ICIMOD

ICIMOD policy on evaluation and impact assessment 2024–2030

APPROVED BY THE
ICIMOD BOARD OF GOVERNORS

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List of acronyms

CEL   Chief of Evaluation and Learning [of ICIMOD]

CGIAR   No longer an acronym. [A global agricultural research network]

FAIR   Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable

ESC   Evaluation Sub Committee of the PAC

GESI   Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

HKH   Hindu Kush Himalaya

HR   Human Resources

HUC   Himalayan University Consortium

IDRC   International Development Research Centre of Canada

MEL   Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

MTAP   Medium Term Action Plan

MTAP V   Fifth ICIMOD MTAP, 2023–2026.

OECD-DAC   Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development- Development
            Assistance Committee

PAC   Programme Advisory Committee

PMEL   Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

QQR   Quinquennial Review [of ICIMOD]

RMC   Regional Member Country [of ICIMOD]

SANDEE   South Asian Network for Development and Environmental Economics

SG   Strategic Group [of ICIMOD]

ToR   Terms of Reference

UNDP   United Nations Development Program

Introduction

1. ICIMOD is a leading regional and intergovernmental knowledge and learning centre for the Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH), serving eight Regional Member countries (RMCs) – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Myanmar, and Pakistan. ICIMOD's mission to 2030 is: To build and share knowledge that drives regional policy and action and attracts investment that enables the diverse countries and communities of the HKH to transition to greener, more inclusive, and climate resilient development.

2. ICIMOD's Strategy 2030: Moving Mountains, Fifth Medium Term Action Plan, MTAP V (2023-26), and Results Framework (2023-26) set out an ambitious agenda, which includes strengthening our Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) to support the achievement of results, using an adaptive learning approach, and working closely with partners.

3. Independent evaluations[1] are an essential investment for improving ICIMOD's work, supporting a culture of learning, and providing accountability to RMCs, funders, and other stakeholders. Evaluations complement monitoring by answering questions such as whether ICIMOD's actions have contributed to observed outcomes, whether there have been any unintended consequences, and how approaches and partnerships could be improved. They help ICIMOD learn quickly from any failure and build on success.

4. This is the first formal ICIMOD Evaluation Policy, incorporating learning from twenty years of previous evaluation experience in ICIMOD.[2] It sets out the scope and coverage of evaluation in ICIMOD; evaluation principles, values and criteria; roles and responsibilities; and processes and partnerships.

BOX 1. EVALUATION TERMS (AS USED IN THIS POLICY)

> **Evaluation** – the systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation, and results. (OECD-DAC 2023). In ICIMOD, evaluations are distinguished from internally managed reviews (not independent) and self-assessments, which are not subject to this policy.
>
> **Performance evaluation** – uses a range of methods to assess aspects of performance such as design, implementation, outcomes, impacts and partnerships, using defined evaluation criteria.

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[1] In this policy, the term *evaluation* should be taken to include Impact Assessments unless otherwise specified. However, not all impact assessments supported by ICIMOD are subject to this policy: see footnote 14.

[2] We acknowledge and thank the designers of the development evaluation policies, strategies and guidance of Australia, Austria, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Canada-IDRC, CGIAR, Norway, Oxfam, Switzerland, UK and USA, as well as the Better Evaluation initiative, that have informed this policy. We also thank the PAC members of the ICIMOD Board for their valuable comments and suggestions.

> **Impact Assessment (IA)** – a specific type of evaluation measuring contributions to outcomes and impacts, while controlling for other factors that might account for observed changes. (modified from Better Evaluation and USAID, see also paragraph 9.)
>
> **Monitoring** – the systematic collection of performance data, to assess progress against targets and identify implementation problems. (modified from OECD-DAC)

Scope and coverage

5. All ICIMOD-budgeted evaluations must serve clearly defined target audiences and purposes and be included in the rolling evaluation workplan.[3]

6. *Performance evaluations* may cover any part of ICIMOD's operations, including work undertaken with partners. They may examine the inputs and behaviour of any party involved in the topic being evaluated (including funders), with the aim of generating lessons and recommendations for future work.

7. During the MTAP V period, performance evaluations may focus on:

    - Specific parts of ICIMOD, such as Strategic Groups, Action Areas, or Interventions.
    - Elements of the ICIMOD Results Framework, for example how ICIMOD is working to achieve a specific 2026 Outcome Target
    - Strategy 2030 Impact Pathways, such as ICIMOD's work on policy, regional collaboration, or institutional capability.
    - Cross cutting areas, such as Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), Climate Change, or Biodiversity
    - Internal ICIMOD policies, such as safeguarding, gender, or publication policies. This may include Human Resources (HR), Finance and Administrative policies and procedures.
    - Specific themes such as ICIMOD's work on water, or ICIMOD's national and international partnerships.

8. In addition, periodic overarching external evaluations of ICIMOD will be commissioned by the ICIMOD Board of Governors (equivalent to past Quinquennial Reviews). For MTAPs V and VI, these are expected in 2026 and 2030.

9. *Impact assessments* covered by this policy are limited in scope. They will normally focus on assessing a specific innovation (e.g. policy, business model, or approach) that is being developed by ICIMOD and partners. Impact assessments are normally required for innovations that ICIMOD plans to scale or expand (see paragraph 24) and are considered a normal part of the innovation development process.

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[3] See Processes and Partnerships section.

Evaluation principles, values, and criteria

10. ICIMOD evaluations will follow international evaluation principles[4] (see draft in Box 2). All ICIMOD evaluations must also adhere to the ICIMOD core values set out in our [Strategy 2030](#) for working across the HKH; these are integrity, neutrality, relevance, inclusiveness, openness, and ambition.

11. ICIMOD performance evaluations will use appropriate evaluation criteria, including relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability ([OECD-DAC](#)), GESI[5] and evidence quality.[6] Evaluations will specify which of these criteria they will address.

12. ICIMOD Evaluation Quality Standards[7] will be developed to guide ICIMOD evaluations falling under this policy. These standards will develop these principles, values and criteria further and explain their interpretation and use; any resulting changes (e.g. in the draft principles) will be reflected in updates to this policy.

BOX 2. DRAFT EVALUATION PRINCIPLES[8]

Evaluation must be:

- **Intentional** – The rationale for an evaluation and the management decisions to be based on its findings should be clear from the outset.

- **Appropriate for ICIMOD** – Evaluations must take into account the type of work that ICIMOD does. This includes long-term, complex impact pathways (via changes in policy, capability, collaboration, and innovation) and working through partners.

- **Including relevant cross cutting issues** (as agreed), such as GESI, climate change, and biodiversity.

- **Independent** – Management must not impose restrictions on the scope of evaluations or the content, comments, and recommendations of evaluation reports (within budget frame). Evaluators must be free of conflict of interest.

- **Impartial** – Evaluators must avoid bias and strive to be objective, while promoting participation and consultation of stakeholders.

- **Ethical** – Evaluation should not reflect personal or sectoral interests. Evaluators must have professional integrity, respect the rights of institutions and individuals to provide

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[4] Evaluation principles and criteria have been developed internationally, and are adapted by each organisation for its own context and needs.

[5] For ICIMOD, GESI is a critical policy objective, and it is not an obvious fit in any of the OECD-DAC criteria, in contrast to ICIMOD's other cross cutting issues of biodiversity and climate change, which are covered under Sustainability.

[6] As a knowledge organization, ICIMOD's core business is producing, mustering, analysing and synthesising high-quality evidence for use by partners.

[7] Forthcoming in 2024. Please see [Better Evaluation](#) for a general introduction to evaluation standards.

[8] Modified from UNDP Norms. They will be reviewed and updated in the Evaluation Standards.

information in confidence, safeguard vulnerable people, and be sensitive to the beliefs and customs of local social and cultural environments.

- **Transparent** – The selection process and criteria for evaluation topics will be clearly specified in evaluation workplans. Evaluation plans and reports will be made public (see paragraph 34).

- **Of high technical quality** – All evaluations should meet ICIMOD Evaluation Quality Standards. This includes choosing an appropriate approach and methods to answer the evaluation questions within the resources available, and realism of conclusions. Strengths and limitations of the methods and data, and any assumptions, will be clearly communicated in evaluation reports.

- **Timely** – Evaluations must be designed and completed in a timely fashion to inform decisions.

- **Useful** —All evaluations should produce clear, actionable recommendations as well as useable lessons, both backward and forward looking.

- Key stakeholders should be consulted on draft findings, lessons, and recommendations.

Roles and responsibilities

13. **ICIMOD's Board of Governors** holds ICIMOD to account for our use of funds. As such, the Board will promote the independence of the evaluation function from management, will approve rolling evaluation workplans and budgets (along with the annual ICIMOD workplan), and will highlight to management if ICIMOD fails to act upon critical, agreed evaluation recommendations.

14. The independent members of the Board of Governors constitute the Programme Advisory Committee (PAC). The **PAC** will nominate a **subcommittee with a minimum of three members**, responsible for overseeing evaluation in ICIMOD (herein referred to as the "Evaluation Sub-Committee or ESC"). The title, scope, mandate, composition, and Terms of Reference (ToR) for the ESC will be approved by the Board.[9]

15. The **ESC** makes regular recommendations to the Board, which may relate to (but are not limited to):

- the approval of the rolling annual evaluation workplan and budget;
1. ESC responses to evaluation findings or recommendations which have major institutional-level implications for ICIMOD[10];

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[9] The ToR for the ESC will be drafted initially by ICIMOD, reviewed, and endorsed by the ESC, and approved by the Board.
[10] These will be limited to major recommendations such as restructuring, as appropriate to Board level.

- Based on the annual report from the CEL on status for follow up of evaluation recommendations and related policy documents, highlighting to the Board in case ICIMOD has failed to implement important recommendations from previous evaluations or important provisions of this policy; and
- commissioning periodic evaluations of the overall performance of ICIMOD.[11]

16. **ICIMOD management** at all levels promotes a culture of learning: creating incentives for evaluation, learning from both success and failure, and incorporating evaluation findings and recommendations into management decisions. Managers must allocate sufficient human and financial resources to undertake the approved evaluation workplan and provide timely inputs and responses to evaluations.

17. The **Chief of Evaluation and Learning (CEL)** of ICIMOD will report directly to the Director General. The CEL will manage a small Evaluation and Learning Unit[12] and be responsible for:

   a) Developing and agreeing the rolling ICIMOD annual evaluation workplan and budget, in close consultation with ICIMOD SMC, Evaluation Sub Committee (ESC), ICIMOD funders and partners, and other key stakeholders, and submitting to PAC and Board for approval (paragraphs 23-29).
   b) Developing and agreeing the implementation plan for this policy, as well as evaluation standards, guidance, templates, and checklists. These will be presented by the CEL to the ESC for review and endorsement.
   c) Being proactive in horizon scanning and seeking evaluation partnerships, to promote coherence, coordination, and where possible joint evaluations.
   d) Commissioning and managing ICIMOD's organizational-level policy and thematic evaluations, as well as programme-level evaluations in cases where independence from programme managers is considered essential, and planning the timing together with managers and partners involved in the evaluations.
   e) Liaising with ICIMOD partners to co-manage and fund evaluations.
   f) Management of a quality assurance system for evaluations and monitoring evaluation quality across ICIMOD.
   g) Providing technical assistance and capacity development on evaluation to ICIMOD staff.
   h) Liaising closely with ICIMOD's planning, budgeting, reviewing and business development functions, to help ensure that evaluation lessons are fed into the planning and implementation process as well as new proposals by staff and partners.
   i) Annual performance assessment of staff with evaluation responsibilities (see also paragraph 18).
   j) Maintaining a direct line of communication with the ESC.
   k) Maintaining a roster of independent female and male evaluators and evaluation groups, predominantly drawn from the HKH region and from other mountain regions, to facilitate drawing on diverse and relevant evaluation expertise. Hiring of independent evaluators will be carried out in accordance with ICIMOD's procurement rules.

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[11] Previously called QQRs – now foreseen to be carried out on a four-yearly basis.
[12] Team to be determined, but will require a minimum of one senior evaluation manager, one junior evaluation staff and one administrative officer.

l) Reporting annually on key learning and recommendations from evaluations, including tracking progress on implementation of agreed recommendations, for further discussion with ESC.

m) Responding to any other requests from the ESC.

18. **PMEL staff in Strategic Groups**: Each of ICIMOD's Strategic Groups (SGs) will designate at least one qualified person responsible for Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (PMEL).[13] This role will include sufficient time and resources (at least 15% of a full-time post) for the evaluation portion of the work, including training and professional development. The staff member holding the PMEL responsibilities will report to the SG Lead, and the Chief of Evaluation and Learning will co-supervise this staff member with respect to the annual performance of their evaluation-related work. The PMEL staff member will act as the liaison and information point for ICIMOD's centrally commissioned evaluations, including gathering and communicating potential topics and opportunities for evaluation related to the work of the SG, and as resources allow, providing support to partners who are designing and managing evaluations.

19. **ICIMOD staff** will give their full support and attention to approved ICIMOD evaluations related to their area of work: allocating time in their annual workplan for supporting the evaluation, for example by providing information, facilitating contacts, and engaging with discussions on evaluation findings and recommendations.

20. **ICIMOD funders and partners** will work closely with ICIMOD in planning for the evaluations they need, and wherever possible, support ICIMOD-managed evaluations or conduct joint evaluations with ICIMOD. They will also support capacity development in evaluation for ICIMOD staff and partners, including through their own networks and Communities of Practice, as appropriate. ICIMOD managers and ICIMOD's Business Development and Resource Management and Partnership Functions will discuss these issues with funders and partners as part of negotiating new projects/funding, and in regular project review, and annual review meetings.

Evaluation processes and partnerships

21. ICIMOD has limited resources, so evaluation must be a proportionate and cost-effective investment. All proposed evaluations must be clear about why an evaluation is needed and specify who is expected to use the evaluation results and what decisions they will inform. Examples include decisions on course correction for ongoing work, scaling or improvement of innovations, design of new programmes or partnerships, extensions of existing funding or approval of new funding.

22. The process of planning for evaluations is summarized in Box 3 and the following paragraphs. Further detail will be given in evaluation guidance.

23. *Performance* evaluations may be requested by any part of ICIMOD, by the Board of Governors and other governance bodies, or by ICIMOD funders or other partners.

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[13] This is likely to be a Programme Officer, but the role is open to other staff.

24. *Impact assessments* covered by this policy[14] will normally be carried out for specific innovations being tested by ICIMOD and partners, as part of the normal operational work, to improve innovations and/or make recommendations about scaling. These should normally be planned in before testing begins, to facilitate the collection of baseline data, as set out in the ICIMOD Guidelines on Piloting and Testing Innovations.[15]

25. ICIMOD will seek opportunities to conduct *joint evaluations* wherever possible. Evaluations that are managed jointly with partners and funders spread the learning and make more efficient use of resources. Joint evaluations can be particularly valuable where ICIMOD contributes to a shared goal – such as a regional project, national programme, or Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) – or where a funder can attain its own evaluation objectives in the context of a wider ICIMOD-managed evaluation. Where this is not possible, ICIMOD will make efforts to maximise coherence and coordination with other planned evaluations. Lack of coordination is wasteful and puts unnecessary burdens on evaluation stakeholders, for example key informants who receive multiple visits.

26. The budget for central performance evaluations will be managed by the Chief of Evaluation and Learning (CEL) and should be a minimum of 2% of the ICIMOD total annual budget.[16] This budget target does not include funding for evaluations commissioned by bilateral projects.[17] Impact assessments will be managed and budgeted by operational teams, with technical support and quality assurance managed by the CEL.[18]

27. Before an evaluation topic can be considered for the workplan, a concept note must be prepared[19] that:

- Clearly and briefly describes the proposed topic and scope.
- Identifies the primary users and uses of the evaluation.
- Gives a positive assessment of evaluability, using agreed evaluability checklists for performance evaluations and impact assessments.

28. A three-year rolling annual evaluation workplan and budget, updated yearly, will be submitted by the Chief of Evaluation and Learning (CEL) to the ESC responsible for evaluation for endorsement.[20] Decisions on what issues or programmes should be prioritized for performance evaluation will be based on transparent criteria that will be set out in our evaluation guidance, for example demand from key decision-makers (including

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[14] As well as impact assessments which are part of the direct work programme of ICIMOD, ICIMOD also indirectly supports other impact assessments with partners in HKH, mainly through our support to the SANDEE network. These are not subject to this policy.

[15] Forthcoming 2024.

[16] Better Evaluation (a respected global evaluation group) recommends 5-10% as a general guideline.

[17] In certain cases, when project evaluations are considered high priority topics for evaluation by the CEL and PAC Subcommittee, some of the core evaluation budget may be allocated to co-fund joint evaluations.

[18] The CEL may request ICIMOD's lead economist to provide technical support for impact assessments. ICIMOD-supported academic networks such as SANDEE and HUC may also provide technical support and quality assessments for ICIMOD's impact assessments.

[19] Templates for the concept note and checklists are forthcoming in 2024. The CEL and evaluation colleagues may assist others in preparing these.

[20] This will happen during the second PAC meeting of the year. Planning and Budgeting for evaluation unit will happen same time as ICIMOD planning and review time.

governance and funders), potential for learning, size of investment and **visibility**/risk. The annual workplan will provide an overview to the ESC on all proposed evaluations that fall under this policy[21] and will also include information on planned evaluations led by funders or other key partners.

29. The workplan and budget will be endorsed by the ESC (following an iterative review process) in advance of starting the main annual workplan for ICIMOD,[22] to ensure that evaluation needs for operational resources are considered in the main planning exercise.

BOX 3. SUMMARY OF PLANNING PROCESS FOR EVALUATIONS

All year	Ideas and concept notes (paragraph 27) come from ICIMOD management, staff, governance bodies, funders, and other partners, as well as CEL.
October	CEL pulls together concept notes, drafts annual workplan update and budget[23]
November	ICIMOD annual review and workplan process starts
November	ICIMOD management comments on workplan and budget (but final decision on what to submit rests with CEL)
November	CEL submits workplan and budget to ESC for review, discussion, and endorsement.
Dec week 1	ESC discussed the evaluation workplan and budget and endorse it.

30. Management of evaluations: ICIMOD will adhere to standard international practices.[24] These will be published as part of ICIMOD evaluation guidance documents.

- Cross-cutting issues will be integrated appropriately into all evaluations, as agreed in the planning phase.
- Users and other key stakeholders will participate in key decisions about evaluations, and their views will be taken into account in the preparation of key evaluation

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[21] This includes ongoing and approved impact assessments. New impact assessments will be approved as part of the main ICIMOD workplan, as they are funded by operational teams.

[22] A revised plan and timetable will be shared for the ICIMOD annual review and work planning exercise, including evaluation planning. It is expected that the next cycle will start in November 2024.

[23] A separate guidance note will be issued with more details, to promote a clear and fair process. Concept notes will be assessed against agreed criteria, and all of them will be open to inspection by the ESC.

[24] Global experience and practices are summarised in the Better Evaluation Managers' Guide to Evaluation. The ICIMOD CEL contributed to the international working group that developed this guide.

documents, including the Terms of Reference, evaluation reporting, and draft recommendations.

- ICIMOD is also committed in the Medium Term Action Plan (MTAP V) to moving towards FAIR data (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable) for all publications by 2025, and this also applies to impact assessments subject to this policy.

31. Every evaluation is subject to **quality assurance**. Quality standards and a quality assurance system with adequate resources will be developed as part of the implementation of this policy (paragraph 37).

32. A **management response** will be prepared for all evaluations, using an agreed template. This will include a specific response to each evaluation recommendation, with either a list of actions to be taken and their timing, or (if there is disagreement) the justification for not accepting the recommendation. Overall, ICIMOD management will be responsible for the evaluation management response.

33. **ICIMOD progress on agreed actions** responding to evaluation recommendations will be tracked by the Directorate, and annually reported to the ESC as part of the Annual Report of ICIMOD, which will have a section on evaluations and their follow-up. The ESC will review the report and inform the Board if it believes that ICIMOD has failed to respond to important recommendations.

34. **Transparency**: ICIMOD will place the executive summary, recommendations, and management response for all final evaluations on the ICIMOD website. The full text of each evaluation will also be placed on the website, unless it does not pass evaluation quality standards or unless it is determined by the CEL – in consultation with the ESC, and with any partners in a joint evaluation – that this may pose an unacceptable risk to staff, partners, or the aims of the programme. The results and relevant recommendations from each evaluation will also be communicated in an appropriate and comprehensible way to partners and contributors to the evaluation.

35. **Learning from** evaluations will be considered as part of ICIMOD's wider commitments to improving knowledge management and learning. Learning will be incorporated in evaluation processes, for example through early discussion with key stakeholders of emerging findings and recommendations. All new projects and plans must demonstrate that they have considered relevant learning from evaluations (as well as other sources including self-assessment reviews). Innovations normally need robust evidence of cost-effectiveness before ICIMOD supports scaling; such evidence may come from various sources, but this will often include an impact assessment.

36. **Capacity development for evaluation:** ICIMOD staff with core evaluation responsibilities will be recruited, trained, and promoted against defined evaluation competencies. Basic evaluative concepts will also form part of training for professional staff, including theory of change, the limitations of monitoring data, interpretation of key data types, ethics, impartiality, and quality aspects. This training will include selected key partners where appropriate (if demand and resources exist). Details of concepts, competencies and training will be developed as part of implementation of this policy.

37. **Implementation of this Policy:** Following approval by the Board, ICIMOD will develop an implementation plan for this Policy, including key expected policy outcomes, planned actions and outputs that contribute to these, and specific responsibilities. The CEL's annual

report on ICIMOD evaluation will provide an update on the policy implementation plan. This report will be submitted to the PAC Chair/subcommittee at the same time, or shortly before, the annually updated rolling evaluation workplan. Full implementation of this policy is expected to take several years; its success will also be evaluated in the overall periodic external review of ICIMOD.