



**Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management
and Rehabilitation**

APFNet Monitoring and Evaluation Policy

2022

Acronyms and Abbreviations

APFNet	Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
ASP	APFNet Scholarship Program
SANFRI	Sino-Asian Network of Forestry Research Institute
SP	Strategic Plan
MTE	Mid-term Evaluation
TE	Terminal Evaluation
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
IA	Implementing Agency
EA	Executive Agency
ED	Executive Director
ToR	Terms of Reference

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I. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and audience

The *APFNet Monitoring and Evaluation Policy* (hereafter referred to as: the Policy) was created to establish a common standard for APFNet monitoring and evaluation (M&E) work, and to provide necessary guidance for users, which include the APFNet Secretariat, external consultants, partners and other stakeholders that are involved in APFNet M&E work. Yet, users of the Policy should be informed that the specific M&E situation may vary according to local context and needs.

1.2 Scope of the Policy

The M&E scope of the Policy mainly covers APFNet-funded projects, programs and mechanisms.

- a. **Projects** aim at demonstrating best practices for sustainable forest management and rehabilitation, as well as help APFNet member economies to enhance their forest management capacities, promote rehabilitation of degraded forests and improve local livelihoods.
- b. **Programs** refer to systematic APFNet-funded activities having one major focus, such as the APFNet Scholarship Program (ASP), the Thematic Training Program, etc.
- c. **Mechanisms** refer to a kind of network that consist of more than two programs, such as the Sino-Asian Network of Forestry Research Institute (SANFRI) of APFNet, under which there are 4 programs, including the Visiting Scholar Programme, the Early Career Academic Forum, the APFNet Small Research Grant and the Financial Supporting for International Attending Program.

1.3 Concept clarification

Monitoring is often used in conjunction with evaluation, and information collected through monitoring is an important source of data used in evaluation. The processes of monitoring and evaluation are viewed as relevant, but they have distinct approaches, focuses and functions.

- a. **Monitoring** is a part of regular management, which is a continuous process of data collection and analysis of an ongoing intervention and enables timely decision-making. It is usually conducted by people who are directly involved in the implementation process.
- b. **Evaluation** is independent from regular management. It is a systematic and periodic assessment of an ongoing or completed intervention, it draws on the data and information generated by the monitoring process, and is usually conducted by people

who have not directly participated in the intervention.

II. Monitoring

Monitoring should be an established practice for all APFNet-funded projects, programs and mechanisms. It is a necessary management tool to ensure that the implementation of the activities is on the right track towards its intended objectives, and improves the delivery and performance in both operational and financial aspects.

2.1 Monitoring scope

For all APFNet projects, programs and mechanisms, the monitoring scope should include input, output, outcome and impact, as shown:

- a. **(Input)** The timely availability of inputs, e.g., personnel, equipment, funds, expenditures and the timely and proper execution of activities and their associated working processes.
- b. **(Output)** The delivery and quality of the outputs (direct results) according to the plan.
- c. **(Outcome)** The extent to which the specific objectives have been achieved.
- d. **(Impact)** A fundamentally sustainable social, economic and environmental impact both during and after the implementation of an intervention. To learn the impacts or Story of Change, it is necessary to collect the baseline data.

2.2 Guiding principles for monitoring

APFNet adopts the monitoring guiding principles of the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), which are impartiality, utility, transparency, credibility, disclosure and participation. The table below provides a summary of the guiding norms and standards.

Table 1 Guiding principles for monitoring

Principles	Description
<i>Impartiality</i>	The key elements of impartiality are objectivity, professional integrity and an absence of bias. Mitigating the presence of bias applies to any monitoring action and reporting.
<i>Utility</i>	In commissioning and conducting monitoring work, there should be a clear intention to use the resulting analysis, conclusions or recommendations to inform further decisions and actions.
<i>Transparency</i>	All stages of the monitoring process should be transparent; consultation with major stakeholders is essential and involves clear and regular communication.

<i>Credibility</i>	Monitoring should be credible. It shall be based on data and observations using systems and tools that can guarantee quality and reliability.
<i>Disclosure</i>	To bolster the organization’s public accountability, the monitoring results should be publicly accessible.
<i>Participation</i>	Whenever relevant, the monitoring activities shall be carried out with the participation of relevant stakeholders.

2.3 Monitoring criteria

For effective monitoring, indicators should be formulated using **SMART** criteria as follows:

Specific: The indicator is sufficiently clear as to what is being measured and specific enough to measure progress towards a result.

Measurable: The indicator is a reliable measure and is objectively verifiable. Qualitative measures should ideally be translated into some numeric form.

Attainable: The indicator can be realistically met.

Relevant: The indicator captures what is being measured (i.e., it is relevant to the activity/result).

Time-bound: The indicator is expected to be achieved within a defined period of time.

2.4 Monitoring classification

Monitoring is normally classified into internal monitoring and external monitoring.

2.4.1 Internal monitoring

An **internal monitoring and reporting mechanism** should be put in place for all APFNet-funded projects, programs and mechanisms during the planning stage. An **annual internal monitoring plan** with clear and measurable monitoring objectives, indicators, targets, responsible parties, methods and timeline should be formulated. **The monitoring results** should present evidence, progress, issues and recommendations in a comprehensive and balanced way, and be shared among relevant stakeholders and APFNet in a timely periodical and manner.

2.4.2 External monitoring

External monitoring is organized by APFNet. It serves to monitor the implementation status of APFNet-funded projects, programs and mechanisms against the approved plans and budget, and identify actual or potential problems in order to facilitate timely adjustments during the implementation duration. Monitoring tools include but are not limited to daily communication, field visits, documentation review and meetings with relevant stakeholders.

For external monitoring reports, which include field site visit reports/back-to-office reports, or meeting minutes, the following aspects should be covered:

- Identified objectives and indicators to be examined pertaining to input, including expenditures, outputs, outcomes and impact (What);
- Methods/means of verification of data collection concerning the indicators (how, when, by whom?);
- Findings, and
- Defining corrective actions.

The partners of APFNet-funded projects, programs and mechanisms will assist and facilitate the external monitoring mission, and results will be shared among partners as reference to adjust/improve the performance of the intervention.

2.5 Monitoring data documentation

The requirements for documenting monitoring data are expected to include the following aspects:

- **Baseline data:** To learn the impacts and develop Story of Change, it's necessary to collect the baseline data;
- **All baseline reports**, e.g., the overall plan, the annual plans, etc.;
- **Implementation reports** that showing the inputs, outputs, issues/challenges, outcomes and impacts. Each APFNet responsible divisions should collect and document the data/reports annually, and M&E Division is expected to collect such data at least twice a year.
- **External monitoring data/reports.**

III. Evaluation

Generally, APFNet conducts results-based evaluations. Evaluation is normally classified into internal evaluation and external evaluation. Internal evaluations are organized by the highest management in the management structure of the APFNet-funded interventions, while external evaluations are organized by APFNet, and the evaluation task is delegated to an independent individual consultant or an evaluation team, or a third-party organization.

Box 1 Results-based evaluation

It is a management strategy that sets out clear objectives and outcomes to define the way forward, and uses specific indicators to verify the progress made. It enables the evaluators to conclude whether a planned goal or expected outputs have been achieved or not, or to what degree they have been achieved.

3.1 Evaluation criteria and scope

3.1.1 Evaluation criteria

A criterion is a standard or principle used in evaluation as the basis for evaluative judgement. At APFNet, the six evaluations criteria of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as shown in Figure 1 are usually adopted.



Figure 1 Evaluation criteria

Relevance: The extent to which the intervention's objectives and design respond to the beneficiaries' global, economy and partner/institution needs, policies and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change. Ownership of an intervention is important and beneficiaries are considered first and foremost to be the primary stakeholders in defining priorities and needs.

Coherence: The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in an economy, sector or institution.

Effectiveness: The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives and its results, including any differential results across groups. To make the result easily measurable, a 'with/without, and before-after' approach shall be adopted.

Efficiency: The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.

Impact: The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.

Sustainability: The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.

3.1.2 Evaluation scope

The internal evaluation usually looks at the performance of implementation (inputs, outputs, outcome and impacts of an intervention) and the implementing team's performance of an intervention, while the external evaluation usually looks at the aspects of planning, implementation and management of an intervention comprehensively.

3.2 Main types of evaluation work in APFNet

3.2.1 Strategic Plan implementation review

APFNet Strategic Plan (SP) implementation review aims to assess the progress and performance of implementing the APFNet SP and the impacts made at global and regional levels, identify challenges and opportunities, as well as provide recommendations for further improvement and future development. APFNet normally conducts a mid-term review and terminal review of the SP, which are mainly organized by the M&E Division.

Box 2 Definition of a review

Review is a periodic and rapid assessment of the performance of an intervention, it tends to emphasize operational issues, and does not undertake the full process of evaluation.

3.2.2 Mechanism/program review and assessment

A mechanism/program assessment normally is conducted to review and assess the implementation and management of a mechanism/program, identify achievements to date, as well as achievements, problems and challenges, and gives recommendations for further improvement. It is suggested to conduct a mechanism/program review once a year or once a term. In addition, APFNet also usually conducts mechanism/program gap or needs assessments.

Box 3 Definition of assessment

Assessment identifies a certain issue before, during and after an intervention. It is often associated with another term to focus on what will be assessed, such as gap assessments, needs assessments etc. It can take place prior, during or after an intervention and may be used in an evaluative context.

3.2.3 Thematic assessment

Thematic evaluation assesses one or several cross-cutting themes that have significance in an economy or a region. For example, APFNet has conducted two assessments, including *Assessment of Progress Towards the APEC 2020 Forest Cover Goal* and *Baseline review and gap assessment on forestry strategic planning in Asia-Pacific economies*.

3.2.4 Project/mechanism/program evaluation

Project/mechanism/program evaluation assesses the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of projects/mechanism/programs, the performance of mainly involved parties, and gives recommendations for better management, implementation and future planning. For project evaluation, it is normally classified into Mid-term evaluations (MTE), Terminal evaluations (TE) and Ex-post-evaluations.

3.3 Evaluation guiding principles

APFNet adopts the evaluation guiding principles of United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) as follows:

Table 2 Guiding principles for evaluation

Principles	Description
<i>Intentionality and utility</i>	In the context of limited resources, evaluations must be selected and undertaken with a clear intention of use and in a timely manner for decision-making with relevant and useful information.
<i>Impartiality</i>	This is mitigating the presence of bias at all stages of the evaluation process, including planning an evaluation, formulating the mandate and scope, selecting the evaluation team, providing access to stakeholders, conducting the evaluation with the necessary methodological rigor and the presentation of key findings, recommendations and challenges. It provides legitimacy to the evaluation and reduces the potential for conflict of interest.
<i>Independence</i>	<p>The evaluation function should be independent from other management functions so that it is free from undue influence. It needs to have full discretion in directly submitting its reports for consideration at the appropriate level of decision-making.</p> <p>To avoid conflict of interest and undue pressure, evaluators need to be independent and must not have been directly responsible for the policy setting, design or overall management of the subject of evaluation. They must have no vested interest and have the full freedom to impartially conduct their evaluative work. They must be able to express their opinion in a free manner, without potential negative effects on their professional status or career development. Independence of the evaluation function should not impinge the access of evaluators to information about the evaluation.</p>
<i>Transparency and consultation</i>	These are essential features in all stages of the evaluation process, particularly with the major stakeholders, as they establish trust, build confidence, enhance ownerships and increase accountability. They also guarantee credibility and quality of the evaluation and facilitate consensus-building and ownership of the findings, conclusions and recommendations.

3.4 Evaluation preparation and conduction

Most evaluation will follow a standard process that begins with a planning stage and ends with the actions taken to follow up on the evaluation's recommendations. This Policy mainly focused on the external evaluation procedure as follows:

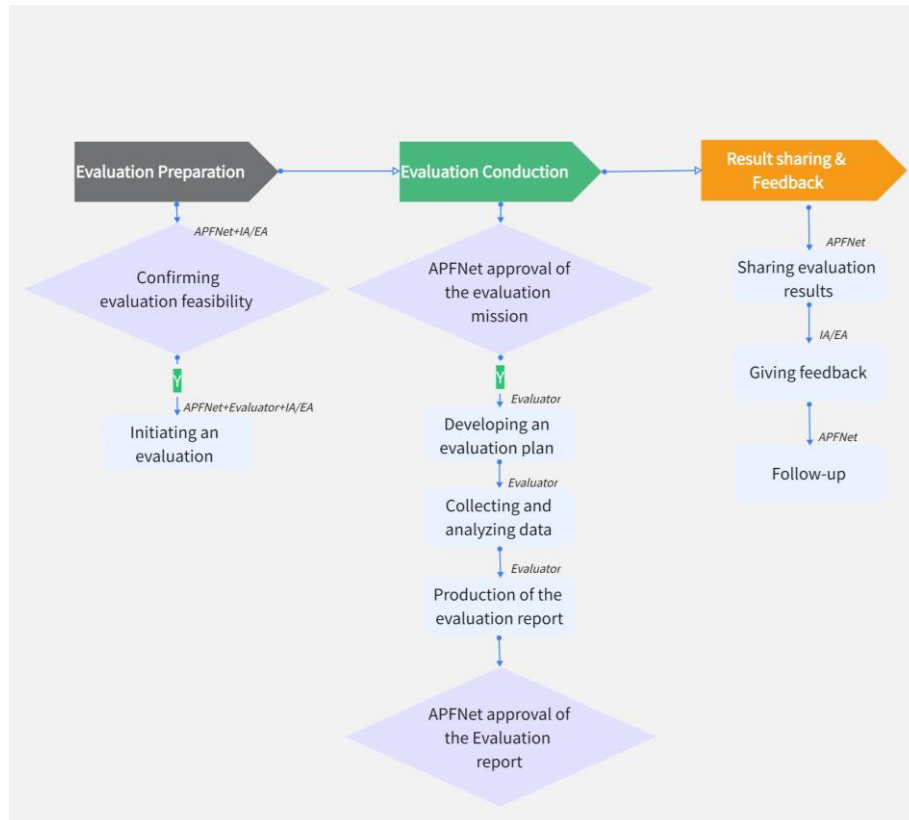


Figure 3 External evaluation procedure

The following sections provide an overview of what is expected at each stage of the evaluation process.

3.4.1 Evaluation preparation

The preparation phase should begin at least 3 months before the evaluation is initiated.

(1) Confirming evaluation feasibility

APFNet should take the lead to confirm evaluation feasibility with IAs (Implementing agencies) or EAs (Executive Agencies), and the following factors shall be considered regarding the evaluation feasibility:

- a. Implementation progress;
- b. Availability of the progress reports and financial reports;
- c. Access to field sites;
- d. Availability of budget.

(2) Initiating an evaluation

Once the feasibility has been confirmed, the evaluation can be officially initiated. During

this phase, the following four aspects should be decided:

- a. Confirming a tentative evaluation time
- b. Gathering relevant documents
- c. Preparing ToR
- d. Confirming evaluators

Normally external evaluators will be selected by APFNet in accordance with the *APFNet Procedures for Consultant Selection and Recruitment (2014)*.

3.4.2 Evaluation conduction

The evaluation conduction begins with APFNet's approval of the evaluation mission and ends with APFNet sharing of the evaluation results.

This session provides guidance on evaluation procedures step by step, which should be collaboratively implemented by evaluators, the IAs/EAs and APFNet, and the evaluation mission must be approved by APFNet before it starts. The evaluation lifecycle is defined by five phases: the AFNet approval of the evaluation mission, the development of an evaluation plan, data collection and analysis, production of the evaluation report, and APFNet approval of the evaluation report. The details are as follows:

(1) APFNet approval of the evaluation mission

After APFNet and an evaluator both reach consensus on the consultancy contract and ToR, the evaluation mission, consultancy contract and ToR will be approved by APFNet.

(2) Evaluation plan formulation

The evaluators will work with APFNet to formulate an evaluation plan, which will incorporate tasks and responsibilities (among the evaluation team), evaluation scope and methods to collect data, stakeholders to be interviewed, and evaluation questions, etc. APFNet will review the evaluation plans and ensure schedules are on track.

(3) Collecting and analyzing data

An evaluation should be of collaborative nature and ensure the greatest possible participative involvement of stakeholders. The evaluators are supposed to gain information as much as possible for the analysis using different methods, which may include participation in project-related activities, desk reviews, consultations and interviews, case studies, field site/project office visits, surveys and questionnaires, etc.

(4) Production and approval of the evaluation report

The evaluation report will be the main output of the evaluation mission to present findings, conclusion and recommendations. The evaluators are expected to draft the report after thorough analysis of the data collected, and submit the report to APFNet within the deadline outlined in the ToR.

During the evaluation report drafting process, the evaluators should keep close contact with APFNet and key stakeholders for further clarifications and comments. Once the consolidated report is prepared, the evaluator should send it to APFNet for comments. When comments and feedback from APFNet are received, the evaluator takes the lead in

incorporating them as appropriate and prepare the final report. And the report should be finally approved by APFNet.

3.4.3 Evaluation result sharing and feedback

Evaluation reports are supposed to be widely shared among the key stakeholders. Soon after the evaluation report being approved by APFNet, APFNet should officially send the evaluation report to the IAs/EAs.

The IAs/EAs of an ongoing intervention should give feedback to the recommendations that were raised in an evaluation report, and take corrective actions after making consensus with APFNet.