SECURE
ACCESS IN
VOLATILE
ENVIRONMENTS

SAVE

Eyes and Ears on the Ground: Monitoring aid in insecure environments

By Julia Steets, Elias Sagmeister and Lotte Ruppert
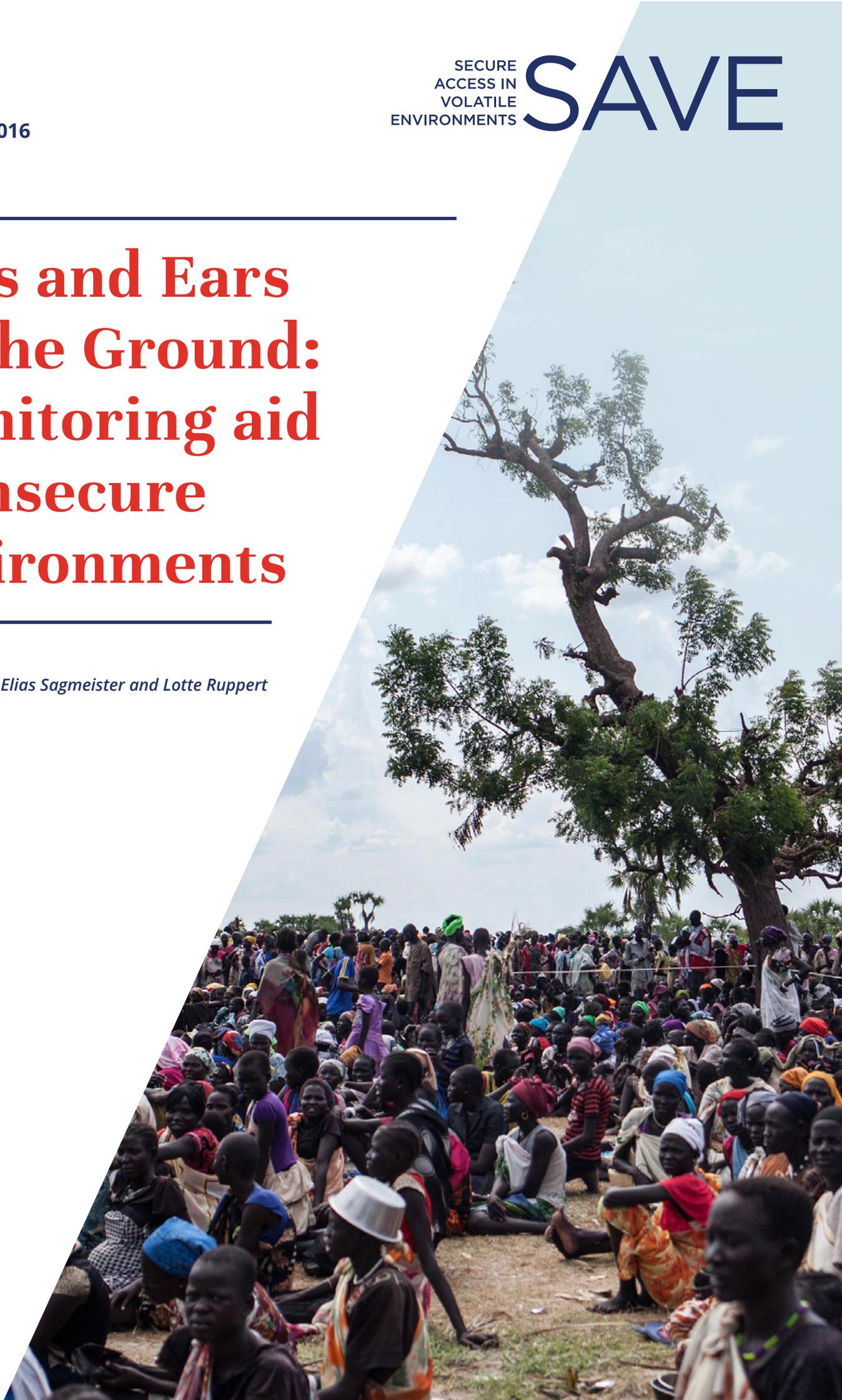
**Humanitarian
Outcomes**

GPPi

GLOBAL PUBLIC POLICY
INSTITUTE

UKaid
from the British people

Table of Contents

Acronyms

ACTED	**Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development**
ADESO	**African Development Solutions**
BRCiS	**Building Resilient Communities in Somalia Consortium**
CHF	**Common Humanitarian Fund**
DRC	**Danish Refugee Council**
GPPi	**Global Public Policy Institute**
GPS	**Global Positioning System**
INGO	**International Non-Governmental Organisation**
IRC	**International Rescue Committee**
IVR	**Interactive Voice Response**
M&E	**Monitoring and Evaluation**
M&R	**Monitoring and Reporting**
NGO	**Non-Governmental Organisation**
NRC	**Norwegian Refugee Council**
OCHA	**UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs**
ODK	**Open Data Kit**
OECD/DAC	**Organisations for Economic Cooperation Development/ Development Assistance Committee**
QR (code)	**Quick Response (code)**

SAVE	Secure Access in Volatile Environments
SMS	Short Message Service
TOR	Terms of Reference
TPM	Third Party Monitoring
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

This research aimed to improve the monitoring of humanitarian assistance in insecure environments with a focus on Afghanistan, South Central Somalia, South Sudan and Syria. It had two main goals: first, to assess available options for aid agencies to monitor assistance, given the constraints that insecurity entails, and second, to identify principles of good practice and particular aspects where monitoring approaches could be improved.

METHODS

The research used a participatory and applied research approach to allow for direct uptake and utilisation of research results. In each of the four focus countries, learning partners were identified through a process of in-country consultation. The learning partners represent a mix of national and international NGOs as well as UN organisations providing humanitarian assistance. In collaboration with the partners, the team developed a specific research agenda for each country that guided in-country and global-level research. The following methods were used:

- Review of more than 300 publications on M&E in insecure contexts;
- Online survey of 190 M&E experts and practitioners in the four focus countries (60 in Afghanistan, 63 in Somalia, 42 in South Sudan, 25 in Turkey/Jordan for the Syria response);
- Community consultations through 121 individual interviews and 65 focus group discussions with community members in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria;[1]
- A structured survey to gather evidence on whether and how crisis-affected populations are consulted about the aid they receive (as part of an earlier phase of the SAVE research on presence and coverage), which garnered 3313 responses across the four countries;
- Semi-structured interviews with 73 global-level experts, 297 experts in countries, 37 per cent of whom were women;
- At least three rounds of workshops in all focus countries including M&E professionals from aid and donor agencies.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION PRACTICE IN INSECURE SETTINGS NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

In all four countries, there is a widespread perception that M&E systems need to be improved. In a survey with M&E experts and practitioners, some 37 per cent of aid agencies reported to be "not so satisfied" or "not satisfied at all" with their own M&E system. Dissatisfaction is higher among those funding others to implement activities: 55 per cent of agencies working through partners are "not so satisfied" or "not satisfied at all" with their partners' M&E systems. The further an organisation is from the field, the greater is the demand for monitoring systems and the higher its concerns about it. The majority of the UN agencies from the four setting were 'not so satisfied' with their own M&E systems. INGOs are slightly more positive in their assessment as around two-thirds find their own M&E satisfactory. National NGOs are the most positive.

---

[1] In Afghanistan, the Peace Training and Research Organisation (PTRO) undertook community consultations and field Camille Hennion supported field research. In Somalia, Nisar Majid led community consultations and Camille Hennion conducted additional research. In Syria, Proximity International in cooperation with a GPPi team implemented field research. John Caccavale implemented the research in South Sudan.

Practitioners see a lack of capacities as the biggest constraint to better M&E. This relates in particular to a lack of skilled staff and technical knowledge on M&E within aid agencies and their partners. In addition, a lack of willingness to share data and increase the cooperation between agencies in these settings constrains the effectiveness of M&E.

The study found that current monitoring systems in the insecure contexts studied are best suited for ensuring accountability to donors and tax payers, for verifying immediate outputs and for providing information to operational decision-makers (see also, DFID 2010, 2012). In contrast, current monitoring systems are perceived as largely inadequate for achieving accountability to affected populations. In addition, monitoring systems are comparatively weak at showing aggregated and country-wide effects, impact on conflict drivers, and demonstrating longer term impact.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR EFFECTIVE MONITORING IN INSECURE SETTINGS

Humanitarian agencies have been working with different approaches to mitigate gaps in current practice and to address the challenges posed by insecurity. This research focused on three of those, as prioritised with learning partners in countries: responding to community feedback in insecure settings; utilising third parties to monitor where access is constrained; and using technologies for monitoring. In addition, the research assessed opportunities for combining verification exercises with capacity development in South Sudan and explored the potential for simplifying monitoring processes by reducing redundancies and collection of superfluous data in Somalia. Detailed thematic reports on each topic can be found online at SAVEresearch.net.

The research identified the following lessons and principles of good practice:

1.   Invest more in communicating with and involving communities.

Regular communication with communities can enable agencies to gain local support and to improve programme quality (Haver & Carter, 2016). Where access is constrained and opportunities for informal and spontaneous personal interactions with communities are rare, it is critical to offer alternative communication channels to communities. As one interviewee put it, there are fewer opportunities for 'drinking tea' with communities and fewer opportunities for exchange. Aid agencies therefore use various media to collect and respond to feedback in insecure settings, but many struggle to make these mechanisms effective. This is due to a variety of reasons, including an inability to reach aid recipients as compared to gatekeepers and other community leaders, a multiplicity of channels that reflects poor coordination and results in confusion for local communities, and a lack of strategic engagement with communities at critical points in the planning cycle, as well as inadequate feedback loops.

Effectively collecting and responding to feedback in insecure settings does not require radically different approaches compared to less insecure operational contexts. Rather than reinventing the wheel, aid agencies should adhere to standard good practice for feedback mechanisms.[2] This involves asking communities about their communication preferences at the onset of a project and combining technology with more traditional approaches. This research found very few cases where this good practice was applied in order to put functioning feedback systems in place.

---

[2] **Annex 9 provides an overview of relevant literature on community involvement in M&E and practitioners guidance. For more details, see: Ruppert, L., Sagmeister, E. and Steets, J. (2016). Listening to Communities in Insecure Environments: Lessons From Community Feedback Mechanisms in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria (report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).**

But the demand for more-direct communication and inclusive programming processes cannot be met with better feedback mechanisms alone. A broader set of approaches is needed in insecure settings, such as providing communities with timely and reliable information on the crisis situation and on available humanitarian services. Inter-agency or collaborative feedback systems can be helpful to collect, aggregate and analyse feedback, and to collect overall data on community perceptions. However, in addition to some examples of good practice, this research also found widespread concerns about sharing negative feedback data with peers and donors that need to be addressed. Multiple stakeholders need to work together to enhance communication with affected populations. Donors should encourage closed feedback loops, which can be supported by third parties that collect data independently and facilitate a dialogue. Implementing agencies and local organisations close to the respective populations need to lead communication efforts.

2. **Continue to invest in monitoring by agency staff and contract third parties as a last resort.**

Monitoring with one's own staff is important for gaining the context understanding required to improve programming. It is also helpful in building and maintaining relationships with partners in the field. To maintain these benefits, it is important that agencies keep investing in their own monitoring as much as possible. In places where one's own staff cannot go due to security risks, Third-Party Monitoring (TPM) involves the practice of contracting third parties to collect and verify monitoring data. TPM allows aid agencies to meet basic requirements of their accountability and results frameworks, and those of their donors or constituencies. For donors, TPM offers an option to verify monitoring information from partners. Ideally, this is done in combination with at least partial monitoring by an agency's own staff. TPM as a monitoring approach is used in many different ways; this research focused on the use of TPM by individual aid agencies to monitor projects and verify partner reporting. It did not assess larger independent monitoring mechanisms that were introduced in some of the focus countries by DFID and other donors.

TPM provides a valuable layer of verification, particularly for international agencies operating remotely. Aid agencies are using it to ensure compliance, and for detecting diversion or fraudulent behaviour. At the same time, managing TPM instead of using one's own staff to achieve the same purpose requires significant resources and experience, and does not always deliver quality reporting. It also involves a level of risk transfer which needs to be carefully mitigated, including increasing reputational risks from field monitors' actions and increasing security risks to field monitors.

When agencies use TPM as a long-term substitute for regular internal monitoring, it can negatively affect their understanding of the context and acceptance on the part of the local community. TPM is therefore most useful as a last resort or to complement internal approaches. The practice of TPM needs to be regularly reassessed, and options for internalising monitoring need to be regularly re-evaluated. To facilitate as much own monitoring as possible, TPM should always be complemented with acceptance-building measures and community feedback systems, and overall transparent communication with communities.

3. **Explore which technologies can support monitoring in each setting.**

Various technologies are available that, depending on the context and specific constraints faced, can increase the quantity and quality of data collected in insecure settings. However, existing experience is documented in a highly fragmented way and often presented by suppliers of the concerned technologies. Practitioners are uncertain about which technology to use and ambiguous about the risks involved in insecure settings. To provide a more comprehensive and independent overview and help practitioners make more informed

decisions about the use of technologies for monitoring, this research assessed major technology types and reviewed available documentation on individual applications. The results of this exercise are presented in a detailed "Menu of Options". Overall, the following benefits stand out:

- Mobile phones can broaden the reach of feedback systems, but provide little information on sensitive issues such as aid diversion.
- Digital data-entry applications save time, enhance data quality and speed up transmission and analysis.
- Satellite imagery, while still rarely used, can provide independent data and support situation and impact monitoring.
- Movement tracking devices can help identify and prevent diversion.
- Radio can inform communities with interactive programme formats.
- Online communication platforms offer an alternative where phone networks do not work, but internet is available.

Using innovative technologies in highly insecure settings inevitably involves risks. Aid organisations should therefore consider the following risk mitigation strategies before and when using technological applications for monitoring:

- Understand who influences and spreads information in your context before choosing tools.
- Work with users when inventing, designing and testing tools. Use trainings and meetings with local staff, authorities and community members to test and explain technological applications.
- Develop standards for handling data, ideally before a crisis hits.
- Put analogue alternatives for data collection and management into place.
- Use security-conscious, free and open-source software.
- Only collect data that you know you will use.
- Collaborate with others to share costs and risks.

4. Create monitoring approaches that include applied learning and capacity development.

As a means to enhance monitoring practice, including the capacity of M&E staff, the research team analysed the Monitoring and Reporting (M&R) system of the South Sudan Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) in a separate case study.[3] As part of this system, monitoring and reporting specialists working with the CHF helped partners design their M&E systems, provided mentoring and hands-on advice, and verified partner reports. The contributions of the M&R specialists were highly valued, in particular, the capacity-building and coaching functions. Overall, they were seen to contribute to the transparency and accountability of CHF-funded projects. The case study offers lessons for similar approaches in other countries.

5. Increase alignment of data needs 'up the chain' and encourage greater transparency of results.

The study found that the majority of humanitarian staff working in the four focus countries is overwhelmed by M&E demands of donors, consortia, clusters and their agencies' headquarters. Before suggesting any additional measures or systems, the research team sought to understand whether there are inefficiencies in the system, including redundancy of data collection and unnecessary complexity of systems. To achieve this, the team tracked theflow of monitoring data for two international humanitarian NGOs working in South Central Somalia, from the field level to end-users.[4]

---

[3] Steets, J. & Caccavale, J. (2016). The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of the Common Humanitarian Fund in South Sudan (report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).

[4] Steets, J., Ruppert, L. (2016). Monitoring and Evaluation in Insecure Contexts: Back to Basics? (Report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).

At the field level, the exercise showed little redundancy or superfluous data being collected. Field teams were using the data to keep track of programme performance. However, the exercise did show potential for making monitoring more efficient higher up the monitoring chain, at the country office, cluster, consortia and headquarters levels. Actors at these levels should align their monitoring indicators as much as possible and agree on the exact variables to be used as the core minimum indicators. Any changes to existing monitoring arrangements should be carefully considered, taking into account effects on field teams. Moreover, monitoring requirements need to be more flexible so that they can be adapted to the type and scale of goods and services delivered in an emergency. Doing so could free up capacities at implementation level. Finally, teams involved in monitoring at all levels should attach greater priority to sharing to their data sources, results and how they are used.

CONCLUSION

This research focused on a range of approaches to conduct and improve monitoring in insecure settings including investing in community communication; contracting third parties to complement their own monitoring efforts; deploying technologies while remaining conscious of their risks; and designing monitoring systems that combine verification with capacity building. The findings suggest that investments in monitoring need to be better-targeted and more-strategic. Rather than creating additional layers of monitoring at partner, agency, cluster, consortium, donor and country levels, more reflection is necessary on which monitoring functions are needed, at what level, and the appropriate overall level of investment.

Since a lack of capacities was the main bottleneck in all countries studied, it is more important to strengthen systems and personnel at the ground level than to invest in more verification or more elaborate systems higher up the reporting chain. In addition, and complementary to investments at the ground level, strengthening accountability to affected populations should be a priority in order to make aid programmes more appropriate and to gain local support. This requires investment in the capacities of implementing agencies and local organisations close to the people they serve. Where multiple agencies are present, joint mechanisms for handling communication with communities and presenting aggregated analysis can be more user-friendly and efficient than a multitude of individual systems. To encourage more data sharing and joint monitoring systems, concerns about sharing negative feedback and findings with peers and donors also need to be addressed. Finally, to reduce the demands on monitoring systems in insecure settings, aid agencies should give priority to shortening implementing chains and having as much direct field presence as possible.

1. Introduction

In contexts where humanitarian organisations and communities are exposed to violence and insecurity, there are significant challenges not only in ensuring access to assistance, but also in assessing its reach and effectiveness. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is critical for understanding the performance of aid, ensuring accountability to affected populations and donors, and allowing effective continuation of programmes amid insecurity. Nonetheless, insecurity can hamper every aspect of M&E, from the collection of evidence and its interpretation, to the sharing and dissemination of M&E information.

Existing options for M&E in these contexts entail trade-offs, such as risk transfer to national staff and third parties, increased reputational hazards to the aid agency, or risks from the application of technological solutions where technology is not viewed positively by local non-state armed actors. Against this backdrop, donors and aid agencies are struggling to determine what level and type of M&E is realistic and appropriate under the constraints of insecurity.

This study investigated different strategies for how aid agencies can track and assess their work in insecure environments. The research focused on four contexts: Afghanistan, South Central Somalia, South Sudan and Syria. It had two main goals: First, to assess available options for aid agencies to monitor assistance, given the constraints that insecurity entails. Second, to identify principles of good practice and particular aspects where monitoring approaches could be improved.

To achieve these broad goals, the research team undertook global-level research to understand the current status of M&E practice and major challenges for more effective M&E in insecure contexts. Based on this assessment, thematic research areas were prioritised together with aid agencies working in these contexts. This final report summarises the findings from applied research on these priority topics:

1. The use of third-party monitoring;
2. Community feedback mechanisms, and;
3. The use of technologies for monitoring.

In addition, the research examined how M&E could be brought 'back to basics' in Somalia, i.e. whether and how monitoring processes could be simplified by reducing redundancies and collection of superfluous data, and whether and how a monitoring and reporting mechanism in South Sudan can increase capacity development.

Research on these topics was designed to stand on its own, with corresponding separate reports and guidance documents targeting relevant audiences at country and global level. All of these reports are available on the SAVE website: SAVEresearch.net.[5] Finally, taking the sum of all findings into account, this report also offers higher-level lessons on monitoring in insecure environments and suggests broader policy implications.

---

[5] Under development at the time of writing this report (July 2016)

BOX 1. KEY TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT

The terms **aid agency** and **aid organisation** are used interchangeably. The SAVE research focused on the part of agencies' work that is **humanitarian** in nature, i.e., designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity, during or in the aftermath of crises. Aid agencies include local, national and international NGOs; UN agencies and international organisations that are members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee; and members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Host government and donor government agencies are referred to separately.

Aid actor refers to a broader set of actors involved in humanitarian action, including aid agencies, representatives of governments, local authorities, private companies and donors. While many aid actors are directly affected by crisis, the SAVE research considers them as distinct from the **affected population**, which refers to people affected by crises.

In a **partnership**, an aid agency works with another actor (e.g., other aid agencies, local authorities, businesses), called a **partner**, to accomplish shared objectives. It can be contractual or non-contractual, paid or unpaid.

Remote management is an approach that can allow organisations to continue some activities in situations where access is limited, by transferring management and monitoring responsibilities to national or local staff members and/or external partners.

Monitoring is a continuous function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and other main stakeholders of an aid intervention with indicators of progress, achievement of objectives and use of allocated funds (OECD/DAC, 2010 and ALNAP, 2013). **Third-party monitoring (TPM)** describes the practice of contracting third parties to collect and verify monitoring data, for example in areas where aid actors' own staff face access restrictions.

Evaluation is the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy, its design, implementation and results in order to draw lessons to improve policy and practice and to enhance accountability (OECD/DAC, 2010 and ALNAP, 2013).

Humanitarian accountability refers to the commitment of aid agencies to improve their professionalism and performance in order to be accountable towards donors and to those they seek to assist (IFRC & ICRC, 1995). The latter type is commonly referred to as **accountability to affected populations** and includes mechanisms for people in need of humanitarian assistance to participate in the decisions that affect them, to receive timely information and to provide feedback on the aid they receive (CHS Alliance, 2014).

Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain (Transparency International, 2014). It includes financial corruption such as fraud, bribery, extortion and kickbacks, as well as non-financial forms of corruption, such as the manipulation or diversion of humanitarian assistance; the allocation of relief resources in exchange for sexual favours; and preferential treatment in assistance or hiring for family members or friends (nepotism and cronyism) (Transparency International, 2014).

Risk is the likelihood and potential impact of encountering a threat, while **risk management** is a formalised system for forecasting, weighing and preparing for possible risks in order to minimise their impact.

2. Methods

2.1 Research design

The SAVE team developed the research agenda together with 18 aid organisations and joint monitoring initiatives in the four focus countries (see Table 1). These operational 'learning partners' were identified through a process of early in-country consultations. The selection of partners was based on (a) their interest, willingness and capacity to contribute to research and to reflect on and improve M&E mechanisms, (b) the goal of ensuring diversity in partner type, including UN, INGOs and smaller or local NGOs, and (c) the desire to include a mix of partners with both comparatively developed and more basic M&E systems.

Table 1: Learning partners of the SAVE research project

Afghanistan	South Central Somalia	South Sudan	Syria (Turkey-based)
Save the Children, UNICEF, People in Need	Action Contre la Faim (ACF), Adeso African Development Solutions, Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS) Consortium (represented by NRC)	Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Nile Hope, ACTED, OCHA/CHF, Save the Children, WFP, Mercy Corps	GOAL, People in Need, OCHA (Humanitarian Pooled Fund), Mayday Rescue

Based on desk research, an online survey and key informant interviews conducted in the inception phase, the SAVE team suggested eight potential research topics and asked all learning partners for comments and additions during a first round of in-country workshops. The list of suggested topics was largely confirmed as including the most relevant issues with regards to M&E in their respective context.

- Beneficiary/community-centred M&E
- M&E to assess effects on drivers of conflicts
- Joint/overarching and coordinated M&E
- Handheld data entry and databases
- Use of other technologies and M&E (including satellite imagery, call-centres, SMS)
- Simplification of M&E systems and tools
- The role of the host government in M&E
- Third-party monitoring

Learning partners identified community feedback mechanisms, third-party monitoring and the use of technological applications for monitoring as the issues of highest priority. In South Sudan, partners also expressed interest in an analysis of the CHF's monitoring and reporting

mechanism, and an overview of context constraints and training opportunities for M&E. Priorities expressed by partners in Somalia furthermore included an exploration of the potential to simplify monitoring processes by reducing redundancies and collection of superfluous data.

The original scope of the research covered aspects related to both monitoring and evaluation, summarised in the broad term "M&E". Monitoring and evaluation as two separate but interrelated components traditionally involve different activities and purposes and tend to focus on different ends of the results chain. In larger aid organisations, monitoring information is traditionally generated by staff who are also responsible for implementation, while evaluations are typically managed by specialised evaluation units and often implemented by external evaluators. Yet, the two components of monitoring and evaluation are closely linked and becoming more integrated. On the one hand, monitoring is no longer only about controlling inputs and tracking processes, but is expected to say something about outputs, outcomes and sometimes impact, which was previously seen as the domain of evaluation (Guerrero et al., 2013; IASC, 2012; Dunn et al., 2013). On the other hand, evaluation (especially in humanitarian contexts) is increasingly expected to provide information in real time rather than traditional mid-term or ex-post assessments, and is thus becoming more similar to monitoring (Ling, 2012).

Starting from this broader scope, initial desk research – including knowledge gaps and priorities expressed by learning partners – determined a focus on monitoring. This is not to discount the value of more strategic, longer-term evaluations. Rather, the findings of this research will be relevant for evaluations as well, since they face similar constraints in insecure settings and often rely on the same methods.[6]

2.2 Methods used

The research employed the following methods:

1. **Document and literature analysis:** Desk research was undertaken to inform the analysis of the current status of M&E systems and to provide input for each of the thematic areas addressed. Taking key references that informed the TORs as a starting point,[7] the team conducted a broad web-based search for additional sources.[8] From this search, a database of more than 200 publications was compiled using an Excel template. This included relevant literature, as well as M&E frameworks, reports, guidance documents and policies provided by learning partners and other aid actors. Moreover, a representative sample of publicised evaluation reports from the selected focus countries was analysed during the inception phase.[9] The evaluation reports were examined both as primary sources – comparing their methodologies and limitation sections, and verifying whether they included

---

[6] As Davies et al. show (2012), conducting rigorous impact evaluation demands distinct research designs, but generally relies on the same methods as monitoring – such as interviews in-person or with communication technology, through own staff or third parties, paper or digital surveys, case studies, etc.

[7] Schreter & Harmer, 2013; Egeland et al., 2011; Stoddard et al, 2009; Steets et al., 2012

[8] We used different keywords (and variations thereof), such as monitoring, evaluation, learning, accountability, effectiveness, M&E and measurement, in combination with keywords such as fragile, complex, violence, humanitarian, conflict, or insecurity. The search included specific sources and databases, such as ALNAP, IDEAS, and ReliefWeb, as well as publications listed on individual aid agencies' and research institutes' websites. Naturally, this search produced a large number of 'false positives', i.e. documents that contain some of the search terms but are not directly relevant for the present research. With the continuous narrowing of research questions to be addressed during the Inception Phase, sources have been reviewed for relevance continuously and additional sources have been added in an iterative process throughout the research phases.

[9] For this, N=49 recent evaluation reports (written no earlier than 2006) from focus countries were randomly selected from the ALNAP database (http://www.alnap.org/resources/). Reports covered 21 different NGOs, national organizations and UN agencies (23 from Somalia, 10 from Afghanistan, 9 from South Sudan and 7 from Syria).

recommendations pertaining to the M&E efforts of the evaluated agency – and in terms of their content, meaning that the specific M&E challenges they described were noted and classified so as to identify the most common challenges.

2. **Online survey:** For the analysis of the current status of M&E systems and the major challenges encountered, an online survey was disseminated to a targeted group of M&E experts and practitioners in the four focus countries. The initial pool of respondents was purposively composed to include a mix of agency types in each context. To cover sufficient parts of the professional M&E community in the countries studied, respondents were asked to forward the survey to their peers. This respondent-driven sampling means it is not possible to give an exact response rate, but figure 1 shows the types of organisations represented in the sample. The survey gathered 190 responses: 60 in Afghanistan, 63 in Somalia/Kenya, 42 in South Sudan and 25 in Syria/Turkey. The survey instrument can be found in Annex 5. For Syria, an Arabic version was used.

Figure 1: Type of agencies included in online survey (N=190)

Red Cross / Red Crescent
4%

Other
3%

Donor
6%

National NGO
14%

UN agency
22%

International NGO
51%
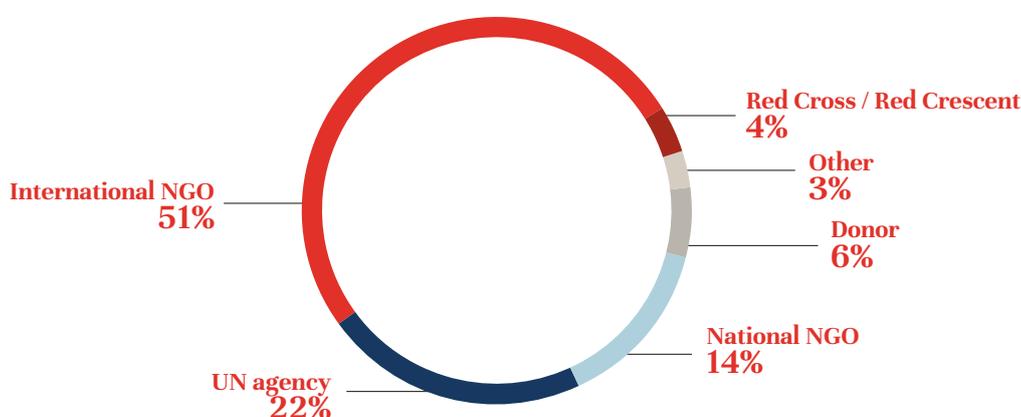
3. **Key informant interviews:** The team conducted 328 semi-structured interviews with 73 global-level and 255 country-level experts. GPPi partnered with a mix of country-level entities and individual researchers to conduct most of the in-country interviews: John Caccavale (South Sudan), Will Carter, (Afghanistan) Camille Hennion (Afghanistan & Somalia), Nisar Majid (Somalia) and Proximity International (Turkey). Their field research also included observation and documentation. Approximately 37 percent of all interviewees were women.

Given the explorative character of these interviews, purposive sampling (Daniel, 2013) was applied to identify interviewees from four groups of stakeholders: evaluators and experts on M&E, practitioners from influential humanitarian organisations responsible for monitoring, practitioners working in evaluation units of aid organisations, and donor representatives. Different interview guidelines were used for the separate research topics (see annexes 1-4). Table 3 shows an overview of all interviews conducted with aid actors, sorted by country, aid actor type and with approximate per centages by gender. The field research teams all involved female interviewers who were available to interview female aid staff, where it was deemed culturally appropriate.

Table 3: Composition of aid actor interviews conducted for SAVE research on Accountability & Learning, by country, aid actor type and gender.

Afghanistan		
	UN (incl. IOM)	**22**
	iNGOs & Red Cross/Red Crescent	**33**
	National NGOs & local Islamic charities	**17**
	Donors	**7**
	Other actors (e.g., research or private sector entities)	**3**
	Sub-total	**82**
	Percent women	**27%**
Somalia (incl. Kenya)		
	UN (incl. IOM)	**4**
	tiNGOs & Red Cross/Red Crescent	**30**
	National NGOs & local Islamic charities	**10**
	Donors	**4**
	Other actors (e.g., research or private sector entities)	**3**
	Sub-total	**51**
	Percent women	**31%**
South Sudan		
	UN (incl. IOM)	**16**
	iNGOs & Red Cross/Red Crescent	**23**
	National NGOs & local Islamic charities	**11**
	Donors	**5**
	Other actors (e.g., research or private sector entities)	**5**
	Sub-total	**60**
	Percent women	**30%**
Syria (incl. Turkey and Jordan)		
	UN (incl. IOM)	**5**
	iNGOs & Red Cross/Red Crescent	**31**
	National NGOs & local Islamic charities	**19**
	Donors	**3**
	Other actors (e.g., research or private sector entities)	**4**
	Sub-total	**62**
	Percent women	**56%**
Global-level interviews		
	UN (incl. IOM)	**14**
	iNGOs & Red Cross/Red Crescent	**26**
	National NGOs & local Islamic charities	**0**
	Donors	**7**
	Other actors (e.g., research or private sector entities)	**26**
	Sub-total	**73**
	Percent women	**50%**
	TOTAL	**328**
	Percent women	**37%**

4. **In-country workshops with aid actors:** The field research was intentionally staggered: two country programmes were initiated at the start of the implementation phase, while the other two only started later. Afghanistan and South Central Somalia were chosen as the first two country cases due to the maturity of the humanitarian and M&E systems in place, with the view that these would yield useful lessons for actors in South Sudan and Syria, where the response is relatively young. While all countries saw three rounds of workshops, the focus of these workshops varied between contexts. In the first two countries, round one at the beginning of the research served to introduce the SAVE research project to selected stakeholders, verify and complete the team's overview assessment of the current M&E situation in countries, and identify and agree with partners on research priorities. The second round of workshops served to present and discuss selected preliminary findings based on field research and ongoing work with learning partners. The staggered approach meant that in South Sudan and Turkey (for Syria), the first workshops already included presentations of findings from research in the other countries. The final round of workshops in all countries served to familiarise participants with research findings, to verify the relevance of findings for the specific contexts, and to jointly reflect on further opportunities for disseminating and using the findings. In South Sudan partners expressed the priority to meet and exchange experiences. Therefore the team organised a total of seven meetings there. The average number of participants per workshop for all four countries was approximately 20 people. Annex 6 provides and overview of all meetings organised in countries.

5. **Consultations with affected communities**: The team cooperated with local research entities to hold 65 focus group discussions and 121 individual interviews with community members in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria.[10] The goal was to understand how communities feel about their existing options for communicating with aid agencies and to assess which types of feedback mechanisms they prefer.

Table 4: Composition of affected people consulted through focus groups and interviews

Afghanistan	
Number of focus group discussions	**12**
Number of individual interviews	**24**
Total number of individuals consulted	**70**
Percent women	**6%**
Somalia	
Number of focus group discussions	**13**
Number of individual interviews	**0**
Total number of individuals consulted	**78**
Percent women	**42%**
Syria	
Number of focus group discussions	**40**
Number of individual interviews	**97**
Total number of individuals consulted	**205**
Per cent women	**30%**
TOTAL affected people consulted	**342**
Percent women	**29%**

---

[10] This number only refers to the focus group discussions and individual interviews that included M&E-related questions. The total number of affected people consulted through qualitative methods (also for SAVE research on presence and coverage as well as on access and quality) is 789, of which 38% were women. This also includes 203 individuals in South Sudan, but these consultations focused on access and quality of aid. The large-scale structured survey with 3313 crisis-affected people across all four countries did provide valuable quantitative information on whether communities feel consulted in South Sudan.

In selecting the specific areas for the consultations, the research team sought a balance between urban and rural areas, as well as between different areas of control. Within each area, the teams sought to ensure a mix of participants according to gender, age, ethnicity and displacement status. (See section 2.3 below for limitations concerning the selection of female researchers for some locations.) The specific locations were:

- **Afghanistan:** Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan provinces
- **Somalia:** Mogadishu, Baidoa and Dolow
- **Syria:** Al-Hasakeh, Deir Ezzor, rural Aleppo, urban Aleppo, Hama and Damascus

In addition, questions on whether crisis-affected populations were consulted by aid agencies were integrated in structured surveys conducted as part of SAVE research on Presence and Coverage that garnered 3313 responses across the four countries (see Annex 8 for the survey instrument used).[11] Remote, mobile phone surveys, using 'interactive voice response' (IVR) technology were used in Afghanistan, Somalia and South Sudan. In Syria, the surveys were conducted in-person.

2.3 Limitations and adjustments to the methodology

Demand-driven research agenda: The research agenda for this study has been driven by the priorities of partner organisations in the four focus countries. This approach led to a research agenda that had certain overlaps between the different focus areas and that did not cover all aspects that might have been identified using a top-down approach. For example, this applied approach put the focus on the perspective of individual agencies and their monitoring practices, as opposed to more systemic questions about current monitoring paradigms in the humanitarian sector as a whole or the role of monitoring in insecure humanitarian crises.

This research started with a diagnosis of current monitoring systems through the learning partners' perspectives. It then aimed to identify potential improvements. However, it did not systematically compare how context factors influenced the design of monitoring systems in each country or monitoring practice more broadly. This would be a worthy question for future research at a higher level, examining e.g. how different tolerance of governments for data collection, different conflict dynamics or information ecosystems in the countries influence the design choices of monitoring systems adopted.

Accepting these limitations, this demand-driven approach helped ensure that research findings were relevant to organisations operating in insecure environments, as feedback received from participants at the final round of in-country workshops confirmed.[12] Around 90 per cent of all participants in the four countries acquired ideas that their organisation can attempt to implement. A majority (68 per cent) also reported they can use resource materials from the research in their work.

Fluctuations in learning partner capacity: Throughout the course of the research, multiple partner organisations experienced rotations of M&E staff and/or downsizing of their M&E units. This required a stronger investment of the research team in (re-)explaining the research programme, the agreements developed with learning partners and building ownership and commitment among partner organisations. It also required a more light-footed engagement of partners between major consultation periods and meetings in the countries.

---

[11] For a full overview of all survey results, see: Stoddard, A. & Jillani, S with Caccavale, J., Cooke, P., Guillemois, D. & Klimentov, V. (2016). The Effects of Insecurity on Humanitarian Coverage (Report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme)

[12] Workshop participants filled in an anonymous workshop evaluation after each workshop. More aggregated results from the evaluations of all workshops are featured in the final report of the entire SAVE research programme (November 2016).

Limitations on piloting of M&E approaches: Initially considered pilots of specific M&E approaches to be implemented by partners in countries turned out not to be feasible. Instead, the research emphasised developing guidance that agencies can readily use without much additional investment of staff and resources, and in discussing the application of this guidance with partners during the workshops. Finally, the team also put more emphasis on documenting globally relevant lessons and facilitating exchange among organisations within and across the four focus countries, e.g., through workshops.

Gender balance: The team actively sought to ensure a mix of participants in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and displacement status. However, when conducting community consultations in Afghanistan, the country-based research partner was not able to recruit female researchers that would have been able to travel to the relevant areas. Initial community consultations in Afghanistan therefore only included male participants. During an additional round of consultations, the local research team managed to identify four female community members who were willing to be interviewed. In Somalia and Syria, by contrast, the recruitment of a female researcher was more successful. In terms of aid staff and M&E experts consulted, the numbers of men and women interviewed seem roughly proportional to actual staffing ratios.

3. Current status of M&E in insecure environments

This chapter presents the main research findings on how aid agencies track and assess their work in insecure environments and the main challenges encountered. Looking at experiences and perceptions of M&E experts in all four countries as well as literature and documents reviewed, a number of general trends, strengths and weaknesses of current M&E systems, can be summarised.

3.1 Satisfaction with M&E systems in insecure environments

The current status of M&E practice is perceived as problematic in all countries. The low satisfaction expressed in the survey echoes observations from other contexts – namely, that M&E tends to be neglected in situations of conflict and fragility compared to more stable crisis settings (DFID, 2010), and that partner M&E systems are notably weaker and can become activity-focused in such settings (DFID, 2012). Nonetheless, survey results demonstrate that agencies are more satisfied with their own M&E systems than with those of their partners (see figure 2). Across all four countries, 55 per cent of respondents were 'not so satisfied' or 'not satisfied at all' with the M&E systems of their implementing partners. In Afghanistan, for instance, while 65 per cent of UN agencies and INGOs consulted were satisfied with their own M&E, only 23 per cent were satisfied with the M&E systems of their partners.

Figure 2: Levels of satisfaction with own and partners' M&E (all countries)

How statisfied are you with your own M&E? (n=140)

How statisfied are you with your implementing partners' M&E? (n=109)

53%   36%   1%   10%

40%   50%   5%   5%

■ Very satisfied   ■ Satisfied   ■ Not so satisfied   ■ Not satisfied at all
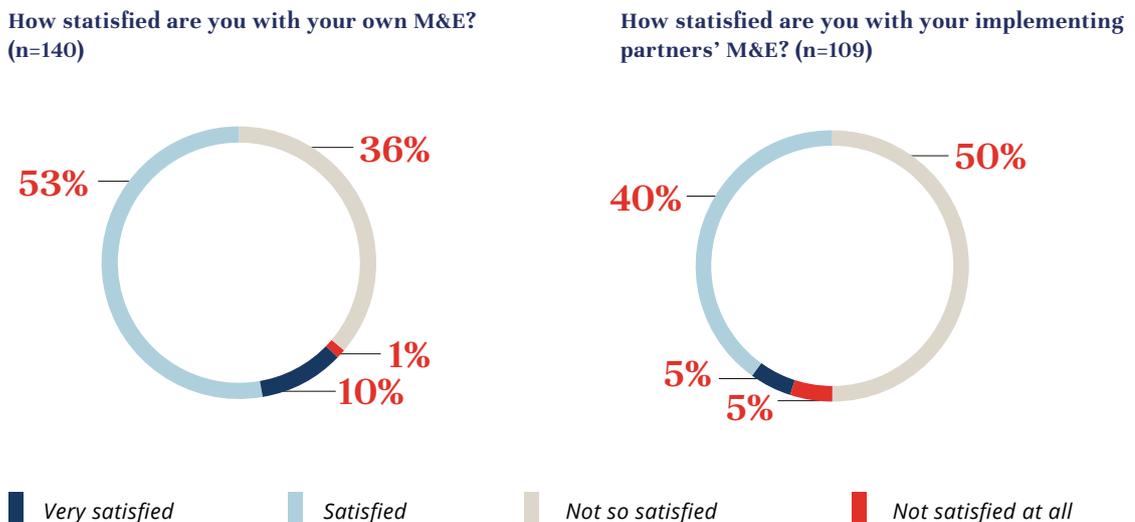
When asked about their current ability to monitor and evaluate their work in insecure contexts, the majority of the UN agencies across the countries were 'not so satisfied' with their own M&E systems. INGOs were slightly more positive in their assessment as around two-thirds find their own M&E satisfactory. National NGOs were the most positive and a majority (75 per cent) are largely satisfied with their M&E systems. Naturally, these self-assessments are subjective and may also reflect different expectations towards M&E. In line with data analysed by SAVE research on presence and coverage, differences can also be interpreted to show that the further an organisation is from the field, the greater its concerns about M&E. In each country, national NGOs were shown to achieve most presence in highly insecure areas, followed by the Red Cross/Crescent movement and a small number of specific INGOs. Only three UN agencies were found among the top 20 'most present' organisations in each country (Stoddard & Jillani, 2016).

3.2 Capacity constraints are the single biggest obstacle to better M&E

When responding to 'what hinders good M&E' in their contexts, the three most critical concerns of respondents are 1. 'Lack of M&E capacity in our implementing partners', 2. 'Lack of willingness to share data or lessons between organisations' and 3. 'Insufficient technical infrastructure' (see figure 3). This focus on lack of capacities in implementing partners confirms the widespread dissatisfaction with partners' M&E systems. Consultations with aid actors in country and during workshops showed that concerns about capacity primarily relate to a lack of M&E personnel on the one hand (with M&E units perceived as the first to be affected by an overall reduction of funding), as well as technical M&E capacity of existing staff on the other (e.g.,, concerning development of M&E tools and systems, sampling, statistics).

Figure 3: What hinders good M&E in your context? (n = 138)

Strongly Agree | Agree | Partly Agree | Disagree
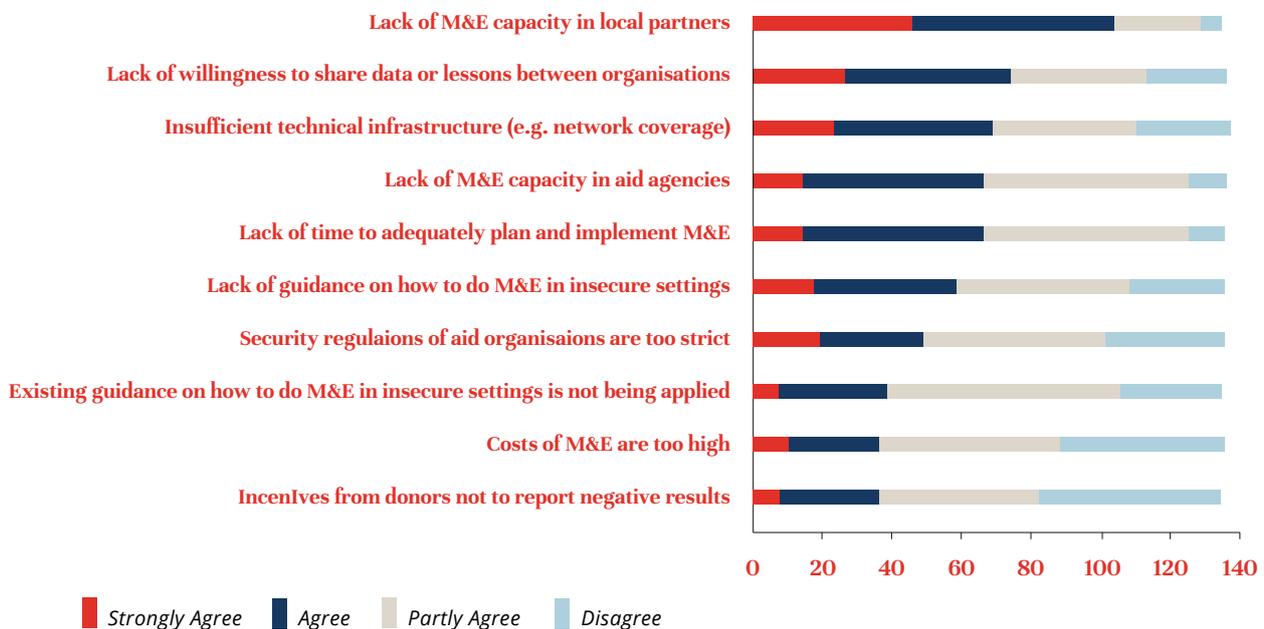
Key informant interviews and a review of evaluations confirmed these concerns about capacities while offering specific examples: over 80 per cent of evaluation reports reviewed mentioned that organisational shortcomings – such as poor planning for M&E, making poor or late decisions, or inflexible programme management – constrain the effectiveness of M&E systems. Similarly, the majority of interviewees noted 'organisational' and 'internal' challenges to effective M&E in insecure contexts.

3.3 Good practice combines verification with capacity development

With capacities as a major constraint to more effective M&E in all contexts studied, the research assessed a potential option to combine verification and capacity development of M&E personnel in cooperation with the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) in South Sudan.

The CHF in South Sudan has a monitoring and reporting (M&R) system that is unique for pooled funds. It consists of one M&R officer and eight M&R specialists hosted by clusters. The system improved the accountability and transparency of CHF-funded projects. M&R specialists reviewed partner project proposals and reports, aggregated and analysed monitoring data, and conducted field monitoring visits using a standard monitoring template to verify and assess progress. This contribution of the CHF's M&R system was most valued by donors. At the same time, the M&R system contributed to the capacity of partner organisations to conduct monitoring themselves and to improve the quality of their programmes. Partners provided examples of how they had strengthened their monitoring approach following comments from the M&R specialists on their project proposals; used monitoring tools proposed by M&R specialists; revised and improved project reports in response to comments; and adapted also the technical aspects of their programmes based on feedback received during and after field monitoring visits. Partner organisations, donors, and several clusters saw the capacity-building and coaching function of the M&R specialists as their single most positive contribution. In addition, cluster coordinators valued the M&R specialists' contributions to cluster strategies and reviews.

The case study also revealed potential for improvement and offered lessons for similar approaches in other countries. For example, there was confusion regarding the priorities of the different activity types, and the split management of M&R specialists between the CHF and clusters created communication problems and inefficiencies. Furthermore, greater priority should be given to field monitoring missions. While specific to the context in South Sudan, the experience of the CHF and its monitoring and reporting (M&R) system can inform strategic investments of other pooled funds and donors.

> **For the full report, see: Steets, J. & Caccavale, J. (2016). The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of the Common Humanitarian Fund in South Sudan (Thematic report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).**

In addition to the CHF example, another promising initiative to enhance monitoring capacities was identified in Afghanistan, where the Risk Management Unit is in the process of developing the Afghan Monitoring Accreditation Scheme (AMAS). The scheme is expected to allow aid agencies to nominate staff for certification and will offer training on monitoring to selected Afghan nationals.[13]

3.4 Current monitoring systems are best suited for accountability to donors and showing outputs

The literature on monitoring (and evaluation) in humanitarian settings had repeatedly pointed out an inherent focus on upwards accountability to donors and tax payers, often at the expense of accountability to affected populations (Brown & Donini, 2014; Barnett & Walker, 2015, as well as publications by the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP); the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alliance; or the Communication with Disaster-Affected Communities (CDAC) Network). Confirming this bias, survey respondents found their current monitoring systems best suited for accountability to donors/tax payers, for verifying

---

[13] At the time of writing, this scheme was still under development. See also United Nations Risk Management Unit – Afghanistan, "Technology, Monitoring and Evaluation. The Use of Technology by UN Agencies in Afghanistan in support of Monitoring and Evaluation" (in press).

immediate outputs and for providing information to operational decision-makers. For example, a majority of respondents from Somalia (76 per cent) agreed that M&E was suited for accountability to donors; likewise, in Afghanistan, a majority of respondents (77 per cent) found it useful for informing operational decisions. In contrast, most respondents found their current M&E systems least suited for showing aggregated and country-wide effects, for assessing impact on conflict drivers, and for demonstrating longer term impact.

This confirms the pattern known from more stable humanitarian settings that most indicators used by humanitarian NGOs (Guerrero et al., 2013) and by aid agencies more generally (Hofmann et al., 2004) measure outputs and processes. Survey respondents were also not satisfied with the ability of their current monitoring systems to achieve accountability to affected populations, while they rated this as one of the main objectives of monitoring. Here, current practice seems to be clearly lagging behind repeated commitments and existing reform proposals such as the IASC's Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations (IASC, 2013) or the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS).

Figure 4: Aid actors' perceptions on what M&E systems are currently best and least suited for

Current **M&E best suited for**
→ Accountability to tax payers/donors
→ Immediate outputs reached
→ Informing operational decisions

Current **M&E least suited for**
→ Aggregated effects
→ Impacts on conflict drivers
→ Longer term impact
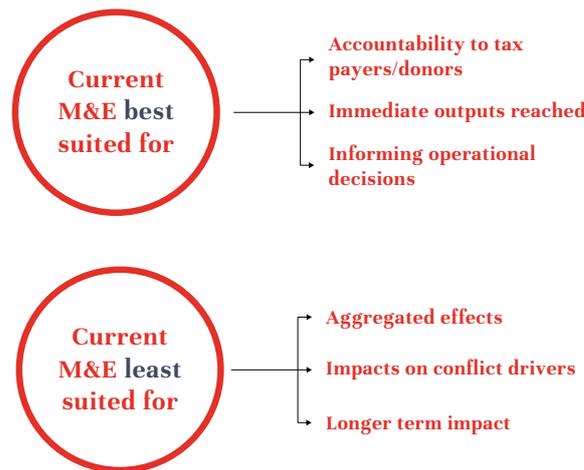
3.5 Country-specific factors

Perceptions of M&E challenges and current practice proved to be remarkably similar across the four countries. Nevertheless, interviews and disaggregated survey responses did show context-specific trends and specificities that should be taken into account. Table 5 provides an overview of the specific situation in each country:

Table 5: Country-specific situation and M&E practice

ACCESS CONTEXT AND STRATEGIES APPLIED BY AID AGENCIES

Afghanistan	South Sudan	South Central Somalia	Turkey / Syria
INGOs localised implementation of programs to enhance acceptance, e.g., hiring staff from the area, using low-profile appearances, trying to 'blend in' with local communities. UN agencies work through local partners. Both UN agencies and most donors largely rely on hard protection to access insecure areas.	In contrast to other countries, higher security risks for local and regional staff and lower risks for international staff. Strong access constraints are created by the lack of infrastructure and climatic conditions. Many efforts to deliver assistance concentrated in 'Protection of Civilian' sites on international military bases. Elsewhere, strong reliance on air-based delivery of aid & mobile distribution teams.	International aid agencies rely on partnerships with local actors, reducing own staff exposure in the field. Most programming is managed remotely from Nairobi. Activities with a stronger emphasis on health are adapted (they tend to be more widely accepted than needs-based delivery of goods).	Most agencies working in the north of Syria from bases in Turkey work through remote partnership models. Generally, international staff cannot move back and forth across the border with Turkey. There is strong reliance on local councils for information-gathering, including (post-distribution) monitoring.

MAIN OBSTACLES COMMUNITIES FACE IN ACCESSING AID[14]

Afghanistan	South Sudan	South Central Somalia	Turkey / Syria
1. Insecurity 2. Corruption 3. Insufficient quantity of aid	1. Insecurity 2. Insufficient quantity of aid 3. Corruption	1. Corruption 2. Insufficient quantity of aid	1. Insufficient quantity of aid 2. Logistical difficulties 3. Corruption

CURRENT M&E PRACTICE AND TRENDS

Afghanistan	South Sudan	South Central Somalia	Turkey / Syria
With reductions in funding levels, pressure from donors to demonstrate results is reported to be increasing. There is a long tradition of community involvement based on local shuras and community development councils. Reliance on remote monitoring is increasing. Reliance on third-party monitoring by UN and donor agencies is increasing.	International and national NGOs are less positive about their own M&E systems (compared to the other three countries). Generally, rapid response mechanisms and air-based assistance have made monitoring very difficult. While the overall volume of aid has been decreasing, agencies have been struggling to put sufficient M&E capacities in place.	Regaining trust from communities and donors after cases of corruption and misconduct during 2011-12 famine is a challenge. Considerable investments in remote monitoring systems and third-party monitoring. Use of technologies for monitoring is high, with many agencies piloting innovative M&E approaches.	Structural investment in M&E started more recently, good practice examples remain rare. Pressure to monitor aid and avoid diversion to ISIS mounting. Use of digital data entry tools is common, frequent use of WhatsApp to communicate with field teams, local implementing partners, local councils and communities.

14 For a full overview of all survey results, see: Stoddard, A. & Jillani, S with Caccavale, J., Cooke, P., Guillemois, D. & Klimentov, V. (2016).

CURRENT M&E PRACTICE AND TRENDS

Afghanistan

The government plays a relatively strong role in M&E, but limited coordination.

South Sudan

Interesting collective approaches were piloted, including the Common Humanitarian Fund's monitoring and reporting system and inter-active radio programming in protection of civilian sites.

South Central Somalia

There has been limited sharing of data between agencies so far, but strengthening collaborative M&E mechanisms is a concern for agencies consulted.

Turkey / Syria

Interest in and use of third-party monitoring (TPM) by donors and implementers is increasing.

ROLE OF COMMUNITIES IN M&E

Afghanistan

35% of people consulted report aid agencies have asked for their opinion.

Communities are sceptical of existing participation mechanisms, perceived as not inclusive enough.

Good practice exists, but agencies report difficulties in setting up functioning feedback mechanisms.

South Sudan

Only 7% report aid agencies have asked for their opinion.

South Sudan has a relatively high number of dedicated initiatives communicating with crisis-affected communities, which can serve as models for other contexts.

Some aid workers are sceptical whether communities manipulate information to increase aid flows.

South Central Somalia

Only 4% of respondents report that aid agencies have asked for their opinion.

Phone-based feedback systems are commonplace, but communities consulted find them to be of limited usefulness.

Turkey / Syria

Some 15% of beneficiaries report that aid agencies have asked for their opinion.

Large agencies have started to set up feedback systems, but struggle to raise awareness and build trust in them.

Local councils are frequently involved.

MAIN REPORTED CHALLENGES FOR M&E

Afghanistan

Lack of capacities in local partner organisations.

Lack of willingness to share lessons between agencies.

Lack of capacities in aid agencies.

South Sudan

High rates of (repeated) displacement.

Large number of national languages spoken and low literacy rates.

Restrictive security regulations of aid agencies.

Geography, infrastructure and climate.

South Central Somalia

The population is highly mobile (displacement and nomadism).

Use of technologies, while still comparatively common, is in some places restricted by Al Shabaab.

Other challenges exist, mostly concerning capacity and a lack of willingness to share data between agencies.

Turkey / Syria

Capacities in international and national aid agencies are lacking.

There is insufficient inter-agency coordination and information-sharing, particularly across conflict lines (Sida et al., 2016).

Secretive operational climate limits opportunities for joint monitoring and peer-learning.

TECHNOLOGY CONTEXT

Afghanistan

Use of technology not as widespread as in other contexts.

Lack of technical infrastructure.

Reservations against modern communication technology by armed groups and parts of population.

Growing potential with increasing mobile phone coverage, reported at 80% in 2013 (USAID, 2013).

South Sudan

South Sudan has one of the lowest mobile phone coverage rates worldwide and very little internet connectivity.

Staff and enumerators require basic training to use technology applications.

Few communities are familiar with technology applications.

South Central Somalia

Somalia's population is very tech-savvy.

Remote management of aid operations stimulated innovation.

Population has considerable experience with use of tablet computers and mobile-phone based applications.

Turkey / Syria

Syrian mobile network largely destroyed, except close to Turkish border.

Internet access largely intact in most governorates.

Syrians use the internet (e.g., WhatsApp, Facebook) to a much larger extent than people in the other three focus countries (REACH, 2015).

PRIORITY TOPICS IDENTIFIED BY LEARNING PARTNERS IN THE COUNTRY

Afghanistan

1. Third-party monitoring
2. Community involvement in M&E
3. Bringing M&E 'back to basics'

South Sudan

1. M&E expectations and standards
2. Analysis of collective monitoring under CHF and clusters
3. Feasibility analysis for selected remote monitoring options
4. Overview of M&E training options

South Central Somalia

1. Technologies for monitoring
2. Bringing M&E 'back to basics'
3. Community involvement in M&E

Turkey / Syria

1. Third-party monitoring
2. Use of social media for monitoring
3. Collaborative feedback-mechanism

4. Thematic findings

4.1 Community feedback mechanisms

> **For the full report, see Ruppert, L., Sagmeister, E., Steets, J. (2016). Listening to Communities in Insecure Environments: Lessons from Community Feedback Mechanisms in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. (Thematic report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).**

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Aid agencies are concerned about their limited ability to deliver accountability to affected populations.[15] Community feedback mechanisms can be an effective tool to strengthen this (CHS Alliance et al., 2014; Alexander, 2015). These mechanisms enable crisis-affected people to share their experience of a particular humanitarian agency or of the wider humanitarian response (ALNAP-CDA, 2014). Moreover, as demonstrated by SAVE research on access and quality, engaging communities in their programming and addressing the most relevant needs are important factors for aid agencies to enable better access (Haver & Carter, 2016).

While a lot of literature and guidance on how to establish feedback mechanisms exists, there is little documented knowledge about the perspective of communities in insecure settings on feedback processes, or on the particular challenges of setting up feedback mechanisms in insecure settings.[16] Against this backdrop, this research stream investigated three main questions:

- What factors influence the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms?[17]
- What type of feedback processes do communities prefer?
- What types of common or joint feedback mechanisms exist, and how useful are they?

The research involved primary data collection in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria[18], including 79 interviews with aid agencies, a review of documentation and reports shared by these agencies and a review of existing literature. The SAVE research team examined which feedback mechanisms communities prefer through 65 focus group discussions and 121 individual interviews across the three countries. Evidence on whether aid recipient and local populations are consulted was also gathered in a structured survey that garnered 3,313 responses across the four countries, as part of SAVE research on Presence and Coverage.[19] Research on examples of joint feedback mechanisms consisted of a review of existing documentation and 8 phone interviews with people involved in these initiatives.

---

[15] For instance the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) principals acknowledge that AAP is still not sufficiently prioritised at the senior, inter-agency and cluster levels, despite the commitments on AAP that agencies endorsed in 2011. See: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/accountability-affected-populations-including-protection-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse

[16] A notable exceptions is the CCVRI Helpdesk Response (2013) "Beneficiary Feedback in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States"

[17] We follow the definition proposed by the ALNAP-CDA project, which defines the overall effectiveness of a feedback mechanism as "the ability of a completed feedback loop to bring about change that affects aid recipient populations." ALNAP-CDA (2013) "Effective Humanitarian Feedback Mechanisms: Methodology Summary for a Joint ALNAP and CDA Action Research."

[18] For Syria, the SAVE research team focused on the feedback practices of Turkey-based organisations providing assistance in Syria.

[19] This survey also included communities in South Sudan. For more details, see Stoddard, A. & Jillani, S with Caccavale, J., Cooke, P., Guillemois, D. & Klimentov, V. (2016). The Effects of Insecurity on Humanitarian Coverage (Report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme: SAVEresearch.net)

MAIN FINDINGS

Humanitarian actors in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria all face high levels of risk to their staff, in addition to corresponding access constraints to implementation sites and communities (Stoddard & Jillani, 2016). However, the feedback landscapes that have developed in these three countries are distinct, reflecting different socio-cultural environments, as well as different degrees of donor support to establish mechanisms. Aid agencies use different media to collect and respond to feedback, and the number and density of formal feedback channels varies between the countries.

In **Afghanistan,** most agencies rely on informal feedback processes, meaning that they do not have organisational structures and systems at the capital and/or field level dedicated to collecting, analysing and responding to feedback. Instead, feedback is collected on an ad-hoc basis, often through (phone) conversations with local community representatives and open office hours. This ongoing, informal communication with community members is highly adaptive, cost-effective and allows for instant reactions by responsible staff. Many organisations have adopted a highly localised approach to providing aid in Afghanistan. As a result, they manage to consult a relatively large share of the population (35 per cent, see figure 5). However, feedback was not systematically documented or used.

In **South Central Somalia,** formal phone-based feedback mechanisms such as hotlines and SMS platforms are more prevalent. Most of these systems were created to address a strong demand for upward accountability from donors and to have a basic information flow with communities where projects are managed remotely. These phone-based mechanisms enable communication with otherwise hard to access communities and are relatively inclusive. [20] However, only four per cent of people surveyed in South Central Somalia stated that they had been consulted by aid organisations (see figure 5). This reflects the scarce direct presence of aid organisations in Somalia, as well as their strong reliance on so-called gate-keepers. It also shows that communities do not equate having a phone-based complaints mechanism with being consulted. In addition, establishing and managing phone-based feedback mechanisms can be time and resource-intensive and not all agencies manage to address incoming complaints to a sufficient degree.

In Syria/Turkey, most international agencies rely on their local partners as well as on local councils to gather feedback and to inform communities. Several international NGOs have adopted zero visibility policies, which constrain active communication and outreach efforts. Most local Syrian NGOs, on the other hand, are still able to regularly communicate with communities in the field. They also frequently use online communication platforms, particularly WhatsApp and Facebook, to communicate with communities. This explains why a comparatively large share of the population (15 per cent) was consulted by aid organisations even though the international aid effort in Syria is much more recent than in the other countries studied. However, only few local agencies have elaborate procedures and capacities in place to register and respond to incoming feedback. The political climate in Syria also means that aid organisations are very reluctant to share information or data that may be sensitive. Efforts to create joint feedback mechanisms have therefore not been successful to date.

In South Sudan, access to communities, especially those outside the protection of civilians sites, is highly restricted due to security concerns and a lack of infrastructure. Aid organisations suffer from particularly acute capacity constraints and there are very few formalised feedback and complaints mechanisms. The share of the population that has been consulted about the aid it receives is therefore very low (seven per cent).

---

[20] **The mobile phone ownership rate for South Central Somalia is 78,5%, according to a 2013 poll from BBG & Gallup on media use. Available from: http://www.bbg.gov/wp-content/media/2013/11/gallup-somalia-brief.pdf**

In all four focus countries, the majority of communities surveyed indicated that they have never been asked for their opinion about the aid they received by aid agencies. This confirms results from other large-scale consultations with communities across a diverse range of countries: very few crisis-affected people have had direct communication with humanitarian staff, and agencies are perceived as not sharing information with the wider community (Anderson et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2016). Yet, the differences between the four countries analysed are significant. They suggest that important factors include the aid organisations' implementation approach, the socio-cultural environment, donor support, and technological preconditions. They also indicate that a prevalence of formal, phone-based feedback mechanisms does not necessarily lead to a sense of being consulted among communities.

Figure 5: Did aid agencies consult you about the aid you received? (n = 3313)
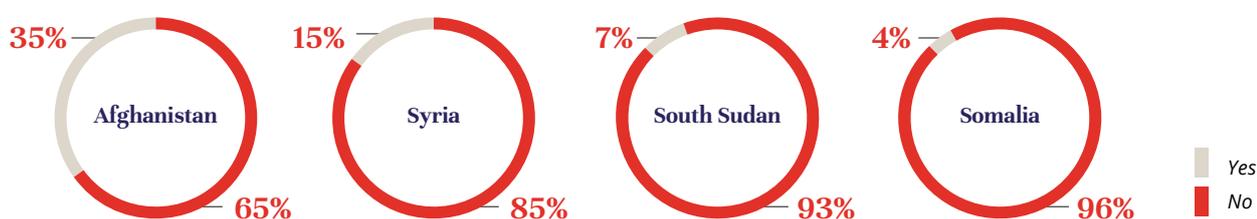
Focus group discussions and interviews with communities revealed that **affected people are similarly sceptical about feedback processes, despite the different feedback landscapes.** Communities criticised aid agencies for relying too much on community leaders, for not involving them when planning projects, and for a lack of follow-up after they provided feedback. Furthermore, they would prefer regular face-to-face communication with independent actors that are not directly associated with programme implementation. As other studies have noted, this would allow them to confidentially report issues concerning field staff and local powerholders, without fear of retaliation (Spearing et al., 2013). People consulted also stressed the need to talk about general concerns that are not related to specific agencies.

Humanitarian staff, on the other hand, noted that their **mechanisms do not deliver the type of feedback the agency expected.** Common objectives are finding out about corruption and aid diversion by partners or community representatives. In practice however, regardless of the mechanism used, complaints about such sensitive issues remain rare. This research was not able to determine why incidents of corrupt behaviour or diversion are rarely reported via available feedback channels, despite this being a major concern for affected populations consulted. However, selected respondents noted that they do not trust phone-based systems and that they fear reprisal for speaking out against influential community members entangled in corrupt practices. In any case, most of the incoming feedback concerns day-to-day operational matters, such as questions about the time of the next distribution or reports of a lost beneficiary card. Agencies reported that they also regularly receive useful feedback about programme quality – another key objective of feedback mechanisms - but mainly through their face-to-face channels.

The volume of incoming feedback is not always what agencies hoped for. In Somalia, for instance, agencies with phone-based mechanisms gather much less feedback than expected.

Four of the eight agencies that had hotlines in place recorded less than 30 communications per month. The volume increases significantly when agencies use their call centres to actively reach out to communities[21] , but only few agencies have done so due to financial and time constraints. In Syria, on the other hand, local staff often feels overwhelmed by the large amount of feedback coming in through face-to-face and digital channels. Agencies with Syrian field staff state they regularly receive face-to-face feedback, with an average of 10 messages per day. One international NGO with offices inside Syria reported that on some days, as many as 200 people come by their offices to talk or complain. This can be highly time-consuming for field staff. Most LNGOs that use Whatsapp and Facebook report that the amount of digital feedback coming in is also relatively high, with some receiving over a hundred messages each week.

LESSONS FOR EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK MECHANISMS IN INSECURE ENVIRONMENTS

Both aid practitioners and affected people in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria stressed the need for better community engagement and two-way communication. Establishing functioning feedback mechanisms in insecure contexts does not require new or radically different approaches. Agencies should adhere to documented good practice[22], and focus investments on frontline staff capacity, information management systems and collaborative approaches to communicate with affected populations. The following lessons can be summarised:

Make communication more inclusive. Too often, agencies only consult 'key informants'. Instead, they should actively seek the views of those without power and inform them about their rights and entitlements (Development Initiatives et al., 2014). By nature, more marginalised groups are not as visible and will not always use existing channels to voice their views. Targeted community outreach with field staff or, where access is constrained, through third parties can help gather perspectives of a more representative sample. Where possible, radio can be used to advertise feedback channels broadly and SMS or phone-based surveys can be used to pose questions to large parts of the population.[23] Where technology is not available or feasible, targeted micro-surveys, such as those piloted in South Sudan, Lebanon or Pakistan, can broaden the scope of feedback collected.[24] Such methods also allow agencies to gather valuable feedback from non-beneficiaries, a perspective that none of the agencies covered by this research have systematically considered so far.

Face-to-face communication channels are most valuable, but require formal procedures to ensure follow-up and learning. International and local implementing agencies that are close to the ground are best positioned to lead efforts to communicate with affected communities. In all countries studied, some field contact is possible and agency staff has selected opportunities to engage with the community. When their own staff cannot go to a certain site, third parties are frequently used to collect data, sometimes including community feedback.[25] To use feedback collected this way, a more systematic and formalised approach is needed. This involves processes and capacities for recording, analysing and following-up on feedback.

---

[21] For example, one UN agency has set up a call-out system for which all its implementing partners are required to collect the phone numbers of at least 30% of the aid recipients. These numbers are then called in order to verify aid delivery, to assess people's satisfaction and to identify sensitive issues such as potential diversion of aid.

[22] Annex 9 provides an overview of relevant literature on community involvement in M&E and practitioners guidance. For more details, see: Ruppert, L., Sagmeister, E. and Steets, J. (2016). Listening to Communities in Insecure Environments: Lessons From Community Feedback Mechanisms in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria (report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).

[23] See chapter 4.3 in this report. For more details and examples, see: Dette, R., Steets, J. and Sagmeister, E. (2016) Technologies for Monitoring in Insecure Environments: A Menu of Options (report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme: SAVEresearch.net).

[24] See for example the work of Ground Truth Solutions: groundtruthsolutions.org

[25] See, for example, Amin Consulting Group (2014), "ACG SPAD Beneficiary Monitoring Full Report" (report commissioned by UK-DFID Afghanistan and DANIDA).

Inclusive communication involves multiple different feedback channels. Face-to-face contact by local field staff or implementing partners needs to be complemented with other communication channels in order to directly connect crisis-affected people with international agencies and donors without field presence. To decide which communication channels are most appropriate, agencies should conduct a (joint) assessment of the communication and information behaviour, in addition to the needs of communities, and consider these factors when designing feedback mechanism(s).

Enable two-way communication instead of only extracting information. To receive meaningful feedback, agencies need to invest in making communities aware of their rights, entitlements, and available feedback channels from the beginning. Posters and leaflets can be useful to provide information and some agencies also use radio broadcasts or online communication and social media.[26] For people to trust the feedback mechanisms, it is also crucial that aid agencies show how they follow up on feedback they receive.

Where multiple agencies are present, more collaborative communication with communities is required. From a community perspective, joint or inter-agency feedback mechanisms are less confusing and more user-friendly. Such systems remain rare since agencies are often not willing to share (sensitive) information with others (Stoddard & Jillani, 2016) and because of the initial costs involved. Nevertheless, examples from Iraq, Kenya, South Sudan and Nepal demonstrate that collaborative approaches bring great benefits:[27] agencies benefit from peer learning and they can remind each other to respond to feedback. In cases where inter-agency platforms are run by entities not involved in aid delivery itself, they offer the benefit of independence, which can help people communicate about sensitive issues. While a comprehensive feedback project or an inter-agency referral platform may not always be realistic or desirable in all contexts, agencies should take steps towards greater collaboration, for instance, through increased information-sharing or joint standards on feedback mechanisms. Humanitarian actors can also enhance transparency and accountability by jointly investing in systematic, independently conducted remote surveys of affected populations including non-beneficiaries (Stoddard & Jillani, 2016). This would strengthen knowledge of underserved areas and highlight which issues are of importance to local populations.

Donors should shape feedback practice more actively. Donors are increasingly requiring agencies to have feedback systems in place.[28] This is not just useful to enhance accountability to affected populations directly, but also to increase acceptance and access of aid agencies. However, it should not be seen as an incentive for each implementing agency to set up their own mechanism. To avoid duplication and to promote wider utilisation of feedback, donors should provide clear incentives for agencies to participate in joint initiatives. Moreover, demanding feedback is only effective if donors create an atmosphere in which agencies feel comfortable to also share the negative feedback they receive. Currently, their 'zero tolerance' policies on corruption can prevent agencies to be open about feedback, especially in areas where terrorist groups of particular concern to donors are active.[29] Donors should also make

---

[26] A good practice example comes from South Sudan, where the NGO Internews uses community radio broadcasts to engage with communities. Through this approach, Internews does not only manage to share vital information, but also creates a trusted channel where people can share their general opinions and aid-related concerns.

[27] The different types of inter-agency mechanisms in Iraq, Kenya, South Sudan and Nepal are discussed in detail in the SAVE report on community feedback mechanisms: Ruppert, L., Sagmeister, E. and Steets, J. (2016). *Listening to Communities in Insecure Environments: Lessons From Community Feedback Mechanisms in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria* (report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).

[28] The US Congress recently passed legislation which requires all agencies receiving USAID funding to report on "*the degree of satisfaction among the beneficiaries of its programming.*" UK DFID has inserted similar requirements into its funding guidelines, see DFID (2015) "Partner Effectiveness Tracker."

[29] These are notably Al Shabaab for Somalia and the Islamic State for Syria. See: Haver, K. and Carter, W. (2016) *Enabling Access and Quality Humanitarian Aid in Insecure Environments* (report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).

sure that their compliance requirements do not hinder responsive programming;[30] rather, they should provide flexible funding so that agencies are able to make significant changes to their programmes based on input from communities.[31]

4.2 The use of third-party monitoring

> For the full report, see Sagmeister, E. & Steets, J. with Derzsi-Horvath, A. and Hennion, C. (2016). The Use of Third Party Monitoring in Insecure Contexts: Lessons from Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. (Thematic report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Third-party monitoring (TPM) has become an integral part of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) toolbox for many agencies working in volatile contexts, as it ensures a minimum level of accountability where access using one's own staff is constrained and provides an independent perspective. But critics have expressed concerns about the approach and emphasise that TPM cannot and must not be seen as a substitute for direct field monitoring by an agency's own staff.[32] Against this background, we examined three main questions:

- What has the experience with TPM been so far?
- What are the benefits and risks of TPM?
- What is required to set up working TPM systems and to ensure that TPM provides a meaningful contribution to a broader monitoring toolbox?

Research on TPM was based on primary data collection in Afghanistan and Turkey (for the response to the Syrian crisis), including 59 interviews that cover 34 agencies relying on TPM, 15 organisations providing TPM services and four donor agencies.[33] The research in Somalia was based mostly on literature and documentation from aid agencies. The team also reviewed general literature on TPM and remote management.[34]

SCOPE OF THIS RESEARCH

Third-party monitoring describes the practice of contracting third parties to collect and verify monitoring data. In insecure contexts, aid actors primarily use TPM to monitor the activities of partner organisations in places where their own staff face access restrictions. TPM has become common practice for many agencies working in volatile contexts, primarily donors and UN agencies, but increasingly also international NGOs. Their uses of the approach can differ.

---

[30] The CHS Alliance is currently assessing whether it can develop a self-assessment tool for donors to see how their reporting requirements encourage or hinder effective community feedback processes.

[31] This point has been included in the final Grand Bargain Agreement that various stakeholders signed at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016: "*Donors commit to fund flexibly to facilitate programme adaptation in response to community feedback.*" Available from: http://reliefweb.int/report/world/grand-bargain-shared-commitment-better-serve-people-need

[32] This division was apparent in interviews with donors and also during SAVE workshops in countries.

[33] All interviews were conducted anonymously. Guidelines used for these interviews can be found in Annex 2. Two consulted organisations are both users and providers of TPM.

[34] Particularly useful was a recent report by the United Nations Risk Management Unit – Afghanistan (2015), entitled 'Third Party and Collaborative Monitoring: Findings, Opportunities and Recommendations." For Somalia, the RMU-Somalia completed a similar study that was shared with the research team, but it was not publicly available at the time of writing this report: RMU-Somalia (2015), "An Exploratory Study Into the Usage of Third Party Monitoring in Somalia." Other sources considered include A. Donini and D. Maxwell (2013), "From Face-To-Face to Face-To-Screen: Implications of Remote Management for the Effectiveness and Accountability of Humanitarian Action in Insecure Environments"; J. Egeland, A. Harmer and A. Stoddard (2011), "To Stay and Deliver"; B. Norman (2012), "Monitoring and Accountability Practices for Remotely Managed Projects Implemented in Volatile Operating Environments"; WFP (2014), "Third Party Monitoring Guidelines"; Integrity Research & Consulting (2015), "Cross Cutting Evaluation of DFID's Approach to Remote Management in Somalia and North-East Kenya – Evaluation Report."

Used by donors, TPM typically serves to verify whether projects were implemented, and, if so, whether they are in line with basic planning indicators. To achieve this end, third parties are commissioned to conduct infrequent visits to project sites (spot checks). But practices vary – two of the donor agencies included in this study reject the sole reliance on TPM and only fund projects that they can visit with their own staff. In some cases, donors also use TPM to gather qualitative data from communities,[35] but, in general, TPM is utilised for verification and quantitative information.

Aid agencies can use TPM in the same way in situations where they act as 'donors.' This is typically the case when the UN or a large international NGO works through implementing partners and wants to verify its partners' activities. TPM is less common among small international NGOs and national organisations, as they rely more on direct implementation and may have greater flexibility to access field sites.

Based on the priorities expressed by SAVE learning partners in countries, this research focuses on the experience of select UN and donor agencies that used TPM to monitor individual programs in areas of constrained access. While the key purpose in all agencies was to overcome access constraints for monitoring, some have broadened the use of TPM beyond verification to resemble an outsourcing of their regular monitoring, including the collection of primary data to inform programming decisions.

Finally, and outside the scope of this research, TPM is also used by donors in an increasing number of countries as one of several components of elaborate independent monitoring mechanisms. In addition to collecting and verifying monitoring data, third parties in these schemes may assess existing monitoring capacities of partners, support partner monitoring, and aggregate and analyse data. [36] These mechanisms were not examined by this research and the following findings should not be read as an assessment of this type of TPM approach.

EXPERIENCES WITH TPM IN AFGHANISTAN, SOUTH CENTRAL SOMALIA AND SYRIA

In **Afghanistan**, agencies have increasingly turned to TPM in order to collect and validate information on partner activities in the field, often to avoid and detect corruption and diversion. Corruption is reported as a major hindrance to receiving aid by a quarter of affected people consulted in a SAVE survey.[37] A survey by the United Nations Risk Management Unit found that in 2015, eight out of nine UN agencies had experience with TPM and had contracted a total of 16 organisations (RMU-Afghanistan, 2015). Today, TPM constitutes a sizeable industry in Afghanistan, with an estimated annual volume of around $200 million.[38] USAID, for example, has spent more than $242 million on TPM services since 2006 (USAID OIG, 2015). Actors consulted for this study noted that the overall demand for TPM is increasing. While no official statistics exist, recent large-scale calls for TPM services by USAID[39] and the World Bank confirm this trend, as does the interest that multiple actors have expressed in the approach.[40] On the supply side, the field consists of a broad range of actors, whose services are used for various purposes, including TPM. New organisations are often being created on an ad-hoc basis to bid on TPM contracts, but do not always

---

[35] See, for example, Amin Consulting Group (2014), "ACG SPAD Beneficiary Monitoring Full Report" (report commissioned by UK-DFID Afghanistan and DANIDA).

[36] Recent examples include the independent monitoring of five humanitarian response contexts funded by DFID, including Somalia, Syria/Iraq, South Sudan, Pakistan and Myanmar, as well as the Monitoring Support Project of USAID in Afghanistan.

[37] For more details, see Stoddard, A. & Jillani, S with Caccavale, J., Cooke, P., Guillemois, D. & Klimentov, V. (2016). The Effects of Insecurity on Humanitarian Coverage (Report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme: SAVEresearch.net)

[38] Estimation based on recent public calls for TPM services put out by aid agencies in Afghanistan.

[39] For example: https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=9b12fc9a284c23065993f89d65bb2644&tab=core&_cview=1-.

[40] This is also exemplified by a recent workshop on third-party and collaborative monitoring convened by the RMU-Afghanistan in Kabul on April 22, 2015.

have the financial capacities to subsist after the contract ends. Moreover, the line between implementing partners and TPM providers is permeable (RMU-Afghanistan, 2015). Several national and international actors active in Afghanistan have added monitoring activities to their traditionally implementation-focused service portfolios.

In **South Central Somalia,** the majority of international organisations run their programmes remotely through partner organisations while based in Nairobi and/or Mogadishu. Given the remote setup and high-profile diversion cases, donors and aid agencies have become increasingly concerned about diversion and corruption. Results from a SAVE survey show that affected people share this concern: Over 80 percent of people consulted see corruption as the biggest obstacle to accessing aid in Somalia. As a result, aid actors have invested significantly in measures to account for the aid channelled into Somalia. Several UN agencies such as UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF have developed elaborate third-party monitoring systems (RMU-Somalia, 2015). Field access remains extremely constrained, and even organisations hired for monitoring rely partly on other parties to do the actual field research.The distance between agencies, their partners and communities is arguably even greater than in Afghanistan, making TPM an important mechanism for collecting and/or verifying data on aid delivery. Today, most donors and UN agencies, as well as selected INGO consortia in Somalia, use TPM. The Risk Management Unit interviewed six UN agencies operating in Somalia and found that five used TPM in some capacity. All donors interviewed for the same study have used TPM (ibid.).

In **Syria,** where the research has focused on the experience of agencies operating from Turkey, the majority of aid agencies have been forced to work remotely from neighbouring countries due to the deterioration of the security situation for international aid workers and increasing restrictions on border crossings for aid workers. These aid agencies are strongly reliant on local partners and on TPM for collecting and verifying data for their programming. Of the 18 organisations consulted, 10 are currently using TPM, and five plan to do so in the future. More recently, donors have been increasing the demand for TPM, using it themselves and asking their partners to do so.[41] Compared to Afghanistan and Somalia, TPM systems in Syria are still at an early stage of their development. Many agencies are in the process of developing their systems further and donors are discussing with their partners suggestions for which projects to monitor and how. All interviewed organisations saw an increasing demand for TPM.

STRENGTHS AND RISKS OF THIRD-PARTY MONITORING

Organisations consulted for this study largely agreed on the main benefits of TPM.[42] Crucially, TPM allows aid agencies to collect and verify data to meet basic requirements of their accountability and results frameworks, and those of their donors or constituencies. As shown in the results of an online survey by the SAVE research programme, satisfaction with implementing partners' M&E systems is generally low among international aid agencies working in insecure contexts. Especially in areas where corruption and diversion pose major concerns to aid actors and affected people, TPM thus offers a valuable additional channel for triangulation.[43] As one interviewee put it, 'The turn to TPM came from the recognition of an increasingly difficult security environment with a large portfolio and a weak implementing partner.' However, TPM is not easy to manage and several risks need to be considered (see table 6).

[41] Interviews with donor agencies.

[42] In doing so, they confirmed results from earlier studies such as Integrity Research & Consulting (2015); RMU-Somalia (2015); RMU-Afghanistan (2015); as well as the conclusions made by SAVE workshops held in Nairobi and Gaziantep (2015).

[43] Based on interviews with donors and confirmed by Risk Management Unit Somalia (2015), "An Exploratory Study into the Usage of Third Party Monitoring in Somalia" (draft not publicly available).

Table 6: The main strengths and risks of TPM

Strengths	Risks
Provides independent "eyes and ears" on the ground where own staff cannot go	Time and resources required to make TPM work are often underestimated by commissioning agencies
Allows the validation of monitoring data from implementing partners where confidence in partner reporting is lacking	Quality of reporting is frequently seen as subpar by TPM users
Can in some cases allow more cost-efficient field monitoring and thus more frequent missions	Reputational risks from field monitors' actions need to be mitigated
Is most useful for verifying quantitative and physical outputs of aid projects	There is significant risk transfer to field monitors, especially where TPM providers lack adequate security systems
	TPM can negatively affect context understanding and acceptance where aid agencies use it as a substitute for regular internal monitoring

To use TPM successfully, this research offers the following lessons:

Anticipate the need for time and resources to set up and maintain effective TPM systems. The work of field monitors is what defines TPM: their conduct in the field is critical to the success of a monitoring mission and to the perception of the monitoring exercise. Therefore, considerable investments need to be made in the selection, training and management of monitoring firms and individual monitors. In addition to the relationship between the third party monitor and the commissioning agency, the relationship between the monitor and implementing partners requires continuous investments and trust building.

Keep expectations and plans modest. The level of access and capacity to collect required data was often overestimated and has led to frustration in many cases. Therefore, it is important to anticipate changes in access early on and to develop parsimonious frameworks for data collection. Focusing on a few key indicators or geographic areas and ensuring the validity of data can prove to be more effective than asking for too much, only to find out later that expectations remain unmet.

Make sure you can use the information collected to inform decisions. Agencies consulted for this study reported that significant adjustments to information management systems were required to make sure that externally gathered monitoring data could be absorbed, interpreted and retained in the agency. Accordingly, commissioning agencies need to invest in internal systems for using this data and feeding relevant information to those in charge of adapting and refining programme design.

Use technological devices to increase control over field monitoring. Agencies relying on GPS to track teams in the field were satisfied with the degree of confidence they consequently felt in the data, particularly when it came to location- and time-stamped data. There are many affordable and easy-to-use tools available to humanitarians. However, it is important to note that the use of technology to collect and verify data also entails risks in conflict contexts.[44]

---

[44] **For a more detailed assessment of the risks and benefits of different technologies, see section 4.3.**

Strengthen security protocols and duty of care. A transfer of risks to monitors is a tolerated consequence of third-party monitoring arrangements. There is, nevertheless, considerable room for improvement in the application of duty of care by contracting agencies. Commissioning agencies should share and discuss security advice with monitors ahead of monitoring missions. As a selection criterion, TPM providers should be expected to provide adequate insurance for their field monitors or access to an equivalent compensatory package for field monitors.

Coordinate use of TPM and exchange on emerging lessons. With multiple actors commissioning TPM services, the need for coordination and joint approaches is growing. More information sharing between and amongst donor and aid agencies would help them to avoid choosing providers that have performed poorly in the past. At the same time, there is considerable unused potential in more collaborative approaches and system-wide use of TPM for purposes of feedback collection. Community consultations showed a clear preference for voicing feedback and complaints to monitors independent from the aid agencies concerned; to make use of this potential, TPM providers need to develop additional capacities to conduct and interpret community consultations. The required skills are different from technical expertise or general M&E knowledge on logframes, indicators etc. Where these skills are lacking and TPM providers are focussing on collection of quantitative data and verification of outputs, lean forms of feedback collection can still be used, e.g., using short standardised surveys about the relevance of aid or perception of aid agencies (cf. chapter 4.1).

CONCLUSION

TPM can provide a meaningful contribution to the broader monitoring and evaluation toolbox by strengthening compliance in places where access is limited. For donors, TPM offers an option to verify monitoring information from partners. Ideally this is done in combination with at least partial monitoring by an agency's own staff.

For aid agencies, TPM can provide a source of primary field data to inform programming and help verify partner reporting. However, agencies should do as much own monitoring as possible. TPM is most useful when it is used as a measure of last resort or complements internal monitoring and verification approaches. Therefore, aid agencies should limit their primary reliance on TPM to exceptional areas with constrained access. The practice of TPM needs to be regularly reassessed, and options for internalising monitoring regularly re-evaluated. To facilitate as much own monitoring as possible, TPM should always be complemented by acceptance-building measures and community feedback systems, as well as transparent communication with communities.

4.3 Technologies for monitoring

> **For the complete toolkit, see: Dette, R., Steets, J. & Sagmeister, E. (2016). Technologies for Monitoring in Insecure Environments: A Menu of Options. (Thematic report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).**

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Consultations with the SAVE learning partners highlighted that many humanitarian organisations are interested in exploring technologies, but unsure what technological options exist and what their respective advantages and downsides for monitoring are. With many dispersed initiatives piloting technologies, it was agreed that the SAVE research could make a valuable contribution by providing an overview of different technological options for M&E and by collecting the lessons learned through various pilot projects in insecure environments.

The team conducted research on a set of specific technology applications: **handheld devices for digital data collection, feedback mechanisms using mobile phones, remote sensing with satellites or delivery tracking, the use of broadcasting with radios, and online communication platforms**. For each application, the research team conducted a literature and document review, identified potential case examples and conducted interviews on practice examples. Results are collected in a toolkit that provides information on how the different applications work, conditions and costs involved, benefits for M&E and limitations and challenges encountered.[45]

DIGITAL DATA ENTRY AND ELECTRONIC DATABASES
Smartphones and tablets, or 'handhelds', can replace paper-based questionnaires to speed up field data collection, enhance control and reduce data-entry errors.

Figure 6: Using digital data entry and electronic databases

Use a pre-programmed interactive form for surveys and enter data along with *multi-media* & *time- and GPS-stamps*. Receive real-time analysis.

Once in reach of an internet connection, *upload* data to server and receive *updates*.

Aggregate and analyse *information*. Build and update forms.
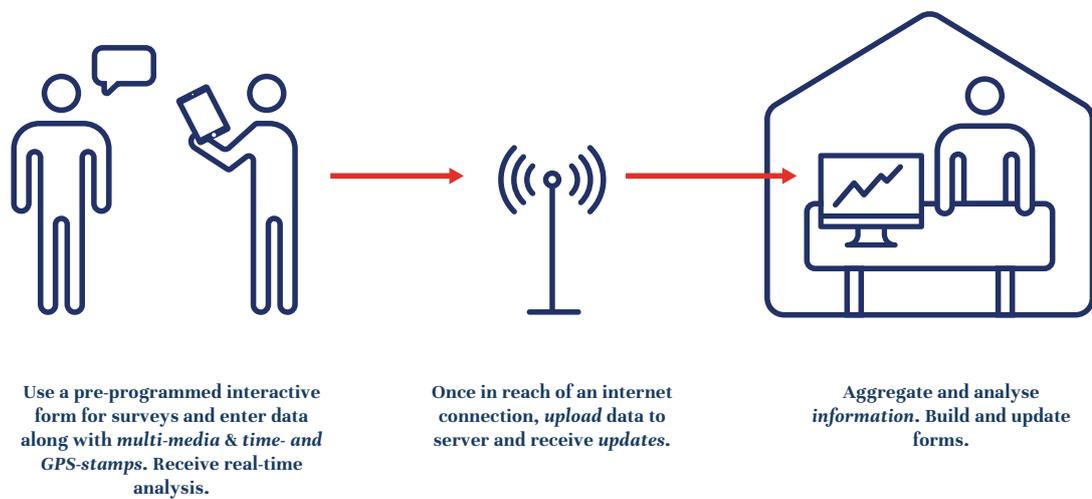
Aid organisations report positive experiences with digital data entry, but also note risks which can make the tool unsuitable in some contexts. The greatest benefits include versatility, ease of use, and efficiency of entering survey data directly on handheld computers. Electronic data transmission from device to database is automatic, which saves time and money. Additional control over the way information is captured (for example, through time and GPS stamps of data entered) improves the quality of data, which is especially valuable where aid actors face access constraints and there is a dependence on third parties to collect data. On the downside, the devices can put staff and local communities at risk where armed groups or authorities are sceptical towards modern communication technologies and suspect them to be used for spying, especially in Syria and Afghanistan, but also in parts of South Central Somalia under Al Shabaab control.

The following table 7 shows main benefits and challenges of digital data entry. Overall, it would be a missed opportunity not to consider digital data entry. Implementation should take place in carefully chosen locations, and should be introduced incrementally, then scaled up over time.

---

[45] Parts of this section were published in an article with the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN): Dette, R. & Steets, J. (2016) Innovating for access: the role of technology in monitoring aid in highly insecure environments. Available from: http://odihpn.org/magazine/innovating-for-access-the-role-of-technology-in-monitoring-aid-in-highly-insecure-environments/

## Table 7: Digital data entry and electronic database: benefits and challenges

Benefits	Challenges
Rapid transmission of data	Requires physical access
Reduced work steps (no data entry from paper forms)	Can attract attention, risk theft and attack, and can increase the risk of being expelled by armed groups
Surveys can be easily adjusted	Encourages closed-question formats
Easier detection of abuse in data collection	Can lead to unequal access to results
Lower visibility for enumerators using small handheld devices	Technology can be viewed with suspicion by armed groups
Can prevent unauthorised views	Requires capacity and skills
Enables the collection of multimedia data	Depends on connectivity and power

PHONE-BASED FEEDBACK AND SURVEY MECHANISMS

Aid organisations have developed several ways to gather beneficiary feedback or survey data remotely using cell phones. In principle, cell phones can be used for all monitoring tasks that would otherwise involve direct conversations between affected communities and aid staff, as well as additional monitoring applications. Three specific applications for monitoring aid efforts and assuring accountability stand out: First, phones are used for feedback or complaints mechanisms where affected people send SMS messages or call hotlines to ask questions, comment or complain about service delivery. Second, targeted data collection is done where aid staff call, send SMS or use interactive voice response surveys to selected groups of people to collect specific data. Third, aid organisations communicate by phone with focal points and/or staff in communities that are difficult to access.

Figure 7: Using call-based feedback and survey mechanisms

Aid organisations or communities send and receive messages via mobile phone networks.

Call centre staff or automated text message or voice recording systems send or receive messages and calls.

Incoming messages are transferred to and processed on a computer, sometimes with specialised software.

The interest and uptake of phone-based systems was facilitated by the increasing spread of mobile phones. More people in crisis situations either own or have access to mobile phones. The devices are becoming cheaper and network connectivity is expanding.[46] At the same time new software and a number of easy to use tools and services were developed that allow organisations to receive large amounts of data via SMS, calls or interactive voice response. This includes applications for managing and receiving calls or messages as well as processing and analysing information.

However, phone-based systems also entail limitations and introduce new challenges. They risk creating a bias toward those who are able and willing to use mobile phones; communities may be confused with navigating parallel hotlines; and there is a risk that armed groups tap into conversations. In some areas, (smart) phones can still put people at risk due to the perception of 'spying' or mistrust towards communication technology.

Communities consulted for this research see phone-based feedback mechanisms as important complements to other channels, especially where physical access of staff is highly restricted. However, introduction and maintenance are costly and uptake can be limited.

Table 8: Phone-based mechanisms: benefits and challenges

Benefits	Challenges
Enables direct contact between aid providers and beneficiaries in areas without physical access	Verification and follow-up are challenging
Phone-based data are technically easy to process	Bias: not everyone has access to a phone
Devices and software are inexpensive	Sensitive data shared via phone can be intercepted and cause risk
Aid organisations have increasing experience with these technologies	Requires literacy

AERIAL IMAGERY WITH SATELLITES, SENSORS AND UAVS

When access is highly restricted, aid agencies have turned to aerial imagery to capture information. This data can provide valuable insights on infrastructure and shelter, population movements, and the effects of disasters. Taken repeatedly over time, imagery can also help assess project outcomes. Practices includes taking images with unmanned aerial vehicles, radar technologies, sensors or barcode scanners that utilise GPS coordinates to track the location of goods, deliveries or people. Remote sensing or earth observation information is often visualised on maps or triangulated with other data sets. In Syria, for example, aid organisations analysed satellite images to help monitor the conflict and key events causing displacement or other impacts on the population. In Somalia, aid organisations used satellite images to assess progress on infrastructure and agricultural projects. The analysis showed, for example, changes in charcoal production, provided rainfall estimates and enabled the identification of different livelihood zones. Another project in Somalia made use of 'crowdsourcing'. Hundreds of volunteers around the world worked with satellite images to tag shelter structures based on their shape, colour, tone and clustering. This created a detailed map of long-term and temporary shelters in the Afgooye corridor.

Figure 8: Using areal and satellite imagery

Projects, their outputs or impact need to be visible from above.

Satellites, planes, radar or UAVs capture image, GPS signal or other data points from the sky.

Experts analyse data and imagery to assess results or make decisions.
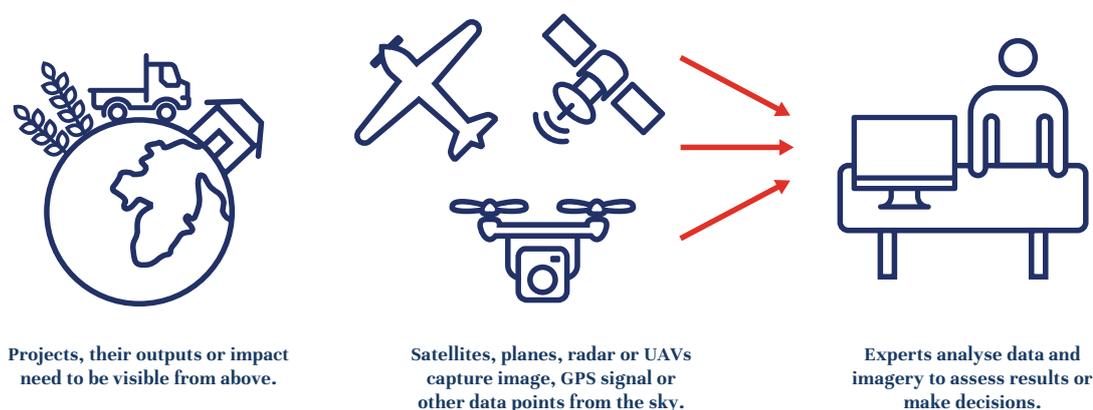
Although satellite technologies are ready to use, barriers include the high price of satellite imagery, the fact that many aid interventions do not create physically visible outcomes and the negative stigma of cheaper UAV alternatives (UAVs or other remote sensing technologies can be associated with spying and military attacks.) In some instances, geospatial information can cause more harm than good. Location records of highly vulnerable or persecuted populations may help aid organisations, but can risk revealing these same locations to persecutors or other actors with harmful intentions. Challenges also remain around ethical concerns, usability and reliability of data. Where satellite imagery was interpreted using voluntary work in the form of crowdsourcing, the reliability of the produced data has been shown to be mixed.[47]

Table 9: Satellite imagery and UAVs: benefits and challenges

Benefits	Challenges
Requires no access	Costs for satellite images can be prohibitive
Enables unique complementary data	Host state, local communities and armed actors can object to their use
Visible impact can be compared over time/scale	Limited experience and evidence of use
One image = many applications	Information requires verification
Industry interest in collaboration	Lack of ethical guidance and standards
UAV and sensor costs	Technical limitations (radius of operation)

LOCATION TRACKING

Using navigation satellites rather than observation satellites discussed above, makes it possible to identify and trace the location of humanitarian deliveries, including tracing points of diversion. It also allows to trace the location of staff and to visualise this information on maps. Satellites then either send signals to GPS devices or scan whole areas to identify

---

[47] **Cf Philippines experience:** http://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/groundtruthing-openstreet-map-building-damage-assessment-haiyan-typhoon

and note transmitter signals. The use of these tools in humanitarian logistics is not new. Yet, recent innovations and creative approaches have made it ever more convenient and cheaper to implement. For example, the IRC in Jordan developed a tracking solution for its Syria response, based on the widely-used OpenDataKit (ODK) software, an android app and printed stickers. If a package gets lost or is diverted, this system can point to the last location where an item was tracked. The source code behind the tool was released along with very clear documentation, meaning that everyone can use and adjust the solution.

Figure 9: Using location tracking

Database at the office receives records on progress.

Warehouse

Distribution center

Delivery location

Stationary or portable tracking tools record arrival and departure of deliveries. GPS sensors, SMS, or smartphone
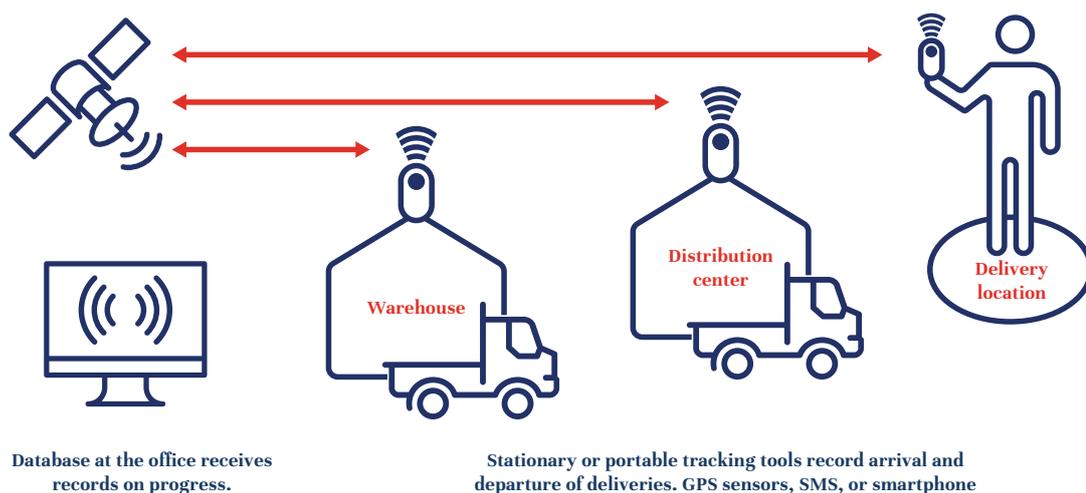
Because location information can be sensitive, location tracking raises similar concerns as satellite imagery with regards to data security and the risk of causing harm to vulnerable populations. Responsible use of the tool and a focus on digital security are essential.

Table 10: Location tracking: benefits and challenges

| Benefits	Challenges
Location coordinates are accurate and difficult to interfere with	Geo-location data is sensitive and can create security risks for staff/locals
Allows for real-time tracking of deliveries	GPS-devices can cause suspicion and access restrictions
Data provides baseline for information management	Technical failures are possible
Recent innovations make tracking cheaper and easier to use for more actors	Infrastructure constraints: not always possible to install GPS-trackers on all vehicles used for deliveries

USING RADIOS AND OTHER MEDIA TO BROADCAST INFORMATION
Radio remains the most popular technology for receiving news and updates, especially in resource-constrained contexts. In insecure environments, it is one of the most reliable ways to reach communities.

Although radio as a one-way communication tool has not received much attention in the monitoring of humanitarian programmes, a number of projects have shown that radio can complement feedback mechanisms and generate input from affected people. In particular, radio can be used to inform communities about humanitarian programming, such as assessments, targeting strategies or distribution dates and locations, linking to accountability efforts and increasing community engagement and feedback. Radio has been used to announce and explain how feedback mechanisms work to increase usage, and interactive radio formats to prompt information from communities.

This research identified different options that aid actors face: using national broadcasts for urgent or regular announcements; contributing humanitarian shows to existing radio stations; or setting up small new radio stations for local humanitarian information, or where no station exists.

Figure 10: Using radio

Broadcast widely or target humaanitarian information, advertise feedback channels, explain programming, accountability, etc.

Record informative radio programme with and for local communities.
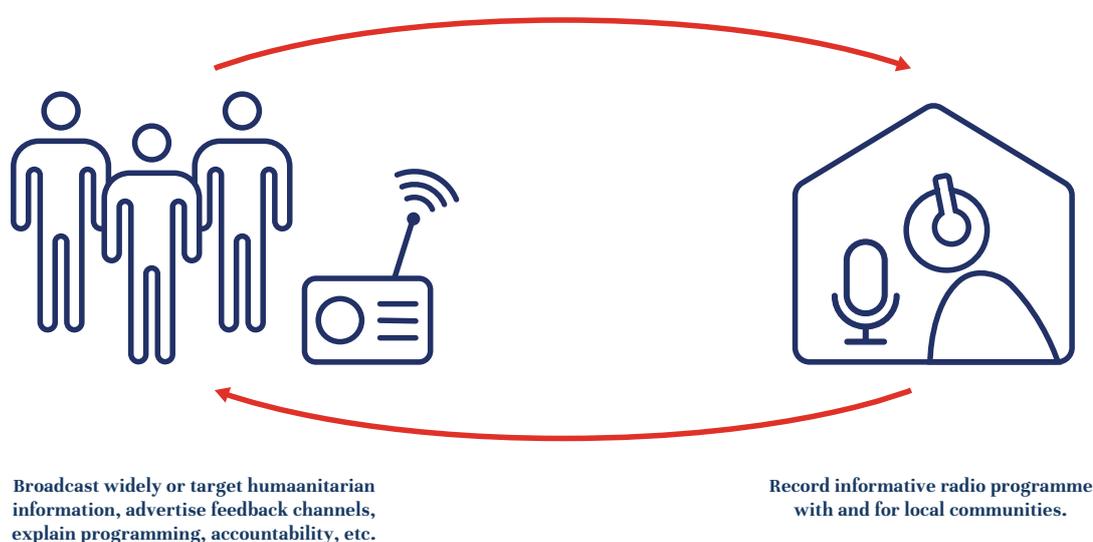
Good practice reviewed includes an example from South Sudan, where one aid agency used a localised USB radio to inform people at protection of civilian (PoC) sites about planned programmes, enabling communities to provide more active feedback. Together with community members, the organisation recorded daily shows aired at select locations at the site.

Table 11: Radio and other media: benefits and challenges

| Benefits	Challenges
Wide and reliable reach	Increases visibility and can create security risks for aid programmes
Local engagement, input and ownership	Difficult to target specific audiences and verify who has been reached
Increases accountability with better information	Translation needs, especially for dialects
Effective for awareness-raising	Costs can accumulate

ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS PLATFORMS

Where online communications platforms are popular, aid agencies can use them for their monitoring, feedback and accountability efforts. This includes social media and networks, like Facebook and Twitter, as well as instant messaging applications, such as WhatsApp. These tools make it possible to transmit information and messages via online connections – often free of charge.

Currently, this is especially popular in the Syrian context where large parts of the population have access to Internet or data connections (but not phone reception) and are actively using web-based communication. If used carefully, social media can effectively fulfil complementary functions for:

- **Outreach and accountability efforts:** Where local communities already use online platforms, they a channel for aid actors to report back, for example on feedback they received and acted on. This can be done on public social media platforms or via bulk communications on instant messaging applications. Information on the follow-up can lead to more confidence among aid recipients to submit feedback.
- **Complaints and suggestions channels:** Instant messaging applications make it is easy to provide numbers for local communities to send comments directly to organisations. Unlike SMS, this would not cost people money, and can be more practical and efficient than complaints boxes or calls.
- **Internal communications for staff:** M&E teams often find it useful to use the available channels to coordinate their work among each other as well as with partners or third-party monitors.

Figure 11: Using online communication platforms
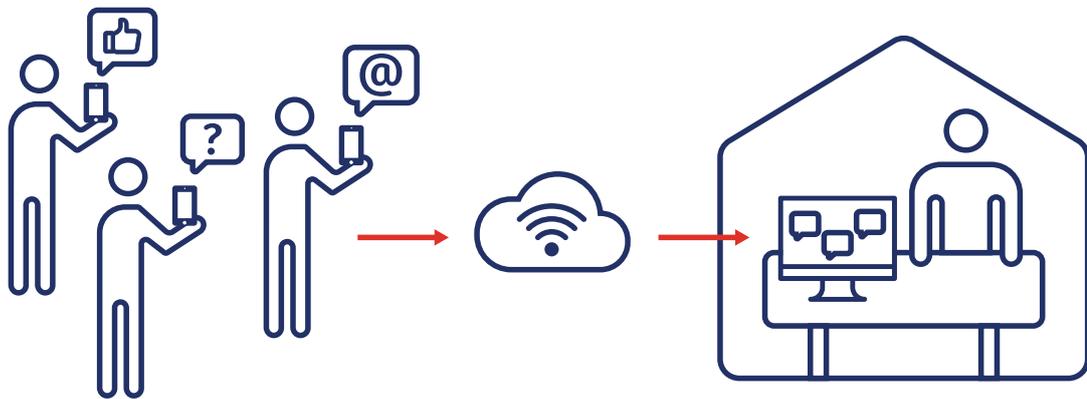
People in local communities can post comments, send questions or feedback via online/cloud channels directly to the aid organisation.

When using online communication platforms, several challenges need to be addressed, especially around information security and data protection. Standards on responsible use should be developed and adhered to, and local communities should be informed clearly about what to expect when submitting messages.

Table 12: Online communication platforms: benefits and challenges

Benefits	Challenges
Low cost or free of charge	Privacy and security risks involved with using public channels that are owned by private companies
Easy to use	Platforms require connectivity, infrastructure and computers/smartphones
Popular and quick communication channels	Risk of expectation mismatch as those sending feedback might assume immediate response/impact
Social media can provide contextual data and information to support programming and M&E	

MITIGATING THE RISKS OF TECHNOLOGY USE FOR MONITORING

Using innovative technological approaches to M&E in highly insecure settings inevitably involves risks, and while there is a natural tendency to revert back to 'low-tech or 'no-tech' in these environments, a range of mitigation strategies should first be considered:

Study the context before choosing tools. It is crucial to understand who influences and spreads information and can impact it.

Involve all users actively. Good practice involves working with users' representatives when inventing, designing and testing tools. Focus groups or interviews and, as much as possible, collaboration all help ensure that technologies are usable and appropriate, including handling, pricing and language. Through trainings and meetings with local staff, authorities and community members, the use of technological applications can be explained and tested

Establish informed consent practices. Amidst the surge in technology across multiple agencies, mechanisms and standards by which to explain the risks involved with handling survey responses or phone requests digitally need to be developed. Ideally, this should be done before a crisis hits.

Provide back-ups and alternatives. Analogue alternatives need to be in place to turn to when a new tool does not work. Users of technological applications need to ensure that every online function has an offline option.

Use security-conscious, free and open source software. In the sensitive contexts covered by this research, it is recommended that only tools reviewable by independent security experts be used. Such free and open-source software options exist for most relevant applications.

Minimise and limit data. Instead of collecting what is possible, good practice entails collecting only data for which a clear use case can be described from the outset. If it is not clear how data collected will be used, it should not be collected.

Share costs and risk. Collaboration can greatly reduce the costs of refining tools. Agencies should also develop agreed mechanisms for sharing data where appropriate.

4.4 Bringing monitoring & evaluation back to basics

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Humanitarian staff working in insecure contexts often feel overwhelmed by the M&E demands of donors, consortia, clusters and their agencies' headquarters; they therefore expressed an interested in exploring how we could bring M&E systems 'back to basics'. To determine where unnecessary complexity existed and where potentially redundant data was collected, the SAVE research team tracked the flow of monitoring data of two international humanitarian NGOs working in South Central Somalia, from the field level to end-users. The research team focused on nutrition data for one of the organisations, and food security and livelihoods data for the other. This involved 31 interviews with staff at different levels of the two organisations, as well as their partners, clusters and donors. In addition, the research team interviewed five donor representatives and M&E experts at the global level and reviewed 30 documents showing the monitoring requirements of various aid agencies. Detailed research results were provided to those two organisations, with the following section highlighting relevant conclusions.

MAIN FINDINGS

Contrary to the initial assumption that M&E requirements were too complex and sometimes redundant, tracking the flow of monitoring data of two NGOs showed that the need for improvement does not lie at the level of data collection on the ground. It should be noted that this research focused on the monitoring processes of only two individual organisations and could therefore not identify possible overlaps and duplications between the monitoring activities of different organisations. Moreover, this finding is not necessarily representative for other aid agencies working in this and other contexts, including in particular aid agencies with lower technical capacity. It should thus be interpreted with caution and against the background of broader studies showing that agencies tend to make limited use of performance information to shape their response strategies (Darcy et al., 2013; Darcy, Anderson et al., 2007). Yet, field teams of the two organisations studied generally perceived the data collection requirements as realistic and indicated that they were using the collected data to keep track of programme performance. The tracking exercise did demonstrate that, for these NGOs, there is greater potential for making monitoring more efficient higher up on the monitoring chain – at the country office, cluster, consortia and headquarters levels. The SAVE research team identified five main issues that were discussed during in-country consultations and seem relevant beyond the two organisations assessed:

1. **Field-level teams collect more data than required and used at the agencies' regional and headquarters level, as well as by donors, clusters and consortia.**
This difference was more notable for food security and livelihoods data than for nutrition data, for the latter are highly standardised at all levels. In one examined case, the agency collected a total of 60 indicators at field level, ranging from 'household composition' and; access to mobile phones' to core food security indicators, such as the Food Consumption Score and the Household Dietary Diversity Score. The agency's country team considered all of these indicators relevant for programming, and for understanding the performance and impact of different projects. However, only nine of the 60 indicators were reported on and eventually used by the agency's regional team and headquarters. The number of indicators that the agency is required to report to external stakeholders, such as donors and the food security cluster, was similarly low.

Implications

The small number of relatively standardised indicators requested by higher levels and by external stakeholders provides the country team with a valuable degree of flexibility. Where agencies face capacity constraints and/or where concerns about beneficiary survey fatigue exist, country teams should consider focusing on a smaller set of core indicators rather than collecting the full range of information. At the same time, different stakeholders should make a greater effort to make use of and analyse the data collected in the field. For example, country and regional teams could analyse whether the collected data allow for an assessment of the impact of the assistance provided.

2. Monitoring requirements are not always proportional to the type and size of intervention.

Monitoring requirements tend to be applied uniformly across programmes –without taking proportionality into account. For example, it was mandatory for one agency to register all demographic household details and implement a post-distribution satisfaction survey, despite distributing only a very small amount of non-food items. Inflexible monitoring requirements can create disproportionate costs and exacerbate beneficiary fatigue.

Implications

Monitoring guidelines need to be flexible, so that requirements can be adapted to the type and scale of goods and services delivered in an emergency.

3. Small variations in the format and categorisation of monitoring data required by different stakeholders can lead to large inefficiencies.

Even where indicators are highly standardised (as is the case in the nutrition sector, for example), agencies, consortia and donors often require data to be disaggregated in slightly different ways, using varying age brackets and data formats or adding additional options. These differences, while minor, often translate into significant additional work.

Implications

Organisations, clusters, consortia and donors should align their monitoring indicators as much as possible. They should also agree on the exact variables that will be used as the core minimum indicators, or, alternatively, give partners flexibility regarding data format and dis-aggregation. The commitment passed by aid agencies and donors at the World Humanitarian Summit to 'simplify and harmonise reporting requirements by the end of 2018 by reducing its volume, jointly deciding on common terminology, identifying core requirements and developing a common report structure' is a step in this direction.[48]

4. Monitoring systems are changed too frequently without giving field teams the time to adjust.

When introducing or changing digital data-entry tools and online databases or when adapting indicators, agencies have not always kept in mind that each change requires additional training for field staff. Accommodating this adjustment is not easy in complex contexts such as South Central Somalia; it requires time that agencies often do not plan for, especially when such changes are made frequently.

Implications

Any changes to existing monitoring arrangements should be carefully considered, taking effects on field teams into account.

---

[48] For additional recommendations, see ICVA (2016) "Less Paper, More Aid" and Caccavale, J. et al. (2016) "Donor Reporting Requirements Research".

5. At each level, there is not enough communication on the use of data to the level below.

At any level, be it affected populations, field teams or country offices, a core source of frustration is the lack of understanding of how the data they provide is eventually used, if at all, for analysis or decision-making further up the chain. As capacities for monitoring and analysis are limited, teams at all levels typically fail to communicate results and related decisions back down to the level from which they received the data. In particular, the benefit of having consortia and clusters as facilitating utilisation and data analysis is often unclear to member organisations. This reduces ownership of the monitoring system and creates the impression that redundant data is being collected.

Implications

Teams involved in monitoring at all levels should attach greater priority to communicating to their data sources what the results are and how they are used. In addition, management staff needs to involve a wider group of stakeholders, such as field teams, already at the stage of designing monitoring systems in order to discuss and determine collectively which type of data will be collected for which specific purpose.

5. Conclusion: Moving towards better monitoring in insecure environments

In some of the most challenging environments, aid agencies have started to innovate and roll out promising approaches to monitor aid, but their efforts fall short of what is necessary. The research finds that rather than generally doing more (or less) monitoring, the overall level and targeting of investments in M&E systems should be determined by more collective and strategic decision-making. This should include donors, implementing agencies and their local partners. This more comprehensive approach is necessary to avoid simply creating additional layers of monitoring at agency, cluster, consortium, donor and country levels that further absorb capacities already under strain.

Figure 12: Current layers of monitoring

Country-wide and system-wide monitoring

Monitoring by individual donors

Monitoring by consortium and/or cluster

Monitoring by UN or INGO

Implementing organisations' own monitoring
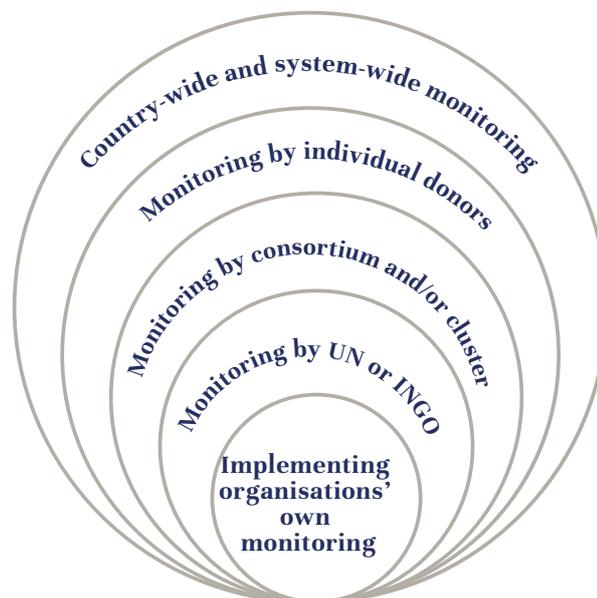
Stronger, system-wide approaches can make monitoring more effective and are necessary to address some of the weaknesses of current practices, by showing aggregated and longer-term effects of assistance, for example. This is in line with commitments to 'The Grand Bargain' passed during the recent World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, which called for joint functional monitoring by donors to be strengthened to allow for monitoring of country-wide effects.[49]

49 **The Grand Bargain – A Shared Commitment to Better Serve People in Need (Various authors, available online)**

Currently, investments in insecure settings tend to focus on introducing additional controls – for example, by using technologies for monitoring or employing third parties to verify results. In areas where corruption and diversion pose major concerns to aid actors and affected people, this offers valuable additional options for triangulation. These additional options for triangulating and verifying monitoring data are valuable including for assessing whether goods and services are delivered, and likewise, for detecting cases of diversion. At the same time, agencies should guard against overreliance on these modalities. Technological applications can improve the quantity and quality of data, but cannot replace face-to-face communication and are no panacea for overcoming access constraints. In addition, these practices bring new risks when applied in violent contexts.

In addition, long sub-contracting chains make effective oversight more difficult and formalised M&E systems become more important and more resource-intensive, the further removed an organisation's activities are from the field. Therefore, while investments in improved monitoring systems are important in remote management situations, it should remain a priority to shorten implementing chains and have as much direct field presence as possible.

This study further confirmed that current monitoring is driven by accountability to donors rather than aid recipients. This presents a missed opportunity to increase local participation and support. It also undermines programme quality, increases costs, raises security risks for operational staff and makes the targeting of aid more difficult (Haver & Carter, 2016). Therefore, good practice for community participation must be applied more consistently in insecure settings. This involves assessing existing communication preferences of communities and combining technology with more traditional consultation methods. System-wide mechanisms and a broader set of approaches are needed to provide communities with timely and reliable information on the crisis situation and on available humanitarian services, and to engage them in programming decisions. More inclusive programming should be encouraged by donors and supported by third parties collecting data on community perceptions. Communication efforts need to be led, however, by implementing agencies and local organisations close to the respective populations.

With capacity gaps as the main obstacle to better monitoring, it is these levels of national and international implementing agencies working close to the field that require more support to strengthen systems and personnel. Good practice examined by this research combines applied learning and capacity support with improved verification.

Finally, to allow these changes to bear fruit and improve the quality of aid delivered in insecure contexts in the long run, donors deciding to provide assistance in highly insecure environments need to commit more explicitly to risk-sharing with their implementing partners. Living up to such commitments, they should reward partners for being transparent about good or bad results, rather than maintaining an appearance of total control and accountability.

References

Anderson, M. B., Brown, D. & Jean, I. (2012). *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid*. CDA Collaborative Learning Projects.

Alexander, J. (2015). *Informed Decision Making: Including the Voice of Affected Communities in the Process*. Humanitarian Accountability Report, CHS Alliance.

Amin Consulting Group. (2014). *ACG SPAD Beneficiary Monitoring Full Report*. Report commissioned by UK-DFID Afghanistan and DANIDA.

ALNAP &CDA. (2014). *Humanitarian Feedback Mechanisms: Research, Evidence and Guidance*.

Barnett, Michael and Peter Walker. "Regime Change for Humanitarian Aid. How to Make Relief More Accountable." *Foreign Affairs* 94 (2015): 130–41.

Buchanan-Smith, M. & Cosgrave, J. (2013). *Evaluation of Humanitarian Action Pilot Guide*. ALNAP.

Brown, Dayna and Antonio Donini. "Rhetoric or Reality? Putting Affected People at the Centre of Humanitarian Action." ALNAP Study. London: ALNAP/ODI, 2014.

Caccavale, J., Haver, K. & Stoddard, A. (2016). *Donor Reporting Requirements Research*. Humanitarian Outcomes. Report commissioned by USAID/OFDA.

CHS Alliance, Group URD and the Sphere Project. (2014). *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*. Available from: https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard

Daniel, J. (2013). *Sampling Essentials: Practical Guidelines for Making Sampling Choices*. Sage, Los Angeles.

Development Initiatives & ITAD and CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. (2014). *Lessons from DFID's Access and Beneficiary Feedback Pilot Programme*. Evaluation commissioned by UK DFID.

Dette, R., Steets, J. & Sagmeister, E. (2016). *Technologies for Monitoring in Insecure Environments: A Menu of Options.* (Thematic report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).

Dette, R. & Steets, J. (2016). *Innovating for Access: the Role of Technology in Monitoring Aid in Highly Insecure Environments.* Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN).

DFID (2010). *Working Effectively in Conflict-affected and Fragile Situations.*

DFID (2012). *Results in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States and Situations.*

Donini, A. & Maxwell, D. (2013). *From Face-To-Face to Face-To-Screen: Implications of Remote Management for the Effectiveness and Accountability of Humanitarian Action in Insecure Environments.* Feinstein International Center, Tufts University.

Egeland, J., Harmer, A. & Stoddard, A. (2011). *To stay and deliver: Good practice for humanitarians in complex security environments.* OCHA Policy and Studies Series, New York.

Guerrero et al. (2013). *On the Right Track: A Brief Review of Monitoring and Evaluation in the Humanitarian Sector.*

Haver, K. & Carter, W. (2016). *Enabling Access and Quality Humanitarian Aid in Insecure Environments.* SAVE Research Programme.

Hofmann, C., Roberts, L. Shoham, J. & Harvey, P. (2004). *Measuring the Impact of Humanitarian Aid. A Review of Current Practice.* Humanitarian Policy Group ODI, London.

IFRC and ICRC (1995) *The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.*

International Council of Voluntary Agencies, ICVA. (2016). *Less Paper, More Aid.*

Integrity Research & Consulting. (2015). *Cross Cutting Evaluation of DFID's Approach to Remote Management in Somalia and North-East Kenya – Evaluation Report.*

Jones, M., des Groseilliers, M., Love, K. & Shams, R., (2016). *Community Consultations on Humanitarian Aid. Overall Findings.* Ipsos Public Affairs. Report commissioned by the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) Secretariat.

Norman, B. (2012). *Monitoring and Accountability Practices for Remotely Managed Projects Implemented in Volatile Operating Environments.* **Tearfund.**

OECD/DAC. (2010). *Evaluating Development Co-Operation. Summary of Key Norms and Standards.*

REACH. (2015). *Area of Origin: Communication Channels and Social Media Report.*

Ruppert, L., Sagmeister, E., Steets, J. (2016). *Listening to Communities in Insecure Environments: Lessons from Community Feedback Mechanisms in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria.* **(Thematic report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).**

Sagmeister, E. & Steets, J. with Derzsi-Horvath, A. and Hennion, C. (2016). *The Use of Third-Party Monitoring in Insecure Contexts: Lessons from Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria.* **(Thematic report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).**

Schreter, L. & Harmer, A. (2013). *Delivering Aid in Highly Insecure Environments. A Critical Review of the Literature, 2007-2012.*

Sida, L., Trombetta, L. & Panero, V. (2016). *Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Syria Crisis.* **UN OCHA.**

Spearing, M., Midgley, T., & Jean, I. (2013). *Beneficiary Feedback in Fragile and Conflict-Affected States.* **CCVRI Help Desk Response. Finance, Performance and Impact Department, UK.**

Steets, J., Reichhold, U. & Sagmeister, E. (2012). *Evaluation and review of humanitarian access strategies in DG ECHO funded interventions.* **Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi).**

Steets, J. & Caccavale, J. (2016). *The Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism of the Common Humanitarian Fund in South Sudan* **(Thematic report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).**

Steets, J., Ruppert, L. (2016). *Monitoring and Evaluation in Insecure Contexts: Back to Basics?* **(Thematic report from the Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) research programme).**

Stoddard, A., Harmer, A., & DiDomenico, V. (2009). *Providing aid in insecure environments: 2009 Update.* **Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) Policy Brief 34. Overseas Development Institute (ODI).**

Stoddard, A. & Jillani, S with Caccavale, J., Cooke, P., Guillemois, D. & Klimentov, V. (2016). *The Effects of Insecurity on Humanitarian Coverage.* **SAVE Research Programme.**

Transparency International (2014). *Preventing Corruption in Humanitarian Operations: Handbook of Good Practice.* **Berlin.**

United Nations Risk Management Unit – Afghanistan. (2014). *Technology, Monitoring and Evaluation.* **The Use of Technology by UN Agencies in Afghanistan in support of Monitoring and Evaluation (in press).**

United Nations Risk Management Unit – Afghanistan. (2015). *Third Party and Collaborative Monitoring: Findings, Opportunities and Recommendations.*

United Nations Risk Management Unit – Somalia. (2015). *An Exploratory Study Into the Usage of Third Party Monitoring in Somalia.*

USAID. (2013). *Connecting to Opportunity: A Survey of Afghan Women's Access to Mobile Technology.*

USAID OIG. (2015). *Audit of USAID/Afghanistan's Strategy for Monitoring and Evaluating Programs Throughout Afghanistan.* **Audit Report No. F-306-16-001-P.**

WFP. (2014). *Third Party Monitoring Guidelines.*