

# External Evaluation Round 6

## Safe Abortion Action Fund (SAAF)

### Terms of Reference

#### Background

The Safe Abortion Action Fund (SAAF) was established by five bilateral donors in 2006 as a multi-donor funding mechanism to support in-country civil society organisations for increasing access to safe abortion. It is the only international fund focused exclusively on the right to safe and legal abortion. SAAF is hosted by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and it is overseen by an independent board, with the day-to-day operations managed by the SAAF secretariat.

SAAF's goal is to build a world where women, girls and people with diverse gender identities have their human rights to abortion and bodily autonomy respected, protected and fulfilled. Since the inception of SAAF there have been six funding rounds, with the current round 6 supporting 87 organisations in 53 countries with a budget of USD 23 million. To encourage locally appropriate programming, SAAF accepts applications for a wide variety of areas of work, such as advocacy and awareness raising, evidence building and delivery of services. Further details on SAAF are available at <http://www.saafund.org/>.

Each funding round includes a donor requirement for an external evaluation to assess the fund for accountability and learning purposes. The recommendations of the last evaluation in 2020, together with an extensive grantmaking review by an external consultant in 2021, influenced a substantial redesign of SAAF's approach and practice of grantmaking, which has been operationalised in the current funding round 6 from 2022. A core aspect of our new approach is a focus on grantee partners' priorities, flexibility, adaptive management and long-term change. We aim to support organisations by understanding the 'big picture' of their progress, along non-linear and uncertain pathways to change. With this we aim for a more meaningful understanding of what progress and its determinants look like in complex realities. This required a complete redesign of our electronic data systems and processes using cloud-based, agile technology and a new focus on qualitative data.

**The new grantmaking approach, including the underlying systems redesign, underpins all of SAAF's operational processes and results; it is therefore essential that the external evaluation is based on a thorough understanding of this approach.**

## Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation is to make an overall independent assessment about SAAF with consideration of [OECD-DAC evaluation criteria and principles](#). The evaluation will consider the SAAF portfolio holistically, with a focus on the effects from the recent changes of its grantmaking approach introduced in 2022. It will provide conclusions to key evaluation questions and propose practical recommendations to maximise SAAF's contribution to its goal and inform SAAF's future strategic direction.

## Objectives

- 1) Determine SAAF's unique role in and contribution to the current funding environment of abortion programming.
- 2) Assess SAAF's overall programmatic and operational performance under its redesigned grantmaking approach including consideration of the following:
  - The practical relevance and usefulness of the approach for SAAF's grantee partners.
  - The extent to which the values-based aspects of the approach have been put into practice, and the resulting effects.
  - The effects of the secretariat's electronic systems redesign - such as the ability to collect and analyse data, make decisions and respond to changes in an agile manner, facilitating an in-depth understanding of its portfolio as well as individual grantee partners' impact.

## Evaluation Questions

Specific questions to be addressed by the evaluators will be agreed jointly during the inception phase. These will be developed to fulfil the evaluation objectives above, satisfy the accountability needs of stakeholders and provide pragmatic recommendations to inform SAAF's way forward in terms of strategy and everyday processes.

[Annex 1](#) lists some of the questions that will be included as required by donors, and others that can serve as a starting point to develop the final evaluation questions during the inception phase.

## Guiding Principles and Approach

**The following key considerations will inform the development of the evaluation approach:**

- The emphasis of the evaluation is on assessing current portfolio-level performance and inform future SAAF strategy instead of assessing the performance at grant-level.
- The evaluation will be conducted with a view of representing grantee partners' experience with SAAF; any recommendations will be developed with the ultimate objective of benefitting this experience and supporting grantee partners' performance.
- Duplication of data collection or setting up of parallel mechanisms is to be avoided.
- Close collaboration between the evaluators and the SAAF team will help ensure that the evaluation will provide relevant and pragmatic recommendations that are informed by and will complement previous work as well as ongoing efforts.
- The evaluation design needs to consider the balance between whole portfolio review and where more targeted in-depth inquiry will yield the most appropriate and relevant evidence.

## Methodology

The evaluation will be developed and conducted in close collaboration with the SAAF secretariat. The evaluators commissioned to conduct the evaluation will be responsible for selecting the methods that are most appropriate for answering the evaluation questions within the scope and budget of the evaluation. The following should be taken into consideration:

- The evaluation will be carried out remotely and does not include in-person visits to grantee partners or other travel.
- Methods should be participatory and inclusive, ensuring participation of key stakeholders.
- The methodology must include a thorough review of SAAF's new electronic systems and processes.
- Where possible data should be triangulated to ensure a robust assessment.

The evaluation process will be carried out through three phases - Inception Phase, Data Collection Phase and Analysis & Synthesis Phase, as described below:

## 1. Inception Phase

In the inception phase, initial discussions with the SAAF secretariat will be held and relevant SAAF systems and documents reviewed, as well as external documents shaping SAAF's wider strategy. Based on the information collected the evaluators should:

- Develop a final methodology for the evaluation, including the final evaluation questions.
- Present each evaluation question stating the information already gathered during the inception phase and their limitations, provide a first partial answer to the question, identify the issues still to be covered and the assumptions still to be tested, and describe a full method to answer the question.
- List the stakeholders to be consulted and describe the final tools to be used for data collection
- Describe the final analysis strategy
- Develop the final work plan including time schedule

An inception report shall be prepared and submitted to the SAAF secretariat for feedback and corrections as relevant before the start of the data collection phase.

## 2. Data Collection Phase

The data collection phase will consist of two parts, which may be conducted concurrently:

- Desk review of SAAF secretariat electronic systems, internal documents and external literature that informs the wider SAAF strategy. For an understanding of the new data systems, 'guided tours' by video call with members of the secretariat will be used to complement the review of documents.
- Use of qualitative and/or quantitative methods to obtain the views of key informants and stakeholders, including a sample of grantee partners.

## 3. Analysis & Synthesis Phase

This phase is devoted to the preparation of the final report. The evaluators will ensure that their assessments are objective and balanced, affirmations accurate and verifiable, and recommendations realistic. They will acknowledge clearly where changes in the desired direction are known to be already taking place. The evaluation team should not repeat the work already covered by existing documents but instead build on the available knowledge. A draft final report will be submitted to the SAAF secretariat, who will provide feedback and quality control, and share the draft report for comments with the SAAF board. The evaluators will integrate the feedback into the final report. The main conclusions of the final report should be shared in a presentation.

## Timeline

The assignment should start in early November 2024 and should be concluded by April 2025. Timelines may be adapted during contract negotiations. The SAAF secretariat needs to be informed of any significant deviation from the agreed workplan or schedule.

Phases	Timeline	Deliverables
Inception Phase	November to mid-December 2024	Draft inception report Final inception report
Data Collection Phase	January to February 2025	-
Analysis & Synthesis Phase	March to mid-April 2025	Draft evaluation report Final evaluation report Main conclusions presentation

## Deliverables Requirements

Any deliverables should be clear, free of jargon, and written in plain English. Any page limits below do not include annexes.

The **Inception Report** of maximum 10 pages will be developed in close collaboration with the SAAF team to ensure that it remains focused on the evaluation objectives. The report will describe findings from this first phase, describe the approach for the following phases and identify foreseen challenges with data collection. SAAF comments will be integrated into the final inception report.

The **Evaluation Report** will describe the evaluation process, methods and data sources and put forward the evaluators' findings and concrete recommendations, including suggestions on how those can be achieved. Background information should only be included when it is directly relevant to the report's analysis and conclusions. All analysis of achievements must be supported with relevant data and the data source must be included. The presentation of results is to be intrinsically linked to the evaluation objectives and key evaluation questions and weave together the findings from different data sources rather than report by data source or type. The report should include the following sections:

- An executive summary of no more than 3 pages
- A main body of no more than 25 pages with:
  - A 'Findings' part structured into sections, one for each of the evaluation objectives. In each section, all data pertaining to that objective are presented, interpreted, and woven together to form a direct answer to the objective
  - A 'Recommendations' section with practical recommendations for each of the programmatic and financial areas assessed and address their relevance and feasibility.

- Technical details should be included as annexes, such as: evaluation questions, list of documents reviewed, list of stakeholders consulted/interviewed, others as relevant.

A draft version of the report will be shared with the SAAF's Secretariat and their feedback will be incorporated into the final evaluation report.

The **main conclusions presentation** will provide a brief overview of the evaluation process and focus on the evaluation objectives, how they have been addressed through the evaluation and what the recommendations are based on the findings and the wider context that SAAF operates in. This summary will be shared as a PowerPoint document or similar format and presented during a videocall.

## Estimated Cost

The total budget available for the external evaluation is UDS 110,000 including VAT.

## Evaluator Profile

**The evaluation team will need to demonstrate strong experience of applying rigorous evaluation methodologies using OECD-DAC criteria across multi-country portfolios, and thematic expertise in the contexts of abortion and/or sexual and reproductive health rights.**

The required mix of skills will cover:

- Experience in conducting grants and fund portfolio evaluations using qualitative and quantitative research and analysis methods, particularly in the health sector.
- Experience with evaluating complex, non-linear and systems-level change.
- Ability to understand and assess electronic data systems based on relational databases and data visualization technologies.
- Knowledge of the international context for sexual and reproductive health services and rights, and/or safe abortion in the regions in which SAAF operates.
- Excellent interpersonal skills and ability and to communicate effectively with a range of stakeholders including within civil society organisations, international donors.
- Excellent oral and written communication skills, including experience in writing technical, analytic and evaluation reports, and critical interviewing skills.
- Ability to discreetly handle sensitive data and/or conversations.
- Advanced oral and written skills in English (required) and strongly preferred in Spanish and French.

We value insights from evaluators from the countries that SAAF can fund (this includes any country eligible for Overseas Development Funding). Therefore, we encourage evaluator teams who include them to apply.

## Proposal Submission

The submission should include two parts:

### 1/ A technical proposal with the following characteristics:

- A maximum of 10 pages (excluding annexes like evaluators' CVs, workplan, timeline, samples of work etc.)
- Describe how the evaluators fit the required profile.
- Include a suggested evaluation approach and methodology (to be refined during the inception phase).
- Propose a strategy for determining a sample of grantee partners and explain how the evaluation will balance the assessment of the SAAF portfolio with the assessment of the SAAF secretariat itself.
- Consider methodological risks and indicate how these will be mitigated.
- Explain how methods will maximise cost-effective use of resources and maximise stakeholder participation in the evaluation.
- Indicate how the evaluation will adhere to standards on ethics in evaluation.
- Articulate the quality assurance processes that will be implemented.
- Provide any feedback or comments on the Terms of Reference.
- Provide a sample of work demonstrating previous relevant experience.

### 2/ A detailed budget spreadsheet including:

- All fees and number of days assigned to tasks and team members.
- All anticipated expenses.

The lead and main point of contact for this work will be Heidi Schroffel, SAAF Evaluation & Learning Adviser. All queries related to these ToR should be sent at [info@saafund.org](mailto:info@saafund.org) with subject line "**SAAF Evaluation- Query**".

The completed proposal must be submitted by email to Heidi Schroffel at [info@saafund.org](mailto:info@saafund.org) by **end of day Monday 23rd September 2024** with subject line "**SAAF Evaluation Submission**".

## Annex 1: Bank of Questions

The questions listed below can be used for the evaluation where deemed relevant during the inception phase or can serve as a starting point to develop the final evaluation questions.

The following questions are a requirement of SAAF's donors and must be addressed in the evaluation:

- Describe the routine for sub-grants. How many sub-grants were issued last year and what were the average amounts? How often are funds issued to sub-grantee level, criteria and systems for transfers to be initiated?
- Does the organisation undertake due diligence/partner assessments of new partners?
- Are there agreements/contracts between the organisation and any third party?
- What are the routines for follow-up of sub-grantees, frequency of field visits, frequency of financial reports and financial reviews, administration vs project implementation at sub-grantee level ?
- Who prepares the financial reporting? Who approves the financial reporting? How frequent is the financial reporting (e.g. what is the financial year)?
- Does the organisation apply the "four eyes principle"? Who are the ones approving transactions?
- Is there an annual audit of the organization as an entity? Were there any significant matters / weaknesses brought up in the last audit?

In addition, below are potential additional evaluation questions according to OECD-DAC criteria:

### RELEVANCE:

- What is SAAF's place in and contribution to the current funding landscape for abortion programming?
- What role does SAAF play in countering the global pushback on SRHR – given its priority focus on local and national civil society and their networks, neglected issues and underserved people, supported by strengthening the international enabling environment?
- To what extent are SAAF activities and results in alignment with its strategic plan?
- Does SAAF reach grantee partners who are otherwise excluded from existing funding?
- To what extent are SAAF's capacity building and partnership initiatives aligned with grantee partners' actual needs and realities?

### EFFECTIVENESS:

- Does SAAF select grantee partners strategically in view of its overall goals? Does it reach organisations that are otherwise not reached?
- How effectively is the SAAF secretariat achieving its intended results?
- To what extent does SAAF's new grantmaking approach facilitate engagement with grantee partners in terms of agenda setting and decision-making?



- To what extent does SAAF’s new grantmaking approach increase accountability or foster trust and understanding?
- Has the new grantmaking approach in practice allowed for flexibility, adaptive management and long-term change?
- How well does SAAF communicate the fund’s as well as grantee partners’ achievements – what more can be done to communicate the big picture impact – how is the whole greater than the sum of the parts?

#### **EFFICIENCY:**

- Does SAAF have an efficient organisational and governance structure?
- Does SAAF have appropriate financial management and administrative processes that ensure accountability? This includes financial controls and audits and agreements with third parties.
- How well does the new results framework capture change as intended, including in the view of grantee partners and donors?
- Does SAAF have appropriate monitoring processes in place for grantee partners’ financial compliance and reporting?

#### **IMPACT:**

- What has been SAAF’s contribution to grantee partners’ strengthening, capacity and partnership building and responsiveness?
- How well does SAAF support grantee partners’ progress towards their goals, along non-linear and uncertain pathways to change?
- Has SAAF funding made a real difference to beneficiaries? If so, how?
- To what extent do grantee partners benefit from being part of the SAAF Community, e.g. in the areas of exchanging information, collaborating, sharing best practices in a region or thematic area?

#### **SUSTAINABILITY:**

- To what extent are the benefits of SAAF programming likely to continue after donor funding ceases?
- What are major factors which influence the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability of SAAF programming?

In addition to the OECD-DAC criteria, SAAF’s donors are interested in the following cross-sectional areas:

- Unexpected effects of SAAF’s work, both positive and negative
- Anti-corruption
- Gender
- Climate change
- Safeguarding