Guidance for quality assurance in UEBT performance and outcome monitoring

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UEBT

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I. Scope

This document describes the procedures that should be followed to assure quality in the implementation of performance and outcome monitoring in the framework of UEBT M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation) system. It is for use to all UEBT staff members who might be concerned with the tasks of collecting, storing, analysing and communicating information about the reach, scale and outputs of the UEBT programs.

II. Background

Performance and outcome monitoring is part of the M&E system at UEBT. It is meant to monitor the reach, scale and outputs of UEBT programs on regular basis. Performance and outcome monitoring is nested in UEBT activities. Relevant information is collected during audits and through member self-reporting procedures that are part of the UEBT verification system. Information is then communicated to the M&E department for storing and analysis. Results of the analysis are used for internal and external communication. Some procedures are defined to ensure quality in performance and outcome monitoring, from the collection of information to the communication of the results of analysis. The procedures are in line with ISEAL Code of Good Practices.

This document reports the procedures and assists UEBT staff contributing to the different steps of performance and outcome monitoring.

III. Quality assurance

Quality assurance mechanisms are built along the entire performance and outcome monitoring cycle: acquisition of information, storing, analysis.

Acquisition

Acquisition is the process through which information relevant for performance and outcome monitoring are gathered from UEBT members. Quality is assured by:

1. Regular collection of complete information

    - Performance and outcome information is collected through audits as well as annual members self-reports, called "annual reports".

- Every year members submit their annual reports. Audits take place yearly for members that are ESS certified, UEBT certified or UEBT-RA certified. UEBT members go through a membership assessment every three years. This is essential for the renewal of their certificates.

- The members and the auditors are required to fill out the annual report and audit templates, respectively, in all their parts, which includes all indicators for the collection of performance monitoring and outcome information.

- The UEBT staff receives the reports once they are filled out and execute a check on possible missing or incoherent information for performance and outcome monitoring. The UEBT staff requests integrations or explanations when information is not provided or may be incoherent. UEBT staff approves the reports for completeness and accuracy with respect to performance and outcome monitoring information.

2. Collection of valid information

- The UEBT M&E staff consults the standard and assurance staff to assess the relevance of the performance and outcome monitoring indicator lists and the feasibility of integrating the collection of relevant information in audits and self-report templates.

- The UEBT M&E staff and the standard and assurance staff coordinate on the update of indicators list and templates to ensure alignment.

- The UEBT staff conducts pilot of the templates each time they are conceived anew or tested. Templates are adjusted based on the findings. The UEBT M&E staff is involved in the testing and adjustments of the templates for what concerns performance monitoring indicators.

- Digital data collection tools with validation rules for data entry fields are used to reduce the number of errors during the data entry process.

- In preparation and along the process of audits and annual reporting, UEBT staff provides written guidance, trainings, and custom guidance upon request to members and auditors about the definitions of the indicators and sources of information.

- The UEBT staff receives the templates once filled out and cross-checks the information to ensure that what reported is in line with the indicator definitions and with previously reported information . The UEBT staff asks for clarifications when necessary and approves the report when information is adequate with respect to performance and outcome monitoring information.

- Automatic validation rules, guidance and cross checking are based on what is written in performance and outcome monitoring indicators protocols and updated accordingly each time that protocols are updated. They include formulas and unit of measures that are included in the templates and do not allow the indication of other information than what asked. Comparisons over the years and between different levels and forms of aggregation of the same information are done to verify that information is provided consistently. An example of validation rule is given below:

> Verify that volumes of raw materials sold as certified are coherent with the volumes of plant produced on the reported number of hectares of certified land by collecting information on yields and conversion rates.

Storage

Storage is the process through which performance monitoring information acquired from the members is archived in UEBT data system. Quality is assured by:

1. Storing complete information

- Once audit is completed and the audit report approved, it is stored in the UEBT online information platform called the Grove. UEBT staff also updates the information about the finalisation of the audit in the Salesforce page for the member involved in the audit.

- Once annual reports are completed and approved, they are stored in the Grove. Potential supporting documents are stored in the UEBT membership folders. The UEBT M&E staff also updates the information about the finalisation of the annual reports in the Salesforce page for the members involved in the reporting.

- When all (audit and annual) reports due for the year assessed are available, the UEBT M&E staff downloads the information from the Grove and gathers all data in two xls files called the "M&E database_Level1" and "M&E database_Level2", stored in the M&E folder.

2. Protecting the stored information

- All information gathered by UEBT related to audits and annual reports is now collected in the Grove. The data protection and confidentiality policy of UEBT related to the use of the Grove is described in a document available on the UEBT website.

- Access to the membership folder and M&E database and folder as well as to the membership folder is allowed just to the UEBT staff.

- UEBT staff sign a confidentiality agreement when signing the working contract. Through this, UEBT staff is committed to not disclose confidential information.

- UEBT does not delete information stored in its system and uses a system that allow storing the same information in multiple locations, including the cloud, to reduce the risk of losing data for system bugs.

Analysis

Analysis is the process through which stored information per each member are elaborated into aggregated data about the reach, scale and output of the UEBT programs. Quality is assured by:

1. Regular compilation of analyses

- UEBT M&E staff compile analysis on reach, scale and output of UEBT programs in the xls M&E database once a year.

2. Accurate compilation of analysis

- Identify and tackle double counting in the analysis of performance information. Double counting occurs when the same raw materials are used by two or more members or when

several raw materials are produced on the same production unit (farm or wild collection area). The UEBT M&E staff deals with double counting as follows:

> Ensure that the total numbers of fresh plants and raw materials (per continent and in total) include each raw material and fresh plant just once.

> Ensure that volumes, field operators, hectares are not double counted when they are involved in the production of several raw materials. This is done by cross-checking data when an organization at source is involved in the production of several raw materials, and ensuring that in the total values, quantities reported for volumes, field operators, and hectares that are the same for several raw materials are not summed.

> When a UEBT member buys raw materials from an organisation at source who is a UEBT member as well and reported about the same raw material, and that both are reporting for the same UEBT programme: double-counting is avoided by only counting the information reported by the UEBT member who is also an organisation at source.

- Handle missing values

  > The UEBT M&E staff contacts the source of information to understand if it is a structural missing value (i.e. information for an item can never be made available) or a random missing value (i.e. information for an item are missing due to temporary circumstances).

  > The UEBT M&E staff closes the gap due to the random missing value by asking for the latest information available for a certain item.

  > The UEBT M&E staff considers the structural missing value as information that are not available and in calculating the total indicates for how many items the values are missing.

- Handle outliers.

  > The UEBT M&E staff identifies potential outliers by cross-checking whether the results of analyses are in line with results of previous years.

  > When outliers are identified, UEBT M&E staff investigates whether the potential issue comes from the current reporting year being analysed, or from an issue undetected in a previous reporting year.

  > The reasons for outliers are explained qualitatively.

- Validating findings

  > The UEBT M&E staff shares reports deriving from the analysis with other UEBT staff, governance bodies, and UEBT members.

  > The UEBT M&E staff integrates their feedback in the procedures, tools and findings.

3. Ensure access to analysis

- UEBT M&E staff stores the analysis of the performance and outcome monitoring information in the M&E databases. This is done in the form of xls sheets summing up the information for performance and outcome monitoring. The sheets contain all the formula used for the aggregations.

- The UEBT M&E staff stores both files in the M&E folder.

- In the first half of the calendar year publishes an M&E annual report related to the previous to last calendar year.

- Staff, members and other stakeholders are informed through newsletters or other communication channels. The General Assembly is solicited to provide feedback. The board is informed and use some of the information to take decisions.

- Results of the analysis are shared, discussed, used internally, selecting those aspects that are of particular relevance for key areas of UEBT work (e.g. due diligence, assurance, risk assessment).

- UEBT M&E staff makes ad-hoc analysis upon request of other UEBT staff, including communication staff and senior management, as well as members, governance bodies, and other stakeholders.

Learnings

- If comments are received on published reports, those comments and any related responses from UEBT M&E staff and Management are made publicly available if considered relevant. Comments and responses are considered relevant if they:

  > Provide clarification on the methodology, contents and/or results, if without such clarification there could be misinterpretation

  > Provide an addition to contents and results that otherwise would be incomplete.

  > Uncover an error in the results or contents that, due to how it was written, could lead to misinterpretation (Note: errors do not refer to smaller typological or wording errors).

- Each year, the UEBT M&E staff performs minor reviews of the process and contents considering comments, learnings from the work of data acquisition, storage and analysis, possible changes in assurance and other UEBT activities linked to M&E.