

# Monitoring and accountability practices for remotely managed projects implemented in volatile operating environments



Innovative response and evidence based best practice

## **Monitoring and accountability practices for remotely managed projects implemented in volatile operating environments**

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# 1 Glossary

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

Acronym / term	Explanation
ANSO	Afghan NGO Safety Office
AOG	Armed opposition group
Beneficiary accountability	An attitude and an approach that promotes the dignity of beneficiaries by enabling them to influence decision-making and play a more active role in their own development. To be truly accountable, project staff must accept responsibility for their actions and agree that they can be called upon to give an account of how and why they have acted or failed to act. For the purposes of this project, beneficiary accountability is understood to be implemented across five standard practices: participation, transparency, feedback and complaints, monitoring and evaluation, and staff competencies and attitudes
CBO	Community-based organisation
Direct operations	Project implementation that is undertaken directly by a humanitarian and/or development organisation, using their own personnel
FBO	Faith-based organisation
HAP	The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, a self-regulating body for humanitarian and development organisations, focused on promoting beneficiary accountability and ensuring quality management
HIF	The Humanitarian Innovation Fund: a landmark grant-making fund to support organisations working in countries that experience humanitarian crises, to develop, test and share new technologies and processes that will make humanitarian aid more effective and cost-efficient in the future. HIF is the product of a partnership between ELRHA (Enhancing Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance) and ALNAP (The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action); and is hosted by Save the Children UK. It is currently made up of contributions from the UK Department for International Development and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, totalling £1.4 million. The research contained within this report has been funded by the HIF
IDP	Internally displaced person
INGO	International non-government organisation
IO	International organisation
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
Monitoring	An ongoing measure of the 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 gather and/or report information to indicate project progress or quality, ie interviews, weekly progress reports or collecting beneficiary feedback for accountability purposes
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSP	The National Solidarity Programme: a countrywide, national government-supported development programme, implemented across Afghanistan with the support of NGOs.
Operation through limited presence	Project implementation that is undertaken with reduced numbers of personnel at the project location. Most commonly, expatriate and/or senior national staff are relocated from the project location, giving responsibility for day-to-day project implementation and management to local staff members based <i>in situ</i>
oPt	Occupied Palestinian Territories
Partner-led operations	Project implementation that is undertaken through a local, national or international NGO or private contractor. In this report, the term most commonly refers to project implementation undertaken through local and/or national partners
PIA	Project implementation area
Private contractor	A private, for-profit organisation that is contracted by humanitarian and/or development organisations to undertake project implementation
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

## 2 Executive summary

Humanitarian and development organisations are increasingly using remote management approaches to project implementation to reach vulnerable populations in conflict-affected regions experiencing medium- to high-insecurity, while safeguarding the security of organisational personnel. What may once have been perceived as temporary modes of operation have ceased to be so as remote management has become a (semi-)permanent approach to project implementation in many countries (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia and Sudan).

The boom in remote management approaches has prompted the arrival of several publications offering recommendations to practitioners using these management approaches. These publications have had a strong focus on remote management structures as a whole, and the security measures that are required to support them. A distinctive focus on project monitoring and beneficiary accountability, however, has been lacking. They have contained little discussion of how project monitoring and beneficiary accountability are affected by the use of remote management and what impact this has on the overall quality and integrity of project interventions.

This project, *Effective monitoring and beneficiary accountability practice for remotely managed projects in insecure environments*, has begun to bridge this gap, identifying key issues for remote monitoring and accountability and developing existing and innovating new good practice responses. The project is funded by the Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF), a landmark grant-making fund established to support organisations working in countries experiencing humanitarian crises. The fund's aim is to help these organisations develop, test and share new technologies and processes that will make humanitarian aid more effective and cost-efficient in the future.

This report will highlight how critical it is for organisational personnel, from programme management right through to local staff, to engage fully with the principles of remote monitoring and accountability and with the planning and preparation required to ensure they are successfully implemented. The good practice sections of this report will also highlight examples of beneficiaries and communities who are themselves involved in planning, designing and implementing projects, and in monitoring and accountability practices. The report will consider practical ways of ensuring this happens in remotely managed settings. It aims to present a thorough and practical assessment of remote monitoring and accountability practices, providing field-driven recommendations and guidelines of good practice. While further collaboration and research is recommended, it is hoped that this work will provide a solid baseline of information to support organisations as they seek ways to continue supporting vulnerable populations groups in volatile security environments.

The research undertaken as part of this project has been demand-led by humanitarian and development practitioners. Thirty-eight stakeholders – from a range of international and national non-government organisations (INGOs and NGOs), UN agencies, institutional donors and research and good practice organisations – have identified 35 different issues related to remote project monitoring and issues related to seven key areas of remote accountability practice. They have provided examples and case studies of existing good practices to support remote monitoring and accountability and have fed into consultations on innovative good practices that have been developed.

Specific focus is given in this report to 11 of the issues highlighted relating to remote monitoring – those that were particularly prevalent. The issues most frequently and fervently raised by stakeholders were concerns about how programme quality and rigorous project monitoring can be ensured in remotely managed projects. Other issues frequently raised related to factors that complement or lay the foundations for ongoing monitoring practices (eg

access to and frequency of visits to project implementation areas; accuracy of data and reporting; inadequate technical oversight). Each of these is analysed individually.

While the research has a strong focus on accountability practice, stakeholders were far more interested in remote project monitoring. This suggests that accountability requires greater promotion as a good practice specialism within humanitarian and development organisations. Stakeholders raised specific issues around the feasibility of traditional beneficiary accountability practices within rapidly changing and deteriorating security contexts. Traditional approaches to promote beneficiary participation, feedback and complaints-handling and information-sharing were shown to be ineffective or unsafe for beneficiaries and/or project staff. There was limited evidence that creative processes had been applied to considering accountability through the lens of remote management.

To date, the organisations using remote management programming have tended simply to add the remote management approach to an existing or traditional method of operating. There were, however, examples of promising practice from some stakeholders, which suggest that this is changing. Evidence suggests that, for the most part, organisations are struggling to make traditional approaches to project management fit with newer remote management concepts. This research strongly recommends that organisations using remote management consider how their whole approach to programming and support functions will need to change in the light of the selected remote management structure. Programmatic considerations including recruitment, programme size and project type need to be reviewed, as well as standard approaches to monitoring and accountability. Remote management approaches to project implementation should be mainstreamed across all existing, traditional aspects of humanitarian and development programming.

The research found that a significant number of the stakeholders (26 of the 38, that is 68 per cent) were in favour of using remote management approaches in project locations of medium- to high-insecurity. They believe that, if sufficient attention is paid to improving remote monitoring and accountability practices, there is the potential for remote management to be successful, safeguarding technical quality and adequately mitigating against fraud, corruption and a lack of accountability. In contrast, nine stakeholders (24 per cent) highlighted that they would be opposed to the practice of remote management under any circumstances. They believed that the challenges outlined in this report can never be adequately addressed, leading to deficiencies in programme quality, personnel safety and security, and in appropriate financial management.<sup>1</sup>

The issues surrounding remote management do pose a substantial threat to programme quality and accountability. However, this report highlights several good practices that can be developed further and used to address these issues. It presents practical recommendations for improving remote monitoring and accountability, with a section dedicated to each, including a summary checklist providing an overview of the individual recommendations proposed. These have been designed to be used by organisations seeking to review existing and/or establish new remote approaches to programming. The annexes also contain details of substantial existing resources for organisations to review and consider as they develop their own systems and practices to support remote management. It is strongly recommended that organisations find ways to coordinate with one another in and between countries experiencing medium- to high-insecurity and that opportunities are seized to promote the sharing of learning and best practice.

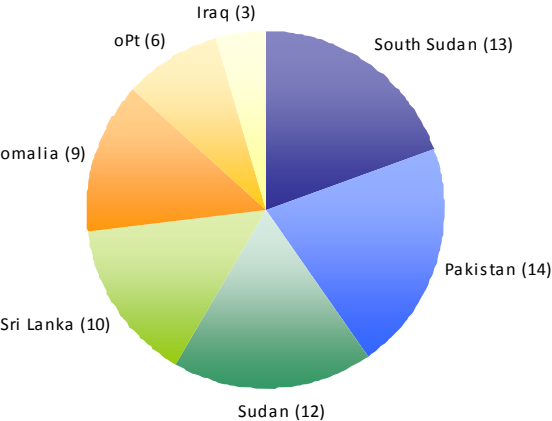
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<sup>1</sup> One stakeholder was not able to make a decision on the appropriateness of using a remote management approach, while three others did not comment.

### 3 Introduction

This report draws together the key research findings and practice recommendations related to remote project monitoring and beneficiary accountability, developed as part of a broader project. The project, *Effective monitoring and beneficiary accountability practice for remotely managed projects in insecure environments*, was divided into two phases. The initial research phase focused on identifying the issues experienced by and concerns highlighted by humanitarian and development stakeholders regarding remote project monitoring and beneficiary accountability practice. This research was followed by an innovation phase in which good practice recommendations were developed to address the issues raised.

The project’s coordinator was working with Tearfund’s humanitarian programme in Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, this project has a strong focus on remote management approaches and strategies in the Afghan context. However, humanitarian and development organisations from a wide range of other countries and contexts were also given the opportunity to participate (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Countries other than Afghanistan where research participants (INGOs and UN agencies) are implementing humanitarian and development operations

The project sought to be demand-led and to ensure that its proposed good practice responses are useful and relevant to humanitarian and development organisations. To this end, a broad cross-section of humanitarian, development, research and good practice organisations and institutional donors were invited to participate. The report also used a baseline assessment of monitoring and beneficiary accountability practice from one of the project areas supported by the project coordinator.

Mid-way through this project, an interim research report was circulated, highlighting the different issues and concerns raised. Following this, substantial effort was made to re-engage with stakeholders in establishing good practice responses. There remains significant interest in the project findings and recommendations from stakeholders across the humanitarian and development community.

This report provides an introduction to remote management for humanitarian and development practitioners and to the context in which remote management approaches are often used. It summarises the predominant issues related to monitoring and beneficiary accountability under the constraints of remote management strategies. It then re-focuses on outlining specific good practices and recommendations to address these issues. It is hoped that this report will stimulate further discussion around remote monitoring and accountability practices. Ultimately, the aim is to develop clearer guidelines and good practice recommendations for this increasingly common implementation method.

<sup>2</sup> Tearfund currently supports humanitarian and development projects in more than 45 countries. It has its own direct operational programme in six countries, including Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, South Sudan and Sudan, as well as working through local and/or international partner organisations.



## 4 Context analysis

Deteriorating security across areas of Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka, South Sudan and Sudan, coupled with the rising number of violent attacks on humanitarian workers, have led increasing numbers of humanitarian and development agencies to trial or adopt remote management systems. Between 2005 and 2011, there were 180 serious attacks on humanitarian and development workers in Afghanistan, as well as approximately 150 similar attacks in Sudan and South Sudan and approximately 100 in Somalia.<sup>3</sup> The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) states that 'violent attacks against aid workers [have] tripled in the last decade'.<sup>4</sup>

*'It is not anticipated that the volatile patterns of insecurity experienced in the areas in which we are working, will change within the next five years and as such, it is anticipated that the remote management approach in all areas of our work in Afghanistan will continue indefinitely.'*

- Deputy country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

Remote management strategies have been developed as a way of continuing to provide humanitarian assistance to vulnerable civilian populations, while reducing the risk to staff.<sup>5</sup> What were initially seen as reactive, temporary responses to insecurity are now increasingly considered to be permanent strategies for working in areas of medium- to high-insecurity.

Of the 14 INGO stakeholders who were interviewed and who are currently using a remote management approach, the majority (11) had no expectation that they would be able to resume standard operations in the foreseeable future. The remote management strategy adopted by one INGO in Afghanistan was developed intentionally as a permanent policy. This organisation has already been implementing a remote management approach in its programming in Afghanistan for three years (following a serious security incident in which four staff members were killed). Of the 13 other organisations, seven (54 per cent) have been implementing projects remotely for two years or less, five (38 per cent) have been doing so for between two and three years, and one for more than three years.

*'The study found that the majority of aid organisations operating in the most dangerous environments have increasingly relied on two specific measures in combination: (1) highly localised operations staffed exclusively with inhabitants from the immediate area, and (2) a low-profile stance.'*

- UN OCHA-supported publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, p.11

Despite calls from institutional funding and UN humanitarian coordination agencies for organisations to stay and deliver programmatic interventions in insecure areas, there is a growing recognition that rising insecurity is causing organisations to switch to remote management. One institutional donor that traditionally takes a strong stance against remote management has recognised that in Somalia almost all organisations will use some form of this programming approach.

There are a diverse range of remote management approaches. Some organisations have relocated all expatriate staff (and often national staff who can be relocated) to a more secure location; other organisations have elected to work through local and/or national partner organisations; still others have chosen to work through private contractors. The key consensus across all of these different approaches, however, is that remote management is 'an operational response to insecurity, [involving the withdrawal or

<sup>3</sup> One World (2011) *Afghanistan – Humanitarian work most dangerous in ten years*, p.1. Article cites that this statement is supported by Jan Egeland (former Chief UN Humanitarian Coordinator). Similar statements also appear in the UN OCHA-supported publication, *To Stay and Deliver* (2010).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Humanitarian Outcomes (2010) *Once Removed: Lessons and Challenges in Remote Management of Humanitarian Operations for Insecure Areas*, p.7.

drastic reduction of] international and sometimes national personnel from the field, transferring greater programme responsibility to local staff or local partner organisations, and overseeing activities from a different location'.<sup>6</sup>

What was also evident from the research, however, is that some organisations choose to operate through partners for reasons other than security. The most common reason cited was that it is part of an organisational mandate to build the capacity of partners or local staff. For the purposes of this research, the issues that such organisations experience in terms of monitoring projects and building accountability with beneficiaries have been included in the analysis, but they do not fall within the scope of this project as they are not remotely managed due to insecurity.<sup>7</sup>

Remote management approaches have significant implications for monitoring and accountability practices and for the assurance of project quality. Where senior project staff cannot monitor activities directly or meet beneficiaries, they rely on local staff to monitor objectively projects that they themselves are implementing and to pilot and review accountability practices. There is also a danger that the risks and pressures that would otherwise be shared by senior project staff are transferred solely to local project staff. This increases the potential for burn-out, security incidents targeted at local staff and corruption due to social and political pressures.

*'Shifting to remote management [means] accepting an unavoidable lowering of technical sophistication and versatility, as well as for programme monitoring and evaluation standards.'*

- Humanitarian Outcomes (2010) *Once Removed: Lessons and Challenges in Remote Management of Humanitarian Operations for Insecure Areas*, p.7

To date, there has been limited published research and guidance that addresses monitoring and accountability practices in remotely managed projects. While the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) has published guidelines on remote management,<sup>8</sup> there is limited guidance on remote monitoring and accountability specifically. Likewise, Oxfam International collaborated in 2009 with Merlin to develop a discussion paper for the Somalia NGO Consortium which focused on remote programming modalities. A briefing paper developed by Greg Hansen focused on the operational modalities of remote management in Iraq (2008). The Humanitarian Outcomes paper, *Once Removed* (2010), as well as the UN OCHA-supported paper, *To Stay and Deliver* (2010), address the issues related to humanitarian programming in insecure locations, including remote management. Though many of these existing publications pay some attention to the issues of remote monitoring and accountability, they do so only as an aspect of the wider issue of remote management.<sup>9</sup> There is therefore an opportunity to capture current practices and to develop innovative responses to monitoring and beneficiary accountability issues, and so determine the extent to which recent adaptations ensure quality project implementation in insecure areas.

## 5 Methodology

The overall focus of this project is to develop innovative solutions for monitoring and accountability practices in remotely managed projects. However, the initial survey of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> These projects can be implemented in insecure locations, but for the most part the justification for using a remote management approach is to build the capacity of local and/or national organisations and to enable effective and sustainable development programming. This would be the approach taken by these organisations in Afghanistan or Darfur (Sudan), as well as in safer countries such as India, Nepal or Malawi. Due to their significant experience of working with local partners, much can be learnt from their monitoring practices.

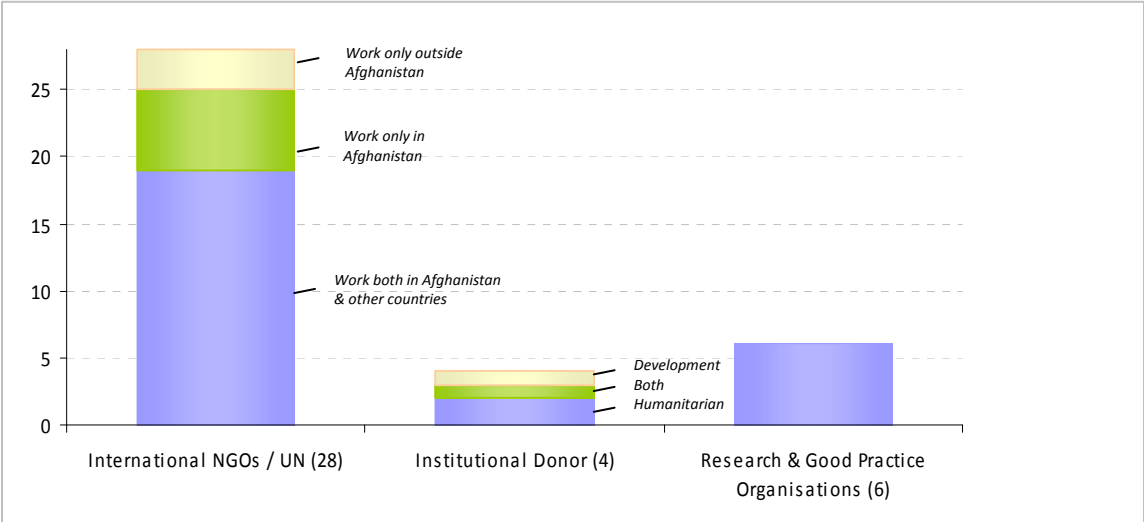
<sup>8</sup> Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN), 'Security', *Humanitarian Exchange* 47 (2010).

<sup>9</sup> The Humanitarian Outcomes paper highlights that remote management approaches can lead to deterioration in programme quality and monitoring, but does not identify any stringent guidelines or procedures to address this issue. This was outside the terms of reference and scope of the research.

humanitarian and development actors addressed wider issues of remote management in order to establish context (see Section 6). Fifty-three organisations were invited to participate.<sup>10</sup> Representatives of 28 organisations participated in individual interviews, while representatives from a further ten organisations took part in ongoing discussions with the project coordinator. These discussions provided case studies and examples of the issues and good practices related to remote project monitoring and beneficiary accountability; these have strongly influenced the findings and recommendations. The majority of discussions and individual interviews took place in person, though some relied on Skype and email.

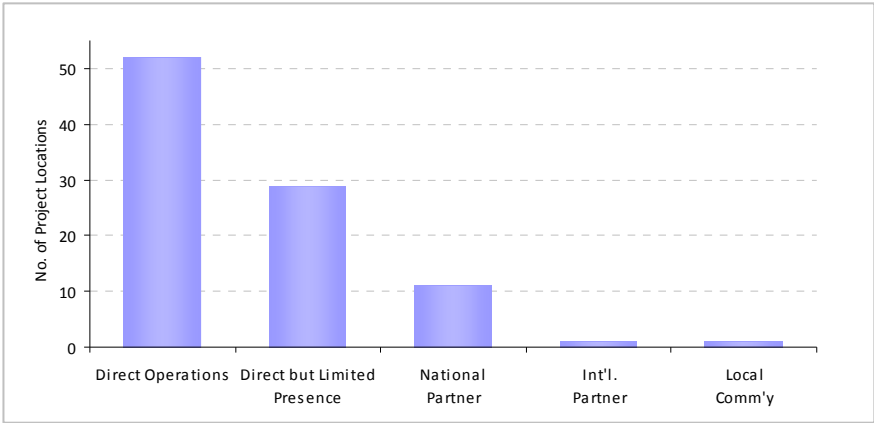
While most stakeholders (27) represented humanitarian and development INGOs, representatives from one UN humanitarian agency, four institutional donors and six good practice and research organisations also participated<sup>11</sup> (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Total humanitarian actors that participated in the research



The project coordinator sought to ensure that the perspectives of organisations of different size, scope, approaches and sectoral foci were included.<sup>12</sup> Fourteen of the INGOs interviewed operate in at least one project location using a remote management approach, while the remaining six operate through a standard operating procedure (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Mode of operation in INGO participants' project locations (those that were interviewed)



<sup>10</sup> Some of the organisations that were contacted included different regional offices for the same organisation. Each of these units has been treated as an individual organisation for the purposes of the research. Of the 53 organisations contacted, 15 either did not respond or were not in a position to participate in the research.

<sup>11</sup> One institutional donor has a significant focus on the coordination of humanitarian action. Two research and good practice organisations have a significant focus on the coordination of humanitarian and development interventions within Afghanistan and South Sudan. Most statistics and figures detailed within this report do not include the data collected from ten of the project stakeholders who did not participate in an individual interview. However, case studies and examples of issues and/or good practice from these organisations are referred to throughout the remainder of the report.

<sup>12</sup> Annex 5 provides a summary of the data relating to the size, scope and sectoral foci of individual stakeholders.

A template of interview questions was designed for each group of project stakeholders. The questions were used to guide discussions and to ensure that resulting data could easily be analysed. The ten organisations that participated indirectly engaged in discussions relating to monitoring and accountability practice for remotely managed humanitarian and development projects. Of the 28 organisations that participated directly in interviews, follow-up discussions were undertaken with eight of them. Data and case studies from each of the interviews and discussions were documented and analysed and they form the basis of research for this report.

This project also included a baseline assessment of the monitoring and accountability practices implemented by Tearfund. An external consultant was contracted to assess Tearfund's projects in Kandahar, Afghanistan; several of the key findings and recommendations are incorporated into this report.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the project coordinator visited Tearfund's remotely managed project office. During this visit, she took the opportunity to consult with Tearfund's local staff, reviewing proposed good practice responses to the issues highlighted by research stakeholders.

The final project element included a review of existing research into remote monitoring and accountability. This review was undertaken throughout both phases of the project.<sup>14</sup>

## **6 Overview of remote management approaches undertaken by project stakeholders**

The INGO stakeholders interviewed currently implement projects in 103 locations, 42 of which (41 per cent) use some type of remote management approach (see Figure 3). For most INGOs, the rationale behind implementing a remote management approach is either an organisational priority to promote the capacity building of local or national partners (in 21 project locations) or a response to deteriorating security in a project location (19 project locations).<sup>15</sup> This section describes the range of different approaches that INGOs have adopted in the locations they manage remotely.

### **6.1 Primary organisation is directly operational but with a reduced number/range of personnel based *in situ***

In 29 project locations (69 per cent), INGOs had decided to relocate expatriate and/or re-locatable national staff.<sup>16</sup> The number of visits made from head office to project locations varied but fortnightly, monthly and quarterly visits were the most prevalent practice. It should be noted, however, that some organisations had the capacity to visit the project locations only on a biannual or annual basis. There was also variation in terms of the type of staff who were able to visit project offices and/or project implementation areas (PIAs). The most common practice for project areas of medium- to high-insecurity was that expatriate staff were authorised to visit only the project office in a provincial capital. In most cases, senior national staff were still able to visit both project offices and PIAs, subject to an assessment of security in the region.

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<sup>13</sup> The terms of reference, methodology and final report for this assessment are included in Annexes 5, 6 and 7.

<sup>14</sup> A full list of the publications and research that have been used is available in the bibliography in Section 10.

<sup>15</sup> Humanitarian and development organisations that operate through local and/or national partner organisations as part of a deliberate and ongoing capacity building initiative often do so in secure as well as insecure project locations. Where it is possible for representatives of such organisations to visit the PIAs of local and/or national partners, the organisation is not, strictly speaking, implementing a remote management approach.

<sup>16</sup> These figures include organisations that have adopted a remote management approach as part of their standard operating procedure, as well as those that have chosen the approach in response to deteriorating security.

It was noted that, by using this approach, an organisation is still able to access vulnerable population groups, although the project coordinator concluded that this had been achieved most successfully in project areas where the INGO had had a presence historically and an ongoing relationship with local communities and stakeholders. One INGO working in Afghanistan noted that they have worked with communities in the same provinces for up to 30 years. Where this INGO had expanded operations, they had experienced greater difficulties with the remote management approach. This finding was supported by other INGOs from within Afghanistan, South Sudan and Sudan. Representatives from these organisations confirmed that they would not choose this management approach in a new location, without first having the opportunity to build acceptance within local communities and without having expertise in the security environment, context or culture for this new location.

## **6.2 Primary organisation works with an international partner organisation, managing the programme from a different location**

One stakeholder works with an INGO to support development interventions in Herat, Afghanistan. This approach was adopted not in response to insecurity in the project area but because the organisation chooses to work solely with international and national partner organisations. At least two other organisations noted that they worked in conjunction with other INGOs in one to three of their project locations. This approach had been adopted primarily because external INGOs have greater capacity, local knowledge or sectoral expertise.

Institutional donors and good practice and research organisations highlighted other examples, particularly those of UN agencies who contracted INGOs as secondary partners to implement projects in insecure locations where personnel from the primary organisation are not permitted. It was noted that, with the restrictions on UN security movements, project interventions are often sub-contracted to INGOs that had had a presence in a project location historically, a practice particularly prevalent in Afghanistan and Somalia.<sup>17</sup>

This approach enables organisations to use the expertise and capacities of INGOs that have an established relationship with project communities and that are easily able to interact with them. The extent to which organisations follow up projects and monitor them directly varied across the stakeholders, with some anecdotal references to limited monitoring.

## **6.3 Primary organisation operates with a local partner organisation, managing the project from a different location**

In 11 project locations (26 per cent), remote management was undertaken through a local or national partner. There were three main justifications for this approach: i) deterioration in the overall security in the project area; ii) an organisational priority to work with and to build the capacity of local and/or national partner organisations; and iii) cost-efficiency.<sup>18</sup>

Three of the INGOs are working with local or national partners due to deteriorating security. These organisations are providing varying levels of direct support to the local or national NGOs. One organisation, operating in Oruzgan, Afghanistan, noted that they had recruited local personnel to support three partner organisations. Senior national staff members also travel regularly to the province to support and monitor project implementation. It was not clear to what extent the other two organisations visit and support their partner organisations or to what extent they conduct monitoring visits to review project progress and quality.

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<sup>17</sup> Tearfund has implemented UN World Food Programme projects in Jawzjan, Afghanistan, in 2010, 2011 and 2012 and is working with international partners who have existing operational programmes in Somalia in response to the ongoing food crisis.

<sup>18</sup> One organisation responding to a humanitarian crisis in northern Afghanistan chose to work through national NGOs as the organisation had no prior experience or presence in the specific region. Establishing an office and presence in the region for a relatively short-term emergency response programme was not seen as cost effective.

#### **6.4 Primary organisation contracts out direct project implementation to a private organisation, managing the project from a different location**

None of the INGOs interviewed was working with or through private contractors. However, representatives from two research and good practice organisations confirmed that they had undertaken evaluations for humanitarian organisations that had contracted out programmes to private organisations.

Private development contractors are currently operational within Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. As with other remote modes of programme management, the extent to which organisations monitor projects directly varied. Anecdotal evidence suggests that one UN humanitarian agency had had to deal with issues relating to insufficient programme quality and corruption resulting from poor project implementation by the private contractor and limited managerial oversight by the primary organisation.

#### **6.5 Primary organisation supports the local project community to implement and monitor projects in locations where it is not possible for local or national staff to visit**

One organisation confirmed that they currently operate through local communities (in two separate districts in Kabul, Afghanistan). Security in those districts deteriorated dramatically and the INGO was targeted with attacks. The project office was relocated and no staff were able to visit the PIAs. The INGO in question was implementing a National Solidarity Programme (NSP) in these two districts<sup>19</sup>. As the programme was near completion, the INGO decided to continue the intervention through close collaboration with the local communities.<sup>20</sup>

Though at least two stakeholders showed interest in community-led project implementation and monitoring, organisations would rarely choose to implement projects solely through local communities. An institutional donor raised concerns about management systems which do not allow organisational personnel to visit PIAs.

#### **6.6 Remote management and partnership policy**

Of the 14 INGOs which are currently managing at least one project location remotely due to deteriorating security, only two have developed a formal remote management policy. Three of the 12 that have elected to work through partners as part of an organisational strategy to develop capacity have developed a partnership policy. These organisations strongly recommended developing such policies which they perceive as being essential tools in promoting project quality and monitoring.

The two remote management policies reviewed as part of this research were both developed by INGOs that have significant expertise in working in countries prone to medium- to high-insecurity. Section 7.2.6 reviews the existing practice of these two INGOs, drawing out recommendations related to remote management guidelines that can be adopted by other humanitarian and development practitioners. One crucial recommendation, and one that is emphasised in that section, is that it is not only necessary to develop a stand-alone remote

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<sup>19</sup> The NSP is a countrywide, national government-supported development programme, implemented across Afghanistan with the support of NGOs. The programme encourages local community leadership structures to engage with and support the implementation of project activities. Because of its community-focused approach, it is understandable that the INGO referred to here chose to keep the programme going through the local community structures already developed.

<sup>20</sup> Four local community facilitators were selected and given training in project planning, assessments, implementation and monitoring. They worked closely with the INGO's engineering staff to support community committees in project implementation. Remote monitoring was achieved primarily through photographic evidence of project progress, surveys and verbal observations.

management policy but also to adjust all existing policies and procedures so that they are adapted and functional under remote management approaches.

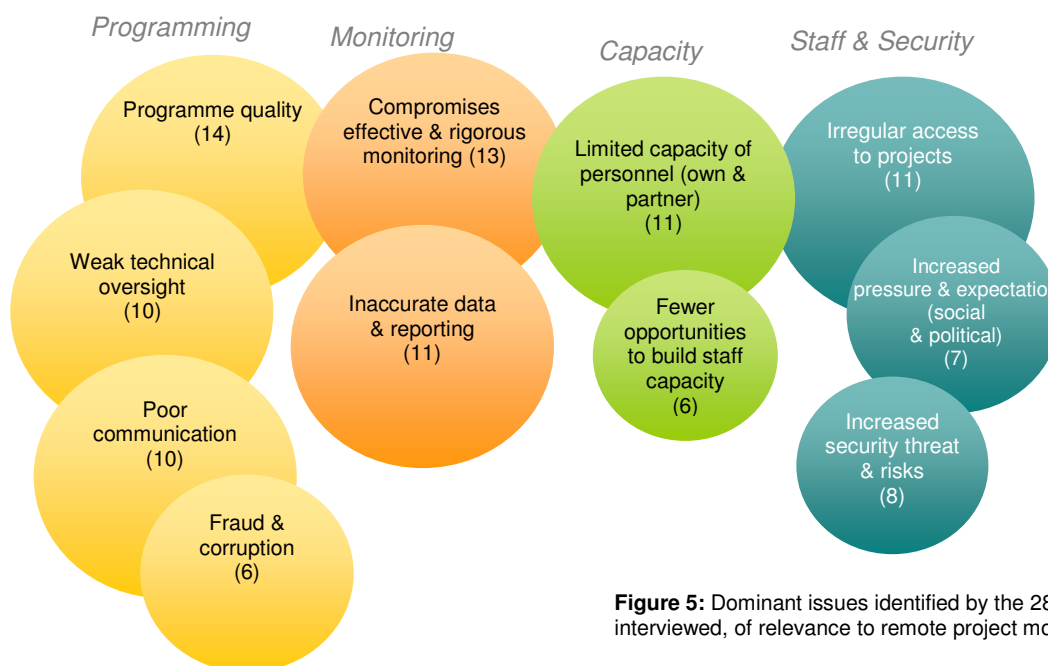
What was very apparent was that there is no foreseeable end in sight for the remote management approach. With deteriorating security and increasing levels of threat against humanitarian and development workers, INGOs confirmed that they did not anticipate ending remote management for at least five years. Those INGOs that did foresee an end to remote management only did so because they plan to close or complete the project and will not remotely manage elsewhere. It is a concern that the majority of stakeholders are embarking on remote management practices without a clear policy or appropriately adapted support systems. This is one of several issues that will be addressed in this report.

## 7 Remote project monitoring

### 7.1 Overview of the issues and concerns raised by stakeholders

Stakeholders highlighted 35 issues and concerns related to remote project monitoring. While most of these issues were highlighted only once or twice, there were several that were more prevalent. Others of a similar nature were combined in appropriate categories, when analysed by the project coordinator. Any issues that stakeholders highlighted a minimum of six times were perceived as posing a potentially substantial threat to effective remote project monitoring (see Figure 5).

The next sections of this report focus on the issues which were raised most commonly.<sup>21</sup> Other issues raised less frequently remain of interest in this research and, where relevant, have been incorporated into later sections as well.<sup>22</sup> Where any of the key issues raised are exacerbated by remote management approaches, this is highlighted. This helps draw a comparison between issues experienced in remotely managed projects versus directly managed ones.



**Figure 5:** Dominant issues identified by the 28 stakeholders interviewed, of relevance to remote project monitoring

<sup>21</sup> The final issue (capacity building and mentoring opportunities) will be addressed as part of Section 7.2.5.

<sup>22</sup> These include: reduced potential for donor involvement; 'power' held by partners and private contractors; and deteriorating team dynamic and relationship (included in the *poor communication* section); risk to organisational reputation (included in the *programme quality* and *fraud and corruption* sections); deterioration of beneficiary selection processes; absence of planned M&E frameworks; insufficient budget to support monitoring and evaluation; and insufficient evaluations undertaken (included in the *rigorous monitoring* section).

Examples of good and bad practice, as well as relevant quotations from interviews and focused discussions, have been included to bring life to the issues raised. This is followed by a section highlighting existing and recommended good practice. It is important that issues relating to remote project monitoring are viewed alongside the recommended good practice, as this highlights ways in which the issues can be addressed.

Drawing together the issues affecting remote project monitoring and presenting existing and developing ideas of good practice provides an innovative baseline for current discussions on remote management. What follows will brief humanitarian and development organisations on the key issues to consider relating to remote monitoring, as well as practices and mechanisms to address those issues. It is hoped that this research will complement existing research and discussion on remote management.

### 7.1.1 Potential deterioration in programme quality

*'Remote management would present difficulties in ensuring that project implementation is being completed to a reasonable or high quality.'*

- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

This issue was raised by 14 out of 28 (50 per cent) stakeholders interviewed. Most acknowledged that the issue or concern was speculative: an anticipated risk resulting from other assumptions regarding remote management, eg limited programme supervision by senior management, limited technical oversight, irregular external monitoring, limited capacity of personnel, social and political pressures on local personnel, as well as other factors.<sup>23</sup> Programme quality

corresponds directly to the level of monitoring that is possible. Project monitoring for monitoring sake is inconsequential. Project monitoring to ensure high programme quality and to reduce the risks of fraud or corruption is essential.

The reason why so many individual stakeholders highlighted this issue is that it links with and is impacted by several of the other issues and concerns raised. Indeed, it is difficult to look at this issue in isolation. As mentioned above, each of these issues will be reviewed in the following sections and their impact on programme quality will be highlighted specifically.

While most feedback on this issue was speculative, six out of 20 organisations had had negative experiences in relation to remote management and programme quality. One INGO in Afghanistan, implementing projects remotely through a modified team structure based *in situ* (comprising local staff only), highlighted that they had experienced a 'failure to either implement projects to a high quality or to spend money correctly'. An INGO operating in Sudan explained that they had struggled to ensure high quality for technically complex projects, particularly construction work.

*'Without direct oversight and management, ensuring project quality will become more difficult. Should an implementing partner or private contractor not be able to meet the existing quality standards of the humanitarian organisation, there is a risk that the project quality will suffer and that the reputation of the humanitarian organisation will be damaged.'*

- UN humanitarian agency representative, supporting programmes in Afghanistan

A humanitarian and development coordination agency based in Afghanistan was concerned about the quality of programmes implemented remotely which have a technically complex focus. They emphasised that this concern was not based on a critical or biased opinion towards the capacity of local and national staff. Rather, they stressed that 'project quality can only be measured effectively, and trust and working style developed, through cross-checking, triangulation of data and ongoing supervision. Remote management approaches make cross-checking and triangulation of data very difficult and supervision can only ever be

<sup>23</sup> It has not been possible within this project to conduct a robust assessment of the quality of individual programmes implemented by stakeholders. Thus, the comments in this section are based on anecdotal remarks and experiences from each stakeholder.



achieved from a distance. Without there being strong systems supporting each of these, ensuring and measuring programme quality is not possible.’

Likewise, two research and good practice organisations noted that there are no project types or sectors that lend themselves to successful remote management. For every project type or sector, significant issues will arise in relation to project quality. Both organisations had undertaken evaluations of remotely managed programmes.<sup>24</sup> All three programmes evaluated experienced significant challenges in ensuring good programme quality. The representative from one of these research and good practice organisations noted that ‘in both cases, this remote management approach had led to significant issues for the organisations in question and had compromised the quality and integrity of their project interventions’. The second organisation representative agreed, noting that ‘the quality of project work is not effectively monitored or challenged (until it was too late, in this instance), and thus projects continue operating with corruption and poor-quality operations’.

At the same time, some organisations have been able to manage programmes remotely while maintaining high quality. In the most striking examples of this, there was a strong focus on training and capacity building for local staff, as well as regular visits to PIAs to review project progress and quality, controls and checks to ensure ongoing programmatic supervision and monthly opportunities for lesson learning and sharing of good practice. In reviewing examples of existing good practice, this report will present and review the Quality Assurance Unit developed by an INGO operating in Afghanistan (see pages 42–43). This will show that quality assurance in remotely managed projects is not impossible, despite the concerns and issues expressed here.

*‘Quality and impact of programmes remains high, especially in participatory community development.’*

- Country director of an INGO operating in South Sudan

### 7.1.2 Deterioration in the potential to ensure effective and rigorous monitoring

Thirteen of the 28 stakeholders were explicitly concerned about effective and rigorous monitoring. However, as with the issue of quality assurance, several other concerns and factors feed into and impact this issue.<sup>25</sup>

The primary concern highlighted by one research and good practice organisation is that humanitarian and development practitioners do not plan and budget sufficiently for effective, rigorous monitoring systems. In only eight of 20 INGOs interviewed was there an organisational monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework in place. Likewise, only ten INGOs had standardised M&E tools and templates. Three INGOs noted that rigorous project monitoring was often one of the practices dropped when projects experienced competing priorities and deadlines.<sup>26</sup> Another noted that short-cuts could be taken in an attempt to be as efficient as possible and to reduce the time taken to facilitate monitoring.<sup>27</sup> Many INGOs stakeholders raised this issue, whether they were managing projects remotely or not. Such problems were exacerbated in remotely managed projects, where senior programme staff undertook less direct supervision and made fewer visits to PIAs.

<sup>24</sup> In these cases, the remote management approach used secondary partner organisations to implement project activities directly. Personnel from the primary organisations had undertaken limited supervision visits and monitoring.

<sup>25</sup> These include: reduced regularity of visits and access to PIAs; inaccuracy of data and reporting; weak technical oversight; poor communication between staff based *in situ* and staff based at primary organisations or organisational head offices; limited capacity of local project-implementing staff; reduced relationship with community / acceptance; deterioration of beneficiary selection processes; reduced community participation; absence of planned M&E frameworks; insufficient budget to support M&E; and insufficient evaluations undertaken.

<sup>26</sup> The country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan noted: ‘There can be a tendency in particularly busy projects for monitoring and evaluation to be one of the first things to limit.’

<sup>27</sup> The country director of this INGO, operating in Afghanistan, noted: ‘Other processes (including monitoring) are often not completed properly, with some short cuts taken in an attempt to try and be more efficient.’

The amount of resources and finances dedicated to project monitoring varied. Thirteen of the 20 INGOs interviewed had access to either an M&E focal person within the organisation or to a team of specialists; one of these organisations also employs a Data Analysis Officer. Despite these measures, concerns were raised by a research and good practice organisation that has undertaken evaluations for INGOs, UN agencies and institutional donors within Afghanistan. It had numerous concerns, including: the infrequency of visits by primary organisations or senior programme staff to PIAs, inconsistencies in data collection, inadequate data analysis, inadequate follow-up by institutional donors, insufficient evaluations undertaken, insufficient budget allocated to M&E, as well as inadequate planning for project M&E.

**Experiences from one research and good practice organisation of inadequate M&E systems**

A representative in Afghanistan of a research and good practice organisation was asked whether they had observed or experienced any issues related to project monitoring in any of the remotely managed project evaluations they had undertaken. The following issues were highlighted:

- *Institutional donors should require stronger monitoring systems. There is currently a lack of consistency between institutional donors in terms of the project monitoring that they require. Often, there are monitoring systems specified but there is little follow-up to ensure that this monitoring is maintained and that it is adequate. Appropriate monitoring and reporting from local implementing partners right through to institutional donors is necessary.*
- *Insufficient funding and capacity is allocated to resource adequate M&E functions. Institutional donors need to be more willing to allocate funding to support these processes.*
- *M&E processes are not planned effectively. They are often an afterthought, tacked on later to project plans rather than being carefully integrated into the project planning process. We have not seen evidence of strong monitoring systems in either of the [two] projects evaluated.*

INGOs employ various systems to support project monitoring. Regular reporting of project progress and impact is one such system. However, there is wide disparity in the regularity of reporting. While 13 out of 20 INGOs confirmed that they had monthly reporting procedures in place for their projects, only seven INGOs have developed frequent follow-up and reporting systems (weekly or bi-weekly). Likewise, there is considerable variance in the number of direct monitoring visits undertaken by primary organisations to implementing partners or by senior programme management staff to PIAs. All INGOs undertake face-to-face monitoring and mentoring with implementing agencies or local personnel, but the regularity of these practices varies, as does the location at which they are undertaken. Four organisations either do not visit PIAs or do so irregularly. Of these, three have not been able to visit PIAs in Kandahar, Afghanistan, for at least two years. In contrast, other organisations have developed practices of monthly to quarterly (sometimes biannual) visits to all project locations that are remotely managed. This latter group of stakeholders were confident that such visits supported project monitoring and helped build the capacity of local personnel and partner organisations to carry out effective monitoring.

INGO representatives did not all agree on the value of having a separate M&E focal person or team. Some organisations argued that this practice can compartmentalise M&E specialisms and removes responsibility from project-implementing staff. Most stakeholders commented that, for project monitoring to be effective, it must be integrated throughout programme and project teams. Effective project monitoring is not just about developing protocols or a team focused on this issue but rather requires integration of good practice and relevant training across the programme. Section 7.2.8 contains examples from INGOs where capacity is dedicated to supporting M&E. It will highlight the specific benefits of this approach, emphasising the need for this capacity to relate to and liaise with all project staff.

*‘There can be a tendency, once an M&E team or staff member is recruited, to put the responsibility on one person or on that unit. M&E should be fully integrated by all programme and project staff so that it does not become compartmentalised.’*

- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

In remotely managed projects, most day-to-day project monitoring falls to the local staff or partners based *in situ*. Concerns were raised about the potential lack of objectivity in relying on people to monitor projects that they themselves are implementing. The project coordinator's own experience of supporting project monitoring Kandahar has been that, while local staff are enthusiastic about visiting PIAs and recording findings, they can be reluctant to highlight specific programming issues or areas that are not working successfully. Likewise,

*'In remote management situations, it is often the case that expatriate staff are not able to visit and monitor project activities. Having not been directly involved in the implementation of projects, expatriates can often be more objective and thorough in their monitoring and evaluation. Without the possibility of their being able to visit projects, this objectivity is reduced and the quality of monitoring detrimentally impacted. Remote monitoring is often merely reduced to a tick-box exercise, even with national staff who are highly competent. Getting detailed and consistent data, and analysing and reporting on that data well, is often not something that is possible under remote management.'*

- Institutional donor representative, supporting programmes in Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan

Tearfund's baseline assessment of monitoring and beneficiary accountability practice in Kandahar revealed that the data recorded by local staff was sometimes inaccurate and required regular follow-up from senior staff in Kabul. This lack of objectivity and the inaccuracy of some project data were not deliberately fraudulent. Rather, they were a symptom of limited capacity to collect, analyse and record data and betrayed a fear of highlighting what is not working well in a project.

Other issues that affect an organisation's ability to monitor projects effectively and rigorously are recorded elsewhere in this report. This issue is fundamental to the success or failure of a remotely managed project and to overall programme quality. Organisations wishing to address issues related to project monitoring

should review the examples of good practice in Section 7.2.

### 7.1.3 Reduced regularity of visits and access to project implementation areas

This issue was highlighted by 11 out of the 28 stakeholders interviewed (39 per cent). Though it was possible for ten of the organisations implementing projects remotely to visit the project office, only three could authorise senior programme management staff to visit PIAs. In two of these cases, only national staff were authorised to visit the PIAs.

The focus of visits to project offices varied between organisations. Often, the aim was to build the capacity of local staff using mentoring and training workshops. Security training was also a common focus for visits, with senior security personnel from within an organisation providing in-house training for local staff. Reviews of project records were also strong foci, as well as monitoring and impact reviews.

The regularity of visits by senior management personnel to remotely managed projects varied between organisations (as highlighted in Section 7.1.2). This variation was often down to the varying availability of funding and resources. All four organisations which noted that they either 'do not' or 'do not regularly' visit project offices and/or PIAs are small- to medium-scale INGOs operating in only one or two countries, without the support and resources of an international head office. The project coordinator observed that risk management and support structures are not in place to support more regular visits to project locations in these instances, nor is there the necessary budget.

*'Expatriate staff have tended to visit Kandahar at least one time per year, though it is recognised that the ideal should be between two and three times. More commonplace practice is for senior project staff from Kandahar to visit Kabul or Jalalabad and to meet there instead.'*

- Community development director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

INGO stakeholders often commented that visits by local staff to organisational head offices (within country) were undertaken to complement visits made to projects by senior programme staff. Monthly to quarterly programme and/or security meetings were the most prominent justification for these visits, though training and capacity building were also common.

Several research and good practice organisations and institutional donors observed that regular visits by senior programme management personnel to PIAs are vital to ensure that

*'Concerns have been raised by the community that we are spending inadequate time on the ground during our day trips. Concerns have also been raised regarding the waste of our resources due to having to use expensive helicopter flights to access remote project locations instead of investing the resources on direct implementation.'*

- Representative of an INGO operating in West Darfur, Sudan

quality project implementation is monitored and supervised. This practice was well established by one INGO operating in Darfur, Sudan. Records showed that twice-weekly day trips were undertaken by senior personnel (including technical advisers) to all remotely managed locations. Time on the ground usually ranged between three and four hours. Twelve to 15 technical staff visited the project on each scheduled field day, with three or four staff visiting each focus village.

This INGO was one of the better examples of frequent visiting of PIAs. Despite this, the INGO still received criticism from local communities that they did not spend sufficient time 'on the ground' during each project visit and that essential financial resources were wasted by using helicopters to fly staff into the project locations, to avoid road travel.

Increasingly, humanitarian and development organisations have to rely on air travel, as opposed to road travel, in order to access project offices and PIAs. Where previously organisations used road travel, greater insecurity along main road routes has meant road travel has often been suspended. An INGO that does continue to use road travel between districts in Kabul noted that this raises significant security concerns, particularly for community members who travel to remotely based project offices. Visits can be cancelled at short notice due to insecurity, based on day-to-day risk assessments.

The absence of regular project visits was of primary concern to institutional donors as well as to research and good practice organisations. The latter commented that often local implementing partners or privately contracted organisations do not believe that primary organisation personnel will ever visit the project location. Furthermore, these organisations, as well as other INGOs and a humanitarian coordination agency, noted that project implementing organisations will actively discourage visits from primary organisations and institutional donors.<sup>28</sup> This power struggle seriously undermines the potential for effective, rigorous project monitoring and the assurance of high programme quality. Some institutional donors are not prepared to fund organisations that are not able to ensure that senior programme personnel (including expatriates) and their own agency representatives can visit PIAs.

There was some disagreement among stakeholders about the type of personnel who should visit PIAs. There was significant complaint from INGOs regarding the requirement (often insisted upon by institutional donors) that expatriate staff need to be able to visit PIAs. This is not possible for most organisations that implement programmes remotely. Often in these cases, national staff are, however, able to visit the PIAs regularly. While this is disputed by some institutional donors, this was a practice that several INGOs were happy with.

<sup>28</sup> The director of a humanitarian and development coordination agency, based in Afghanistan, commented that: "There could be a danger in remotely managed projects that local staff will advise head office or project management staff against visiting the project location, citing insecurity as the reason. These staff may even create a security incident, should head office or management staff continue with their plans for the visit, to discourage them from doing so in future".

Regularity of visits and access to PIAs are key requirements for ensuring robust project monitoring and technical oversight of projects. Visits by senior programme management or primary organisation personnel to PIAs are essential. There is a need for further discussion within the wider humanitarian and development community regarding risk transfer to local and national staff (see Section 7.1.8), as is greater consensus on the regularity of visits.

#### 7.1.4 Inaccuracy of project data and reporting

Eleven out of 28 stakeholders interviewed (39 per cent) highlighted that the process of generating accurate project data and timely and accurate reports would be detrimentally affected by using remote management approaches. The key foci highlighted were: adequate data collection, thorough data analysis, and effective management and use of data through project reporting and regular lesson-learning.

Stakeholders were unanimous in highlighting concerns about the quality of project data collected in PIAs. They noted that the data collected by local staff, partners and private contractors could often be inaccurate, requiring time and resources to address and investigate and to produce more solid data.<sup>29</sup> These issues were heightened in remotely managed project locations, where communication with local staff or partners was delayed, as were visits to PIAs.

*'We do experience issues across all of our project areas in ensuring that good-quality data is collected and sent to the Kabul office for analysis. While data issues for more secure, non-remote management project areas (Jawzjan, Balkh, Bamyan etc) can be solved in one day, it can take up to a month to address similar issues faced in our remotely managed project location.'*

- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

Collecting high-quality data is an essential element of project management, yet these practices are often not being undertaken to a high standard in remotely managed projects. One institutional donor referred to monitoring and data collection as having become a 'tick-box exercise' for organisations that operate programmes remotely, even where the capacity of local and national staff is high. Similarly, a research and good practice organisation representative claimed that, in its experience of undertaking evaluations for a UN humanitarian agency, accurate project data collection was not common practice. Without accurate data being collected at project implementation level, humanitarian and development organisations are forced into a situation whereby they experience 'a deficit in project progress, quality and impact reporting'.<sup>30</sup>

*'Technical skills to support project monitoring and evaluation, report writing and data analysis have been particularly difficult to hone in the absence of regular training, mentoring and capacity building.'*

- M&E officer of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

There was not unanimous agreement that the low quality of data collected was a staff capacity issue, although evidence cited by several organisations did support this assumption.<sup>31</sup> The Country director for an INGO operating in Afghanistan noted that M&E and the processes that support these systems are complex. They urged the humanitarian and development community to recognise that local, national and expatriate staff do not automatically understand how to implement these systems and processes (mentioning data analysis and surveying as

<sup>29</sup> In most instances, the responsibility for regular project data collection fell to local staff and/or partners. In some cases, national staff were also able to visit PIAs and to conduct data collection and other monitoring practices. In one case, where access to two PIAs was not possible even for local staff, data was collected by the community and four Community Facilitators.

<sup>30</sup> Comment from an institutional donor representative, supporting programmes in Afghanistan and elsewhere in Southern Asia.

<sup>31</sup> Of the 20 INGOs interviewed, twelve (60 per cent) confirmed that their local and/or national staff demonstrated low capacity in relation to data collection; five (25 per cent) confirmed that their local and/or national staff demonstrated low capacity in relation to data analysis, and; nine (45 per cent) confirmed that their local and/or national staff demonstrated low capacity in relation to producing timely and accurate project reports.

particular examples). There is a need for further focus on relevant capacity building for staff and partners.<sup>32</sup>

As the next section shows, remote management approaches also have a detrimental impact on the opportunities to build the capacity of and to mentor staff. While senior national and expatriate staff may have been based at the project location historically, supporting local staff with direct project implementation, day-to-day mentoring and cross-checking of data would have been possible. In the absence of these opportunities, stakeholders recognised that it was more difficult to build this capacity.

Data triangulation is one mechanism that can help ensure the accuracy of data collected, though to date it has not been well established as a process by organisations seeking to operate remotely. While primary organisations or senior management staff make fewer visits (if any) to PIAs, there is an almost total reliance on local project and partner personnel to collect data for the projects they are implementing. One institutional donor representative noted that there are fewer opportunities to cross-check and verify project data that is submitted by a local partner, private contractor or local staff member, making the reliability of that data weaker'. There is ample scope to address this issue and to develop systems to triangulate and verify data, particularly in remotely managed projects.

*'While monitoring systems might be in place, often data that is collected by local implementing partners is not analysed and findings from this data are not articulated or used. Data that is collected goes into a pool of unused data and key lesson learning fails to be captured. This is an issue of inadequate management and project oversight, rather than an issue of low capacity.'*

- Research and good practice organisation representative, Afghanistan

The final concern most commonly highlighted relates to adequate data management systems for remotely managed projects. Even where high-quality data is collected, it often ends up in a pool of data and is not used for project reporting or lesson learning. It was clear that not all of the INGOs had developed adequate data analysis and management systems. Just three organisations had advanced databases in place to support data analysis and data sharing (between project locations and organisational head offices). Only one organisation had a dedicated data analysis officer, based at the programme head office and supporting data analysis across all project locations.<sup>33</sup> While not all humanitarian and development organisations have the resources to recruit a dedicated data analysis officer, two research and good practice organisations recommended that 'dedicated capacity to collect, manage, analyse and report on data' is required.

Recommendations to support improved practice for data collection and reporting, as well as examples of existing good practice, are reviewed and developed in Sections 7.2.8 to 7.2.10.

### 7.1.5 Limited capacity of own and/or partner personnel

There was considerable variation in stakeholders' opinions on this issue. While 11 out of 28 stakeholders identified limited capacity of their own and/or partner staff as a substantial issue in remotely managed projects, some organisations reported operating successfully with local and national staff of high capacity, and others were observed to be doing so. Two organisations had already nationalised all their project and provincial management positions,

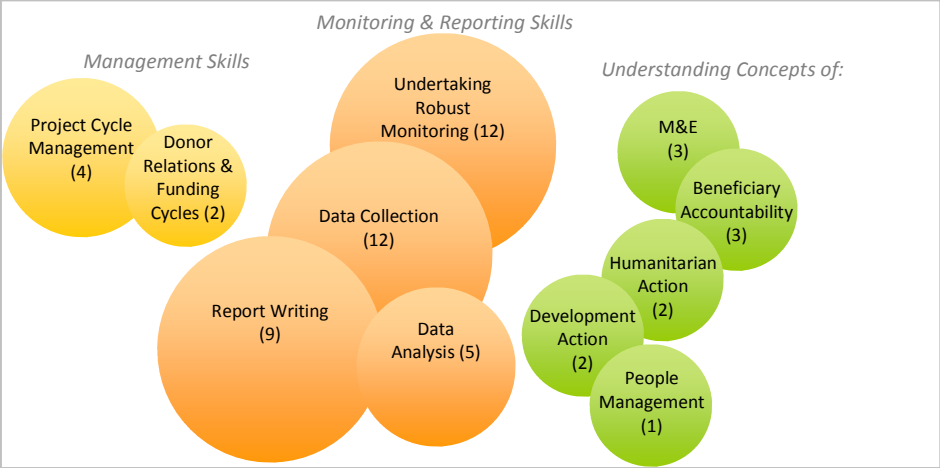
<sup>32</sup> The country director of this INGO, operating in Afghanistan, commented, 'Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices are complex – they require constant capacity building and training (particularly in the areas of data analysis and surveying). Staff not only need to understand how it is achievable, but also why it is necessary or important. M&E also need to be contextualised for each project environment. Questionnaires developed for communities living in rural areas, for example, are not necessarily going to be suitable for communities living in urban areas. Questionnaires will need to be contextualised in these cases.'

<sup>33</sup> A further INGO that participated in focused discussions with the project coordinator has also installed a project monitoring database. A good practice case study referring to this INGO is included in Section 7.2.10.

while another was in the process of nationalising many positions, with national staff found to be of sufficient capacity to take on these roles.

Each stakeholder interviewed was asked to raise examples of capacity issues that they feared or had experienced and which had been exacerbated through remote management. Responses were reviewed and trends in the capacity issues highlighted were analysed (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6:** Staff and/or partner capacity issues related to monitoring and beneficiary accountability identified by INGOs



The capacity issues raised primarily fell into three separate categories: management skills, monitoring and reporting skills, and concepts of humanitarian and development action (and related practices). The majority of capacity issues related to monitoring and reporting skills, with robust monitoring and data collection highlighted as being most critical. Report writing came a close second, followed by data analysis and project cycle management. It is interesting that these issues are closely interlinked.

*‘Staff capacity issues are a key concern for the remote management approach in Melut, particularly because, across the board, capacity is weak.’*

- Representative of an INGO operating in South Sudan and Sudan

Staff capacity issues were often worse in remote management situations where senior programme staff were not based with local staff and could not provide day-to-day mentoring and capacity building opportunities. Staff training workshops represent an additional expense, requiring trainers to travel to the project location (which is not always possible in insecure environments), or requiring project staff to travel elsewhere for training.

*“It is really important to ensure that adequate training is provided, not only to the humanitarian organisation’s own staff but to the staff of local partners or private contractors as well. A crash course in emergency basics (eg how to conduct assessments, how to facilitate distributions, how to monitor project activities) should take place”.*

- UN Agency representative, supporting humanitarian programmes in Afghanistan

Interviews with stakeholders commonly highlighted that switching to remote management in a project area where the organisation has a presence historically is often more effective than initiating a remote management approach for a project in a completely new project location. An INGO operating in Afghanistan commented that where senior programme management staff had previously been able to be based in Kandahar or Maimana (which are both now being remotely managed), significant time had been dedicated to building staff capacity. Now that remote management approaches are in place, local staff are better equipped to manage the day-to-day implementation of projects. This was contrasted with a third project location, Kush, which had switched to remote management soon after the project was initiated, without substantial time given to

capacity building.

Training workshops and capacity building initiatives were common practices recommended by stakeholders. The examples of best practice were where local and national staff receive training relevant to their roles on a monthly to quarterly basis. Training, of course, requires resources and funding which will need to be budgeted for to ensure staff's capacity is continually developed. To promote high capacity in staff, many recommended strongly that organisational resources should be applied to increase internal and external training opportunities, rather than to pay higher salaries and/or providing financial incentives to personnel to work in insecure areas.

To implement a project effectively using remote management, it is essential that local staff, partners or contractors are provided with tools, resources, training and support. Recognition of staff capacity issues is vital and targeted training to address specific weaknesses should be undertaken regularly. Section 7.2.3 contains practical guidance on training approaches and materials that can be developed to improve staff capacity in understanding and implementing concepts of project M&E and reporting.

### 7.1.6 Weak technical oversight of project implementation

Ten stakeholders (36 per cent) raised concerns that remote management may lead to a deterioration in the technical oversight of projects, particularly those with a technically complex focus (eg infrastructure, engineering etc).

Two of the organisations currently using a remote management approach shared their experiences of technical oversight of project implementation. One had not chosen to operate remotely due to insecurity, but had decided to work through local implementing partners with an existing presence in the PIAs. Instead of establishing a new project office in this region, the organisation decided to work through local partners to undertake project activities, for only a short project period. The Country director commented that, despite the final project outcome being of good quality, there had been issues regarding technical oversight. He also noted that his organisation's technical specialists had not provided adequate support to the local partners, making insufficient visits and putting inadequate controls in place to review and guide project implementation. This had resulted in a delay in the project being completed and in partners consistently missing the deadlines for key indicators and project outputs.

*'We experienced a failure to monitor project activities closely enough or to push implementing partners to keep to the project time frame, resulting in delays in some project activities and outputs. Too much freedom was allowed to local implementing partners and insufficient project oversight was undertaken by us.'*

- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

An INGO in West Darfur, Sudan, recently initiated a new project using a remote management strategy. They raised concerns regarding the technical oversight that would be possible for this project, particularly in relation to the regularity of technical specialists' visits to PIAs. These visits would be undertaken twice-weekly in this instance. However, this INGO was concerned that even twice-weekly visits were insufficient to ensure proper technical oversight and supervision for projects.

Strong or even adequate technical oversight for project implementation requires primary organisation and/or programme management personnel to visit PIAs regularly. The recommendations from most stakeholders were in favour of undertaking monthly to quarterly visits and one institutional donor raised concerns about the possibility of personnel not being able to visit PIAs or visits being undertaken irregularly.



### 7.1.7 Poor communication between country and field offices

*'We often send emails to the project offices to help clarify project implementation details. These emails ask specific questions for clarification but often we do not receive a response. Communication can often be very "one-way".'*

- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

Ten out of 28 stakeholders highlighted this issue. Each INGO was asked to outline the different communication practices in place for their projects (both remotely and directly managed ones). The predominant practices included: daily to weekly email (in the case of 18 INGOs interviewed); daily to weekly telephone and/or Skype calls (all INGOs); face-to-face interaction (all INGOs); and programme meetings (12 INGOs). The frequency of face-to-face visits (either at project or programme head offices) as well as the frequency of programme meetings varied between organisations. Some tried to ensure monthly face-to-face interaction while others confirmed that this would be carried out on a quarterly basis. Fewer organisations noted that face-to-face interaction would take place less frequently than this, though biannual to annual interaction was not unheard of.

Programme meetings tended to bring together senior programme and project staff at either the head or regional office. Meetings were held on a monthly, quarterly and/or biannual basis, with varying purposes (some for security discussion and planning, others for programmatic reviews and learning). One INGO, operating in Afghanistan, conducts monthly Grant Review Meetings (GRMs). These bring together various staff from both the head office and each remotely managed provincial office. The purpose is to review project progress and to discuss transferrable learning. The meetings are used as an interactive monitoring opportunity. This INGO has substantial experience in managing projects remotely and had several good practices to share with other organisations seeking to do the same (see Section 7.2.4 for details).

Other organisations interviewed were still in the process of developing such rigorous communication systems. Specific challenges included: unanswered queries raised by email or telephone; the absence of regular updates on project progress (even where these had been requested); limited coordination between personnel; and limited follow-up by primary organisations and/or programme management. Regular communication was described by the Director of an INGO operating in South Sudan as 'a continual frustration'. Most communication between the Nairobi head office and project offices within South Sudan relies on email, and 'responses are often slow'. An INGO operating in Sudan agreed, noting that internet and telephone connections in Darfur and areas of South Sudan could significantly hinder regular communication, slowing the project decision-making process.

*'There has been experience of a lack of coordination, collaboration or engagement between staff. In one example (the development of a baseline assessment), there was too much separation between colleagues and insufficient communication. This resulted in issues experienced as part of the assessment process.'*

- Representative of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

Concerns were not restricted to INGOs. One institutional donor commented that, for remotely managed projects, 'there might be a lack of communication and accountability between [their] direct partner and the local implementing partner'. They recommended that all remotely managed projects should have a communication protocol in place, including systems for regular communication between the institutional donor and the primary organisation, as well as between that organisation and any local staff, partner or contractor.

Team- and relationship-building between head office and project office staff was also highlighted as a potential issue. The director of a humanitarian and development coordination agency asked: 'How can you build trust and team without adequate oversight and presence at a project location?' Regular visits, telephone and email communication and

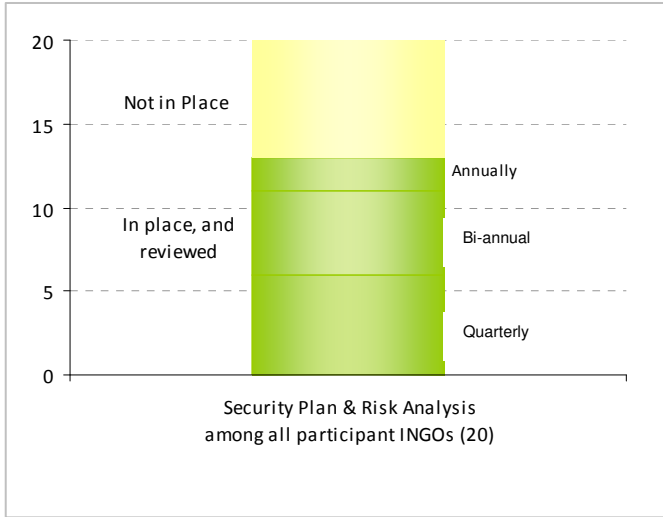
opportunities to participate in the planning and review of programmes are essential. Different stakeholders carry out these practices with varying frequency and success. Improving these systems will be essential for remotely managed projects, particularly to ensure that communication is adequate.

**7.1.8 Increased security threat and risks to personnel and/or communities and beneficiaries**

Fifteen project locations use remote management approaches due specifically to a general deterioration in security. In two project locations, the causal factor was a security incident targeted specifically against the organisation. Two organisations noted that, before shifting to remote management approaches, personnel from their own organisations had been killed while working in insecure project environments.<sup>34</sup> A further two organisations highlighted that they had experienced targeted attacks against their office compounds and/or vehicles and that their staff had received threats from armed opposition groups (AOGs).<sup>35</sup>

Security and risk management has had to become a key area of focus and capacity for organisations operating in areas of medium- to high-insecurity. INGO representatives were asked to clarify what systems they have in place for security planning and risk management. While most organisations confirmed that they do have a security plan and/or risk analysis system in place, seven organisations noted that theirs had not been well developed (see Figure 7).

Likewise, each humanitarian and development organisation interviewed was asked to comment on the level and frequency of security and risk management training available to staff (expatriate, national and local). Fifteen (out of 20) INGO representatives confirmed that their organisation provided and/or ensured security and risk management training for expatriate staff; 13 confirmed that this training was provided for national staff; and 13 confirmed that this training was provided for local staff.<sup>36</sup>



**Figure 7:** Number of participant INGOs with security plans and risk analysis

<sup>34</sup> One INGO, operating in Afghanistan, noted that in one year four staff members were killed. Following this acute security incident, expatriate staff members from four medium- to high-insecurity project locations were relocated to Kabul. The security incident followed a general deterioration in security in the project locations, and was the final trigger for the move to remote management. After the incident, projects were closed for a period of about two months before a remote management approach was instigated across the four locations. Another INGO, also operating in Afghanistan, noted that one expatriate staff member was killed while travelling outside Kabul. This same organisation also experienced a rocket attack against one of its compounds. Operations were suspended after both incidents and remotely managed for a time.

<sup>35</sup> These trigger events, combined with the overarching deterioration in security, led to the closure of district offices and the establishment of a remote office away from the project locations. Project staff are not permitted to visit PIAs and are required to work with locally recruited facilitators and Community Development Councils to implement and monitor project activities.

<sup>36</sup> The training provided is often compulsory and can be undertaken internally or through external trainers (eg the Afghan NGO Safety Office, ANSO).

One criticism levelled against remote management is the danger of risk transfer to local or national staff. Historically, it has been a criticism of remote management that organisations fail to assess adequately the risks and dangers for local and national staff that are based *in situ* in a medium- to high-insecurity environment. Critics argue that being local to the region or country offers no guarantees that security dangers will impact or affect local or national staff any less than they do expatriate staff. There is therefore a concern that remote management, which puts greater responsibility on local and national staff, increases the level of risk and danger experienced by those 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 to Kandahar so it should not be a big deal. But our staff there say it can be a problem because we look different. 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.'*

- National staff member of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

This concern was shared by several stakeholders. The representative for a humanitarian and development coordination agency, based in Afghanistan, commented: 'By leaving [local and/or national staff members] to manage and implement the projects without direct support and supervision from an expatriate, the organisation responsible maximises the risk that is faced by the project team'. The representative for an INGO operating in Darfur, Pakistan and Afghanistan questioned the appropriateness of expecting local and national staff to conduct monitoring visits of projects in insecure areas when expatriate staff were not willing to do so: 'Because [our] staff are not able to visit project locations in order to conduct scheduled monitoring visits, how appropriate, safe and ethical is it for that risk (considered to be too great for our expatriate staff) to be transferred to partner staff instead?' Likewise, an institutional donor, supporting humanitarian interventions in Darfur, Somalia, Pakistan and Afghanistan, commented that remote management approaches may lead to 'heightened security risks for national and local personnel'.

There is no easy answer and in fact there is significant debate across the humanitarian and development community about the extent to which remote management increases the security risks faced by national staff. The INGO quoted in the previous paragraph also commented: 'If they do not do this though [requiring local and national partners to visit and monitor projects when expatriate personnel are not able to], there is a concern that the project is not being monitored regularly and this is an issue as well.'

However, another stakeholder commented that the idea that remote management 'automatically puts national staff at unacceptable risk' confuses two components of risk: exposure and vulnerability. Remote management, by definition, reduces expatriate exposure and generally increases national staff exposure. However, the overall level of risk depends heavily on conflict *vulnerability*. Depending on context-specific conflict dynamics, factors such as language, ethnicity, religion, political connections and cultural affinity may either increase or decrease the vulnerability of national staff relative to expatriates. A substantial vulnerability analysis must underpin any decision about remote management, with the same threshold of unacceptable risk (exposure x vulnerability) applied to all staff, regardless of nationality or gender. An immediate recommendation from this research is that security, risk and vulnerability assessments should be undertaken with greater rigour and that relevant training should be compulsory for all staff operating in insecure areas. (Similar recommendations will be covered in more detail in Sections 7.2.1 and 7.2.6).

The majority of INGOs interviewed did comment that they liaise closely with beneficiary communities in regularly assessing and mitigating against risk. One INGO operating in Afghanistan explained that before a project intervention has even been approved within a community or village, the members of that community or village are required to guarantee

100 per cent that they will do their best to safeguard the security of all personnel related to the project. If this commitment is not provided, the project is not initiated in that area. This was noted as having been largely successful to date, with community members regularly contacting staff at the INGO to warn them of potential security incidents and to advise when it is not safe to visit. This practice is common amongst INGOs, but it does not always guarantee staff safety and security.<sup>37</sup> There were concerns from the project coordinator that communities might promise a 100 per cent guarantee simply to avoid the INGO choosing not to initiate the project in their community.

*“It is no longer possible to rely simply on good acceptance to ensure the safety and security of programme and project staff. In view of the fluidity of security across Afghanistan... it would be naïve to think that a reliance on community acceptance alone will protect staff... Communities can be manipulated to turn against organisations. Likewise... when there are community disputes or AOG actions against a specific community, an organisation might be targeted in order to indirectly target the community that the organisation supports”.*

- Representative of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

Discussion was initiated with stakeholders on how community acceptance-building measures and accountability practices can be used to reduce security risks and threats to organisations. Several did support the hypothesis that increased community acceptance leads to safer access to PIAs for humanitarian and development staff. However, there were concerns that in a volatile conflict with increased fragmentation of insurgent groups, community acceptance is a less reliable indicator of security than it once was.

There was significant debate between stakeholders on the issues raised here and the measures that can be used (potentially) to reduce risks. What is clear, however, is that security of all staff, as well as the beneficiary community, must be paramount in any remote management approach.

### **7.1.9 Increased pressure and expectation (social and political) on local staff, in absence of senior national and expatriate staff**

*‘Strong power relations at a project level may well influence and pull or push national and local personnel in ways that they cannot resist... NGOs that seek to implement remote management approaches do not adequately consider these issues and do not meet the duty of care needs of their staff.’*

- Institutional donor representative, supporting programmes in Afghanistan

A further issue related to the security of project staff and to programme quality was raised by seven stakeholders (25 per cent), all of whom represented organisations operating in or supporting operations in Afghanistan. This may be an issue specific to the social and political context there, though it would be interesting to explore further whether this is something that organisations in Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia or Sudan experience. The issue itself relates to the extent to which remote management exacerbates existing social and political pressures and expectations on local and national staff. It assumes that these pressures, enforced by families, local communities, tribal groups, religious groups, AOGs and government ministries or leaders, do not have the same impact on expatriates as they do on local and national staff.

Finally, it assumes that by placing the responsibility for project management on these staff, organisations increase the levels of stress and anxiety they experience, as well as the risk of fraud and corruption and for reduced programme quality.

In the Afghan context, where family, tribe, ethnicity and political affiliation are so strong and where levels of chronic poverty are high, local and national staff may be susceptible to

<sup>37</sup> Another INGO operating in Afghanistan noted that, during an INGO visit to a potential project community, members of an AOG arrived, demanding to speak with the INGO personnel. In this instance, the community members were forced to hide them inside one of their homes. This incident put both the INGO personnel as well as the community at heightened risk.

pressures to provide assistance to certain groups. Partiality in targeting project beneficiaries, contractors and suppliers is a potentially damaging outcome of this issue (linking closely with fraud and corruption – see next section).

A second outcome is the risk to local and national staff well-being. This assumes that local and national staff are left without adequate support from expatriate colleagues, to fend off social and political pressures. One institutional donor remarked that this issue, in the context of remote management, presents a serious duty-of-care deficit. The concern was echoed by the director of a humanitarian and development coordination agency, also based in Afghanistan, who noted that insufficient support and supervision was put in place by INGOs operating remotely in Afghanistan: ‘Pressures and threats might be made against local and/or national staff (by their family, community, mosque, or governor). Not having the support of expatriate staff to respond to these pressures puts local and national staff in danger and at greater risk of insecurity.’

Two national staff members confirmed that there can be substantial expectations placed on staff by family, community and tribe. These expectations are particularly exacerbated when staff are local to the area in which they are working. While both staff members highlighted this expectation, they also confirmed that they did not feel any significant pressure, responding to requests and expectations by emphasising the mandate and values of the INGO, which ‘usually satisfies the community, family or tribe’. The project coordinator considered that these two staff members did feel comfortable expectations put on them by family, community and tribe. They felt able to share concerns with their line manager (an expatriate based in Kabul) and are sufficiently supported.

It is difficult to know the extent to which local and national staff feel able to share their feelings about this honestly. It could be a concern that, by raising this issue, they may inadvertently put themselves at greater risk of scrutiny by senior management and may therefore be less inclined to do so. Sensitivity to the issues related to social and political pressures must be a consideration for any organisation, especially those managing projects remotely, as part of their duty of care to staff. Training, mentoring, regular communication, face-to-face interaction and opportunities to discuss key issues must be ensured.

**7.1.10 Increased risk of the occurrence of fraud and corruption; organisational liability increased**

The risks of fraud and corruption are present in any humanitarian and development organisation, and no project stakeholder (expatriate, national or local staff, implementing partners, private contractors, suppliers, community leaders, and institutions) is immune. What was recognised by the six stakeholders highlighting this issue (21 per cent) was that remote management approaches offer greater opportunities for fraud and corruption, due to the assumption that limited project supervision by senior management personnel is in place.

*‘When we experience increasing problems in not being able to visit projects and to see project progress and quality ourselves, there is an increasing reliance on the implementing partner to do this. There is a concern that this can lead to corruption or fraud.’*

- Programme officer of an INGO supporting programmes in Darfur, Afghanistan and Pakistan

Few INGOs admitted to having experienced fraud and corruption in their programme interventions. Three, however, all operating remotely managed projects in Afghanistan, referred to specific instances or to financial disparity experienced within the last 12 months. One of the three had experienced minor to moderate corruption with their own staff (local and national) based at remotely managed project locations. One had experienced a lack of financial accountability between their staff and the staff of partner organisations. The third INGO referred to community-level corruption, particularly in beneficiary selection processes.

These concerns were shared by representatives of institutional donors and research and good practice organisations. Several of them reinforced the link between this issue and the social and political pressures (see above). One institutional donor commented that they had strong concerns about the appropriate selection of beneficiaries, particularly in view of these pressures.

Different stakeholders invariably commented on the severity of the context in countries such as Afghanistan or Somalia. They noted that in countries that have experienced long-term conflict and insecurity and that continue to experience chronic poverty and recurrent humanitarian crises, it is not surprising that fraud and corruption develop.

**Social, economic and political factors lead to increased likelihood of fraud and corruption**

*'The ongoing conflict in Afghanistan has traumatised portions of the population. Historical social fabrics have broken down and new, diverse social fabrics have developed in their place. 'Normal' is not a term to be used in reference to Afghanistan, where the day-to-day conflict and political context changes. One of the specific impacts of the conflict has been the breakdown in trust between many Afghans and 'outsiders' (foreigners). A second impact has been the development of a day-to-day mercenary attitude on the part of many Afghans – what's in it for me? – developed within the nature of ongoing conflict and uncertainty and the fear that any day might be one's last.'*

- Research and good practice organisation representative, Afghanistan

The research and good practice organisation representative quoted above highlighted further concerns about fraud and corruption. They explained that, without external monitoring and rigorous supervision by a primary organisation or by senior programme management, too much power is given to the implementing partner or local staff. When insufficient checks and controls are made, projects will not be implemented to a high standard and that there may be a misuse of funds and resources. This had been the case in at least three organisations. The Country director for one INGO noted that 'small-to-medium sized instances of corruption have been experienced. These have tended not to be cash-based but focused on resources and other items. This is likely to have arisen due to a lack of adequate monitoring controls.'

*'Good monitoring and quality management processes are essential for ensuring that humanitarian actors are not compromising their commitment to programming and quality, and for ensuring that humanitarians can be here for the long term.'*

- Institutional donor representative supporting programmes in Afghanistan

In addition to the financial impact that fraud and corruption can have, there is also a huge risk to organisational reputation, particularly when the quality or impartiality of the programme is compromised. One stakeholder noted that fraud and corruption led to a deterioration in the quality of humanitarian and development programming and to a reduction in trust and acceptance by project communities. This in turn impacts the beneficiaries' acceptance of the wider humanitarian and development community. It can reduce the time organisations can work in such project areas. The risk of fraud, corruption and poor quality and preferential programming is heightened in remotely managed projects.

However, the threat of fraud and corrupt practices can be mitigated, even in projects which are managed remotely. The INGO that had experienced minor to moderate fraud (above) has since initiated a controls-based approach to project management and supervision. They now take a micro-management approach to project monitoring and management, which has significantly helped to reduce the potential for fraud and corruption. The approach has been supported by regular training on organisational process and by developing a whistle-blowing policy which highlights and addresses instances of fraud and corruption in the organisation.

## 7.2 Existing and recommended good practice in remote project monitoring

Clearly, numerous significant issues related to remote project monitoring need to be addressed for the quality of programmes to improve or be maintained. During the project coordinator’s interviews and discussions with stakeholders, stakeholders were asked to provide examples of existing good practice, as well as highlighting the issues raised in the report so far. They were also asked for recommendations for improvements to these practices and about support systems to help strengthen the rigour and effectiveness of monitoring.

It was often apparent that there is already a plethora of good practice monitoring approaches used in both directly and remotely managed projects. What was also apparent, however, was that often this good practice was confined to individual organisations rather than its being shared more widely to promote learning and best practice. A significant portion of the information required is already out there; the challenge is to ensure that this good practice is shared and communicated in a way that it is practical and realistic.

Table 1 presents a summary checklist of the good practices for remote monitoring that are currently being used or that stakeholders recommended as areas for development. To present them as practically as possible, areas of good practice and recommendations of a similar nature have been grouped collectively into 13 different areas. The first areas of good practice relate to programmatic strategy and support-function procedures. While not monitoring activities in themselves, the following sections will highlight how good practice in these areas significantly supports remote monitoring. After these come specific monitoring-focused recommendations. The final areas of good practice encourage greater levels of collaboration between humanitarian and development practitioners and highlight the potential for this to support capacity building, peer monitoring and a more detailed understanding of humanitarian imperatives at local, national and international levels.

There is light at the end of the tunnel. The case studies and ideas presented highlight the systems and practices that can be put in place to secure tighter monitoring and high programme quality. While this report is not a practical toolkit, it provides an overview of the potential that does exist. Specific examples, tools, training materials and templates that relate to existing areas of good practice are available in the project annexes.

**Table 1:** Summary checklist for remote project monitoring good practices

	<b>Project monitoring good practice recommendation</b>	<b>Check?</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Programmatic considerations, including recommendations to:</b>	
	• Consider limiting the size and/or scope of the programme	
	• Implement multi-region projects in both secure and insecure locations	
	• Pursue and sustain positive community relationships to encourage acceptance and access	
<b>2</b>	<b>Targeted recruitment of local, national and international staff, and personnel management, including recommendations to ensure that:</b>	
	• Local staff demonstrate existing capacity and the potential to develop capacity	
	• Team leaders demonstrate strength in capacity building and team motivation	
	• National staff who are less vulnerable to conflict when visiting insecure locations are recruited and adequately briefed on risk assessment	
	• Nationals from the diaspora are considered for expatriate positions	
<b>3</b>	<b>Capacity building initiatives for local staff and/or partners, including recommendations to:</b>	
	• Develop a regular internal training schedule (quarterly to biannually)	
	• Invest in collaborative training events with local/international actors in the humanitarian and development community	
	• Arrange cross-programme exposure visits	
	• Invest in international training events (using training-of-trainers approaches)	
	• Promote good practice presentations (internal and external)	

	<b>Project monitoring good practice recommendation</b>	<b>Check?</b>
4	<b>Ensuring facilitation of regular face-to-face meetings, such as:</b>	
	• Grant review meetings	
	• Project inception workshops	
	• Programme review and planning meetings	
	• Local staff meetings	
5	• Meetings with other project stakeholders (eg beneficiaries, community, local government, national government)	
	<b>Promotion of organisational values and ethos, including recommendations to:</b>	
	• Capacity build local staff / partners on international codes and standards	
	• Capacity build local staff / partners on own organisational values	
	• Promote team building activities	
6	• Ensure regular face-to-face interaction and communication	
	<b>Developing a remote management strategy, considering factors relevant to the:</b>	
	• Foundations (programmatic considerations, recruitment, logistics, finance systems)	
	• Preparation (adapting all existing systems to the context of remote management)	
	• Implementation (implementing the remote management approach, referring back to new methods of operating and supporting programme monitoring)	
7	• Review (conducting ongoing assessments and reviews, documenting the learning, and improving remote management programming)	
	<b>Tightening controls and building micro-management approaches to monitoring, including to:</b>	
	• Ensure additional layers of sign-off and decision-making authority at project office	
	• Increase the frequency of reporting	
	• Increase the frequency of project review meetings	
8	• Conduct spot-check, unannounced monitoring visits to project offices	
	<b>Ensure dedicated monitoring and evaluation capacity is instigated at programme and project level, such as:</b>	
	• Programme-wide advisers (M&E or Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning – MEAL)	
	• Project or region-specific officers (M&E or MEAL)	
9	• Other models (eg Quality Assurance Unit, M&E teams etc)	
	<b>Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework, at programme and project level</b>	
	• Develop programme-wide M&E (or MEAL) framework	
10	• Develop project or region-specific M&E (or MEAL) framework	
	<b>Research and invest in information and communication technologies to support remote monitoring, including recommendations to:</b>	
	• Develop web-based project monitoring	
	• Invest in global positioning systems (GPS referencing)	
11	• Use photography as a monitoring tool	
	• Use video monitoring	
	<b>Peer monitoring, including recommendations to:</b>	
	• Promote cross-agency monitoring	
12	• Promote local government monitoring	
	• Arrange cross-project exchange visits and monitoring within own organisation	
	• Contract monitoring assignments to external sources	
	<b>Beneficiary- and community-led monitoring, including recommendations to:</b>	
13	• Recruit community facilitators and/or mobilisers	
	• Use existing structures within the community to support ongoing project monitoring	
	• Use community-based surveying tools	
	• Consider community-implemented and monitored programming	
	<b>Greater collaboration between organisations of the humanitarian and development community, including recommendations to:</b>	
• Facilitate and/or participate in best practice learning events		
• Facilitate and/or participate in training and capacity building workshops		
• Share resources between agencies (monitoring and beneficiary accountability)		
• Use existing structures to support ongoing collaboration (eg Clusters; UN OCHA)		
• Engage with local and national humanitarian and development coordination bodies		



## 7.2.1 Programmatic considerations

A careful review of programme structure, as well as detailed planning of any new project, is critical for the success or failure of a remotely managed project. Three key areas for consideration were highlighted: (i) limiting the size and/or scope of the programme; (ii) ensuring that at least one secure location is selected where direct management is feasible (where a project is implemented across multiple regions); and (iii) pursuing a relationship with local communities and other stakeholders to build acceptance and access to PIAs.

### (i) Consider limiting the size and/or scope of the programme

Operating in medium- to high-insecurity environments brings additional complexity to project implementation. Here, it is essential to be realistic about the coverage that the project can sustain, taking into particular consideration the capacity of staff implementing projects, the safety and security of those staff as well as visitors, the regularity of access to PIAs, the potential for external review and evaluation, etc. All these factors are exacerbated in medium-to high-insecurity environments, making effective monitoring of remotely managed programmes more complex, risking deterioration in programme quality and increasing the risk of fraud and corruption. There is a danger with organisations that seek to implement large-scale programmes remotely across multiple unstable, complex environments that programme quality will suffer due to the ambitious programme approach.

One stakeholder had conducted a programme evaluation for a UN humanitarian agency operating in Afghanistan. This evaluation highlighted that the number of accessible areas in Afghanistan in which UN agencies can implement programmes directly is shrinking; this trend looks set to rise in the next few months and years as US military troops begin a gradual withdrawal. The analysis observed a greater reliance by the UN agency on remote management approaches in complex, insecure areas. It also observed that, due to the scale on which they were currently managing projects using these approaches, it was not possible to use the required monitoring systems, so programme outcomes and outputs could not be managed effectively.

A good practice publication, supported by UN OCHA, highlighted that, in volatile security environments, UN personnel are often limited in their movements to PIAs by tight security restrictions. This underlines the fact that, in countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan, it is increasingly the norm that some UN agencies implement projects remotely. The scale of those projects needs to be reviewed and brought in line with the realities on the ground 'refocusing, in the short and medium term, on a reduced number of manageable areas'.<sup>38</sup>

Ahead of any proposed programme intervention, adequate time must be given to planning the programme approach. Where a remote management approach is chosen, a detailed M&E framework must be developed and reviewed for practicality. If the scope and focus of the project are too large for this framework to be implemented adequately, the quality of assistance to beneficiaries will suffer. It is essential to design programmes appropriately according to the size, scale and context of remote management (considering what monitoring practices are feasible to suit the remote management approach) and to recognise that, in some cases, this might mean drastically reducing the size and scope from what was originally planned. Only then will programme quality be maintained through realistic project monitoring and management of project outcomes and outputs.

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<sup>38</sup> Remark from a research and good practice agency, currently supporting programmes in Afghanistan.

(ii) Implement multi-region projects in both secure and insecure locations

*'In situations where a programme is being implemented in multiple provinces, [we] would like ideally to visit all, but would be willing to consider monitoring visits to one provincial location (dependent on the security of the province).'*

- Institutional donor representative, supporting programmes in Afghanistan

If the decision is made to implement a programme across a multi-region area, it is important to ensure that not all of the regions selected are complex, volatile security environments. One institutional donor that does not favour remote management approaches confirmed that they would consider supporting a programme that included a remotely managed element in some insecure regions, so long as the programme was also implemented in more secure locations which could be directly managed. The identifiable benefit of this approach is that direct monitoring is possible in the securer project location(s), not only by the managing

organisation but also by the donor, who may be able to visit more secure PIAs and observe project progress and quality (albeit in only one location). It also provides a baseline of programme progress and quality, which can be used for measuring progress and quality in the other PIAs (assuming the programme adopts a uniform approach across all areas).

This approach enables the managing organisation to have greater input into project implementation and monitoring in more secure locations, developing systems and procedures that might be used for the medium- to high-insecurity locations. An example might be that monitoring tools and templates can be developed and trialled directly in the more secure project setting and shared with local partners or staff in insecure locations. Monitoring reports using these templates can be submitted, providing an indication of project progress and quality. These reports can then be reviewed against those developed in the directly monitored projects, promoting comparable learning.

(iii) Pursue and sustain positive community relationships to encourage acceptance and access

Almost all humanitarian and development organisations claim that seeking acceptance from the communities they are working with helps to secure relatively safe access to PIAs, while also helping to build positive relationships with project stakeholders. The UN OCHA-supported good practice publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, provides several positive examples of acceptance measures that highlight this and is recommended as further reading for anyone interested in a more robust overview of this topic.

The UN-OCHA-supported publication and several of this project's stakeholders recognise that acceptance is an accolade that is not automatically given to an organisation but that is earned often over a period of time. The readiness with which it is given is based on the quality of programming and the behaviour of organisational and/or partner staff in that region, district or community (among other factors). An INGO operating in south-central Somalia invested in developing a long-standing relationship with its project communities. In 2008–09, when Al-Shahbab restricted the access of humanitarian organisations in this region, these communities lobbied on behalf of the organisation to restore access and to keep the programme running. Likewise, an INGO currently operating in six highly volatile provinces in Afghanistan noted that they have developed significant relationships with local stakeholders, honed over a period of up to 30 years in some cases. The latter organisation

*'Acceptance of humanitarian action by local authorities and communities needs to be approached as a process rather than as an event, requiring presence, time and sustained engagement with all relevant parties, including non-state actors as well as influential political, military, or religious leaders.'*

- UN OCHA-supported publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, p.3

also commented that in the provinces in which it has been working for a shorter period (five years), acceptance by communities is still being earned and programmatic support by stakeholders is more difficult to ensure.

Having a long-standing organisational presence in a specific region can have a hugely beneficial impact on developing a positive relationship with stakeholders (including beneficiary communities, local government, service providers, contractors, etc). This, in turn, can help to provide the right environment for regular project monitoring, with active input from different stakeholders. Where a long-standing organisational presence is not in place (eg in short-term humanitarian emergency response operations), it is important to consider alternative programming options that use existing local and international partners who already have a relationship with local communities to implement the project.

Targeting the most vulnerable groups naturally leads organisations into new geographical areas and it may be necessary to implement programmes directly (as opposed to through partners) there. In these cases, it is imperative that adequate time is spent liaising with potential stakeholders ahead of any project intervention (including negotiating access to communities, meeting with different actors within a hostile conflict, and meeting with various

project stakeholder groups), to ensure that information about the organisation and the potential project is shared and that time is taken to review project plans with these stakeholders. Accountability practices to support information-sharing and participation are crucial in this process and could ‘make or break’ an organisation’s ability to monitor the programme to good effect later on (see also Section 8.3).

*‘Find a partner (eg a local NGO) who has the long-standing presence that you lack. In many cases, this is probably preferable to trying to build up the community relationship yourself.’*

- Representative of an INGO operating in at least five volatile countries

The recommendation linked with this section urges organisations to consider where they might develop a long-term presence in a region or country (directly or through a partner organisation) and

how they might use this presence to build accountable relationships with communities and other stakeholders. This in turn can be used to foster the environment needed to support regular monitoring (access to PIAs, community-led monitoring, triangulated monitoring, peer monitoring etc).

## 7.2.2 Targeted recruitment of local, national and international staff, and personnel management

In Section 7.1.5, it was observed that in complex, insecure environments (which have often experienced medium- to long-term conflict or political instability), the pool of high- or even medium-capacity staff/partners can be small. This often forces organisations to either recruit outside the local area or to recruit lower-capacity personnel.

Obviously, where possible, investing in recruitment procedures that draw out the best local candidates is optimum practice. Reviewing recruitment processes to sharpen job descriptions for local staff (who will be the ‘face’ of the organisation in the PIAs) and building into interviewing procedures tests or practical role-playing that can assess the skills of the individual are two such practical measures to support this. However, it may be that in a particular project location, it is necessary to recruit outside of the local area. In such cases, it is prudent for organisations to bear in mind cultural and

*‘Remote management programming... is a common adaptation in extreme circumstances of insecurity, and while it poses many challenges for effective and accountable programming, some areas of good practice are emerging. These include investing in highly localised staff structures for field offices, recruiting staff members in consultation with their communities, and appointing nationals from the diaspora as international staff.’*

- UN OCHA-supported publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, p.2

tribal factors that may affect staff and community liaisons. For example, an INGO operating in the (predominantly ethnic Pashtun) southern Afghan province of Oruzgan was not able to locally recruit any of the three staff members that they planned to place in-region. Instead, they broadened the recruitment process nationally and selected individuals who were from other provinces of Afghanistan, but who were all Pashtun.

In terms of selecting local partners to implement programmes, partnership strategies or agreements are recommended, to safeguard the appropriate selection of medium- to high-capacity partners. The same INGO, operating in Oruzgan, selected partners from neighbouring Kandahar that exhibited higher levels of capacity than the organisations from Oruzgan.

Capacity building local staff and partners is essential in remotely managed projects (see next section for detailed recommendations). What is imperative, therefore, is that senior organisation or programme management staff (expatriate and national) have a passion for and proven experience in capacity building, professional development training and in developing local counterparts to replace them. These staff will need to think creatively about methods to build staff capacity remotely, using telephone and Skype catch-ups and regular (monthly) face-to-face interaction. Practically speaking, these requirements could be included in job descriptions for these staff to ensure that adequate focus is given to promoting and building the capacity of the local staff or partners who will be implementing projects (see also the case study of personnel management guidelines for remotely managed projects implemented by Tearfund on the next page).

Another key issue, as highlighted in Section 7.1.3, is that visits to PIAs by expatriate and sometimes national staff can diminish or stop altogether in remotely managed projects implemented in medium- to high-insecurity areas. Organisations should ensure that thorough risk analysis for staff visiting PIAs is undertaken ahead of project initiation and throughout implementation, including a vulnerability analysis of how the conflict impacts different categories of staff (eg women and men; expatriate, national and local staff). At the recruitment stage, however, discussion should be initiated with all staff to ascertain how comfortable they would feel visiting and working in medium- to high-insecurity PIAs. For organisations that rely heavily on senior national staff visiting and monitoring project progress and quality, it is necessary to ensure that the staff selected are comfortable with this. It is also important to ensure that they are involved in the ongoing risk analysis which would assess whether it is safe for them to do so.

It is more difficult for obviously foreign expatriates to visit PIAs in complex, politically unstable areas where security might be an issue. The research for this project highlighted two examples, however, where senior expatriate posts were filled by nationals from the diaspora, recruited as international staff members (Country directors for INGOs in Pakistan and Somalia). These staff members were able to visit PIAs while other expatriates were not.

What is crucial to these recommendations is ensuring that thorough and ongoing risk analysis is undertaken, promoting the safety and well-being of all staff. It is also recommended that organisations invest in regular catch-ups with staff to ensure that they are aware of and give value to the level of comfort local and national staff have working in and/or visiting complex, insecure locations, in order to mitigate risk transfer (see Section 7.1.8) and to develop duty of care to staff.

### Good practice guidelines for personnel management in remotely managed programmes: Tearfund

*Good remote management begins with good management. A programme coordinator's ability to manage a site remotely will never be better than his/her ability to manage it directly. In any site which may require remote management, it is particularly crucial to follow these general good practices from the beginning:*

- *Recruit national staff who **already have the capacity** to do their job well, not ones who need to be developed.*
- *Give high priority to **professional development** – especially building national staff leadership skills and capacity to 'act up' into a higher role. Hire expatriate managers who have passion for and proven experience in developing local counterparts to replace them.*
- *Ensure all managers for the site – national and international – are trained in organisational **values and humanitarian principles**, and are applying them in intentional, concrete ways in their work. In conflict situations, it is essential that all local staff understand how to outwork humanitarian impartiality and independence in their context.*
- *Be aware of **social divisions** (especially around gender, ethnicity and religion) that may result in some team members marginalising others. Model positive, inclusive relationships. Be proactive in listening to, supporting and developing team members from marginal groups.*
- *Keep in mind the **remote working dynamics** that can strain or strengthen relationships between field staff and managers/colleagues in other offices or countries.*
- ***Translate key documents** into the language read most easily by national managers and staff. This will require that adequate budget is set aside for translation. Key documents include:*
  - *Values and code of conduct*
  - *Staff handbook*
  - *[Documents specific to remote management, eg finance and logistics summaries, project logframes etc]*
- *Create a professional culture in which **staff are not afraid or ashamed to admit mistakes**, but promptly alert managers/colleagues and work constructively to solve issues. This must be modelled by programme managers admitting mistakes without shame.*

### 7.2.3 Capacity building initiatives for local staff and/or partners

This research confirmed that organisations place a high value on staff capacity building initiatives. Some larger-scale international organisations allocated significant funding to this, both within country and internationally.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, some of the faith-based organisations (FBOs) implementing programmes in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Sudan use expatriate staff on secondments or voluntary or private funding arrangements so that they can increase the number of expatriate staff within country and at field locations and can focus on daily staff capacity building initiatives.

What is of interest, however, is how capacity building structures, particularly for local staff and partners, require adaptation in remotely managed settings. For the FBOs operating in Afghanistan, none had expatriate staff based in the medium- to high-insecurity areas in which they were operating (eg Kandahar). They commented that staff in those areas were not able to benefit from daily capacity building. Likewise, training and capacity development visits by senior national and expatriate staff working with INGOs in Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan and South Sudan to volatile, insecure project locations were less frequent than those undertaken to more stable project locations (see Section 7.1.3). This trend suggests the question: how can organisations develop and maintain active capacity building initiatives for local staff or partners working in medium- to high-insecurity areas?

<sup>39</sup> One INGO calculated that approximately US\$100,000 is budgeted annually to support staff capacity building initiatives.

(i) Develop a regular internal training schedule (quarterly to biannually)

Organisations need to develop an internal training schedule for local staff and/or partners, which provides targeted training workshops to those individuals on a regular basis. (The most common suggestion was quarterly or biannually.) A list of appropriate training initiatives should be developed in consultation with local staff or partners, addressing prominent training needs. Workshops targeted to these needs should then be scheduled and implemented at either the project office or a suitable alternative venue.

*'We have an extensive focus on staff training and capacity building. The training-of-trainers approach is used with senior local staff so that they can repeat the training of key monitoring and accountability principles to other local staff.'*

- Accountability representative of an INGO operating in Somalia

Training should be as participatory as possible, delivered in local languages and with locally translated materials. A plan should be developed at the training workshop to identify how the training will be put into practice, and what follow-up will be made by senior management to ensure that this has been accomplished. That follow-up is essential to ensure that the training has been useful. Setting tasks for participants to complete or using telephone or Skype discussions to ascertain what was learnt and how it was practically implemented are good supporting practices.

(ii) Invest in collaborative training events with local and international actors in the humanitarian and development community

At local level, there is mileage to increase the collaboration between humanitarian and development organisations and to facilitate cross-agency training initiatives. A group of Dutch INGOs operating in Oruzgan have invested in such collaborative approaches, including a monthly training programme. This initiative is managed by one of the INGOs present there. Three staff members have been recruited by this INGO with roles targeted specifically to ongoing capacity building. They coordinate and facilitate training workshops for all of the INGOs, as well as for any of their local implementing partners. Training takes place at a central location in Oruzgan, with workshops facilitated between 2009 and 2011 focusing on: project cycle management; M&E; survey, report and proposal writing; photography; and leadership, among other topics.

(iii) Arrange cross-project exposure visits

Two INGOs coordinate cross-project exposure visits whereby local staff from individual field offices visit other field offices to interact with staff there or to use their existing experience in a specific sector to learn more about programme interventions in that field. These exposure visits offer opportunities for staff to share learning between field offices, to observe project progress and implementation approaches, and to build relationships between staff and a greater understanding of the organisation and what it is trying to achieve.

One INGO has coordinated international cross-programme exposure visits, a practice recommended by several other stakeholders (both national and international staff from INGOs). Staff from this INGO's Afghanistan programme

*'We place a strong emphasis on capacity building and training of staff... Training is available both internally and internationally. Cross-programme exposure visits are also arranged. Such initiatives have been noted as being successful in building the capacity of and retaining staff. All staff access the national and international training opportunities, irrespective of their rank.'*

- Representative of INGO operating in Afghanistan

have visited programmes in other countries to review project implementation processes there and to glean learning about cross-cutting issues (eg equality, gender, beneficiary accountability etc). It was noted that this had made an invaluable contribution to the capacity development of the staff, challenging and changing mindsets as well as providing useful skills and innovative ways of thinking for project management.

**(iv) Invest in international training events (training of trainers)**

Within the humanitarian and development community, there are often opportunities in which good practice training events are opened out to a variety of organisations. HAP provides training on accountability, programme quality management and child protection (amongst other topics) at workshops facilitated in regional ‘hubs’ across the world. Organisations are invited to send participants to these workshops. There is a training-of-trainers approach to learning and participants are expected to return to their organisation and to re-facilitate the training to their peers (either within the organisation or to other organisations). One such organisation that has proactively taken this approach on board is Church World Service Pakistan / Afghanistan (CWS-P/A). They provide training, which has either been led or endorsed by HAP, on accountability and quality management to organisations in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

*‘The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has significantly promoted the capacity building of local and national staff and, as a result, has now been able to nationalise some of its staff positions. AKF runs a university in Pakistan. Annually, staff from their Afghanistan programme enrol on a course. They are required to sign a five-year contract with AKF and it has been seen to promote capacity and staff retention.’*

- Country director of an INGO in Afghanistan

International training events, of course, have funding implications (flights, accommodation). However, there are promising opportunities for small- to medium-scale organisations and local partners to benefit from the training provided in these international settings when training is re-facilitated within country by those who were able to attend. Organisations within countries particularly prone to insecurity and where international training events are often not held (eg Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia) should develop greater levels of collaboration to ensure that the skills and opportunities gleaned by those that can attend international training events are shared (through follow-up training) with other organisations in-country. There is certainly mileage to increase the level of collaboration between organisations (see also Section 7.2.13).

**(v) Promote good practice presentations**

Linked closely to this is the recommendation that organisations should seek opportunities (both in-house and inter-agency) for local staff and partners to engage with collaborative good practice learning events. Humanitarian and development coordinating bodies have a strong role to play in arranging such events. One coordination body in Afghanistan arranges a monthly meeting of member agencies, which includes best practice seminars. An INGO, also in Afghanistan, provides a programme of good practice learning seminars, inviting representatives from other organisations. Where possible, these are key events in which to include senior local staff to develop their knowledge and understanding of good practice.

Internal structures can also be used to engage local staff in presenting and discussing good practice, as will be explored in the next section. Two INGOs, operating in Afghanistan, noted that team meetings (conducted on either a monthly or quarterly basis), were used to present learning and good practice from project implementation. In both cases, locally based programme managers are asked to prepare presentations of key learning for the wider team.

There is opportunity for discussion, feedback and open learning. These are inexpensive and create a culture of learning within organisations that can be used to build local staff or partner capacity, improving the rigour of programme and monitoring processes.

#### 7.2.4 Ensuring facilitation of regular face-to-face meetings

Remote management, by its nature, reduces the frequency of face-to-face interaction between the local staff or partner and the programme management staff or organisation. For organisations that are directly managing projects, it may not be necessary to arrange face-to-face meetings with staff (country and field office representatives) more frequently than annually. However, organisations working with remote management should arrange face-to-face meetings on at least a quarterly, if not monthly, basis.

Representation at these meetings will differ between agencies, depending on organisational size and structure. A fundamental baseline is the inclusion of senior local staff to ensure that their ideas and concerns are reflected and responded to, and to ensure that there is an opportunity to review 'on the ground' project progress. The focus of these meetings will also depend on the specific organisation, though it is recommended that the agenda for each meetings includes the following: a review of project progress against targets and indicators, an overview of issues related to project implementation, an assessment of the quality of programming, and an opportunity to share good practice.

Standards of organisational practice related to facilitating staff meetings varied between organisations, with three INGOs exhibiting particularly good practice. An INGO operating remotely managed programmes through locally recruited personnel in six different provinces within Afghanistan uses monthly Grant Review Meetings (GRM). These meetings are facilitated at the country office and senior management personnel and field coordinators from each remotely managed region attend.

*'Discussion of monitoring data, project progress and quality is undertaken at the monthly GRM. We have found that interactive discussion at the Kabul office level between key project and programme staff helps to stimulate progressive thinking with regard to monitoring and programming. This interactive forum has worked more successfully than simple reporting alone... The GRM forum, as well as regular communication with field coordinators, provides them with good support and a forum to build their capacity and to feed into project design, planning, review and management.'*

Similar good practice was identified by an INGO that has chosen remote management to promote national staff development and to nationalise key positions. This organisation currently retains some expatriate positions but, with the exception of one provincial area, all programme management in the field has been nationalised. This INGO has developed inception workshops and programme review and planning meetings.

*'Once a project has been approved, an "inception workshop" is facilitated. The project team (based at the project location) and staff from the head office meet together in order to develop a comprehensive project work plan and a detailed budget... Programme planning and review meetings are held for a week long period. Each provincial programme manager and district programme coordinator is required to present an update on their programme. There is a strong focus on lesson learning and sharing at this meeting forum. Project progress, impact and quality for the previous quarter is reviewed and plans are made for the following quarter.'*

A further INGO operating in Darfur confirmed that quarterly programme planning and senior management meetings are conducted. Representatives from each of the four project locations are included in these meetings, with the expectation that they will update the teams on project progress and that any issues (programming, security etc) can be discussed.



*'The office Shura is a weekly meeting of senior office staff in Kandahar to coordinate and address any issues in the projects or office.'*

*- Excerpt from the External baseline assessment of Tearfund's monitoring and accountability practices in Kandahar, Afghanistan*

Alongside programmatic meetings, which take place at more secure country or regional offices (and which include some senior programme and project managers), it is also important to ensure that regular meetings are undertaken at project offices themselves. Minutes from these meetings should be shared with senior programme management or the primary organisation. These meetings should take place with even greater frequency (either weekly or bi-weekly) and can be used as an opportunity to include direct project

stakeholders (eg beneficiaries, community representatives, local government representatives, local service providers etc). Such meetings not only ensure an opportunity to solicit input on project implementation from key stakeholders, but they also provide opportunities to build the capacity of and to share learning with stakeholders.

## 7.2.5 Promotion of organisational values and ethos

An important area of developing good practice to support remote project monitoring is the promotion of organisational values and ethos. This is a necessary foundation enabling staff to grasp the principles and importance of the work that they are involved in, and the basis for a commitment to carry that work out to a high standard, with respect and integrity among relevant stakeholders (beneficiaries, civil society, government etc).

Most stakeholders confirmed that orientation on organisational values and ethos was provided for all staff at their induction and briefing. Fewer organisations confirmed that regular refresher training followed this induction. Where this follow-up practice was in place, it led to increased interest in and commitment to the organisation and to developing staff's integrity.

*'Values and ethos are continually reiterated through training and mentoring. This has been found to be important for encouraging the longevity with which staff stay with the organisation, as well as the safety and security of staff and project stakeholders.'*

*- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan*

In practice, organisational values and ethos training can take the form of bite-sized information-sharing or capacity building workshops. These can focus on the individual values of the organisation, as well as international good practice codes and standards with which the organisation might be affiliated (eg the Red Cross Code of Conduct or the HAP Standard). These workshops can be incorporated into existing national and local meeting structures (with senior local staff being asked to repeat the session for local staff and partners). Alternatively, programme management staff could feature this in their objectives as part of visits to remotely based project or partner offices.

*'Ensuring that staff in all project locations fully grasp and take on board the ethos and values of [our organisation] and feel part of the wider team is critical... Ethos, value and team-building concerns are addressed through regular interaction between senior head office-based staff and project staff. Significant time is taken to ensure that project staff are mentored and monthly meetings at the head office have a strong focus on discussing our ethos and values.'*

*- Representative of an INGO operating in Afghanistan*

Developing and reinforcing an understanding of the organisation helps local staff and partners when they come to explain projects and the organisation to project stakeholders. Developing a commitment to humanitarian and development good practice principles will also support project monitoring and accountability systems, as was recognised in the UN OCHA-supported publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, which called organisations to:

*'... Ensure that staff deployed to high-risk environments possess a sound understanding of humanitarian principles as they relate to practical operations. Ensure organisational policies and operational decision-making on issues such as funding, beneficiaries, modes of operation, liaison with other actors, and security measures are in line with humanitarian principles. Invest in communicating the organisation's adherence to humanitarian principles. Review operations in complex security environments [regularly] to ensure compliance with humanitarian principles.'*

- UN OCHA-supported publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, pp.49-50

Promoting organisational values and ethos can also include team-building activities. Stakeholders often acknowledged that organisations need to think more creatively about team building when remote management structures are in place. Regular face-to-face interaction with senior local staff will be possible (see Section 7.2.4) but, for junior local staff and partner personnel, organisations should consider how they will be included within the wider organisational or programme team. One INGO, supporting remotely managed programmes in four provinces of Afghanistan, ensures that staff across the organisation meet together annually. This annual meeting includes a prize-giving ceremony based on staff attitudes, presentations, project quality, project progress etc throughout the year. It is an opportunity to encourage all of the staff, especially those who are based remotely, as well as being a chance to reinforce good practice messages and the ethos and values of the organisation.

This good practice not only lays the foundations required to support project monitoring (integrity, honesty, truthfulness, impartiality, accountability etc), it also reportedly increases the time staff stay working with an organisation. Building loyalty to an organisation and developing individuals who are committed to ensuring that the name and reputation of that organisation are upheld are important outcomes.

### 7.2.6 Developing a remote management strategy

We have seen that remote management is often a reactive response to deteriorating security in a project location and, as such, is not always supported with strategic planning. Remote management has until recently been approached as a temporary management structure, without policies and procedures specific to this structure being developed necessarily. Of the 14 organisations currently operating at least one project using remote management, only two had developed a remote management strategy. A further two organisations commented that they planned to develop such a strategy within the next year.

*'We need to understand the difference between planned remote management (as part of project design, policies and procedures), and responsive remote management.'*

- INGO representative operating in Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan

What the remote management strategy looks like and includes in practice will vary between organisations, depending on what procedures and systems are already in place. At its most basic level, however, the strategy should provide guidance for organisational staff and partners on the following areas:

#### (i) Foundations

Organisations must have general good policy and practice already well established in their programme ahead of any move to remote management, particularly in the following areas: personnel management, security management, project cycle management, quality assurance, and finance and logistics management.

## (ii) Preparations

These should include: preparing staff to ‘act up’ into more senior areas of responsibility; team structure; project activity and design considerations; budgeting and finance considerations; communications; and remote monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning procedures.

## (iii) Implementation

This should include: details of the criteria for remote management; standard operating procedures (SOPs) for remote team management; organisational monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning framework for remotely based structures; SOPs for remote finance management; SOPs for remote logistics management; and learning processes specific to improving the practice of remote management.

Incorporating these three areas into any remote management strategy enables the organisation to consider the underlying programmatic procedures required to support remote management. It provides organisations with a framework through which to develop or adapt those systems and procedures specifically to suit remote management and to prepare staff for this approach. Finally, it develops and uses remote management SOPs to support high-quality programming, duty of care to personnel, fraud and corruption mitigation measures, and ongoing learning processes. The three-stage process – foundations, preparations and implementation – considers remote management as a complete package, adequately preparing organisations for it. Reactive, responsive programming and systems are replaced with planned, strategic approaches to remote management.

A further area that should be covered in any remote management strategy is the ongoing review of the remote management approach and criteria to support a return to normal practice. This section would need to spell out the individual criteria that should be met (security, political stability, absence of conflict etc) in order for remote management processes to be discontinued and for a return to direct management to be possible. Anecdotal evidence from INGOs and UN agencies suggests that in many countries a return to direct practice is many years away. However, it remains good practice to consider what factors would need to be in place in order for directly managed programming to be considered viable.

Detailed security planning and risk management are essential for organisations operating in any location, but especially for those in medium- to high-insecurity areas. While the remote management strategy is not necessarily the place to cover security and risk management in detail, it should certainly be included. Furthermore, reference to external security and risk procedures which have been developed and adapted to remote management should be included within the strategy to ensure that staff and/or partners are clear on these procedures. This has been an area of weakness for many organisations. For remote management to continue and operate well, the security situation and risk facing all personnel and partners involved in programme operation should be considered.

It is important to have an overarching strategy that encompasses policy and procedure related to remote management. However, one INGO operating remotely managed programmes in Afghanistan urged organisations to look beyond this mechanism. They have developed a remote management strategy but recognise that remote management cannot be perceived as an ‘add-on’ to programming or summed up in one document. Instead, it is essential that policies, procedures and practices across the board are adapted to remote approach:

*'It is crucial not only to have a remote management policy in place, but also to ensure that remote management is integrated into all existing policies; to adapt existing policies in order to ensure that additional controls and mechanisms are put in place to support remote management.'*

- Deputy country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

Thinking through and planning the remote management approach will provide solid foundations and practical steps for various areas of programming, critically for project monitoring and quality assurance. Establishing the number of visits made by programme specialists to remotely managed project offices and/or PIAs is one area that can be made explicit in these procedures. Details of different remote monitoring tools can also be explored. The strategy and the adaptation of other procedures and protocols provide the environment in which remote monitoring can flourish.

### 7.2.7 Tightening controls and building micro-management approaches to monitoring

*'Ensuring that additional approval steps are included (eg for procurement etc), and that additional documentation, signatures and checks are in place, is essential. Also ensuring that there is more than one person overseeing or having responsibility for decision-making is crucial. Spreading responsibility across a number of different people in a project location is an important control to promote accountability.'*

- Representative of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

Micro-management and remote management seem to be polar opposites and it may seem an oxymoron to suggest that both are possible simultaneously. However, there were examples of INGOs that have instigated creative approaches to remote management in which programme and project monitoring structures have been tightened and into which different layers of controls have been built to support programme quality assurance and to reduce fraud and corruption.

This recommendation does not presuppose a lack of trust in local and national staff. Rather, it seeks to support those staff, recognising the pressures that they can experience from local communities, tribe and government. It builds systems which share responsibility for project and programme decisions across different staff at a project level, and which provide follow-up on any decisions made regarding project progress, quality and management.

#### (i) Ensure additional layers of sign-off and decision-making authority at project office

Two INGOs had developed systems to increase the layers of decision-making authority at local project offices, sharing out this responsibility between different members of staff. This has promoted accountability between these staff members, as well as between the local project office and regional or country offices. Tearfund has developed a creative model to support staff in its Kandahar office: the office *Shura*.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> The full terms of reference for the Tearfund office *Shura* is available in Annex 11

### Tearfund office Shura, Kandahar

Tearfund's humanitarian programme in Afghanistan has instigated an office Shura for its remotely managed projects in Kandahar. Tearfund's standard operating procedure is to work with a combination of locally, nationally and internationally recruited staff in any project office. In the Kandahar project office, however, only local staff are present. Visits by national staff are undertaken on a quarterly basis and include visits to PIAs. Visits by international staff are undertaken on a bimonthly to quarterly basis but do not include visits to PIAs and movement in and around Kandahar is restricted. The senior programme coordinator is located at the country office (Kabul). In a bid to tighten decision-making procedures and controls, as well to put in place a regular source of programme and project monitoring, the office Shura was instigated. The Shura model is organic to Afghan culture, arising from and linked to traditional Jirga models of autocratic and consultative decision-making leadership structures.

The Shura includes five members of senior local staff, based at the project location. Decision-making authority for programmatic and project decisions is shared across these individuals. They are required to meet on a weekly basis:

- facilitating open communication between senior staff
- ensuring coherence and unity of effort between project and office activities
- sharing accountability and decision-making
- lending direction to Tearfund Kandahar's activities, and
- ensuring implementation of the area coordinator's directives and Tearfund policy.

The Shura members are expected to provide the minutes from their meetings to the senior programme coordinator, including any pertinent action points or recommendations. This provides the programme coordinator with a regular overview of programme and project progress, issues, and concerns, as well as the opportunity to engage in them.

Communication and coordination are essential to Tearfund's delivery of high-quality projects. The weekly Shura provides a forum for this on a regular basis and it is given a high priority. It is a useful means for the coordinator to relay information to senior staff in Kandahar, and vice versa.

- Summary of excerpts taken from the Tearfund Kandahar office Shura terms of reference

### (ii) Increase the frequency of reporting

Standard reporting practice for directly managed programmes was most commonly recorded as being either monthly or quarterly. However, where remote management structures are in place this frequency should increase. Two INGOs use a weekly reporting structure, and local staff provide an update on project progress, security, beneficiary feedback and quality to the programme coordinator (based at the head office). Another INGO commented that reporting against project milestones has increased in remotely managed projects:

*'In recognition that the risk portfolio for projects significantly increases with remote management approaches, [we] have increased the number of checks and the regularity of checks undertaken (eg key project milestones). While before there may have been only six project milestone checks for a project of two years, now there might be 24 milestone checks included. Project staff will closely monitor these and new project activities will not be initiated until evidence of the initial milestone having been completed is provided. This reduces the risk to programme quality.'*

Increasing the frequency of reporting enables greater accountability between local staff or partners and the programme management or primary organisation. It highlights any issues or problems with project progress, quality or monitoring practices, which can in turn be readily addressed by the senior management team in the country office/primary organisation.

(iii) Increase the frequency of project review meetings

This recommendation overlaps with the recommendations detailed in Section 7.2.4 and should be considered in conjunction with that section. Organisations need to promote a regular schedule of project review meetings, either at the project location or at a suitable alternative venue (eg regional or country office). Whether these include local project staff or not, they create a forum in which projects can be reviewed in detail. Local project managers can be asked to prepare a presentation or report of project progress, including details of the monitoring that has been undertaken to date and the outputs of that monitoring.

*'Quarterly Programme Review and Planning (QPRP) is facilitated at provincial and national levels. Field staff engage with programme and technical staff to review progress and achievement and to plan for the next quarter.'*

- Representative of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

(iv) Conduct spot-check, unannounced monitoring visits to project offices

Senior programme staff and technical specialists are encouraged to undertake *ad hoc* spot-check visits to project offices, without prior warning given to the local project team or partner. The benefit of such visits is not only in ensuring face-to-face interaction and team-building opportunities with staff, but in generating a more realistic assessment of the programme management on the ground, staff relationship dynamics and procedural compliance etc.

Visits can take a specifically 'monitoring focus', with the use of procedural compliance and monitoring checklists. Examples of both of these have been developed by Tearfund for use in its programmes in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Sudan. During the visit, senior programme staff liaise with local project staff to review and assess adherence to organisational policy using the compliance checklists. Checklists for quality standards, beneficiary accountability and beneficiary selection criteria have also been developed and are used to assess the extent to which projects comply with Tearfund's quality assurance commitments, monitoring and impartiality standards. Templates for each of these checklists are available in Annexes 11 and 12.

*'Significant trust, but not blind trust, is given to local project staff and managers.'*

- Deputy country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

A criticism of the highly controls-based approach to remote management has been that staff or partners may feel disempowered and distrusted by senior programme personnel. One factor that will help to mitigate this is to ensure that procedures to support more directive control are developed and stipulated in the programme remote management strategy and outworked across all remotely managed project offices. This will highlight that the procedures are part of a wider strategy to support remote management, and that they are agreed and implemented across the whole programme (or remotely affected project offices). They should not be a response, mid-way through a project, to 'poor' project implementation or quality, but rather are the foundation on which remote management stands.

### 7.2.8 Ensure dedicated monitoring and evaluation capacity is instigated at programme and project level

Project monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) specialisms have become a greater focus for humanitarian and development organisations in recent months and years. This has prompted a rise in the number of organisations recruiting specific roles to oversee these specialisms. Oxfam and CARE International have pioneered the post of 'MEAL'

adviser / officer, a model adopted by several other organisations that participated in this research.

These four concepts are complex; the recognition that dedicated capacity to build systems to mainstream each of them across programmes and/or organisations is an important development. Out of 20 INGOs interviewed as part of this research, 11 have roles with focused capacity to develop M&E systems. A further three organisations are currently looking to recruit to such a role within the next year. Often, this role has been an innovative development for these organisations, recruited within the past one or two years.

*'M&E is complex – it requires capacity building and training (particularly in the areas of data analysis and surveying). Staff not only need to understand how it is achievable, but also why it is necessary or important. M&E also needs to be contextualised for each project environment.'*

- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

The M&E support model differed between the 11 INGOs that have dedicated capacity in these areas. In five of the 11 INGOs a specialist had been recruited at the country office to support the development of programme-wide M&E systems and practices. In four INGOs, M&E personnel at both country and regional offices had been recruited (most commonly with an international country office specialist, supported by regional and/or district level officers). In the final two INGOs, M&E capacity had been built into projects at a district or regional level, with local and national staff recruited specifically to support these specialisms. Each of the 11 INGOs, however, recognised the crucial importance of having dedicated roles to support the development and mainstreaming of project M&E systems:

*'These roles... have helped to challenge the status quo of project implementation, to push the boundaries of standard project implementation and to encourage project staff to be more determined and consistent in project monitoring.'*

- Country director of an INGO in Afghanistan

A number of these same INGOs, however, recognised that an important feature of this additional capacity is the mainstreaming of project M&E procedures across the project and/or programme. As such, while there is dedicated capacity to support the development of systems and to train staff on M&E principles and practices, the ultimate responsibility for M&E still lies with all personnel, across the organisation:

*'These M&E roles are not designed to take on the whole responsibility of project monitoring, but are rather there to support the institutionalisation of M&E across the programme and to support project staff with their own project monitoring. There has been a training focus in the roles in order to support this, whereby the M&E Managers [regionally based] receive detailed training from the M&E Adviser [country office-based] and are then sent to provincial office locations in order to repeat this training... Our approach to M&E is one of integration.'*

- Country director of an INGO in Afghanistan

Investing in dedicated capacity to support the mainstreaming and prioritisation of project monitoring systems has been proven to improve remote management for one INGO operating remotely in six provinces of Afghanistan. This INGO has recruited a three-person *Quality Assurance Unit (QAU)*, based at the country office in Kabul. Each of these three individuals undertakes regular visits to project offices and PIAs to conduct training workshops with remotely based staff, as well as to monitor project activities directly.<sup>41</sup> Being located away from regional offices, they provide a more objective and external perspective that can be used to review project progress, quality and staff competency.

<sup>41</sup> The three individuals have been recruited nationally. Ongoing risk analysis is undertaken to ensure that it is safe and suitable for them to visit the remotely managed medium- to high-insecurity PIAs in which the INGO is operating.

### Quality Assurance Unit: promoting high-quality programming for remote management

*'We have developed a highly efficient national Quality Assurance Unit... Each unit member is from a different province and is currently based in Kabul. Each has been immersed in our organisational ethos and values. Despite concerns from other organisations as regards national monitoring teams, our organisation's experience is that this unit works highly efficiently and effectively in supporting the quality of programming, and monitoring and investigating programme and personnel issues. The unit is dispatched to the project locations with regularity – focusing on monitoring project quality and progress and assisting project staff in the development of project log-frames and work plans. They have a strong understanding of the people and culture of Afghanistan and are able to provide an objective, third-party approach to project monitoring.'*

- Representatives of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

It was acknowledged by this INGO that a strong factor leading to the success of the QAU is the longevity with which each member of the unit had worked with the organisation. There is a greater level of trust in the professional competence and objectivity of the unit, partly due to the relationship between the organisation and the individuals that has developed over this period. It has undoubtedly had a positive impact on the success of the unit and the project monitoring and programme quality that it is able to support. When questioned as to whether this unit would work equally successfully with newly recruited personnel, the INGO said that it would have greater complexities (namely, developing the institutional knowledge, professional competencies, levels of objectivity and staff relationships to support the work of the unit). This is useful to bear in mind, for organisations that might consider this as an approach to developing monitoring and quality assurance capacity at a country office. However, the approach taken by this INGO has been highly successful and speaks of innovative good practice, using national staff to support direct project monitoring and regular capacity building at remotely managed regional office levels.

### 7.2.9 Develop a monitoring and evaluation framework at programme and project levels

Programmatic policies, procedures and frameworks for M&E must be reviewed within the context of, and adapted to, remote management. The issues explored in Section 7.1 can only be addressed when organisations redefine project monitoring approaches to fit the new model of remote management. Typically, such issues include reduced frequency of visits by senior programme personnel to PIAs, limited technical oversight of programme operations, concerns regarding the reliability and frequency with which project data is reported, and concerns regarding the capacity of staff with relation to project monitoring and implementation. Ahead of any remotely managed programme intervention, appropriate time must be taken to review these issues and to develop an M&E framework that addresses them with targeted remote M&E practice.

*'Solutions should be integrated, rather than simply added, to the implementation and monitoring framework.'*

- Excerpt from the *External baseline assessment of Tearfund's monitoring and accountability practices in Kandahar, Afghanistan*

The accountability representative of an INGO operating in Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan commented that for remote management to be a success, projects need to be designed to be remotely managed. It is not simply a case of designing a standard project and adopting remote management approaches to deliver it. Rather, organisations need to review the whole process of project design through the lens of remote management and develop a project cycle management (PCM) structure, including adequate M&E, fitting that remote management model. It was the experience of this INGO in Somalia that, when projects are designed using the standard model of implementation and management but with the expectation that they will be implemented remotely, significant issues arise for programme quality and the delivery of outcomes.



In Section 7.2.6, we observed that developing a remote management strategy includes the review and development of remote monitoring systems. While this should be referenced within the remote management strategy, a more detailed framework should be developed at programme and project levels, outlining the different remote approaches to project monitoring, specific to the programme and project.

#### (i) Develop a programme-wide remote monitoring and evaluation framework

It is essential to have buy-in from organisational and/or programme management in support of remote M&E systems. The development of an organisational and/or programme-wide M&E framework is one tool that can support this. The framework should outline the overall organisational and/or programmatic approach to M&E, including:

- an overview of the principles of project M&E
- programme-wide responsibilities for M&E
- frequency of remote monitoring capacity building workshops, responsibility for delivering them, and key participant groups
- curriculum for remote monitoring capacity building workshops
- frequency of visits by national and/or expatriate personnel to project offices and, where possible, PIAs
- focus of visits by national and/or expatriate personnel to project offices and, where possible, PIAs for remote monitoring
- programme-wide standard M&E tools (eg senior management monitoring visit template; sector-focused M&E templates; pre- and post-KAP survey templates; 'most significant change' guidance and templates etc)
- details of the proposed engagement with other NGOs, INGOs, government stakeholders and beneficiaries which could be used for monitoring triangulation and/or to support external monitoring systems, and
- an overview of how data will be collected, recorded, circulated to senior organisational and/or programme management and used in support of documenting project progress, impact and quality.

Facilitating an assessment of current M&E practices across the organisation and/or programme and then reviewing those practices within the context of remote management will help in developing a specific remote M&E framework. Though it is logical for this process to be managed centrally within the organisation and/or programme's country office, it is also critical that local and national staff feed into the processes, schedules and tools that are developed, as they are likely to be the personnel using them most often.

#### (ii) Develop a project-specific remote monitoring and evaluation framework

Standard good practice is to develop a project M&E framework for any humanitarian or development project. It is absolutely essential that this is undertaken for remotely managed projects. When the project is being designed, a plan of how M&E activities will be facilitated and supported remotely should be developed, including:

- details of what monitoring activities will be carried out, by whom and with what frequency (eg surveys, observations, focus group discussions, individual interviews, transect walks, reviews of statistical data, use of communication technologies etc)
- an explanation of how the selected monitoring activities relate to individual project activities, including time-specific indicators, milestones, targets

- a plan detailing how beneficiaries and other project stakeholders will participate in monitoring activities (eg beneficiary- and community-led monitoring practices, local data triangulation techniques, local government-led monitoring practices etc)
- data collection and recording methods and frequency
- reporting frequency (including in what format and to whom)
- a plan detailing how end-of-project outcomes and impact will be measured
- timeframes for internal and/or external project review and evaluation, and
- a clear budget to support the remotely led M&E activities.

This framework can be linked to or incorporated with the project logical framework. The scope of the remote M&E framework, as detailed above, is broader than the logical framework alone. While the two mediums can be brought together, it remains important that all of the considerations listed above are properly planned and reviewed by the project implementers and management. An INGO operating programmes in Afghanistan using a remote management structure has instigated a project inception workshop that supports this detailed thinking surrounding project design, implementation and M&E planning. A similar mechanism is recommended to other organisations operating remotely.

### 7.2.10 Research and invest in information and communication technologies to support remote monitoring

This is a developing area of good practice for many organisations seeking to manage projects remotely. Anecdotal evidence from organisations that are already engaging with information and communication technologies suggests that they provide highly useful snapshots of project progress and records of ongoing project outcomes, quality and impact. However, as a tool to support project monitoring, it remains in its infancy. The use of web-based data management systems, GPS referencing, interactive mapping and digital and advanced photography and videoing were the primary technologies stakeholders were using. It is anticipated that as remote management becomes more prevalent in the next five years, information and communication systems will develop in tandem to support interactive, web-based systems, enabling greater monitoring of projects.

*'As a response to the prohibitive security environment, UNHCR has developed the Project Tracking Database – a computer system to monitor their project activities in Iraq undertaken by local partners. Rather than sending staff out to see that houses are being built, for instance, the local partners take pictures that are uploaded with GPS information. Evidence-based monitoring of construction, costs, and deliveries take place before, during, and after construction, and payments are tied to the photographic evidence. There are 10,000 projects in Iraq currently on the database. A similar system potentially could be used for distributions or other types of projects'.*

- UN OCHA publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, pp.26-27

There can be an assumption that information and communication technologies incur high costs (as they generally require medium- to high-speed internet facility, adequate training for staff and – in some cases – software targeted to meet the specific needs of the organisation). While some of these foundations will require financial investment by the organisation, that investment can often be negotiated with service providers and/or institutional donors.

#### (i) Web-based project monitoring

Various organisations are beginning to embark on using customised, web-based software to support project monitoring, particularly for remotely managed projects. Three stakeholders had developed data management systems using such software, while a further organisation is developing such a system. UNHCR, supporting programmes in Iraq, is reported to be

using similar software successfully to monitor the progress and quality of projects implemented by local partners across the country. The benefit of this type of information technology is that it enables organisations to monitor the progress, quality and impact of projects from a remote location (commonly outside the country of project implementation). In all cases, data related to projects (including photographs, maps, beneficiary numbers, project activities, surveys and other monitoring tools undertaken) can be uploaded by local project staff or partners and then reviewed by programme or organisational management.

**(ii) Global Positioning System: GPS referencing**

As highlighted in the Clear Path International (CPI) case study (see next page), GPS referencing is a common tool used to support the verification and positioning of project data for remotely managed programmes. GPS referencing can be used in interactive mapping systems, providing verification of project activities in specific areas.

A development of GPS referencing, *geo-tagging*, provides a useful addition to standard digital photography. Selected digital cameras now have built-on or built-in GPS technology, allowing for automatic geo-tagging once a photograph is taken.

Some organisations and institutional donors have questioned the validity of using photographs as a remote monitoring tool, arguing that, without direct visits to PIAs, it is difficult to verify that a photograph was taken where it was reported to have been taken. Geo-tagging addresses this issue and enables organisations managing programmes remotely to have confidence in the photographs of project progress submitted to them.

Geo-tagging is currently being used successfully by at least two stakeholders. Organisations considering using technologies that involve GPS referencing should review the security context within which it is being used. Some stakeholders commented, for example, that GPS referencing can be viewed with suspicion by local government and/or actors within the conflict in Afghanistan. A risk analysis targeting the use of GPS in such countries should therefore be undertaken before using this technology.

**(iii) Photography**

We have observed that, in some remotely managed projects, it is not possible for senior programme management personnel ever to visit PIAs. In these instances, it is beneficial to use project photography to support remote monitoring of project progress and, in some cases, project quality (where detailed photographs are solicited of project structures – particularly useful in engineering, construction, WASH programmes etc).

Photography is an essential component of web-based project monitoring. Alongside interactive mapping systems, it provides the necessary visualisation to support remote monitoring. Yet, the use of

*'Photos are effective for monitoring outcomes when used to triangulate information collected from the field.'*  
- Excerpt from the *External baseline assessment of Tearfund's monitoring and accountability practices in Kandahar, Afghanistan*

- *For most Tearfund activities, it will be appropriate for local staff to email daily or weekly photographs from the project sites as part of their regular reporting. These photos can be linked to the online map of project activities, and create a timeline showing project progress.*
  - *Time-stamping photographs confirms the date and time of the photograph, which increases their credibility as evidence of project progress. All digital cameras should have their time-stamp function turned on.*
- Guidelines on using photography as a remote monitoring tool, taken from Tearfund's international guidelines on remote monitoring

photography as a remote monitoring tool is only as strong as the skills of the individuals or partners taking the photographs. These skills need to be developed. Local staff and partners will require training in high-quality photography, which should be factored into capacity development programmes for remote monitoring.

#### Mapping systems in Afghanistan: Clear Path International (CPI)

*Clear Path International (CPI), an INGO, is the largest provider of integrated victim assistance (IVA) for landmine survivors in Afghanistan. The organisation operates from a country office in Kabul staffed by three expatriates and eight nationals. CPI supports ten local NGOs that together implement IVA projects at approximately 300 separate project sites throughout Afghanistan.*

*CPI emphasises capacity building through regular partner interaction. This includes joint proposal development, compliance workshops, performance measuring, routine inspections and detailed M&E. CPI's implementing partner (IP) network currently provides service to more than 80,000 beneficiaries nationwide. Based upon its success in Afghanistan, CPI seeks to replicate and manage the same IP approach in other countries. It intends to do this in part by using digital mapping tools.*

*Information Management and Mine Action Programs (iMMAP), an interactive mapping and database software provider, is working with CPI to design a web-based IVA data management programme. The programme, known as OASIS, is designed to use the M&E tools currently employed by CPI and its partners. OASIS not only helps CPI compile performance data, it also illustrates the results of impact surveys collected from individual beneficiaries living in mine-affected communities. Currently, data received by CPI's IPs is entered into the OASIS system by national staff at CPI's country office. CPI's current development plans include expanding the system to enable partners to enter the data directly from their respective locations. Once entered into the system, data is immediately available for review by programme staff at CPI's country office.*

*Data is collected on an ongoing basis and summarised in periodic programme reports. Each activity undertaken is recorded by date and GPS coordinates. The OASIS programme enables CPI to work with various interactive maps of Afghanistan. Clicking on a province or district enables the user to view a region-specific page that highlights project data for that area. iMMAP provides CPI and other qualified NGOs with this OASIS software, support and training free of charge.*

*CPI is considering providing IVA services to multiple countries from a centralised hub. CPI believes OASIS will play a pivotal role in the success of this operation by enabling management staff to view, analyse and adjust programme implementation in near-real time from a remote location.*

- Clear Path International, Afghanistan

#### (iv) Video monitoring

Like photography, digital video-making can be a supplementary tool to remote monitoring. Videoing project progress not only provides a monitoring reference for programme managers who are unable to visit PIAs, but it has a secondary bonus of creating data that can be used at the close of the project to demonstrate to project stakeholders the project's progress, quality and impact. Video monitoring can be used in conjunction with monitoring tools such as transect walks or focus group discussions. It can be used to visualise gradual construction of key project components. It can also be used in end-of-project celebration events, when a review of how the project has been implemented and the key outcomes it has had are presented to stakeholders.

Like photography, local staff and partners need training in using a digital video camera to ensure the high quality of any footage taken. Video monitoring has been well received by at least one INGO operating in Afghanistan. Footage from filming has been used in project monitoring, in promotional videos of the organisation's work and in accountability events for beneficiaries, community members, government etc.

## 7.2.11 Peer monitoring

In medium- to high-security environments where senior management staff cannot visit beneficiaries or PIAs, peer monitors provide a service to beneficiaries, institutional donors and project-implementing organisations in improving accountability:

- **Beneficiaries:** monitors who are independent of the organisation serve as an impartial check to beneficiaries that they have received the agreed levels of service
- **Institutional donors:** peer monitoring enhances donors' confidence in the organisation's accountability in situations where donors may not be able to readily carry out their own verification checks
- **Local project managers:** project staff are fed 'ground truth' information about their projects and beneficiaries. Transparency through peer monitoring maintains trust between organisational staff members
- **Remotely based programme management:** peer monitoring assignments can review and verify project data that has previously been recorded by project staff.

Peer monitoring builds on collaborative relationships and networks between humanitarian and development organisations in a particular location. The process sees personnel from one organisation undertaking monitoring visits to the PIAs of another. Specific terms of reference would be developed for the monitoring visit, outlining exactly what is expected of the peer monitoring team (eg cross-checking that appropriate beneficiaries have been targeted with the agreed assistance; observing and reporting on progress of project activities etc), how the monitoring outcomes should be reported and to whom.

Peer monitoring has been undertaken between Tearfund and another INGO operating in Kandahar. Local staff from that INGO met with Tearfund's area coordinator and M&E officer in Kabul to agree upon the terms of reference for the monitoring visit. Following this meeting, a team of peer monitors from the INGO visited Tearfund's PIAs and monitored the propriety of Tearfund's beneficiary selection, as well as checking that the agreed assistance had been provided to the targeted beneficiaries. A report highlighting the findings of this monitoring visit was later shared with the Kabul-based programme management personnel.

### Remote monitoring – peer monitoring (Tearfund)

*Other agencies (INGOs, local NGOs, CBOs or Tearfund partners) operating in the area of remote management can provide impartial cross-checks and corroboration of information.*

- *Any peer monitor must be **answerable to the area coordinator (AC)** during his/her work with Tearfund. All checks will be carried out against documentation (eg beneficiary lists) provided by the AC, and the AC alone is to be asked for any clarification that is required.*
- *The monitor may be asked to check the following (not an exhaustive list):*
  - *Checking actual beneficiaries against lists of names and selection criteria to determine if the **correct individuals** have benefited*
  - *Checking that beneficiaries have received the **right amounts** of distributed items or stipulated hours of training*
  - *Checking the **quality of distributed items or training**, and*
  - *Checking the **quality of the interaction** between Tearfund staff and beneficiaries.*
- ***Terms of reference**, including an appropriate per diem per monitor to cover transport and food costs, must be signed before the monitoring visit.*
- *Be aware that **conduct of peer monitors** may fall short of Tearfund standards (eg poor beneficiary accountability, non-impartial action in communities), weakening our own community acceptance. Ensure that all peer monitors are aware of Tearfund standards of conduct and agree to abide by them for the duration of their assignment.*
- *Ensure that peer monitors know they **may not make or imply promises** on behalf of Tearfund.*

*- Excerpt taken from Tearfund's international guidance on remote management*

These guidelines provide useful specifications for peer monitoring and they highlight important sensitivities that must also be considered. Several stakeholders, especially INGOs, were interested in peer monitoring, but they also raised concerns that require consideration ahead of implementing this monitoring approach. These include:

- Ensuring that organisations are selective in identifying peer monitoring agencies (referring to a selected list of key criteria or standards that must be met, eg report writing, experienced staff, experience of reviewing and assessing qualitative and quantitative outputs etc)
- Ensuring that a thorough risk analysis is undertaken for staff from any peer agency to safeguard their security, as well as the security of beneficiaries and project-implementing staff
- Ensuring that adequate briefing is provided to the peer monitors on the project and organisation implementing the programme (including programmatic approach – whether humanitarian or development, and ethos and values of the organisation)
- Mitigating the risk that local staff or partners might coerce or bribe peer monitors to reflect project progress and quality in a specific light
- Ensuring that own local staff or partners understand that peer monitoring approaches do not undermine their own monitoring, but rather add an additional opportunity for data triangulation.

*'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 the context of the project overall'.*

- Excerpt from the *External baseline assessment of Tearfund's monitoring and accountability practices in Kandahar, Afghanistan*

Peer monitoring is a promising remote monitoring tool. While there is certainly potential to develop this monitoring approach, adequate planning and preparation are required. An associated component of peer monitoring includes the practice whereby external agencies are contracted to undertake project monitoring in areas where security and access can be difficult for senior management in an organisation. This practice is most commonly used by UN humanitarian agencies.<sup>42</sup> It requires similar levels of preparation (eg adequate briefing for selected monitoring agencies on the project being monitored, the organisation that has implemented the project, and the particular outcomes expected from the monitoring visit). Good practice and research organisations can also be used to support project reviews and evaluations during or at the end of projects, to support learning and good practice development.

A final component of peer monitoring is cross-project exchange visits. As with peer monitoring, suitable risk analysis needs to be undertaken beforehand but, where it is deemed safe to do so, local and national staff from one project location could visit another project location with a view to reviewing project activities, progress and quality, as well as developing their own understanding of specific humanitarian or development sectors. This practice is being used by three INGO stakeholders, one of whom commented that this practice 'is seen as an equally important aspect for team building. The visits also build the technical capacity of staff who are involved, as well as their understanding of why the projects are important.'<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The UN OCHA-supported publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, (p.27), reported that: 'WFP, UNHCR and some other agencies have been using third-party monitoring in a number of contexts, including Afghanistan, Yemen, and Somalia. In Afghanistan, WFP uses three outsourced monitoring firms (two Afghan companies and one based in Dubai). These companies provide non-UN personnel who work on what WFP calls Programme Assistance Teams (PATs) that can go into UN 'no-go' areas and monitor the distribution outcomes.'

<sup>43</sup> Comment from representative of an INGO operating in Afghanistan that uses cross-project exchange visits.

Each of these three components of peer monitoring requires careful planning, negotiation, briefing and clarity in order to be administered as effective remote monitoring tools. They can be low cost (using peer or internal cross-project monitoring relationships) and provide the necessary external assessment of a project or programme. The director of an inter-agency coordination body in Afghanistan affirmed the use of peer monitoring, commenting: ‘An external entity (someone who is not themselves directly implementing the project), is required to triangulate and cross-check data and project information.’

**7.2.12 Beneficiary- and community-led monitoring**

*‘Part of ensuring a successful remote management approach will require communities and beneficiaries to be mobilised and to become actively involved in the project.’*

- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

Strong examples of beneficiary- and community-led monitoring practice were exhibited by some of the INGO and NGO stakeholders. Good practice and research organisations also recommended this monitoring approach as an area for development by organisations seeking to operate remotely in medium- to high-insecurity locations. Beneficiary- and community-led monitoring has been exhibited in a number of different forms. An important factor that all organisations need to ensure though is thorough transparency with and training for relevant communities and beneficiaries, ahead of any expectation that they will engage in project monitoring. Adequate information about the organisation and project (including relevant project targets, outputs and outcomes) should be shared with stakeholders and complemented with targeted training on monitoring practices and with briefings to clarify what is expected from the stakeholders.<sup>44</sup>

**(i) Recruit community facilitators and/or mobilisers**

This practice was exhibited by two stakeholders. Facilitators and mobilisers are selected from within a project community, often from outside the beneficiary population. They receive training in both project plans and monitoring techniques. In insecure areas where access to PIAs can be restricted, they are the ‘eyes and ears’ of the organisation, providing regular assessments of project progress and quality, as the following two case studies highlight.

**Community-selected mobilisers: Oruzgan, Afghanistan**

*‘Male and female community mobilisers (often married couples) will be selected from communities and trained in project implementation support. They will be used as the ‘eyes and ears’ of our organisation in less secure project locations, providing updates on the community, as well as project progress and quality. These community mobilisers will be supported at community level by Shuras and Community Development Councils. None of the community mobilisers will be direct beneficiaries and are therefore assumed to have greater objectivity to observe and monitor programmes. They will send photographs to reflect project progress and quality. They will provide opportunities to triangulate the data collected by our own personnel. This approach is going to be piloted in three different districts, with the lessons learnt and documented for future projects.’*

- Representative of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

**Community facilitators: Kabul, Afghanistan**

*Four community facilitators have been recruited by our organisation from communities in two districts of Kabul which are currently experiencing high insecurity. These CFs, though not direct employees, do receive a financial incentive for their work. They have been provided with extensive training by our engineering staff. This training has enabled them to undertake project assessments, monitoring checks, photographs of project activities and detailed updates on project progress. Our staff work closely with these CFs to ensure that project milestones are met and that the quality of the work being undertaken is of a high standard.’*

- Country director for an INGO operating remotely managed projects in Kabul province, Afghanistan

## (ii) Use existing structures within the community to support ongoing project monitoring

Humanitarian and development projects use input from existing community structures, committees and support groups as a necessary element of their implementation. Community Development Councils/Committees, village elders, *Shuras*, school management committees and parent and teacher associations were referred by various INGOs as means through which community feedback and monitoring input were solicited. The benefit of these structures is that they often exist before the project being implemented, and are therefore not an additional strain on the community. However, there was also evidence of project-specific community committees being developed as well, most notably by Tearfund in its remotely managed programming in Darfur, Sudan.

### Beneficiary, community and government stakeholder-led monitoring through new structures – Beida, Darfur

*Tearfund implements a humanitarian programme in Darfur. Between August 2009 and 2011, a remotely managed project was implemented in Beida (West Darfur). Alongside twice-weekly visits by project staff (based outside the project location at Geneina) to monitor project progress, technical quality and impact, various beneficiary, community and government-led monitoring structures were put in place as follows:*

- *Village supervisory committees comprising staff, village leadership, sub-contractors and village-based organisations, who were selected to report on concerns in project implementation and community mobilisation*
- *A multi-purpose review (evaluation) team was constituted with representatives from the government of Sudan, as well as local NGO partners to periodically assess projects*
- *Beneficiary exchange visits were implemented between different PIAs to help communities share and exchange notes on project implementation and quality*
- *Quality standards oversight committees were established, comprising host communities and beneficiaries. Their focus was to review and ensure project quality and to feedback any concerns or issues to project staff (during twice-weekly visits to PIAs).*

*- Representative of Tearfund's humanitarian programme in Darfur, Sudan*

## (iii) Use community-based surveying tools

Social audits and community-perception surveys were the most prevalent examples of this monitoring approach recommended by stakeholders. These tools can be used by local staff and partners when working with project communities and beneficiaries. The surveys propose questions related to changes, impact and quality resulting from the specific project. They also provide an opportunity for organisations to understand how their own staff or partners are perceived at a local level by project stakeholders. The feedback provided is critical for organisations in understanding community perceptions about the project, as well as triangulating information on project progress, quality and impact.

## (iv) Consider community-implemented and monitored programming

The UN OCHA-supported publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, refers to an approach taken by local partners of the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan (MACCA) enabling them to continue or initiate de-mining programmes in medium- to high-insecurity areas where access to PIAs is limited. National partner organisations, including the Demining Agency for Afghanistan (DAFA), have developed programmes which recruit 'young adults from geographic areas that need mine clearance. Community members nominate the recruits and guarantee their reliability. These local staffers then receive over two months of training and



*'We are currently working with the host community on the Kenyan side around the Daadab refugee camps. We are considering grouping beneficiaries into specific groups with a leader. The leaders of each group would provide information to us regularly regarding the quantity and quality of aid being delivered. They could also send other information, eg of positive changes in the beneficiary community. If beneficiaries agree, during registration a photo of the beneficiary could be taken to positively identify who is being supported (photos may help reduce "ghost" beneficiaries).'*

- Representative of an INGO operating in Somalia

are to work in their own community.<sup>45</sup> DAFA have implemented 11 community-based de-mining programmes in Afghanistan since 2009. This approach to programming has been most prevalent in medium- to high-insecurity provinces, including Helmand, Kandahar, Nimroz and Zabul, and has enabled DAFA to continue implementing programmes in these volatile areas. Extensive focus on training and preparing selected individuals for the programme and ensuring ongoing opportunities for capacity development are imperative.

This approach to programme implementation and monitoring is reported as having been highly successful. MACCA urges that 'other agencies and NGO programmes could certainly make use of this programming model, particularly if it involves a defined skill set that people can be trained in'.<sup>46</sup> This

is an area that can be further developed and used to support project monitoring. As with community-selected facilitators and mobilisers, there is potential for organisations to select and train community members to monitor projects.

### 7.2.13 Greater collaboration between organisations of the humanitarian and development community

Several of the proposed recommendations in this report find greater strength where there is collaboration between organisations within the humanitarian and development community. Section 7.2.3 observed that capacity building and training initiatives can be more cost-effective and inclusive where there is collaboration between organisations. The same section observed that best practice learning events can build understanding and knowledge of key humanitarian and development issues. Where these learning events are opened out more widely, there is potential for greater learning and improved quality of practice across the sectors. Likewise, Section 7.2.1 observed the potential of peer monitoring structures. Peer monitoring too relies on successful and collaborative relationships between humanitarian and development organisations.

In addition to these good practices, greater and intentional collaboration can also promote the sharing of resources and tools to support project monitoring. Several of the recommendations highlighted in this report reflect existing good practice by agencies already seeking to manage programmes remotely. There already exists a multitude of good practices that could be shared and used by organisations to support remote management, and particularly remote monitoring. These organisations need to invest time, resources and interest in networking among themselves and building relationships that can support the remote monitoring recommendations highlighted in this report. In an attempt to promote the sharing of good practice, the annexes to this report include existing templates and tools that can be used to support remote project monitoring and accountability practices.

*'Clusters should also support the sharing of good practices and lessons in operating in complex security environments and address the coordination challenges in situations where the cluster lead has no field presence due to insecurity.'*

- UN OCHA-supported publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, p.50

<sup>45</sup> UN OCHA-supported publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, p.26.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

This collaboration does not need to be arduous; existing structures and coordination facilities can be used to support it. Cluster meetings are one opportunity whereby remote management and monitoring practices can be highlighted and discussed. Implications for remote management and monitoring on specific sectors (eg WASH, food security) can be presented at the relevant cluster meetings, which can be used as a forum for discussion of good practice. Examples of best practice or learning reviews can also be presented, again focusing on issues related to remote project monitoring.

Likewise, existing coordination bodies can promote and develop greater levels of collaboration between organisations. UN OCHA has already made significant headway in researching and sharing issues and good practices related to remote management through the publication which it endorsed, *To Stay and Deliver*. The focus of this publication reviews humanitarian assistance in a rapidly changing and deteriorating security environment and suggests good practice guidelines to support that assistance. It does include a section dedicated to project monitoring and quality as an element of this assistance, but there remain further opportunities for coordination bodies such as UN OCHA to research and share findings specific to remote monitoring.

Other coordination bodies are commonly in place in individual countries to support humanitarian and development organisations. A list of such agencies is available in Annex 10. There is an opportunity for these agencies to incorporate topical thinking on remote management and, as part of that, remote monitoring. The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR), for example, provides a monthly forum for organisations to meet together. Often, this opportunity allows for the presentation of good practices or learning. A future agenda item for such an agency could surely be the impact of remote management on project quality and stakeholder assistance and the associated good practice responses.

The key is to ensure that dialogue between organisations is open and that opportunities for peer learning are available. This applies not only to NGOs, INGOs, UN agencies and research and good practice organisations, but also to institutional donors. There is growing interest from donors in project monitoring, specifically with relation to monitoring and evaluating programme outcomes and impact. This mirrors an increasing interest amongst humanitarian and development organisations in these areas and suggests that there is potential for greater levels of discussion and coordination between all these different actors to capture and to share ideas and examples of best practice.

### **7.3 Concluding remarks (remote project monitoring)**

Remote monitoring remains a relatively new concept for humanitarians and development actors. It is critical that discussion, research and sharing of ideas and good practice continue in this area and that resources and capacity are dedicated to developing innovative systems that safeguard programme quality in remotely managed projects.

This section has aimed to present recommendations and case studies of existing good practices being used to improve the rigour of remote project monitoring and to develop the foundations to support project monitoring at a programmatic level. Each recommendation highlighted here is summarised in the checklist in Section 7.2. There are already useful resources available for organisations to review and to consider as they develop their own systems and practices to support remote management.<sup>47</sup> It is strongly recommended that organisations seek ways to coordinate with one another in and between countries that experience medium- to high-insecurity and that opportunities are seized to promote shared learning and best practice in relation to remote management and monitoring.

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<sup>47</sup> These are available as annexes. Refer to Section 11: List of Available Annexes, for specific information.

## 8 Remote beneficiary accountability

### 8.1 Terms, definitions, and practices

To understand beneficiary accountability practices within the context of remote management, it is important first to ensure that there is a common understanding of the terms and practices related to beneficiary accountability.<sup>48</sup> This is especially important given that this common understanding was not evident among stakeholders engaged in this project. Accountability was understood by some as referring to the appropriate means by which beneficiaries are targeted and selected for project interventions. By others, it was understood in reference to either the relationship developed between a primary organisation and its local or international partner, or between an organisation and its broader funding source.

*'Accountability refers to the means through which power is used responsibly. It is a process of taking account of, and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily those who are affected by the exercise of power.'*

*- The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, p.5*

This latter interpretation readily adheres to traditional perceptions of accountability: 'the way in which those who authorised others to act on their behalf made sure that authority was being used as agreed'.<sup>49</sup> However, this understanding has been superseded by the recognition that accountability is the right of anyone who is affected by that use of authority, especially project beneficiaries. Accountability addresses the relationship between beneficiaries and the project-implementing or project-managing organisation. It ensures that beneficiaries' needs are met and that they are able to participate fully in and engage with project planning, design, implementation and

M&E practices.

The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) promotes the practice of accountability. As a humanitarian self-regulatory body, it requires that its member agencies commit to meeting the highest standards in accountability and quality management. HAP has recently revised and developed *The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management*,<sup>50</sup> which defines accountability and presents practical steps that organisations can take to ensure that accountability principles are met. These practical steps form part of the benchmarks, detailed below – critical areas of accountability good practice that organisations must address.<sup>51</sup> Each benchmark includes specific requirements and means of verification enabling organisations and their partners or contractors to meet identified accountability good practice. It is an overarching recommendation that any organisation not already familiar with the HAP Standard review this good practice document, as well as relevant case studies that can be found on the HAP website ([www.hapinternational.org](http://www.hapinternational.org)). Additional content in the HAP Standard relates specifically to working remotely through partner organisations, so this guidance is also useful for organisations that are operating remotely with local or international partners or contractors.

### 8.2 Overview of the issues and concerns raised by stakeholders

Most issues highlighted by research stakeholders were no more specific to remote management than they would be to directly managed programming. Focus on accountability

<sup>48</sup> Beneficiary accountability will hereafter be referred to as 'accountability'.

<sup>49</sup> HAP Humanitarian Accountability Partnership: *The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management*: pg. 1.

<sup>50</sup> This document is available in Annex 12.1. It is recommended to readers as a succinct summary of the terms and definitions related to accountability and provides practical benchmarks and activities to promote accountable practice amongst humanitarian and development organisations. It has been created in consultation with 1,900 people, across 56 countries, including those affected by disaster. Hereafter, it will be referred to as the HAP Standard.

<sup>51</sup> These six benchmarks have been taken from *The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management*, pp.8-24.

practices remains relatively recent, and humanitarian and development organisations have shown a stronger focus on it within the last ten years. It is to be expected, therefore, that there are some teething problems in ensuring successful practices are in place to support the accountable relationship between beneficiaries and project-implementing or project-managing organisations. It is also understandable that not all organisations are yet familiar with the concepts of accountability.

This research highlighted several issues related to accountability and those most pertinent to remote management are the focus of the following sections. Each issue has been incorporated into relevant key areas related to the individual accountability practices. (A review of the HAP Standard is recommended in Section 8.1 for readers unfamiliar with this good practice document.) However, some overarching issues had also been experienced and these will begin our assessment next of the concerns and issues related to remote accountability practices.

#### **Essential benchmarks to support beneficiary accountability good practice**

(i) Establishing and delivering on commitments

*The organisation sets out the commitments that it and its partners or contractors will be held accountable for and identifies how they will be delivered.*

(ii) Staff competency

*The organisation ensures that staff and/or partners or contractors have competencies that enable them to meet the organisation's commitments.*

(iii) Sharing information

*The organisation ensures that the people it aims to assist (directly or remotely), as well as other stakeholders, have access to timely, relevant and clear information about the organisation and its activities.*

(iv) Participation

*The organisation listens to the people it aims to assist, incorporating their views and analysis in programme decisions.*

(v) Handling complaints

*The organisation enables the people it aims to assist and other stakeholders to raise complaints and receive a response through an effective, accessible and safe process.*

(vi) Learning and continual improvement

*The organisation learns from experience to continually improve its performance.*

*- The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management*

### **8.2.1 General issues and concerns**

As discussed, senior programme and/or primary organisation personnel are less or completely unable to visit PIAs in remotely managed projects, impacting the level of and approach to direct monitoring that is possible. From an accountability perspective, this reality results in fewer opportunities for these personnel to build relationships with the community and fewer chances to observe and review firsthand the accountability practices put in place by local staff, partners or contractors.

- (i) Fewer opportunities for senior programme and/or primary organisation personnel to build an accountable relationship with beneficiaries

The first of these concerns was highlighted by an INGO that is remotely managing part of a project in especially volatile PIAs in Afghanistan. This organisation has a strong focus on rights-based accountability practices, opting to build relationships with community and

increase their involvement in programming. In the two remotely managed PIAs, they have opted to work through the local community. Community facilitators have been recruited and are responsible for liaising between the community and the organisation. While this is a good example of community empowerment, the country director of this INGO commented that building relationships with beneficiaries has been difficult for the INGO's own staff, with total reliance on the community-based facilitators to be the eyes, ears and face of the INGO on the ground.

*'Because the sub-office staff are based so far from the communities and cannot visit them, it is difficult to build relationships and to manage the relational dynamics between Community Development Councils (CDCs), Shuras, beneficiaries etc.'*

- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

They also commented that they were not able to implement other accountability practices remotely, such as their standard approach to participation, leading to a 'significant dent in the organisation's approach to sustainable development'.<sup>52</sup> Developing accountability practices with the community has not been a strong focus within the agreed remit for the community facilitators. Levels of information-sharing about the project and organisation with beneficiaries have reduced, as have opportunities for the community to raise feedback and complaints and to engage in rigorous reviews and monitoring of the project.

(ii) Fewer opportunities for senior programme management and/or primary organisations to observe and review firsthand the accountability practices in place

The second concern was raised by the accountability representative of an INGO operating in Somalia. This INGO implements programmes through its own personnel, all of whom were locally recruited from within Somalia. A team of senior programme personnel (expatriates) are located in Nairobi but face-to-face interaction between them and local personnel is limited, most often undertaken at training events based outside Somalia. Interaction between senior programme personnel and project beneficiaries is non-existent due to the severe security restrictions experienced in PIAs. Senior programme personnel are unable to engage directly in reviewing accountability practices and have little opportunity to confirm that these practices are in place and functioning without access to the beneficiaries themselves. There is greater reliance on *ad hoc* reports from local staff on the progress of such practices.

*'It has been difficult to verify accountability systems, practices and feedback in remotely managed projects. Where programme management staff are based away from project locations and are unable to visit them, there is a reliance on local staff to report back on the accountability systems in place and it is not easy to verify or triangulate this information... The frequency with which local staff report on accountability systems is often low. Language barriers can create issues for the quality of reporting (which is expected in English). This adds to the issues mentioned regarding information verification; it is difficult for staff to have a strong idea of what is happening in the field.'*

- Accountability representative of an INGO operating in Somalia

This concern was echoed by the country director of an INGO that had opted to work through local partners for some of its operations in Afghanistan. Communication between the local partners and the INGO was an issue and reporting by local partners was of particular concern. There was a strong need to build the local partners' capacity in project monitoring and reporting, including reporting on accountability.

The concern raised here is that local staff, partners or contractors may not have adequate capacity to implement accountability practices or to report sufficiently on those practices.

<sup>52</sup> Comment from the country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan.

Without opportunities to visit PIAs and to meet with beneficiaries, these issues will be exacerbated as senior programme management and/or primary organisations are unable to monitor the accountability practices and to be assured that they are working successfully.

### 8.2.2 Establishing and delivering on commitments

#### (i) Selective disinterest in the principle and practices of accountability

A surprising finding of this project was the relatively low priority placed on accountability practices by some stakeholders. The dominant concern amongst stakeholders was project monitoring in the context of remote management. A few stakeholders, most notably HAP and about six INGOs, showed equal interest in accountability. Among the institutional donors interviewed, there was relatively minimal focus on accountability. One INGO stakeholder suggested that institutional donors (and other stakeholders that showed less focus on this issue) might be pessimistic as to how successfully the principle and practices can be met in remotely managed settings. This was echoed by the representative for a humanitarian coordination body in Afghanistan, who suggested that accountability, while good practice to promote, is not necessarily feasible in remotely managed settings.

*'Community participation is promoted during assessments. However, this is not always achievable (particularly in remotely managed projects where full representation of communities is not happening)... We have to focus our resources on life-saving assistance, rather than on accountability.'*

- Representative of a humanitarian coordinating body, supporting organisations in Afghanistan

One INGO stakeholder confirmed that, in terms of the subject matter for this research (project monitoring and accountability), project monitoring was certainly of greater interest to them. Other stakeholders, as discussed at the beginning of this section, were not familiar with the principle and practices of accountability and provided little evidence of a programme focus on this. This calls into question how much priority is given to remotely driven accountability practices and whether a lower priority reflects an assumption on the part of stakeholders that accountability is not practical or feasible in remotely managed, medium- to high-insecurity environments.

It may reflect a lack of creative thought at programme and organisational levels to consider how standard accountability practices, such as information-sharing, participation, complaint-handling and capacity development of staff, function within the context of remote management. Recommendations for good practice addressing this are detailed in Section 8.3.

#### (ii) Difficulties in promoting accountability with local/international partners and contractors

Remote management often uses local or international partners and contractors to implement projects in medium- to high-insecurity areas where the primary organisation has no access. While accountability might be a strong focus for the primary organisation, it cannot be assumed that it will be as such for the local or international partner or contractor. The primary organisation may well have established key commitments to be met and a plan for how these commitments will be implemented and measured. However, this cannot be imposed on the project-implementing agency. Organisations wanting to promote accountability should consider how to ensure that project implementing organisations factor this into their programming plans.

### 8.2.3 Establishing Staff competency

Accountability principles are complex, often challenging traditional approaches to humanitarian assistance as well as cultural norms. The prioritisation of accountability can often be viewed as part of wider organisational change processes as the thinking behind it develops and organisations promote input from beneficiaries in project design, planning, implementation and evaluation. For organisational change processes such as accountability to be a success, it is essential that local staff, partners and contractors understand the following:

- The purpose of and thinking behind the change process
  - *Why does the organisation wish to promote accountability and what impact will it have?*
- The principles of the change
  - *What is meant by the term 'accountability'? How is it understood within a humanitarian and development context? Why is being accountable important?*
- How the change can be implemented
  - *What practical steps need to be taken in order to develop a relationship of accountability with beneficiaries? What cultural or tribal factors will need to be considered or challenged to make it a success? How will accountability success be measured? How will the organisation learn from the process?*
- What they might expect to see or experience as a result
  - *What are the impacts of accountability? What should the organisation expect to see as a result of dedicated accountability practice?*

To ensure each of these considerations is addressed, it is important to clarify what is expected of staff in terms of meeting accountability commitments (eg knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes). It is important to clarify what behaviours and attitudes are not expected, outlining them in a staff code of conduct. The principles, knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes that an organisation promotes must be supported with thorough briefing and training for all staff. Sufficient resources, funding and personnel need to be allocated for this briefing and training to ensure that it is regularly and consistently facilitated.

Organisational change processes such as promoting and ensuring accountability flourish in environments where there is opportunity for continued reiteration of the principles of the change. They also flourish if there is regular interaction with senior staff members who have a solid understanding of the change processes and highlight the principles as an organisational priority. Where these are limited, issues arise in ensuring regular and consistent staff competency and capacity development within the context of remote management. For example, there is often a reliance on training workshops implemented away from the PIA (eg at a country or regional office). Fewer local staff can participate directly in such training and those staff are then responsible for understanding complex principles and practices and reiterating them to their local colleagues through refresher training. Organisations must consider the ways that change and capacity building are usually established and explore how these can be adapted to a remote management context, while engaging a majority of local personnel.

*'Without direct management and the day-to-day interaction of senior managers with project-implementing staff, how can organisations push through the ideas of accountability and other change management processes? How can the progress of accountability be measured and who is responsible for managing that? Who reviews and reports on the individual accountability practices? Who improves them when they are not successful? Who is responsible for adapting them to the specific context and culture into which they are being introduced?'*

- Accountability representative of an INGO, commenting on accountability practices for remotely managed programming in Somalia

As recounted above, the accountability representative of an INGO operating in Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan commented that the progress of prioritising and mainstreaming accountability in remotely managed programmes has been much more gradual than progress made in more secure, directly managed programmes.

The representative’s concern about responsibility for adaptation of accountability practice was echoed by the country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan, who pointed out that, despite the uniformity of accountability principles between countries and regions of project implementation, practices can vary significantly depending on what works in the context and culture of the project area.<sup>53</sup> This is not to say that accountability practices cannot work in medium- to high-insecurity, remotely managed project areas. Rather, there needs to be sufficient organisational or programmatic input and managerial encouragement to pilot different approaches to accountability and to establish what works best. Likewise, there needs to be greater input into staff competency and capacity development to ensure that accountability is truly understood and adopted by local staff or project-implementing agencies.

**8.2.4 Sharing information**

(i) What information should be made public in medium- to high-insecurity environments requiring remote management?

Local staff and/or project-implementing agencies often raise concerns regarding the sharing of information about an organisation or project in an environment of medium- to high-insecurity. Best accountability practice recommends that organisations ensure project beneficiaries and other stakeholders have access to timely, relevant and clear information about the organisation and its values. This information usually includes an update on project plans and financial summaries, as well as project outcomes. HAP recommends that organisations also share details of staff roles and responsibilities, contact information, complaints procedures, beneficiary selection criteria and examples of how past beneficiary participation practices have helped shape present project design and implementation.

In projects that are implemented in contexts experiencing complex insecurity and political instability, information-sharing is more difficult and can sometimes put local staff or project-implementing agencies at risk. Stakeholders raised queries over what information should be made publically available, as well as who should be responsible for deciding what information is shared and with whom. HAP highlighted an example from its experience of working with faith-based organisations to promote accountability practices:

*‘Faith-based organisations operating in Sri Lanka and northern Pakistan (where there was ongoing civil conflict), had to be careful to ensure that an organisational stance was undertaken regarding the type and amount of information that was shared with project stakeholders about the organisations. In such circumstances, it is critical that the staff ‘on the ground’ are aware of what information should be shared and what (if any) information should be held back from project stakeholders. The decision regarding what information to make public should not be left up to individual local staff members to decide, but should be made at organisation or programme level, in consultation with staff. Discussion should be undertaken to consider what information staff are comfortable sharing with stakeholders and what the answers to ‘sensitive questions’ might be etc. Local staff need to be trained and briefed on this and to feed into any decisions made.’*

- Anecdotal example provided by a representative from the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership, HAP

<sup>53</sup> This finding was supported by the accountability representative of an INGO operating in East Africa, who commented that while beneficiary reference groups (a community-based accountability and feedback committee) were successful in parts of northern Kenya and Pakistan, they had been piloted and did not prove a success in southern Afghanistan.



There are clearly examples of existing good practice here, particularly concerning the need for greater levels of decision-making involvement from programme and organisational management. It is also essential that local staff and project-implementing agencies are consulted when such decisions are made, to ensure that they are happy with the information that will be shared and with their involvement in sharing that information. In parts of Afghanistan, staff working with international humanitarian and development organisations withhold from their own families information about who they work for and what they are doing.<sup>54</sup> Should they be required to provide contact details to project stakeholders, there may be concern about how their involvement with international organisations might be perceived locally and that this information might reach their families. It is therefore essential that they are consulted and they agree upon designated information-sharing plans.

**(ii) How can information be shared with project beneficiaries and other stakeholders in a safe forum?**

Traditional methods of information-sharing with beneficiaries and other stakeholders have often included public noticeboards, leaflets and public meetings. In remotely managed project environments of medium- to high-insecurity, it is not always possible to use such media. Where this insecurity is the result of ongoing conflict or political instability, the association with an international organisation may endanger beneficiaries. Tearfund has been able to use project noticeboards and beneficiary information leaflets in other humanitarian programmes, including the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia, yet these have not been accessible for project beneficiaries in insecure areas of Afghanistan. While there has been agreement by Tearfund staff at organisational, programmatic and field levels on the information that should be shared with beneficiaries and other stakeholders about Tearfund and its projects, local staff continue to pilot different methods of sharing that information and are yet to find an ideal solution. This could also be the case with community meetings, where community members, beneficiaries or local staff and/or project-implementing agencies might feel endangered or exposed.

*'Women's participation and feedback is not actively sought. A reliance on male staff, as opposed to female staff, means that it is difficult for implementing partners and our own staff to meet with women and to ensure their participation. The project relies on men passing information onto their female household members.'*

- Country director of an INGO operating remotely managed programmes through local partners in Afghanistan

**8.2.5 Participation**

Beneficiary participation relies on close levels of interaction between project-implementing organisations and beneficiaries. This close interaction builds trust between the two parties, which is particularly important in relational cultures. Being able to invest time in this is therefore essential. Information-sharing meetings, household surveying, feedback and consultation meetings, project review focus group discussions, as well as community-based committees, are all participatory tools that can be used with beneficiaries. However, as discussed in Section 8.2.4, beneficiaries in medium- to high-insecurity environments may not feel safe using these tools, fearing that it exposes them to greater levels of scrutiny by their peers. Additionally, access by even local staff and implementing agencies to PIAs can often be more restricted than for other directly managed projects which experience lower levels of insecurity. This can reduce the interaction they have with project beneficiaries, therefore reducing the opportunity for participation and building trust.

<sup>54</sup> This was cited by two of the INGOs interviewed as part of the research. Other examples were raised by stakeholders of staff members who told their families that they were working as taxi drivers or with other local organisations, to avoid revealing that they worked for an international organisation.

As discussed in Section 8.2.1, INGOs have experienced reduced potential for community participation as a direct result of remote management. In one example, a project was implemented entirely by the community in two districts of Kabul. Local staff were not able to visit PIAs and were completely unable to interact with and engage the participation of beneficiaries. Beneficiaries in this programme were not able to advise or offer feedback on the plans for, progress, quality and impact of the project.

Participatory approaches to programming are also often counter-cultural. Historically, organisations have set the plans for projects and have implemented them according to their own design process. There has been limited engagement with beneficiaries in developing

*'We have promoted a change in mentality – historically we would present ourselves to beneficiaries as 'coming to do or bring this product'. A shift has been made now to ask communities and project stakeholders what they would like (within the boundaries of what we are able to do).'*

- Country director for an INGO operating in Afghanistan

project plans outside of initial needs and capacity assessments. Challenging this historical approach to programming with local staff can be difficult. Local staff can assume a 'we know best' policy, limiting dialogue and participatory engagement with beneficiaries, particularly with children, minority and disabled groups or with women.

Where local staff or project-implementing agencies do engage with beneficiary groups and communities, it is often not a truly representative group that they are able to engage with. Children, disabled groups, ethnic minorities and women can be excluded from participating. This is not always deliberate. In medium- to high-insecurity areas, it may not be possible for female staff to be recruited as readily as their male counterparts, or females may be restricted in their movements

to PIAs due to heightened security risks facing them.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, sometimes because of insecurity, PIAs either cannot be accessed or can only be accessed for short periods, limiting the level of participation with all beneficiary groups that is achievable. (Organisations may only have sufficient time to meet with community committees or male representatives from communities may have to travel outside PIAs to meet with personnel remotely.)

Unless senior programme or organisational staff have a strong grasp of the principles of participation and are able to advise on context-specific approaches, there is a risk in remote management that participation will be seen as too complex and will not be prioritised by local staff or project-implementing agencies.

**8.2.6 Beneficiary feedback and complaints handling**

The primary issues highlighted in relation to beneficiary feedback and complaints handling relate to concerns over the complexities involved in developing successful mechanisms for them. HAP demonstrated this well in referring to problems experienced with feedback and complaints-handling mechanisms for two humanitarian organisations, one operating in Pakistan and the other in Sudan. The organisation working with communities in Pakistan established a feedback box at key locations within the PIAs. Due to ongoing insecurity in those areas and military action affecting communities, community members had become more distrustful and fearful of government, military and other institutions. Beneficiaries did not use the feedback boxes, fearing repercussions of using a mechanism that they felt exposed them. As a result, the humanitarian organisation collected little feedback.

<sup>55</sup> It was the finding of the UN OCHA-endorsed publication, *To Stay and Deliver*, that male and female staff members face different risks. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, female staff members are at high risk of sexual assault. It was noted by humanitarian and development agencies there that heightened security measures are in place for female staff (sometimes preventing them from going anywhere alone, even ten metres away). This security situation would have a serious impact on the potential to promote participation with female beneficiaries as it limits the direct interaction that female staff can have with them.

The organisation operating in Sudan had failed to establish a fair, transparent, public feedback and complaints-handling system. Instead, it was expected that any feedback or complaints would be verbally presented by beneficiaries and other stakeholders to local staff. However, stakeholders were not comfortable with this. So their complaints and feedback were only solicited during visits by senior programme (often expatriate) staff to project offices. This put pressure on all staff when visiting project communities because stakeholders felt that their concerns had not been heard systematically, which sometimes led to anger or violence.

*'They felt that their complaints would not be heard or received well by local staff members.'*  
- Representative from HAP, highlighting the example from a humanitarian agency operating in Sudan

This may well be influenced by the specific context or culture in the PIAs. However, it presents a significant issue for remote management if there is a trend whereby beneficiaries feel uncomfortable raising complaints concerning the project and/or staff and directing them to local staff. In most remotely managed programme approaches, there is no opportunity for international staff to meet with beneficiaries, particularly in PIAs. This means there is a risk that complaints will not be raised and adequate feedback systems will not be implemented or used by beneficiaries.

The accountability representative of an INGO operating in East Africa noted that the feedback received most commonly from beneficiaries referred only to requests for further assistance, rather than specific feedback or complaints related to the project being implemented. This finding was supported by the country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan, where feedback and review workshops had been developed, engaging beneficiaries and soliciting their response to project implementation, progress, quality, impact and staff. While the feedback and review workshops had been successful, the INGO had not received a significant number of concerns or complaints.

*'A feedback mechanism for project stakeholders (including beneficiaries and community members) is in place, though we are yet to receive any complaints.'*  
- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan (also experienced by two other INGOs in Afghanistan)

Part of the context for this is that it is not culturally appropriate in Afghanistan to complain about assistance provided and there can be a fear that by raising complaints about project interventions or personnel, the support will be discontinued. Tearfund observed, however, that beneficiaries might be more willing to raise complaints if it was not necessary to direct those complaints to the very staff that are involved (eg local staff and implementing agencies). Expecting honest, critical feedback when it is directed at the person(s) that you might be criticising is not realistic within the Afghan context where this has been trialled. External bodies, be they senior programme or primary organisation personnel, or external monitors and evaluators, are more likely to be approached with criticisms and complaints from beneficiaries.

*'Few accounts of critical feedback are reported, though this is possibly a reflection of Afghan cultural social norms.'*  
- Excerpt from the External baseline assessment of Tearfund's remote monitoring and accountability practices in Kandahar

This issue requires creative consideration and is addressed in the following section on good practice.

### 8.2.7 Learning and continual improvement

One of the issues with not following through on promoting accountability with local project-implementing staff and project stakeholders is that organisations will fail to learn from the very people that they are trying to help. So they will miss valuable opportunities to continue improving the quality and impact of the assistance provided.

This problem is exacerbated where responsibility for accountability practices rests primarily with project-implementing staff and/or other agencies. They must be supported by senior programme and/or organisational management to ensure that learning related to accountability practices (whether successful or not) is incorporated into ongoing systems to improve practices. When these senior personnel are located away from local project staff, creative ways of doing this (including intentional accountability review meetings) must be prioritised.

While this is not impossible in remotely managed projects, research stakeholders did experience issues in terms of learning from the accountability practices being implemented remotely. As highlighted in Section 8.2.1, there are fewer opportunities for senior programme and/or primary organisation personnel to meet and interact with local project staff and implementing agencies. Likewise, there are often no opportunities for those personnel to meet with project beneficiaries. Unable to observe and review firsthand the successes, failures and outcomes of accountability practices, senior programme personnel and/or primary organisations rely on the updates and reports received on accountability practices. However, as seen in Section 8.2.1, the frequency and reliability of local accountability reporting can be poor.

There is another contributing factor: without the engagement and follow-up of senior programme and/or primary organisation management to support the prioritisation of accountability, there is no impetus for local staff and implementing agencies to review accountability practices regularly. (This may differ where there is also a staff member based at the project location with responsibility for accountability.) This was a finding in Tearfund's practices in Afghanistan:

#### **Beneficiary accountability prioritisation within senior management**

*In 2009, a dedicated beneficiary accountability adviser was recruited to support the implementation and review of accountability practices across Tearfund's humanitarian programme in Afghanistan. This post ended in 2009, after which there was limited follow-up on the progress of the implemented practices. In 2010, when a monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) officer was recruited, a baseline assessment of those practices was undertaken, highlighting that accountability practices had regressed and required reprioritisation. With the MEAL officer in place, there has since been dedicated capacity to provide training on accountability practices and to monitor closely the progress of those practices, suggesting improvements based on the learning collated. This remains a strong focus of this individual, working with local project managers in both directly and remotely managed project locations. Accountability has also featured more prevalently in project evaluations, providing another opportunity to assess the progress of the individual practices. While this process is developing, there is an opportunity for the MEAL officer to visit project offices and to liaise with project staff.*

- Tearfund, Afghanistan

Where it is not possible in other remote management structures for senior management and/or primary organisations to have such interaction with staff and beneficiaries, there is a strong likelihood that opportunities to learn from and continue improving accountability practice will be de-prioritised in favour of other competing tasks.

### 8.3 Existing and recommended good practice (remote beneficiary accountability)

Table 2 contains a summary of the recommendations addressing the issues raised in Section 8.2. These have been influenced by the good practice already available in the HAP Standard, as well as other good practice guidelines supporting accountability and existing practices demonstrated by stakeholders.<sup>56</sup> While this good practice enhances remote accountability, there is nothing uniquely innovative about it. It pre-dates this research and will have been propounded by good practice organisations, forming the basis for the accountability practices that they have piloted. To present an innovative approach to accountability, we need therefore to review good practices through the lens of remote management, adapting and modelling them to ensure that a sustainable approach to accountability can be taken forward for remotely managed projects.

HAP supports this review of standard accountability practice within the wider context of remote management. It warns organisations against ignoring or disestablishing accountability practices in remotely managed, medium- to high-insecurity environments, while urging them to ensure that transparent and systematic risk management processes are undertaken to promote the safety and security of both staff and project stakeholders:

*'Agencies can no longer use the context of insecurity as an excuse to avoid accountability practice. It is not a blanket excuse. Accountability needs to be properly embedded in organisational values and procedures, included in risk management strategies, and taken on at managerial levels.'*

- Representative of the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership

What follows is a review of a selection of the good practices recommended. These will be reviewed within the context of remote management, resulting in practical good practice recommendations to support accountability within remotely managed projects in medium- to high-insecurity locations.

**Table 2:** Summary checklist for remote beneficiary accountability good practices

	Beneficiary accountability good practice recommendation	Check?
<b>1</b>	<b>Establishing and delivering on commitments (organisation-wide)</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a beneficiary accountability focal person at the primary organisation/programme head office</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a beneficiary accountability focal person at the local project office</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure sufficient time and preparation is allocated to develop a contextually appropriate beneficiary accountability approach for the remotely managed project</li> </ul>	
<b>2</b>	<b>Staff competency</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a capacity development programme to promote beneficiary accountability specific to the remote management context</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure adequate follow-up is undertaken after training (including post-training action plans)</li> <li>Ensure that organisational values and international good practice standards are regularly reinforced with local staff and/or implementing agencies</li> </ul>	
<b>3</b>	<b>Sharing information</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that the content of information shared with beneficiaries about project activities is consulted upon and agreed between senior programme and/or organisational management and/or implementing agencies</li> <li>Ensure that safe, practical and accessible means of sharing information are consulted upon and agreed between local staff and/or implementing agencies and beneficiaries and other stakeholders</li> </ul>	

<sup>56</sup> These include Tearfund's guidelines on accountability, taken from our *Quality Standards in Emergency Response Field Guide* (<http://tilz.tearfund.org/Topics/Disasters/Disaster+management+good+practice/Disaster+Management+Good+Practice.htm>), as well as Mango's *Guidelines on Financial Accountability to Beneficiaries*: [www.whocounts.org](http://www.whocounts.org).

	<b>Beneficiary accountability good practice recommendation</b>	<b>Check?</b>
4	<b>Participation</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop additional structures within the community to promote beneficiary participation, ensuring that there are opportunities for these structures to interact with project-implementing organisations</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider whether it is practical and appropriate to meet with beneficiaries outside a project implementation area</li> </ul>	
5	<b>Beneficiary feedback and complaints handling</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that feedback and complaints mechanisms are agreed in consultation with the local community in the PIA</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that local staff and/or implementing agency personnel are given thorough training in the principles supporting beneficiary feedback and complaints mechanisms, which are reinforced through regular refresher training, catch-ups and mentoring</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a reporting system that documents the details of individual beneficiary feedback and complaints</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure that beneficiary feedback reporting system is supported by third party verification (eg visits by senior national personnel; peer monitoring by other agencies; meetings at a secure location between beneficiary representatives and senior expatriate personnel)</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate beneficiary feedback questions into standard monitoring, review, and evaluation surveys and templates</li> </ul>	
6	<b>Learning and continual improvement</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use ongoing project monitoring and evaluation tools and stakeholders to review individual beneficiary accountability practices and to document the learning that can be used to improve them</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure regular opportunities for local staff and/or implementing agencies to present findings related to beneficiary accountability practice (eg methods that work particularly well) to senior programme management and/or primary organisation personnel</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure regular opportunities for local staff and/or implementing agencies to review beneficiary accountability approaches with beneficiaries, communities and other stakeholders</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instigate a beneficiary accountability working group at a regional and/or country level. Ensure that there is local staff representation within this group</li> </ul>	

### 8.3.1 Establishing and delivering on commitments

For accountability practices to be successful, it is imperative that there is sufficient organisational and managerial support, promoting it and following up on its progress. In directly managed projects, where senior programme and/or organisational personnel visit more regularly, it is easier to ensure a high level of support. However, in remotely managed projects, there is far less interaction between local staff and senior programme and/or organisational personnel, which poses difficulties in ensuring the necessary support.

- (i) Establish a beneficiary accountability focal person at both the primary organisation/programme head office, and the local project office

It is essential to have a dedicated focus on accountability practice across all levels of programme and project management. As discussed in Section 8.2.7, without dedicated capacity supporting the roll-out and monitoring of accountability practices in project locations, Tearfund experienced a regression of good practice.<sup>57</sup> INGOs working in Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan commented that it had been essential to recruit accountability focal persons or to assign such responsibility to staff members showing an interest in and capacity to promote accountability (eg ‘accountability leaders’).

<sup>57</sup> This capacity is sometimes also called a Community Liaison, taking away the distrust issue in some countries that a staff member has been hired specifically to check up on their colleagues by talking with beneficiaries.

In remotely managed settings, these staff ensure that organisational commitments to accountability are met. They liaise with programme management and develop contextually appropriate plans for accountability practices. They participate in training workshops focused on developing, reviewing and learning from accountability practices. With the support and input from senior programme and/or organisational management, they have responsibility for ensuring that local peers are also trained in the context-specific practices that they develop for the project location, providing reinforcement of that training on a regular basis.<sup>58</sup> Their main focus is on promoting the relationship between beneficiaries and the organisation, not on direct project implementation. In this way, they are able to provide an objective, external point of contact for beneficiaries. They should have the requisite authority to carry out their duties and to bring about qualitative change.

*'Local and national staff are recruited as beneficiary accountability officers, at project level, to support the roll-out and promotion of accountability systems across each project. Though these persons will have dedicated focus and capacity for implementing accountability practices, they will be supported by all other project staff. They will be trained and will provide training to other local project staff. Programme managers will also be trained in accountability practice so that they can support and promote it across the programme.'*

- Representative of an INGO operating remotely managed programmes in Somalia

Programme and/or primary organisation accountability focal persons provide the additional capacity at a managerial level to support accountability practice. They provide a direct source of contact for local accountability focal persons. Weekly catch-ups (via phone or Skype) and monthly to quarterly face-to-face catch-ups and training ensure managerial buy-in and promotion of the accountability project model. People in this role can engage with other agencies in researching and developing best practice, liaising with their local counterpart to ensure that it is practical and contextually appropriate.

(ii) Ensure sufficient time and preparation is allocated to develop a contextually appropriate beneficiary accountability approach for the remotely managed project

For accountability practices to be successful, organisations need to invest in adequate assessments of factors relating to the environment, beneficiary community, project staff and project. They should also pilot practices and learning from what works well and what could have worked better to improve and develop future practices.

*'A programme accountability framework self-assessment tool has been developed, in consultation with the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership. This tool allows programme staff to assess for themselves their own capacity in terms of the minimum accountability standards – what is already in place? What are the gaps? What are the training needs?'*

- Representative of an INGO operating remotely managed programmes in Somalia

Organisations should utilise accountability focal persons (at different levels) to undertake a project-specific baseline assessment of accountability practice. This could take the form of an accountability self-assessment. It is important that beneficiary communities and different levels of staff (local, regional, programme management and organisational) engage in this assessment. It should identify gaps (training, support systems, reporting structures, learning processes), and develop a plan to address those gaps at programme and project level. For remotely managed projects, it is important that thorough reporting structures on accountability practices are included as an outcome of the assessment, as well as a training schedule for local

<sup>58</sup> When first initiating accountability practices in a remotely managed project, training for local staff and/or partners should ideally be undertaken on a monthly basis. This regularity enables continual reinforcement of the principles of accountability, as well as opportunities to review the progress and suitability of individual practices. It provides a forum for discussion between local project-implementing personnel, whereby accountability practices can be further developed and contextualised. Feedback from this should be circulated to senior management who in turn should support the contextualisation of practices.

staff. Risk analysis for the proposed accountability practices should also be undertaken, leading to the piloting and development of practices that both project-implementing staff and beneficiaries feel secure and comfortable with.

This process should not be viewed as a stand alone event. Section 8.2. emphasised that accountability practices implemented in medium- to high-insecurity remotely managed project locations are often unsuccessful. It is imperative with remotely managed projects that time and capacity is allocated to review and refine the piloted practices.

As with remote monitoring, accountability cannot be an ‘add-on’ to programming. It must be suitably embedded across organisational and programmatic procedures and values. In remotely managed projects there needs to be an assurance by programme management that processes and practices will be followed up. Local staff and partners need to themselves be held to account for the relationship and practices that they develop with beneficiaries. This research therefore recommends the importance of adopting suitable reporting mechanisms to ensure that additional information related to accountability is captured.

### 8.3.2 Staff Competency

The immediate priority in securing remote accountability practices is to build staff competency through regular training. International and country-level training workshops in standard accountability good practice are already available, facilitated through agencies including HAP and CWS-P/A. These workshops often use training-of-trainers approaches, whereby participants return to their countries or regions to re-facilitate training locally. Five of the INGOs interviewed for this report also provided internal accountability training events.

The focus here, as highlighted in the remarks below from one stakeholder, is to review the standard training provided on accountability and to ensure that the conditions for remote management are incorporated within that training:

*‘Organisations need to adapt their training to the remote management context. The “normal” accountability training that is given to staff will not touch on all the distinctive challenges of remote management. In general there is a danger that because remote management is a far from normal operating situation, staff will too readily assume that normal systems are irrelevant and not look for creative ways of accomplishing those systems’ goals. For example, in locations where it is unsafe to post project information in written form, staff may assume that they have been ‘let off the hook’ in terms of giving beneficiaries information about a project. We should ensure that their training involves brainstorming alternatives that accomplish the same goal as a project noticeboard.’*

- Representative for an INGO operating and supporting programmes in Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan

- (i) Develop a capacity development programme to promote beneficiary accountability specific to the remote management context

Information-sharing and participatory approaches to accountability (which ensure opportunities for regular feedback and confidential complaints handling) need to be incorporated in a training programme for local staff and partners. While there is ample standard good practice already available, this good practice needs to be reviewed by programme and/or organisational management and incorporated into training materials that specifically support the implementation of accountability practices targeted at remote management. Organisation and programme management must engage in and lead this process. An example of remote management-specific accountability training in Somalia is given on the following page.

In practical terms, it might involve producing a training workshop that presents the principles behind accountability (e.g. What does it refer to? Why is it important? What will be the



impact?) It could then introduce the key areas of focus for implementation (e.g. sharing information, participation, beneficiary feedback and complaints handling, and learning and continual improvement). Each of these areas should be presented in terms of what they aim to achieve, with examples provided of potential methodologies. Time should then be given to considering some of the bigger challenges of promoting accountability in medium- to high-insecurity environments, particularly those that are managed remotely, and to brainstorming practical ways that these challenges might be overcome. This practical, interactive brainstorming process should be a strong focus for those facilitators hosting the workshop. Local staff, accountability focal persons and programme management should all feed into this process and should solicit the input of beneficiaries themselves to ensure that the ideas reflect what is safe and practical for them.

This workshop should be provided at the outset of any remotely managed project. The practices that are brainstormed as an outcome of the workshop should be piloted with beneficiaries as the project is implemented. Following this, regular opportunities for follow-up training, in which the brainstormed practices can be reviewed and adjusted, should be created. The local accountability focal person should be responsible for coordinating this training, in close liaison with their programme management counterpart. They should also remain engaged in national and international-level capacity building initiatives to ensure that they can feed such initiatives into their ongoing, local-level training plan.

#### (ii) Ensure adequate follow up is undertaken after training

Following a training workshop, a plan of follow-up actions should be developed identifying specific actions that can be taken forward to implement project-level accountability. Owners, deadlines and opportunities for review should be included in this action plan and it should be communicated to all local staff or partner personnel. It should also be shared with the programme management and/or primary organisation for review and approval. They should ensure that they familiarise themselves with the actions and deadlines and follow up to review progress, engaging with local-level reviews of practice in order to document the learning arising from the successes and failures of the approach.

#### **Beneficiary accountability training plan for remotely managed projects: Somalia**

*Extensive focus is given to staff training needs, in order to build their capacity and competency and to generate accountability-promoting attitudes. We are currently in the process of developing a two-day training curriculum that will be facilitated in Nairobi, Kenya. This workshop is designed to train local 'beneficiary accountability officers' (BAOs). The expectation is that they will return to Somalia and in turn train their project colleagues in accountability principles. A training workshop has also been developed for programme managerial staff, in recognition that in order to fully roll-out accountability systems, you need the backing and support of programme management. This workshop will also be facilitated in Nairobi, Kenya.*

*After training workshops have been facilitated, community-level interaction and consultation is initiated. BAOs and other local staff visit project communities and conduct focus group discussions (FGDs) with community representatives. (Separate meetings with men, women and children are conducted.) The purpose of the discussions is to provide communities with a forum to identify their preferred mechanisms for information provision, consultation, participation, feedback and monitoring / evaluation. (Training in facilitating FGDs is provided to local staff. Tools for facilitating FGDs are also provided). The purpose of the FGDs is to ensure that the accountability practices that are developed fully reflect the needs and requirements of the communities, in order to promote their effectiveness and sustainability, particularly in a remotely managed, insecure environment. This process enables programme management staff to understand the accountability needs and context in the community, region and/or country. This is useful particularly for remotely based staff who may not understand or be familiar with this context.*

Global humanitarian accountability adviser for an INGO operating programmes in Somalia

- (iii) Ensure that organisational values and international good practice standards are regularly reinforced with local staff and/or implementing agencies

The principles supporting accountability are commonly evident in organisational values and ethos, as well as in international good practice standards.<sup>59</sup> It is recommended that these values and standards be reiterated with local staff and partners to ensure that an understanding of the principles of accountability is reinforced. Those local staff and partners will be the face of the organisation presented to beneficiaries. It is important that sufficient investment is made to ensure that they reflect the values and standards required for the assistance provided (see Section 7.2.5).

### 8.3.3 Sharing information

Insecurity presents huge challenges for information-sharing, especially in a context where organisations or the communities they serve are potential targets for violence. Section 8.2.4 noted that beneficiaries and community members often do not feel safe or comfortable attending meetings arranged by international organisations, or accessing public notice boards or leaflets developed by them. This begs the question, how does the standard information released by organisations differ in a remotely managed conflict context and what techniques can be used to promote it safely?

- (i) Senior programme and/or organisational management should consult with local staff and/or implementing agencies to agree upon the content of information that is shared with beneficiaries

HAP highlighted three examples of issues that had been experienced in implementing accountability practices, as a result of insufficient consultation and agreement with local staff. In medium- to high-insecurity environments, it is important to discuss and agree between local staff and programme management what information is going to be shared with project stakeholders. Standard good practice dictates the following guidelines for information-sharing with beneficiaries. These guidelines must be reviewed within the context of greater insecurity. It is likely that the content related to each guideline will need to be adjusted to the insecure context.

For example, FBOs operating in conflict-prone environments, where that conflict is related to or exacerbated by religious disputes or extremism, need to consider the extent to which they share information about their organisational background. Clashes between Islamic and Christian groups in Nigeria might mean that FBOs operating in conflict-affected areas choose to withhold details of their Islamic or Christian background. Similar issues have been experienced by humanitarian and development organisations (with faith-based foundations) operating in Afghanistan, Somalia and Sudan. Any decisions regarding the information that is shared about the organisation's background or faith-based foundations have to be made by the organisations, in consultation with the staff on the ground.

*Organisations shall share with beneficiaries and other stakeholders information appropriate to their needs, including:*

- 1. Its background and contact details*
- 2. Its accountability framework, staff code of conduct and complaints procedure*
- 3. Its goals and project objectives, expected results with the time frame, and a financial summary, as well as summaries of evaluations and progress reports*
- 4. Staff roles and responsibilities*
- 5. Criteria for selecting target groups and deliverables*
- 6. How input from participation activities has contributed to decisions*

- The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, p.15

<sup>59</sup> Including, among others, the *Red Cross Code of Conduct*, the *SPHERE Standards*, and *The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management*.

A second example relates to information that is shared with stakeholders regarding local staff roles, responsibilities and contact details. Organisations must consult with local staff and partners to understand whether it is safe and appropriate for their names and contact details to be shared with beneficiaries. If there is a danger that this information might be passed on to other parties that intend to harm staff, it is not appropriate to share the details. Having a standard office contact number as opposed to individual contact details for staff may help to avert this threat.

Research stakeholders did not highlight sharing information about individual projects as being particularly hazardous. However, some concern was raised regarding project financial information. In already insecure environments, some INGOs commented that sharing this information could present a hazard, particularly if it is contentious or not understood by beneficiaries and other stakeholders. It is important that organisations do their best to present information to beneficiaries in a way that is accessible to them and that further explanation is provided where necessary. However, as with other areas of shared information, it is critical that local staff and partners engage in the decision-making process.

Sharing beneficiary-selection criteria is fairly low risk. However, publicising lists of selected beneficiaries may put those persons in danger if they are known to be benefiting from a project, particularly if it is known to be implemented by an international organisation. Listing names and locations may lead to community disputes or targeted violence against beneficiaries. It is, therefore, important not only to consult with local staff and partners, but with beneficiaries themselves to agree upon the extent to which this information is shared.

- (ii) Local staff and/or implementing agencies should consult with beneficiaries and other stakeholders in order to agree safe, practical, and accessible means by which information should be shared with them

Ensuring organisations are creative in their approaches to information-sharing is not a requirement specific to remote management. In the majority of contexts, illiteracy is a far greater issue for beneficiary communities than insecurity, and so organisations cannot rely on standard noticeboards, information leaflets and community meetings to publicise information about themselves and their projects. Ideas for different media need to be brainstormed at a local level, between local staff or project-implementing agencies and beneficiaries.

An INGO operating in Afghanistan uses promotional videos about its work and the organisation as a means of introduction in project communities. Video documentaries of project progress are produced throughout project implementation and are presented to communities at the close of the project as part of 'celebrating success' events. This type of media appeals to literate as well as illiterate beneficiary groups. It presents information in an interesting and captivating way. Organisations wanting to replicate this practice should consider, however, how videos will be presented (particularly in communities where there may be no access to electricity or video-screening devices), how many people will be viewing the video at any one time, and how accessible it is to deaf and blind people. Other organisations have also invested in radio messaging to support information-sharing practices. These have been a huge success for one organisation, Internews, with communities along the Chad-Sudan border.<sup>60</sup> Similar consideration should be given to engaging deaf beneficiaries, as well as those who do not have access to radios.

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<sup>60</sup> The WASH Cluster Accountability Project, *WASH accountability resources: ask, listen, communicate* (2009).

Other INGOs use existing structures within the community to share information (eg Community Development Councils, village elder or tribal leader meetings). This is a common means by which organisations are able to access communities and to feed information to them. Organisations must consider how women and children’s information needs are also met (eg at schools, women’s groups etc).

Information-sharing leaflets, when used, do not have to include words. One INGO developed a successful pictorial brochure outlining how beneficiaries should expect staff to behave<sup>61</sup>:

*“Concern in Ethiopia has produced a pictorial booklet that provides communities with information on what they can expect from Concern staff. This includes pictures related to bribery and corruption and staff attitudes as well as sexual harassment and bullying. Each page of the booklet portrays the unacceptable behaviours in greyscale and marked with a cross and the acceptable behaviours in colour and marked with a tick”.*

Information-sharing practices will succeed or fail depending on how well they are consulted upon and agreed with the people they aim to empower. Beneficiaries must be consulted and given opportunities to suggest how they would like to receive information about the organisation and project. Methods should be safe, practical and accessible for different people groups (men, women, boys, girls, disabled people, ethnic minorities). To ensure that the selected practices meet the needs of these groups, representatives from all of them should be consulted.

### 8.3.4 Participation

- (i) Develop additional structures within the community to promote beneficiary participation, ensuring that there are opportunities for these structures to interact with project-implementing organisations

In directly managed programmes, implemented in relatively secure environments, it is standard practice not only to engage with existing community support structures (eg CBOs, tribal committees and village elder groups), but to also develop complementary structures that can promote and engage direct participation from beneficiaries. Beneficiary reference groups (BRGs) have been developed and piloted by Tearfund in northern Kenya and Pakistan.<sup>62</sup> Accountability teams have been implemented by one INGO to support projects in Afghanistan, while beneficiary and community oversight committees were established by Tearfund to support remotely managed projects in Beida, Darfur, and to ensure that beneficiaries were able to influence directly and participate in project design, implementation and review. These three structures have one thing in common: beneficiaries and community members are integral to the structures, and their participation is successfully engaged.

Developing such structures provides a definite forum in which participation can be promoted. Tearfund’s practice in Darfur highlights that this is possible even in remotely managed settings. Section 7.2.12 observed that several INGOs managing projects in Afghanistan remotely have piloted beneficiary- and community-based approaches to project monitoring and review. Individuals from PIAs have been trained in aspects of project implementation, monitoring and review and act as the ‘eyes and ears’ of the implementing organisation. While it has been common practice to select non-beneficiaries (eg community members or other project stakeholders), there is potential to expand these processes to include beneficiaries

<sup>61</sup> The WASH Cluster Accountability Project, “WASH Accountability Resources: Ask, Listen, Communicate” (2009): pg. 12. This booklet is also available on the HAP website, as an example of good practice, along with other similar material.

<sup>62</sup> A case study on Tearfund’s BRG approach is available on the HAP website (March 2012): <http://www.hapinternational.org/pool/files/tearfund-north-kenya-programme-increasing-levels-of-participation.pdf>.

and by doing so to promote their participation and input into project design, implementation and review. It will be important to ensure regular opportunities for interaction between local staff and such beneficiary groups. Tearfund's practice in Darfur allowed for personnel to visit PIAs twice-weekly, providing an obvious opportunity for interaction.<sup>63</sup>

#### Beneficiary and community oversight committee, Darfur

*In Beida, West Darfur, Tearfund's humanitarian programme team established various community-based structures to support the implementation and review of its projects. All of the projects implemented in this location used a remote management approach. Tearfund personnel were based in Geneina, a neighbouring region, and would visit the PIAs twice-weekly. To support the implementation and monitoring of projects, a beneficiary and community oversight committee was established. This included members of the beneficiary population, as well as representatives from the wider communities in which the projects were implemented. Tearfund personnel would meet with the beneficiary and community oversight committees during their visits to the PIAs. Tearfund also enabled exchange visits between PIAs for beneficiary and community representatives. This provided the opportunity for beneficiaries and community representatives to share and exchange views and ideas related to project progress and quality. It presented an opportunity for participation in the wider project. Feedback related to project progress and quality was relayed to Tearfund staff, who addressed any concerns or issues with project implementation, technical quality and impact.*

- Tearfund, Darfur

#### (ii) Consider whether it is practical and appropriate to meet with beneficiaries outside of a project implementation area

A representative from UN OCHA's northern office in Afghanistan commented that it is often difficult within emergency relief programming to ensure the participation of beneficiaries in highly insecure environments. UN OCHA supports emergency relief programming in 55 different districts of northern Afghanistan. Of those, 11 experience a substantial security threat and four experience the highest-level security threat. In the latter districts, access to PIAs and district centres is not possible; all assessments and assistance are undertaken remotely. In the former 11 districts, access to district centres is possible, though PIAs remain 'no-go' areas. Across all 11 districts, project-implementing agencies have been encouraged to ensure that beneficiary and community representatives travel outside PIAs to meet local staff. Though this situation is far from ideal in terms of accountability practice, effort has been made to ensure that there are opportunities to meet with and engage participation of beneficiaries in programming.

However, such modes of promoting participation often exclude significant portions of beneficiary communities. In parts of Afghanistan, it is impossible for women to travel outside their own communities. For disabled groups as well, remotely based participation meetings present a challenge. Likewise, in parts of Darfur, it is dangerous for men to travel outside IDP camps. The beneficiaries who are able to meet with project staff remotely are therefore not always truly representative of the wider beneficiary group. The research did not find any examples that buck this trend and present a better model of working. There is certainly further work to be done in developing adequate participation models for highly insecure remote management.

<sup>63</sup> Another INGO, working through community facilitators in Kabul, provided opportunity for interaction at a location away from PIAs on a bi-weekly basis, while community mobilisers, recruited by an INGO working in southern Afghanistan, met with local personnel on a bi-weekly to-monthly basis.

**8.3.5 Beneficiary feedback and complaints handling**

- (i) Ensure that feedback and complaints mechanisms are agreed in consultation with the local community in the project implementation area

The success and failure of beneficiary feedback and complaints mechanisms rest on the extent to which beneficiaries feel comfortable and safe using them. This is especially the case in PIAs of medium- to high-insecurity. Section 8.2.4 gave examples where beneficiary and community groups did not feel safe accessing beneficiary feedback boxes in parts of Pakistan, while beneficiaries of an INGO in Sudan were not confident speaking to local staff about their concerns or complaints.

*'We... randomly telephone beneficiaries to verify information provided by partner agencies... We are also considering providing a hotline number that beneficiaries can call to complain or give feedback directly to us.'*

- Representative of an INGO operating in Somalia

Feedback and complaint mechanisms that rely on beneficiaries leaving their households and/or communities will impede disabled groups (and sometimes other groups) from accessing them as they may have less access outside the household and/or community. Without engaging with local schools and child-friendly spaces, it may be challenging to engage feedback and complaints from children and, where feedback is possible, it may be influenced by other adults in positions of authority (eg parents, guardians or teachers).

In remotely managed, medium- to high-insecurity project environments, it is imperative, therefore, that individual groups of beneficiaries (men, women, boys, girls, disabled groups, ethnic minority groups) are consulted at the outset of a project intervention to ascertain how they would choose to feed back comments or complaints about the project, organisation or staff, considering particularly the conflict, political or religious context. It is unlikely that the feedback and complaints mechanisms selected by these different groups will be the same and organisations must demonstrate flexibility and creativity in responding with the preferred mechanisms.<sup>64</sup> It is also necessary, however, to balance the beneficiary and community preference with what is practical and safe for them and for staff.

- (ii) Ensure that local staff and/or implementing agency personnel are given thorough training in the principles supporting beneficiary feedback and complaints mechanisms, which are reinforced through regular refresher training, catch-ups and mentoring

These practices are often complex and can challenge the culture into which they are introduced. Beneficiaries and local staff may feel discomfort about raising and handling complaints. It is important to ensure that thorough explanation is provided to both beneficiaries and local staff as to why soliciting and responding to feedback and complaints are important. In remotely managed settings, senior programme and/or primary organisation personnel should ensure that practical, interactive training is provided to local staff on the principles of beneficiary feedback and complaints handling. Local accountability focal persons can participate directly in remotely based training workshops (eg at a regional or country office) and can re-facilitate this training to local peers. Training should provide opportunities to brainstorm with those staff culturally and contextually appropriate means for soliciting feedback and complaints. It should be followed by an action plan, indicating how

<sup>64</sup> Staff or project-implementing partners should explain to beneficiaries at the outset of the project intervention why their feedback is important and underline that, as stakeholders to which the organisation is accountable, they are free to voice complaints or concerns, where necessary. (This can be counter cultural for beneficiary groups.) They should also highlight how the feedback will be used and responded to and provide regular updates on any action taken from feedback and/or complaints.

staff will consult with different groups of beneficiaries, which beneficiary feedback mechanisms they recommend, the deadline for implementing mechanisms, and methods of reviewing the success and failure of these mechanisms.

Training should also be followed by regular catch-ups between programme management or/and primary organisation personnel and local staff or partner personnel, in place of the standard day-to-day mentoring model that is possible in directly managed projects. These catch-ups can be facilitated by telephone, interactive media (eg Skype) or during any face-to-face visits or meetings. A focus of catch-ups should be to discuss what mechanisms have been put in place; the number and frequency of feedback comments and complaints solicited; the responses provided; and the learning documented as a result. Refresher training should be undertaken ideally on a monthly basis while staff or implementing partners become accustomed to the practices. Quarterly or biannual refresher training (as part of team meetings or capacity building programmes) can then be put in place, when staff are more familiar and comfortable with the mechanisms and principles.

- (iii) Develop a reporting system that documents the details of individual beneficiary feedback and complaints. Ensure that this system is supported by third party verification

Various stakeholders raised concerns about the authenticity of feedback recorded by local staff. One stakeholder questioned the extent to which local staff can be trusted to involve excluded or minority groups in soliciting feedback. Another commented that there was a danger that, even where feedback and complaints are solicited, the responses provided would be inadequate or even non-existent. It is a challenge without the direct presence of senior management to ensure that the feedback and complaints systems have been initiated and are working effectively. However, various practices can be instigated to provide verification or closer monitoring on the feedback and complaints systems in place.

Tearfund has used visits by senior national and expatriate staff to help verify feedback mechanisms in Kandahar. Senior national staff include questions regarding feedback mechanisms in their discussions with beneficiaries when they visit. They themselves solicit feedback verbally, comparing it against the feedback solicited and recorded by local staff. Expatriate staff, when visiting the Kandahar project office, will meet with beneficiary representatives at the office. Though it is only possible to meet with male representatives, there is at least some opportunity to hear and triangulate the feedback that they provide. Peer monitoring presents a further opportunity for organisations to monitor and triangulate the feedback recorded by local staff. Peer agencies can meet with beneficiary groups, not only soliciting their own feedback but confirming that feedback is regularly solicited by local staff or partners. Organisations in Somalia, where access to mobile phones is high, use this medium to contact beneficiaries and community members to solicit and verify feedback. This practice could be developed further by using a dedicated phone line (used by several organisations) to solicit and verify feedback.

Beneficiary feedback should be recorded. Tearfund's humanitarian team in Afghanistan has developed a template to support local staff in recording feedback and complaints received on a monthly basis.<sup>65</sup> Details of the location from which the feedback or complaint arose, the type of feedback (whether verbal or written), the person(s) feeding back, and the content of the feedback are separate fields in the report. In addition, local staff are required to provide a summary of the response and follow-up actions (where necessary) taken to address the feedback or complaint. This report is submitted to the country office on a monthly basis and

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<sup>65</sup> This template is included in Annex 12.7.

is followed up by the M&E officer. Such reports can be used as a base to triangulate and verify feedback through the organisation’s own monitoring, or through peer monitoring.

- (iv) Incorporate beneficiary feedback questions into standard monitoring, review, and evaluation surveys and templates

Local staff will need to engage in ongoing project monitoring, reviews and evaluation. Ensuring that questions that solicit beneficiary feedback (whether positive or critical) are incorporated into standard surveys will help to enable beneficiaries to have a voice. It will also provide an opportunity to raise comments, concerns and ideas related to project implementation and the implementing agency or staff. An INGO operating in Afghanistan has incorporated feedback mechanisms into ongoing monitoring tools:

*‘Community feedback and input is heavily influential for our projects. We use surveys and discussion groups to establish the needs of the communities we work with, as well as their desired programming responses.’*  
- Country director of an INGO operating in Afghanistan

In medium- to high-insecurity environments where other means of soliciting feedback are challenged, using existing project monitoring structures to incorporate this specialism will give beneficiaries a voice. External evaluators and monitors are more objective in soliciting feedback, which is particularly useful where stakeholders may feel uncomfortable about raising feedback or complaints with local staff.

### 8.3.6 Learning and continual improvement

- (i) Use ongoing project monitoring and evaluation tools and stakeholders to review individual beneficiary accountability practices and to document the learning that can be used to improve them

Project evaluations, monitoring and review reports, as well as reports on individual accountability practices, can be used in remotely managed settings to review the success and failure of accountability practices and to solicit learning that can be used to improve them. Rather than adding a layer of additional checks to review accountability, these existing practices (evaluations, monitoring etc) can be developed to incorporate questions related specifically to the accountability principle. Accountability is a prioritised quality standard for Tearfund’s operations in Afghanistan. As such, in any internal or external evaluation, it is a requirement that accountability practices be reviewed and assessed. The objectivity of external evaluations and monitoring enables a more robust analysis of ongoing accountability practices, as well as greater honesty from beneficiaries.

These tools are a strong source of learning to support the continual improvement of accountability in remotely managed projects. External evaluators, peer monitors and internal senior national staff are all viable options to use these tools and to solicit and record learning. Evaluations, peer-monitoring visits and senior programme visits to PIAs should incorporate a findings summary session, in which accountability practices are included. This session can be facilitated at either a local level with all project staff or at a country or regional office level (ensuring that at least the local accountability focal person and project manager are present). Drawing up an action plan after these findings sessions is recommended in order to address any proposed recommendations and to improve future accountability practices.



- (ii) Ensure regular opportunities for local staff and/or implementing agencies to present findings related to beneficiary accountability practice to senior programme management and/or primary organisation personnel

Programme management and/or project review meetings present regular opportunities for senior local staff who are based remotely to meet with other programme and senior programme management personnel. Good practice learning sessions should be incorporated into such meeting forums, where this is not already common practice. Accountability practices should form a compulsory element of such sessions. The potential for programme personnel from across a country meeting together and sharing learning about accountability provides ample opportunity for discussion of best practice and for improvements to be made across the board in these individual practices. Learning should also be shared with senior management in organisational head offices (where they are outside the country), to promote and ensure cross-learning between programmes within one organisation. Should changes to an organisation's accountability approach be necessary, this should be documented in organisation-wide policies and procedures to ensure that learning is captured and used in future programme and project implementation.

- (iii) Ensure regular opportunities for local staff and/or implementing agencies to review beneficiary accountability approaches with beneficiaries, communities and other stakeholders

Local staff and partners should be encouraged by programme management and/or primary organisation personnel to facilitate regular opportunities to review existing accountability practices with beneficiaries, community members and other project stakeholders. The means through which information is shared with the community and the methods through which feedback and complaints are solicited should be reviewed to ensure that they are still practical and safe for staff and communities. Furthermore, the means through which participation is promoted should be reassessed to ensure that each group of stakeholders remains engaged. Their input is vital to ensure that review processes remain relevant and practical.

Senior national staff and external monitors or evaluators can also use their discussions with beneficiaries to review accountability processes and to note down any findings and areas for improvement. These can be fed back to local staff and senior management in summary-of-findings meetings.

- (v) Instigate a beneficiary accountability working group at a regional and/or country level. Ensure that there is local staff representation within this group

While this section has highlighted specific recommendations and practices that can be used to enhance remote accountability, it has also underlined that there is significant need to further research, discuss and innovate creative accountability approaches.

HAP recommends greater collaboration and sharing of best practice between humanitarian and development organisations. One mechanism through which this can be attained at a regional or national level is the development of an accountability working group.<sup>66</sup> This group would consist of persons focused on and passionate about implementing accountability. Accountability focal persons and/or monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning

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<sup>66</sup> Details of the HAP deployment to support accountability and quality management for the 2011 East Africa food crisis (Dadaab) can be found at: <http://hapinternational.org/projects/field/hap-in-dadaab.aspx>. The terms of reference for the Dadaab working group is available at: <http://hapinternational.org/pool/files/tor-accountability-and-quality-working-group-final-20-9-10.pdf>

personnel would form the ideal basis for such working groups. The group is intended as a support forum between organisations, a means through which representatives from those organisations can present and tackle key issues related to accountability practice. Specific terms of reference should be outlined for the group at its outset, highlighting what it aims to achieve and in what timeframe. For organisations attempting to develop remote accountability practices, an important objective for this terms of reference might be the development of a series of practical, piloted approaches, based on the combined practice and learning of the organisations represented. It might also aim to disseminate this learning through existing cluster meetings, coordination bodies and multi-agency training events.

Accountability practices within remotely managed projects are almost entirely managed by local staff or project-implementing agencies. It is critical that they are included within the working group. They can provide an essential means through which the practicality and safety of proposed accountability practices can be reviewed. Regional work groups are therefore recommended, whereby the participation of local staff will be more frequent and realistic. Should the working group be established at a national level, adequate planning is required to ensure that the group meets when local staff are available.

HAP has committed to supporting organisations interested in taking this recommendation forward at a country level, particularly in helping to design the working group terms of reference and to provide examples of existing good practice that might stimulate discussion and provide potential practices for organisations to pilot.

#### **8.4 Concluding remarks**

This section reviewed accountability practices through the lens of remote management. It has observed how critical it is for organisational personnel, from programme management right through to local staff, to engage fully with this principle and with the planning and preparation required to support its successful implementation. The section offered examples of beneficiaries and communities engaging in the planning and design of accountability practices, and considered practical ways of ensuring this in remotely managed settings. While this research has highlighted several good practices that can be taken forward, it also acknowledges that this innovative area of programme quality assurance remains in its infancy and has significant potential for further development.

The overarching recommendation arising from this section is that organisations should digest the good practice examples and actions highlighted here, incorporating them into wider reviews of accountability practice. At different levels of organisational programming, networks should be formed with other agencies to pilot and develop good practice. Learning from this process should be incorporated to ensure that remote accountability practices improve and are targeted to the needs of beneficiaries.

## 9 Overall project conclusions

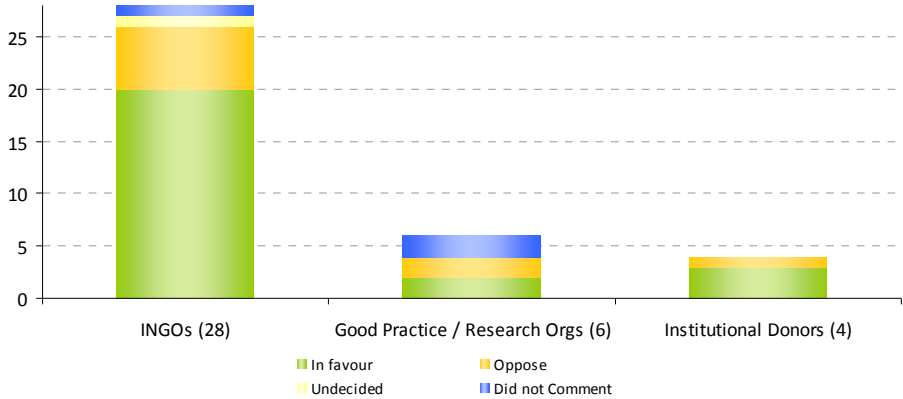
This research has sought to give space to humanitarian and development practitioners in identifying the key issues related to or impacting project monitoring, beneficiary accountability and technical quality for remotely managed projects. It has highlighted examples of existing good practices that can be used or developed further to address those issues. It has also recommended some innovative practices that practitioners are encouraged to review and pilot, in order that remote management approaches to programming safeguard the quality of projects and accountable relationships between project-implementing agencies and those whom they assist.

The research builds on existing assessments and publications that review remote management as an operational response to insecurity. While these have a significantly stronger focus on remote management structures as a whole, this research has aimed to focus primarily on the technical quality and accountability aspects of remote management.

Concerns regarding how remotely managed projects can ensure high programme quality and rigorous project monitoring were the issues project stakeholders raised with the greatest fervour. All of the other individual issues and concerns raised, it could be argued, contribute or are related in some way to these preliminary key issues. The research had a strong focus on accountability practice, yet there was not substantial evidence of this being a strong focus for all individual stakeholders. Remote project monitoring was by far a greater area of interest for stakeholders, which suggests that accountability still requires greater promotion as a good practice programming principle. The issues that did arise primarily considered the impact of greater insecurity on the relationship-building activities that are possible with project beneficiaries (e.g. limited participation opportunities; fewer means by which to share information etc).

An overarching number of stakeholders (26 out of 38 or 68 per cent) are in favour of using remote management approaches in medium- to high-insecurity project locations (see Figure 8). They believe that with adequate attention paid to improving remote monitoring and accountability practices, there is the potential for remote management to be a success. One stakeholder noted that they are currently unable to make a decision on the appropriateness of using a remote management approach,<sup>67</sup> while three others did not comment. Nine stakeholders (24 per cent) highlighted that they would be opposed to the practice of remote management under any circumstances. They felt that the issues contained in this report could never be addressed adequately, leading to deficiencies in programme quality, personnel safety and security, and appropriate financial management.

**Figure 8:** Number of all organisational participants in favour of, or in opposition, to remote management



<sup>67</sup> Though unable to make a decision either for or against, they did highlight concerns regarding remote management practice.

The issues raised do pose a substantial threat to programme quality and accountability, but the good practice presented highlights that there are potential practices that can be developed further and used to address these issues. The development by two INGOs of a remote management policy to guide programming highlights how guidance and regulations, when fully integrated across other programme policies too, can be used to inform and control project implementation, management and quality. The development of specific tools to support remote management policies by tracking and monitoring project implementation was also a positive example of practice. Likewise, it is very positive that stakeholders increasingly recognise that capacity building and mentoring are important to ensure the ongoing development of own personnel and implementing partners, as well as promoting high-quality programming. This is something to be developed further. Instilling values and humanitarian principles into local staff is also important to help ensure that staff understand the importance of quality humanitarian assistance and the need to be accountable to project stakeholders. And while there is some debate as to whether micro-management, controls-based approaches to project monitoring and accountability are appropriate and successful, there was evidence from INGOs that this had led to the improvement of project implementation and the reduction of fraud and corruption.

The project has aimed to be led by stakeholder demand. It is hoped that the outcomes of the research can be of practical, direct use to all humanitarian and development organisations wrestling with these issues. Further dialogue between these organisations is recommended as part of stronger and more intentional collaboration, not only at a country level but also on

*'The adoption of remote management strategies should be inspired... by the humanitarian imperative... It should not be the ideal or deemed to be the best approach... but should be viewed more as a "necessary evil" that must be undertaken in the meantime to save lives [in volatile, insecure project areas].'*

- Representative of an INGO operating in Somalia

an international level. Capturing input and experience from different practitioners across several countries that experience medium- to high-insecurity enables the transfer of learning and good practice, as well as opportunities to share tools, templates and processes to support remote monitoring and accountability.

The need remains to improve the quality of remote programming through rigorous, effective monitoring and to ensure that organisations are accountable to their beneficiaries. This research equips practitioners with guidance and practices to support them in this struggle. The information provided in the annexes includes practical templates, guidelines and process information that can be adapted by individual organisations to equip them further.

## 10 Bibliography and recommended reading

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<b>Crowley, Patrick</b>	<i>Kandahar Shura terms of reference.</i> Tearfund internal policy document, 2010
<b>Davies, Rick, and Jess Dart</b>	<i>The ‘Most Significant Change’ (MSC) technique: a guide to its use.</i> Guidelines produced in 2005 with the support of: CARE International, UK; Community Aid Abroad, Australia; Learning to Learn, Government of South Australia; Oxfam; New Zealand; Christian Aid, UK; Exchange, UK; Ibis, Denmark; Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke (MS), Denmark; and Lutheran World Relief, USA
<b>ECHO</b>	<i>ECHO Annual Partner Conference minutes.</i> Minutes circulated to participants of the ECHO Annual Partner Conference, October 2011
<b>Egeland, Jan, Adele Harmer and Abby Stoddard</b>	<i>To stay and deliver: good practice for humanitarian in complex security environments.</i> Independent study commissioned by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2011
<b>Fishstein, Paul, and Andrew Wilder</b>	<i>Winning hearts and minds? Examining the relationship between aid and security in Afghanistan.</i> Feinstein International Center and Tufts University, January 2012
<b>Global WASH Cluster</b>	<i>WASH accountability resources: ask, listen, communicate.</i> Oxfam UK, 2009
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<b>HAP International</b>	<i>Interim guide to the 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management.</i> HAP International, 2010
<b>Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN)</b>	‘Operational security management in violent environments.’ <i>Humanitarian Exchange</i> 47 (2010)
<b>International Rescue Committee (IRC)</b>	<i>Remote management policy for Afghanistan.</i> First edition. Internal organisational policy document, circulated at the request of the project coordinator, 2011
<b>Metcalfe, Victoria, Alison Giffen and Samir Elhawary</b>	<i>UN integration and humanitarian space: an independent study commissioned by the un integration steering group.</i> Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) and Stimson. December 2011
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<b>One World</b>	‘Afghanistan: humanitarian work most dangerous in ten years’. AFP, 2011
<b>Souness, Colleen</b>	<i>Monitoring and beneficiary accountability in remotely managed locations: an assessment of Tearfund’s monitoring and accountability practices in Kandahar, Afghanistan.</i> Baseline assessment report, Tearfund, 2011
<b>Stoddard, Abby, Adele Harmer and Jean Renouf</b>	<i>Once removed: lessons and challenges in remote management of humanitarian operations for insecure areas.</i> Humanitarian Outcomes, 2010

## 11 List of available annexes

1	Project proposal
2	List of project stakeholders
3	Individual interview survey templates
3.1	<i>Afghanistan-based humanitarian and development organisations (national and international)</i>
3.2	<i>Internationally based humanitarian and development organisations (national and international)</i>
3.3	<i>Institutional donor agencies</i>
3.4	<i>Research and good practice organisations</i>
4	Individual interview data summary
5	Tearfund remote monitoring and beneficiary accountability practice: baseline assessment terms of reference
6	Tearfund remote monitoring and beneficiary accountability practice: baseline assessment methodology
7	Tearfund remote monitoring and beneficiary accountability practice: baseline assessment final report
8	Tearfund remote monitoring and beneficiary accountability practice: baseline assessment management response action plan
9	Tearfund Kandahar remote management review (2010)
10	List of recommended contacts
11	Remote monitoring tools
11.1	<i>Standard monitoring training presentation (can be adapted to remote management)</i>
11.2	<i>Monitoring training handout (can be adapted to remote management)</i>
11.3	<i>Project filing training presentation (can be adapted to remote management)</i>
11.4	<i>Project filing training handout (can be adapted to remote management)</i>
11.5	<i>Project cycle management training activities</i>
11.6	<i>Beneficiary selection criteria compliance checklist</i>
11.7	<i>Quality standards compliance checklist</i>
11.8	<i>Monitoring and evaluation officer job description (Tearfund)</i>
11.9	<i>Remote monitoring and evaluation approach (framework) for Tearfund's operations in Kandahar</i>
11.10	<i>Tearfund Afghanistan Shura TOR</i>
12	Remote beneficiary accountability tools
12.1	<i>The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management (summary)</i>
12.2	<i>Interim guide to the 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management</i>
12.3	<i>Beneficiary accountability training presentation (can be adapted to remote management)</i>
12.4	<i>Beneficiary accountability training handout (can be adapted to remote management)</i>
12.5	<i>Beneficiary accountability training plan (can be adapted to remote management)</i>
12.6	<i>Beneficiary and community feedback guidance</i>
12.7	<i>Beneficiary and community feedback record (template)</i>
12.8	<i>Beneficiary accountability compliance checklist</i>
12.9	<i>Beneficiary accountability officer job description (Tearfund)</i>





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