

THE ROLE OF EVALUATION FOR CLIMATE ACTION

A post-COP26 dialogue on how evaluative evidence can help deliver the Paris Agreement

ABOUT THE EVENT AND THIS NOTE

Building on the outcomes of the United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in November 2021, EvalForward and the Evaluation Offices of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Food Programme (WFP) and CGIAR held a dialogue on the role of evaluation in climate action.

Drawing on key elements of the dialogue, this note highlights the value that evaluation can bring to learning and forging solutions as part of global efforts to address climate change. The dialogue took place in December 2021 and brought together 140 participants from 42 countries.

WHY EVALUATION COUNTS AND SHOULD COUNT FOR MORE

“We can now say with confidence that we have kept 1.5 °C alive. But, its pulse is weak and it will only survive if we keep our promises and translate commitments into rapid action”

ALOK SHARMA, President for COP26, in concluding remarks

COP26 showed how the global response continues to struggle to meet its commitments and keep pace with escalating climate threats. At the same time, there are also gaps and shortcomings in evidence of and reporting on commitments, undermining the credibility of the COP process and, ultimately, actual progress made on climate change action. This is where evaluation needs to play a far greater role and help to place evaluative evidence firmly in the picture.



KEY MESSAGES

1 EVALUATION CAN PLAY A KEY ROLE IN CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS

For the sake of the planet, there is an urgent need to ensure that the multitude of climate actions and commitments made by the international community are clearly and properly assessed for aim, execution and impact. Evaluations can no longer be ignored in major global meetings if we are to stand a chance of keeping the rise in global temperatures below 1.5°C.

2 EVALUATION IS THE SOLUTION TO IMPACT WASHING: CLIMATE PROMISES MUST BE ASSESSED FOR THEIR TRUE IMPACT

Independent evaluations are the best way to ensure that pledges made by climate actors are held to honest account. The existential threat of the climate emergency demands rigorous monitoring and cool-headed scrutiny of what works, what doesn't and why. Great danger lies in impact washing, spinning or over-inflating achievements.

3 TO SAVE THE PLANET, DECISION MAKERS NEED TO DRAW ON THE BEST EVIDENCE

Our emperors have no clothes. Today, climate change finance is largely based on forecasts, projections and naked belief. There is no proper assessment of the impact of climate change adaptation or monitoring of maladaptation. The evaluation community has a duty to make sure that sound evidence informs tomorrow's climate decisions and that a culture of examination and lesson learning takes root in the climate community.

4 COMMON STANDARDS MUST BE SET TO MEASURE THE PROGRESS OF CLIMATE ACTION

There is an urgent need for climate actors to join forces and share their knowledge to advance common standards for measuring climate resilience. A common standard that raises the bar of credibility and increases the comparability of different sources of evidence will be critical in tracking good practices, reporting on activities to donors and bringing confidence to future climate funders.

CHALLENGES, LESSONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The parallel sessions discussed how to adapt evaluation methods and practices, and how to shift them, exploring new ways of working that will enable evaluators to enter into the climate change debate and prove the worth of evaluation.

The issues and concerns that surfaced proved complementary and converged on a number of emerging issues.¹

Evaluation should be a convener of climate expertise and integrate different approaches to produce climate evidence.

- Knowledge-sharing and collaboration between different sectors and disciplines is important to understand and address climate change. Evaluators are well positioned to facilitate such an exchange and to help create common understanding by convening subject-matter experts and by integrating methods and tools from other disciplines.

- Assessing the “quality of science” criteria (included in CGIAR evaluation policy) allows to bring together different aspects of the research for development. CGIAR evaluation teams largely comprise subject-matter experts who undertake in-depth peer-reviews throughout the design and implementation of an evaluation. This helps to embed evaluative thinking into scientific approaches, enhancing the credibility and uptake of evaluative knowledge.
- Climate change crises unfold in unpredictable ways, so backward-looking evaluation approaches should complement predictive ones to design plans for climate interventions, anticipate shocks and pre-empt their impacts. Climate change adaptation means thinking about what will work in future. Evaluation can integrate different approaches to conceptualize and explore what the future may look like, incorporating foresight work and scenario planning in addition to expert knowledge.

¹ Questions discussed in the parallel groups:

- Methods and frameworks for measuring/assessing climate resilience outcomes in evaluations in different contexts (climate threats, agricultural systems, landscapes, agroecology, etc.).
- How to address the complexity of evaluating climate change interventions, including assessing transformational change in climate action.
- How can we increase the utility of our evaluations of climate change and make evaluations a vocal instrument in global consultations?
- What do evaluations say about the main synergies and tradeoffs and how to approach them from a food-systems perspective?
- What is the best way for the evaluation community to work with climate experts and expand its knowledge on specific climate action tools and methods, and how?
- What are the lessons emerging from Impact Evaluation on climate change in the humanitarian context and the methodological challenges?



- Evaluations should also identify the trade-offs between different places, people and time. This is particularly important when looking at food security where, for instance, agricultural intensification can raise the potential risk of deforestation or biodiversity loss.

How can evaluation better understand and assess climate resilience?

- Understanding how households and communities absorb and recover from climatic shocks is key to developing effective adaptation strategies. This requires measuring households and communities' exposure to shocks, their well-being and their coping strategies over time.
- Climate change entails numerous shocks and chains of events, making it difficult to find the right assessment strategy. This is especially true in humanitarian settings, where communities face conflict, economic slump and other stressors at the same time.

- Climate resilience – defined as the capacity to absorb shocks, adapt to changing climatic environments and improve well-being in a changing climate – can be short term, including the ability to bounce back from a shock, or long-term – meaning adapting to the environment and becoming less vulnerable to future shocks (WFP definition).
- Evaluation can help understand climate resilience and adaptation strategies by implementing the following approaches:
 - adopting a “helicopter view” and mapping the different interconnections and sources of data;
 - adopting a systemic approach, looking at networks of factors affecting climate resilience;
 - looking at the different scopes and scales of interventions and their impacts;

- recognizing slow-onset consequences and threads, as well as catastrophic effects and different types of indicator, and identifying the possibility of reversal; and
- looking at different angles of resilience outcomes and the different dimensions in which resilience and climate change happen, the points in the results chain and how climate resilience is built in.
- A coordinated set of impact evaluations in several countries allows WFP to gather global evidence of the effectiveness of its programmes in supporting communities, as well as households' ability to respond to and recover from shocks (Climate and Resilience Impact Evaluation Window).
- Recognizing the complexity of the topic and the need for contextualization, the design and use of theories of change should enhance country-driven interventions and integrate synergies to take into account both rapid evolution and long-term changes.

Evaluations can assess the secondary and spillover effects of adaptation and mitigation interventions, integrating and building on foresight and trade-off analysis.

- Foresight and trade-off analyses are essential tools in developing and executing research strategies that are evidence based and which facilitate evaluability.
- A continuum of evaluative evidence, including from impact evaluations, can provide comprehensive assessments

of interventions by looking at the whole system, including planned and unexpected outcomes and impacts, trade-offs and alternative solutions.

- Examples include:
 - Looking at the effects on the environment caused by climate change adaptation, which has often been anthropocentric.
 - Carbon offset programmes rely heavily on forestry programmes, themselves beset by spillover and additional concerns. Impact evaluations can capture and quantify these issues, ensuring realistic expectations of this financing tool.
 - Foresight review through the lens of the impact areas of One CGIAR: environmental impact areas of Climate adaptation & greenhouse gas reduction.

Impact evaluation can generate evidence that links micro- and macro-level impacts.

- Impact evaluations can document micro-level changes from successful interventions at the local level through the systematic measurement of the impact of weather/climate shocks on individuals and households.
- Impact evaluation work in the field of climate change can become more relevant by using these micro-estimates to inform national/global policies and complement economic and climate modelling, as well as by mapping the conceptual links between the micro-estimates and the bigger global questions.



- Transitioning from project to portfolio level and programme approaches is a necessary step that organizations and funds should take. CGIAR, the Climate Investment Funds (CIF), the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and WFP are moving in this direction.
- Global questions related to climate action need to be mapped to specific outcomes at regional and national level. This will enable impact evaluations to systematically identify relevant evidence gaps, fill them and generate sufficiently robust evidence to drive higher-level programme/policy changes.
- Examples include:
 - providing an empirical basis for carbon offset programmes by quantifying their effect (afforestation projects, for example);
 - supporting a just transition by generating better evidence on effective social protection programmes that assist households and communities through big transitions in key sectors.

How do we advance on evaluation commitment to climate action and gain a role in climate change negotiations?

- Climate change considerations need to be systematically included in evaluation and go beyond programmes and interventions that specifically target climate as a cross-cutting theme. Climate change affects both expected and unexpected results by interacting with drivers, altering assumptions and impacting results chains of interventions. Evaluators and agencies are formalizing steps to this end (FAO is publishing a guide on how to integrate climate change into evaluation).

- Climate change requires the evaluation community to speed up the evolution of its practices and approaches. One major step would be to move beyond the results framework by: i) looking more at future scenarios through formative evaluations; ii) adopting developmental approaches to working together with policy and programme designers (in other words, recognizing the context and complexity of climate change, evaluators should work with rather than apart from key players; evaluation donors and commissioners will need to support and align with this vision); and iii) assessing transformational change in interventions, comprising all five dimensions (relevance, systemic change, speed, scale and adaptive sustainability).
- Evaluation should become more vocal and its contribution more visible, going beyond the usual formats and using channels used to reach different audiences.
- The evaluation community should join forces to build a coalition of evaluators and activists to bring strong evaluation evidence to the table and disseminate it widely. Transformative narrative should come from youth and indigenous peoples, so that their involvement becomes preponderant in evaluation design and the implementation of climate action initiatives.
- The struggle of countries to achieve their Nationally Determined Contributions and the lack of tools and baselines to monitor their progress towards their goals provides an opportunity for evaluation practices to improve their support and assist countries in building national capacity. Evaluation practice should be aligned with and contribute to the climate commitments and needs submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These submissions to UNFCCC are country led and country owned and connect the national with the global context.

EVENT OUTLINE

Plenary speakers: ALLISON SMITH, *Director, CGIAR Advisory Services*

ANDREA COOK, *Director of Evaluation, WFP*

Keynote: JYOTSNA PURI, *Associate Vice-President, Strategy and Knowledge Department, IFAD*

Parallel sessions: NANTHI SUPPIRAMANIAM, *Senior Evaluation Officer, IFAD*

LUISA BELLI, *Evaluation Officer, FAO*

SVETLANA NEGROUSTOUEVA, *Evaluation Function Lead, CGIAR*

JONAS HEIRMAN, *Impact Evaluation Officer, WFP*

Participants: *140 participants from 42 countries*

Event page: www.evalforward.org/webinars/evaluation-climate-action

Link to recording: https://youtu.be/2_O-Vc2AyFk