



# No Longer a Last Resort: A Review of the Remote Programming Landscape

A team from Integrity Research and Consultancy and Axiom Monitoring & Evaluation conducted a cross-cutting evaluation of DFID's remote management approaches in Somalia and North-East Kenya from June to November 2014.

This working paper is based on the literature review conducted as part of this evaluation. It presents an overview and analysis of academic and policy literature on remote delivery of humanitarian aid and development assistance in fragile and conflict-affected states.

First, the paper provides an introduction and background to remote programming, then outlines the various types of remote programming modalities. The final section outlines the main lessons learned and best practices as identified in the literature.



*The information presented in this working paper is drawn from Integrity Research and Consultancy's evaluation of DFID's approach to remote management in Somalia and North-East Kenya. It is based on a longer desk review conducted and written by Dr. Althea-Maria Rivas. This working paper was compiled and edited by Alex Martins and designed by Carly Owens-Callan. All images are property of Integrity Research and Consultancy. For further information please email [info@integrityresearch.com](mailto:info@integrityresearch.com).*

*Disclaimer: This report has been prepared by Integrity as an output of the Cross Cutting Evaluation of DFID's Approach to Remote Management in Somalia and North-East Kenya. The conclusions reached and the suggestions offered are those of the author and do not represent the policy of DFID.*

# Summary of Key Points

- There is a **growing but limited body of literature** that discusses issues related to remote programming, much of which is focused on aid delivery mechanisms of implementing organisations. Literature written by donors or focused on donor-specific challenges, monitoring and accountability, is even more limited.



- Academic and policy literature use varying terminology to discuss remote programming, but certain **elements tie the definitions together**, including an acknowledgement that a relocation of staff is a key feature of remote management.
- The literature primarily **focuses on humanitarian programming**, a few commonly used case studies and has been written by a small group of experts.
- **Policy guidelines are largely absent**, even among agencies that have been conducting remote programming for several years. The **lack of donor guidelines** in this area is even more pronounced. The documentation that does exist tends to be general in nature and little is said about the application, implementation and impact of these guidelines.
- Remote management is still **viewed as a short term, temporary solution** in the policy literature rather than a **regular mode of operation** as is the case for many donors and implementing organisations, particularly those working in highly insecure contexts.
- Over the last five years there have been **consistent calls for more information sharing, analysis, coherence and coordination** among I/NGOs and donor agencies. However, they have not yet resulted in increased coordination on the development of policy frameworks.
- Although use of third party monitoring (TPM) is on the rise, **very little information exists on the different models or experiences with TPM**. What does exist focuses on the process and fails to discuss many of the ethical issues attached to using external parties to conduct monitoring.

# 1. Introduction



In the literature, remote programming (or remote programme management) has predominantly been described as a response to insecurity and risk that involves a temporary shift in operational modalities, for instance a relocation of staff members from insecure environments to a more stable operational base.

Remote programming is not a new topic in the humanitarian and development communities; as more assistance is delivered in high-risk contexts affected by conflict and fragility, donors and implementers have called for the development of policy frameworks, coordination and more research into remote programming in complex environments. To date, however, these calls have not led to significant policy changes or increases in the research. Rather, there is a growing but limited body of literature, most of which has been produced over the last ten years when large-scale interventions in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and other fragile and conflict affected states began to require more complex remote management mechanisms.

## This working paper has two aims:

1. Provide a snapshot of the current literature on remote programming, summarising issues that are relevant to current work within DFID
2. Outline best practices and lessons learned on remote programming from the literature, donors and implementing partners

## 1.1 Methodology and Limitations



The desk review that informed this working paper was based on a variety of sources, including grey literature, academic articles, evaluations, case study documents, short reflection pieces and guidelines.<sup>1</sup> However, the majority of the sources reviewed here are policy or practitioner focused. The evaluation team reviewed DFID reports, annual reviews, emails and other documents about the portfolios and individual programmes managed by DFID and its implementing partners.

Much of the existing literature is based predominantly on experiential learning, for instance reports by NGO consortiums in Iraq, Kenya and Somalia on their experiences with remote programme management. These sources are important for furthering a wider understanding of the issues from a practitioner perspective. They also provide important information from the perspectives of organisations working in remote programming environments.

Large-scale comparative studies or statistical data on remote programming, particularly in the public domain, are difficult to locate; however, the existing sources do provide qualitative rigour in their assessments of various aspects of RPM. Furthermore, very little academic work has been done on the subject, although several academics have written non-academic publications on related areas such as risk management.<sup>2</sup>

The desk review that informed this working paper had two limitations. First, it was completed as part of an ongoing evaluation for a donor that had specific objectives and information requirements with a focus on Somalia and North-East Kenya. These parameters have contributed to a prevalence of literature from the Horn of Africa. Second, some material that would have been pertinent to the review was either unavailable or inaccessible.

### Fragile and conflict affected states share some common characteristics:

- Risky environments for citizens, governments, neighbouring countries and international assistance providers
- Positive outcomes are hard to achieve and risk of regression back into armed conflict is high.
- Interventions within these complex environments are often implemented, either temporarily or on a longer-term basis, using remote programming mechanisms.

Most often cited case studies on remote management are Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. Syria, which is one of the largest humanitarian crisis in recent history, is a recent example of aid delivery through remote practices.

1. For a reading list of the documents included in the desk review, please see the Bibliography at the end of the document.

2. For example please see Duffield, Mark. 2011. How Did We Become Unprepared? Emergency and Resilience in an Uncertain World. Presented at "How Did We Become Unprepared?" London. British Academy.

## 1.2 A Brief History of Remote Programme Monitoring (RPM)



Over the last twenty years, the international community has increasingly intervened and invested in fragile and conflict-affected states (OECD, 2013; Kaldor, 1999). Although engagement in these contexts is challenging, the prevailing question in the literature is not whether to conduct humanitarian and development interventions, but how to engage in ways that are context-specific and that do not come at unacceptable security, financial and operational costs. Maintaining an institutional or staff presence in these challenging environments depends heavily on resolving the tension between accepting or mitigating risks and remaining safe.

This tension has become increasingly apparent since the late 1990s, when a serious deterioration in the security situation in Russia forced aid agencies to relocate their operational bases and international staff from Chechnya to Ingushetia and then to North Ossetia. In Iraq in late 2003 and 2004, many agencies relocated their international staff to Amman, Jordan following the deadly attack in August 2003 on the UN Headquarters in Baghdad that killed 22 people, including the UN Special Representative. Deteriorating security conditions have necessitated the use of remote programming in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia. RPM has also been used at different times in northern Uganda, Gaza, Sri Lanka, Colombia and South Sudan (ODI GPR, 2010). Syria, the largest humanitarian emergency in recent history, is yet another context in which humanitarian and development assistance is delivered through a variety of remote practices.

Advances in communications technology over the past two decades have allowed aid agencies to adopt innovative management approaches. Widespread use of mobile phones (in addition to wider penetration of mobile networks), satellite phones, and the Internet can facilitate regular contact with national staff and partners based in the field, beneficiaries and project monitoring (FAO, 2012). A variety of communications software makes it possible to manage programmes not just from a neighbouring country but also from further afield.



## 1.2.1 RPM as a Response to Security Challenges

Donors and implementers make the decision to deliver humanitarian and development programmes remotely for several reasons; however, the main motivation is often a [response to increasing or continued insecurity](#) (Stoddard et al., 2010). As violence increases, security risks rise and access to communities is reduced. Facing increased risks, organisations tend to move their operations to safer locations and shift to security-induced remote programme management (Egeland et al., 2011). As described below, however, programmes and projects are increasingly being designed and implemented remotely from the inception phase, most notably in Somalia, which has faced protracted conflict for over two decades.

While some country-specific data exists, there is no comprehensive data on insecurity and access trends (Scheter and Harmer, 2013). Somalia and Kenya, the geographic focus of this desk review, are among the top ten countries with the highest number of security incidents against aid workers between 1997 and 2013. Table 1 compares the number of violent incidents and number of victims in Somalia and Kenya to the worldwide total for the period 1997-2013.<sup>3</sup>

	Total Incidents	Total Victims	Total International Victims	Total National Victims	Total Fatalities
Worldwide	1660	3378	592	2786	1275
Somalia	207	362	87	275	168
Kenya	41	57	20	37	18

Table 1: Statistics on Violence against Aid Workers (1997-2013)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>The pre-2000 statistics may not be historically accurate, particularly in the case of national staff. The post-2000 statistics are more rigorous as improvements in communications technology facilitated information exchange and awareness on these issues. For more detail, see: Humanitarian Outcomes (2014), Aid Worker Security Database, <https://aidworkersecurity.org/>.

<sup>4</sup>The countries with the highest number of security incidents between 1997-2013 are: Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia, Pakistan, South Sudan, DR Congo, Syria, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Kenya. A more recent time period (2010-2013) sees Somalia move down the list to spot 4, while Kenya moves to spot 7.

## 1.3 Gaps and Assumptions in the Literature

Several gaps and assumptions were identified in the literature review, grouped into six categories:

- **No longer a temporary or last resort:** Donors and implementers working in insecure contexts primarily view remote programming as a last resort strategy to be adopted once other measures have failed. However, remote programming is now the new normal in fragile and conflict-affected states where access is severely restricted, rather than a temporary response. More recent publications (Steets, 2012) recognise the potential long-term nature of remote programming in certain conflict-affected areas such as Somalia, North-East Kenya and Afghanistan, but beyond this recognition little has been said about the impact of long-term remote programming and different approaches that may be necessary as a result of this shift.
- **Focus on international implementing organisations:** The majority of the literature reviewed here has been written for or by and focuses on the practices of international organisations that implement programmes with a remote programming component. As a result, there is little information on the experiences of other bodies, including national, non-Western and faith-based organisations and staff.
- **Sparse information about remote oversight:** Given the literature's current concentration on remote programming conducted by implementing organisations, there is little focus on remote oversight by donor agencies. Some of the recent literature (Donini, 2011) touches on these issues, but only tangentially.
- **Lack of information on national/local views:** Although a stated objective in much of the literature is a better understanding of effective aid delivery in situations that require remote programming, the perspectives of national and local actors – the primary beneficiaries – are largely absent.
- **Focus on humanitarian programming:** With a few exceptions, the majority of the literature (including the GSDRC, 2013; and Tearfund, 2012a and 2012b reports) centres on humanitarian programming. However, social, economic and governance development programming exists alongside humanitarian and emergency assistance programmes in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, the three case studies that are most often the subject of documentation on remote programming.<sup>5</sup> The delivery of two different types of assistance through remote management in the same space is not explored in any depth in the current body of literature.
- **Lack of discussion on ethics:** Much of the literature addresses ways to maintain programme control and oversight through technical and operational improvements, such as strengthening monitoring systems, testing new technologies and building staff capacity. Comparatively less attention is given to serious ethical considerations that warrant recognition and engagement. Although some researchers address these issues,<sup>6</sup> debates on ethics often concentrate on the issue of risk transfer, ignoring a number of other ethical dilemmas that arise in remote programming environments, such as the transfer of beneficiary data to third parties, appropriate engagement strategies by implementers and monitors in high-risk environments, and the use of the information that is obtained through monitoring. The dilemmas differ by context and this nuance is not fully interrogated in much of the literature. The 2011 Aid Worker Security Report addresses this concern in its analysis of the role of national staff in remote programming.

*“The contradiction between the expectation that international aid workers accept more risks and the countervailing pressures to limit exposure seems irreconcilable... ethical, personal and financial difficulties involved in working in challenging environments, and the fundamental tension between ‘staying’ and ‘staying safe’, suggests that bunkerisation and remote management are an unstoppable trend. The aid industry has yet to systematically discuss the wider implications and possible consequences of these trends.” (Collinson, Duffield et al, 2013)*

5. Although Syria has not yet figured as a case study in the literature on remote programme management, dual programming (humanitarian aid and development or stabilisation assistance) is also the implementation model employed by donors and implementers in response to the crisis there.

6. For example, please see Egeland, J. et al. (2011). To Stay and Deliver: Good Practice for Humanitarians in Complex Security Environments. New York. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Policy and Studies Series. [http://ochanet.unocha.org/pr/Documents/Stay\\_and\\_Deliver.pdf](http://ochanet.unocha.org/pr/Documents/Stay_and_Deliver.pdf). Also, Humanitarian Outcome's Aid Worker Security Report 2011 addresses this issue as well.

## 2. Overview and Analysis of Remote Programming



### Shared characteristics of terms that refer to remote programming:

- Reduced access to the project sites
- A shift in operational modalities whereby staff (usually but not always international) are relocated
- A transfer of responsibility and risk to national, local or other stakeholders
- Formation of new partnerships investment in capacity building, support and training

Donors and implementers make the decision to deliver humanitarian and development programmes remotely for several reasons; however, the main motivation is often a response to increasing or continued insecurity (Stoddard et al., 2010). As violence increases, security risks rise and access to communities is reduced. Facing increased risks, organisations tend to move their operations to safer locations and shift to security-induced remote programme management (Egeland et al., 2011). As described below, however, programmes and projects are increasingly being designed and implemented remotely from the inception phase, most notably in Somalia, which has faced protracted conflict for over two decades.

While some country-specific level data exists, there is no wide scale comprehensive data on insecurity and access trends (Scheter and Harmer, 2013). Somalia and Kenya, the geographic focus of this desk review, are among the top ten countries with the highest number of security incidents against aid workers between 1997 and 2013. According to recent statistics, Somalia ties with Sudan and is second only to Afghanistan in terms of the highest number of recorded incidents against aid workers during this time period.

### 2.1 Definitions and Terminology

There is no consensus on the appropriate terminology to refer to situations where organisations implement assistance programs in difficult locations while the majority of staff (primarily international members) resides elsewhere. In the 1980s in Ethiopia, the term cross border programming was used, while in 1990s Somalia it became long arm programming (Tsitrinbaomy, 2010).

Both Somalia and North East Kenya are considered classic remote programming situations (ALNAP, 2013; WFP, 2012). Donors and implementers in both contexts face limited access to implementation sites and high levels of insecurity. As a result, they heavily rely on local partners for programme delivery and monitoring, managing them mainly from headquarters in Nairobi, or hubs in Somalia, including Hargeisa, Mogadishu and others.

## 2.2 Remote Programming Practices and Arrangements

Hansen's Iraq study (2008) provides a useful categorisation of various remote practices, which he brings under the umbrella of remote programming modalities (RPM). His research delineates four different types of remote programming practices, outlined in Table 2 on the following page.

Organisations can adopt different arrangements within these modalities. Stoddard et al., (2010, adapted from Stoddard, Harmer and Haver, 2006) propose a classification system of six remote management practices with on-site staff presence as the differentiating criteria. Norman (2012) identifies five levels of remote management ranging from regular but limited access, irregular access to no access at all. Figure 1 synthesises the various classifications found in the literature.

Some organisations use only one method of remote management while others employ a broad range. The choice of programming approaches depends on the capacity of the organisation, the project location and type of project (Hansen, 2008; Donini, 2011).



Figure 1: Remote Management Arrangements

### Distinction between direct aid delivery and remote delivery

It is important to distinguish between aid delivery and remote programming in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. A common strategy used by aid agencies facing increasing insecurity and lack of access is a relocation of activities (rather than staff) to accessible areas (Norman, 2012). Relocation of activities denotes maintaining the same operational policies and procedures by moving implementation to a different area. This decision is attributed to reasoning that the risks in shifting to remote programming outweigh the benefits of trying to stay (OCHA, 2011).

These comprehensive operational guides outline the various approaches adopted by aid agencies:

- Good Practice Review: Operational Security Management in Violent Environments (ODI, 2010)
- OCHA: Stay and Deliver (Egeland et al., 2011)
- ECHO: Evaluation and Review of Humanitarian Access Strategies in DG ECHO Funded Interventions (Steets et al., 2012)

# Remote Programming Practices and Arrangements

Modality	Decision-Making	Implementation Method/Actors	Site Access	Risk Transfer	Timeline
<b>Remote control</b>	Majority of decisions made by relocated international managers. Delegation of responsibility for implementation not decision-making.	National/Local staff	No access	Complete risk transfer to national/local staff	Very short term
<b>Remote Management</b>	Temporary and partial delegation of authority and responsibility to national staff, implementing partners or other stakeholders. Development of communications, accountability and effectiveness, procedures and protocols	National/local partner organisations or local contractors. Moderate investment in skills transfer and capacity building for national staff.	Limited access	Transfer to other stakeholders and staff	Temporary but can be sustained in the medium term
<b>Remote Support</b>	Goal to hand over decision making and authority to national/local actors, while financial and strategic oversight is retained remotely to ensure a high level of due diligence and accountability.	National/local staff, local authorities and communities. High level of investment in mentoring, skills transfer and capacity building.	Limited/Some access	Complete	Ongoing
<b>Remote Partnership</b>	Equal partnership and near-complete handover of responsibility to other actors. Difficulties encountered in partnerships: equality, accountability, communication and monitoring.	National/local partner organisations or contractors.	Limited/Some access	Complete	Long-term but can be dated

Table 2: Remote Programming Modalities\*

\* The main source used for the table is the NGO Co-ordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI) study by Hansen (2008). Integrity has adapted his ideas using several other authors to make the table more comprehensive.

## 2.3 Policy Guidance and Frameworks

Although a few comprehensive reports and articles on remote programming exist, **very few agencies have developed formal policy guidance or frameworks.** Most of the remote programming guidelines or frameworks, most have been developed by humanitarian NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) or coordination bodies.

Stoddard et al. (2010) suggest that the decision to shift to remote management tends to be a reactive rather than planned choice. Remote management is conceptualised as a less-than-optimal, negative and short-term operations model. This perception may impact the willingness of agencies to dedicate resources and planning to develop specific formal policy and guidelines on remote programming. Few organisations have taken steps to specify what will trigger the move toward remote management or what types of programming they will adopt to mitigate various types of risks. There is generally little discussion and no common framework to support organisations in their decision-making (Collinson and Duffield et al, 2013).



## 2.4 Coordination

Little information exists on remote programming coordination bodies, their successes or challenges. A few examples include:

- A UNHCR evaluation (Savage, et al, 2007) recognises the unlikelihood of shifting from remote programming operations in Northern Kenya and suggests the need for common framework and approaches to ensure the implementation of effective aid.
- A conference hosted by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Copenhagen, November 2010) focused on risk management in ‘transitional’ contexts, characterised by a combination of humanitarian, development and stabilisation activities. The conference proceedings contain an eight-point approach that includes:
  - Jointly defining terms and categories related to risk, including distinguishing risk outcomes and risk factors, as a basis for a more coherent approach across the different policy spheres;
  - Pooling information and sharing learning between the different actors on the most effective and appropriate risk management approaches is an important step towards more coherent, harmonised approaches;
  - More effective coordination at global and field levels between the different policy spheres.
- Members of the Somalia NGO Consortium formed the Working Group on Risk Management and Accountability in 2013. A 2013 report (McEcoy, C) commissioned by the group, recognises the challenge of coordination and common approaches among agencies with different mandates, programming modalities, guiding principles and risk tolerances.

## 2.5 Risk Management

Remote programming carries a number of risks and the costs of poor decision-making can be significant (Donini, 2011). The literature identifies the most common risks, which include:

- Inadequate and poor quality information management and credibility
- Corruption
- Inciting conflict
- Casualties and fatalities
- Insufficient programme impact
- Poor monitoring
- Informal taxation
- Security challenges
- Fund diversion and fiduciary risk

Donini argues that despite risk management strategies organisations maintain a stance of risk aversion. Duffield (2007, 2010 and 2012) and Smirl (2009) contend that the risk management stance of the aid and humanitarian industry has contributed to a militarisation of aid and is more concerned with containing rather than managing risk. Steets et al. (2012) and Egeland et al. (2011) also raise this issue, cautioning that risk management measures can act as barriers to distance aid workers and agencies from the populations they are meant to assist.

An OECD brief (2011) on donor risk management in fragile environments outlines several emerging patterns in donor approaches to managing risk in fragile states, including:

- A preference to fund projects and programmes implemented by trusted UN, NGO or commercial partners
- Unrealistic objectives and measuring standards
- Risk-averse organisational cultures
- An unwillingness to accept exposure to corruption and adapt control measures

The brief suggests that donors and implementers are excessively cautious due to the risks cited above and weigh the benefits of local engagement too lightly. This, in turn, inhibits organisations from seizing opportunities for constructive and innovative engagement with local institutions and markets. The brief also highlights the need for political backing that acknowledges the necessity of risk-taking with accompanying strong control/oversight measures in these environments. One of its key conclusions is that real progress in this area may depend on more collective approaches to managing risk, a better balance of high- and low-risk forms of engagement, and more realistic mutual expectations between donors and their implementing partners.



## 2.6 Remote Monitoring and Oversight

While many of the risks mentioned above speak to **challenges with monitoring and oversight**, there has been limited published research and guidance that addresses these practices in remotely managed programmes. Though many of the existing publications (e.g., Somalia NGO Consortium (2009), Hansen (2008), Stoddard et al. (2010), and Egeland et al. Deliver (2011) pay some attention to remote monitoring and accountability, they do so only as an aspect of the wider issue of remote management. The Tearfund study (2012) and the ALNAP study by Darcy and Clarke (2014) are two of the few documents that address monitoring and oversight directly, with a focus on humanitarian programming.

Challenges in conducting effective monitoring (Stoddard et al., 2010) have led both donor and implementing agencies to develop innovative ways of monitoring projects and triangulating information. The methods of monitoring vary, but the most commonly discussed are:

- Third party monitoring
- Increased beneficiaries feedback forums
- Community meetings
- Local monitors
- Evaluations and independent analysis

Despite the range of monitoring mechanisms, organisations are operating at a disadvantage due to their distance from implementation and many issues can go either unreported or unnoticed. Donini (2011) points out that this is particularly the case for human rights and gender-based violence issues. A growing challenge for the aid organisations using these new technologies is to convince beneficiaries that reporting problems will make a difference and not place them in danger if they lodge complaints (SIDA, 2011).

The literature raises concerns about the range of actors that become involved in the remote programming environment, particularly in monitoring and oversight efforts, noting that this raises a series of ethical dilemmas. The inclusion of so many different actors can create more risk, making it challenging to align different approaches and objectives within one strategy. Gordon (2014) argues that responsibility for oversight has actually been delegated to private contractors and new technologies.

New technologies such as GPS tracking, tablet-loaded surveys and direct beneficiary feedback through call centers and SMS have also been put in place to monitor remotely managed projects. Other possibilities for collecting monitoring data include crowdsourcing, employment of diaspora as monitors and the use of local media to gather and share information.





## Local perspectives

There is little in-depth research and analysis of the views of local staff and communities on accountability and remote programming. Schreter and Harmer (2013) propose a greater focus on understanding how people are affected by insecurity, how this affects the aid presence and effectiveness of aid actors (i.e. what determines secure access), as well as the usefulness of the kinds of aid received.

## 2.7 Accountability

In addition to programme quality and monitoring, the literature raises issues around accountability—another major concern for donors and aid agencies. The lack of information, difficulty in accessing project sites, challenging data collection and poor data quality contribute to the perception that accountability is illusive.

There are multiple lines of accountability within remote programming environments, some of which are created due to the emergence of new actors in development and humanitarian assistance programming. ALNAP's 2014 paper, *Engagement of Crisis-affected People in Humanitarian Action*, suggests that although increased remote management may contribute to the devolution of power to the grassroots level, it also means that the chain of intermediaries between funders and recipients of humanitarian action is becoming longer and more remote. This contributes to the system's growing institutionalisation, as well as the multiplication of standards, coordination processes and reporting requirements.

Currently, the formal requirements of donor accountability for aid projects in insecure areas are similar to more stable contexts (Schreter and Harmer, 2013). However, Stoddard et al (2010) outline the complex realities of donor responses to funding remote management programmes. The report suggests that donors have tended to take a hands-off approach by being flexible with additional funding and loosening monitoring requirements when security conditions change. This may be due to deference and a reluctance to micromanage their partners, recognising that the contextual knowledge of their partners is most likely greater than their own (Stoddard and Harmer 2010).

There is increased perception among some donors and agencies that considerable risk, particularly regarding corruption, diversion of funds and abuse of aid, exists in remote programming situations (USIP, 2014; SIGAR, 2013). Demands for greater accountability by governments have contributed to greater scrutiny of programmes by donor agencies, leading to a limitation on the types of projects that donors are willing to fund. (Darcy and Clarke, 2014). The OECD report (2013) argues, however, that current accountability expectations among donors are often unrealistic in fragile and transitional contexts, which can lead to perverse results and calls for donor flexibility and realism. 'The lack of literature on accountability frameworks and presumed lack of policy itself, may act as an obstacle to decision-making, and may lead to reliance on standard accountability processes which may not be achievable in highly insecure environments (Schreter and Harmer, 2013).

# 3. Best Practices and Lessons Learned



Scheter and Harmer, (2013) suggest a range of best practices in remote management, including:

- Establishing highly localised and static staffing which may involve an increase rather than a decrease of national staff.
- Use of diaspora nationals as international staff.
- 'Soft' remote management, which involves senior international staff having a regular but not full-time presence in country.
- Methods to enhance accountability and mitigate quality deficits for remote programming, such as web-based monitoring and project verification through third-party triangulation.

The literature identified several best practices in remote programme management which can be summarised as follows:

- **Plan for remote programming:** Planning should propose **simplified processes and contingency funding** may also need to be set aside given the additional costs that are associated with remote programming (Egeland et al., 2011; Freeman et al., 2011; Mullany et al., 2009; Norman, 2012; Zyck, 2012)
- **Develop on-the-ground networks to enable accountability:** Investing in **strong relationships with key stakeholders** on the ground that can enable remote verification and monitoring if remote programming is implemented (Hammond and Vaughan-Lee 2012; Stoddard et al, 2010).
- **Build partnerships for third-party monitoring and evaluation:** A variety of actors can provide assistance in monitoring through third party verifications and spot checks, for instance **local NGOs, private firms and university departments**, enabling aid agencies to receive relatively objective data on programme performance.
- **Build capacities for remote management:** Good humanitarian and development practice emphasises the need to **build the capacities of local counterparts**. Capacity building should focus on (i) technical project components (e.g., engineering, community mobilisation, etc.) and (ii) basic problem-solving and management skills (Rogers, 2006). According to Scheter and Harmer (2013), several evaluations concluded that planned site-visits from management and support staff stationed outside of the conflict setting serve to promote local capacity and autonomy, coordination, information-sharing, and a sense of mutual trust and ownership of projects (ACF 2012; Mullany et al., 2012; Norman, 2012; Sompok, 2012).

In conclusion, a review of the literature demonstrates that although remote programming is not a new practice, specific documentation, policy guidelines and evaluation of the key issues are lacking. Those that do exist are limited in their scope, detail and level of analysis. The literature also demonstrates that **aid agencies and donors are thinking about, concerned by and struggling with the many challenges that arise from remote programming in politically complex, weak and fragile states**. Appropriate implementation, oversight and monitoring mechanisms, understanding of risk and developing risk management strategies, and increasing accountability are all major issues for agencies and donors alike.

The gaps identified in the literature arise primarily from the fact that remote programming has relatively recently grown in prevalence as more aid and projects are delivered in areas that are difficult to access directly. Additional action-based research and evaluations (both programme and process) are needed to inform policy decisions and programming structures, and should ideally come from a range of donors working in different remote programming contexts. Research that prominently incorporates the perspectives and experiences of local stakeholders should also be a priority, as this has been identified as a major gap in existing literature.

Additionally, **further research into best practices** from both humanitarian and development perspectives would allow practitioners to select appropriate implementation models based on the needs and challenges faced in their specific contexts. As more robust evidence emerges from both academic and policy literature, practitioners (including donors and implementing organisations) will be better equipped to design interventions that capture lessons learned from other contexts and minimise the inevitable challenges that arise when remote programming is adopted.

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