8 Conducting the technical review

To determine whether an assessment report is consistent with ICAT key recommendations, technical reviewers conduct several activities. Reviewers conduct all activities according to the technical review plan before forming a technical review statement.

Checklist of key recommendations

- Conduct a desk review to evaluate whether the assessment report is consistent with the ICAT key recommendations upon which the assessment was based and/or any other criteria for technical review
- Undertake a field visit to support the review

8.1 Conduct technical review

All technical reviews involve a desk review. Field visits are also recommended. Both desk reviews and field visits can be further supported by interviews and surveys, as described in the sections below.

8.1.1 Desk reviews

It is a *key recommendation* for the reviewer to conduct a desk review to evaluate whether the assessment report is consistent with the ICAT key recommendations upon which the assessment was based and/or any other criteria for technical review. Desk reviews are the main way in which assessment reports are evaluated. A desk review is an examination of documents and supporting evidence that is done away from the user's place of work (i.e. the review is done remotely, most likely at the office of the technical reviewer in the case of second- or third-party review). It also includes phone calls and emails between the reviewer and the user.

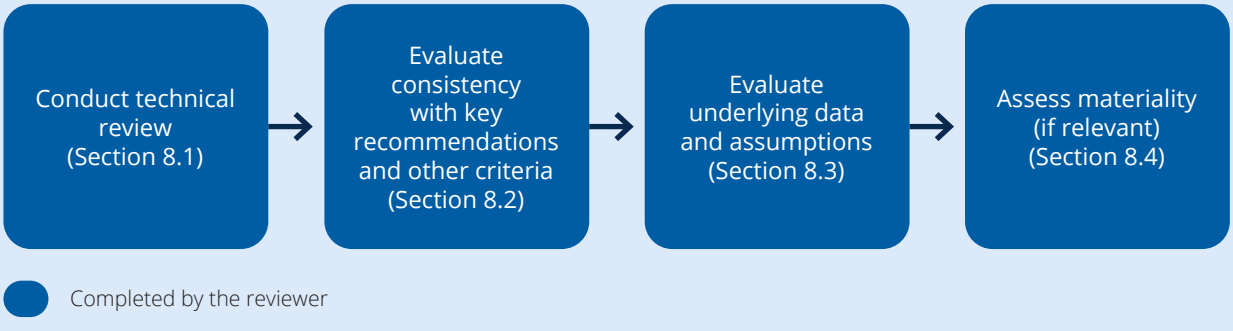
Documents to review include the assessment report; supporting evidence; and the methods, models, tools and assumptions applied. Descriptions of the relevant policies – including detailed explanation of objectives, implementation plans, progress reports, limitations observed and key institutional arrangements – can strengthen technical reviewer understanding and improve their review.

8.1.2 Field visits

Desk reviews can be strengthened through field visits. A field visit entails an evaluation of the impact assessment (possibly including examination of documents and supporting evidence) at the user's place of work, and/or the place of work of the entity

FIGURE **8.1**

Overview of steps in the chapter



that prepared the assessment report (if it was not prepared by the user).

It is a *key recommendation* for the reviewer to undertake a field visit to support the review. This allows face-to-face discussions between the user and the technical reviewer, and enhances the reviewer's understanding of the assessment report. These conversations can occur while the desk review is being conducted.

The visit may include visits to multiple offices or field sites relevant to the collection of data and other information for the assessment report. Depending on the type of policy, it may be beneficial for the reviewer to visit a sample of facilities, natural areas (e.g. agricultural lands and forests) or communities affected by the policy.

Technical reviewers should independently collect data to confirm the reported information and results. Data can be collected at a selected or random sample of facilities within the relevant industry, supply chain or governmental agency. For example, in the United States, the Wage and Hours Division selectively inspects production facilities that use low-wage labour to ensure that they are following a range of state and federal laws (e.g. *Fair Labor Standards Act*).[27] The United Nations Law of the Sea allows for state-sponsored officers to inspect any foreign boats of states that are signatories to the Law of the Sea for violations of the Fish Stocks Agreement.[28] The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization conducts facility inspections and on-site environmental sampling to verify that no current or past chemical activity has occurred in non-compliance with the treaty.[29]

Data can be collected outside of specific facilities when (1) data are needed to measure large natural areas; (2) data are needed to measure the greater impact, independent of specific facilities; or (3) access to facilities is limited or prohibited. The International Atomic Energy Agency uses satellite imaging to monitor facility activity and detect radioactivity.[30] Equipment and software that make verification cheaper and thus more accessible are being developed. For example, drone technology is being used by countries receiving UN-REDD+ funding to verify that their forests are being managed in accordance with UN-REDD requirements.[31]

8.1.3 Interviews and surveys

Interviews and surveys can be conducted to understand more completely the policy that was assessed, confirm previously asserted information and improve the technical review process as a whole. Interviews and surveys can be conducted face to face or through digital means. They can be targeted to the user directly or can involve external experts, community members, and other representative and identified stakeholders.

When conducting interviews and surveys with stakeholders, consider the following:

- Feedback on the assessment report can be solicited from stakeholders through various consultation methods, including online surveys, and meetings or workshops with different stakeholder groups.
- All feedback received from stakeholders should be collated and taken into account. Share with stakeholders (those involved in the technical review and others), and publish, the methods followed to process feedback received, as well as at least a summary of the inputs received and how they were taken into account.
- Seek the support of stakeholders – for example through a multi-stakeholder body – to resolve differences of opinion among stakeholders and to validate reports. These can include both the final report of stakeholder participation in policy design, implementation and evaluation, and the report of the technical review, including methods, processes followed, participation, feedback received and how feedback was taken into account.

Chapter 8 of the ICAT *Stakeholder Participation Guide* contains additional guidance for designing and conducting consultations, including interviews and surveys.

Box 8.1 gives an example of use of interviews and surveys in technical review.

[27] USWHD (2015).

[28] United Nations General Assembly (1995, 2010).

[29] CTBTO (2010).

[30] IAEA (2007).

[31] Zwick (2011).

BOX **8.1**

Examples of using interviews and surveys in technical review

Example 1: The World Health Organization, in its fight against measles and rubella, conducts vaccination surveys in treated communities. These surveys are used to triangulate reported data on vaccination rates and to verify that vaccination programmes are reaching the estimated number of people.[32]

Example 2: ICF International, in its verification of Entergy's Corporate Greenhouse Gas Inventory, interviewed key personnel to understand the emissions monitoring system, and gain insight into margins of error within the system.[33]

8.2 Evaluate consistency with key recommendations and other criteria

8.2.1 Key recommendations and other criteria

Technical reviews are conducted according to the criteria for review (see Section 5.2). In general, the review is an evaluation of the assessment report for consistency with ICAT key recommendations and any other criteria. The assessment report contains an assessment statement, which sets out the key recommendations that the user has followed and any other criteria with which consistency is to be assessed in the technical review. For example, if using the ICAT *Renewable Energy Methodology* and *Sustainable Development Methodology*, the assessment statement will include the relevant key recommendations from these assessment guides. Some key recommendations in the assessment guides may not be relevant to the particular policy or impact assessment, and the assessment statement explains and justifies why such recommendations have not been followed.

Reviewers should evaluate whether the user has interpreted the key recommendations correctly, stepping through each key recommendation one by one. The ICAT assessment guides provide supporting methods for each key recommendation, which provide the basis for the reviewer to evaluate whether the recommendation has been interpreted correctly and the assessment report is consistent with it. Where other criteria are specified as part of the scope of the review, reviewers should evaluate all supporting evidence and determine whether the assessment report is consistent with the criteria.

Reviewers should also draw upon their own experience, expertise and professional judgment, and relevant norms and good practice. In undertaking this evaluation, reviewers should keep in mind the technical review principles in Section 2.3.

Reviewers should evaluate whether the assessment report contains sufficient information to explain and justify how each key recommendation and other criteria were followed. Written explanation should be supported by reference to evidence, such as the outputs of methods and tools, and analysis and other studies.

8.2.2 Application of principles

The ICAT impact assessment guides provide a set of principles for impact assessments, and the documents state that it is a key recommendation to base the impact assessment on these principles. The principles are *relevance*, *completeness*, *consistency*, *transparency* and *accuracy*. In addition, the principle of *comparability* can sometimes be relevant. The ICAT *Transformational Change Methodology* provides an additional principle on *reflection on action*. Reviewers should ensure that any key recommendations relating to impact assessments (followed by the user) have been interpreted in a way that is consistent with these assessment principles. Each assessment guide discusses the principles in full, and reviewers should use these discussions as their guide for interpreting the principles.

The ICAT *Stakeholder Participation Guide* provides a set of principles for stakeholder participation, and the document states that it is a key recommendation to base stakeholder participation on these principles. The principles are *inclusiveness*,

[32] WHO (2014).

[33] ICF International (2016).

transparency, *responsiveness*, *accountability* and *respect for rights*. Reviewers should ensure that any key recommendations relating to stakeholder participation (followed by the user) have been interpreted in a way that is consistent with these principles. The principles are discussed in full in the *Stakeholder Participation Guide*, and reviewers should use this as their guide for interpreting them.

Review of adherence to the intent of assessment principles takes place at an overarching level. It is not a review of each individual key recommendation against each principle. Nor would all key recommendations that a user followed lend themselves to clear-cut evaluation.

8.3 Evaluate underlying data and assumptions

It is important for the technical reviewer to cross-check the underlying data and assumptions used to estimate impacts with other independent sources. The purpose of cross-checking is to confirm that data and assumptions are appropriate for the country and context to which they are being applied. Reviewers can cross-check through consultations with experts (e.g. academic and NGO researchers), published literature or specialized websites. Field visits, interviews and surveys, and field-based observations can be used. For example, if a user conducts a financial feasibility analysis, the reviewer can check whether the discount rate used in the analysis is appropriate for the country context. Population growth and data on gross domestic product are other examples of data that can be cross-checked with domestic and global databases to determine the appropriateness of the assumptions made in the impact assessment.

8.4 Assess materiality (if relevant)

The technical review should be conducted according to the agreed-upon materiality threshold. The reviewer should conduct the review to either a reasonable or limited level of assurance, or according to the agreed-upon procedures (see Chapter 2). Where a materiality threshold was established, the reviewer should ensure that all results are free from material misstatement. Materiality has both qualitative and quantitative aspects. Certain qualitative discrepancies, such as a discrepancy with respect to ownership, must always be noted as a material issue. In other cases, qualitative discrepancies will be less definite and may ultimately manifest themselves as quantitative discrepancies. When considering less definite qualitative discrepancies, reviewers should use their professional judgment to determine the issues that immediately need to be identified as material, and that require further investigation through sampling and testing.

When assessing quantitative materiality of data errors, omissions or misrepresentations, reviewers should assess materiality with respect to the aggregate estimate of results, such as the GHG emissions reductions and removals, set out in the assessment report. Uncertainties inherent in methodologies are not to be considered.

All material errors, omissions and misrepresentations should be addressed before a technical reviewer issues a conclusion with the desired level of assurance on an assessment report. Where non-material errors are found in the assessment report, reviewers should ensure that such errors are addressed by the user, where practicable.