

Discussion on Challenges and Strategies for M&E in the Time of COVID-19

Questions and Answers During Webinar on April 1, 2020

WHAT IS THIS DOCUMENT?

The M&E community is adjusting its practices to support program needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. On April 1, 2020, IDEAL hosted an online event to provide practitioners an opportunity to hear how other organizations are addressing these challenges, connect with M&E colleagues, and ask questions.

At the end of the event, there were over 100 questions posed in the webinar Q&A box, with a plethora of answers from both presenters and participants. This document is a collation of all the questions – both answered and unanswered – which have been edited for clarity, grammar, and spelling. The top five most answered community questions have been posted to the [FSN Network Forum](#), where we encourage continued discussion in this evolving, multilayered context. Statements which neither addressed nor posed a question, were removed for conscious sharing.

QUESTIONS WITH COMMUNITY ANSWERS

Community Question: How do the COVID challenges facing humanitarian assistance M&E differ from those facing development assistance M&E? It seems to me that the tools used in remote data collection in humanitarian assistance M&E for hard-to-reach settings have suddenly become relevant to longer term development assistance. ([FSN Network Forum Link](#))

Community Answer 1. *I think the reality is that neither international humanitarian nor development programs use remote data collection very frequently. Phone surveys are used frequently in domestic US research and evaluation - there is a huge forced shift in methodology happening now.*

Community Answer 2. *The virus outbreak is also going to create a lot of humanitarian assistance needs in and of itself, so this will require us to completely change the response strategy in some contexts and start up new responses in other places... I don't know but I assume that this is less likely to change the fundamental nature of longer-term development projects to that extent.*

Community Question: How do we reach the MOST vulnerable population through remote M&E data collection? (People with disabilities, Rural areas, etc.) ([FSN Network Forum Link](#))

Community Answer 1. *If can't reach directly, you can make sure to ask key informants about them.*

Community Answer 2. *As long as you still have access use time - if you do not know already - who can serve as a trusted intermediary when you cannot access a specific population anymore - contact existing Community Based structures / organizations as much as possible*

Community Answer 3. *It depends on what you decide to prioritize as essential monitoring. The best way will be to use the family approach. Target families and not individuals as you do this*

hybrid remote monitoring. The families will be expected to be closer (all members near or in one place) during this Covid-19 pandemic. My Opinion.

Community Question: How can you conduct DQA activities remotely? ([FSN Network Forum Link](#))

Community Answer 1. *I had two DQAs postponed because we couldn't interview project staff and collect documentation and data on spot at project office or headquarters.*

Community Answer 2. *You can call people if they have a phone*

Community Answer 3. *It's not the problem of call people. It's a DQA where assessors need to collect documentation and data at project site.*

Community Question: Mobile Survey rate in Pakistan is very low, are there any tips or guidelines to boost it up? Moreover, to what extent we can rely on the data collected from it in terms of quality and reliability as well as the sample size in relation to significance level and margin of error? ([FSN Network Forum Link](#))

Community Answer 1. *There's some good guidance here*

https://blogs.worldbank.org/impacetevaluations/reducing-attribution-phone-surveys?CID=WBW_AL_BlogNotification_EN_EXT

Community Answer 2. *A great webinar from J-PAL on this topic:*

<https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog/3-20-20/best-practices-conducting-phone-surveys>

Community Question: How do you consider the fact that people's responses to any ongoing data collection or monitoring will change considering the COVID-19 situation? What's the best way to adapt analysis or survey tools to ensure the data collection is still valid for a normal context? ([FSN Network Forum Link](#))

Community Answer 1. *regarding analysis of responses - this is a terrific question to which I do not have an answer currently! In terms of adapting survey tools, mostly we are planning to reduce survey length substantially to facilitate phone surveys, and adding some questions to capture contact information, ""when is a better time to contact you?"" and probably a few questions about the effects of COVID on the household specifically.*

Community Answer 2. *At Mercy Corps DRC, we are mapping qualitatively through key informant interviews what are the downstream effects of Corona (political risks, security risks, land access issues, price increases and so on). We're triangulating between participant groups and community leaders, and integrate subjective shock severity in our surveys. This way we hope to be able to control qualitatively and quantitatively for changes in the context. We haven't quite cracked the nut yet, but I hope this helps already!*

Community Question: Do you anticipate learning about how the larger (combined) cash might have helped people prepare for lockdown? I realize reducing contact was the reason for combining several distributions, but it seems like this could be positive unintended consequences...

Community Answer 1. *That is certainly our hope! Our PDM surveys capture the use of cash broadly, but we are working on adapting the tool to shorten its length and add some COVID-specific questions to try to capture this effect.*

Community Question: How exactly did you use COMM care to collect monitoring data given the closures and the social distancing directive?

Community Answer 1. *you can do this in two ways - one is to have your enumerators calling beneficiaries with their tablet in front of them with the survey on it -- another is to use SMS phone surveys (which is easier but much less reliable)*

Community Question: Many thanks for this very interesting presentation. I was just wondering whether all beneficiaries already had mobile phones? and are they all literate, or is there an ability to undertake phone surveys using audio?

Community Answer 1. SMS or IVR. RTI has a great guidance note on this:

<https://www.rti.org/insights/mobile-survey-data-collection-covid-19>

Community Question: How do I ensure quality assurance in conducting an end line survey for EGMA and EGRA remotely? Considering working in very rural locations

Community Answer 1. *Seems to me it's fundamentally not feasible to conduct EGRA in current conditions; quality assurance issue is secondary. First, I assume schools are closed, so it's a non-starter. 2nd, are you suggesting you'd have a means of administering EGRA remotely (independent of the quality assurance of that administration)? If so, I'd be very interested, as I've never heard about such a thing, which would require very special contextual conditions (typically not present in "very rural locations". When EGRA is done on tablets, the aspect of QA focused on inspecting data for anomalies in close to real time - this can always be done remotely, so no challenge there. The aspect of QA focused on supervising data collection and ensuring proper conditions of administration: if you're sending out data collectors, then why not one supervisor along with them?*

Community Question: How can we conduct DQA exercise remotely? DQA would normally require inspecting documents and data at implementing partner site/office.

Community Answer 1. *You can ask the office to send you scan of some documents and photos of some activities. Do phone interviews only with project staff.*

Community Answer 2. *Documents need to be collected on spot to prevent project staff from altering any data.*

Community Question: WHO policy states that current stocks of PPE should be allocated to health workers. Your recommended approach of providing PPE to M&E workers conflicts with this.

Community Answer 1. *WHO COVID-19 policy states that existing stocks and procurements of PPE should be transferred to health care clinicians who are at the highest risk. Please address this in the context of your recommendation to provide PPE to M&E staff.*

Community Question: Regarding the program criticality, is it something that IRC Colombia conducted for its activities, or something that was already available at cluster/donor level?

Community Answer 1. *I think this is something which UN has determined at a global level. (PC-criteria)*

Community Question: Do you have any recommendations for using digital means to conduct focus groups or group activities e.g. via social media? Is there any pre-established/evidence-based guidance?

Community Answer 1. *Another area that is tough to deal with... I know that we're planning to do group WhatsApp calls/threads for focus groups in Kenya and Uganda. Our Middle East teams already use Facebook groups for client feedback and information dissemination, so in that instance we may use FB as well...*

Community Question: Can you give examples of how much you've cut down phone surveys to essential questions only and what the process was? (i.e. are you only collecting on program indicators etc.).

Community Answer 1. *From the start, we try to keep the surveys to no longer than 30 minutes, collecting only the very essential and critical information. Key outcome and contextual indicators*

Community Question: Have your team had difficulty with engagement when recruiting participants for an evaluation over the phone?

Community Answer 1. *Fortunately, response rate has been high as part of the post-distribution monitoring (PDM). As for final eval, the biggest challenge will be tracking everyone down (we are doing a panel survey with the baseline sample), as most people have changed phone numbers - obtaining a local Peruvian number. or their service has been disconnected or they've moved to another country or back to Venezuela.*

Community Question: Can you explain how did you use remote data collection amongst beneficiaries who don't have access to a telephone at lot or an android/iOS supported phone?

Community Answer 1. *Inside Syria, we are used to a remote monitoring approach. For phone call interviews. We usually make multiple arrangements before administrating the survey. Such as calling the respondents ahead of time to explain the process, introduce the study objectives and take appointments. Then we call again at the agreed time to administrate the survey.*

Community Question: Beneficiaries living in areas without network coverage will be excluded during phone surveys. How do we compromise the bias in sampling?

Community Answer 1. *This is a challenge - you will not be able to reach these people with phone surveys. one is to conduct survey at a distance and have enumerators in full protective gear. --- most people do have cell phone coverage, however.*

Community Question: How did you select hot spot? Did you have any selection criteria for hot spot?

Community Answer 1. *These are well-known areas with heavy migrant traffic, mainly near borders of regions. many were identified during the initial need's assessment*

Community Question: Please can you explain how you reduce bias related to baseline data if cash promoters are project staff?

Community Answer 1. *There is a MEAL Officer in each region, they oversee this process. all the data is validated by the MEAL Coordinator.*

Community Question: How do you collect the consent of the person? Did you have a process to ensure that person completely understands the project and the usage of the data?

Community Answer 1. *We, Save the Children, have an internal IRB process that ensures appropriate informed consent is provided and obtained. This includes providing background and context of the intervention, how the data will be used, with whom it will be shared, and letting the participant know their participation is voluntary and they can stop at any time, and their non-participation will not affect their participation in the intervention/program.*

Community Question: What measures did you put in place to ensure data collected via phone has quality? And how did you validate data quality?

Community Answer 1. *Get IRB approval to record and do audio back checks by having supervisors listen to a proportion of interviews daily!*

Community Question: Given importance and value of qualitative data ... I am interested in what approaches folks are considering or have experience with, in terms of remote data collection... considering all of the challenges that have been presented (access to technology, etc.).

Community Answer 1. *We are considering Zoom workshops with break-out rooms, alongside white-board online interactive software to allow for interactive discussion*

Community Question: I need more clarification why delay or omit qualitative portions of an evaluation?

Community Answer 1. *If quality interviews and/or focus group discussions can be done via phone, the team will consider it. however, it has been challenging to track some beneficiaries down if phone numbers or providers are changed (to a local number).*

Community Question: For non-potential beneficiaries or illiterate beneficiaries, how can an online platform apply with them?

Community Answer 1. *The same concern, any online data collection requires literacy among beneficiaries which is an issue for the most vulnerable rural population in fragile countries.*

Community Answer 2. *Voice response applications are available... so don't require participants to read.*

Community Answer 3. *Incorporating visuals - this also done for young children.*

Community Question: How are you planning to conduct the quant survey for the evaluation? Are you planning to minimize your questionnaire? How do you go determine what's essential information to collect?

Community Answer 1. *This has been the plan since the beginning since much of the population will be difficult to track down physically and 1/3 of our beneficiaries are in transit. the HHs that have settled in Peru, they are quite dispersed. since phone ownerships is very high, final eval will be done via phone similar to post-distribution monitoring (PDM).*

Questions without community answers

Community Question: Since the COVID movement restrictions, have you been able to target new households for the cash transfers? If so, how have you been able to do remotely?

Community Question: How would you rate the reachability of your beneficiaries regarding quality of the calls?

Community Question: How do existing datasets play into data usage? Things like DHS data?

Community Question: What kind of capacity building was done to enable the beneficiaries to better protect themselves?

Community Question: Another challenge we have is making digital monitoring accessible to people with disabilities.

Community Question: Did you do quantitative data collection or qualitative as well? if yes how did you do?

Community Question: My questions are how to mitigate or prevent staff getting infected virus from the participants, vice versa? and any disruption or interruption from local government or community that hinders staff to continue the program implementation?

Community Question: About analysis side. 1) Do you have any strategy to deal with anyone who doesn't have any phone in your analysis? 2) The program changed rapidly due to COVID; do you have any strategy to deal this change in your analysis later?

Community Question: Agree about data minimization. Do folks have go-to guides they use or find insightful around this issue... for sharing with staff?

Community Question: What capacity strengthening activities for local staff were necessary to allow for that adaptation?

Community Question: It would be good to get your impression on how effective remote monitoring is/was in the face of challenges regarding access to information?

Community Question: Even if beneficiaries have mobile phones, they are not tech savvy to join platforms like WhatsApp, zoom or skype. How do you overcome this obstacle?

Community Question: Since you have less M&E staff on site now, how are you re-allocating human resources of M&E personnel?

Community Question: How you ensure Household priority? I mean how do you identify household priority and how do you remove duplication through phone tracking or distance monitoring mechanism during cash or food assistance to household. (It would be good to know practice)

Community Question: Could the community play a greater role in M&E during a timeline this. For example, utilizing the community themselves to conduct the M&E instead of external parties conducting it...

Community Question: Can you elaborate further on phone data animation and computer assisted data collection especially amongst beneficiaries with no or very low literacy level?

Community Question: How do you use phone-monitoring? phone call, message, offline mobile data collection App. or ...?

Community Question: What of in cases where beneficiaries are not literate and are in very rural context?

Community Question: How do you ensure that the person interviewed is in a safe place, I mean free to answer what he/she wants?

Community Question: How can we translate this approach to other country bearing in mind that country policy differs when it comes to cash flow and humanitarian response?

Community Question: How do you manage nonflexible donors during such a time?

Community Question: What recommendations do you have for countries/programs that do not have existing cash transfer in place that they can adapt and/or don't have teams to support this? It seems to be a heavy lift for those countries/programs especially given risks of start-up without the accountability controls in place.

Community Question: Did you have Govt. support for the program? How did Govt. engage in this program? Did you share the data analysis and report to them?

Community Question: Can anyone explain the possibility of collecting that from remote locations that do not have access to telephone services? (eg Congo, South Sudan, Somalia)

Community Answer 1. No cell phone means no remote data collection via phone - but I would investigate if there really is no cell phone coverage..... most places have at least voice/SMS.

Community Question: Did these programs already have phone surveys in place? How do we adapt current programs that don't have mobile phone or tablet availability? Are there any examples today that have adapted their surveys without already having phone surveys or where surveys previously relied on in-person monitoring?

Community Question: I would be very interested in how you plan to do you evaluation remotely.

Community Question: How do you advertise the online form so that beneficiaries can find it?

Community Question: For areas that don't have mobile network, how can you reach them?

Community Question: How is identification of Out of School Children possible?

Community Question: How to collect data from participants that don't have much technological literacy?

Community Question: Regarding beneficiaries selection or registration: some details should be collected by observation or face to face interviews. So how will you do these interviews?

Community Question: The crisis provides both an opportunity and a threat. In some countries, our communities have expressed fear that by invoking emergency provisions, many governments will limit civic power and take away their agency. How do we track this? Also, this could be an opportunity to engage communities in the M&E processes - which we see very little of. Can we have a more participatory approach to evaluation (without putting community members at risk)?

Community Question: How many cases on average per week do you deal with through WhatsApp? Is it manageable with your current human resources?

Community Question: Have you done pilot test of your designed Questionnaire?

Community Question: Would you share any strategy on how you train enumerators remotely? I found it quite difficult with bad internet connection and low tech-literacy level among enumerators.

Community Question: How to you moderate WhatsApp channels/groups?

Community Question: With the increasing volume of remote collection of personal information, what additional measures and costs are involved and anticipated in protecting the security of this information?

Community Question: How to collect data from the people with no cell phone or network coverage?

Community Question: Is bulk messaging possible on WhatsApp (how many at once?)

Community Question: How do we ensure the data accuracy collected online?

Community Question: Do all beneficiaries have cell phones& how is their literacy level?

Community Question: The two examples are from Latin America (literate, access to phone). What strategies can be utilized for different contexts where literacy and phone access aren't as good?

Community Question: Are staff adequately equipped (psycho-social, safeguarding training) to take WhatsApp on safeguarding? How is this managed? Is it centralized? How do you ensure confidentiality? How do you investigate cases?

Community Question: What about virtual focus groups via Zoom or similar... any innovative approaches to group qualitative approaches virtually for low tech environments?

Community Question: For using WhatsApp how do you ensure the protection of the data of the beneficiaries? For example, phone numbers to be known within the group.

Community Question: Has anyone tested using written/audio/video diaries as a substitute to more traditional qualitative data collection methods (KII, FGDs)?

Community Question: Is there a way that you could organize zoom focus groups with a combination of local mediators and/or smartphone users in the community?

Community Question: Are you monitoring human rights incidents (in particular in Colombia where illegal armed groups are taking advantage of Covid19 and people alone at home to carry out violations in complete impunity)?

Community Question: Would be interested in any tips / lessons from the speakers in how they have assessed risks to their programs in this specific COVID-context?

Community Question: Does working with partners just displace risk and lead to outsourcing harm? How do we mitigate against shifting risk?

Community Question: Our project is about to end in 90 days. We already collected all the qualitative and quantitative data. Now we are processing the data. Next, we will be presenting the processes the data through a reflection event that requires participation from project team. However, COVID is affecting our movement in the field as the country has already implementing national and local level community quarantines to prevent the spread of the disease. Are there any insights from the group on how to do a Reflection Event using online facilities i.e. sending the reflection questions thru email, then collecting their responses in the same way. Then organizing an online meeting call for the

team to discuss further their responses based on the reflection. Will this still be considered as a "participatory approach" by facilitating the event remotely?

Community Question: Most of you are talking about having "access" to respondents. For those of you who have managed to collect information, do you find that the responses are different than you would have received in a "non-COVID" world? Do we have to be mindful of response biases, "salience-bias", etc. which would also affect the construct validity of our findings on regular interventions?

Community Question: What approaches have organizations taken to remote training of MEAL and enumerators? What's work well? What hasn't?

Community Question: Can you give some ideas how to conduct quant survey through phone and how long questionnaire will be appropriate for the remote data collection?

Community Question: Is the TPM involved in on site/in person field visit?

Community Question: I am working in Afghanistan and leading the M&E within Aga Khan Foundation. I would like to add, that having the survey through phone in a context where the people have access to phone and network coverage, would work. But working in rural communities, where the networks are limited for the people and a limited number of people own mobile number is one of the key challenges. Additionally, cultural sensitivity can make this process difficult. Is there any advice for these difficulties? Would a phone survey work?

Community Question: There are challenges talking to women on the phone. Are there suggestions for overcoming this challenge?

Community Question: What about the ethical aspect, if someone is starting a new study during this period how to address the ethical approval from a research body? also, verbal consent?

Community Question: Do you have any case experience in using Earth Observation Technology for environmental conservation or land rehabilitation projects?

Community Question: People who may not have considered themselves vulnerable pre-C-19 and would have responded to surveys positively may not respond quite differently, even though the project intervention was no different. How can I now rely on my survey data, or else, how can I take out the C-19 bias of responses?

Community Question: Any lessons learnt from M&E during Ebola?

Community Question: How do you access the most marginalized people in a community? It seems that they might not have access to a phone but also that the power dynamics with a community liaison or to access a phone on a phone point would be a big limitation (that could go against the 'do no harm' principle).

Community Question: How would you train community enumerators virtually given the current COVID19 situation?

Community Question: How to include the prevailing COVID challenge (Situational analysis) in our intervention area as a part of monitoring and how to gauge the effect of these to our intervention components?

Community Question: How can we collect remotely data from older Age people and disable person?

*Note: These questions have been edited slightly for grammar and spelling.

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