Scoping > Evaluation > Approval > Use of the assessment findings
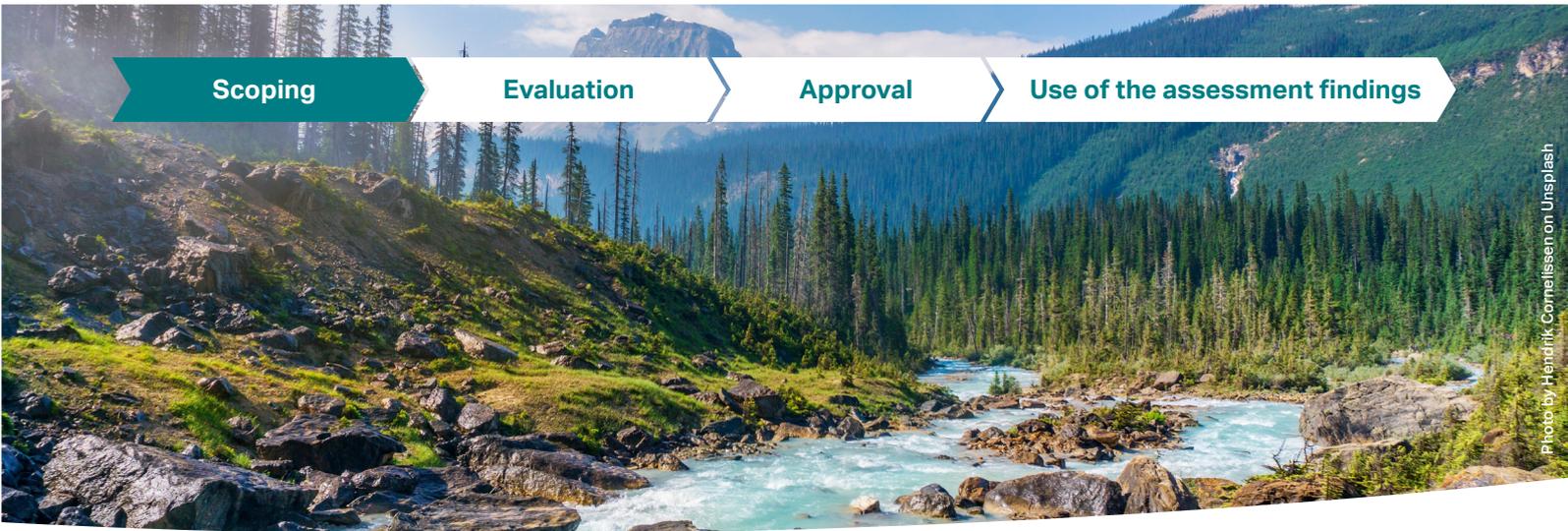
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SCOPING OUTLINE

This outline provides a guide to the key elements to be included in the scoping report for a national ecosystem assessment. A scoping report is developed by stages and content is iteratively reviewed, revised and adjusted throughout the scoping stage in collaboration with stakeholders and knowledge holders.

1. RATIONALE

The rationale highlights the reasoning behind undertaking a national ecosystem assessment within a specific country context, including outlining the important issues that the assessment will aim to address and why they are important to support the full consideration of the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services in decision-making within national circumstances. It summarises the outcome of discussions with stakeholders, knowledge holders and/or user groups regarding the need for conducting the assessment, a critical first step in building ownership and enhancing the relevance of its findings.

TOP TIP

There is no strict word limit for the scoping report, however, it is encouraged to keep it as concise as possible. Scoping reports developed by partner countries of the NEA Initiative range between 5,000-12,000 words.

The following questions may be useful to consider when developing the rationale:

- What specific gaps regarding biodiversity and ecosystem services would the national ecosystem assessment be trying to fill given the country context?

- Why is building a knowledge-base on biodiversity and ecosystem services at the national level needed to support decision-making in the country?

- Are decisions taking full account of the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services to the country's economy and human well-being?

- What are the barriers to fully account for the value of biodiversity in decision-making?

- Does the country's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) or other national plans and strategies outline the need for a national ecosystem assessment?

- What are the major contributing sectors to the economy (e.g., tourism, agriculture, fisheries) in the country and which sectors are the major employers of people?

- Which sectors are underpinned by healthy and well-functioning ecosystems in the country?

- Which sectors will the national ecosystem assessment findings be relevant to and useful for to achieve country targets and commitments relating to sustainable development?

- What are the key priorities for the country's economy and livelihoods (e.g., water security, food security, climate adaptation, disaster resilience)?

1.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Creating a conceptual framework at the outset, in collaboration with a range of stakeholders and knowledge holders, can be useful to guide thinking and support the communication of the assessment rationale. The IPBES conceptual framework can be tailored to the country context.

The following questions may be useful to consider when developing the conceptual framework:

- What defines a good quality of life in the country?

- What are the intrinsic values that Nature provides to individuals in the country?

- What biodiversity and ecosystems will be included in the assessment?

- What are the critical services and contributions that these ecosystems provide to the country?

- What are the anthropogenic assets (i.e., built-up infrastructure, health facilities, knowledge, technology and financial assets) which impact ecosystem services and human well-being?

- What are the direct drivers of change (both natural and anthropogenic) which affect biodiversity and ecosystem services?

- What are the institutions and governance systems and other indirect drivers of change which influence biodiversity and ecosystem services?

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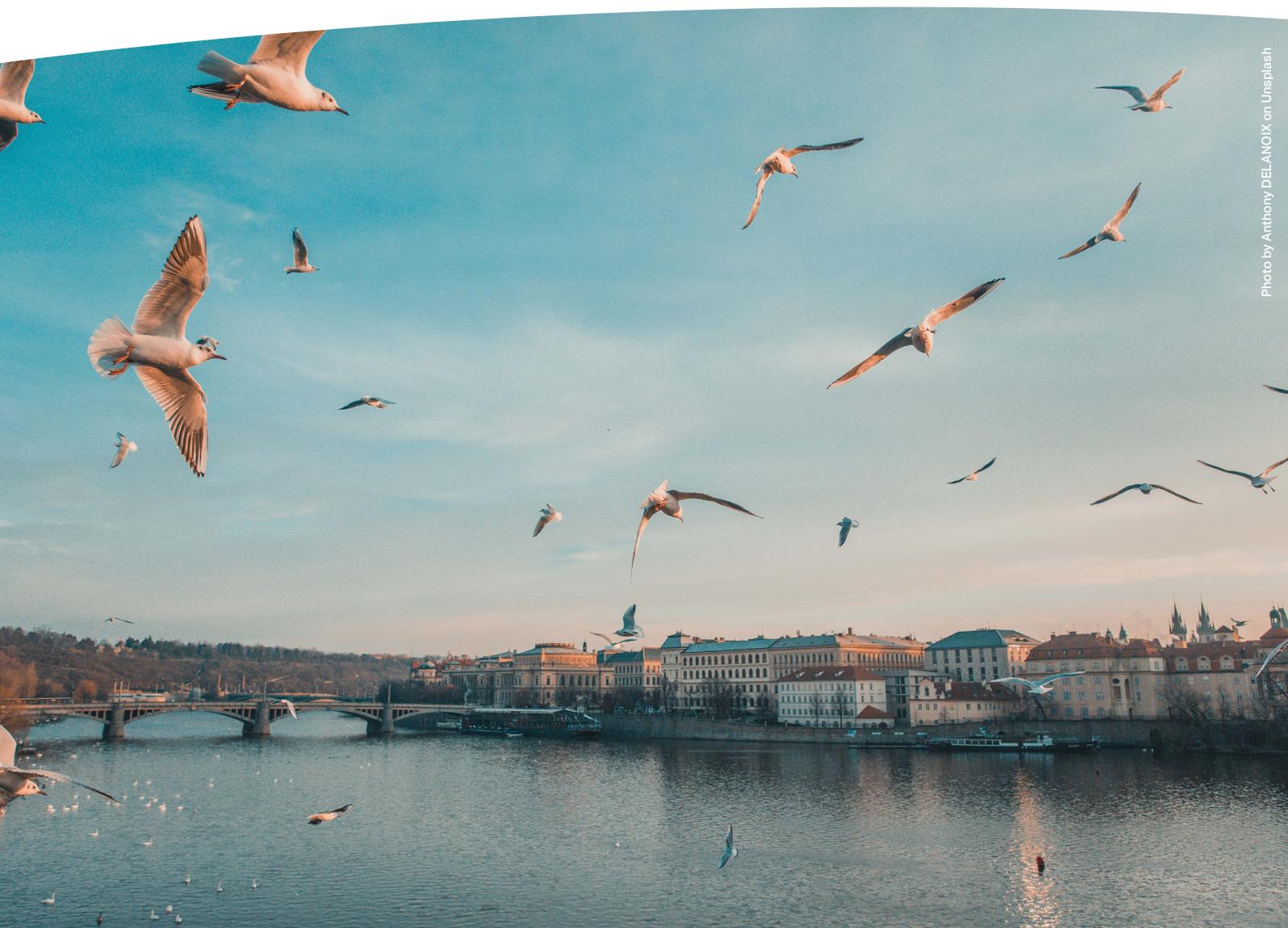
2. KEY POLICY QUESTIONS

A national ecosystem assessment aims to be demand-driven and policy relevant. Therefore, it is suggested that the key policy questions reflect the assessment's rationale, such as the country's economic, political, societal and environmental priorities (e.g. national health concerns, food security, climate change resilience). It is beneficial to develop these in consultation with a range of stakeholders and knowledge holders to ensure that the assessment remains policy relevant and enhance its legitimacy amongst stakeholders and knowledge holders.

The following questions may be useful to consider:

- What is the value that biodiversity and ecosystem services have to different sectors? (i.e., agriculture, forestry, fisheries)

- Who are the main stakeholders, including indigenous peoples and local communities, that have a direct relationship with biodiversity and ecosystem services?

- What are the potential economic and societal implications (i.e. human health) of changes in biodiversity and ecosystems in the country?

- What are the key policy issues and priority decision-making processes in the country that are linked to considerations regarding biodiversity?

- What existing and future/planned policies and programmes may affect the economic, political, social, and environmental situation in the country? And what type of information on biodiversity and ecosystem services would be useful to support their development, implementation and monitoring?

- What are the current socioeconomic development strategies and policy frameworks within the country? Are there plans to update or replace these soon? And how can the national ecosystem assessment provide a useful knowledge-base for these?

- What strategies and policy frameworks related to climate change exist in the country? And how can a knowledge-base on biodiversity and ecosystem services be strengthened via a national ecosystem assessment to support the implementation of these climate change strategies and policies?

- What strategies and plans exist to support implementation of international commitments (i.e. CBD, UNFCCC) and targets (i.e. NBSAPs)? how can a knowledge-base of biodiversity and ecosystem services through a national ecosystem assessment support progress and reporting towards these?

3. DEFINING THE ASSESSMENT'S SCOPE

3.1 PRIORITY ECOSYSTEMS AND SERVICES

Based on the national ecosystem assessment rationale and key policy questions, the next step is to prioritise the ecosystems and ecosystem services which will guide the focus of the assessment. Preliminary information on the status and trends of the country's ecosystems inclusive of drivers of change can be outlined in this section too. Creating a conceptual framework at the outset can also be useful to guide thinking and support in the identification of priority ecosystems.

The following questions may be useful to consider:

- Which ecosystems are relevant to the information and knowledge needed for addressing the key policy questions identified?

- What ecosystem services is the country more reliant on?

- Are there ecosystems in which populations and livelihoods depend on?

- Are there ecosystems that are key for the economic sector?

- Are there ecosystems that have few or no information that can be included to identify knowledge gaps?

- Which ecosystems might be linked to achieving national, regional, global targets the country has committed to?

3.2 TEMPORAL SCALE

Defining the temporal scale of the assessment at the scoping stage is important as it has implications for setting the national ecosystem assessment baseline and exploring potential scenarios. For example, the temporal scale can describe the period for which data and knowledge, literature and other types of knowledge sources are needed.

The following questions may be useful to consider:

- When did the country experience significant environmental changes (i.e. landscape changes) in its past?

- At what point were significant biodiversity or landscape-related policies implemented?

- How did data availability and reliability vary through time in the country's context?

- How far into the future would the assessment be relevant to explore? i.e., how far into the future are stakeholders able to visualise the needs and standards of biodiversity and ecosystem services for their country?

- Are there any relevant dates and targets in national plans and strategies in which to aim towards?

3.3 GEOGRAPHIC BOUNDARIES

The geographic scale chosen for the national ecosystem assessment will be strongly linked to the key policy questions identified. Even though the assessment is based at the national scale, certain key policy questions may only be relevant at the sub-national level and/or to key ecosystems.

The following questions may be useful to consider:

- Are the key policy questions relevant to the entire country or are they relevant for specific ecosystems or regions?

- Are there knowledge sources that are particularly relevant or focused on specific geographic scales?

- Are there policies, which the assessment is planning to inform, that are relevant only to specific ecosystems or regions?

4. POTENTIAL USE OF THE ASSESSMENT

This section discusses how assessment findings can be used in the country's decision-making processes, as well as in national implementation of international agreements. A national ecosystem assessment can have several different uses which can depend on the key policy questions, ecosystems assessed and report format (i.e. technical report, Summary for Policymakers). Stakeholder and knowledge holder engagement is crucial at an early stage to identify users of assessment findings which will be guided by the rationale of the assessment. It is also important to support stakeholder and knowledge holder buy-in by ensuring strong communication throughout the assessment. For example, a communication strategy could be developed and stakeholders and knowledge holders regularly engaged for the assessment's credibility and uptake, ensuring to highlight the relevance of the national ecosystem assessment to their needs. As well as evaluating available knowledge around the key policy questions, national ecosystem assessments also identify gaps in knowledge and capacity along with options for addressing these. This information can be valuable to users, specifically national governments and stakeholders and knowledge holders directly and indirectly affected by the findings of the assessment.

The following questions may be useful to consider:

- How can the information in national ecosystem assessments be useful and relevant to national and sub-national decision-making and policy implementation processes?

- What key policies, plans and strategies does the country have that require targeted information to support decision-making (e.g., sector-specific policies for agriculture, forestry, fisheries)?

- How can knowledge and information gaps identified in the assessment be used to inform decision-making?

- What regional and global multilateral environmental agreements and strategies can the national ecosystem assessment support for implementation at the national level (e.g., CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD, SDGs)?

5. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

A national ecosystem assessment is a synthesis of existing knowledge, information and data which is gathered primarily through literature reviews, grey literature, existing databases, and stakeholder and knowledge holder input. Identifying the methodological approaches that best adapt to the national context will support the selection of the technical capacities required from those involved in the assessment, as well as capacity-building, data and knowledge needs. The following are some examples of such methodological approaches:

- Conceptual Framework
- Data management plan
- Process for the identification of data and knowledge gaps
- Inclusion of indicators
- Integration of scenarios for the future
- Valuation of key ecosystem services and genetic resources
- Biophysical mapping of ecosystem services and threats
- Inclusion of local and indigenous knowledge
- Ensuring gender balance and women's participation

The following questions may be useful to consider:

- What analysis will be needed to help answer the key policy questions identified?

- How can the IPBES Conceptual Framework be used to guide the assessment's approaches?

- What approach will be needed to identify the data and knowledge to be gathered? How will the data and knowledge be stored, curated, used and referenced?

- How will you identify data and knowledge gaps and how will you present this information in the assessment?

- How will you identify capacity-building needs to ensure an effective implementation of methodological approaches? How will you address these?

- How will your assessment engage with different academic disciplines and knowledge systems, including indigenous and local knowledge? How will you ensure gender balance and women's representation in your engagement?

- What official indicators do you have that can be used to address the key policy questions?

- What types of scenarios for the future would be relevant for your assessment? What scenarios and modelling outputs do you have available in your country and how can they be useful to address the key policy questions?

- Have there been biodiversity and ecosystem services valuation studies completed in the country which are relevant to address the key policy questions?

- What spatial information on biodiversity and ecosystem services and threats is available at the country level? Is there regional spatial information, data or models which are also relevant and useful for the assessment?

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6. CHAPTER OUTLINE

Within the scoping report, it is encouraged to outline the structure of the technical report which might be organised by priority ecosystems, key thematic areas or reflecting the conceptual framework. This will depend on the needs the assessment is aiming to address and its intended users. It is important to note that the technical report will not specifically answer the key policy questions, but rather compiles the knowledge-base needed to answer them. The summary for policymakers will then synthesise this knowledge into key messages that directly address key policy questions.

The following questions may be useful to consider:

• How can the information be structured to better address the key policy questions (i.e. organised by priority ecosystems, key thematic areas or reflecting the conceptual framework)?

• What are the key topics the assessment should cover to address the key policy questions?

• Will there be chapters focused on specific knowledge types (i.e. a chapter on indigenous and local knowledge) or will this be integrated throughout the chapters?

7. RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS AND INITIATIVES

This section summarises the stakeholders and knowledge holders that the assessment will be aiming to engage throughout the process. This can be identified through stakeholder mapping exercises. Stakeholders include all the groups who can contribute to, and who might be impacted by the national ecosystem assessment process and the subsequent use of its findings. This includes academia, non-governmental organisations, youth, and decision-makers who may use the assessment findings. This also includes indigenous peoples and local communities, particularly if a policy based on assessment findings may impact their livelihoods. In addition, indigenous peoples and local communities hold valuable knowledge for the assessment. Therefore, it is beneficial to bring in relevant stakeholders and knowledge holders to ensure the outcome is relevant and accessible to them.

The following questions may be useful to consider when mapping your stakeholders and knowledge holders:

• Who could be most affected by decisions arising from the use of assessment findings?

• Which stakeholder groups are currently most interested in the results of the national ecosystem assessment in the country (e.g., government bodies, research institutions, private sector actors, academia, civil society and community organisations)?

• Which stakeholders might hold knowledge relevant to the key policy questions to be addressed by the assessment (e.g., government bodies, researchers, indigenous peoples and local communities, civil society, private sector actors, women and youth organisations)?

8. KEY DATA, KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION

This section presents the key data and knowledge sources which could be included in the assessment. Identifying the temporal scale, the geographic boundaries and the ecosystems relevant to address the policy questions will help in narrowing down the scope of the assessment, and identifying the data and knowledge required. Data and knowledge can be extracted from publicly available peer-reviewed literature and grey literature, databases, project reports and national plans and policies. Data and knowledge can also be contributed by knowledge holders, including indigenous peoples and local communities. Ensuring the assessment brings together a range of sources and knowledge types contributes towards its legitimacy, credibility and relevance.

The following questions may be useful to consider:

- What type of information sources (eg., databases, peer-reviewed and grey literature, research projects) are available and accessible at the country, regional or global level to help address key policy questions?

- Who could support efforts in identifying key databases?

- Which knowledge holders could contribute their knowledge to the assessment?

- What approaches might encourage various types of knowledge holders to share their knowledge and contribute to the assessment process?

- What approaches can support the inclusion of indigenous and local knowledge among other types of knowledge in the assessment process?

9. OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE

A Technical Support Unit (TSU) or assessment team manages the administration and provides technical support for the assessment (see the guidance on roles and responsibilities). An effective TSU/assessment team can support the assessment process, including to:

- Facilitate the timely completion of deliverables
- Ensure the scope of the assessment is realistic
- Supports the identification and mobilisation of stakeholders and knowledge holders throughout the process
- Support the identification of a multidisciplinary author team (see the guidance on selecting authors).

The following questions may be useful to consider:

- How will the co-chairs of the national ecosystem assessment be identified and what will their responsibilities be? What professional backgrounds do you want the co-chairs to have? How many co-chairs will you have?

- How many Coordinating Lead Authors (CLA), Lead Authors (LA) and Review Editors (RE) will be involved in the national ecosystem assessment process? Which type and/or level of knowledge would need to be considered?

- Will there be a task force or nominated person leading stakeholder engagement or engagement with groups such as indigenous peoples and local communities and/or ensuring women's participation?

- Will a national biodiversity platform be established or build upon an existing platform in the country? What role will the platform have in the national ecosystem assessment process (i.e., will they validate the national ecosystem assessment report)?

10. PROCESS AND TIMETABLE

This section details the proposed process for undertaking the assessment and the timetable for preparing the drafts. It may be useful to develop a work plan to outline milestones, deadlines and deliverables (i.e., a Gantt chart). A clear work plan ensures problems and risks are minimised, issues are addressed, progress is monitored, and work is integrated into products which are delivered on time and to budget. The work plan should be flexible and allow for future changes (e.g., resources being made available, authors identified and selected etc.).

The following questions may be useful to consider when mapping your stakeholders and knowledge holders:

- What is the timeframe for developing the national ecosystem assessment? Are there key policy process that would be strategic to aim for?

- What are the milestones in the process and when should they be completed?

- What tools can support the TSU/assessment team, and the authors to keep on track with deliverables?

11. COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

It is recommended that a communication strategy is developed as early as possible during the scoping stage and then kept under review and updated throughout the assessment process. The detailed communication strategy usually comes as a separate, stand-alone document (see the guidance on developing a communication strategy). However, within the scoping report, it is recommended to summarise the key communication priorities.

The following questions may be useful to consider:

- What are the main communication goals that the country would like to focus on during the assessment process? And what are key messages?

- Who are the internal and external audiences of the assessment? How will they be reached? How will stakeholders be engaged? And will there be any outreach to the general public?

- What languages will the scoping report, technical report, summary for policymakers and other outputs be available in? And how will the outputs be published (e.g. in electronic format available on a website and/or printed)?

- How will the key findings be disseminated and to whom? (e.g. will the results be presented to decision-makers across sectors? Will they be socialised with indigenous peoples and local communities? Will key findings be disseminated at national/international events/forums)?

12. CAPACITY-BUILDING NEEDS

Capacity-building is one of the key legacies of the assessment process. As such, an important objective of the national ecosystem assessment process is to build capacity of all those involved at the science-policy-practitioner interface (i.e., the TSU/assessment team, authors, stakeholders). It is important to lay out capacity-building needs for the assessment at the scoping stage, identifying who would need capacity-building support, what would this support be (i.e. on certain topics, methodological approaches), when capacity-building activities could take place and how they could be delivered. For the latter, workshops, consultations and early career fellowship programmes can be useful in building capacities with key stakeholders in the assessment process. Consideration of the topics, methods, knowledge types that might be covered and needed during the evaluation stage might help identify and address capacity gaps. Capacity-building needs can then be revisited throughout the assessment.

The following questions may be useful to consider:

- Were any gaps in expertise around the key policy questions identified during the scoping process?

- What capacities would need to be built for individuals conducting the assessment to deliver a relevant assessment?

- Are there particular topics, methods or knowledge types relevant to the assessment? How will you support these?