**GUIDELINES FOR THE EVALUATION OF PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE
STANDARDS AND TRADE DEVELOPMENT FACILITY**

1 INTRODUCTION

1.   This document provides practical guidance for external evaluators of STDF projects, based on the STDF Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.[1] It outlines the framework and approach for independent ex-post evaluations of STDF projects, drawing on the OECD-DAC Principles for the Evaluation of Development Assistance.[2] It aims to promote consistency and a common standard in the quality of independent ex-post evaluations of STDF projects.

2.   The STDF's Operational Rules require at least 50% of STDF projects completed every year to undergo an independent ex-post evaluation.[3] Projects to be subjected to an independent evaluation are selected by the Working Group chairperson, during the first meeting of the Working Group in the year after project completion, using the method of ordinary random selection, unless the Working Group decides otherwise.

2 STDF'S THEORY OF CHANGE

3.   The STDF's global partnership drives catalytic SPS improvements in developing countries that facilitate safe trade, contributing to the SDGs related to sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction, and food security. The Theory of Change in the STDF Strategy for 2020-2024, "Safe and Inclusive Trade Horizons for Developing Countries",[4] outlines the pathway through which change will be achieved. It sets out the intervention logic and provides the backbone of the STDF's MEL Framework.

Source: STDF Strategy

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[1] See: www.standardsfacility.org
[2] OECD DAC Principles for Effective Aid. Available at: www.oecd.org/dataoecd/31/12/2755284.pdf
[3] See: www.standardsfacility.org/sites/default/files/STDF_139rev4_EN_0516.pdf
[4] See: www.standardsfacility.org/sites/default/files/STDF_Strategy_2020-2024.pdf

4.   The STDF provides a limited number of project grants to strengthen SPS capacity in developing countries, in line with beneficiary's priorities. Both public and private sector stakeholders benefit from projects that address key SPS challenges or opportunities, which influence their ability to gain and/or maintain market access. STDF projects convene and connect public, private and other stakeholders at global, regional and country level to pilot innovative and collaborative approaches, leverage expertise and resources, and deliver results in developing and least developing countries.

5.   Projects link to STDF's knowledge work on different thematic topics (such as public-private partnerships, electronic certification or using evidence to set priorities), allowing all those involved to learn about what works well and less well. STDF projects have a key role to play in enhancing the effectiveness of SPS capacity building through the identification and dissemination of good practice, and promotion of synergies and collaboration among different stakeholders including government authorities, the private sector, and international, regional and bilateral organizations. STDF projects also seek to influence and catalyse SPS improvements more widely, including through outreach and dissemination of the results, experiences and lessons.

3 OBJECTIVE OF PROJECT EVALUATIONS

6.   As indicated in the STDF MEL Framework, evaluation aims to assess the overall relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact of the STDF's work streams to ensure accountability. Evaluation contributes to the broader evidence base for STDF Working Group members and SPS stakeholders in developing countries, supports learning and informs decision-making on future policy and practices related to SPS capacity development.

7.   The MEL Framework outlines how independent ex post evaluations of STDF projects should focus on the impact of the project beyond the immediate project outputs, addressing for instance improved market access, reductions in rejections, improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of regulatory processes, improvements in national food safety, plant or animal health, etc. More specifically, independent ex-post evaluations of STDF projects are carried out to:

 ➢ assess the project's results focused on the outcome and impact level, including attention to the contribution of the project to safe, inclusive trade and development outcomes in support of the UN's 2030 Agenda (particularly SDG 1, 2, 3 8 and 17).

 ➢ assess the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability of the project, based on the logical framework.

 ➢ identify key experiences, good practice and lessons to inform future decision-making and interventions by the project beneficiaries[5], other project stakeholders, as well as members of the STDF's global partnership and other development partners more broadly.

4 EVALUATORS

8.   Independent project evaluations are carried out by consultants with the necessary expertise and experience to deliver on the Terms of Reference for the evaluation. The evaluator is selected by the STDF Working Group Chairperson, based on a short-list provided by the STDF Secretariat, and contracted by the WTO.

9.   The selected evaluator should be independent from the STDF project intervention, as well as intended beneficiaries. Any possible conflict of interest (real or perceived) should be addressed openly and honestly. The evaluator should be able to work freely and without interference; s/he should be assured of cooperation and access to all relevant information necessary to carry out the evaluation.

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[5] The OECD defines beneficiaries as "the individuals, groups, or organisations, whether targeted or not, that benefit directly or indirectly, from the development intervention." See: www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm

5 METHODOLOGY

10.   A detailed evaluation framework should be developed by the evaluator, and reviewed and approved by the STDF Secretariat, before the start of the evaluation. The evaluation framework will set out the parameters for a systematic and objective evaluation of the project, based on the project document and its logical framework with indicators to measure progress at different results-levels (goal, outcomes, outputs). A template for the evaluation framework is provided in Annex 1.

11.   The project evaluation should be organized around the standard OECD evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability and lessons learnt. Key evaluation questions (see below) under each criterion should be complemented with additional sub-questions focused on the project being evaluated. The questions should assess the project's theory of change, including the extent to which the underlying assumptions behind the project proved relevant and realistic in terms of delivering the desired results, meeting expectations and managing risks.

12.   The evaluation framework should map the questions to be asked against the project indicators and any other lines of inquiry, as well as data collection tools and methods, and sources of information. Cross-cutting issues (including issues related to gender equality, women's empowerment and the environment) should be analysed as far as possible across all of the key evaluation criteria.

13.   The full range of stakeholders (including the project applicant, beneficiaries, the implementing organization and any other relevant stakeholders) should be consulted during the evaluation process and given the opportunity to contribute. All the relevant stakeholders should be clearly identified in the evaluation framework.

14.   Evaluations may be conducted as desk studies or may involve travel to beneficiary country(s). For regional or global projects, the evaluation framework should clarify the criteria used to select country case studies, if relevant.

Key evaluation criteria and questions[6]

Relevance: did the project do the right things?
- To what extent did the objectives and design of the project respond to: (i) the SPS-related needs, policies and priorities of the beneficiaries, as well as other stakeholders involved (public and/or private sector, regional, international partners, etc.); as well as (ii) the STDF's goal to facilitate safe trade?
- To what extent were there differences and/or trade-offs between different priorities or needs?
- How were local contexts, ownership, processes and stakeholders taken into account in the design and implementation of the project?
- To what extent did the project remain relevant, even if the circumstances changed over the course of implementation?

Coherence: how well did the project fit?
- How well did the project fit vis-a-vis other interventions in the particular context (country/region, sector, etc.)?
- To what extent did other interventions (including policies) support or undermine the project, and vice versa?
- What were the synergies and interlinkages between the project and other interventions carried out by the same institution/government, as well as with the relevant international (Codex, IPPC, OIE) standards?

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[6] Based on the OCED definitions and principles for evaluation criteria, updated in 2019. See: www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm and www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/revised-evaluation-criteria-dec-2019.pdf

- To what extent was the project complementary to and/or coordinated with relevant interventions supported by other actors in the same context, including how did it add value while avoiding duplication of effort?

Effectiveness: did the project achieve its objectives?

- To what extent were the project objectives achieved or are likely to be achieved (based on the indicators for expected outputs and outcomes identified in the project's logframe) including any differential results across groups?

- What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the project objectives, outcomes and outputs?

- To what extent were horizontal issues (particularly related to gender and environment) adequately addressed in the project?

Efficiency: how well were resources used?

- To what extent did the project deliver results in an economic and timely way[7], based on the project document?

- What changes and risks, if any, occurred during project implementation, and how was the project able to adapt to these changes and manage risks?

- Was the project a cost-effective contribution to addressing the needs of the beneficiary?

- How well was the project managed?

Impact: what difference did the project make?

- To what extent did the project generate, or is expected to generate, significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects linked to the STDF's theory of change? These may cover an improved domestic and/or regional SPS situation, measurable impact on trade, contribution to sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction and food security, etc.)?

- What real difference (expected and/or unexpected) has the project made, or is likely to have, on the final beneficiaries including on people's well-being, gender equality and the environment?

- How did the project catalyse any other action or change, for instance raising awareness on SPS challenges and/or mobilizing additional resources for SPS capacity development?

Sustainability: will the benefits last?

- To what extent are the benefits of the project continuing, or are likely to continue over the longer term, after the end of STDF funding?

- To what extent was sustainability addressed at the design stage and during the project, and what are the major factors (including risks) influencing sustainability?

- Are the necessary capacities and systems (financial, social, institutional, etc.) in place to sustain the project results over time?

- What follow-up activities, if any, are planned and/or required to sustain these results over time?

Lessons learned

- What lessons can be learned from the project regarding the process of project design and implementation?

- What lessons can be learned from the project, which may be of importance to the broader donor community and which should be disseminated more widely?

- What actions have been taken by the beneficiary, STDF partnership or others to disseminate, learn and follow-up on the outcomes of the project?

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[7] The OECD describes "economic" as the conversion of inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) into outputs, outcomes and impacts in the most cost-effective way possible, compared to feasible alternatives in the context. "Timely" delivery is defined as delivery within the intended timeframe, or a timeframe reasonably adjusted to the demands of the evolving context.

- How could the STDF increase the sharing of good practices on SPS capacity building coming out of this project?

6 REPORTING

15.   The information obtained in response to the questions in the evaluation framework will provide a basis on which to analyse and report on the project's performance, results and experiences and draw evidence-based conclusions and recommendations.

16.   The evaluation report should present the findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons separately and with a clear logical distinction between them. The findings should flow logically from the analysis of the data and information, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions should be supported by the findings and analysis. Recommendations and any lessons should follow logically from the conclusions. Any assumptions underlying the analysis should be made explicit.

17.   The evaluation report should be clear, concise and reader-friendly. The main body of the report (excluding the executive summary and annexes) should be approximately 20 pages. It should normally be written in the same language as the project documents. Additional information, for instance on the evaluation framework or the stakeholders consulted, should be included as annexes. A template for the final evaluation report is provided in Annex 2.

18.   Key partners involved in the project, including the relevant government agencies in the country/region and the project implementing organization, should be given the opportunity to comment on an advanced draft of the evaluation report before it is finalized. The final evaluation report should reflect comments received (if and when considered appropriate by the evaluator) and acknowledge any substantive differences of opinion. Where there are different views on facts that can be verified, the evaluator should investigate and change the draft where necessary.

19.   The conclusions, recommendations and lessons drawn in the evaluation report should be clear, relevant, targeted and actionable so that the evaluation can be used to achieve its intended learning and accountability objectives.

7 QUALITY

20.   The OECD DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation shall be used, as far as possible, to ensure the quality of the evaluation process and final product.[8] The quality of the evaluation report will be assessed on the basis of the criteria in Annex 3.

8 DISSEMINATION

21.   The final evaluation report shall be shared with the STDF Working Group for discussion. Wherever possible, project evaluators may be invited to share the key findings, lessons and recommendations and lessons of the evaluation during a Working Group meeting. It shall be further disseminated through the STDF website and other fora for learning and follow-up actions and to ensure transparency. Based on any key lessons emerging from the evaluation, additional interested parties in the wider development community will be identified and targeted to maximise the use of relevant findings.

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[8] See: www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/qualitystandards.pdf

Annex 1: Evaluation Framework

The following template is provided to guide and structure the evaluation framework. It should be prepared by the evaluator and discussed with the STDF Secretariat, before the evaluation is started.

1. Introduction

Provide an overview of the project being evaluated, including a description of the project's intervention logic or theory of change. This should include details on the timeframe of the project (including extensions, if any), funds spent, geographical area, target groups, organisational set-up, implementation arrangements and any other dimensions to be covered by the evaluation. Any known discrepancies between the planned and actual implementation of the project should be identified, as well as any known factors that may affect the feasibility of the evaluation.

2. Key evaluation questions

Identify detailed questions to be asked to different types of stakeholders as part of the evaluation process. The broad evaluation questions above, focused on relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and lessons learned, should be used to frame the evaluation. Additional, specific evaluation questions related to the particular project to be evaluated should be elaborated and included in the evaluation framework, as well as questions related to cross-cutting issues.

A range of different types of questions should be asked, including:
- descriptive questions (e.g. what happened? what was delivered? what changed?)
- causal questions (e.g. what caused or contributed to the results? what were the outcomes and impacts? what other factors contributed?)
- synthesis questions (e.g. how could the project have been improved? what were its strengths and weaknesses?)
- action questions (e.g. what are the recommendations for follow-up for different types of stakeholders, what are the opportunities for scaling-up?)

3. Data collection methods and sources

Explain the methods to be used to conduct the evaluation and gather credible evidence, including the techniques and tools to be used for data collection and analysis. Identify all the information collection methods to be used such as literature reviews, survey questionnaires and/or interviews with relevant project stakeholders (beneficiaries, implementing organization(s), other collaborating or relevant organizations). Other methods such as case studies or cost-effectiveness analyses may also be applied, depending *inter alia* on the size and complexity of the project. Describe desk analysis and field visit, if applicable.

The evaluation should seek diverse views and insights. Available information sources should be clearly identified by the Evaluator by including a detailed list of:
- project documents (progress and final reports, and end-of-project assessments if existing),
- other relevant documents produced under the project and any other information (e.g. training resources, news stories, media articles, video clips, etc.)
- key stakeholders involved in the project (including beneficiaries, implementing partners, any other relevant public/private sector organizations), as well as any other relevant STDF Working Group members or other organizations that are potentially relevant.

The key evaluation questions, relevant indicators and data collection methods and sources may be set out in the form of a table or matrix that is tailored to the particular project (see example below). As appropriate, more detailed surveys or questionnaires targeted at particular groups of stakeholders involved in the project may be elaborated separately and included in the evaluation framework.

Example of Evaluation Criteria: Effectiveness		
Example of key evaluation question and sub-questions	**Indicators**	**Data collection methods and sources**
1. To what extent were the project objectives achieved or are likely to be achieved, including any differential results across groups? 2. What were the major factors influencing the achievement or non-achievement of the project objectives, outcomes and outputs? 3. To what extent were horizontal issues (particularly related to gender and environment) adequately addressed in the project? Additional sub-questions should be formulated by the evaluator and included here, based on the specific TORs for the evaluation and discussions with the STDF Secretariat, and any other relevant stakeholders involved in the project.	Identify the relevant qualitative and/or quantitative indicators from the project's logical framework that correspond to the evaluation question and sub-questions	Identify the data collection methods to collect the required data and information for each question. Different methods (e.g. surveys, key informant interviews, desk review, etc.) may be used for each question. Identify where the required data and information will be found, including primary and secondary data sources.

4. Workplan and timetable for the evaluation

Provide a workplan and timetable for the evaluation that includes the expected timing of mission travel (if any), as well as key milestones and deadlines for deliverables.

Annex 2: Template for project evaluation report

1. Executive summary (2 pages)

    *   Overview of the report, which highlights the main conclusions, recommendations and key lessons learned.

2. Introduction (2 pages)

    *   Objective of the evaluation.

    *   Description of the policy context and institutional environment within which the project was implemented, including the role of the STDF, implementing organization(s), other donors and project partners as well as the private sector, consumer organizations and NGOs, as relevant.

    *   Summary of the project including its objectives, activities, inputs (budget), outputs and outcomes.

    *   Indication of the evaluator's independence to carry out the project evaluation, addressing previous collaboration (if any) with the STDF, project partners and/or beneficiaries, including a description of conflicts of interest, if any.

3. Methodology (2 pages)

    Based on the evaluation framework:

    *   Explanation of the method(s) and techniques used for data and information collection, analysis and processing, the validity, reliability and limitations (if any) of these method(s).

    *   Description of the sources of information (documents, respondents, administrative data, literature, etc.).

    *   Description of the key stakeholders consulted, their relevance to the project, the criteria for their selection, as well as limitations (if any) in access to key project stakeholders.

    *   Explanation on the selection of any case studies or particular countries selected within regional projects (if any) for mission travel or more in-depth assessment.

    *   Recognition of any constraints encountered and, if so, how these affected the evaluation, including its independence and impartiality as appropriate.

4. Findings and analysis (10 pages)

    *   Description and assessment of the project's intervention logic and theory of change, including an analysis of the rationale for the project at the design stage, and any key assumptions made.

    *   Detailed description and analysis of the responses to all the evaluation questions, covering the project's relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, that clearly refers to the available evidence. Where it is not possible to answer some questions, explanations should be provided. This analysis should cross-validate the information sources, and critically assess the validity and reliability of the data obtained. It should address key evaluation questions under the following points:

        o   **Relevance** to needs and overall context, including the extent to which the project: (i) met the needs, priorities and policies of the target groups, and continues to do so if circumstances changed; and (ii) was aligned to the STDF's goal to facilitate safe trade.

o **Coherence** in terms of the fit and compatibility of the project with other interventions in the country/region, sector or institution.

o **Effectiveness** in terms of the extent to which the project achieved its expected objectives and results, including any differential results across groups.

o **Efficiency** in terms of the extent to which the project delivered results in an economic and timely way, including how the available resources (funding, staff, regulatory, administrative, time, other resources, etc.) contributed to or hindered the achievement of results.

o **Impact** in terms of the extent to which the project generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects – including effects related to the STDF's programme goal (increased and sustainable SPS capacity in developing countries) and the facilitation of safe trade, as a means to contribute to sustainable economic development, poverty reduction and food security and the UN's 2030 Agenda (particularly SDGs 1, 2 3, 8, 17).

o **Sustainability** related to whether the results and net benefits of the project have been, or are likely to be, maintained over time without STDF funding or other donor support. This should address the capacities (e.g. financial, economic, human, institutional) capacities needed to sustain the results and benefits over time, as well as risks and potential trade-offs involved.

o **Cross-cutting issues** in terms of how the project contributed to cross-cutting objectives, including on gender equality and the environment.

o **Risk management** in terms of the risks that were faced during project implementation and the extent to which they were approximately managed.

➢ Overall analysis and judgement on the performance and results of the project. In assessing the project's outcomes and impacts, attribution and/or contribution to results should be clearly explained.

5. Conclusions and recommendations (4 pages)

- Main conclusions based on the findings and analysis of the evaluation.[9] These should include conclusions related to how the project contributed to the STDF's unique value proposition identified in the STDF Strategy for 2020-2024, including to convene and connect, pilot and innovate, learn and disseminate, influence and catalyse increased and sustainable SPS capacity in developing countries.

- Clear and actionable recommendations targeted at relevant stakeholders in the specific country/region (including government authorities, the private sector, regional economic communities, etc.), the project implementing organization, any other project stakeholders, members of the STDF's global partnership, and/or the wider community of donors and development partners.

6. Lessons learned (2 pages)

- Key lessons learned which are of relevance for wider use and future programme development, both on process and substance.

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[9] Conclusions and recommendations should be clearly based on the findings and analysis included in the previous section of the report.

Annexes

- Evaluation framework.

- Final list of all the persons consulted during the evaluation (to the extent that this does not conflict with confidentiality).

- List of documents and/or other information sources consulted.

- Any additional annexes, as relevant, based on the scope of the project evaluated.

Annex 3: Criteria to assess the quality of STDF project evaluation reports

Theme	Criteria
Context	• The context and purpose of the evaluation is adequately described • Key information on the project is included (e.g. context, need and demand for the project, objective of the project, applicant and beneficiaries, implementation arrangements and other key stakeholders involved, budget, timeframe, etc.)
Purpose	• The report clearly describes the objective and scope of the evaluation
Methodology	• The report adequately describes and explains the evaluation methodology and how it was applied • The report clearly explains the approaches/methods/tools that were used and why they were selected • The logic and consistency of the project results framework and/or theory of change is assessed • The validity and reliability of information sources are adequately addressed • The report adequately addresses limitations, if any, to the methodology • The report attaches an evaluation framework that clearly includes the key evaluation questions as well as more detailed sub-questions • The OECD DAC criteria, STDF MEL Framework and STDF project evaluation guidelines are mentioned • Surveys used (if any) are attached as an annex • The response rate to surveys is clear • The report explains whether missions/field visits were carried out, the selection of countries visited for regional/global projects (if relevant) with details on the timing, stakeholders met, etc.
Cross-cutting issues	• Gender, the environment and any other relevant crosscutting issues are adequately addressed
Findings, recommendations and lessons learned	• The report presents findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons separately, clearly and logically • The report adequately addresses all the evaluation criteria and questions • Findings are clearly presented and based on the objective use of the reported evidence • The report analyses the main external factors facilitating or hindering implementation of the project, and assesses whether

12	risks were appropriately managed

• Conclusions are clearly substantiated by findings and analysis

• Recommendations are well-grounded in the evidence and conclusions reported, clearly stated and realistic

• Lessons learned are correctly identified and relevant

• The report can be used reliably to extract good practices and lessons learned for STDF |
| **Structure** | • The report is well structured, logical and clear |