

Building Back Greener
Evaluation Scoping Study

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary of Key Findings	i
I. About This Study	1
II. Global Context and Relevance to BBG Evaluation	3
III. 'Building Back Greener' and 'Building Back Better': Definitions and Terminology Considerations .	7
IV. Priority Considerations for Evaluating efforts to Build Back Greener	9
V. Narrowing Down Evaluation Options	16
VI. On Evaluation Questions, Topics, and Frameworks.....	20
VII. The Way Ahead	26
Annex 1. References	29
Annex 2. On Direct and Indirect Programme/Funding Relationships (and Implications on Influence) .	38

ACRONYMS

BBB	Building back better
BBG	Building back greener
COP	Conference of Parties
COVID	Coronavirus disease
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EU	European Union
EvalNet	The DAC Network on Development Evaluation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GFDRR	Global Fund for Disaster Reduction and Recovery
GGGI	Global Green Growth Institute
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
IDA	International Development Association
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TOR	Terms of Reference
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The Secretariat of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Network on Development Evaluation (commonly known as the OECD/DAC EvalNet Secretariat) commissioned this study to help the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition scope and plan for evaluation work related to building back greener—and better—from the global COVID-19 pandemic. The primary audiences for the study are the evaluation specialists in bilateral agencies, multilateral agencies, and partner countries who are engaged in the Coalition.

The term ‘building back greener’ and closely related ‘building back better’ both generally mean recovery from the global pandemic in a way that is more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient than before. Clearer, more specific definitions are uncommon. As long as term choice and intention are clear, which term to use is a judgment call, and any evaluation will be well served by first focusing scope and definitions based on the evaluation context and objective.

Ten considerations can inform BBG evaluation priorities, approaches, and practice:

1. First Things first: Respond to the Pandemic;
2. Do No Harm and Minimise Burden;
3. Scoping evaluations to be realistic and manage scope expectations throughout;
4. Taking advantage of opportunities for evaluation to strengthen BBG design and implementation;
5. Considering evaluation of systems change and transformation;
6. Embracing contribution as the norm and attribution as the exception;
7. Embracing reality to maximise BBG evaluation relevance and effectiveness;
8. Considering implications on methods and communication;
9. Considering variations on accountability; and
10. Accepting limitations without apology, and keeping things simple.

Of the many types of evaluation, some may be more suitable for BBG evaluations than others, considering the multi-sectoral nature, ongoing developments, evolving knowledge base, and practical limitations such as capacity constraints. Also, as with evaluation in general, BBG evaluations will be most useful if fit for purpose, with clear focus, audience, and use. *Evaluability* seems particularly important for BBG-related work. Considerations for selection of evaluation approaches based on stages of initiatives and purpose of evaluation are offered.

BBG evaluations may be more susceptible to common evaluation question pitfalls, such as too many questions (and sub-questions), questions that are not truly evaluable, and question rigidity. Approaches that may help to avoid and manage these pitfalls include evaluability assessments, limiting the number and scope of questions, tailoring questions to the needs of *one* priority

audience, building in reasonable flexibility around adapting questions, and regularly communicating about the ability to answer questions as expected.

Consistent with guidance on their use, the OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability), if used for BBG evaluations, should be used thoughtfully, in a fit-for-purpose rather than mechanistic manner consistent with an evaluation's purpose, scope, and intended use.

No single framework need be the only one considered for evaluations of BBG. Another possible framework (among many) for efforts aimed at long-term systems change could be the five dimensions of transformational change identified by the Climate Investment Funds' Transformational Change Learning Partnership: Relevance, systemic change, speed, scale, and adaptive sustainability.

The study offers illustrative evaluation questions and topics, but does not an attempt to be comprehensive or formulaic. The potential scope of BBG evaluation topics is immense, spanning a wide array of social, economic, and environmental sectors and programming areas of focus. Further, the interrelationships between sectors and topics are arguably at the centre of what BBG evaluations could if not should examine. These two issues pose a challenge in terms of developing generalised guidance. Each evaluation will be well served to identify focused, fit-for-purpose topics and questions.

The study concludes with options, or 'light' recommendations, for the Coalition to consider:

1. Continue to meet as a Working Group and to share evaluation plans, metrics, findings, and lessons.
2. Keep evaluations as simple as possible.
3. Conduct joint evaluations where possible and when they add value.
4. Engage more voices beyond evaluators or evaluation units.
5. Use the Coalition's voice and intentions to encourage donors and other global actors to minimise M&E burden on beneficiaries (and evaluators).
6. Expand Coalition capacity.

I. ABOUT THIS STUDY

THE OECD DAC AND COVID 19 GLOBAL EVALUATION COALITION

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) promotes development co-operation and other relevant policies to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.¹ In November 2020, the OECD/DAC emphasised how COVID-19 recovery will only be resilient and lead to sustainable development if it addresses environmental degradation and the climate emergency.

The Secretariat of the [OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation](#), commonly known as the OECD/DAC EvalNet, supports the [COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition](#) (hereafter referred to as the Coalition), with facilitation, strategic management, communication, and research. The Coalition is a network of the independent evaluation units of countries, United Nations (UN) organisations, international NGOs, and multilateral institutions. Participants work together to provide credible evidence to inform international co-operation responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, learning with and for the world.

STUDY PURPOSE AND SCOPE

By mid-2020, it was clear that an ambition to build back greener will be part of the COVID-19 recovery for many of the participating institutions, and that these efforts would likely need to be evaluated. The Coalition commissioned this study to help Coalition participants scope and plan for BBG-related evaluation work.

This BBG scoping study focused on international development assistance and other international investments and programmes that have direct or indirect relationships² to COVID-19 recovery and ‘green’ goals, policies, programmes, and projects. These include, but are not limited to, the Paris Agreement, the SDGs, and efforts to prevent biodiversity loss and protect ocean ecosystems.

The Terms of Reference (ToR)³ for this study outlined three primary tasks:

- (i) Scoping the topic of green recovery / sustainable transition in the context of COVID-19 and identification of strategic evaluation questions;
- (ii) Analysis of feasibility of answering the identified questions; and
- (iii) Identification of appropriate, credible processes and ways of working.

¹ Including “sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, poverty eradication, improvement of living standards in developing countries, and to a future in which no country will depend on aid.” (OECD/DAC 2021a).

² See discussion of what this means in Annex II.

³ Available upon request.

The ToR also stated that, “During the scoping exercise, consultants are invited to refine this list, including providing clear definitions of key terms, and propose additional relevant topics and questions.” The approach was to combine document review, targeted expert interviews with 8-12 key stakeholders, and drafting of the paper. The scope did *not* include assessing the effectiveness or results of COVID-19 BBG efforts.

INTENDED AUDIENCES

The primary audiences for the study are the evaluation specialists in bilateral agencies, multilateral agencies, and partner countries who are engaged in the Coalition. Additional audiences include interested parties doing related work, such as:

- Other evaluation specialists, researchers, and decision makers working on COVID-19 recovery efforts and related work in OECD member countries;
- Officials from national institutions, donor agencies, and development institutions working on environment and climate-related issues;
- Other international development/assistance organisations;
- National and local governments;
- Researchers, including evaluators; and
- Others, including policy makers, philanthropies, and others also seeking guidance on how to understand how to improve their contributions to ensuring a just and sustainable future.

INTENDED USES

As noted above, this study intends to help Coalition participants scope and plan for BBG and related evaluation work, which could include:

- Making the case and planning for evaluation;
- Developing evaluation terms of reference or plans;
- Sharing of evaluation findings or related research, evidence, or resources; and/or,
- Other ways of supporting joint learning and collaboration, ranging from informal sharing to formal joint evaluations.

The Coalition will also use this study to develop next steps for working together.

APPROACH

The study approach:

- Consultation through informal interviews with approximately 20 Coalition members and external experts about the direction of study and member priorities;

- Desk review of over 60 studies, articles, evaluations, evaluation plans, and related research, evidence, and public-facing communications;
- Consideration of trends and developments in international aid/assistance, such as a just transition to a green economy and movements focusing on equity, justice, and the cross-cutting and interrelated nature of global social and economic challenges (and ‘intersectionality’ in this vein); and,
- Sharing and discussing drafts of this with the OECD/DAC EvalNet Secretariat and Coalition BBG Working Group and updating the paper based on input.

II. GLOBAL CONTEXT AND RELEVANCE TO BBG EVALUATION

As of mid-December 2021, the World Health Organisation had reported over 270 million cases and over 5.3 million deaths from COVID-19 (World Health Organisation, 2021). The pandemic, far from under control, is still ravaging many parts of the world, impacting vulnerable and marginalised populations the most. Vaccine access and rollout are global challenges and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

Social and economic shocks brought on by the pandemic are accentuating gaps between the rich and poor. In fragile and conflict-affected areas food insecurity and political unrest are worsening, increasing migration pressures. Global supply chains have been disrupted. Many of these challenges have regional and global spill overs. In 2020, the global economy contracted by nearly four percent (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021) – and the real toll is far greater than simple measures of economic contraction convey. Under many scenarios, economic recovery is expected to be slow and uneven, and questions remain about whether poor countries will be left behind (Development Finance, Corporate IDA & IBRD; 2020). Decades of work to end poverty and promote equitable development have been set back.

Making matters more serious, we simultaneously face a worsening climate crisis marked by global heat waves, extreme-weather events, droughts, fires, warming oceans, and extinctions. According to the IPCC’s [Sixth Assessment Report](#) on the physical understanding of the climate system and climate change:⁴

- Human influence has warmed the climate at a rate that is unprecedented in at least the last 2,000 years;
- Climate change is already affecting every inhabited region across the globe;
- Global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least mid-century under all emissions scenarios considered; and
- Many changes due to past and future greenhouse gas emissions are irreversible for centuries to millennia, especially changes in the ocean, ice sheets, and global sea level.

⁴ See: AR6 Climate Change 2021 (IPCC 2021a, IPCC2021b). Points included are drawn from the Technical Summary (Arias et al. 2021) and Summary for Policymakers (IPCC 2021c).

Further, the planet faces unprecedented loss of biodiversity and critical ecosystems including forests and coral reefs. It is estimated that there has been a decline of 60% of animal populations since 1970 (Carrington, 2018). According to a 2021 study conducted by scientists at Imperial College London, more than a million species are believed to be on the verge of extinction (Wynton, 2021; Frankel, 2021). The current rate of biodiversity loss is 1,000 times higher than the historical rate (de Vos et al., 2014), with extinctions caused by human activity. Coral reefs alone harbour the highest biodiversity of any ecosystem globally and directly support over 500 million people worldwide, mostly in poor countries (International Union for the Conservation of Nature, 2021). The interrelationships between challenges are similarly sobering, including research suggesting that deforestation and extinctions make pandemics more likely (Tollefson, 2020).

UN Secretary-General António Guterres's echoed grave concerns in his remarks to the World Leaders Summit at the UNFCCC's 26th Conference of Parties (COP) on 1 November, 2021:

“Recent climate action announcements might give the impression that we are on track to turn things around. This is an illusion. The last published report on Nationally Determined Contributions showed that they would still condemn the world to a calamitous 2.7-degree increase. And even if the recent pledges were clear and credible—and there are serious questions about some of them—we are still careening towards climate catastrophe. Even in the best-case scenario, temperatures will rise well above two degrees. So, as we open this much anticipated climate conference, we are still heading for climate disaster” (United Nations Secretary General, 2021).

THE RESPONSE

Wealthy countries and donors are still trying to stem the loss and damage from the pandemic domestically and internationally, while simultaneously facing domestic crises, political turmoil, economic insecurity, extreme weather events, and some of the hottest years on record (NASA, 2021). Under these immense pressures and also constraints, those working around the world on COVID-19 response and recovery are also trying to ensure that those urgently needed efforts are advancing—or at least not hindering—progress toward meeting global commitments including the Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In 2021 it is clear that the pandemic is far from over, profound change is shaking the fundamentals of society, and global trends offer dismal warnings. World leaders are signalling calls for alarm while also recommitting to global goals and the [2030 Agenda](#) (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.). In advance of the COP 26, the OECD DAC, like other prominent global institutions, issued a joint Declaration committing to align overseas development assistance (which totalled USD 161 billion in 2020) with the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (OECD/DAC, 2021b).

The international community understands that effective, lasting, and resilient COVID-19 responses must address multiple needs and priorities simultaneously; be broadly inclusive, considering socio-economic disparities, equity, and ultimately justice; and consider both

immediate needs *and* long-term goals (Development Finance, Corporate IDA & IBRD, 2020). Increased understanding of the intersectionality of underlying social and economic problems has driven clarity around the need for inclusive and cross-cutting problem solving and solutions that face rather than ‘turn a blind’ eye to underlying or fundamentally connected issues.⁵

COVID-19 recovery efforts can—and ultimately must—achieve multiple objectives. This is possible, and many credible analyses have shown potential ‘win win’ outcomes of doing so. For instance, with regard to climate change mitigation and resilience, a 2020 working paper entitled ‘Will COVID-19 fiscal recovery packages accelerate or retard progress on climate change?’ the authors make the case that recovery policies can effectively deliver economic and climate benefits (Hepburn et al., 2020). The basis for these arguments was well established prior to the scourge of COVID-19.⁶ **In short, we can, and ultimately must, build back greener and better.**

A glimpse into how BBG is progressing

There are many valid questions about how to build back greener and better, and whether we—the international community and partners across the world—are headed in the right direction. This study was not designed to assess building back greener (BBG) or related building back better (BBB) efforts. However, a brief glimpse at foundational indicators helps to frame the challenge and urgency for action. Two such indicators focus on the extent to which COVID-recovery finance is environmentally friendly or ‘green’.

The [Global Recovery Observatory](https://recovery.smithschool.ox.ac.uk) (Oxford University Economic Recovery Project, 2020) tracks and assesses COVID-19 related fiscal spending policies by 50 leading economies for potential impacts on the environment and the socio-economy.⁷ As of early November 2021, the Observatory reported that 21.5% of global recovery spending (USD 0.50 Trillion of USD 2.33 trillion) is environmentally positive or ‘green’.⁸ While at face value,



⁵ Much has been written on this topic. See, for example, Kajumba and Shakya (2021) and Erwin et. al. (2021).

⁶ For example, the International Energy Agency (IEA) estimated that investing \$1 trillion (0.7% of global GDP) each year between 2021-2023 in six key energy sectors (transportation, industry, electricity, fuels, buildings and emerging low-carbon technologies) could increase worldwide economic growth by 1.1% each year, boosting jobs faster than what would be achieved with investments in the fossil fuel sector. (IEA, 2020 as cited in Wijaya et. al., 2021). Similarly, analysis by the Global Commission on Adaptation demonstrated that investments in climate adaption consistently deliver high returns, with benefit-cost ratios ranging from 2:1 to 10:1 (Global Commission on Adaptation (2019).

⁷ Policy items are assessed for potential environmental impact (greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, natural capital), social impact (wealth inequality, quality of life, rural livelihood) and economic impact (multiplier, speed of implementation). These assessments consider the impact of policy versus a scenario in which no intervention is made. (O’Callaghan et al. 2021).

⁸ Three environmental impact metrics for fiscal policy are assessed: GHG emissions, air pollution, and natural capital. The environmental impacts of policies are considered through a first-principles assessment guided by literature and supported by input of environmental experts and economists (O’Callaghan et al. 2021).

USD 0.50 Trillion may sound like a large amount of ‘green’ spending, it is unclear whether this spending is making the difference hoped for, or overtaking the opposite forces including those driven by re-opening economies, markets, travel, and other drivers of GHG emissions, resource extraction, etc.

Analysis by the OECD also underscores how recovery efforts fall short. The OECD Green Recovery Database (OECD, 2021a; OECD, 2021b), which draws upon Global Recovery Observatory data and other databases, tracks financing from 43 countries and the European Union allocated to environmentally positive recovery measures compared to ‘non-green measures.’^{9,10} As noted by OECD, ‘green’ positive finance is over USD 336 billion, or about 17 percent of all recovery funding. By contrast, measures marked as having negative or ‘mixed’ environmental impacts total around USD 334 billion, suggesting that funding for environmentally positive measures, while impressive, is nonetheless almost matched by funding allocated to negative and mixed measures. Moreover, this also means that over 80% of recovery funding either does not consider environmental dimensions or, worse, reverses progress on some of them (OECD 2021b).

Further, the OECD points out that the remaining two thirds of recovery spending that has not yet been categorised as environmentally impactful (in a positive or negative way) cannot be considered environmentally benign, especially given that the billions of USD allocated to green investment may be counteracted by ongoing support to environmentally harmful activities. In the OECD’s words, “If we are serious about transitioning towards a low-carbon economy, we are going to have to do better than this” (OECD, 2021c).

Importantly, the above work does not track all spending outside of COVID-19 recovery, nor does it track overarching global spending across all sectors (nor could it possibly do so). Decisions at all levels, from individual to international, are driving the direction of change, and realistically only those with sufficient resources and decision-making power are in a position to shift the direction of change.

Stepping back, while funding is critical, funding alone (and commitments to funding—which do not always materialise) does not dictate what is happening in the atmosphere, oceans, or other natural systems. As of October 2021, the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was 413.93 ppm, the highest level since accurate measurements began, and emissions are widely predicted to increase in 2022 (NOAA Global Monitoring Library, 2021). Yes, 2020 saw global emissions decrease as a result of the global pandemic and related economic slowdown, but even those reductions were minimal. The following statement sums up the state we are in:

“While 2020 saw a historic drop in emissions, the fact that at certain points more than half the world’s population was under lockdown, and emissions ONLY fell 6 percent, should be a sobering reminder of how staggeringly hard it will be to get to net zero and how much more work we have to do,” - Jason Bordoff, Columbia University Global Energy Center (Dennis and Mufson, 2021).

⁹ Those with negative or “mixed” environmental impacts.

¹⁰ Other impacts included are pollution (air, plastics), water, biodiversity, and waste management.

III. ‘BUILDING BACK GREENER’ AND ‘BUILDING BACK BETTER’: DEFINITIONS AND TERMINOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the review conducted for this study, **‘building back greener’ (BBG) and closely related ‘building back better’ (BBB) both generally mean recovery from the global pandemic in a way that is more inclusive, sustainable, and resilient than before.** International aid agencies, government leaders, and others appear to more often be using ‘building back better’, which emphasises a human-centred and inclusive recovery and makes it clear that ‘building back greener’ is fundamental to ‘building back better’. In many instances both BBG and BBB specifically refer to advancing progress toward the Paris Agreement and the SDGs in addition to the general intention to recover stronger and ‘greener’ from the global pandemic.

Clearer, more specific definitions of both terms are uncommon, leaving practical applications up to ad-hoc interpretation and use. For evaluations, the lack of clear, specific, and authoritative definitions offers advantages such flexibility, fit-for-purpose applications, and perhaps opportunity to shape definitions for clarity and evaluability. However, the disadvantages from lack of specificity and clarity include vague interpretations and use. Arguably, these terms are far too broad, essentially meaning anything about everything.

For any number of possible reasons, the term ‘building back better’ has grown in popularity, use, and recognition in recent years. **I offer that the principles and framing underlying both ‘building back greener’ and ‘building back better’—including acknowledging the need for change from the status quo—are more important than which term is used.** As long as term choice and intention are clear, which term to use is a judgment call.

However, ‘building back better’ may have more widespread appeal, acceptance, and relevance to the deepening awareness of interdependencies among social, economic, and environmental issues and solutions. ‘Building back better’ *may* also be less alienating to those who mistrust ‘green’ initiatives out of concern that they may be ‘anti people’ or prioritise environmental priorities at the expense of prioritising human needs and livelihoods. This apparent perception-viability challenge with regard to the ‘green’ focus was noted in a September 2021 article in *The Economist* titled, [*“An anti-green backlash could reshape British politics—And as radically as Brexit did”*](#) (Economist 2021a).

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS AROUND THE USE OF THESE TERMS TERM USAGE AND RELEVANCE

‘Building back greener’ is associated a number of recent high-visibility initiatives, though upon further review, these often refer to ‘building back better’

Examples of initiatives that cite or use ‘building back better’ headline statements include:

- Work by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), which defines ‘building back greener’ as *a commitment to job creation and inclusive economic growth that boosts rather than diminishes public health and the environment*;¹¹
- The European Commission’s [European Green Deal](#);
- Green Party platforms in multiple countries and continents; and
- High-profile announcements by Her Majesty’s Government, including [The Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution: Building back better, supporting green jobs, and accelerating our path to net zero](#) (HMG, 2020) and the [Net Zero Strategy to Build Back Greener](#) (HMG, 2021).

In these and other examples, more specific definitions of the term and its use are not readily identifiable. These sources and others refer to the same general concepts, and, while some include modest variation, there is an overarching lack of definitional specificity useful for ‘off the shelf’ evaluation purposes. For example, the ILO refers to job creation and public health and UNICEF emphasises children (UNICEF 2020). Others use general language emphasising the issues, populations, or communities they work with (e.g. climate change mitigation, women). Moreover, even ‘building back greener’ word searches quickly reveal that when this term is used in titles or headings, the term often used in the main content-material is ‘building back better’ (not ‘building back greener’).

‘Building back better’ is currently used by many if not most high-profile global initiatives that are aligned with the intent of this study.

The term ‘building back better’ initially stemmed from recovery efforts following the Indian Ocean Tsunami disaster in 2004 and the subsequent 2006 address by U.S. President Bill Clinton titled, “Key Propositions for Building Back Better” (Clinton, 2006). In 2015 the UN General Assembly formally adopted the term as part of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR, 2021). For additional understanding of the term’s history and pre-COVID-19 use, a helpful resource is a 2014 article “[‘Build Back Better’ Principles for Reconstruction](#)” from the New Zealand-based group [Build Back Better](#), which is affiliated with the University of Auckland’s Centre for Disaster Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction (Mannakkara et al., 2014; Build Back Better, 2021).¹²

Pre-pandemic, ‘building back better’ was already gaining traction in the global community, particularly in post disaster contexts, as well as following the 2007-8 financial crisis. One example is the 2018 World Bank and Global Fund for Disaster Reduction and Recovery report [Building Back Better: Achieving Resilience through Stronger, Faster, and More Inclusive Post-Disaster Reconstruction](#), which defined building back better as “post-disaster recovery that reduces vulnerability to future disasters and builds community resilience to address physical, social, environmental, and economic vulnerabilities and shocks” (Hallegatte, S. et al., 2018).

¹¹ Personal communication. See also Gueye (2021).

¹² A more recent book is also available for purchase (Mannakkara et al. 2019).

Since the pandemic hit in early 2020, ‘building back better’ appears relatively often, and has reached widespread recognition as relevant to the world today and going forward.

The OECD’s 2020 definition is one noteworthy example. In [Building Back Better: A Sustainable, Resilient Recovery after COVID-19](#) (June 2020), the OECD describes how ‘building back better’ is “people-centred recovery that focuses on well-being, improves inclusiveness, reduces inequality, aligns with long-term emission reduction goals, factors in resilience to climate impacts, slows biodiversity loss, and increases circularity of supply chains” OECD (2020a).

Like with use of the term ‘building back greener’, there are many other examples of the use of ‘building back better’, though, these also seem to offer few specific and focused explanations that are actionable as defined, or that are easily evaluable or measurable.

GENERAL TOPIC AREAS THAT FALL UNDER THE SCOPE OF BBG/BBB

For practical purposes, individual evaluations will likely have to rely on the definition of BBG/BBB used for the intervention being evaluated or the institutions involved. Table 1 below lists topic areas cited in the context of BBG and BBB initiatives, as a starting point for understanding the substance behind the concepts. As discussed above, the BBG/BBB scope is inherently broad and multi-dimensional. The categories cited in the sources are general/high level, overlapping, and not necessarily unique to COVID-19 recovery. They are areas that need attention and investment in order to set the world on a better, more sustainable, more humane, and more equitable path.

Any evaluation will be well served by first focusing scope (and definitions) to be clear and practical, and working from that starting point.

IV. PRIORITY CONSIDERATIONS FOR EVALUATING EFFORTS TO BUILD BACK GREENER

Many considerations can inform evaluation priorities, approaches, and practice. Below are ten based on a review of recent BBG/BBB efforts including evaluation work, consultations with Coalition members and external experts, and observation based on experience.

1. FIRST THINGS FIRST: RESPOND TO THE PANDEMIC

A first and fundamental priority that alleviates further pressure to ‘build back’ from the global crisis is addressing the pandemic itself, including minimising further spread of the disease, preventing avoidable deaths, providing sufficient personal protection and health care, and—of course—ensuring that vaccines are available to all. Addressing these immediate needs will mitigate further loss of lives and livelihoods and other impacts across all aspects of society.

As put by the International Development Association in 2020,

“To be successful, building back better requires that all countries find sustainable solutions for the acquisition and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, once available” (Development Finance, Corporate IDA, & IBRD; 2020).

Table 1. Types of interventions that may be considered BBG/BBG based on recent studies and emerging guidance

(Note: Categories and examples are not exhaustive or mutually exclusive.)

General Category	Illustrative examples
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - COVID-19 response & recovery finance, considering relationship to BBG issues, sectors, and programmes. Some of this finance is more directly related to BBG. Other COVID-19 finance may relate to BBG (positively or negatively) in less explicit ways. - Other (not COVID-19 related) 'green' finance with BBG relevance. - Finance not included above that relates to BBG positively or negatively (e.g.; fossil fuel subsidies)
Domestic and international policies, programmes, reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fiscal incentives, macro and micro-economic policies that shift the economy towards more sustainable development. - Reducing/eliminating market distortions, such as fossil fuel subsidies
Green growth, green jobs, and Just Transition to a clean energy economy and more resilient world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting a just transition to clean energy economy - Continuing and advancing ongoing/pre-COVID green growth & development, including rescuing green businesses and sectors hit by the pandemic - Recognizing natural capital as key economic asset and source of public benefit - Protecting and improving workers' livelihoods including health, skills, and rights; and supporting their communities - Advancing resilience, including to climate change impacts and other shocks and stressors (including global pandemics) - Factoring in future generations - Creating/preserving green businesses and sectors - Support for job retention and security for 'green' jobs; away from 'brown' jobs - Recognition of both formal jobs and informal or undocumented labour
Protecting natural systems and biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nature-based solutions - Ecosystem and habitat protection and restoration - Supporting climate-smart agriculture - Preventing zoonotic inter-species interactions; - Reducing food waste - Improving agricultural sustainability and supply chains (e.g. through bioregionalism)
Consumption and waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Waste reduction and recycling - Sustainable supply chains
Digital divide and e-options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reducing the digital divide (e.g. free Internet access) - Leveraging technology for inclusive delivery of health, education, social protection
Human rights, healthcare, and social protections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Universal health care - Social protections, including from political upheaval and violence - Protections for migrants and refugees
Disaster resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disaster risk reduction and management (reducing vulnerability; building resilience)
Sources include: Cambridge Econometrics (March 2021); Global Green Growth Institute (2020, 2021); Hallegatte, S. et al. (2018); International Development Association (2020); International Labour Organisation (2015, 2020); Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020a); UN Department of Global Communications (2020); United Nations Environment Programme (March 2021); UN Secretary General (2020)	

Others echo this sentiment. For instance, the World Bank Group's Development Committee, a ministerial-level forum that represents 189 member countries of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund, issued a communique in April 2021, stating,

“Strong international coordination is urgently needed to contain the impacts of the pandemic, resume progress toward countries’ development goals, and lay the groundwork for green, resilient, and inclusive development” (World Bank Group, 2021).

In this vein, and embedded into all other considerations shared in this paper, is a moral and ethical imperative to uphold the Agenda 2030 and its universal values, as laid out in the UN Sustainable Development Group's [Leave No One Behind](#) promise to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2019). For BBG evaluation programming, regardless of topic, building in considerations of vulnerable, marginalised, and disproportionately affected populations¹ should be a priority from the outset.

For these reasons, COVID-19 responses are arguably within scope for BBG/BBB evaluations.

2. DO NO HARM AND MINIMISE BURDEN

A priority underscored by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), OECD, and others is ensuring that both international assistance and evaluations of such efforts do not cause harm to the well-being or safety of staff, contractors, partners, communities, or interlocutors. Screening and regularly checking on the ethical implications of evaluation work should be built into evaluation plans and resourced appropriately (OECD/DAC and UNDP/IEO, 2020).

Similarly, it is important to minimise the burden on aid recipients, marginalised groups, and others, including evaluators, while ensuring voice and representation of all stakeholders. Respecting capacity and resource constraints may equate to changes in evaluation scope or approach, easing reporting frequency and other forms of flexibility.

Ways to minimise burden while ensuring that partners and vulnerable or marginalised stakeholder groups have a ‘seat at the table’ and are adequately heard and represented could include joint evaluations, utilising existing data and remote data gathering technology, joint monitoring and reporting (utilising the same reporting data for multiple donors), and supporting local evaluation capacity building.

3. SCOPING EVALUATIONS TO BE REALISTIC AND MANAGING SCOPE EXPECTATIONS

Focusing evaluations on BBG/BBB assistance and related topics poses practical challenges. It is simply not feasible for every COVID-19 recovery or BBG effort, or evaluations of such efforts, to cover every possible related issue. For instance, the SDGs span all major segments of society, from poverty to health and education. It is not practical or even desirable to consider all of society’s issues in one evaluation. Prioritisation is not only essential; it will bring more depth and clarity to the work and the findings.

“The lens of ‘do no harm’ should be applied to all evaluation work, as a matter of good practice, and requires attention in the current context. It may at times be preferable to not carry out evaluation when weighing risks with staff or partners.”

UNDP/IEO and OECD/DAC Evalnet (2020)
*Joint Guidance Note for Evaluation Units:
Good Practices During Covid-19*

4. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVALUATION TO STRENGTHEN BBG DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

International aid surrounding the pandemic will be needed for years to come. Ex-ante or early-stage evaluation can take advantage of the current window of opportunity to shape priorities, inform design, avoid unintended design or process flaws, and ensure that current best-in-class information is used. This window also offers an opportunity to manage expectations about timeframes, goals, impact, and what is indeed achievable is neither very clear nor predictable.

“It will take time to evaluate the impact of the damage to our economies and societies — and to rebuild them to be more sustainable and resilient. But only five years into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, we cannot wait to take the collective action that could make a difference.”

[Joint Statement of Angel Gurría, Secretary-General of OECD, and Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator: [COVID-19: How to avert the worst development crisis of this century](#), 9 April]

5. ACKNOWLEDGING THAT SOVEREIGN DOMESTIC DECISION MAKING AND LOCAL ACTION WILL LIKELY HAVE THE GREATEST INFLUENCE ON BBG OUTCOMES IN RECIPIENT COUNTRIES AND LOCAL AREAS

Although international donors provide much-needed support in response to need and demand, they do not have authority over countries’ national policy making or other domestic national or local decisions. The right to self-determination at all applicable levels takes precedence. More appropriate evaluations given this include could be partner-driven and in collaboration with partners (e.g. that look at partner-led policies, capacity building, and shared learning). The role of ODA in domestic BBG/BBB decisions and responses, and how partner countries think ODA could be most effective, may also be a valuable evaluation topic area.

It is wise, therefore, to have realistic expectations about what international efforts can achieve—and to design evaluations accordingly. This also relates to attribution (see consideration 6).

5. CONSIDERING EVALUATION OF SYSTEMS CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

In order to realise BBG goals and a healthier, more equitable, and sustainable future, transformational and fundamental shifts are needed in the human-driven systems that have caused and exacerbated our current crises. Evaluation of systems (and transformational) change involves a systems' lens¹³, suitable frameworks and approaches, and relevant change theories that are often less familiar to traditional evaluation units.

That said, all evaluations can be relevant to BBG if properly scoped and understood in terms of strengths, weakness, and limitations. For instance, a narrow, project-level evaluation can be useful if it is understood within a broader context of change and contextualised appropriately. This includes instances where projects do not deliver the outcomes hoped for, when innovations do not yield the desired results *the first time*, or when incremental change leads to the last step needed to reach a bigger systems-level 'tipping point'. Each of these examples (and evaluations thereof) can be very valuable for understanding and building momentum for systems change.

Creating a primer on systems change evaluation is beyond the scope of this study, and this report would be substantially longer if it were to try to do justice to this topic. The Coalition might consider discussing this topic and possibly commission a separate study on the topic as it relates to not only BBG but also all COVID-19 related evaluation. There are other resources that provide thoughtful discussion on systems change – and related transformational change (Williams et al., 2020; Uitto et al., 2019; van den Berg et al., 2019; Patton, 2020).

6. EMBRACING CONTRIBUTION AS THE NORM AND ATTRIBUTION AS THE EXCEPTION

Attribution of outcomes or impact to any (or all) international aid efforts will likely be difficult due to reasons discussed above and for practical reasons such as limited options for control/comparison groups. This is particularly true when evaluating outcomes at scale (beyond project or programme boundaries), at the systems level (sector, region, country, global), and evaluating longer-term outcomes that must ultimately be self-sustaining (and not reliant on international assistance).

Even evaluations of 'big picture' issues such as alignment of partner countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) with the Paris Agreement goals, or whether domestic BBG/BBB policies align with global best practice, should be approached carefully, given real-world constraints during a time of unprecedented crisis.

7. EMBRACING REALITY TO MAXIMISE BBG EVALUATION RELEVANCE AND EFFECTIVENESS

¹³ Seminal work in these areas can be found in Meadows (2008).

Maximising BBG evaluation relevance and effectiveness—especially for informing future BBG investments where the greatest contributions could be made—is likely to require rapid action, innovative approaches, and considerations of rigour, credibility, and accountability that accept and embrace reality.

Decisions and actions taken during a time of global crisis are different than ‘business as usual’.

Decisions on COVID-19 response and recovery have been and will continue to be made in real time. The problems and solutions are often not well defined or clearly understood, yet high-stakes decisions must be made based on (often limited) information, judgment calls, and leadership. It is not unlike wartime (and some areas of the world of course are in the midst of such conflicts), with resource constraints and incessant pressures to make difficult and rapid decisions with lives, livelihoods, and more in the balance. Policies, programmes, and practices have been and are still rapidly evolving, just like the Coronavirus that causes COVID-19 continues to mutate.

Evaluation should meet the world ‘where it is at’, including matching budget with scope, else it will not be relevant or fulfil its potential. Rarely, for example, will this mean taking 2-5 years to design and implement evaluations. By that time, the window of opportunity for relevance will have largely or entirely passed, and questions evaluations aimed to answer will be less relevant.

8. CONSIDERING IMPLICATIONS ON METHODS AND COMMUNICATION

In most cases, BBG evaluation—considering the interdependencies between social, economic, and environmental factors—will require mixed and non-traditional methods and ways of thinking about how change happens. Qualitative and quantitative methods, alternative ways of modelling, and embracing uncertainty are some of the capacities needed.

As put by UNDP and OECD, in times of information and content overload, traditional methods of disseminating evaluation findings can be unproductive. Practical options such as well-structured briefs and infographics can provide concise and practical information to audiences and are associated with higher knowledge translation by increasing information retention (OECD/DAC and UNDP Independent Evaluation Office, 2020).

The broader findings from the Coalition’s [*Synthesis of Early Lessons and Emerging Evidence on the Initial Covid-19 Pandemic Response and Recovery Efforts*](#) also found that institutions that were able to quickly adopt more flexible ways of working, or which had systems to support strategic adaptation already in place, were able to respond to emerging needs and balance new pandemic related priorities without losing sight of their core mandates.

In 2020 and 2021, the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) in collaboration with the OECD/DAC EvalNet and others created a very useful set of evaluation briefs and guidelines with these and other considerations in mind. Rather than repeat the content of these resources here, readers can access them on UNDP’s [Evaluation During COVID-19](#) webpage (UNDP, 2021). Coalition members may have suggestions on methods well suited for BBG evaluations, including rapid and (real) real-time evaluations, evidence syntheses, systems change evaluation, and ongoing learning collaborations.

9. CONSIDERING VARIATIONS ON ACCOUNTABILITY

Although accountability to funding recipients, beneficiaries, donors, the public/taxpayers, and other stakeholders is always important, BBG evaluations that primarily aim to assess accountability in a judgement-laden or similar ‘gotcha’ punitive manner may not be tapping into the highest potential evaluation use. Variations to traditional accountability frames may be useful to consider, such as:

- accountability to learning, including enabling nimble decision making and embracing mid-course adjustments;
- accountability to the needs of the ultimate beneficiaries and stakeholders *as defined by them*; and/or
- accountability to use of best available evidence and good practice accessible (at the time).

10. ACCEPTING LIMITATIONS WITHOUT APOLOGY, AND KEEPING THINGS SIMPLE

Evaluators work within contexts including organisational mandates, political priorities, and budget allocations. They are not typically in positions to make recommendations ‘in a vacuum’ and expect those recommendations to be followed. Like others, evaluators must be mindful about the scope and remit of their evaluation offices.

Further, there are no absolute or universal ‘right answers’ about how to BBG or to evaluate BBG-related work. We are all overwhelmed with the enormity of the current global situation and the challenge of contributing to solutions to the best of our ability. Despite the urgent nature of the problems, evaluators need not pressure themselves too much, nor let ‘the perfect be the enemy of the good’. The best minds in the world are actively working on addressing the pandemic and enabling a robust recovery in ways that avoid further damage, support other priorities, prevent similar crises in the future, and build long-term resilience.

No one has all the answers, and there may not be any ‘right’ answers yet. Yet, we can only do what we can, and this includes being practical and keeping things as simple as possible. The ideas shared in this paper and to be further explored by the Coalition and others going forward offer ways to advance thinking and practice.

V. NARROWING DOWN EVALUATION OPTIONS

Of the many types of evaluation, some may be more suitable for BBG evaluations than others, considering the multi-sectoral nature, ongoing developments, evolving knowledge base, and other reasons discussed above. Also, as with evaluation in general, BBG evaluation will be most useful if it is fit for purpose, with form following function. Being clear on the focus of the evaluation (e.g. intervention logic, noting that logic does not always keep up with changing context or learning) and intended evaluation use and audiences will hopefully drive what follows.

Below are options to consider for different stages and purposes, followed by a discussion on evaluation questions, frameworks, and tailoring BBG evaluations to be fit-for-purpose.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EX-ANTE OR EARLY DESIGN STAGE EVALUATIONS

- (a) If evaluations are intended to **inform decisions on priorities, funding, or design ex-ante or early on**, for instance on:
 - finance (amounts, purpose, possible results, risks, etc.),
 - prioritisation of focus, (e.g. location, sector, stakeholder group),
 - design of intervention, and/or
 - rationale for scope, budget and approach to monitoring, evaluation, and learning...
- (b) Then, given the evolving nature of the problems and options for action, **utilise *multiple* evaluative sources and perspectives**. Sources and analytical options could include:
 - Rapid evidence synthesis – including different kinds of research and data, not restricting only to peer reviewed literature or particular methods,
 - Evidence gap mapping (with same ‘broad brush’ as previous),
 - Review of grey literature and public opinion,
 - Analysis of barriers to progress and ‘tipping points’ needed for meaningful change,
 - Analysis of funding/programme landscape and related gaps and opportunities, and
 - Consultations with stakeholders and technical experts – reflecting a range of perspectives.
- (c) **Then, based on these inputs, identify options and possible outcomes, factoring in degree of uncertainty, level of confidence in approach and outcomes, and risks — including the risks of inaction or delay**. Several analytical options can be used for this, such as scenario planning and risk analysis. The intention is to inform decisions with full transparency, including around evidence/information gaps and uncertainties about results.

It is also critical to **make the case at this early stage for robust monitoring and evaluation with an emphasis on learning throughout implementation**. Designating at least five percent, but ideally ten percent (or in some cases perhaps more) of a budget toward these can make all the difference between success and failure. Why? The first reason is that the contextual factors such

as the ongoing immediate needs to stem and respond to the pandemic are likely to continue to change rapidly, as too will available data. More adaptive and 'leading edge' interventions will need to be nimble to stay current and relevant, and this requires active strategic learning and adaptation-response. Devoting sufficient resources to these at the programming levels can make the difference between interventions that affect minimal change from the status quo and those that catalyse breakthroughs.

EVALUATION OPTIONS AT DIFFERENT INTERVENTION STAGES

Below (in Table 2) are examples of other common evaluation types and the stages of interventions when they may be most relevant. This table is largely based on points made throughout this paper and also reflects the experience of the author who has been involved in several 'trailblazing' evaluations of complex global initiatives. The designations (high/medium/low BBG relevance and stage usefulness) are therefore subjective and as such need not be viewed as definitive guidance. Table 2 also does not provide an exhaustive list or assessment of options, and it does not cover methodologies which can be deployed across different types of evaluation.

Considering these caveats and limitations, options indicated with a star (★) *may* be the most promising for BBG given the complex and changing context and nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic and political instability, climate change, other global developments, and responses to all of these. Items in Table 2 with a check (✓) may also be useful in certain situations, but ultimately, as already noted, decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis. Additional options for how to approach and commission evaluations are discussed below.

Table 2. Illustrative list of evaluation types and their possible relevance to BBG at different levels and stages

<i>Evaluative options (may not be formal 'evaluations'):</i>	Level of Focus (BBG relevance: High, Med, Low)			Stage when most useful for BBG (Most useful = ★; possibly useful = ✓)			
	Project	Programme , Portfolio, Thematic	Meta, Systems	Ex- Ante*	Design *	Mid- Course	At end, ex-post
Evidence synthesis; gap analysis	H	H	H	★	★	★	✓
Evidence-based learning collaboration	H	H	H	★	★	★	✓
<i>Evaluation 'types'</i>							
Developmental	L	H	H		✓	★	
Formative	M	H	H		✓	★	
Process	H	H	M		★	★	★
Mid-term	H	H	M		✓	✓	
Impact	M	M	M		✓	✓	✓
Outcome	M	M	M				✓
Summative	M	M	M				★

*Ex-ante and design may or may not be the same. Investment/initiative design often occurs after (ex-ante) making the case for funding, priorities, etc., but also occurs simultaneously or afterward.

TABLE 2 ILLUSTRATIVE TYPES OF EVALUATION AND RELATED BBG CONSIDERATIONS

Two evaluation ‘types’ that may be highly useful and relevant for BBG are evidence synthesis, drawing on secondary data with a focus on recent research and practice, and developmental evaluation, which is a more ‘hands on’ approach suited to rapidly evolving and complex contexts where being nimble and responsive is key to effectiveness. Developmental evaluation is less familiar to many international aid organisations and requires different skills and methods. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has invested in a series of [pilot developmental evaluations](#) and has issued a set of useful resources on the subject, including [Implementing Developmental Evaluation: A Practical Guide For Evaluators And Administrators](#) (USAID, 2019).

On the more traditional and perhaps familiar end of the evaluation spectrum is **impact evaluation** using experimental or quasi-experimental methods.¹⁴ This may have utility for a limited set of BBG interventions (e.g. community-level projects aimed at behaviour change in support of a particular hypothesis) and evaluation purposes (e.g. understanding why a behaviour change has or has not occurred) where specific evaluation design criteria such as suitable control or comparison groups are attainable. In these instances, it is still critical to check assumptions about relevance to BBG outcomes (beyond, for example, measurable behaviour change), external validity, and general applicability at higher and more complex scales.

Table 3 explores these three illustrative evaluation ‘types’, considering the context of BBG. Many evaluation options, be they approaches (e.g. utilisation-focused), ‘types’ (e.g. ex-ante, summative), or methods (e.g. theory-based, experimental) are available.

Joint evaluation is a promising approach that could apply to any type of BBG evaluation including those in Table 3. Joint evaluations are co-led or managed by multiple partners based on shared interests. They may enable a broader scope of analysis, including multiple interventions and their relationship to system-wide change. Joint evaluations may also reduce burden including evaluation redundancy for implementing partners and other stakeholders. Coordination, management, and pooled procurement systems can be a challenge; however, a recent article “From evaluation of joint programmes to joint evaluation of SDGs-ready interventions” makes a case that joint evaluations can be as timely and efficient as standard evaluations provided that processes are streamlined and management structures are kept simple (Carugi and Bryant, 2021).

¹⁴ There are other kinds of impact evaluation that use different methods. Here the discussion focuses on the subset of impact evaluations that utilize experimental or quasi-experimental methods.

Table 3. Illustrative Evaluation ‘types’ and considerations for BBG evaluations

Approach	Brief description	Suitable for / when	Other considerations
Evidence synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gathering of relevant evidence on particular research/strategy questions Based on screening criteria (what constitutes ‘evidence’; grey literature included/excluded) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence and related data are available Evidence is rapidly evolving Different research methods, contexts, data, etc. can inform evidence base When evidence varies or clashes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fit-for-purpose and flexible Broad relevance for across BBG focus areas Well suited for external collaboration Can be rapid Language constraints; paywall barriers for many sources
Developmental evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hands-on, and emergent, typically using qualitative and mixed methods Evaluators/evaluation is partially or entirely embedded in strategy development and implementation Helpful when influence, progress, and outcomes are not measurable (or will never be public or in writing) Typically (but not always) less quantitative Not ‘independent’ – evaluator is part of the intervention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergent social-change initiatives and complex systems change work When evidence base is weak or rapidly evolving beyond ability to monitor or predict Major strategy pivot points Investments that require ongoing innovation and adaptation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High suitability for rapidly evolving movement building, advocacy, and other efforts that cannot be measured and/or where decisions need to be made without ideal data Broad applicability for BBG Intense and not easy to do effectively Often resource and time intensive with ‘hands on’ engagement Usually long evaluation period Takes special skillset; hard to find seasoned developmental evaluators (esp. with climate expertise)
Impact evaluation (experimental or quasi-experimental methods)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses experimental (randomised control trial) or quasi-experimental evaluation methods Compares a treatment group to a valid comparison (control) group Typically relies on frequentist assumptions and methods; Bayesian is far less common but compelling in contexts with uncertainties and unknowns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of a programme’s effectiveness is lacking Alternative approaches are considered; piloting can test effectiveness and inform scale up It is ethical to have a control group Variables can be controlled or accounted for and outcomes can be accurately measured Accurate baseline can be identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considered by some to be evaluation ‘gold standard’ and only credible basis for evidence Considered by others to be irrelevant if not detrimental to complex systems change work (including climate change interventions) Typically resource and time intensive Worth considering if feasible for innovative, replicable, untested, and influential investments Likely a sound option for a small proportion of BBG investments that focus on evaluating measurable interim outcomes and factor in oft overlooked assumptions; e.g. about external validity (and time-context validity)

VI. ON EVALUATION QUESTIONS, TOPICS, AND FRAMEWORKS

Evaluation questions are the core of most evaluations, and indeed they are essential to think through carefully, as seasoned evaluators (including those reading this report) know well. A prudent step to take prior to initiating any evaluation is to considering evaluation questions and their evaluability to fulfil the purpose of the evaluation for the target audience. This may be even more so in the case of BBG-related evaluations.

Before offering some starting-point questions for BBG evaluations, readers are encouraged to consider common **evaluation question pitfalls that may be more likely to apply to BBG evaluations**:

1. Posing too many questions, including sub questions
2. Not asking the right questions
3. Not tailoring questions for priority audiences
4. Deciding on questions before knowing if they are sufficiently evaluable
5. Question rigidity

Approaches that may help to avoid and manage these pitfalls include evaluability assessments, limiting the number and scope of questions, tailoring questions to the needs of *one* priority audience, building in reasonable flexibility around adapting questions, and regularly communicating about the ability to answer questions as expected. (see Table 4).

It is possible that these pitfalls will not apply to any particular BBG evaluation. However, awareness of pitfall possibilities, thoughtful planning, and proactive communication, can mitigate the risk of not answering questions to the satisfaction of key audiences, thereby undermining evaluation utility and credibility. Building precautionary measures into evaluation plans, such as reasonable evaluation question flexibility and a process for communicating and approving changing contexts and assumptions about evaluability, may simply be prudent across the board.

Separate from evaluation questions themselves, another common pitfall is inopportune evaluation timing (e.g. evaluation findings relevant to decision making surfacing after decisions have been made). This study does not go into this or other common pitfalls, but they can make all the difference in evaluation utility, credibility, and demand.

Table 4. Five common evaluation question pitfalls and their possible relevance to BBG evaluations

Common pitfall	Possible relevance for BBG
<p>1. Posing too many questions, including sub-questions</p> <p>Each question and sub-questions can take on ‘a life of its own’, increasing scope and complexity. Some recommend limiting evaluations to no more than three questions (with no hidden sub questions).</p>	<p>Given the complex, cross-cutting, and evolving nature of BBG, BBG evaluations will understandably strive to analyse multiple angles, sectors, systems, etc. This will likely result in pressure to have more (and more) evaluation questions covering more (and more) topics.</p> <p>Resisting and managing expectations around this ‘more more more’ pressure will be key.</p>
<p>2. Not asking the right questions</p> <p>Questions that are unclear, off topic—not getting at the core issues, lacking sufficient focus or granularity, inactionable (answers cannot be acted upon), or narrowly project-focused and short-sighted (lacking broader thinking and relevance).</p>	<p>Getting the questions right may be particularly difficult for BBG, given likely challenges surrounding attribution, and identifying questions that are specific, timely, and relevant for the intended evaluation uses/audiences.</p> <p>It may be not even possible to know the right questions at the outset of an evaluation. An evaluability assessment will likely help, as will building in the ability to adapt questions during the early evaluation stages (see also, pitfall 5).</p>
<p>3. Not tailoring questions for priority audiences</p> <p>Having too many audiences, not satisfying expectations of priority audience(s), or potentially any audience.</p>	<p>With BBG, there are likely many audiences, each with their own interests or priorities. It will be easy to overcommit and underdeliver on hopes and expectations of interested stakeholders and possible audiences.</p> <p>Identifying up front the most important audience (without slipping into a many ‘secondary audiences’ trap) will help, as will reiterating the target audience and managing expectations throughout the process (avoiding audience-scope creep).</p>
<p>4. Deciding on questions before knowing if they are sufficiently evaluable</p> <p>The information available or that can be collected may not be sufficient for answering the questions confidently (or at all). This can depend on the methods used and required/sought after level of rigor and confidence.</p> <p>Also, the time or resources required to collect information may exceed budget or scope.</p>	<p>Given that BBG evaluations are likely to look at multiple dimensions or angles, and rely on mixed methods and a range of data sources, evaluability may be harder to predict or plan for. The likelihood that questions are harder to answer than anticipated seems higher than for relatively narrow-in-scope evaluations.</p> <p>Evaluators are not to blame for a lack of available data, inherent challenges associated with accessing existing data, or for what data limitations inevitably mean for drawing conclusions or conclusively answering evaluation questions. Evaluators are, however, responsible for understanding and planning around the limitations of available data managing expectations accordingly.</p> <p>Conducting evaluability assessments early on should help, as should regular check ins with evaluation commissioners, reference groups, and key audiences to adjust plans and expectations as evaluations unfold.</p>
<p>5. Question rigidity</p> <p>The starting point evaluation questions, including questions identified in an evaluation inception phase or plan, may ultimately not be the optimal questions. This may come to light as evaluations are designed or implemented.</p> <p>Focusing on accountability to the questions (or the evaluation plan) over accountability to learning can undermine the value of the evaluation.</p>	<p>BBG evaluations will likely involve learning-by-doing, given the evolving nature of the challenge, emerging evidence, and rapidly evolving lessons from experience.</p> <p>While professional standards and accountability should apply to all evaluations, question rigidity and rote ‘stick to the plan’ thinking are not likely to serve most BBG evaluations well.</p> <p>Helpful ways beyond evaluability assessments could be building reasonable question flexibility into the plan (and a process for communicating implications of question shifts with commissioners and key audiences).</p>

On Evaluation Frameworks

There are a number of possible frameworks for BBG evaluation work, including the revised OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria (see Figure 1) considering guidance on use of these Criteria to:

- Promote “an interconnected approach to the criteria, including examination of synergies and trade-offs”;
- Use the criteria in a thoughtful and contextualised way, noting that “evaluation questions (what you are trying to find out) and what you intend to do with the answers, should inform how the criteria are specifically interpreted and analysed”; and, importantly,
- Avoid applying the criteria mechanistically: “The use of the criteria depends on the purpose of the evaluation” ...“according to the needs of the relevant stakeholders and the context of the evaluation... ...Data availability, resource constraints, timing, and methodological considerations **may also influence how (and whether) a particular criterion is covered**” (OECD/DAC EvalNet, 2019, emphasis added).

Figure 1. Revised OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria



Source: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm>

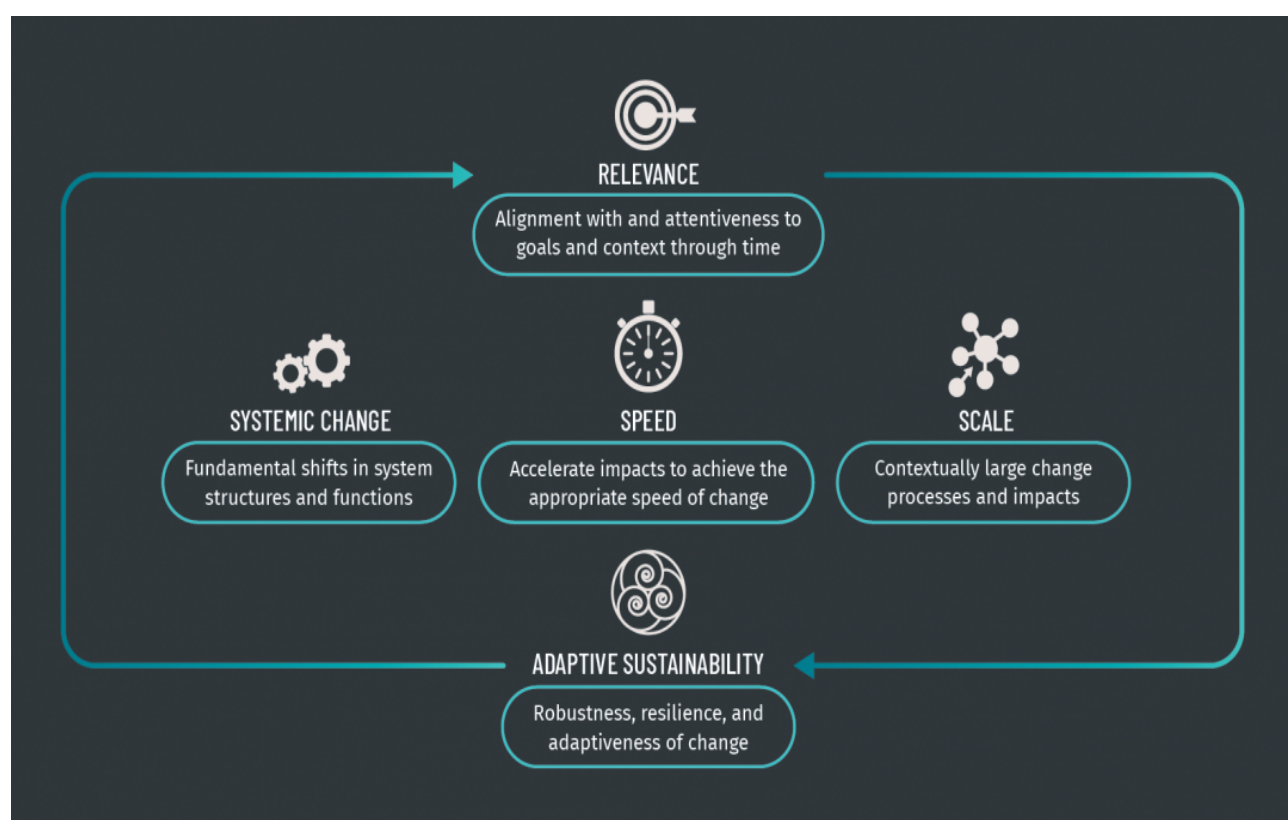
Consistent with this guidance, using the OECD/DAC Evaluation Criteria for accountability-focused evaluation purposes may be the most common application historically, but for BBG evaluations, as already discussed, accountability as it is traditionally considered as a primary evaluation focus could be reconsidered. There is no reason why the DAC criteria cannot also support learning-oriented evaluations.

That said, all frameworks naturally have limitations, and no single framework need be the only one considered for evaluations of BBG. Further, in response to critics of the DAC Evaluation Criteria including for BBG purposes or evaluations of systems change or transformational change, I offer the following: This debate unnecessarily and counterproductively undermines a field that should instead be coming together at a time when our skills, intentions, and commitment to

making real contributions to much-needed change are (as they should be) more united than they are divided.

Another framework among others to be aware of are the dimensions of Transformational Change developed by the Climate Investment Funds' Transformational Change Learning Partnership (TCLP) (see Figure 2). This framework is geared for initiatives explicitly aimed at catalysing or advancing deep systems transformational change.¹⁵ The TCLP has identified five dimensions of transformational change that must be attended to or present for there to be confidence that climate actions are transformational. The five dimensions—Relevance, Systemic Change, Speed, Scale, and Adaptive Sustainability—vary in emphasis and significance based on context and timing, but all must be present to some degree for change to be considered transformational.

Figure 2. Dimensions of Transformational Change from the Transformational Change Learning Partnership



Source: <https://www.climateinvestmentfunds.org/tclp>

¹⁵ The TCLP's working definition of transformational change in climate action is: Fundamental change in systems relevant to climate action with large-scale positive impacts that shift and accelerate the trajectory of progress towards climate neutral, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development pathways. See CIF (2021).

ILLUSTRATIVE EVALUATION QUESTIONS BY OECD/DAC EVALUATION CRITERIA

Below are illustrative evaluation questions clustered by the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria. These are illustrative examples and not an attempt to be comprehensive.

RELEVANCE

- To what extent and how is the *design of* initiatives aligned with BBG priorities and good practices (such as ‘do no harm’)? To what extent is design relevance maintained or improved over time to ensure this alignment is optimised?
- To what extent are BBG funds directed to where the needs are the greatest, considering the Leave No One Behind Agenda and other considerations including disproportional impacts of COVID-19, climate change, etc. on women, youth, Indigenous Peoples?
- To what extent do *implementation and related processes* (e.g. decision making on mid-course adjustments and participatory approaches) align with BBG priorities and good practices?
- What are the risks or impacts of design or implementation misalignment with BBG priorities and good practices? How can such risks/impacts be mitigated or addressed?
- How can design or implementation plans be improved to strengthen alignment with BBG considerations and outcomes?
- To what extent are initiatives strategically designed to advance steps toward or realise tipping points needed to enable systems / transformational change?

COHERENCE¹⁶

- To what extent is the initiative aligned with related recovery efforts or BBG developments that could affect the direction of or influence of the initiative?
- What, if any, are the risks or benefits of duplication of efforts?
- What, if any, are the risks or benefits of relationships to other efforts?
- What are other possible donors intending or wishing to do in these areas? How and when to work in partnership and co-ordination with these donors?

EFFECTIVENESS AND SPEED

- To what extent is finance being mobilised to meet BBG needs?
- To what extent is BBG finance/programming/intervention implementation materialising at the right times and speed to meet needs and maximise opportunities?

¹⁶ See also the extensive discussion on evaluating coherency in the parallel scoping study commissioned by the COVID10 Global Evaluation Coalition (Drew 2021-Draft).

- What, if any, barriers have hindered scaling up of finance in the areas of greatest need? Can/How can these barriers be addressed?
- What evidence is there that the interventions (finance, technical assistance, diplomacy, international pressure, etc.) are advancing progress toward BBG goals (as defined for each evaluation)?
- To what extent are there unintended trade-offs between priorities/financing/programming?
- What are the risks associated with providing finance?
- How can risks be mitigated/managed?
- To what extent should finance be channelled bilaterally vs. through multilateral systems?
- What are the opportunity costs of financing in these areas versus others?
- Is this window of opportunity immediate and fleeting? Is it urgent, or can it wait?
- How are decisions changing in response to COVID-19 and BBG considerations?
- How is implementation changing in response to COVID-19 and BBG considerations?

SUSTAINABILITY¹⁷

- To what extent will the benefits be continued in the post-COVID period?
- To what extent are the interventions contributing to enduring changes in systems?

EVALUATION META LEARNING AND COLLABORATION

- Are evaluation norms, methods, collective intelligence, and lessons from experience evolving in ways that affect BBG evaluation planning, implementation, or use?
- How are findings from evaluation being used (or not used)? How can evaluation planning, information, or communication be improved?

¹⁷ Sustainability as defined by either the DAC sustainability criterion or the TCLP dimensions of adaptive sustainability, poses particular challenges. *This is because the term ‘sustainability’ is not understood or used consistently, and neither definition used by these two frameworks fits with the use of the same term with regards to the environmental sustainability or the Sustainable Development Goals.*

The helpful 2021 OECD Guidance on Applying Evaluation Criteria thoughtfully includes a discussion that underscores the importance of clarifying how the term is being used in an evaluation: “Confusion can arise between sustainability in the sense of the continuation of results, and environmental sustainability or the use of resources for future generations. While environmental sustainability is a concern (and may be examined under several criteria, including relevance, coherence, impact and sustainability), the primary meaning of the criteria [sic] is not about environmental sustainability as such; when describing sustainability, evaluators should be clear on how they are interpreting the criterion.” (OECD, 2021d). Ultimately, giving only cursory attention to the Sustainability Criterion (or TCLP dimension of Adaptive Sustainability) does not do this topic justice. Further work on this topic, its implications, and possible next steps for further analysis could be quite productive.

- How are evaluators collaborating with each other, across organisations and evaluation units, and with non-evaluators, to maximise opportunities for learning and joint work? What are the emerging trends, breakthroughs, thought leadership examples, and impacts of this work?

ON MATCHING EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND TOPICS

The potential scope of BBG evaluations is immense, spanning a wide array of social, economic, and environmental sectors and areas of focus. Further, the interrelationships between related sectors and topics are at the centre of what BBG evaluations will examine.

These two issues pose a challenge in terms of scope and guidance around topic areas. This paper does not try to offer specific guidance around topic selection which should be fit-for-purpose, considering the type of intervention, existing evidence and confidence levels (e.g. around design, decision making, and action), and the specific evaluation purpose and audience. It may be helpful to simply acknowledge the challenge surrounding the scope of BBG-related initiatives and evaluating them (acknowledging that the extent of this challenge will vary) and accept the necessity to focus evaluations to be focused and scope limited in order to be manageable and sufficiently deep into the focused questions and topics, despite this equating to not answering all important questions.

VII. THE WAY AHEAD

The following ideas explore options for the COVID-19 Coalition members and others thinking about how to evaluate BBG, whether under the rubric of ‘evaluation’ or simply because this is one of the quintessential challenges—and opportunities—of our time.

These options, or ‘light’ recommendations, are for consideration only. Each organisation, or collaboration, will undoubtedly want to choose its own way forward.

Options for consideration:

1. **Continue to meet as a Working Group and to share evaluation plans, metrics, findings, and lessons:** The Coalition Secretariat and participants can continue to identify and share evaluation tools and products, quickly, widely, and in formats (and languages) tailored to the intended audiences and to have the broadest reach and influence possible. This could include ‘endorsing’ or developing and sharing best-in-class BBG/BBB monitoring data, analytical tools, approaches, and related M&E/MEL good practices, principles, and guidance.
2. **Keep evaluations as simple as possible.** Consider starting with a few questions that are evaluable, actionable, and can be answered at the right time to make a real difference. This is how evaluators can keep up with a rapidly evolving world where decisions are being made all the time, with or without evaluation.

3. **Conduct joint evaluations when it adds value.** As put by one Coalition member during a consultation for this study, joint work offers opportunities for innovation, prioritisation, affordability, and ultimately more successful and effective work.
4. **Engage more voices beyond evaluators or evaluation units** in ways such as:
 - Inviting individuals from partner (funding recipient) entities and local stakeholders, respecting capacity constraints and making it clear that any involvement is optional. Stipends may be appropriate to offer and would likely enable more participation.
 - Inviting teams within the Coalition members' organisations/agencies from the 'programme' side, who are doing related research, analysis, and (importantly) overseeing decisions around BBG investment priorities, budgets, programme/project design, etc.
 - Reaching out to external experts doing work in this area, many of whom are cited in this report (e.g. members of Global Recovery Observatory team at the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment), considering both those working on 'green' issues *and those working on highly relevant issues that are not categorised as 'green' per se* (e.g. decisions on COVID-19 response budget allocations) as decisions in the overarching areas of finance and COVID-19 recovery have profound implications for BBG finance and impact (positive or negative).
5. **Use the Coalition's voice and intentions to encourage donors and other global actors to minimise M&E burden on beneficiaries (and evaluators).** Reducing the evaluation burden is a key principle of the Coalition – recognising that now is not the time to impose new reporting or other requirements on capacity constrained agencies or individuals. The Coalition participants can use their collective voice to support donors in this direction. There are ways to build upon existing data and reporting, or to be flexible in terms of the time or frequency of reporting.² An additional option to consider would be building capacity for BBG evaluation/evaluators, especially for local/recognizing that now is not the time to impose new reporting or other requirements on capacity constrained agencies or individuals. The Coalition participants can use their collective voice to support donors in this direction. There are ways to build upon existing data and reporting, or to be flexible in terms of the time or frequency of reporting.¹⁸ An additional option to consider would be building capacity for BBG evaluation/evaluators, especially for local and regional evaluators.
6. **Expand Coalition capacity**, in ways such as:
 - Increasing involvement by inviting or recruiting more members from evaluation offices/agencies, including from other entities such as philanthropies, think tanks, academic institutions, and civil society organisations;
 - Increasing secretariat capacity and function (e.g. number of people; time commitment). Options might include a rotating secretariat role/commitment; sharing secretariat

¹⁸ Notably, information provided as part of routine monitoring and reporting historically has not answered many important questions, and this lesson may be helpful to keep in mind.

functions and responsibilities across organisations; or creating a quasi-independent secretariat function; and

- Increasing the Coalition's budget (beyond dedicated secretariat capacity) to enable additional commissioning and/or conducting of analytical work, and enhance communication (outreach, dissemination, and uptake).

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ANNEX 2. ON DIRECT AND INDIRECT PROGRAMMING/FUNDING RELATIONSHIPS (AND IMPLICATIONS ON INFLUENCE)

Direct relationships involve having clear authority and/or direct influence over relevant policies, programmes, and ultimately outcomes/impacts. Examples could include having decision making authority over programme design and implementation in partner countries, or providing support under the condition that particular priorities and implementation criteria are met and verified.

Indirect relationships involve the possibility of informing, influencing, or providing capacity-related support for those who have direct authority and influence. Examples could include providing technical or financial assistance to a recipient country agency or authority—for instance to support domestic commitments such as the NDCs in support of the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2021). In many if not most cases relevant to this study, donor countries/agencies may have more of an indirect relationship.

Broadly speaking, irrespective of whether the relationships are direct or indirect, the subject matter that falls under the ‘BBG’ scope is wide ranging and context- or purpose-specific, for three reasons:

1. Relevance of ‘environmental’ or ‘green’ work (or desired outcomes) is a vast topic area, ranging from toxins to indoor air pollution to biodiversity loss to habitat conservation to urban transport to waste management to supply chains- and so on. The vast range of problems that are trying to be addressed means that there is no ‘one size fits all’ topic area for ‘green’ work.
2. There is widespread understanding that addressing ‘green’ challenges requires also addressing the human drivers of and relationships to these challenges, including underlying socio-economic drivers; political, institutional, social, and behavioural, and technical barriers; and related inequities and contributing power dynamics. In other words, ‘green’ issues are really only ‘green’ – they are primarily human-centred and human-driven, and even if they are not, the solutions worth investing in must be.
3. The relevance of COVID-19 (and COVID-19 response and recovery efforts) and ‘green’ issues/topics is similarly vast and wide-ranging, of course involving immense suffering and millions of deaths, and interacting with our social systems, economies, livelihood options, and also natural resources systems in profound and diverse ways.
4. Efforts not falling under the rubrics of ‘green recovery’ or specifically related to COVID-19 also often have a relationship to the broader ‘BBG’ scope, including programmes that have been underway for some time and those including much of the work on making progress toward the SDGs and other global priorities that are not specifically COVID-19 targeted but still relate.
5. Efforts relevant to both ‘green’ issues and COVID-19 response and recovery fall not only under the formal titles or programmes related to either of these terms. Other programmes not focused

on ‘green’ issues or COVID-19 can have negative (or positive) influences on the ‘environmental’ side of things.

*These above points are not intended to suggest that it is impossible or not feasible to narrow down the subject or focus of BBG-related initiatives or evaluations of these. It is possible and feasible. These points are rather to explain why **the overarching BBG scope is potentially vast and inherently complicated, and underscoring the need for BBG evaluations to be carefully scoped and focused.***

¹ Including women and girls, Indigenous Peoples, youth, and others hit hardest by the pandemic, climate change, and unequal access to education, health care, and viable and sustainable livelihood options.

² Notably, information provided as part of routine monitoring and reporting historically has not answered many important questions, and this lesson may be helpful to keep in mind.