolio that each staff member oversees
- To collect all relevant documentation for that portfolio
- To cross-check and complete the list of key stakeholders for subsequent individual interviews.

The evaluation manager should ensure that evaluators can collect the available documents on the spot; for those documents that are not yet available, evaluators should agree to collect them during the subsequent days. The evaluation manager should ensure that information will be made available when due.

During their first days in the UNFPA country office, the evaluators should **add to the existing documentation** on the UNFPA **country programme** they received previously (during the preparatory phase and the design phase) from the evaluation manager . They must **continually organize and review all material** to improve their understanding of the country programme, the interventions and the UNFPA partners. This will help the evaluators to prepare the subsequent interviews with external stakeholders and UNFPA partners (implementing partners, other government agencies, donors, NGOs, etc.).

Finally, the first days in the country office should be used to finalize the schedule of meetings and interviews with external UNFPA partners. This is the responsibility of the evaluation manager, who must ensure the cooperation of all other country office staff members. S/he should also formally introduce the evaluators to the country office counterparts in the government as well as to other stakeholders.

4.3.2.2 Interviewing government and other national partners in the capital

Interviews with UNFPA counterparts among implementing partners, other government agencies, United Nations and other donor organizations, and civil society organizations are important data sources for CPEs. Discussions will provide one of the few opportunities to solicit external views on the scope, scale and approach of the UNFPA country programme and its overall performance.

Section 3.4.2.2 provides more information on the role and significance of individual interviews (and the other data-collection tools and approaches) for UNFPA CPEs. In particular, this section discusses the comparative strengths and added value of individual interviews in relation to other data-collection approaches (focus groups, document reviews).

The suggested schedule for the field phase of a CPE foresees two periods in which to carry out individual interviews in the capital of the programme country – i.e.: (a) in the first week of the field phase (before the team leaves the capital to visit selected field sites); and (b) upon the return of the team to the capital.

For an overview of the typical timetable and process of the field phase, see *Table 11*.

The evaluators will conduct interviews with the stakeholders identified:

- In the stakeholders mapping table
- In the evaluation matrix.

The topics for each interview with each stakeholder (or type of stakeholder) are delineated on the basis of the evaluation matrix and interview guides.

The stakeholders mapping table has been introduced in *section 2.6* as part of the discussion of the Preparatory phase in *Chapter 2*. More information on the stakeholders map can also be found in the sections on evaluation tools in this handbook. In particular, see *Tool 4*, *The stakeholders mapping table*. For more information, see *Tool 1*, *The evaluation matrix*.

The evaluation manager needs to start developing the timetable for the individual interviews before the start of the field phase. The evaluation team must update and finalize the interview schedule during their first days in the country office.

The importance of excellent data management and timely processing of interview finding

The field phase of a UNFPA CPE is typically busy and demanding. Meetings will, in most cases, yield additional documents to be reviewed and analysed. Therefore, ensuring the ongoing and timely management and recording of data from interviews is a prerequisite for the development of credible, evidence-based findings, conclusions and recommendations.

- Evaluators should make time every evening during the field phase to review their notes, and to reflect on the events of the day.
- Each member of the evaluation team needs to record the information collected in the interview logbook (*Tool 12*).
- The evaluators have to ensure that the preliminary summary findings table (*Tool 1* and *Template 5*) is updated regularly.

Tools to support the planning and implementation of individual interviews during a UNFPA CPE: *Tools 10*, *11*, *12* and *Template 7*.

4.3.2.3 The importance of site visits

A UNFPA CPE is the evaluation of a strategy and its implementation. It is not an evaluation of individual UNFPA-supported interventions. This distinction is very important, particularly in view of the CPE approach to site visits – e.g., the collection of primary data and information at facilities, training centres or other establishments that have benefitted from UNFPA support.

In project evaluations, these site visits would be at the core of the evaluation, and would serve as one of the primary sources of data, information and evidence that support the findings of the evaluators. In CPEs, however, site visits are primarily used to put into perspective and into a specific, local context the previously collected data and information – i.e., from the analysis of data sets, the study of reports and from interviews in the capital. In other words, site visits are primarily used to provide illustrations of the emerging findings, and to help evaluators gain a deeper, more detailed understanding of contributing factors from the programme and from the larger socio-economic context.

The selection of interventions and sites to visit

Evaluators need to select those sites for field visits that have the potential to illustrate and deepen the understanding of important strategic components of the UNFPA country programme and its implementation. Note that it is important that the methodology used to select the site visits is clearly detailed/explained in the methodology section of the evaluation report. The evaluators, in cooperation with the evaluation manager, should make a preliminary selection of field visits that:

- Allow evaluators to visit sites supported for each of the programmatic areas of the country programme
- Are likely to enable the evaluators to observe the utilization of the main types of assets (facilities, equipment, etc.) and to interview beneficiaries
- Provide the opportunity to interview the most important stakeholders of the country programme (other than beneficiaries) outside of the capital. For example, if UNFPA has supported local authorities under its country programme, the selection of visit sites should allow evaluators to interview a selection of representatives from the different types of agencies involved.

Evaluators should consult *Chapter 1* and *Tool 1, The evaluation matrix*, *Tool 3, List of UNFPA interventions by country programme output and strategic plan outcome*, and *Tool 4, The stakeholders mapping table*, to identify the main outcome areas, the main types of interventions for each of these, and the main types of stakeholder to be interviewed during the field visits.

The evaluators need to discuss the selection criteria for site visits with the evaluation manager as well as with the country office senior management and programme officers. In particular, they should explain in detail: (i) what role the site visits play in the CPE approach; and (ii) what expectations they have for the interviews and observations on site.

In selecting the field visits, evaluators are dependent on the knowledge of UNFPA staff about the programme and related operations at different sites. Involving them as partners in the selection process will increase the likelihood that relevant sites will be selected, and that observations and interviews at these sites can help to advance the evaluators' understanding of the country programme. However, the evaluators must ensure that they are not being directed to only the best-performing interventions.

Preparing the logistics for the site visits

The logistical requirements for the site visits need to be discussed early on during the field phase. Once the evaluators have shared their expectations for the visits with UNFPA staff (i.e., initially during the launch meeting and subsequently during the following individual meetings with country office staff), the evaluation manager needs to work with the relevant programme officers to discuss:

- How much time is needed for travelling to and from the sites
- How individual meetings and visits need to be timed to account for distance and road conditions between the sites
- What accommodation is available, and so on.

The evaluation manager and the evaluators should discuss a preliminary schedule for the time spent outside of the capital sufficiently in advance of the actual field visits to allow for changes or amendments of the schedule if/when necessary. Arranging logistics is an important responsibility of the evaluation manager.

4.3.2.4 Logistical aspects of organizing focus groups

It is particularly difficult to prepare focus groups in the context of a UNFPA CPE. The evaluators have to select and convene a group of participants at a specific time and place, often without having had a chance to travel to the site before the focus group discussion.

The participants have to be carefully selected to adhere to previously defined criteria to ensure that they present the characteristics of the demographic group from which the evaluators want to solicit information. This is also important since the make-up of the group significantly influences the dynamic of the discussion, and the willingness of individual participants to share private or sensitive information. Having the “wrong participants” in a focus group, in terms of their willingness to engage and/or their compatibility with the selection criteria, can significantly skew the results of the discussion, and can result in the collection of irrelevant or misleading information by the evaluators.

Preparing a focus group in the context of a CPE

Preparation for focus groups has to start early during the field phase. The evaluators should share their intention of carrying out focus group discussions with the evaluation manager and mention it clearly during the launch meeting as well as in the subsequent follow-up meetings with UNFPA managers and staff.

i For information on the significance and approach for launch meetings and bilateral meetings at the beginning of the field phase, see *section 4.1*.

The evaluation manager is an important facilitator and intermediary for the evaluators. The evaluators rely on him/her to:

- Identify the potential partners on whom the evaluators can rely to select and invite participants – e.g., community leaders
- Find suitable venues and support staff (e.g., translators) for the conduct of the focus groups.

The evaluation manager may have to delegate and monitor certain tasks related to the preparation of the focus groups to other members of the staff in the country office and/or sub regional offices. However, to be able to fulfil this role as intermediary, the evaluation manager needs to have a good and accurate understanding of:

- The nature of focus groups
- Their thematic scope for the particular CPE
- The significance of the associated selection criteria for participants.

Evaluators need to carefully brief the evaluation manager on these aspects. They should provide a short description of the focus groups approach (see *Box 9* for a list of main attributes), including:

- The types of participants they intend to target
- The main criteria for selection (citing both inclusion and exclusion criteria)
- The importance of the relative homogeneity of each individual group
- The creation of a safe environment for open discussions, to ensure that no participant can unduly influence others.

The evaluation manager should then **convey all information to the UNFPA partners** in the field (i.e., UNFPA staff in sub regional offices, counterparts among implementing partners) and should encourage them to direct any questions or requests for clarification to both her/himself and the evaluation team leader (who should be copied on the exchange).

Finally, the evaluators should **review the proposed focus group arrangements together with the evaluation manager, before departure to the field**. Evaluators should check in particular that:

- Participants have been selected and screened in line with the discussed criteria
- All requested group discussions have been organized
- Possible difficulties have been anticipated and dealt with – e.g., addressing the risk that community leaders participating in a focus group adversely affect the group discussion due to the imbalance of power in the group by organizing a separate individual interview with leaders.

This is also the time when evaluators may introduce (small) changes to the focus group set-up, in response to new insights from desk research or interviews the evaluators may have already conducted.

Anticipating "no-shows": the importance of over-recruitment for focus groups

The evaluators need to encourage the evaluation manager and the organizers in the field to over-recruit for each of the focus groups by about 30 to 40 per cent. This will help to mitigate the possibility that a proportion of those invited to participate in a focus group do not attend ("no-shows"). To reach a target size of eight to ten participants, evaluators (or their partners) should invite between 10 and 14 candidates.

Managing the group discussion and its follow-up

Despite efforts to prepare focus groups, evaluators are likely to encounter some unexpected challenges when arriving on site, and when conducting group discussions. "No-shows" are only one of the possible obstacles in this regard (see above). Some other common obstacles are:

- In community settings, it is possible that a large group of 25 or more community members wish to participate in the focus group. However, with such a large group, it will be extremely difficult (even for a skilled focus group moderator) to manage the discussion and to achieve a balanced exchange that allows all participants to make relevant points and arguments.
- The composition of the group does not adhere to the previously agreed selection criteria. Although only young women might have been requested by the evaluators and invited for a particular focus group, evaluators might find a mixed group of men, older women and community leaders when they arrive on location. Also, other community members or even leaders might try to join the group, potentially disrupting the discussion and atmosphere that the moderator has worked hard to create.

These events can be managed if the evaluators put in place certain contingencies in their management and division of labour for the focus groups:

- Evaluators should always arrive at the site of the focus group in advance of the arranged starting time. Arriving sufficiently early will allow them to deal with inadequate facilities and, if necessary, will give them time to divide large or heterogeneous groups.
- In addition to the moderator (and possibly a translator), each focus group should ideally be staffed with an additional member of the evaluation team, who can act as note-taker. Alternatively, s/he can also serve as back-up moderator for a second focus group, should a large or heterogeneous group of participants need to be divided into smaller groups. The second evaluator could also invite potential community leaders (who might want to join a particular focus group) for an individual interview.
- This also means that each moderator should be prepared to act as her or his own note-taker, or have the equipment to record the focus group discussion.

Quick brainstorming on the main points of the discussion after the focus group

Whenever possible, the moderator and any colleagues who assisted in carrying out a particular focus group (note-takers, translators, co-moderators) should hold a brief (10–15-minute) brainstorming session to review the main points or arguments immediately after the group discussion has ended. The moderator should either record this team discussion, or should make brief notes. This summary will help greatly in the subsequent data analysis.

4.3.3 Finalizing the focus group: preliminary analysis and debriefing

Evaluators should use the last week of the field phase (typically upon the return of the team from field locations) to conduct follow-up interviews with key informants in the UNFPA country office, and among government partners and the development community (see *section 4.3.2.2* on the two periods for interviews with UNFPA partners in the capital).

In addition, the team needs to set time aside for an internal analytical team workshop. This workshop will be particularly useful with a view to preparing the debriefing for the UNFPA country office. The workshop will also be an opportunity to provide important inputs for the subsequent analysis and reporting phase.

Debriefing the UNFPA country office: sharing preliminary findings, exploring conclusions, testing recommendations

The debriefing meetings with managers and staff of the UNFPA country office is an important step in the process from data collection towards analysis and reporting.

First, it provides the evaluators with the opportunity to identify the data and information they have collected and to present the preliminary findings. The discussion with UNFPA staff can help them identify possible weaknesses or gaps in the collected evidence, and they can use these insights to adjust their findings.

Secondly, evaluators can use the debriefing to introduce and discuss the possible:

- Conclusions that identify patterns or other systemic aspects across findings from the different evaluation questions
- Corresponding recommendations for actions UNFPA could take to improve or change these patterns.

The exchange with country office staff helps to identify gaps in the chain of reasoning behind the conclusions, which will ultimately help to enhance their validity and credibility. The exchange with UNFPA managers and staff can also help to develop more realistic, feasible and operational recommendations.

4.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE DURING THE FIELD PHASE

Quality assurance during the field phase is an ongoing process. Responsibility for quality assurance is exercised by both the team leader and the evaluation manager.

Throughout the field phase, the team leader needs to ensure that all members of his/her team correctly understand which types of information must be collected, and how this information should be recorded and archived. Specific tasks in this regard include:

- Ensuring that all members of the evaluation team use the evaluation matrix for the formulation of appropriate interview guides and other data-collection tools. In some instances, the team leader may prepare all or most of the data collection tools her/himself. Yet this might prove to be too labour-intensive and impossible within the days allocated to the team leader according to the CPE budget and work plan. In this case, the team leader should provide guidance to individual team members for the development of the tools, and s/he will closely check and review them before they are being used.
- Reviewing the selection of interviewees and other (documentary) sources of information with the team. Bias in the selection of information sources can significantly affect both the quality and credibility of the evaluation. Therefore, the team leader must ensure that the selection of interviewees and other sources of data/information have been performed in a balanced manner with a view to taking into account differing viewpoints and interests.
- Ensuring that interview protocols and entries into the evaluation matrix reflect the required level of detail for the subsequent data analysis. Different experts typically have different ways to document and record their findings. In order to support a joint analysis of all the data collected by the different members of the team, the information must be recorded in a uniform and consistent way by all evaluators. To this effect, it is the responsibility of the team leader to set up common rules for the recording of data. S/he must also review the notes of her/his teammates at different points to ensure that the notes provide a sufficient level of detail/precision to enable the writing of a high-quality report.

The evaluation manager plays a lesser role during the field phase compared to the evaluation team leader, yet his/her responsibilities in quality assurance remain significant. In particular:

- Reviewing and checking the evaluators' selection of interviewees and other data sources. The evaluation manager is responsible for supporting the evaluators in arranging interviews and accessing other data sources. The quality assurance role is part of this larger responsibility. The evaluation manager is expected to use his/her knowledge of the context as well as of the stakeholders of the country programme to ensure that all of the main interest groups and stakeholders are taken into account during data collection.
- Assessing the validity of hypotheses (preliminary findings) presented at the end of the field phase. The evaluation manager is tasked with assessing the validity of the preliminary findings and answers to the evaluation questions as presented by the evaluators during the debriefing session at the end of the field phase. S/he should point out weaknesses in the reasoning of the evaluators and point out those findings, conclusions or preliminary recommendations that do not appear to be sufficiently backed by evidence.