



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

CONTEXT-SENSITIVE REMOTE MONITORING: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

Key messages

Cordaid, a non-governmental relief and development organisation, has developed context- and conflict-sensitive remote monitoring guidelines. Mixing methods, triangulation and digital data collection have allowed Cordaid to reduce reporting gaps and ensure data was of sufficient quality. Good relations with grassroots organisations are instrumental. Bias needs to be avoided, especially when considering access to the technology used for monitoring.

Keywords

[Crises, fragility and humanitarian assistance](#) | [Global goods and challenges](#) | [Risk management](#)

Key partner

[Civil society organisation](#)

Challenge

Crisis situations such as the Covid-19 pandemic, conflicts, and natural and man-made disasters often make project monitoring challenging. High security risks, costs or the unacceptable burden for project monitors make their access to implementation sites impossible or very infrequent. This can affect the reliability and quality of monitoring data and reporting that are essential for decision making, adapting the intervention where needed, drawing lessons and enabling accountability.

Approach

The international development and emergency relief non-governmental organisation, Cordaid, based in the Netherlands, has developed guidelines for remote project monitoring. Cordaid started by disseminating good practices from its own operations as well as those of other organisations. It then went on to distil these into guidelines containing detailed instructions on how to conduct quality remote monitoring and options for different contexts. Key principles include:

- **Identifying existing, alternative data sources** that could replace or complement primary data collection.

- **Using mixed methods to increase data validity**, looking for complementary methods rather than duplication of proof.
- **Collecting evidence as much as possible via digital data collection methods.** Data from emails and messaging apps can easily be exported. Consider using secondary sources that provide “hard” evidence such as global positioning systems (GPS), photographs and videos.
- **Developing a remote verification plan** including tasks and documentation demonstrating that each activity occurred to the quality agreed upon by Cordaid and the implementing organisation.
- **Including the most difficult to reach** such as those having little access to technology.
- **Developing risk assessments and mitigation plans with partners** to ensure the safety of staff and the communities they work with.
- **Using existing relationships to triangulate prices, trends and issues**, for example with community-based monitors, agents, vendors or leaders.

Results

Projects have integrated remote monitoring practices into their monitoring, evaluation and learning plans, both at the proposal stage as well as the implementation phase. These changes are primarily due to the large dissemination of the guidelines and the clear direction on remote monitoring arrangements provided by Cordaid’s Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (PMEAL) team at the bidding and proposal stage of development projects.

Fewer reporting gaps have been identified in Cordaid’s database since the application of the guidelines and there have been fewer delays in meeting reporting deadlines. The data that has been collected is of sufficient quality.

Monitoring and evaluation risks due to context or conflict restrictions are becoming part of the quarterly risk matrix and country offices are more aware of the risks of underreporting and inferior data.

Lessons learnt

- **Contact different people through various techniques**, such as via community volunteers or youth leaders. Remote selection of key informants is prone to bias. If key informants have not been verified independently, their feedback may not be impartial.
- **Phone-based interviews are the most user-friendly tool**, suitable for both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Ensure telephones are accessible and safe to use.
- **Be aware of bias** through gender, literacy, age, people living with disabilities, or wealth factors that can influence access to and use of technology (e.g. smartphones).
- **Good relations with grassroots organisations are instrumental** for obtaining access to target groups and including the voice of partners and civil society organisations in remote monitoring. This can help gather useful contacts and get a representative sample, even when restrictions occur suddenly.
- **Remote monitoring can save costs.** Once a good relationship has been established, it can replace some, but not all, field visits.

- **Safety of staff and communities are always a priority over data collection.** In-depth surveys or case studies require on-site presence. However, household surveys or post-distribution monitoring could be done remotely if travel is challenging.

Further information

Cordaid website, <https://www.cordaid.org/en>.

Dianne van Oosterhout, PMEAL manager Cordaid, Dianne.vanOosterhout@cordaid.org.

Supplementary Material - Cordaid Remote monitoring guidelines, <https://www.slideshare.net/secret/n8A8EV9PV82jEu>.

Supplementary Material - Presentation Cordaid on learning, <https://www.slideshare.net/secret/FtltE1moeiMhg>.

OECD resources

OECD, *Results in development co-operation*, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/results-development>.

Last updated: 29-06-2021