

Monitoring & Beneficiary Accountability in Remote Managed Locations

An assessment of Tearfund's
monitoring & accountability practices
Kandahar, Afghanistan

Prepared for Tearfund Afghanistan
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Glossary

The list below defines the meanings of acronyms and terms contained in this assessment.

Acronym / Term	Explanation ¹
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
AC	Area Coordinator (Kabul-based)
BSF	Bio-sand Filter
KAP Survey	Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice Survey. This includes questions about health and hygiene and is conducted with project beneficiaries both pre- and post-project activities.
DMA	Disaster Management Advisor (Kabul-based)
AO	Agricultural Officer (Kabul-based)
SoT	Stories of Transformation
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
Field staff	Community Supervisors (2) and Community Facilitators (6), who daily implement and monitor the project in the field.
Logframe	Logistical Framework for project implementation (objectives, indicators)
Methodology	A description of 'how it will be done', in this case the <i>set</i> of methods appropriate to monitor and/or evaluate the project. Designed to collect the best possible evidence to prove achievement (or not) of project objectives.
Monitoring	An ongoing measure of progress, quality and impact of a project to determine what is and is not working well, so adjustments can be made along the way.
Monitoring activities	Activities that collect and/or report information to indicate project progress or quality, i.e. water testing, interviews, weekly progress reports. Collecting beneficiary feedback for accountability purposes is one type of monitoring activity.
Outcome	The short- and medium-term results of the projects outputs/activities, i.e. decreased incidence of communicable disease.
Output	The immediate product or services delivered as a result of project activities, i.e. number of health training sessions or BSFs delivered.
Peer Monitoring	Tearfund commission local project staff from a partner organisation in Kandahar to conduct monitoring specific to agreed terms of reference. This provides an independent check of project activities to assure beneficiaries, donors, and project management of project quality, and obtains impartial input.
Project	The 'project' refers to the BPRM 2 project, which was the sole project implemented in Kandahar at the time of this assessment. ²
Project activities	Activities carried out in the field to implement the BPRM project, i.e. health training, distributing BSFs.
Project staff	Community Supervisors and Facilitators, and the Project Manager in Kandahar.
Qualitative information	Information collected through interviews, focus groups, observation etc, which provide an understanding of social situations and interaction, as well as people's values, perceptions, motivations, and reactions. Information is generally expressed in narrative form or pictures (i.e., not numerically).
Quantitative data	Numerical data collected through surveys, observation etc, that can be counted, classified and analysed to explain what is observed.
Reliability	The consistency or dependability of data or information from the field.
Remote Management	An operational response to insecurity, involving the withdrawal or drastic reduction of the number of international and sometimes national personnel from the field. Remote-management transfers greater programme responsibility to local staff, local partner organisations or private contractors. Projects and programmes are then managed and overseen from a different location.
Validity	The extent to which a method or test accurately captures what is intended to be captured or measured

¹ Some monitoring terms are based on: Tearfund Terms & Definitions, with additional information from http://www.unaids.org/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/document/2010/11_ME_Glossary_FinalWorkingDRAFT.pdf and <http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/340-evaluation-monitoring-outcome-and-impact.html>.

² A second project, BPRM 3 was also in the initial stages of implementation, but nearly all documents and verbal answers to questions referred to the BPRM 2 project.

Executive Summary

An independent assessment of Tearfund’s monitoring and beneficiary accountability practices in Kandahar was conducted in September 2011. This assessment was commissioned as part of the wider research project: *Effective Monitoring and Beneficiary Accountability Practice for Remotely Managed Projects in Insecure Environments*, which aims to capture and critically evaluate current remote monitoring practices in a range of NGOs in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

This assessment clarified Tearfund’s approach to monitoring in remote managed locations; assessed the extent to which existing practices were being implemented to effectively monitor project progress and quality; identified the strengths and weakness in existing practices; and makes recommendations to improve monitoring in Kandahar. Lessons have also been drawn to contribute to the wider research to develop practical monitoring solutions in remote managed locations.

The assessment was conducted using a qualitative case study methodology; the ‘case’ being the monitoring practices for projects in Tearfund’s remotely managed Kandahar project. Information was gathered through semi-structured interviews with Tearfund project staff, peer monitors and beneficiaries in Kandahar, and senior staff in Kabul; observation of project office practices; and review and analysis of project documents.

Across all Tearfund project locations, the majority of monitoring practices and expectations for reporting are common, whether or not the location is remote managed. The differences in monitoring practices that do exist in Kandahar are in response to two related factors; the absence of an Area Coordinator *in situ*, which requires additional practices to assure operational oversight (Office Shura and Weekly Progress Reports), and second; insecurity, which requires all in-field monitoring to be conducted by national staff, including peer monitors. No additional information is required from projects in Kandahar by Tearfund management or donors as a result of it being remote managed.

Three types of monitoring are conducted in Kandahar; direct monitoring in the field; operational monitoring and reporting; and activities to build M&E capacity. Under these categories, the assessment considered the extent to which each of the monitoring practices were: able to be carried out; adequate to monitor project progress and quality (methodology); appropriate to the cultural and security context; and produced reliable and useful information. The findings provided a summary of strengths and weaknesses.

Overall, the assessment did not identify any monitoring practices in Kandahar that were obsolete or unnecessary, with the exception of collecting health clinic data³. All activities were able to be implemented in the context of remote management, though the reliance on national staff in the field contributed to a lower quality reporting in some cases and cautious confidence of senior staff in quantitative data. All practices were linked to project objectives and were useful to their audience.

Opportunities do exist, however, to improve the rigour of individual practices to better monitor the quality and outcomes of projects. The following summarises the recommendations to address opportunities for improvement in Kandahar.

Establish a clear methodology to show how existing activities that monitor project progress contribute to monitoring project outcomes. The methodology would describe how the set of individual methods fit together to monitor and evaluate project outcomes over the duration of the project, and ensure that project progress and outputs are monitored in coordination with project outcomes. (Rec. 1)

³ See end of Section 5.1.1 and Recommendation 4.

Introduce more rigour to qualitative methods, to capitalize on staff's strengths, capacity and interest and strengthen the validity of findings in the mid-year and final evaluations, which rely heavily on qualitative information. (Rec. 2)

Quantitative data form the backbone of reporting against project indicators for Tearfund management and donors; the methods need to be robust. Recommendations include the need to strengthen the KAP survey though using sample frames and tracking change in the same group of beneficiaries over the duration of the project, as opposed to single 'snapshots'. Findings also suggest ways to improve the validity of existing methods to collect health data, another key part of reporting against indicators. (Recs.3&4)

Establish clear expectations about the frequency of visits by Kabul-based specialists to Kandahar project sites. Currently, Kabul-based specialists visit the Kandahar project fewer than four times per year. In the context of remote management, in-field monitoring by national staff is vital to assure the quality of the project and accountability. However, the expectation upon national staff points to an inherent difficulty of monitoring in remote managed locations, where often "the result is not a security gain, but rather a shift of risk from internationals to nationals."⁴ (Rec. 5)

Peer monitoring is a promising tool for remote monitoring, but to be effective peer monitors must have a clear understanding of the instructions, scope of the task, of reporting expectations, and context of the project overall. Peer monitors bring different experiences and understanding of development, terminology, and M&E. This is an inherent strength of peer monitoring that allows fresh insight, but it may also be necessary to establish an understanding of these differences so they don't instead become a hindrance. (Rec. 6)

This assessment did not identify any 'silver bullet' solution for monitoring in remote managed locations. To the contrary, the assessment highlighted that effective monitoring and beneficiary accountability in remotely managed locations requires a multi-faceted approach that: is appropriate to the strengths and capacity of staff; has a clear 'roadmap' to guide monitoring, reporting and to act as a common reference point for communication between project staff and management; employs a robust methodology; and includes focus on building the capacity of staff.

The lessons highlight the importance of developing practical solutions that are appropriate to projects' context in Afghanistan. This context is often more complex than our 'ordered' monitoring systems can capture. Appropriate solutions may need to bend beyond the strict discrete and numerical-based indicators of donors and include a more creative, or at least a mixed-method⁵ approach to monitoring.

Finally, monitoring is not an 'end in itself'. The goal of the remote managed monitoring solution must be to capture the *best* evidence to assess project progress or quality and, most importantly, to provide evidence for project outcomes that will answer the question "Did the project make a difference?"

⁴ Quotation from findings in *Remote Management, Lessons Learned* (2008), Tearfund Afghanistan. Kandahar Remote Management Review (2010), Area Coordinator, Tearfund Afghanistan, p.28.

⁵ A 'mixed-method' approach to monitoring refers to the integrated use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in the methodological design.

1. Introduction

An external assessment of Tearfund's monitoring and beneficiary accountability practices was conducted in Kandahar in September 2011. The assessment was required as part of the larger research project *Effective Monitoring and Beneficiary Accountability Practice for Remotely Managed Projects in Insecure Environments*.

Kandahar provided a case study to examine how Tearfund conducts project monitoring in remotely managed locations. This assessment examined the strengths and weaknesses of monitoring and beneficiary accountability practices, and proposes recommendations for improving these in Kandahar.

See Annex1 for the assessment's Terms of Reference.

1.1 Purpose

To assess the monitoring activities and practice, and beneficiary accountability systems, in Tearfund's remotely managed project in Kandahar.

1.2 Assessment Aims

Three aims guided the structure and method of assessment:

1. Clarify and describe Tearfund's overall current approach to monitoring and accountability practices in remotely managed locations.
2. Critically assess Tearfund's existing monitoring and accountability practices in Kandahar, identifying strengths and weaknesses.
3. Identify recommendations and/or potential solutions that may be used to improve monitoring and accountability practices in remotely managed locations in Afghanistan.

1.3 Background

Kandahar is Tearfund's only remotely managed project location in Afghanistan. Tearfund has operated in Kandahar since 2001. In 2008, Tearfund relocated its Area Coordinator to Kabul and introduced a system of remote management after the kidnapping of an expatriate NGO worker. Insecurity now excludes expatriates from visiting project sites to monitor project activities and meet beneficiaries.

Remote management has significant implications for project monitoring and therefore for the assurance of project quality in insecure areas. In Kandahar, local project staff are relied on to implement the project and also monitor it.

The findings from this assessment contribute to the research project, *Effective Monitoring and Beneficiary Accountability Practice for Remotely Managed Projects in Insecure Environments*, which aims to capture and critically evaluate current remote monitoring practices in a range of humanitarian and/or development organisations in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The research seeks to develop new practices to meet the challenge of ensuring quality project implementation in medium to high insecurity project locations.

1.4 Tearfund's Project in Kandahar

Tearfund was implementing and/or finalizing projects funding by the US Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration, (BRPM) in Kandahar at the time of this assessment. Because the most recent BPRM-funded project had only been initiated in mid-September 2011, the focus of the assessment was on the recently completed BPRM-funded project (completed on 14 September 2011; BPRM 2 "the project"). The project provided assistance for returnees and IDPs in 26 communities from October 2010 to September 2011. Activities included water, sanitation, and hygiene interventions, education and promotion; education and implementation

of bio sand filtration systems; and nutrition promotion through home gardening and animal husbandry programmes.

2. Methodology

A qualitative case study of existing monitoring practices in Kandahar was conducted to address three key assessment aims (Table 1). Assessment methods used included interviews of Tearfund staff in Kandahar and Kabul, observation, and document analysis. See Annex 2 for the detailed methodology.

Table 1: Assessment Aims & Key Questions

Assessment Aims	Key Questions
1. Clarify and describe Tearfund's overall current approach to monitoring and accountability practices in remotely managed locations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What monitoring practices are considered routine/compulsory for all Tearfund locations? b. What monitoring practices are unique to Kandahar, Tearfund's remotely managed location? c. What are the direct or indirect influences that guide Tearfund's overall approach to monitoring in remotely managed areas (if any)?
2. Critically assess Tearfund's existing monitoring and accountability practices in Kandahar, identifying strengths and weaknesses.	<p>To what extent are monitoring practices in Kandahar:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. able to be carried out? b. adequate to monitor project progress and quality? c. appropriate to the cultural and security context? d. reliable (objective/triangulated)? e. useful?
3. Identify recommendations and/or potential solutions that may be used to improve monitoring and accountability practices in remotely managed locations in Afghanistan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. What opportunities exist to improve current monitoring practices in Kandahar (including if practices are unnecessary, ineffective or obsolete)? b. Were any new solutions identified that may improve monitoring in remotely managed locations?

2.1 Methods

Semi-structured individual interviews with advisors and senior project staff were conducted with the M&E Officer⁶, Kandahar Area Coordinator (AC), Agricultural Officer, Disaster Management Advisor, and the Project Manager in Kandahar.

Semi-structured group interviews with field staff, peer monitors, and community members. Group interviews were conducted in the Kandahar project office with: project Community Supervisors (2); female Community Facilitators (4); male Community Facilitators (2); peer monitors (4); and male community members/beneficiaries (7)⁷.

Observation of operational environment. The evaluator visited the Kandahar office for three days, with the Area Coordinator, to observe the operational environment, conduct interviews, and view hardcopy project records. It was not possible, nor intended, to visit the project site due to security.

Analysis of project documents. Documents were reviewed for evidence of how monitoring practices are carried out; to understand the content of information reported; and to verify the flow of information from the field to reports. Brief quantitative analysis of beneficiary feedback was conducted to compare Kandahar reporting with other locations. (See Annex 3 for the list of project documents reviewed).

⁶ Two short discussions were held with the M&E Officer prior to the evaluator's visit to the Kandahar project office. A third interview via Skype was conducted after the visit when the M&E Officer was out of country.

⁷ The group interview was not representative of all beneficiaries; no sampling frame was used in the selection of beneficiaries for the group interview. Field staff asked known male community leaders from the project to attend; it was not possible for female members to visit the office. Participation was voluntary.

3. Context Analysis

Factors that affect the environment in which Tearfund projects in Kandahar operate are both external (security and humanitarian context) and internal (cultural and social norms).

Security

Kandahar's external environment is dominated by insecurity. NGOs are not deliberately targeted nor is their presence opposed by any parties to the conflict. The number of incidents in the province involving NGOs has remained stable when compared to 2010⁸. However, the security of NGO staff remains at constant risk of “*accidental, collateral, or ignorant attacks*”.⁹ Tearfund is one of the very few remaining international NGOs with a project office based in Kandahar, due to insecurity.

Kandahar province is considered among the group of ‘most violent’ provinces in Afghanistan.¹⁰ In Kandahar City, incidents have been dominated by high profile assassinations, such as the assassination of Ahmed Wali Karzai in July 2011, a pre-eminent ‘power broker’ and head of Kandahar's Provincial Council. This resulted in a ‘power vacuum’ and jostling for political control by various factions. Tearfund assesses no significant developments in these recent conflict dynamics to warrant a change in project operations in the near future, which remains remotely managed from Kabul. However, as international troops withdraw from Afghanistan in the coming years, the security situation is unlikely to improve and may in fact worsen.

Humanitarian

In Kandahar, a city of approximately 470,000 people, the overwhelming majority ethnic group is Pashtun. The ongoing conflict continues to create waves of vulnerable refugees, returnees and internally displaced peoples (IDPs) to host communities already living with limited resources. Between 2007 and 2009, Kandahar City received an estimated 2,267 returnee households.¹¹ In 2010, more than 4,000 IDP families flowed into Kandahar City and were expected to remain during the winter.¹²

Vulnerable populations face challenges of little or no land for farming, poor irrigation, few income-generating opportunities, poor access to basic services such as healthcare, education, sanitation and clean water and vulnerability to disasters. Their ability to access already limited essential services and basic necessities is impeded by insecurity. New arrivals contend with these challenges, as well integration into a host community that may resent their presence and use of community resources.¹³

Social & Cultural Norms

Underlying values, beliefs and attitudes contribute to the complex ‘hidden power’ of cultural context, which is very relevant for those who promote and seek change in a context so different from their own.

Kandahar, like all Afghan society, is non-individualistic and one's loyalty and devotion is foremost to the family, then to the ethnic or other collectivity, such as Pashtun, rather than to the country as a whole. Within these ethnic groups, sub-groups and tribes often exist that can be the source of further tensions and ‘in-fighting’.

Social relations have a strong ethos of generosity and hospitality. Order in society is influenced by a high-power distance culture, where wealth, age, charisma, and authority of the person hold power, rather than expertise, position or laws. Traditional, patriarchal gender roles are set in the family and are reinforced in the schools, workplace, and social settings.

A strong understanding of the internal complexities, of which only a few are described above, is important for cross-cultural understanding between the expatriate and local Tearfund project staff in Kandahar.

⁸ ANSO Quarterly Data Report, Q.3 2011. The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office. p.4.

⁹ *Ibid.* p.1

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.9.

¹¹ 2010-11 UNHCR Global Appeal, <http://www.unhcr.org/ga10/index.html>, retrieved 19 October 2011.

¹² Afghanistan Protection Cluster: Protection Overview (Southern Region 2010).

¹³ Paragraph sourced from Tearfund's Proposal to BPRM, *Kandahar, Jawzjan, & Faryab Integrated and Sustainable Services for Returnees and Host Communities*, (2010).

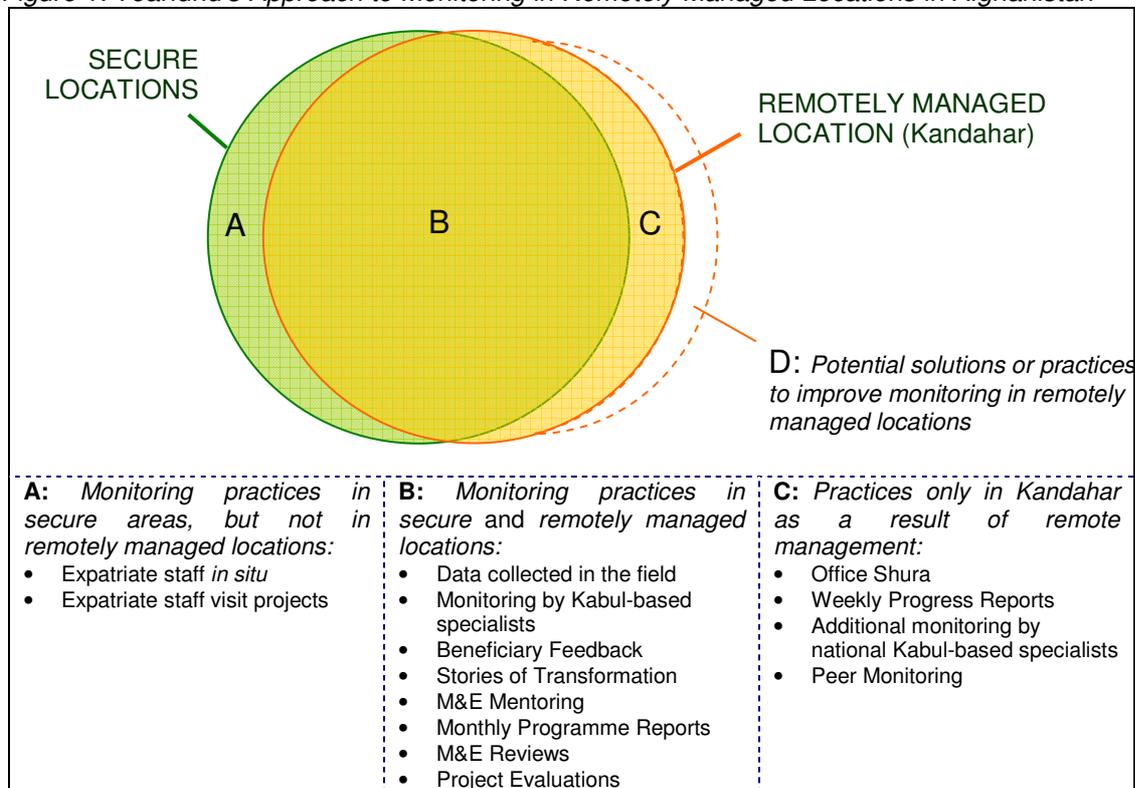
4. Tearfund Monitoring in Remote Managed Locations (Aim 1)

This section clarifies and describes Tearfund’s overall approach to project monitoring in remotely managed locations in Afghanistan, using Kandahar as a case study.

Figure 1 below illustrates Tearfund’s overall approach to monitoring projects in secure and remotely managed locations in Afghanistan. It shows that overall, the majority of monitoring practices exist in Kandahar as they do in all Tearfund locations (see Area B in Figure 1). The expectations for monitoring and reporting are the same for all projects, whether or not it is remotely managed. While the reporting requirements are common, the ‘means’ to achieve them do differ slightly in Kandahar. For example, Tearfund must rely on national staff to collect *all* information from the field.

In secure locations, expatriate staff live *in situ* and can visit projects to monitor activities (Area A in Figure 1 below). This cannot occur in Kandahar due to insecurity. To compensate, additional practices have been adopted in Kandahar to ensure regular communication between Kabul and project staff and provide assurance of project quality (Area C).¹⁴

Figure 1: Tearfund’s Approach to Monitoring in Remotely Managed Locations in Afghanistan



In the Kandahar project office, national staff¹⁵ carry out day-to-day project operations and field work, and monitor project progress and quality. The Project Manager has a few additional responsibilities for reporting and decision-making given the absence of an Area Coordinator *in situ*, but final responsibility for the project remains with the Area Coordinator.

¹⁴ The findings in this report indicate that the additional practices to ensure the credibility of information from the field is due to the desire of Tearfund staff in Kandahar and Kabul to show a high standard of accountability and transparency, and are *not* a response to issues of trust with local project staff.

¹⁵ National staff in Kandahar include the Project Manager, Human Resources / Finance Officer, Logistics Officer, Logistics Administrator, and Community Supervisors and Community Facilitators (field staff)

From Kabul, expatriate staff¹⁶ provide management and support through regular phone and email communication, and visits to the project office. Kabul-based specialists¹⁷ (Afghan) are also able to visit Kandahar’s project implementation areas, to carry out training and monitoring.

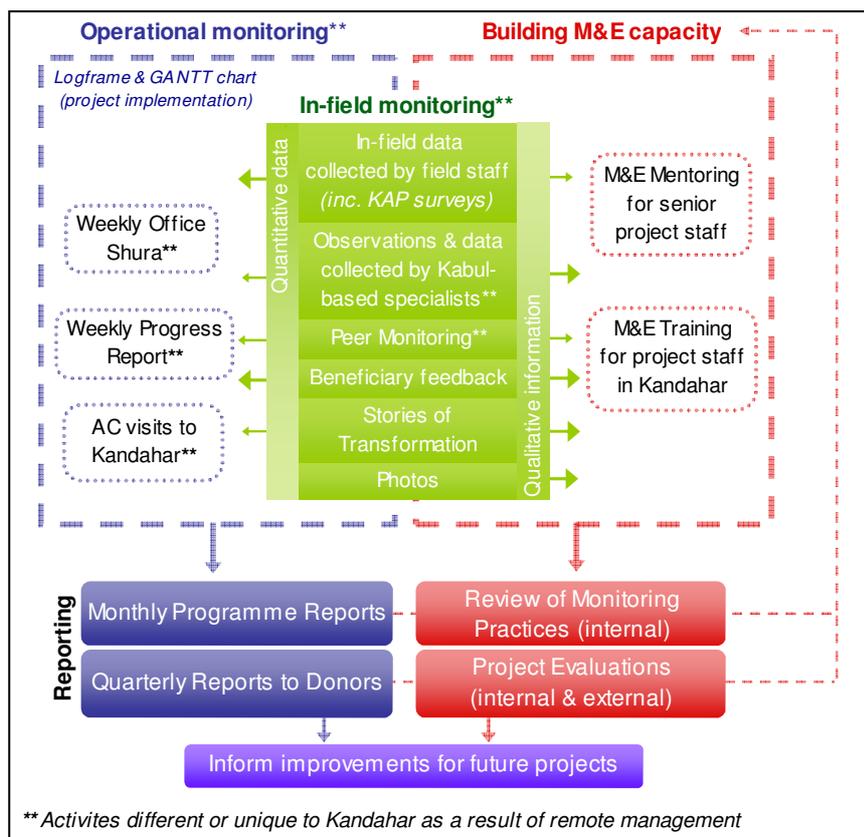
Tearfund recognizes that remote management is a unique strategy, with consequences for monitoring project progress and quality. This recognition has prompted Tearfund to review Kandahar’s remote management twice during the three years it has been in place.¹⁸ The 2010 research, *Once Removed*, identified methods to mitigate deficits in the quality of monitoring and evaluation in remote managed areas.¹⁹ This assessment identified that all the methods listed were evident in Tearfund’s existing practices in Kandahar.

4.1 Overview of Monitoring Activities in Kandahar

There are three types of monitoring activities in Kandahar; operational monitoring and reporting; direct monitoring in the field; and activities to build M&E capacity (Figure 2 below). Asterixes indicate the activities adopted in Kandahar in response to remote management.

Tearfund uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to monitor activities in the field. This is a strong monitoring approach, necessary to adequately monitor a project like the recently completed BPRM-funded project where the expected changes are both ‘measurable’ (i.e. water quality testing) and intangible (i.e. beneficiaries experience of good health). The solid green arrows in Figure 2 indicate that operational monitoring uses mainly quantitative data to report progress against project indicators, and evaluative activities make most use of the qualitative information collected in the field.

Figure 2: Overview of existing monitoring activities in Kandahar



¹⁶ Expatriate staff in Kabul include the Kandahar Area Coordinator and M&E Officer.

¹⁷ Afghan Kabul-based specialists include the Agricultural Officer and Disaster Management Advisor.

¹⁸ *Remote Management, Lessons Learned* (2008), Tearfund Afghanistan. Kandahar Remote Management Review (2010), Area Coordinator, Tearfund Afghanistan.

¹⁹ Stoddard, Abby, Adele Harmer & Jean S. Renouf, *Once Removed, Lessons and Challenges in Remote Management of Humanitarian Operations for Insecure Areas* (2010), p.29.

5. Assessment of Kandahar Monitoring Practices (Aim 2)

The assessment of Tearfund's existing monitoring practices considered the extent to which they were:

- a. able to be carried out?
- b. adequate to monitor project progress and quality? (methodology)
- c. appropriate to the cultural and security context?
- d. reliable (objective/triangulated)?
- e. useful?

Not all considerations listed above were relevant to the monitoring tool or the evidence at hand. A summary of the strengths and weaknesses is included at the end of this section.

5.1 In-field Monitoring

Information is gathered directly from the field by Community Supervisors and Community Facilitators (field staff), and less frequently by Kabul-based specialist staff and peer monitors. Expatriate staff are unable to visit projects sites.

Able to be carried out?

Field staff typically visit communities daily and are rarely disrupted by insecurity. With each new community, access is negotiated. Field staff emphasized the importance of building strong relationships and acceptance among the community to ensure their security. Community members described the type of action they take to ensure Tearfund can safely carry out the project.

"We support the staff who come and work with us. We guard the car and keep it inside compounds to keep it safe. The facilitators work in small groups, so in the streets they don't stand out and they're not recognizable. This doesn't create problems for us."
Male community member

5.1.1 Quantitative data collected by field staff

Field staff collect two types of quantitative information in the field.

- Data to record the delivery of activities (outputs), such as the number of training sessions, participants, and distribution of livestock, seeds and BSFs.
- Data to measure change is collected before and after project completion.²⁰ Tools include KAP surveys, household water quality tests, knowledge & maintenance checks of BSFs, incidence of communicable disease surveys, gardening and crops survey, and a herd size survey.

Adequately monitor progress & quality?

All field staff showed an understanding of the value of being able to collect this data. The tools used were adequate; information is clearly linked to the six key indicators (outlined in the logframe); and timeframes for collecting data (outlined in the GANTT chart) are appropriately timed with project activities to capture change. However, the methodological rigour of two key methods for monitoring project outcomes, the KAP survey and health surveys, could be strengthened. (See Recommendations 3 and 4, Section 6.1).

Is the information reliable?

This assessment did not audit whether data collected is an accurate record of real facts in the field. Senior Kabul-based staff were cautious about the reliability of quantitative information, given their experience of receiving inconsistent data. The AC often needed to clarify data with project staff before using in reports. This has improved over time. Inconsistencies in data were a reflection of staff's capacity to

²⁰ This type of design is called quasi-experimental. Measures to further increase methodological rigour and validity of findings include randomly selecting survey participants, and adopting a control group (experimental design, where the KAP survey is also conducted in a community not a part of the BPRM 2 project). However, this may be beyond the capacity of the project.

“handle numbers” and *not* the result of being intentionally misleading. Overall, staff placed less confidence in *quantitative* data compared to qualitative information collected in the field.

Triangulation of information collected by Kabul-based specialists and peer monitors assist in assuring the reliability of information collected by field staff.

Is the information useful?

Quantitative data is used mostly to report against project indicators in the monthly programme report and quarterly donor report. Mid-year and final evaluations use very little quantitative data.²¹ The assessment identified that only health clinic data is not used or useful because meaningful conclusions cannot be drawn from it.²² (See Recommendation 4).

Adequately monitor progress & quality?

5.1.2 *In-field monitoring by Kabul-based specialists*

Kabul-based specialists (Afghans) are able to visit project sites in Kandahar. The specialists are expected to visit Kandahar four times per year. In the BPRM 2 project, the Agricultural Officer (AO) visited twice and the Disaster Management Advisor (DMA) once to carry out monitoring for the internal mid-year evaluation.²³ This was partly due to insecurity. When the AO could not visit the field, monitoring was completed by field staff but to a lower quality.

Appropriate to the security & cultural context?

The risk to visiting Afghan staff is considered to be less given they are nationals (Pashtun) and speak Pashto. If security is poor, community members will instead come to the Tearfund office. Both specialists expressed discomfort about being ‘outsiders’ in Kandahar. Albeit they acknowledged that Kandahar posed less threat to them as it does for expatriates.

"In Jawzjan I feel well, but in Kandahar it is different. In 2010 I suggested that I don't go to the field. Now security is still awful but we can go to the field. The important point is that I am Pashtun. I wear the local clothes and talk the Pashtun language. This is difficult for [the AC]."

Kabul-based specialist (national staff)

"I think that [it is difficult] not just for expats but also for national staff from Kabul. I was not very comfortable [going to Kandahar]. But our [field] staff were going every day in Kandahar so it should not be a big deal. But our staff there say it can be a problem because we look different. But you need to take some risk and have some level of discomfort. Once I got to the field it was okay; I was afraid going through the city on the way to the field."

Kabul-based specialist (national staff)

The comments from national staff point to an inherent difficulty of monitoring in remote managed locations, where “often the result is not a security gain, but rather a shift of risk from internationals to nationals”.²⁴

Is the information reliable?

The information collected by specialists in the field triangulates that which is collected by field staff. The DMA’s method to visit a household chosen ‘randomly’ from the attendees at a community meeting is good, however the validity of findings could be further strengthened by using a sampling frame (see Recommendation 2) to mitigate against selection bias – in case only ‘the good ones’ attend the meeting.

²¹ The evaluation of BPRM 2 will make use of existing quantitative data.

²² Information was collected from local clinics to strengthen the reliability of health information that field staff collected in the communities. The health clinic data indicated that the incidence of patients with communicable diseases decreased (using month-to-month comparison of previous year) and this was supported anecdotally by the doctor. However, it is not possible to draw causality, as the catchment for the local clinic is 3-4,000 people – much larger than the number of project participants, and it is not known if project participants ever used the clinic initially.

²³ Called the Mid-term Review.

²⁴ Stoddard, et al, *Once Removed, Lessons and Challenges in Remote Management of Humanitarian Operations for Insecure Areas* (2010), p.28.

Is the information useful?

Information collected by the AO was used in discussions with project staff in order to make decisions on improvements to projects. The DMA's findings contributed information for Kandahar in the internal mid-year evaluation. There is capacity for specialists to improve reporting of their findings. The specialists emphasized that visits to the field allowed them to gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the project and the issues raised by beneficiaries.

5.1.3 Peer Monitoring

Peer monitoring has been trialed in Kandahar on two occasions to check specific activities in the field.²⁵

Tearfund staff and the peer monitors reported that peer monitoring was a useful and promising tool. The methods used in the peer monitoring trials appeared sound (i.e. peer monitors were free to visit any project site for checking). However, the trials did point to some necessary improvements (see Recommendation 6).

Appropriate to the security context?

Using local peer monitors, with development experience in Kandahar, is an appropriate and practical measure to strengthen the reliability of monitoring, and accountability. The BPRM project was suited to peer monitoring because it has tangible, finite activities (i.e. distributions), as opposed to projects that are specialist, technical, or that engender a unique approach to development.

Is the information reliable?

The reliability of peer monitoring is based on the assumption that peer monitors are impartial; there was no reason to suggest otherwise.

Is the information useful?

The usefulness of findings from peer monitoring has been mixed given that not all tasks were understood and carried out. When a specific list was expected to be reported against, only general findings were emailed to Tearfund and discussed with senior project staff.²⁶ However, the general feedback was useful.

5.1.4 Beneficiary feedback

Opportunities for community members to provide feedback to Tearfund include:

- verbal feedback in community meetings²⁷ or informally to staff in the field (i.e. after training sessions).
- infrequent monitoring visits by non-project staff²⁸
- letters written by community leaders to the project office.

Under remote management it is very difficult for community members to meet directly with the AC. This wasn't a concern among community members, who reported they would visit the project office if an issue couldn't be resolved with field staff.

Able to be carried out?

Senior Kabul-based staff highlighted concern for the low level of beneficiary feedback reported by Kandahar. A comparison²⁹ with Jawzjan/Faryab showed that Kandahar reports contained: more verbal feedback; less feedback from non-project staff (with few or no opportunities to visit project sites); and fewer letters from community leaders.

²⁵ The first peer monitoring trial monitored Tearfund's Quality Standard implementation (August 2010). The second aimed to verify the distribution of livestock and seeds in project implementation areas (June 2011).

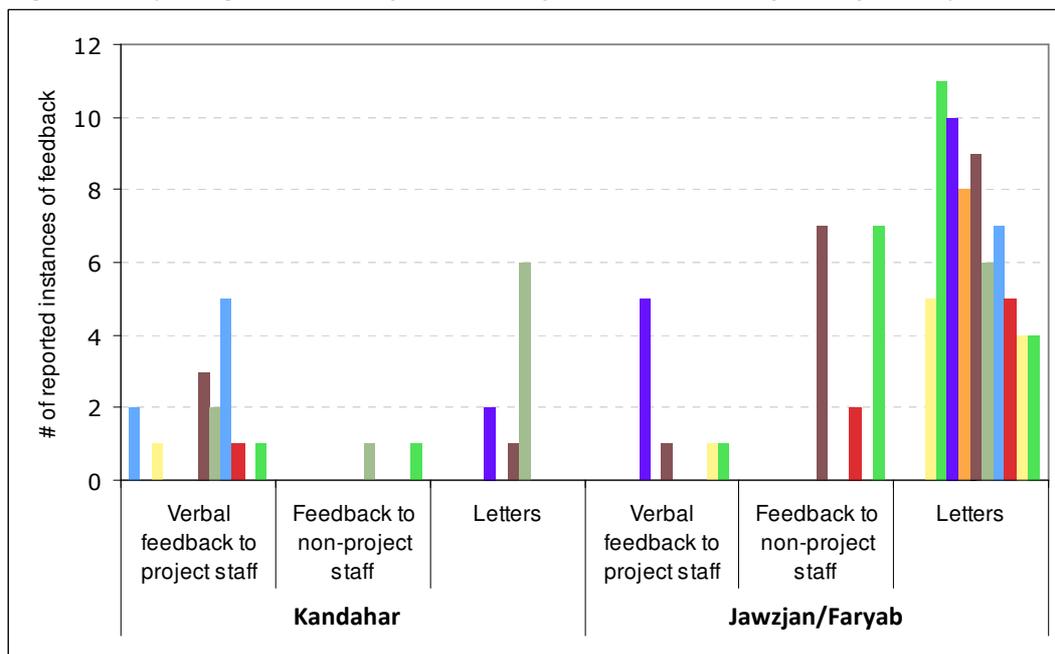
²⁶ Communication between Kabul management following peer monitoring in June 2011 suggested the capacity or skills of peer monitors, or misunderstanding of instructions, may have been the reasons that the peer monitoring was not carried out as expected. This assessment showed that it was likely the latter reason, combined with peer monitors taking a wider scope than the task required, and peer monitors finding that their different approach to development was a hindrance to carrying out the specific task required.

²⁷ Community meetings are held with field staff and the Community Development Coordinator (CDC).

²⁸ Non-project staff who visit the field include Kabul-based specialist staff and peer monitors.

²⁹ The review included beneficiary feedback forms, October 2010 to August 2011, for Jawzjan/Faryab and Kandahar. It excluded the few reports from other smaller project locations.

Figure 3: Reporting of beneficiary feedback by Kandahar & Jawzjan/Faryab, Sep '10 – Oct '11



Is the information reliable?

Some informal or minor feedback received by field staff may not be captured in formal written reporting. This feedback may otherwise be heard if the AC was present in day-to-day discussions with field staff. However, common themes emerged in both reported feedback and in interviews, which suggests reporting does capture *key* feedback. Few accounts of critical feedback are reported, though this is possibly a reflection of Afghan cultural social norms.

Field staff have a strong capacity and skills to build relationships within the communities they work. This increases the likelihood of reliable, open feedback. Male and female Community Facilitator groups ensure that men and women have opportunity to provide feedback.

Appropriate to the security & cultural context?

A low profile, relational approach to gathering feedback is appropriate and supported by community members in the security context of Kandahar. Community members welcomed NGOs to visit to gather feedback and ask questions of elders, children, and women in the community.

"We are very welcoming and if there is one question you need, I am happy to be questioned ten times to get the answer! This doesn't allow corruption and we understand that the questions and checking is for our benefit."
Male Community Member

Is the information useful?

The Project Manager collates and records all feedback from field staff in a monthly report for the AC and M&E Officer. Feedback may not appear useful to community members, and field staff, to instigate change due to the rigidity of project objectives and budget. In some instances, Tearfund may take on an advocacy role to fulfill the request through another agency. Positive feedback was sometimes retold to encourage field staff and some were developed further as 'Stories of Transformation'.

Overall, beneficiary feedback is asked for within the parameters defined by the project budgets and objectives, which are agreed by Tearfund with the donor. This limits the scope for communities themselves to set the agenda of development projects. This issue was identified by community members and Kabul senior staff and is a wider challenge to the development sector, not specific to beneficiary feedback within projects.

"We would like NGOs to ... come meet the community and see the real problems and work together to solve the problems. It is good when they come first and talk, rather than coming with the idea already."
Male Community Member

5.1.5 Stories of Transformation (SoT)

Stories of Transformation (SoT) are stories collected by field staff to illustrate the difference the project has made in the life of an individual or family in the community. The capacity of project staff to interview and write SoTs has improved with mentoring. At least one SoT is expected per month.

SoTs are recorded as a single 'snapshot in time'. Individuals are purposively chosen to illustrate the best example of how the project has "transformed lives". While the 'snapshot' is sufficient to richly describe change as a result of the project, it is not a robust method for evaluating project outcomes. Tearfund's *Internal Monitoring System Guide* suggests field staff visit the *same* beneficiary at the beginning and end of the project.³⁰ This basic experimental design, if, practiced, would introduce more validity to findings about project outcomes.

Appropriate to the cultural context? SoTs are appropriate to Afghan's story-telling culture. With photos they recount 'tangible' evidence of changes in the community and were obviously a source of energy and encouragement to field staff.

Is the information reliable? The reliability of SoTs were strengthened by having been observed and chosen by more than one field staff, with the intention that the story is not only the *best* example, but it is also a common transformation in the community. Photos also support the reliability of stories. The M&E Officer reported that field staff easily retell the stories during visits to Kandahar, with obvious reliability.

It is acknowledged that some nuances may be lost in the recording and translation of SoTs, however, this is likely to make a big difference to overall reliability of the story. Potentially Kabul-based specialists could visit and verify individual SoTs to further strengthen reliability.

Is the information useful? SoTs are appended to monthly programme reports, which are submitted to Tearfund management. SoTs are very well received for their positive, rich descriptions of "lives transformed". As a tool for evaluating project outcomes, SoTs are less useful.

5.1.6 Photos

Photos are taken regularly by field staff primarily to show evidence of:

- daily activities for accountability, i.e. livestock distributions, training sessions
- project outcomes, i.e. to complement observations and SoTs.

Adequately monitor progress & quality? Photos are effective for monitoring outcomes when used to triangulate information collected from the field. In Kandahar photos are used in combination with SoTs, beneficiary feedback, and observations by Kabul specialists.

Appropriate to the security & cultural context? Community members were positive towards the taking of photos. However, taking photos in Kandahar can be restricted by people's fear that it will be shared with Taliban or Afghan government ministries. Culturally, photos of women can be difficult to take.³¹ Field staff reportedly always seek permission first. Field staff have also received training on how to take humanising photos. Overall, the large collection of photos regularly taken by field staff indicate these issues are not insurmountable.

Is the information reliable? Other than one instance of receiving a photo that had been sent before, photos are sent to the M&E Officer 'afresh' for the month, properly labeled.

Is the information useful? Photos are a vital source of visual information for expatriate staff who cannot visit the field, as well as useful in other communication and publicity

³⁰ Tearfund Internal Monitoring Systems Guidance, p.2.

³¹ A findings from Tearfund's *A Mid-year Review of Monitoring, Evaluation, Beneficiary Accountability and Knowledge Management Practice across DMT Afghanistan* (June 2011).

with Tearfund UK and donors. Photos of daily activities are primarily for the project manager and AC to ensure accountability and progress. Facilitators report that taking photos in the community is useful for them to show they are accountable to Tearfund management. Photos have also been used on occasion as a tool for teaching in the field.³²

5.2 Operational monitoring and reporting

The absence of the AC *in situ* is the defining characteristic of remote management in Tearfund, and raises challenges for the AC regarding monitoring. These include:

- not being able to see projects first-hand or meet beneficiaries;
- fewer opportunities to interact with field staff;
- a reliance on the Project Manager to alert the AC to issues in the project;
- distance from the day-to-day pattern and progress of work.

To help mitigate these challenges and ensure strong oversight, additional operational³³ monitoring and reporting has been adopted. These include the Office Shura, Weekly Progress Reports, and regular 'catch-ups' between AC and senior project staff by phone or *Skype*.

The multiple exchanges of information and contact between a variety of staff in both Kabul and Kandahar offices appeared to provide a reliable indication about project progress and quality. Neither senior staff, nor project staff, could identify additional or different information they required from existing monitoring activities.

The final destination for most monitoring information from the project are reports to Tearfund management and donors. Some information (i.e. photos and SoTs) are used for communication purposes on Tearfund's website to raise awareness and funding.

5.2.1 Office Shura & Weekly Progress Report

The Office Shura is a weekly meeting of senior office staff in Kandahar to coordinate and address any issues in the projects or office. Detailed reviews of the advantages and disadvantages of the Office Shura have been highlighted in an internal review and external report of remote management in 2010.³⁴ Their findings remain pertinent.

The Weekly Progress Report is project-specific. It reports on activities completed for the week as well as any security incidents that may have affected project work, which are rare.

Appropriate to the cultural context? The Shura model is organic to Pashtu culture and mirrors autocratic and consultative leadership structures. Both the Shura and Weekly Progress Report are basic elements for ensuring good oversight and communication for the AC.

Is the information reliable? In combination with email, phone and face-to-face communication, the written Office Shura minutes and Weekly Progress Reports contribute to the AC receiving reliable information about project progress and quality. A

³² A supervisor provided one example of photos being used in BPRM 2's hygiene training to show participants the positive difference between photos taken in their community at the beginning of training, and those taken of people and streets at the end. It was received very positively. Facilitators also knew of an instance in another programme where photos were taken of children in a hygiene programme in school, and used in a similar way to show the changes in children's own appearance.

³³ Operational monitoring and reporting refers to the oversight of activities that occur at the office-level, between senior project staff, management or donors regarding project progress and quality. This is in contrast to monitoring carried out directly in the field to collect and report information about project activities, or activities to build M&E capacity.

³⁴ Kandahar Remote Management Review (2010), Tearfund Kandahar Area Coordinator; and, Stoddard *et al*, *Once Removed, Lessons and Challenges in Remote Management of Humanitarian Operations for Insecure Areas* (2010), p.23 and Annex 1.

review of June 2011 progress reports showed that activities planned for the following week are generally indicative of what actually happens.³⁵

Is the information useful?

The Office Shura minutes, while broad and office-focused, are important to keep the AC in touch with the daily pattern of work and combat disconnectedness from the project. The Project Manager finds the Office Shura useful and important for sharing information and solving problems. The Weekly Progress Report sometimes includes information relevant for M&E, such as photos and beneficiary feedback.

5.2.2 Area Coordinator Visits

The AC aims to visit Kandahar four times a year. The frequency of visits was considered sufficient by project staff, provided the regular communication remains strong. Project staff valued the support, encouragement, and energy that the AC's presence brings to office and project staff.

For both the AC and project staff, meeting face-to-face is the most valuable aspect of the AC visits. The visit allows a chance for both project staff and the AC to address issues, and introduce or explain changes that are better discussed in-person. The most important time to visit, from the perspective of project staff, is at the beginning of the project in order to establish clearly the objectives and plans for the new project.

The AC's inability to visit the field is part-mitigated by visits from Afghan Kabul-based specialists and peer monitors. Field staff did not identify any difficulties for them or the project by the inability of expatriate staff to visit project sites.

5.2.3 Programme & Donor Reporting

The programme logframe (purpose, objectives and indicators) guides all operational reporting. More importantly the logframe guides the implementation of project activities and most monitoring. Senior project staff in Kandahar were keenly aware of the logframe and GANTT chart for the project. These also provided a common point of reference for communication between the AC and Project Manager regarding project progress.

The indicators in the logframe and GANTT charts are numerical-based, which emphasize the use of quantitative monitoring. The logframe includes qualitative methods (photos, interviews and observations) as "Means of verification" for indicators. Qualitative findings, through SoTs and photos, are submitted separately from the donor report template.³⁶ The GANTT chart does not include Stories of Transformation nor beneficiary feedback.

The Monthly Programme Report includes reporting against monthly objectives to show achievement towards the overall programme objectives.³⁷ Content includes descriptive information on the progress of activities and results from in-field monitoring, both quantitative and qualitative.

The Quarterly Donor Report focuses on reporting against programme indicators, which are numerical-based measures. For this reason the report includes mostly quantitative monitoring findings from the project. No additional information is required from Kandahar by Tearfund management or donors as a result of it being remote managed.

³⁵ A week-to-week comparison of weekly progress reports show that the activities planned for the following week are not a complete record of what actually happens – more usually happens than what was planned. However, the general activities planned for did occur, even if not in the exact communities specified.

³⁶ Qualitative information, such as stories of transformation or descriptive observations, can be more difficult to report succinctly and against indicators that demand discrete, numerical-based information.

³⁷ Kandahar AC and Project Manager compile information from Kandahar in the Monthly Progress Report. This is submitted to the Programme Director to include in the Monthly Programme Report, which includes all locations.

5.3 Building M&E Capacity

Building knowledge, skills, and an understanding of the value of M&E among project staff is particularly important in remotely managed locations where local staff both implement *and* monitor projects. Observations and interviews in Kandahar showed that project staff:

- understood the value and importance of monitoring;
- considered monitoring as part of their activities in the field and not an additional burden;
- expressed encouragement rather than resentment at external monitoring of the project.

Project staff noted that having evidence through strong monitoring *“allows the project to speak for itself”*³⁸ about the outcome of project activities and helps to combat false allegations or consequences of failing to meet requests for bribery.

5.3.1 M&E Mentoring & Training

The M&E Officer mentors Project Managers and trains staff to build capacity in monitoring. The M&E Officer aims to visit each of the project locations four times a year but due to insecurity visited the Kandahar office two times in the duration of BPRM 2.

<p>Adequately contribute to monitoring progress & quality?</p>	<p>M&E training and mentoring is adequate to building capacity in qualitative methods of monitoring, which reflects the strengths of project staff. There is less emphasis on building capacity in quantitative skills and methods. Quantitative methods and information are taken care of by the AC and other Kabul-based staff.</p>	<p><i>“The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to know the community has been changed, involved, and the project has been achieved.”</i></p> <p>Project Manager</p>
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Mentoring via email or phone is carried out sufficiently by the M&E Officer, though this is made more difficult when English is not the Project Manager’s mother tongue.

<p>Is the training useful?</p>	<p>The case for building capacity in monitoring in remotely managed locations is strong; it is in these locations that the need for staff to have the skills to gather reliable evidence of project progress and quality is greatest. The effectiveness of M&E mentoring and training was evident in the strong understanding project staff had of the purpose and value of monitoring, and examples cited by project and Kabul-based staff of improvements made as a result of training, i.e. better quality SoTs.</p>
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Staff with English, which excludes all field staff except the male supervisor, received individual training. However, all field staff received general training, translated into Pashto.

5.3.2 Mid-year Project Evaluation & Review of Monitoring Practices

During the one-year BPRM 2 project, a mid-year internal evaluation³⁹ and two assessments of monitoring and accountability practices⁴⁰ were conducted, led by the M&E Officer. A final external evaluation is underway.

The Mid-year Project Evaluation assessed progress and implementation across all project locations, including Kandahar, to identify any improvements that could be made. In Kandahar, the Kabul-based DMA collected information using qualitative methods, including interviews with beneficiaries and observations of project activities. Reporting of Kandahar findings was not as strong as reporting carried out by the M&E Officer in other locations.

³⁸ Verbatim comment from interview with male facilitators.

³⁹ Referred to in Tearfund as a ‘Mid-Year Review’.

⁴⁰ Refers to *A Baseline Assessment of Current Monitoring Practice across DMT Afghanistan* (Dec 2010), and *A review of internal monitoring compliance Internal Monitoring Compliance: A Mid-year Review of Monitoring, Evaluation, Beneficiary Accountability and Knowledge Management Practice across DMT Afghanistan* (May 2011)

The evaluation report included some quantitative findings from operational reporting, but was largely qualitative based. The final external evaluation is expected to evaluate project outcomes and will include analysis of existing monitoring data, such as the KAP survey.⁴¹

The Review of Monitoring Practices by the M&E Officer assessed monitoring, beneficiary accountability and knowledge management practices across all Tearfund locations, including Kandahar. The review assessed compliance with good practice monitoring standards and highlighted areas for improvement. A follow-up review was conducted to assess progress six months later.

This internal 'audit' was detailed and focused on strengthening internal system compliance and appeared effective in making improvements. The reviews are a positive indication of reflexive practice and orientation towards learning and improving monitoring in Tearfund.

5.4 Summary of Strengths & Weaknesses

The following figures summaries strengths and weaknesses identified in monitoring activities practiced in Kandahar, based on the three types of monitoring: In-field monitoring; operational monitoring and reporting; and building M&E capacity.

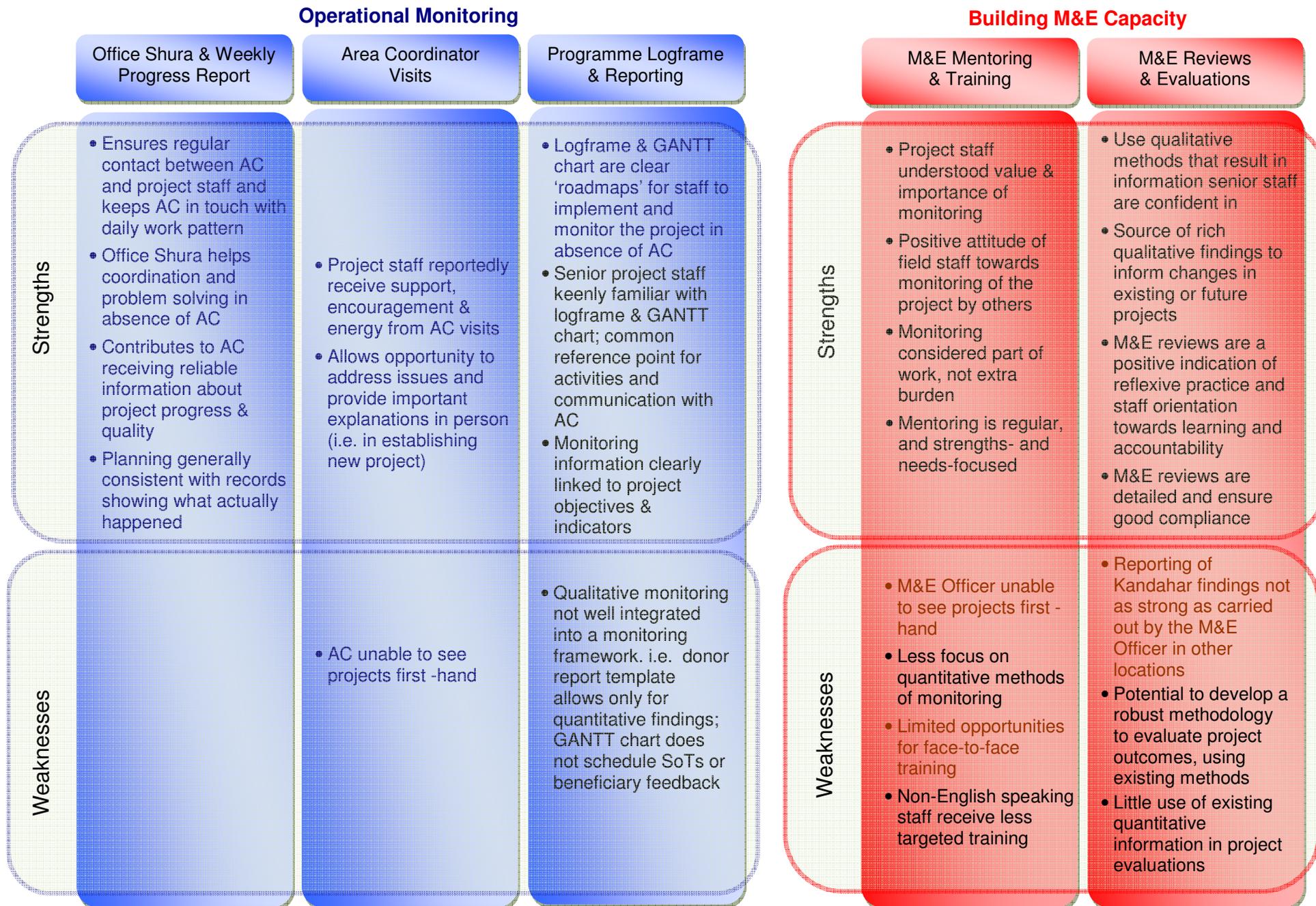
⁴¹ The previous external final evaluation for BPRM 1 was entirely qualitative based, and the methodology employed did not appear robust enough to produce valid findings regarding project outcomes.

Figure 4: Strengths & Weaknesses in Kandahar Monitoring Practices **In-field Monitoring**

	Quantitative data collected by field staff	In-field monitoring by Kabul-based specialists	Peer Monitoring	Beneficiary feedback	Stories of Transformation	Photos
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KAP survey is a valid quasi-experimental design to monitor project outcomes • Data collected directly addresses progress against indicators • Data collections appropriately timed • Staff show understanding of the value of quantitative data to capture project outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mitigates inability of expatriate staff to visit the field • Triangulates information collected by field staff • Specialists gain deeper understanding of project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulates information collected by Tearfund staff • Independent check strengthens accountability • Tangible nature of Tearfund projects suited to peer monitoring • Peer monitors familiar to Kandahar context • Opportunity for fresh input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valued & considered part of routine project work • Reporting of feedback by field staff comparable to other Tearfund locations • Field staff build strong connections in communities, maximizing open feedback • Low-profile approach valued by community members • Male & female field staff collect feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rich description of beneficiaries' experience of change. • Stories purposively selected for a <i>common</i> 'best example' • Suited to the strengths, interest and capacity of staff • Potential to develop into robust method for monitoring project outcomes • Senior staff confident in reliability • Excellent communication tool to external audiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taken regularly • Strong tool for accountability & visual information to staff unable to visit the field • Triangulates information collected through other qualitative tools (SoTs, specialist monitoring) • Complements staff capacity and interest in 'story telling' • 'Tangible' source of encouragement to project staff • Welcomed by community members
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior staff lack confidence in reliability of some quantitative data • Low capacity among project staff to 'handle numbers' • Weaknesses in the rigour of methods used for KAP & health survey • Little quantitative data used to support mid-year or final project evaluations • Health clinic data does not allow for meaningful conclusions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few visits to project sites, resulting in lower quality monitoring • Low quality written reporting from field visits • Specialists remain 'outsiders' in Kandahar; illustrates the shift of risk from expatriates to nationals under remote management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for strong understanding of the scope and reporting expectations of the task • Different approaches to development & monitoring may be a hindrance if not acknowledged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few opportunities for beneficiaries to provide feedback directly to non-project staff • Minor, informal feedback likely lost in formal written reporting • Little negative or critical feedback • Raises false expectations when changes are not possible or immediate • Limited scope for community to set their own development agenda 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The single 'snapshot' of a positive case is not a robust methodology to monitor project outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking photos in the community is not always appropriate • Potential for photos to be used in more rigorous qualitative methodology to monitor project outcomes

Coloured font indicates strengths and weaknesses related to activities unique to remote management

Figure 4: Strengths & Weaknesses in Kandahar Monitoring Practices (cont'd)



Coloured font indicates strengths and weaknesses related to activities unique to remote management

5.5 Recommendations to Improve Current Practices in Kandahar

The assessment did not identify any monitoring practices as a result of remote management in Kandahar that were obsolete or unnecessary. Overall, all activities were able to be implemented, had a purpose and were useful to their audience. However, opportunities do exist, to improve the quality or rigour of individual practices to better monitor the quality and outcomes of projects.

1. *Establish a clear methodology to show how existing activities to monitor project progress contribute to monitoring project outcomes.*

Although the logframe lists the monitoring activities already in practice in Kandahar (i.e. KAP survey, SoTs, observations), there is no overall plan or description for how the *set* of individual methods fit together to monitor and evaluate project outcomes over the duration of the project. Establishing a clear methodology will improve the quality of monitoring by:

- Ensuring that project progress against indicators and outputs is monitored in coordination with project outcomes. This will help minimize the risk of collecting unnecessary information and strengthen the validity of final evaluations.
- Identifying opportunities to introduce more methodological rigour, so the best possible evidence is collected to address project objectives (see Recommendations 2-4).

2. *Introduce rigour to qualitative methods to achieve valid information for monitoring project outcomes.*

Improvements will capitalize on staff's strengths, capacity and interest for collecting qualitative information. Suggestions include:

- Use a sampling frame⁴² to select groups of beneficiaries for interviews or observations, to avoid only selecting positive or engaged beneficiaries.
- Track change in the same beneficiaries consistently over the duration of the project, as opposed to single 'snapshot' interviews, observations, SoTs, or photos.
- Integrate quantitative data into the methodology of the mid-year evaluation to strengthen the validity of the rich qualitative information collected.

3. *Introduce methodological rigour to the KAP survey to achieve valid information for monitoring project outcomes.*

The KAP survey is a key monitoring tool for measuring progress against indicators and project outcomes. Suggestions include:

- Use a sampling frame in the KAP survey to select and interview the *same* group of beneficiaries in pre- and post-surveys (basic experimental design).
- Include 'don't know' responses in KAP survey recording to minimize the need to make assumptions during analysis.

4. *Investigate ways to improve the validity of existing methods to collect health data.*

Recommendations include:

- Review and improve the collection of health clinic data. Information must capture the *same* and *right* population year-on-year so the claims of causality are valid and reasonable. Currently the data is not used because meaningful conclusions cannot be drawn from it.

Further suggestions:

- Use the KAP survey as the main focus for collecting health data, but reduce the period of time (from 3 months) that respondents are asked to recall sicknesses.
- Collect incidence of sickness from participants in community trainings *prior* to the session. Or, conduct a pre- and post-survey of the same group of participants that extends beyond the five weeks of training.

⁴² A sampling frame is a way of selecting participants from the communities in the project. The selection does not have to be random, but it should be purposeful, transparent, and representative to produce valid findings.

5. *Establish clear expectations about the frequency of visits by Kabul-based specialists to Kandahar project sites.*

In the context of remote management, in-field monitoring by national staff are key to assure the quality of the project and accountability. Currently, the number of visits by Kabul-based specialists does not meet the expectation for four visits per year. However, this expectation must be balanced with the risk, real or perceived, that these visits pose to the staff concerned.

6. *Ensure peer monitors have a clear understanding of: instructions and scope; reporting expectations; and project context for the task requested.* It may also be useful to acknowledge any differences in organizational approaches to development.

Lessons identified from the peer monitoring trials in Kandahar include:

- *Ensure instructions, scope, and reporting expectations are understood before monitoring begins.* This will require time and discussion in-person.
- *Inform peer monitors about the wider project and objectives.* This will prepare peer monitors for what they encounter in the field. It will also assure them that the task is only one component in a range activities to monitor the project.
- *Peer monitors will bring different experiences and understanding of development, terminology, and M&E.* This is an inherent strength of peer monitoring to bring fresh insight. However, it may be necessary to establish an understanding of these differences so they don't instead become a hindrance.

6. Lessons for Developing Solutions for Monitoring in Remotely Managed Locations (Aim 3)

This section takes a step back from the direct assessment of monitoring practices in Kandahar,. Reflecting on the assessment in general and existing good practice in Kandahar, it highlights broad lessons to inform the development of new solutions for monitoring in remotely managed locations.

This assessment did not identify any 'silver bullet' solution. To the contrary, the assessment showed that effective monitoring in remotely managed locations requires a multi-faceted approach that:

- is appropriate to the strengths and capacity of staff
- has a clear 'roadmap' to guide monitoring, reporting and to act as a common reference point for communication between project staff and management
- employs a robust methodology to collect the *best* possible evidence
- includes focus on building the capacity of staff.

Reliable solutions will rise and fall on the capacity of staff. The most reliable information is gained from monitoring activities that staff have the capacity, confidence, and skills for. Where possible, solutions for remote monitoring should be strengths-based. In Afghanistan this may require solutions that minimize the demand on staff to write in English or analyse data for example.⁴³ This may of course be mitigated by mentoring and training.

A clear 'roadmap' is vital to monitoring, reporting and communication. The project logframe and GANTT chart provided a strong, common reference point for staff in both Kandahar and Kabul that clearly guided all project activities, monitoring, reporting, and communications. Solutions should be integrated, rather than simply 'added' to the implementation and monitoring framework.

⁴³ As an example, Tearfund Afghanistan previously introduced a system for project offices to record data, to allow the tracking of project progress against indicators in 'real-time'. However, it was very 'data-centric' and beyond the capacity of project staff to use it. Had they persisted in using it, the information would very likely be unreliable and undermined the original intention to improve information reliability.

"Allow us to tell our story". Among suggestions for how NGOs can best monitor insecure areas, community members and field staff stressed the importance of being able to tell the stories of people in the community. Practical solutions for remote monitoring may need to include creative, robust qualitative methods that draw on the knowledge and lived experience of beneficiaries, and the capacity of staff. This may mean re-thinking the emphasis on quantitative-based indicators and consider indicators that allow for mixed-method monitoring to ensure that the *best possible evidence* is collected and used. Indicators may still be numerical, but may be informed by both qualitative and quantitative information.

"We are the best evidence for you - the community members and leaders will prove for you that the NGO project works for us and we have received those things."

Male Community Member

Cautionary tales for using photos. Photos are one of several solutions for remote monitoring and provide much needed visual information and 'evidence' for those who cannot visit the field. However, using photos is not the 'silver bullet' solution. As shown in Kandahar, taking effective photos requires a level of skill and training. There must also be a way to record the context and significance of the activity shown, or used in a robust manner that shows progress or outcomes over time. Photos will suit projects with tangible outcomes (i.e. gardens) but will be less effective as a monitoring tool for field staff to show complex or intangible social change (i.e. women's empowerment).

Is the remotely managed project and its environment ordered, complicated, complex, or chaotic? A framework known as *Cynefin*⁴⁴ divides systems and environments into these four types. The framework has been applied to humanitarian responses. It is useful to consider the framework in the development of effective monitoring solutions to match the 'real world' of remotely managed projects. For example, the types of monitoring utilized by Tearfund are *Ordered* or *Complicated* (methods are process based, indicators are discrete and numerical, logframes predict direct causality between project activities and outcomes, and success is based on 'ticked distribution lists' and compliance of internal processes). However, the environments of remote management in Afghanistan are best described as *Complex* (i.e. project with IDPs in a vulnerable host community with traditional structures, under cross-cultural remote management, and external influences on the project are harder to perceive or predict) or possibly *Chaotic* (a rapidly changing and uncertain situation, i.e. disaster relief). The *Cynefin* framework poses that applying an *Ordered* system to a *Chaotic* environment, or *Complicated* system to a *Complex* environment will result in dysfunction. The framework is a useful reminder that effective solutions or systems for monitoring remote managed projects must be appropriate to the environment or context in which they operate.

Finally, monitoring is not an 'end in itself'. The goal of the remote managed monitoring solution must be to capture the *best* evidence to assess project progress or quality and, most importantly, to provide evidence for project outcomes that will answer the question "Did the project make a difference?"

⁴⁴ The Cynefin Framework was developed by Dave Snowden. See articles <http://morealtitude.wordpress.com/2010/07/08/embracing-the-chaotic-cynefin-and-humanitarian-response/> and <http://morealtitude.wordpress.com/2011/07/19/systems-complexity-and-staff-realities/> (retrieved 19 October 2011)

Annexes

Annex 1: Assessment Terms of Reference

[See attached document].

Annex 2: Assessment Methodology

[See attached document].

Annex 3: Project Documents Reviewed

Table 2: Project Documents Reviewed in the Assessment of Kandahar Monitoring Practices

Assessment Aim (abbreviated)	Documents Reviewed
1. Overall approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviews of Kandahar remote monitoring in 2008 & 2010 • Guide to current monitoring practices in Tearfund • Stoddard, Harmer & Renouf, <i>Once Removed, Lessons and Challenges in Remote Management of Humanitarian Operations for Insecure Areas</i> (2010),
2. Current Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BPRM 2 proposal, logframe, and GANTT chart <p>Direct monitoring in the field</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly Beneficiary Feedback Reports • Reports & data from visits by DMA and AO to Kandahar project sites • Peer monitoring ToR and findings • Stories of Transformation • Field data reports, including pre/post KAP survey results, examples of training session evaluation forms <p>Building capacity for monitoring</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents used in M&E Mentoring, including emails • Monitoring & Accountability Reviews reports <p>Indirect project monitoring & reporting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly Project Progress Reports • Office Shura ToR and weekly minutes • DMT Afghanistan Monthly Programme Reports • Evaluation Reports for BPRM 1 & 2 (internal & external) • Quarterly Donor Reports