

# Sustainability-inclusive evaluation:

## Practical ways to address the environment alongside equity in all evaluations

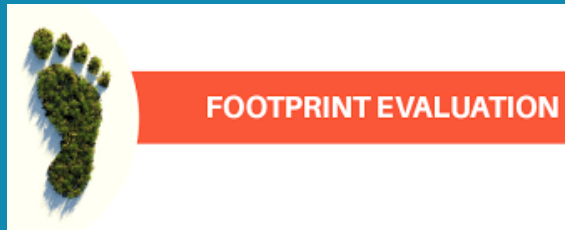
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June 5, 2025

Presentation for:



# Footprint Evaluation: A quick introduction



## Activities

Free tools, materials, and resources

## Our work to date (mostly pro bono)

Creation, curation, and dissemination of **tools, frameworks, and approaches** for sustainability-inclusive evaluation



Organizational partnerships

2023: Global Affairs Canada  
2024-25: Colombian Department of National Planning (DNP)  
2025: DEval Strategic Partnership with a focus on LAC and Africa



Online learning offerings

Occasional **webinars and conference presentations**, including gLocal Evaluation Week!



Nurturing the next generation of Footprint Evaluators

Proof of concept established via **ad hoc, opportunistic collaborations**:

- CES fellows leading training in Canada
- Intensive work with DEval
- LAC collaboration





# Footprint Evaluation: Looking to the future

	Activities	Our work to date	Our future plans
	Free tools, materials, and resources	Creation, curation, and dissemination of <b>tools, frameworks, and approaches</b> for sustainability-inclusive evaluation	Development of the <b>next generation of materials</b> , including sector-specific resources that will be more easily applied
	Organizational partnerships	2023: Global Affairs Canada 2024-25: Colombian Department of National Planning (DNP) 2025: DEval Strategic Partnership with a focus on LAC and Africa	2025: Costa Rican Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN)  Helping <b>frontrunner organizational partners</b> to infuse sustainability into evaluation and decision making right across their portfolios
	Online learning offerings	Occasional <b>webinars and conference presentations</b> , including gLocal Evaluation Week!	Offering <b>professional learning modules</b> for evaluation professionals on various Footprint Evaluation concepts, tools, frameworks, and their application
	Nurturing the next generation of Footprint Evaluators	Proof of concept established via <b>ad hoc, opportunistic collaborations</b> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• CES fellows leading training in Canada</li><li>• Intensive work with DEval</li><li>• LAC collaboration</li></ul>	Supporting <b>diverse cohorts of mid-career professionals</b> to become Footprint Evaluators who can work with organizational partners and run live workshops and webinars in their own regions, languages, and organizations

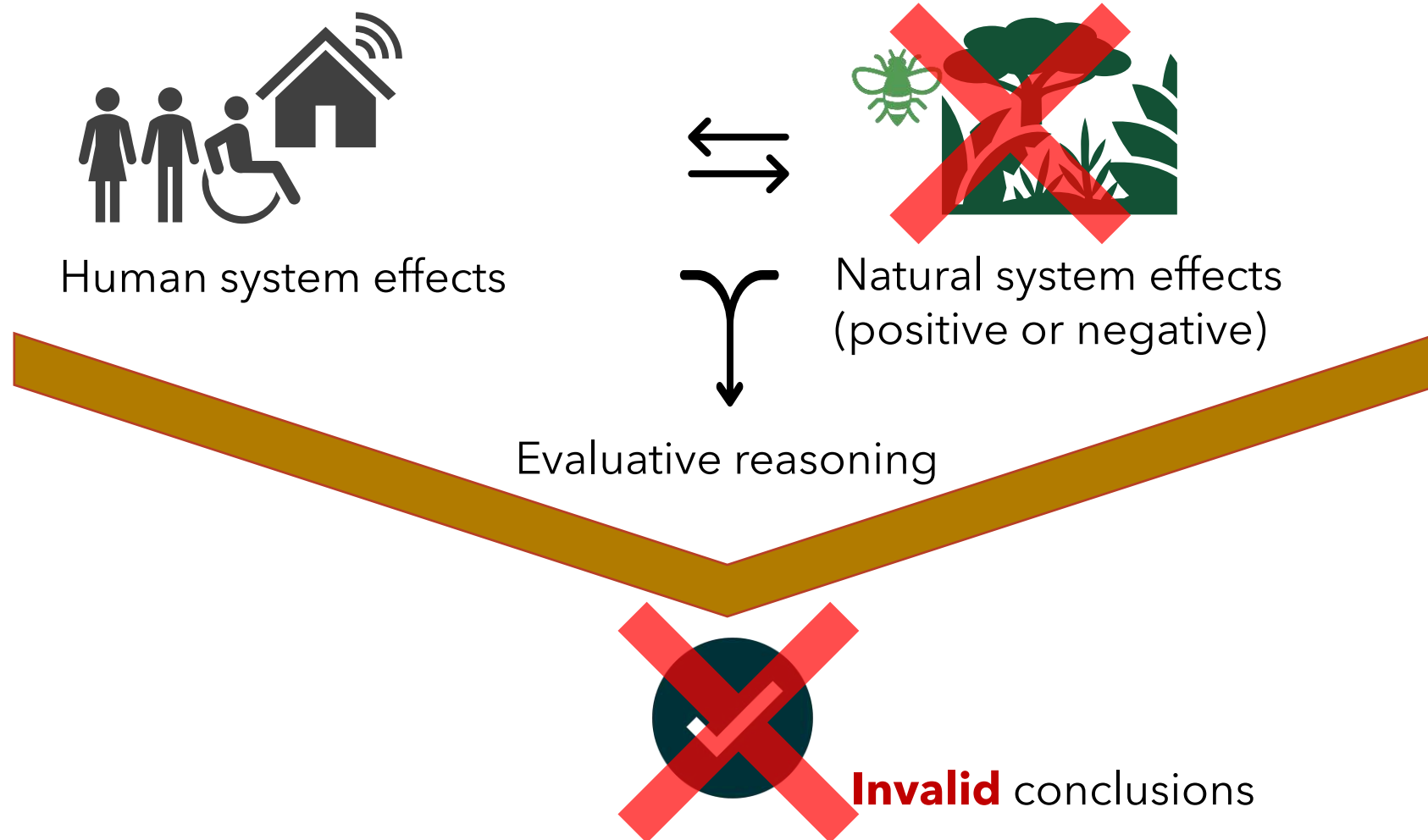
# Why cover equity and sustainability in ALL evaluations?

Programs and policies with NO equity objectives and/or NO environmental objectives cause by far the biggest negative impacts.

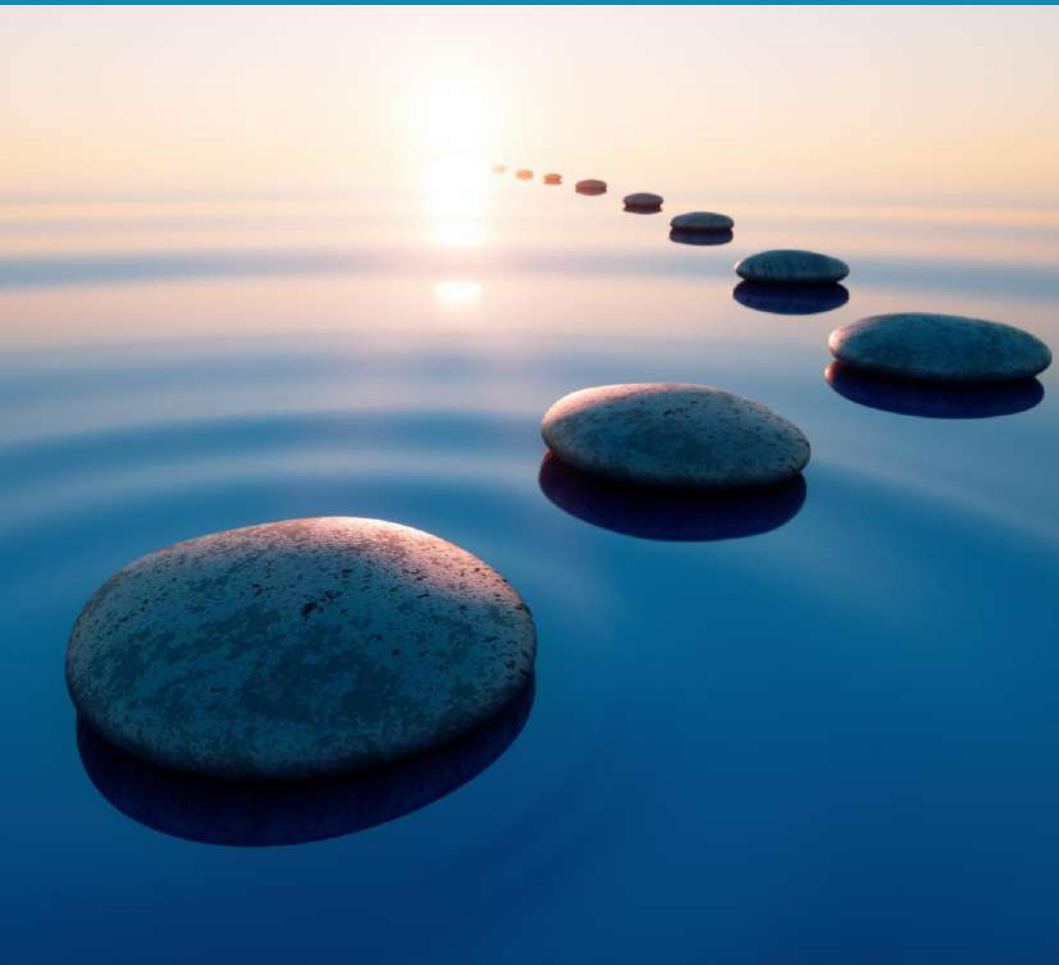
They are the ones that MOST need equity- and sustainability-inclusive evaluation.



# Ignore natural systems → invalid conclusions!



# Decision makers need crystal clear answers to coupled-systems questions



To influence decision makers with the appropriate level of urgency, evaluations must be **crystal clear about how beneficial or problematic the effects are on coupled:**

- **human systems** (including equity) *and*
- **natural systems** (environmental sustainability)

AND how well the initiative is **using win:win approaches** rather than framing equity/human needs and sustainability as a zero-sum tradeoff



**Practical ways  
of addressing  
coupled human  
and natural  
systems in all  
evaluations**



# 1. Ask

**"coupled-systems"**

**Key Evaluation**

**Questions**





# OECD-DAC criteria

Is the intervention doing the right things with respect to both human and natural systems?

**RELEVANCE**  
is the intervention  
doing the right things?

How  
beneficial or  
detrimental  
are the  
intervention's  
effects on  
human and  
natural  
systems in the  
short to  
medium  
term?

**EFFECTIVENESS**  
is the intervention  
achieving its objectives?

**IMPACT**  
what difference does  
the intervention make?

How beneficial or detrimental are the  
intervention's effects on human and  
natural systems in the long term?



**COHERENCE**  
how well does  
the intervention fit?

How well  
does the  
intervention  
align with  
policies and  
commitments  
to protect  
and restore  
natural  
systems?

**EFFICIENCY**  
how well are resources  
being used?

How  
sustainably  
and equitably  
are resources  
and natural  
systems  
being used,  
protected,  
and restored?

**SUSTAINABILITY**  
will the benefits last?

How resilient and well sustained are the  
installations, activities, outcomes and impacts  
in the face of emerging environmental challenges?

# Download and share these free resources

Gracias, DEval, for the  
Spanish translation!

Addressing  
environmental  
sustainability  
through the  
OECD DAC Criteria  
for Evaluation of  
Development  
Assistance



**Footprint Evaluation Initiative**

February 2023  
Version 1.2



Evaluación de la  
sostenibilidad  
ambiental con base  
en los Criterios de  
Evaluación de la  
Asistencia al  
Desarrollo del  
CAD de la OCDE



**Iniciativa Evaluación de la Huella  
Ecológica**

Febrero de 2023  
Versión 1.2



## 2. Use evaluative reasoning to draw clear evaluative conclusions

Use the Footprint Evaluation Typology  
Use rubrics to help apply the Typology  
Use Footprint's Coupled-Systems matrix





# Encouraging crystal clear evaluative conclusions

## **Restorative**

Restores the natural environment so that it thrives

## **No Net Harm to the Natural System**

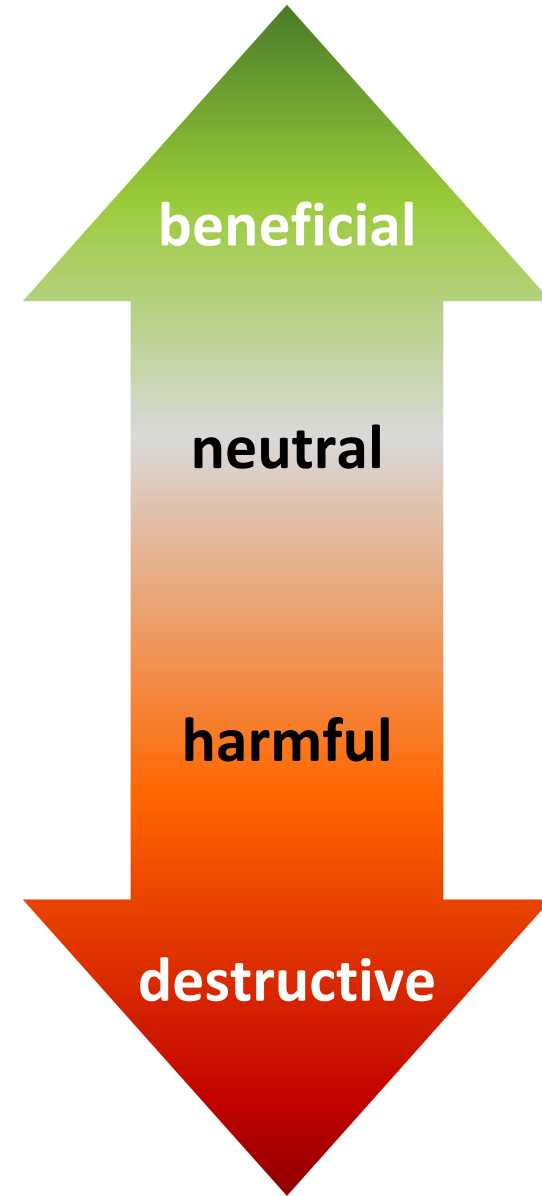
Practices cause no harm OR restoration offsets any harm

## **Sustainability-Aware Practice**

Sustainability-aware practices limit environmental damage

## **Ignores the Natural System**


Damaging practices cause serious harm



# IFAD smallholder adaptation evaluation



# Reconstructed rubric\* for IFAD example

	Rating	Description
beneficial	<b>Restorative</b>	A combination of strong sustainable practices, important offsets, and restorative actions meant that <b>the health of natural systems was improved / restored</b> as a result of the smallholder farming project in question.
neutral	<b>No Net Harm</b>	Strong sustainable practices and important, well-designed offsets were used effectively to ensure that the project did <b>no net harm to natural systems</b> .
harmful	<b>Sustainability-Aware +</b>	<b>Strongly sustainable practices were being used</b> , although they were not sufficient to ensure no net harm to the environment. For example, in pastoral agriculture: appropriate location with respect to landscape and important ecosystems; limiting the number and type of livestock; maintaining important farm boundaries, keeping animals away from water bodies, buffers to reduce sediment and nutrient flow into water bodies; etc.
	<b>Sustainability-Aware</b>	<b>The project at least considered environmental issues</b> , with the case study including mention of key terms such as environment, climate, sustainability, landscape, ecosystem, integrated, pest and water management, etc. Some sustainable practices may have been evident.
destructive	<b>Ignores Natural Systems</b>	The project was in proximity to protected areas, forested lands, waterbodies, etc., but the case study showed <b>no evidence that natural systems were considered</b> .

\* This rubric is a reconstruction of the evidence-based expert judgment used to rate each of the 20 case studies.



# When and why rubrics can be useful

Rubrics provide a **shared language** for assessing environmental sustainability (and other outcomes) across multiple projects

They are **not prescriptive about evidence** to be used (e.g., indicators)

They are designed to **mimic the evaluative reasoning of experts**

They serve as '**trainer wheels**' for making **evidence-based evaluative judgments** about the environmental sustainability of projects

They help ensure **interrater reliability**

They make it **easier to synthesize insights** from diverse projects

# Another option: the Coupled-Systems Matrix



## Human System Effects

## Natural System Effects



Ignoring (and therefore harming) natural systems

Using sustainable practices but still somewhat harmful

No Net Harm to natural systems

Restorative (fixing past harm so natural systems thrive)

Smallholder farming families experience food shortages for all or part of the year and generate less than a subsistence income

Farms produce enough for families to eat and drink year-round, but less than a year-round subsistence income

Farms produce enough for families to eat and drink year-round, as well as a modest but reliable income

Farms produce enough for families year-round as well as a decent, reliable income, now and for future generations

Ultimate aim:  
Systems are thriving for people & nature

# Consider rating each project or site on both dimensions using the Matrix



## Human System Effects

## Natural System Effects



	Ignoring (and therefore harming) natural systems	Using sustainable practices but still somewhat harmful	No Net Harm to the natural system	Restorative (fixing past harm so natural systems thrive)
Smallholder farming families experience food shortages for all or part of the year and generate less than a subsistence income		1		
Farms produce enough for families to eat and drink year-round, but not a year-round subsistence income	1	9	5	
Farms produce enough for families to eat and drink year-round, and a modest but reliable income		3	1	
Farms produce enough for families year-round and a decent, reliable income, now and for future generations				Ultimate aim: Systems are thriving for all



# Going sustainability-inclusive: The frontrunners



Departamento  
Nacional de Planeación



Colombia



Global Affairs Canada

# Imagine your evaluation practice in 5 to 10 years

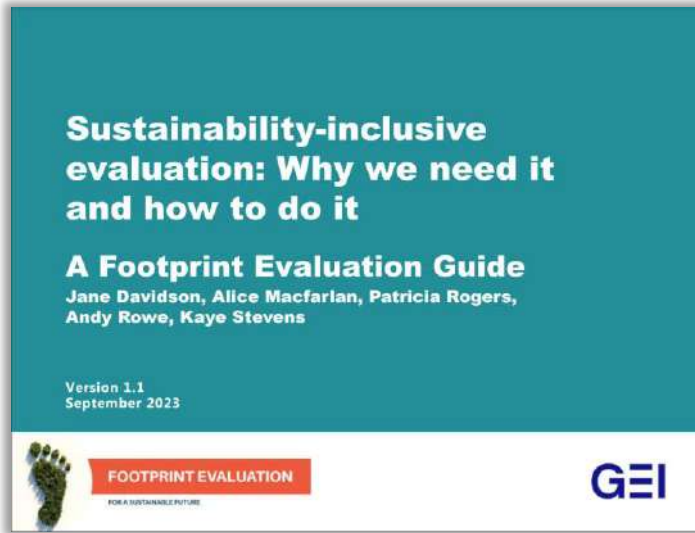
Climate disruption and environmental degradation will be even more **blindingly obvious and urgent**.

Every single decision maker will be under **intense pressure** to show **what they are doing about it** and **how well that is working**.

To meet that moment, **ALL evaluations** must be **sustainability-inclusive**.

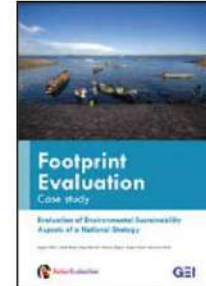
The time to **gear up** for this is **NOW!**

# Footprint Evaluation Initiative resources



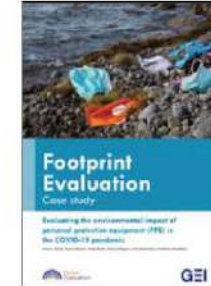
## Thought Experiments

Description, analysis and process of four examples which revisited completed evaluations to think through whether it would have been feasible and useful to include environmental sustainability.



## Evaluation of environmental sustainability aspects of a national strategy

Processes used to address environment as a cross-cutting issue despite constraints.



## Evaluating the environmental impact of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the COVID-19 pandemic

Drawing on a range of evidence to illustrate how an evaluation of PPE might consider environmental impacts.



## Sustainability-inclusive evaluation

Guidance for what actors can do to include consideration of the environment in all evaluations

Prepared by:  
Andy Rowe & E. Jane Davidson  
Footprint Evaluation Initiative  
March 2023



## Addressing environmental sustainability through the OECD DAC Criteria for Evaluation of Development Assistance

This resource shows how the six OECD DAC evaluation criteria can be used to get environmental sustainability on the agenda for evaluations and monitoring.



## Key Evaluation Questions to Guide Footprint Evaluations

The key evaluation questions (KEQs) are designed to support the inclusion of environmental sustainability by embedding consideration of the environment in each evaluation question rather than adding environmental considerations as a standalone question.



## Identifying environmental commitments

Step by step guide to using The World Fact book to identify international agreements to which countries are signatories.

Connect to materials and community of practice  
<https://FootprintEvaluation.com>.



# Some resources on evaluation rubrics methodology

## Rubrics Methodology in Detail: Helping Save The Children Turn Children's Experiences of Discrimination and Exclusion into Rich, Trackable Outcomes

Rubrics Methodology in Detail: Helping Save The Children Turn Children's Experiences of Discrimination and Exclusion into Rich, Trackable Outcomes

Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation  
Volume 13, Issue 4, 2015  
UPDATED VERSION  
January 30, 2023  
JMDE  
http://www.jmde.com

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**Background:** Over the last 10 years, the program Rubrics Methodology in Detail (JMDE) has been instrumental in helping Save the Children turn children's experiences of discrimination and exclusion into rich, trackable outcomes. The program has been instrumental in helping Save the Children turn children's experiences of discrimination and exclusion into rich, trackable outcomes. The program has been instrumental in helping Save the Children turn children's experiences of discrimination and exclusion into rich, trackable outcomes.

**Setting:** Rubrics Methodology in Detail (JMDE) was developed in 2013, as a result of a 2-year pilot study. The program has been instrumental in helping Save the Children turn children's experiences of discrimination and exclusion into rich, trackable outcomes. The program has been instrumental in helping Save the Children turn children's experiences of discrimination and exclusion into rich, trackable outcomes.

**Research Design:** The program involves a series of focus groups and interviews with children and their caregivers. The program has been instrumental in helping Save the Children turn children's experiences of discrimination and exclusion into rich, trackable outcomes. The program has been instrumental in helping Save the Children turn children's experiences of discrimination and exclusion into rich, trackable outcomes.

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FASHION FOR  
GOOD

Independent Evaluation

COMEa

COMUNICAÇÃO E AVALIAÇÃO LTDA.

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February 19, 2021



actionable  
evaluation  
basics



Getting succinct answers to  
the most important questions

E. Jane Davidson, Ph.D.



CHILD RIGHTS  
RESOURCE  
CENTRE



Children's Sessions A & B

Training, 22-23 November 2023, 9:00-11:00 AM (GMT+1)

FREE FROM DISCRIMINATION

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE FOR

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Manuals, Toolkits and Guidance

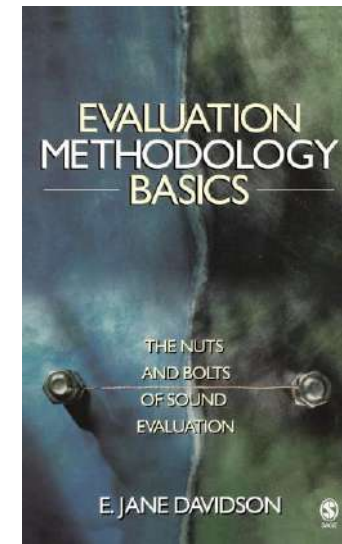
Rubrics 11: A Toolkit to Address Child  
Discrimination and Exclusion

Publication year: 2024

English

Format: PDF (221.7 KIB)

Publisher: Save the Children International



EVALUATION  
METHODOLOGY  
BASICS

THE NUTS  
AND BOLTS  
OF SOUND  
EVALUATION

E. JANE DAVIDSON





# Thank you!



**FOOTPRINT EVALUATION**