# REMOTE HUMANITARIAN MONITORING
Guidance Note

**MAY 2020**

**Work in the Age of COVID-19 Guidance Note Series**

HUMANITARIAN ADVISORY GROUP

GLOW CONSULTANTS

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# REMOTE MONITORING IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

Strong monitoring systems are important for effective program delivery in humanitarian contexts. During a global pandemic, there is a vital need for real-time data and evidence to inform responses to rapidly changing environments. However, collecting and using monitoring data to inform programming is often challenging. During COVID-19, this challenge is compounded by access, safety and travel restrictions.

In addition to implementing remote management and programming, humanitarian actors are initiating or scaling up remote monitoring. Agencies are re-evaluating their existing monitoring design and data collection processes, and recognising that new methods will require changes in staffing, working with partners and resourcing.[1]

Remote monitoring, including third-party remote monitoring, enables humanitarian actors to continue to monitor program implementation, understand context dynamics and make informed decisions about adapting to the pandemic. It can help agencies reduce COVID-19 risks for staff, partners and communities.

## Why this guidance note?

This note is intended to guide international and national operational actors on how to adapt and think about remote monitoring in the context of COVID-19. It provides a snapshot of key takeaways from previous research, and draws together emerging learning and guidance.[2] HAG and GLOW collaborated on this guidance note, drawing on our collaborations on third-party monitoring for a range of humanitarian agencies. It is part of a guidance series on remote working produced as part of our Humanitarian Horizons research program.

## Summary of key actions

**Build on what you have:** Build on existing information and streamline the data that is to inform programming.

**Working with partners and local third-party monitoring organisations:** Develop remote monitoring approaches with partners to ensure safety and feasibility.

**Remote monitoring methods and tools:** Ensure remote monitoring tools and methods are appropriate for context, and that the data collected can be used to inform decision-making.

**Collaborate with others:** Share information with in-country stakeholders if feasible and appropriate to inform monitoring activities.

**Maximise inclusion, accountability and protection:** Ensure remote monitoring addresses inclusion, accountability and protection issues, particularly those that are exacerbated in the context of COVID-19.

**Safety and wellbeing :** Ensure remote monitoring approaches minimise risks (COVID-19 and others) to staff, partners, third-party organisations and communities.
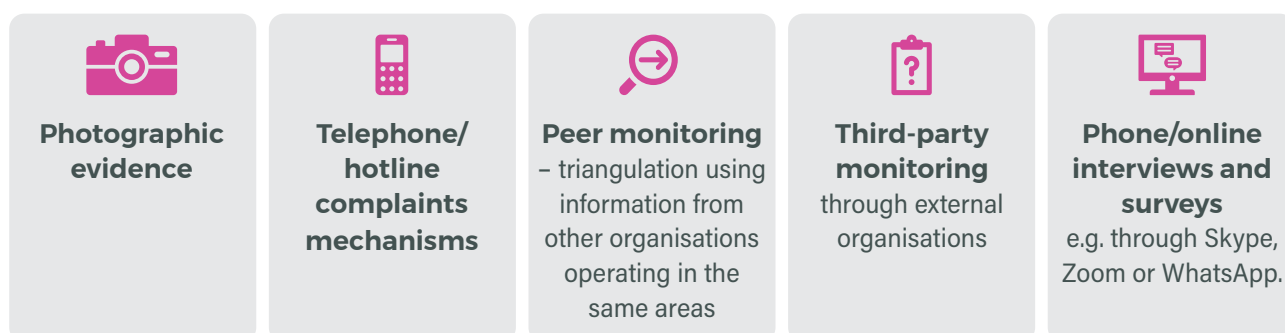
# REMOTE MONITORING IN THE COVID-19 CONTEXT

**Remote monitoring has traditionally been used in complex or conflict environments where agency staff or partners are unable to engage with affected communities in person.** Some agencies and their partners also use external or independent organisations to collect independently verifiable data to support the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of their programming. This is referred to as 'third-party monitoring'. This guidance note also provides some tips for organisations who undertake third-party remote monitoring.

Remote monitoring approaches are underpinned by:

1. **Reducing risk:** Remote monitoring should reduce risk for program staff and communities

2. **Simplicity:** Remote monitoring approaches should be simple and streamlined. This supports acceptance from both program teams and communities

3. **Rigour:** Findings from remote monitoring activities should be triangulated before conclusions are drawn, and should withstand any tests of data validity and reliability.

### Remote monitoring example approaches and methods[3]

| **Photographic evidence** | **Telephone/ hotline complaints mechanisms** | **Peer monitoring** – triangulation using information from other organisations operating in the same areas | **Third-party monitoring** through external organisations | **Phone/online interviews and surveys** e.g. through Skype, Zoom or WhatsApp. |
|---|---|---|---|---|

## Challenges and opportunities for remote monitoring during COVID-19

Humanitarian actors must adapt monitoring designs and approaches to reduce infection risk for their staff, partners and affected communities. Some key challenges and opportunities are outlined below.

### Challenges for program monitoring

- ▶ Increased travel restrictions reduce access to communities and project sites
- ▶ Social/physical distancing to reduce COVID-19 risk results in less in-person engagement for collecting information
- ▶ Increased workload for agencies in responding to ongoing crises and the impacts of COVID-19, resulting in less time and resources for data collection

### Opportunities

- ▶ Strengthening processes for working with communities and partners on remote data collection, including via phone and online platforms
- ▶ Developing more effective and efficient remote third-party monitoring systems
- ▶ Streamlining monitoring processes to ensure real-time data is fed into decision-making

# KEY ACTIONS AND PRACTICAL STEPS FOR REMOTE MONITORING DURING COVID-19

## 1. Build on what you have[4]

**Key action: Build on existing information and streamline the data that is to inform programming.**

### Practical steps

✔ Review existing M&E frameworks and assess how these could be adapted to incorporate remote monitoring (see section 3 below). This includes reviewing protocols for data storage, confidentiality and privacy.

✔ Analyse existing program data and information and determine what other relevant data could be easily and safely obtained elsewhere before designing remote monitoring approaches.[5]

✔ Reassess the monitoring data you need. What critical information is required to assess the impact of COVID-19 in your context and for your program? Can less information be collected?

✔ Identify if information on COVID-19 risks and impact, or other relevant information related to your program, is being collected by other actors (i.e. peer monitoring) and how this can be safely and securely shared to inform decision-making.

✔ Discuss with donors how monitoring constraints are likely to affect reporting and how reporting can be adapted.[6]

### Inspiration and ideas

**REACH site profiling**

REACH is undertaking site profiling and mapping of camps using remote technologies enabling at-risk areas to be monitored. The monitoring gathers information on access to services and aid, as well as specific vulnerabilities to COVID-19, using indicators already established with clusters. In partnership with UNHCR, Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), and the UNOSAT humanitarian rapid mapping service, REACH is identifying high-priority sites and camps globally, analysing existing data, and complementing it with remote mapping and, where possible, direct data collection (including through remote interview of key informants) to assess camp and urban vulnerabilities.[7]

## 2. Working with partners and local third-party monitoring organisations

**Key action: Develop remote monitoring approaches with partners to ensure safety and feasibility.**

### Practical steps

✔ Co-design remote monitoring and/or evaluation approaches with local partners and independent monitoring organisations to ensure activities are safe, feasible and that the data collected can inform programming in real time.[8] Draw on local knowledge – partners such as local organisations and community groups are familiar with the context, potential threats and their mitigation.

✔ Discuss how to safely engage experienced local staff, or community members previously trained on carrying out M&E functions or with experience in the humanitarian or development sectors. If relevant, provide training on WHO risk mitigation measures for COVID-19.

✔ Establish processes with partners for two-way information sharing on the broader health context and discuss how this will affect programming and monitoring activities.

✔ Ensure there are clear pathways for partners or third-party organisations to raise issues about risks of remote monitoring activities for staff and communities, and that agreed risk thresholds and mitigation measures are in place.

✔ For third-party remote monitoring, work with experienced, locally based researchers, consultants and organisations who have contextual knowledge and networks.

---

### Inspiration and ideas

**Local third-party expertise**

GLOW is a third-party monitoring organisation, and works with agencies, donors and their local partners to design and implement remote monitoring approaches. GLOW uses a range of remote monitoring tools to collect data. Before undertaking M&E data collection, safety and security risks are discussed and risk mitigation measures are implemented.

**Key action: Ensure remote monitoring tools and methods are appropriate for context, and that the data collected can be used to inform decision-making.**

## Practical steps

- Adapt remote monitoring tools and methods for the context, including access and ability to travel. For example, monitoring the activities in health and/or quarantine centres will require adopting specific protocols and methods that avoid face-to-face engagement.

- Ensure that data collected about program activities and the operating context can be fed into decision-making processes quickly to inform programming.

- Understand the limitations of remote monitoring tools, and counter them through triangulation and collaboration if possible.

- Use a range of methods and tools to support triangulation of findings, such as collecting formal and informal evidence.

- Coordinate with relevant local actors who have access to communities and/or sample details and contact information, making it easier to plan and implement data collection.

- For remote third-party monitoring, ensure external organisations communicate closely with the program team to ensure tools and approaches are fit for context.

### Inspiration and ideas

**CartONG**

CartONG has developed a detailed guide on how to adapt tools and processes in the COVID-19 context. It covers data collection mechanisms, ways information is exchanged with communities, and related data protection issues.[9]

# REMOTE MONITORING METHODS AND TOOLS[10]

*Adapt as per restrictions outlined in national guidelines*

## 1. Remote training and orientation for field staff

Consider how training on remote monitoring approaches can be safely done with field staff and partners.

### Example

HAG and GLOW have worked together to provide remote training on the specific monitoring tools. The field researchers we have worked with previously have access to smart phone or laptops/computers or both. Training was delivered using Skype and Zoom and our experience suggests this approach can be successfully adopted in situations where face to face training delivery is a challenge.

## 2. Remote field visits

Consider establishing remote field visits through connecting via phone/video technology with key community or local partner representatives.

### Example

The GLOW team conducted remote field visits with field partners and communities and collected information on activities that were completed prior to the on-set of the COVID-19 situation, on-going COVID-19 responses as well as emerging needs resulting from the evolving situation.

## 3. Focus group discussions

Minimise in-person meeting by conducting these discussions with a small group of people or doing it altogether online via Skype or Zoom. WhatsApp, which is more commonly available at community level has recently introduced a group meeting feature that can include up to 50 people. FGD guidelines could also include information regarding hand washing and social distancing to protect both field team and community from risk of COVID-19.

### Example

HAG and GLOW conducted focus group discussions with program participants by engaging them in small groups and ensuring social distancing protocols were adhered to. The group formation was based on availability of respondents who were visiting the health facilities for services thus no specific travel was made for this purpose of the evaluation activity and discussions focused on the most important questions.

## 4. Interviews

**In-person:** Keep interviews short and targeted. The interview guidelines could also include information regarding hand washing and social distancing to protect both field teams and communities from COVID-19 transmission risks

**Phone:** Conduct phone interviews (or via platforms such as Skype and Zoom) with key stakeholders including program staff, partners, community representatives and members (with consent)

### Example

GLOW Consultants evaluated a program in the Newly Merged Districts (NMDs) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. In areas that were unsafe for field researchers to travel to, verification was done through telephone interviews. In areas with weak connectivity local researchers were utilised for the verification activities who then ensured that the data was shared with GLOW confidentially. This was triangulated with other data to inform findings.

## 5. Surveys

Undertake via phone or via SMS/text software with community stakeholders, or weblink with organisational staff.

### Example

GLOW led a project that conducted phone surveys with over 10,000 individuals across Pakistan. A number of face-to-face interviews were also conducted to validate the data collected through phone surveys. Results obtained through phone survey had similar results as face to face interviews highlighting that that this approach can produce sound and actionable findings and recommendations.

## 6. Photographs and pictorial data

With limitations on site or community visits, visual evidence can be used in third party monitoring. This could include photos by the project team and/or community members of distribution of the seeds, hygiene kits and other food or NFIs with the appropriate consent.

## 7. Reflective journal and photo diary

With the help of field based third-party monitoring staff and members of the communities, reflective journals and photo diaries can be maintained to measure daily or weekly progress for particular activities, such as infrastructure related work. These journals and diaries can be shared confidentially via email or WhatsApp at pre-agreed times to the third-party monitoring team who can use it for triangulation purposes against other documents such as progress reports.

## 4. Collaborate with others

**Key actions: Share information with in-country stakeholders if feasible and appropriate to inform monitoring activities.**

### Practical steps

✔ Explore with other stakeholders how data can safely be shared, to inform programming.[11]

✔ Use remote monitoring activities to share information on COVID-19 national guidelines and promote public information and awareness about risk reduction.

✔ Discuss with donors if there are opportunities for collaborative remote monitoring with other donors and actors, and how reporting could be harmonised in COVID-19 contexts.

### Inspiration and ideas

**Coordination and collaboration**

The Pujiono Centre in Indonesia has been instrumental in establishing the SEJAJAR network, a platform of national and local civil society organisations. The SEJAJAR network coordinates at the national and provincial levels to share information and coordinate approaches to COVID-19 programming in Indonesia.

## 5. Maximise inclusion, accountability and protection

**Key action: Ensure remote monitoring addresses inclusion, accountability and protection issues, particularly those that are exacerbated in the context of COVID-19.**

### Practical steps

✔ Include funding for inclusion expertise in third-party monitoring teams.

✔ Ensure that where possible partners continue to collect disaggregated data and have meaningful conversations with other partners and communities on how to ensure inclusion in programs.

✔ Identify marginalised groups that can contribute to data collection via phones or cameras and ensure that feedback mechanisms are accessible to everyone in the community.

# 6.  Safety and wellbeing

**Key action: Ensure remote monitoring approaches minimise risks (COVID-19 and others) to staff, partners, third-party organisations and communities.**

## Practical steps

- Avoid risk transfer as a priority. Ensure remote monitoring approaches identify and address the risks (COVID-19 and other) to staff, partners, third-party organisations and communities. Establish safety and wellbeing protocols and how these will be managed in remote monitoring activities.[12]

- Conduct a context-specific risk assessment prior to initiating or scaling up remote monitoring activities.

- Discuss COVID-19 national and organisational policy and health guidelines with partners and staff, and implications for remote monitoring of programming, including providing training on WHO guidance where required.[13]

## Inspiration and ideas

GLOW Consultants maintain a database of over 2,500 trained field researchers. These field researchers will be trained on safety aspects related to COVID-19, WHO guidelines and promoting safety measures such as hygiene and handwashing when conducting monitoring.

# USING THIS GUIDANCE NOTE

An increase in remote monitoring during COVID-19 is likely to significantly shift the way humanitarian sector works now and in the future. Collaborating with national and local actors and communities on effective remote monitoring approaches is vital, as is sharing successes and common challenges.

This guidance note can be used to:

- ✔ plan remote monitoring approaches
- ✔ raise awareness of remote monitoring best practices
- ✔ advocate with donors for supporting remote monitoring requirements

## USEFUL RESOURCES

CartONG, **https://blog.cartong.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/IM-covid-19-impact-on-monitoring-and-accountability_CartONG.pdf**

Coffey International, MERL in a time of COVID-19: A resource tool, 2020.

Donini, A., and Maxwell, D., From face-to-face to face-to-screen: remote management, effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian action in insecure environments, International Review of the Red Cross, 2013.

GSDRC, Approaches to remote monitoring in fragile states, 2018.

Humanitarian Learning Centre, Remote monitoring in SDC: challenges and opportunities, Humanitarian Learning Centre, Institute of Development Studies and SDC, 2019.

IASC resources relating to accountability and inclusion, **https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/covid-19-resources-relating-accountability-and-inclusion**

ODI, **https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/odi-ml-adaptivemanagement-wp569-nov19_0.pdf**

WHO, **https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/risk-communication-and-community-engagement**.

# ENDNOTES

1   IAPS, Guidelines for adapting third-party monitoring in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, 2020 http://www.i-aps.com/pdf/
    Guidelines-for-Adapting-Third-Party-Monitoring-in-The-Context-Of-The-Covid-19-Outbreak.pdf
    https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-04/WFP%20letter%20to%20NGOs%20on%20COVID-19%20-%20
    April%202020.pdf IMPACT Initiatives, https://www.impact-initiatives.org/what-we-do/news/proposition-to-adapt-and-upscale-its-
    reach-programming-to-support-an-evidence-based-response/

2   See 'Useful Resources' on p. 9

3   Drawn from ECHO's remote management instructions, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/partners/humanitarian_aid/Remote_
    Management_instructions.pdf

4   Coffee International, MERL in a time of COVID-19, https://coffey.com/en/ingenuity-coffey/merl-in-a-time-of-covid-19-a-resource-tool/

5   https://coffey.com/en/ingenuity-coffey/merl-in-a-time-of-covid-19-a-resource-tool/

6   Grand Bargain Secretariat, COVID-19 and the Grand Bargain, https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-04/
    The%20Grand%20Bargain%20and%20COVID-19%20-%20April%202020_0.pdf

7   https://www.impact-initiatives.org/what-we-do/news/proposition-to-adapt-and-upscale-its-reach-programming-to-support-an-
    evidence-based-response/

8   https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-04/The%20Grand%20Bargain%20and%20COVID-19%20-%20April%20
    2020_0.pdf

9   https://blog.cartong.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/IM-covid-19-impact-on-monitoring-and-accountability_CartONG.
    pdf

10  Adapted from http://www.i-aps.com/pdf/Guidelines-for-Adapting-Third-Party-Monitoring-in-The-Context-Of-The-Covid-19-
    Outbreak.pdf

11  https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-04/The%20Grand%20Bargain%20and%20COVID-19%20-%20April%20
    2020_0.pdf

12  https://www.gppi.net/media/SAVE__2016__The_use_of_third-party_monitoring_in_insecure_contexts.pdf

13  https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance/risk-communication-and-community-
    engagement

**Remote
humanitarian monitoring:
Guidance note**

2017   2018                    2019                      2020