SECURE ACCESS IN VOLATILE ENVIRONMENTS SAVE

Improving the evidence base on delivering aid in highly insecure environments

INTERIM REPORT

COMPONENT 3: ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING

1 August 2015

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Executive Summary

Component 3 of the SAVE research programme focuses on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in insecure environments. The goal of the research is to understand the challenges organisations face with respect to M&E in the four focus countries (Somalia, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Syria) and to analyse good practices and potential innovations for addressing these challenges.

The research approach is participatory and involves identifying a small group of operational aid organisations to act as 'learning partners' in each focus country. Together with these learning partners, a research agenda is established focusing on priority M&E issues in each country. Specific research methods are chosen for each topic, including interviews, community consultation, observation and documentation by field researchers, as well as global-level research.

The field research for Component 3 was intentionally staggered: two country programmes (Afghanistan and South Central Somalia) were initiated at the start of the implementation phase, while another two (South Sudan and Syria) are currently being launched. At the time of writing, field research addressing the agreed priority issues had largely been concluded in South Central Somalia and Afghanistan. Workshops to review the findings with the learning partners and other interested stakeholders are under preparation. Afghanistan and South Central Somalia were chosen as the first two country cases due to the maturity of the humanitarian and M&E systems in place, with the view that these would yield useful lessons for actors in South Sudan and Syria, where the response is relatively young.

While the original scope of the component covered aspects related to both monitoring and evaluation, the priority of the learning partners so far has been on monitoring. The priority research issues identified in South Central Somalia and Afghanistan included perceptions of, and factors influencing the effectiveness of community feedback mechanisms; the role of technology; the role of third party monitors; and bringing M&E tools and systems for insecure environments 'back to basics'.

In addition to an ongoing dialogue with the learning partners, a total of 151 interviews have been conducted so far during the implementation phase, of which approximately 30 per cent were with female interviewees. In addition, consultations with members of communities and affected populations were held in Afghanistan and South Central Somalia. A total of 137 individuals were consulted, of which approximately 28 per cent were women.

The evidence from the two field contexts as well as global-level research will continue to be consolidated and analysed, including in relation to forthcoming research in South Sudan and Syria, but preliminary general findings as well as analysis on the four research streams to date has yielded some indicative findings that are shared in this report.

M&E in insecure environments

An online survey conducted in South Central Somalia and Afghanistan showed that the overall level of satisfaction with current M&E systems varies by organisation type. In both countries, UN agencies were least satisfied with the current system, while international NGOs (INGOs) occupied the middle ground and national or local NGOs were most satisfied. At the same time, respondents expressed the highest level of dissatisfaction not with their own, but with their partners' M&E systems, which often were national or local NGOs.

Current M&E systems were perceived as relatively well suited for tracking outputs and creating accountability to donors and taxpayers, as well as informing operational decisions. By contrast, they were not seen to be performing well in showing aggregate effects or impact. Donors largely shared this perception and a majority of donors responding to the survey indicated that they were not satisfied with their partners' M&E systems.

In terms of obstacles, respondents in both countries rated the lack of capacity of partner organisations, the lack of willingness to share data and their own capacity gaps as the top three factors influencing the effectiveness of their M&E systems. Related to this, to manage the difficulties posed in these contexts, background desk research and initial consultations with learning partners found that the tendency was to go 'back to basics', in terms of ensuring that basic information collection and triangulation of that data occurs.

In addition, an evident trend is to create more joint or overarching M&E systems (for example linked to consortia or put in place by donors to cover a wide range of partners). This was designed to address the limited sharing of monitoring information, and to raise the overall standard of M&E being conducted. Outside of these new mechanisms, the research suggests there has been limited sharing of data between agencies, and the scope for peer-to-peer monitoring has also been also limited in part due to the geographic distribution of activities. Where they exist, joint databases or mechanisms for exchange usually serve a purpose of risk management more than improving performance or learning – for example when joint databases on implementing partners or third-party monitoring providers are created. Existing beneficiary feedback mechanisms also lack coordination, with multiple agencies piloting and rolling out systems in parallel. The issues related to coordinated monitoring will be further examined in the research focusing on South Sudan, where the joint monitoring and reporting mechanisms created through Common Humanitarian Fund will be reviewed, as well as possible research in Syria.

Community feedback mechanisms

Formalised community feedback mechanisms were found to be much more prevalent in Somalia than in Afghanistan. In Somalia, the increased investment in formal feedback mechanisms was linked to several large-scale cases of aid diversion being publicised following the 2011 - 2012 famine response, the long-term use of remote management modalities in some areas and the increasing requirements imposed by donors, including donor-funded NGO consortia. Somalia also has comparatively well-developed mobile phone networks and coverage, which facilitated the adoption of phone-based feedback mechanisms. In Afghanistan, where the opportunities for employing technology-based feedback systems are seen as more limited, many organisations have opted to continue involving already established local councils (*shuras*) or community development councils, and few other formalised feedback mechanisms are used.

Community perceptions on the available feedback mechanisms, however, were negative in both settings, highlighting that consultation was limited to elders, gatekeepers or community committees. Communities expressed concern that this practice leads to a bias and / or corruption. Communities in both countries strongly demanded more, and more direct, feedback channels.

At the same time, aid organisations using formal feedback channels noted that one of the key challenges was the low usage of the feedback mechanisms among communities. They also observed critically that the majority of feedback concerned questions about details of the operations, rather than information about the appropriateness and quality of interventions or other concerns such as fraud.

Factors influencing the effectiveness of formal feedback mechanisms included the level of human and financial resources invested in staff capacity and information management systems; the involvement of communities in selecting feedback mechanisms and their awareness of their entitlements and available channels for providing feedback; confidence in the confidentiality of received messages; and clarity about who is responsible for verifying and following up on received information.

Technologies for M&E

The increasing use, but limited number, of technologies for M&E was identified in insecure environments (based on global research and in-country analysis). Currently, only two types of technology were found to be widely used. Digital data entry applications linked to electronic databases were broadly recognised as useful tools for increasing data entry and processing efficiency and for offering more opportunities to supervise enumerators. However, these technologies still require physical access for enumerators.

Phone-based feedback and survey mechanisms take advantage of basic mobile phones that are increasingly available in some insecure settings. Consulted communities saw phone-based feedback mechanisms as important complements to other communication channels, especially where the physical access was highly restricted. However, their introduction and maintenance is costly and, as noted above, uptake of this type of feedback channel is often limited.

Third-party monitoring

Third-party monitoring (TPM) is a controversial practice that is increasingly used by UN agencies, donors, and some large INGOs in Afghanistan and Somalia. The field research focused primarily on the case of Afghanistan, and draws on findings from other recent literature, particularly related to Somalia. It found that aid organisations see the main benefits of TPM as offering increased monitoring in insecure areas; low-visibility monitoring in areas of limited access; more regular and more frequent monitoring than possible with own staff; and independent triangulation of data provided by partners and an organisation's own staff. In Afghanistan, TPM is mainly used to verify whether specific outputs were delivered, thereby creating a basic level of accountability for operations in areas that are difficult to access.

However, the research also found significant constraints and risks related to TPM. The quality of data and reports provided by third party monitors was found to be mixed at best. TPM providers had little awareness of humanitarian principles and their behaviour in the field sometimes created serious reputational risks for the commissioning agencies. Most of the organisations consulted also initially underestimated the time and resources required for setting up and adequately managing TPM. In addition, some types of TPM providers might face conflicts of interest and their ease of access to locations is often erratic. Over the longer term, reliance on TPM can reduce an organisation's links to and acceptance by communities and thereby potentially further reduce access. Finally, the research found that ethical concerns relating to risk transfer and the duty of care had in most cases not been sufficiently considered.

The research reached the preliminary conclusion that TPM can be a meaningful component of a broader M&E toolkit where the following conditions are met: The commissioning agency has sufficient capacity to vet, select, train and manage the monitors; TPM is not used across the board, but only in particularly hard-to-access areas; the commissioning agency knows the provider's security arrangements and

systematically shares security information and analysis; partial field monitoring by own staff or implementing parties to validate and cross-check their own data is possible; the agency implements acceptance-building measures including communicating actively with communities; and the commissioning agency is able to absorb, interpret and retain received information.

Research uptake and next steps

The research team has discussed relevant issues and emerging findings with a broad range of stakeholders. Research uptake activities implemented to date include: Workshops with the learning partners and other interested aid organisations operating in the focus countries; a range of presentations, including to the SAVE Advisory Group, a group of DFID M&E specialists, the Learning Group on Beneficiary Feedback; as well as to in-country M&E networks. The team has also presented or attended a broad range of meetings and conferences related to technologies in M&E.

The next phase of Component 3 research will involve finalisation of the research from Afghanistan and South Central Somalia, including workshops on emerging findings with learning partners and other interested stakeholders in Kabul, Nairobi and Mogadishu. The team will also focus on implementing country-level and global research relating to the research agenda developed with learning partners in South Sudan and Syria. The final phase of the research will involve the development and peer review of the research results from all four focus countries; and the development of a global synthesis including a Menu of Options relating to the different M&E approaches analysed. A final report to DFID, to be submitted on 1 August 2016, will summarise the overall research process and methods, provide a full summary of the research findings, and document available evidence and impact of its uptake.

1 Introduction

1.1 Objectives

Secure Access in Volatile Environments (SAVE) is a three-year programme of applied research that seeks to improve the evidence base on what works for maintaining humanitarian access in the world's most challenging operational contexts. In doing so it seeks to contribute to solutions for providing effective and accountable humanitarian action amid high levels of insecurity.

The research is operationally driven and field-based. It focuses on four contexts: Afghanistan, South Central Somalia, South Sudan and Syria. There are three linked, overlapping components:

- Access: Quantifying and mapping humanitarian coverage in relation to security conditions
- Quality: Identifying the key determinants for enabling access and quality aid interventions
- Accountability and learning: Providing practical lessons and guidance for improved monitoring and evaluation

This report covers Component 3 of the research (accountability and learning).

In contexts where humanitarian organisations and communities are exposed to high insecurity, there are significant challenges not only in delivering assistance, but also in assessing its reach and effectiveness. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is critical for understanding the performance of aid, ensuring accountability to beneficiaries and donors and allowing effective continuation of programmes amid insecurity. Yet, insecurity can hamper every aspect of M&E, from the collection of evidence and its interpretation, to the sharing and dissemination of findings and M&E information.

In particular, methodological challenges for M&E arise where interviews and assessments cannot be done in person due to access challenges, or cannot be done by the right people, such as having female staff able to monitor programmes related to women. Lacking baseline information and the unpredictable nature of insecure environments also make applying standard metrics of effectiveness more difficult. Furthermore, organisational and systemic constraints such as competition over limited funding can create incentives against gathering data where it could reveal negative results. As a result, critical information is not always collected and/or shared and acted upon by aid actors.

Existing options for M&E entail trade-offs, such as risk transfer to national staff and third parties, or risks from the application of technological solutions where the use of technology is not viewed positively by local non-state armed actors. Against this background, donors and aid agencies are struggling to determine what level and type of M&E is realistic and appropriate under the constraints of insecurity. Component 3 investigates the options for how aid organisations can track and assess their work in insecure environments. Taking a collaborative and context-specific approach, the research seeks to understand the particular challenges that organisations face on the ground. It explores good practice and potential innovations to contribute to developing concrete M&E solutions for insecure locations.

The research component has two main goals. First, to help donors and aid organisations decide on appropriate M&E approaches, given the constraints in insecure contexts. Second, to identify practical solutions to monitor and evaluate, including strategies to increase the sharing of findings and lessons learned.

To achieve these broad goals, three main research questions are posed:

1. What is the status of M&E practice in the focus countries Somalia, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Syria?
2. What are ways to address major challenges and blockages affecting M&E?
3. What good practices and principles can the research offer for the humanitarian community in insecure environments?

1.2 Structure of this report

This report describes the research activities to date and presents selected preliminary findings. Section 2 describes the development of the methodology since the inception phase and how this has changed in the initial phases of the implementation.

Section 3 reports on the implementation of research activities and presents initial results. Due to the participatory nature of this component's research design, the research agenda that was developed based on desk research, an online survey, and in-country stakeholder consultations is the first result presented in this section. Section 4 then presents selected emerging findings for each research stream, making note of results to date as well as planned next steps for each.

Section 5 summarises the remaining steps for the overall component and remaining country cases. Section 6 presents past and planned dissemination activities. Depending on the feedback to this report and the results of upcoming consultations in Afghanistan and Somalia, planned activities and products may be modified or expanded.

2 Methodology development

The core elements of the Component 3 research framework and methodology have remained largely unchanged since the Inception Report for the SAVE programme. However, the selection of research topics (determined jointly with the learning partners) required some adjustment, as outlined below. Also, while this component was initially designed to include questions pertaining both to monitoring and to evaluation, the interest of the learning partners has primarily focused on monitoring. This was welcomed by the research team as it is an area that has received insufficient focus generally in humanitarian action, not only related to insecure environments. The issues addressed to date therefore relate mainly to monitoring processes and tools. Thus far the research has been rolled out in Afghanistan and South Central Somalia, with South Sudan and Syria the focus over the next six months. Afghanistan and Somalia were chosen as the first two country cases due to the maturity of the humanitarian and M&E systems in place. This promised to yield useful lessons for actors in South Sudan and Syria, where the response is relatively younger.

2.1 Methodological approach

The methodological approach of Component 3 entails a combination of global-level analysis (desk research, online survey and global consultations), field research and cooperation with selected research learning partners in all focus countries.

Desk research, interviews and community consultations: Desk research was undertaken to prepare the ground for analysis of the major research questions concerning challenges to M&E in insecure contexts and existing good practices, as well as to lean about tools and alternative options. To date, the team has collected and studied a large collection of documents, including those provided by learning partners, such as M&E frameworks, reports, guidance documents and policies. Over the course of the research (and in addition to an ongoing dialogue with the learning partners) the team has interviewed a total of 151 stakeholders, of which 48 actors were based in Afghanistan, 44 in Nairobi and Somalia and 59 at the global level or via phone. 30 per cent were female. The interview template for general interviews and for each focus areas is attached as Annex 1. In addition, 70 members of communities or affected populations were consulted in Afghanistan (of which 6 per cent were female) and 67 in South Central Somalia (of which 45 per cent were female). 137 individual were consulted altogether. The template for the consultations with communities and affected populations is attached as Annex 2.

An **online survey** was prepared and disseminated to a targeted group of M&E experts and practitioners in Afghanistan, Somalia and, most recently, South Sudan to cross-check and complement findings from the desk research (the survey instrument can be found at Annex 3). The survey will be rolled out in Syria (Turkey) in August 2015. The results from Afghanistan and Somalia are presented in this report.

The learning partners were identified through a process of in-country consultation. The partners represented a mix of national and international NGOs, UN organisations, and Red Cross/Red Crescent organisations active in the provision of humanitarian aid.

The selection of partners was based on (a) their interest, willingness and capacity to contribute to research and to reflect on as well as improve M&E mechanisms, (b) the goal to ensure diversity in types of partner, including UN, INGOs and smaller or local NGOs, and (c) the desire to include a mix of partners with both comparatively developed and basic M&E systems. Following the initial suggestion

about the broad terms and content of partnerships, detailed Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) were developed with the following partners on an individual basis:

South Central Somalia: Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS) Consortium, represented by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC); UNICEF; ADESO African Development Solutions; Action Contre La Faim (ACF).

Afghanistan: Save the Children; UNICEF; People in Need.

South Sudan: Nile Hope; Universal Intervention and Development Organisation (UNIDO); Agency for Tachnical Cooperation and Development (ACTED); Save the Children; Mercy Corps; Danish Refugee Council (DRC); World Food Programme (WFP); and the Common Humanitarian Fund, OCHA.[1]

Syria: Consultations begin in August 2015.

Learning partners play a particularly critical role in the early phases of Component 3 research in each country. During consultations in Nairobi (Kenya), Mogadishu (Somalia), and Kabul (Afghanistan), the team verified and completed its overview assessment of the current M&E situations based on desk research and identified and agreed on the research priorities outlined further below.

Finally, throughout the project, **country-based researchers** have been working with learning partners in Afghanistan and South Central Somalia to ensure a continuous research presence and support to learning partners in their work, as well as conducting embedded research, observing and documenting their M&E practices.

2.2 Adjustments and challenges to the methodology

During consultations with learning partners and in the joint work conducted thus far, a number of challenges became apparent and were taken into account when further refining the methodology:

Diversity of learning partners: The research team attempted to include a variety of organisations, including UN agencies, INGOs and national NGOs as learning partners in each country. In Afghanistan, however, discussions with national NGOs did not result in an agreement, and this perspective is missing from the learning partner group, although local NGOs were interviewed in the course of the research in Afghanistan. In Somalia, one national NGO joined the project as a learning partner and has agreed to host workshops specifically involving other national and local NGOs for the discussion of emerging research findings. In South Sudan, two local NGOs have agreed to become learning partners and their research priorities have been included in the agenda. Similar efforts will be made to ensure diversity in Syria, including with diaspora NGOs

Fluctuations in learning partner capacity: In Afghanistan, and at a much lower level in Somalia, learning partner organisations have experienced fluctuation of staff levels and transitions and/or downsizing in their M&E units. This has required a stronger investment of the research team in (re-) explaining the project and building ownership and commitment among partner organisations, as well as a more light-footed engagement of partners between major consultation periods and meetings.

[1] Signatures of some MoUs with the learning partners is pending.

Balance between global and field-level research: Overall, early findings have shown that the topics that partners care most about call for a balance between global-level and desk-based research on the one hand, as well as direct observation of partner practices and embedded (field) research on the other. The research team has therefore created linkages with other ongoing research projects, especially in the area of innovation and the use of technology, to increase the team's global research capacity.

In addition, the research focus chosen by the learning partners required a stronger analytical capacity of the country-based researchers than originally anticipated. This meant that country-based researchers charged higher daily rates and could therefore only be contracted for shorter periods of time, i.e. until the completion of the first round of research and the presentation of preliminary results.

Limitations on piloting of M&E approaches: The preceding two factors taken together mean that pilots of specific M&E approaches are unlikely to be implemented by partners in Afghanistan and South Central Somalia at the current stage. The research will emphasise preparing such pilots for a later stage (or in another case study context, for example in South Sudan and Syria) and developing guidance that agencies can readily use without much additional investment of staff and resources. In South Sudan, for example, learning partners have signalled their interest in assessing the feasibility of different remote monitoring techniques that are frequently used in other countries. The feasibility analysis was included in the research agenda and would constitute the first step towards potentially piloting an approach. Furthermore, the project will put more emphasis on documenting globally relevant lessons and facilitating exchange among organisations within and across the four focus countries.

Gender balance: When conducting the community and beneficiary consultations in Afghanistan, the country-based research partner was not able to recruit female researchers that would have been willing to travel to the relevant areas. Initial community consultations in Afghanistan therefore only included male members. During the last round of consultations, the local research team managed to identify four female community members who were willing to be interviewed. In Somalia, by contrast, the recruitment of a female researcher was successful and 45 per cent of consulted individuals were female. Efforts to increase the number of females interviewed, in particular by utilising female researchers or female staff from the learning partners will be a high priority in South Sudan and Syria.

Interviews on technologies in M&E: Finally, the research encountered difficulties in conducting interviews relating to the case examples for the use of technologies for M&E, with a very low rate of response to interview requests at the country-level. The research team therefore decided to use the upcoming workshops in Afghanistan and Somalia to identify and secure additional case examples and interviews.

The other research methods have largely remained in line with the proposed approach in the Inception Report and relied mostly on qualitative data gathered through methods such as interviews, desk research, structured surveys and interactive workshops.

Looking ahead at the second set of country cases – South Sudan and Syria – the team will further refine the approach, largely as reflected in the Inception Report. In contrast to Somalia and Afghanistan, where thematic priorities were only selected after the desk research and after all partners had been selected, the research conducted thus far has already been informing consultations with potential partners in Syria/Turkey and South Sudan. While the team made an effort to not forestall specific topics or monitoring approaches for examination in these settings, aid agencies in South Sudan and Syria have

expressed a clear interest in learning about emerging results from the first two countries and the thematic priorities of future partnerships are likely to be at least partially aligned with priorities identified in the first two countries.

3 Development of research agenda and initial overview findings

As of July 2015, the initial global and field research phase of Component 3 in Afghanistan and Somalia/Nairobi is near completion. The team will conduct interactive workshops and a series of meetings with learning partners, as well as with other interested stakeholders, in both countries in August to present and discuss preliminary findings and close remaining data gaps.

The emerging findings presented in this section should be read with the caveat that the interpretations and conclusions may change after the upcoming consultations and pending peer review feedback.

3.1 South Central Somalia

This section highlights the preliminary results from the desk research, global interviews and the online survey for Somalia. All results were discussed with partners and other stakeholders during workshops and meetings in Mogadishu and Nairobi, based on which the team developed the research agenda described further below in point 3.3.

3.1.1 Context

Interviews with aid practitioners and policymakers as well as documented experience from the response to the 2011 famine showed that accountability standards were lowered considerably during the famine period. Since 2011 and following high-profile cases of corruption and misconduct, humanitarian actors have faced the challenge of regaining the trust of the affected communities and their donors by raising standards of monitoring and reporting back to or in many cases above pre-famine levels. The response to weak levels of accountability during the famine is set against a backdrop of long-term challenges in monitoring assistance in South Central Somalia, which has become increasingly difficult given the highly restricted access for expatriate staff as well as – to a lesser degree – restrictions faced by national staff and partners. Many humanitarian organisations have faced significant limitations on their movement due to the bans imposed by Al Shabaab, which has, at times, also resulted in caution on the part of agencies around the use of certain technologies that could otherwise support data collection, such as cell-phones, mobile internet and GPS.

An additional challenge to monitoring in the Somali context is that the population is highly mobile due to frequent displacement and nomadism in large parts of the society. This can make longitudinal tracking – but also simple post-distribution monitoring and verification – more challenging than in other, comparatively more static contexts.

3.1.2 M&E trends identified in South Central Somalia

Based on interviews and document research, the study identified a few key trends that framed the initial scope of the research and were largely confirmed by stakeholders during interviews in Mogadishu and Nairobi. First, the term 'back to basics' was mentioned frequently but not always coherently to describe different approaches to dealing with similar concerns. Some agencies focus on direct implementation in areas that their own staff can access, instead of relying on partners or third parties to implement and monitor (but this may limit where they operate). These organisations aimed to maximise or secure field presence by increasingly employing Somali staff in management positions. Other organisations pointed to the humanitarian imperative and the requirement that assistance be based on need as the main reasons to attempt serving communities in areas beyond their direct reach with the help of partners.

For them, a 'back to basics' approach refers mostly to a simplification in programme designs with simultaneous maximisation of opportunities to triangulate monitoring data from partners using technology, their own staff, or third parties.

Second, over recent years, the use of technologies for monitoring has steadily increased in South Central Somalia. The most common are handheld devices for collecting M&E data and transferring them to online databases. The main benefits cited by interviewees include the time savings allowing almost real-time analysis and the possible aggregation of data in central databases, facilitating analysis and visualisation of results. Different forms of phone-based beneficiary feedback mechanisms are widely implemented (for more details, see the section on preliminary findings below). Also practiced, but less common, are biometric beneficiary identification techniques, satellite images and radio broadcasts. How to collect qualitative information is another frequently-mentioned challenge that technological solutions do not provide an easy answer for.

Third, strengthening joint and overarching M&E mechanisms came out as a strong concern for most stakeholders interviewed. However, the research has shown very limited sharing of data between agencies. Where they exist, joint databases and exchanges about implementing partners usually serve a purpose of risk management more than accountability or learning – for example when joint databases on implementing partners or third-party monitoring providers are created. More elaborate examples of joint and overarching M&E are demonstrated by consortia such as the Somalia Resilience Programme (SomRep) or the Building Resilient Communities in Somalia (BRCiS) programme, as well as pooled funding mechanisms such as the Common Humanitarian Fund. Overall, respondents felt that, outside of the NGO consortia and pooled funds, the incentives for more information sharing have not been established and the scope for peer monitoring is limited due to the geographic distribution of activities.

3.1.3 Results from the online survey on South Central Somalia

Sixty-three respondents completed the online survey, which was disseminated to targeted M&E actors in Somalia and Nairobi.[2] The respondent breakdown included INGOs (52 per cent), UN agencies (24 per cent) and local NGOs (10 per cent). The majority of the responses were from individuals in management (71 per cent), followed by M&E focal points (19 per cent) and other categories.

The status of M&E is perceived as problematic in South Central Somalia, with a clear difference observable between types of organisation. The survey results demonstrate that agencies are more satisfied with their own M&E systems than those of their partners.[3] In addition, apparently the further an organisation is from the field, the greater its concerns about M&E. Organisations implementing through local partners were not as satisfied with their M&E, when compared to organisations implementing through their own staff.

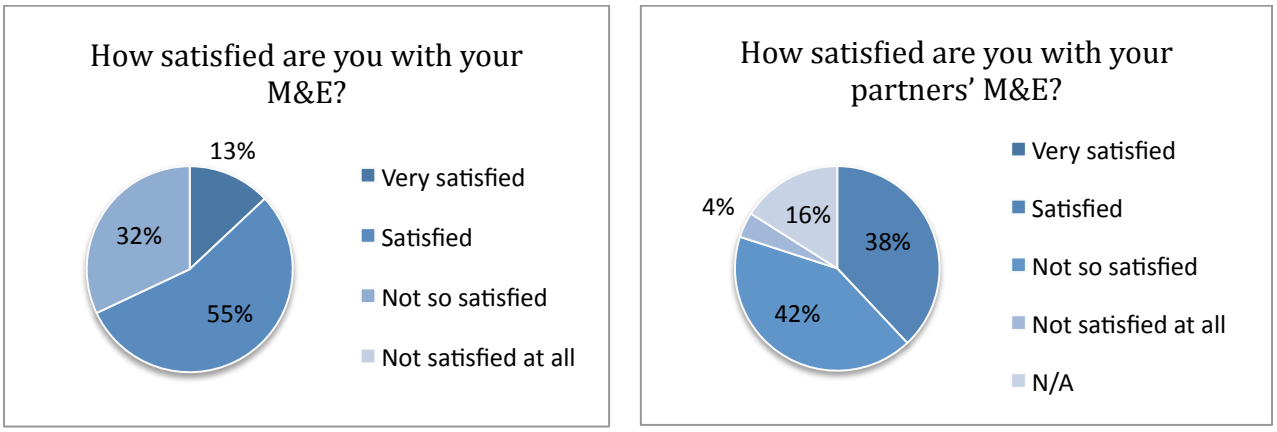
A majority of UN agencies in Somalia (58 per cent) responded to be 'not so satisfied' with their own M&E. International NGOs were more positive, with 76 per cent responding that they were satisfied with

[2] Thirteen had to be excluded from the survey analysis because they were incomplete. In 'incomplete' responses, respondents only clicked through the survey without answering a single question, or did not click submit in the end.

[3] While 55 per cent of those surveyed in Somalia were satisfied with their own M&E, only 38 per cent were satisfied with the M&E systems of their partners.

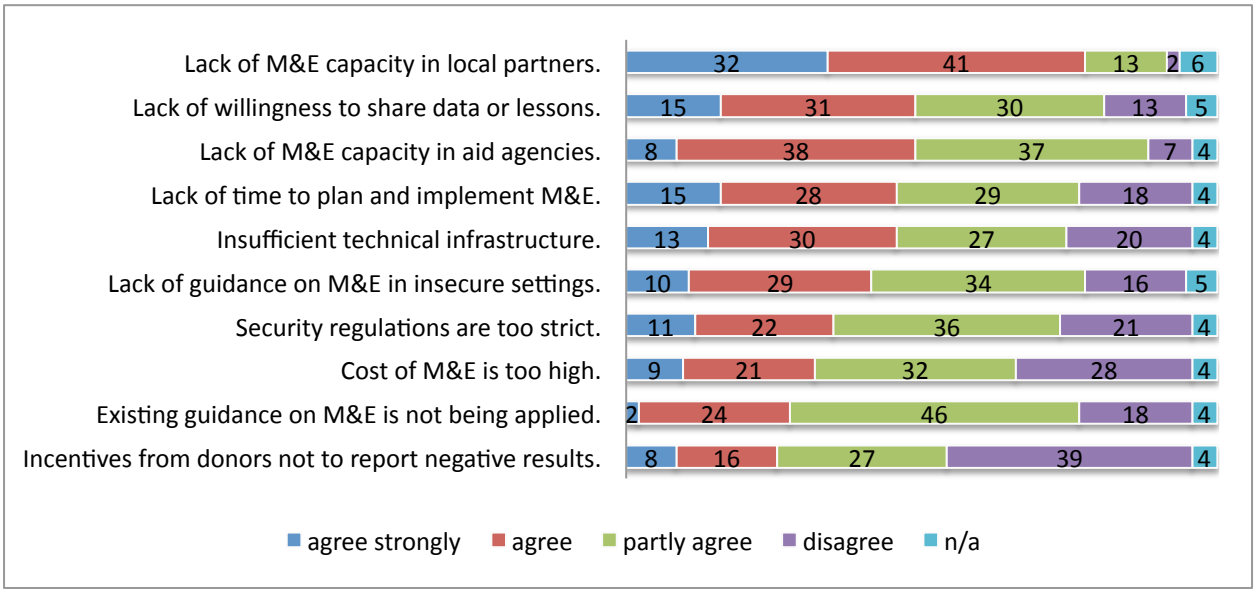
their own M&E systems. Interestingly, national NGOs were broadly positive and close to 100 per cent responded that they were satisfied with their own M&E systems, reflecting a very different perception by international and national actors.

Graph 1: Levels of satisfaction with own and partners' M&E, Somalia



According to survey respondents, the biggest perceived hindrances to effective M&E reported in Somalia are 'lack of capacity in local partners', followed by the 'lack of willingness to share data and lessons' among organisations, and the 'lack of capacity in aid agencies'. On the other hand, 'incentives from donors not to report negative results' were *not* perceived as a hindrance by a majority of respondents.

Graph 2: What hinders good M&E in your context? (Somalia)



When asked about the purpose of M&E in insecure contexts, more than two-thirds of the respondents in Somalia replied that M&E is best suited for ensuring accountability to donors and tax payers and for informing operational decisions. The majority of respondents (approximately 80 per cent) agreed however that M&E was least suited to show aggregated or country-wide effects, including impacts of aid.

Looking at the usefulness of different methods of data collection, respondents in Somalia considered approaches which rely on face-to-face meetings and assessments as the most useful, and were considerably optimistic regarding the use of technology. Most respondents (80 per cent) considered field visits by agencies' own staff 'very useful', followed by photo or video documentation. In addition, other options such as collection of data using GPS or satellite images were also found to be useful by a considerable number of respondents.

Specific challenges to effective M&E in Somalia reported by respondents included a lack of trust between expatriates and local staff as well as a lack of community and beneficiary owned M&E systems. Donor expectations, which can be unrealistic and uncoordinated at times, and a tendency of partners to overpromise on M&E were also reported as challenges to effective M&E practice. As far as time and funding challenges are concerned, respondents in Somalia also reported that short-term and project-based funding created significant obstacles to developing effective systems for M&E.

3.1.4 Results from in-country workshops and consultations

From 25 January to 31 January 2015, the SAVE research team consulted with stakeholders in Mogadishu and Nairobi and conducted a total of 44 interviews, 27 per cent of those interviewed were women.

The purpose of this country visit was to (a) verify and complete the team's overview assessment of the current M&E situation in South Central Somalia; (b) identify and agree with partners on research priorities; and (c) facilitate a discussion on specific M&E issues with a broader group of practitioners.

Based on the desk research, the online survey results, and the overview assessment, the SAVE team suggested eight potential research topics and asked all partners for comments and additions. The list was largely confirmed as including the most relevant issues with regards to M&E in insecure contexts/in South Central Somalia, with some additional topics mentioned but later not considered a priority.

Table 1: Suggested issues, Somalia

Issues suggested based on desk research	Additional issues discussed in workshops
• Beneficiary/community-centred M&E • M&E to assess effects on drivers of conflicts • Joint/overarching and coordinated M&E • Handheld data entry and databases • Use of other technologies and M&E (including satellite imagery, call-centres, SMS) • Simplification of M&E systems and tools • The role of government in M&E • Third-party monitoring	• Impact assessments • Role of donors in M&E • Skills of local staff to conduct M&E • Use of data generated by M&E for programming • Attitudes towards M&E by members of agencies • Target setting in insecure contexts without baselines or adequate data • Biometric beneficiary identification • Implications of context (e.g., clan-based system) for M&E

To focus available resources on high priority issues for learning partners and where existing research gaps are most pressing, the team facilitated the participatory prioritisation of research options. From all four workshops held, a clear trend emerged with a strong emphasis on three focus areas described below. For each priority, the group then discussed potential sub-questions, existing evidence (or lack thereof) and potential research approaches.

Focus area 1: Technologies for monitoring in insecure environments

With many organisations gathering experience in using technologies, participants felt that a valuable exercise would be to collect and aggregate lessons learned and to explore limitations and potential pitfalls of the different technologies, as well as possible ways for dealing with them.

Focus area 2: 'Back to basics': A simplification of monitoring tools and systems for insecure environments

Consultations in Mogadishu and Kenya confirmed concerns about M&E tools and systems being 'too complex' and comprising too many different indicators, and about surveys being too long as a consequence. In addition, the multitude of M&E frameworks and reporting formats added to this complexity, often leading to duplicated or superfluous data collection. Despite the general feeling that existing capacities and the complexity of M&E systems and practices are out of balance, actors consulted did not know of any systematic way to simplify M&E while ensuring a minimum of rigor and validity.

Focus area 3: Beneficiary/community-centred M&E

All organisations consulted in Somalia had formal beneficiary feedback or complaints systems in place, but it was unclear the extent to which they were being used and integrated into programming. Agencies indicated uncertainty about the degree of participation M&E systems can allow in insecure contexts and were interested in concrete options and examples of beneficiary-centred M&E. Adapted and simplified community consultation processes suitable for insecure environments were identified as under-researched and practices largely undocumented.

Also apparent was a lack of coordination, with multiple agencies piloting and rolling out additional feedback and complaint systems (e.g., hotlines) in parallel. Many of the stakeholders consulted felt that systems are often imposed on communities, with their main features determined by agencies' preferences rather than the needs or preferred communication channels of the communities of concern. A lack of meaningful feedback and lack of uptake of such systems is a common concern among aid actors in Somalia and respondents clearly expressed that hotlines and similar systems are no substitute for presence or personal field visits, since complaints need to be validated and followed up in communities.

While many stakeholders expressed an interest in additional guidance about such mechanisms, the desk research showed that a broad range of guidance already exists and that additional 'how-to' documents by the SAVE research team would not add much value. The team therefore decided to focus the research on exploring community perceptions about feedback or other participatory M&E mechanisms and to explore the factors that influence whether organisations can establish effective feedback mechanisms.

3.2 Afghanistan

This section highlights the preliminary results from the desk research, global interviews and the online survey for Afghanistan. All results were discussed with partners and other stakeholders during workshops and meetings in Kabul, based on which the team developed the research agenda described under point 3.3.

3.2.1 Context

As outlined in the Component 1 Interim Report, the large range of threat sources in Afghanistan has made negotiated access for humanitarian operations difficult, and the association of aid efforts with the West's stabilisation campaign has created dangerous and difficult conditions for humanitarians, as demonstrated by attacks on aid workers and operations in Afghanistan. To manage the challenges of insecurity, there has been an increasing reliance on remote monitoring as part of a remote management approach, including the use of third-party monitoring agents. However, these measures appear not to be able to compensate for the lack of access. Interviews and the online survey results (outlined below) indicate that the quality of reporting is decreasing as security and fiduciary risks continue.

Overall, agencies report an increased pressure from donors to demonstrate results, including at an aggregated level. This coincides with a reduction in humanitarian funding in some areas and a fatigue among donors to support humanitarian work in the country.

3.2.2 M&E trends identified in Afghanistan

Despite the diversity in terms of cultural and political context, the M&E trends identified in Afghanistan largely overlap with those identified in South Central Somalia. One distinction is the strong focus on acceptance building by many agencies that have been present in Afghanistan for years or even decades. In regular forums and initiatives, INGO actors come together to exchange lessons on acceptance-building measures and strategies.[4] This has not necessarily changed the operational footprint on the ground however. The UN's access in particular remains highly restricted and has led to a strong focus on third-party monitoring.

The use of technology is not as widespread as in Somalia, owing to the lack of telecommunications infrastructure as well as to cultural constraints. Aggregated databases are being used, but broad use of mobile data gathering is limited to comparatively secure areas. Many actors consulted as part of the desk research have expressed concerns that the potential benefits of technologies for monitoring are being brushed aside too quickly in Afghanistan, citing security concerns. Some technologies, like remote sensing and satellite imagery, could arguably provide benefits without raising security risks.

The M&E context in Afghanistan is further characterised by a long tradition of community involvement based on cooperation with local shuras and community development councils (CDCs). Perceptions of the effectiveness of such mechanisms, however, differ widely between organisations working in Afghanistan and are seen critically by communities themselves (see section on community feedback mechanisms below). Levels of trust are mixed, regarding established community-based approaches, and most actors agree that they tend to reinforce existing marginalisation and biases, for example, by relying

[4] For example, the Programme Support Group, supported by ECHO.

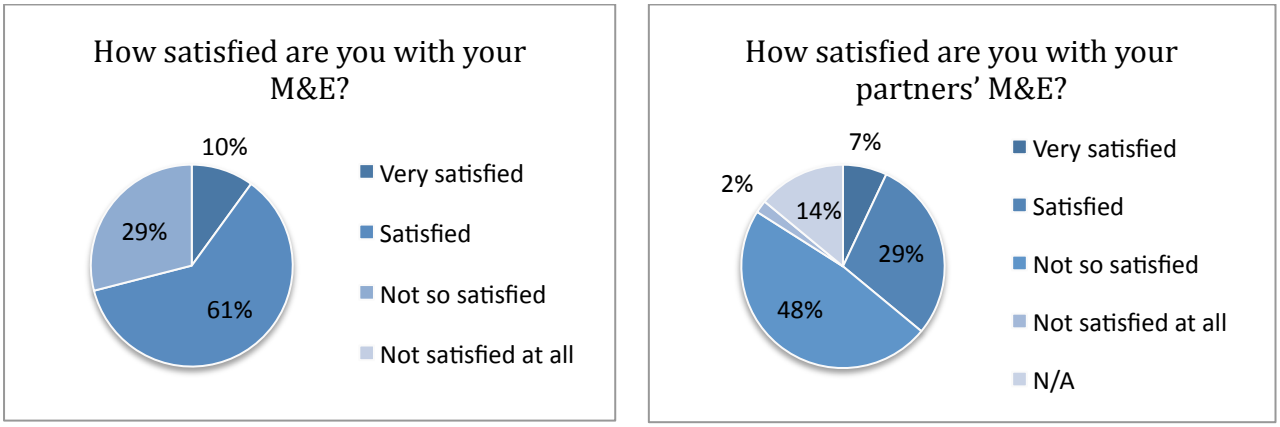
on male-dominated or elite committees to collect information. An additional concern is the lack of information exchange on the lessons learned and also failures of community feedback mechanisms in Afghanistan.

3.2.3 Results from online survey

A total of 60 respondents completed the online survey in Afghanistan, of which 16 responses were excluded from the analysis because they were incomplete. The respondent breakdown included INGOs (45 per cent), UN agencies (31 per cent) and national NGOs (13 per cent). The majority of respondents were in management (57 per cent), followed by other categories including M&E focal points (14 per cent).

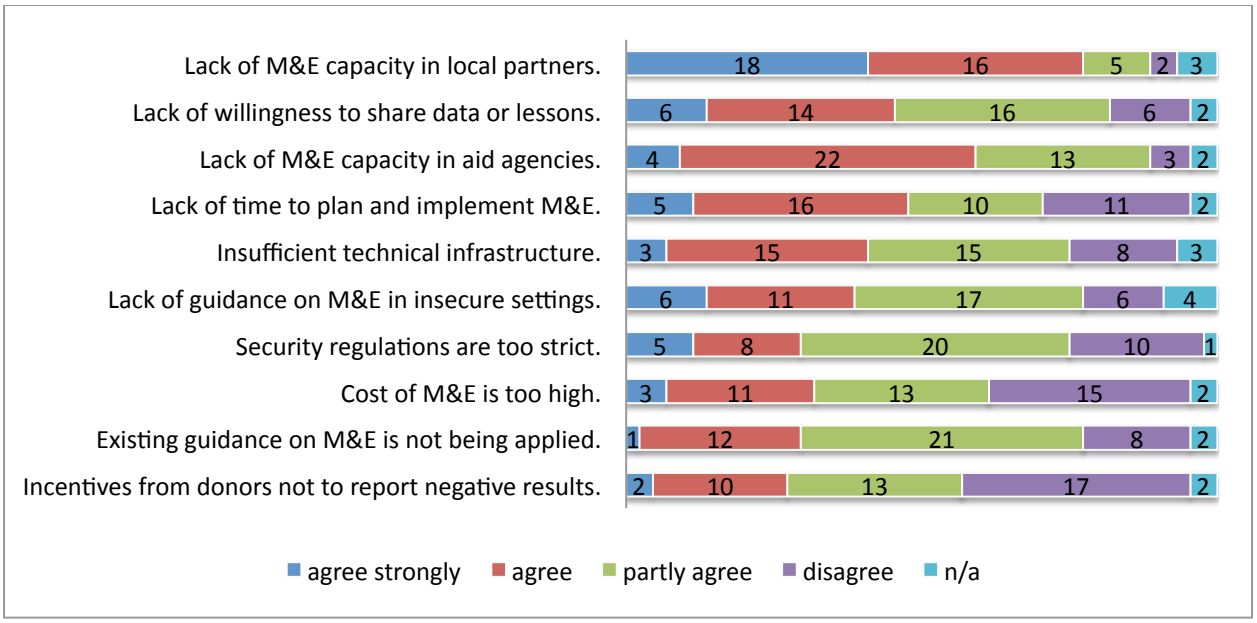
The current status of M&E is perceived as problematic in Afghanistan, with a clear difference between the types of organisation observable in the survey responses. As in Somalia, results demonstrate that agencies are more satisfied with their own M&E systems than with those of their partners. While 61 per cent of those surveyed in Afghanistan were satisfied with their own M&E, only 29 per cent were satisfied with the M&E systems of their partners. Only half the UN agencies consulted in Afghanistan reported to be satisfied with their own M&E, while INGOs are more positive, and a majority (75 per cent) reported satisfaction with their M&E systems. As was the case in Somalia, national NGOs were most broadly satisfied with their M&E systems and almost a 100 per cent replied with positive self-assessments.

Graph 3: Satisfaction with own and partners' M&E, Afghanistan



The biggest perceived hindrances to effective M&E in Afghanistan were the 'lack of capacity in local partners', followed by 'lack of willingness to share data or lessons' among organisations, and 'the lack of capacity in aid agencies'. Similar to Somalia, 'incentives from donors not to report negative results' was not perceived as a hindrance by a majority of respondents. When asked about the purpose of M&E in insecure contexts, more than two-thirds of respondents in Afghanistan considered M&E best suited for informing operational decisions, and to show immediate outputs reached. Similar to Somalia, respondents considered it least suitable to show aggregated and country-wide effects, and the impact of aid.

Graph 4: What hinders good M&E in your context? (Afghanistan)



Looking at the usefulness of different methods for data collection, respondents in Afghanistan considered approaches which rely on face-to-face meetings and field assessments as the most useful. These include field visits by agencies' own staff (65 per cent found 'most useful'), followed by photo or video documentation and in-person surveys.

Respondents strongly disagreed over the use of remote approaches as expressed in the ranking of different approaches in the survey and further elaborated through follow-up interviews – with some pushing towards responding to needs everywhere through remotely managed partners, while others stressing direct implementation. Other expressed challenges to M&E in Afghanistan included short-term and project-based funding; insufficient coordination with the government on M&E; and overly complex systems and tools for insecure contexts.

3.2.4 Results from in-country workshops and consultations

From 14 to 20 February 2015, the research team consulted with stakeholders in Kabul, Afghanistan to verify and complete the team's overview assessment of the current M&E situation and to identify and agree with partners on research priorities. The team conducted 48 total interviews for the Afghanistan case, approximately one quarter with female interviewees. Based on the priorities discussed with learning partners, three topics were identified as clear priorities.

The SAVE team suggested the same eight potential research topics as described above for Somalia and asked all partners for comments and additions. In Afghanistan, the following additional topics were raised, but not considered a priority:

- Remote monitoring relying on community focal points
- Defining the right indicators
- Setting up M&E mechanisms versus individual tools and applications
- Identifying the right level to address challenges in an M&E system
- Capacity development for M&E

From the workshops held, three focus areas emerged. Additionally, respondents showed considerable interest in the role of the government in M&E. While a relevant topic for research, the team decided not to pursue it as a focus area, because it would go beyond the scope of the SAVE research project and its core focus on insecurity, as well as stretch available resources. For each priority, the group discussed potential sub-questions, existing evidence (or lack thereof) and potential research methods. Emerging priorities were then additionally triangulated in individual consultations with donors, international and local NGOs, UN agencies and coordination bodies.

Focus area 1: Third-party monitoring

Independent validation of monitoring information has become a major priority for aid agencies and donors in Afghanistan. Third-party monitoring (TPM) is perceived by some as the new 'gold standard' and multiple agencies have already or are in the process of rolling out TPM schemes. However, the practice is controversial, existing practice is rarely documented and evidence on the costs, strengths and limitations of TPM appeared to be lacking.

Focus area 2: Community involvement in M&E

Stakeholders consulted in Afghanistan widely agreed that current M&E practice and systems focus on upwards accountability and limiting the abuse of aid, rather than ensuring accountability to affected communities. While stakeholders have a long tradition of working with communities in Afghanistan, insecurity increasingly constrains access and thus limits the capacities and time available to interact with communities.

Partners consulted expressed some doubt and concerns with their current complaints and feedback systems and were generally uncertain about the quality, representativeness and usefulness of feedback received. Anecdotal evidence suggested that uptake of complaints mechanisms is highly context-specific and differs from region to region. Cultural appropriateness of feedback channels was perceived to be critical, but often not systematically incorporated into the design of feedback mechanisms. Also, a strong sense persisted that past pilots have not been documented and assessed thoroughly enough and that important lessons remain yet to be learned, for example, concerning the exclusion of certain groups of beneficiaries from communication channels, the acceptance of technological options and appropriate ways to disseminate information to communities, as well as the organisational handling of and response to complaints. Finally, respondents felt that going beyond collection of complaints, more qualitative feedback was required, allowing conclusions about the impact and quality of interventions.

Focus area 3: 'Back to basics': Simplification and adaptation of M&E systems to available capacities

Stakeholders in Afghanistan stressed that often very basic knowledge about M&E processes and methods cannot be assumed. Beyond individual capacities, agencies consulted struggle to decide on appropriate systems to provide a minimum of M&E functions while being simple enough so that non-

experts can maintain and use them. Against a backdrop of contracting funding, aid agencies find themselves with less M&E capacity than they had only one or two years ago, while demands for accountability have increased. Agencies working through partners felt that trainings for implementing partners were not ideal and did not sufficiently take the existing level of capacity into account, and that many potentially useful tools were beyond what communities and field researchers could realistically implement and use. This means that, for example, technologies need to work in local languages and be appropriate for illiterate (or computer illiterate) users, and that structures need to be put in place so that changes in staff do not jeopardise the overall M&E system.

3.3 Combined research agenda for Afghanistan and Somalia

Based on the desk research, survey results and joint prioritisation done with learning partners in Afghanistan and Somalia, the research team developed the following work plan that shows the four key topics, corresponding work streams that the research for Component 3 has since focused on and outputs to be delivered on each theme.

An earlier version of this work plan was presented to the advisory group for comment and the feedback was integrated into Table 2.[5] Similar work plans will be developed in cooperation with learning partners in South Sudan and Turkey (for the Syria response).

[5] The inputs of the advisory group meeting are documented in the meeting notes of that session.

Table 2: Final work plan for Somalia and Afghanistan

Theme 1: Reviewing a 'back to basics' approach to M&E		
Questions What minimum expectations towards monitoring in insecure environments do stakeholders at different levels have in practice? Given these expectations, what are the major gaps, but also redundancies or duplications? What options are there for improving the fit between expectations and capacities for monitoring?	**Work streams** Analysis of monitoring expectations and practice of two organisations working in Somalia in one sector of programming (e.g., food security) in detail Workshops with agencies whose monitoring systems were assessed and other relevant stakeholders to jointly identify options to reduce overlaps and redundancies, simplify systems or fill gaps where minimum standards are not met	**Outputs** Specific suggestions for two learning partners on how to adapt monitoring systems Short analytical paper showing common minimum standards or lack thereof, as well as analysis of typical duplications and unused data
Theme 2: Community-centred M&E in insecure environments		
Questions What feedback channels and/or community-based M&E systems would communities in South Central Somalia and Afghanistan prefer? What factors influence whether organisations implement participatory M&E and functioning beneficiary feedback mechanisms?	**Work streams** Community consultations in selected locations in South Central Somalia and Afghanistan Desk-based research on community involvement in M&E Potential in phase 2: Structured, qualitative comparison of a medium-N sample of organisations	**Outputs** Overview of community preferences for feedback and M&E systems in South Central Somalia and Afghanistan Paper presenting analysis of factors influencing community involvement in M&E, including recommendations
Theme 3: Third-Party Monitoring		
Questions What is the experience with TPM in Afghanistan so far and what lessons can be documented? What are the benefits, costs, limitations and downsides of TPM? What is required for TPM to provide a meaningful contribution to a broader M&E toolbox?	**Work streams** Synthesis of results of existing case studies and pilots Interviews with relevant stakeholders in Afghanistan Potential in phase 2: Facilitating / accompanying roll-out of TPM mechanism in one partner organisation	**Outputs** Mapping of experience with TPM in Afghanistan Documented potential value as well as drawbacks of TPM approaches, including recommendations on how to make the best use of the approach
Theme 4: Technologies for monitoring in insecure environments		
Questions What benefits and constraints or pitfalls do different technological solutions for monitoring aid in insecure environments entail?	**Work streams** Synthesis of results of existing case studies and pilots of technological approaches in Somalia Documentation of anonymised case examples, mainly in Somalia Potential for phase 2: Inclusion of technologies and experiences made in other countries	**Outputs** Menu of options for using technologies for monitoring in insecure environments, including an analysis of costs, benefits and limitations, as well as descriptive, anonymous case studies

4 Emerging findings for each focus area

Preliminary findings are emerging for the topics of community-centred M&E, TPMs and Technologies for M&E, based on field and global research (results for 'back to basics' are still being analysed). Please note that all results are preliminary and will be discussed with stakeholders in Afghanistan and Somalia in August 2015. The individual outputs for each research stream outlined in the table above will then be finalised and may be developed further based on research in South Sudan and Syria.

4.1 Community feedback

4.1.1 Method and limitations

Research on community feedback involved a review of existing studies and key documents from aid agencies, interviews with seven global M&E experts and an examination of 17 aid agencies' experience with feedback mechanisms in Afghanistan and 14 in South Central Somalia. For Afghanistan, interviews with aid agencies have been conducted in Kabul and Jalalabad. For Somalia, the research included interviews in Mogadishu and Nairobi.

To examine what feedback channels and/or community-based M&E systems communities prefer, the team conducted community consultations with affected populations (the interview guide can be found at Annex 2, and the maps of the locations at Annex 4). In Afghanistan, 10 focus group discussions and 18 individual interviews took place in the provinces of Kandahar, Uruzgan and Helmand, involving 70 people in total, of which 4 were women. These consultations were undertaken by the Component 2 research partner, the Peace Training and Research Organisation (PTRO). For Somalia, 12 focus group discussions were held in Mogadishu, Baidoa and Dolow. 67 people were interviewed altogether, and the groups ranged from 3 to 10 people, including both rural and urban communities, as well as IDP communities. In Somalia, around 45 per cent of consulted community members were female. These consultations were undertaken by the Component 2 research team, led by Nisar Majid.

Contrary to our expectations and anecdotal evidence, a limited number of established, formal feedback structures exist in Afghanistan, and as a result the planned structured comparison between 10 agencies and their systems was not feasible. To still be able to shed some light on the internal (internal to the agency) and external factors (related to the context that the agency operates in) influencing the effectiveness of formal feedback mechanisms, the team focused on individual cases and a more explorative examination of current practices. In addition, detailed documentation on the specific feedback practices of agencies have been collected and analysed.

4.1.2 Emerging findings

More-established feedback mechanisms in Somalia than in Afghanistan

During the initial background research on M&E systems in Afghanistan and Somalia, many organisations in both countries indicated that they had formal feedback mechanisms in place. When conducting a more-detailed scoping exercise and selecting case studies for this research, however, it emerged that surprisingly few formal community feedback mechanisms existed in Afghanistan. Instead, more organisations relied on informal feedback processes such as providing the phone numbers of programme staff to community members; contacting community monitors; field offices that were

visited by community members; collecting feedback information during field visits or contacting community development committees.

In Somalia, the research team found a greater number of organisations with formalised community feedback systems, such as hotlines, SMS feedback platforms, two-way call centres, suggestion boxes, formalised community meetings or office visits and helpdesks at implementation sites. Several reasons explain why organisations in Somalia faced higher pressure or incentives to establish formalised feedback systems than in Afghanistan:

- Several large scale and highly visible aid diversion scandals occurred in South Central Somalia, following the enhanced response to the 2011 famine. These created strong pressure to include additional fraud-detection and -prevention mechanisms.
- Aid in large parts of South Central Somalia has been provided through 'remote management' for a very long period. This, combined with aid diversion, has undermined trust between international and local organisations and staff, as well as trust in so-called gate keepers.
- In addition to the pressure from donors and peers created through these two factors, several large consortia for the provision of aid in Somalia have been created. These consortia have specific M&E requirements for their members, often including the establishment of a formal feedback and complaints mechanism.

Neither country had examples of coordinated or joint feedback mechanisms.

Community perceptions of feedback channels are critical

The research team conducted community consultations to establish how communities viewed current consultation and feedback practices and to explore whether communities had alternative ideas for creating more community-centred M&E practices. Community perceptions in both contexts were relatively critical of current practices – although more acutely so in Afghanistan than in Somalia.

In Afghanistan the main findings included the following:

- Communities generally reported very few existing feedback mechanisms and had mainly negative perceptions of existing ones.
- Communities reported that only local elders or local councils (shuras) were consulted and usually only before, not during or after implementation.
- Communities expressed grave concerns that aid delivery was not effective and that resources were being diverted by aid organisations and local authorities.
- Communities strongly demanded direct communication and feedback mechanisms with aid providers, but no radical alternatives were suggested for more community-centred M&E approaches.

In South Central Somalia the main findings included the following:

- Communities reported that their most frequent experiences were with phone-based hotlines, working either through SMS or voice calls, in addition to some systems using active calls to community members to gather feedback.
- While phone-based feedback systems were appreciated in theory, many community members reported that they were not working in practice, be it because indicated numbers no longer worked or because calls were not answered.

- Communities reported that gate-keepers or community committee members were directly contacted and asked for feedback and communities were concerned that this would create a bias in the information transmitted.
- Communities most frequently suggested more field visits by staff and open office hours in field locations to increase opportunities for direct feedback. No radical alternatives were suggested for M&E systems.

Low uptake of certain feedback mechanisms

The organisations that offer hotlines or SMS platforms for communities to provide feedback noted that they received a relatively low average number of feedback messages – typically between 10 and 100 per month. Much higher volumes of feedback messages (2,000–3,000 per month) were reported by organisations using active call-out services to collect feedback.

Regarding the content of feedback messages and their utility in either detecting fraud (especially in Somalia in the wake of the aid diversion scandals, fraud detection and prevention was an important motivating factor behind the introduction of formal community complaints and feedback mechanisms) or adapting programming, most of the organisations involved in the research in South Central Somalia were disappointed. The vast majority of messages were requests for information and enquiries (e.g., reporting the loss of beneficiary cards, enquiring about the time and/or location of the next distribution, questions about targeting and selection criteria), rather than direct feedback to the organisations. Some messages concerned diversion of aid, especially 'taxation' through gatekeepers. Office visits and community meetings were seen as most useful for identifying issues relating to the quality of programming and enabling organisations to address obstacles to the effectiveness of their interventions.

Factors influencing the effectiveness of formal feedback mechanisms

The research found the following factors most important in influencing the effectiveness of formal community feedback mechanisms:

- the level of investment in systems, staff capacity and information management systems in the aid organisation (e.g., toll-free lines; female operators; dedicated staff to develop and operate feedback systems, capacity to verify, interpret and analyse information);
- the degree to which communities are involved throughout all stages of the project cycle, including the selection of complaints and feedback mechanisms;
- where projects are implemented through partners, the investment of the commissioning agency in creating community awareness of their entitlements and available feedback channels;
- successful practice and clear communication that messages will be treated confidentially and will receive an answer or reaction;
- the establishment of several complementary, parallel feedback channels;
- clear donor demands for a high-quality mix of feedback channels; and
- a clear delineation of responsibilities for gathering and responding to feedback within the organisation.

4.1.3 Next steps

Emerging findings will be discussed with stakeholders in Afghanistan and Somalia in August. The topic of community feedback is further likely to remain of relevance in the coming two country cases and SAVE-wide community consultations in Syria will include corresponding questions to gather communities' experiences with feedback in the Syrian context. The research will make an effort to foster cross-country learning on the topic, given the different levels of sophistication of feedback mechanisms observed thus far. Results of all research activities relating to community feedback mechanisms in Somalia and Afghanistan will be summarised in a SAVE briefing paper. This briefing paper will be disseminated among aid actors in the four focus countries, as well as among interested global stakeholders in the last quarter of 2015. Should additional results regarding community feedback emerge from the research in South Sudan and Turkey (for the Syria response), the briefing paper will be revised in the spring of 2016 to reflect these, as well as any feedback stakeholders may provide in the meantime.

4.2 Technologies for Monitoring

4.2.1 Method and limitations

Different technologies are increasingly used to facilitate M&E in insecure environments (as well as elsewhere). Consultations with the SAVE learning partners working in Somalia brought to light that many humanitarian organisations are interested in exploring technologies, but unsure what technological options exist and what their respective advantages and downsides are. With many dispersed initiatives piloting technologies, learning partners felt that the SAVE research could make a valuable contribution by providing an overview of different technological options for M&E and by collecting the lessons learned through various pilot projects in insecure environments. Since there was also interest in the focus area among stakeholders in Afghanistan (even if it did not emerge as one of the main priorities), emerging findings will also be discussed there.

Drawing on research activities implemented by GPPi as part of a project on innovation and technologies for the European Commission, the research process included a broad mapping of available technologies, based on document research, participation in relevant technology conferences and meetings and interviews with 50 experts. Based on this preliminary research, the team decided to focus on a set of specific technology applications (digital data entry and electronic databases; phone-based beneficiary feedback and survey mechanisms; tracking of changes through satellite images and UAVs; use of radio, media or phones to broadcast information).

For each application, the research team conducted a literature and document review, identified potential case examples and started to conduct interviews for the case examples. Results are collected in a toolkit that provides information on how the different applications work, conditions and costs involved, benefits for M&E and limitations and challenges encountered.

4.2.2 Emerging findings

The first finding of this research element was that very few technological applications are widely used to support M&E in humanitarian settings, especially in conflict settings. Pilots include mainly digital data entry tools and phone-based community feedback mechanisms.

Overall, technologies offer a range of generic benefits or potential benefits, including

- increased coverage in areas that are hard to access

- more timely information
- higher quality and greater capacity for data collection
- greater efficiency in data collection, analysis and dissemination
- scalability, flexibility and adaptability
- greater participation, feedback and community buy-in
- convenience and ease of use

However, they also face a range of general limitations and potential downsides, including

- increased risk through stigma and attention/visibility
- privacy and ethical concerns relating to the potential interception and misuse of collected data
- access to the programme area is often still required to validate data
- theft or interception risk
- misinterpretation errors and bias
- high costs and efforts to introduce new technologies
- restrictions through the requirements of electricity and connectivity

While the research on technologies for M&E is still ongoing, findings on the main technology applications are emerging. This section provides a short summary of these emerging findings, while a presentation (provided as a separate document to complement the interim report) includes more details.

Digital data entry and electronic databases

Digital data entry applications use smartphones or tablet computers to enter survey responses or other information. Data can be transmitted via an internet or direct connection to a central database, which often has automatic analysis functions. Generally, these applications are recognised as a positive tool for rendering data entry and processing more efficient and for offering greater opportunities to supervise enumerators remotely (since data can be time- and geo-stamped and photos and audio recordings can be added as data). However, digital data entry technologies require physical access for enumerators to enable their use.

Experience with this technology is growing quickly. In South Central Somalia, for example, one INGO replaced all its paper-based monitoring over the last three years after a headquarter decision to support data collection software. Each field office now possesses 5 basic smartphones that cost around $100 each, which enumerators collect before going on assignment. As they enter survey responses in the field, data is immediately sent to a central database via a mobile data connection. The INGO found that digital data entry not only improved data quality, but also decreased the time needed to administer surveys by more than 50 per cent. The fact that surveys record place and time information created strong incentives not to enter false responses and enabled honest conversation around inaccessible areas. Overall, the tool was considered a worthwhile investment. It was also said, however, that a region- or cluster-wide system to record and share such digital data between agencies would be valuable.

The main benefits and challenges of using digital data entry and electronic databases have been identified, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Digital data entry and electronic database challenges and benefits

Benefits	Challenges
Rapid transmission of data	Requires physical access
Reduced work steps (no data entry from paper forms)	Can raise attention, risk theft and attacks and can increase the risk of being expelled by armed groups
Surveys can be easily adjusted	Encourages closed-question formats
Easier detection of abuse in data collection	Can lead to unequal access to results
Lower visibility for enumerators using small handheld devices	Technology can be viewed with suspicion by armed groups
Can prevent unauthorised views	Requires capacity and skill
Enables the collection of multimedia data	Depends on connectivity and power

Phone-based feedback and survey mechanisms

As cell phones are becoming cheaper and more wide-spread, aid organisations have developed several ways of working with phones to gather beneficiary feedback or survey data remotely. These include hotlines, verification calls, phone-based surveys and bottom-up reporting. These applications are often used together with analysis and visualisation tools.

In Somalia, INGOs and UN agencies have used this opportunity in various ways. For example, one organisation set up an SMS-based feedback hotline, where beneficiaries can submit complaints, praise or comments at any time. The messages are reviewed and (unless they contain sensitive information) recorded on a publically viewable online map. Anyone can visit the site to see where feedback is overwhelmingly positive or critical and the aid staff can follow up directly with individual and bulk requests.

Another group set up a call centre to reach out to individuals who agreed to provide information about food security indicators, such as crop prices etc. In short interviews, aid staff quickly collect data points and enter these directly into a centralised database. A large number of such interviews have since been completed also including individuals from areas that the organisation was previously not able to reach.

Communities in Somalia consulted for this research see phone-based feedback mechanisms as important complements to other feedback channels, especially where physical access of international staff is highly restricted. However, their introduction and maintenance is costly and uptake of the feedback channel is often limited. Another widely shared concern is the risk of multiple call systems from different organisations confusing or simply annoying affected populations.

Table 4: Phone-based mechanisms challenges and benefits

Benefits	Challenges
Enables direct contact between aid providers and beneficiaries in areas without physical access	Verification and follow-up are challenging
Phone-based data are technically easy to process	Biases: not everyone has access to a phone
Devices and software are inexpensive	Personal data on phones can cause risk
Aid organisations have increasing experience with these technologies	Requires literacy

Tracking changes through remote sensing with satellite images

Some aid organisations use high-resolution aerial images taken by satellites to track visible changes in a specific region or location. Aerial images provide information about areas that are inaccessible and can allow the tracking of outcomes. Although the evidence-base on remote sensing for aid monitoring remains small, a number of different projects have been undertaken in volatile settings that offer insights on possible M&E applications.

In Syria, for example, aid organisations analysed satellite images to help monitor the conflict and key events causing displacement or other impacts on the population. A team of analysts used commercial satellite imagery collected over time to document damage to and the destruction of critical infrastructure, including markets, hospitals and educational facilities. The analysis also enabled them to observe new structures including the growth and evolution of IDP settlements and likely burial sites.

In Somalia, aid organisations use satellite images to assess progress on infrastructure and agricultural projects. The analysis showed for example changes in charcoal production, provided rainfall estimates and enabled the distinction of different livelihood zones. Another project in Somalia made use of 'crowdsourcing'. Hundreds of volunteers around the world worked with satellite images to tag shelter structures based on their shape, colour, tone and clustering. This created a detailed map of long-term and temporary shelters in the Afgooye corridor.

The barriers to using remote sensing technologies for aid monitoring or evaluation currently include the high price of satellite imagery, the negative stigma of cheaper UAV alternatives and the fact that many aid interventions do not create physically visible outcomes

Table 5: Satellite image and UAV challenges and benefits

Benefits	Challenges
Works without any access	Costs
Technology is very advanced	Stigma
Industry is looking to collaborate	Little experience in the sector
One image = many applications	Requires verification and ground-truthing

Using radios and other media to broadcast information

Aid organisations can use radiobroadcasts in local languages, newspaper articles, SMS messages or calls to inform affected populations about planned interventions and spread awareness-raising messages. In South Sudan, for example, an aid organisation uses a very localised USB radio to inform people at Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites about planned programmes, enabling communities to provide more active feedback. Together with community members, the organisations record daily shows that are only aired at select locations at the site, to ensure that armed actors cannot listen in.

While broadcasting tools cannot be used to collect information, they can usefully complement other M&E efforts. Popular local media with wide reach (e.g., radio and local newspapers) can make beneficiaries more aware of and thus responsive to aid programming. In addition, radio can be used to broadcast telephone numbers for hotlines announce timings of aid delivery, or data collection.

Table 6: Radio and other media challenges and benefits

Benefits	Challenges
Wide reach	Increases visibility and can create security risks for aid programmes
Potential to improve relationships	Difficult to target specific audiences
Support to accountability to affected populations through better information	Difficult to verify who has been reached
Effective for awareness raising	Not fit for direct data collection

4.2.3 Next steps

The preliminary findings will be presented to learning partners and other interested stakeholders during workshops in Somalia and Afghanistan. The workshops will serve to test preliminary findings, identify additional case examples for applications and discuss priorities for further research. A first draft of the technology toolkit is expected in the last quarter of 2015.

4.3 Third-party monitoring in Afghanistan

4.3.1 Method and limitations

This topic focused on primary field work in Afghanistan, including qualitative data collected through 14 interviews in Kabul and Jalalabad with agencies relying on TPM and 8 interviews with organisations providing TPM services.[6] The team also reviewed the general literature on TPM and remote management,[7] as well as grey literature made available by aid organisations. This literature review

[6] All interviews were conducted anonymously. Guidelines used for these interviews are included in Annex 1.
[7] Particularly useful was a recent report by the Risk Management Unit (2015, not publicly available) entitled 'Third Party and Collaborative Monitoring: Findings, Opportunities and Recommendations.' Other sources considered include A. Donini and D. Maxwell (2013), 'From Face-To-Face to Face-To-Screen: Implications of Remote

included the recent study undertaken by Integrity of DFID's remote management approach in Somalia, which looked at DFID's experiences with TPM in Somalia in detail.

In the case of Afghanistan, with constrained field access, the independent collection and validation of monitoring information using external parties has become the method of choice for some aid agencies and donors. At the same time, critics of the approach express significant concerns and stress that TPM cannot and must not replace direct field monitoring by an agency's own staff.

Given this polarised debate about third-party monitoring, stakeholders unanimously noted a lack of documentation of experiences and evidence on major benefits and shortcomings of the approach as it has been applied in Afghanistan thus far. Similar sentiments were raised in Somalia in exploring DFID's remote-management approach. The research aimed to contribute to a structured debate by examining three main questions:

1. What has the experience with TPM in Afghanistan been so far and what lessons can be documented?
2. What are the costs, benefits, limitations and downsides of TPM?
3. What is required for TPM to provide a meaningful contribution to a broader M&E toolbox?

4.3.2 Emerging findings

This study assessed both positive aspects of third-party monitoring as it has been applied by aid actors in Afghanistan, as well as limitations and shortcomings. The following section provides a selection of key findings, suggested requirements for TPM to provide a useful contribution to a larger M&E toolbox, and recommendations to improve the use of TPM.

Strengths of third-party monitoring

The organisations consulted for this study strongly agreed on the main benefits of TPM. Crucially, it can allow continuing service to communities while maintaining a basic level of accountability both to an agencies' own accountability and results frameworks and to its donors or constituencies. One UN agency with an interest in scaling up its future use of TPM described how they 'cannot see themselves' in many parts of Afghanistan and thus depend, among other approaches, on 'external eyes and ears' on the ground.

For selected donors and UN agencies, TPM can provide opportunities to gather data from 'no-go' areas where direct access to the field is not possible for their own staff. Even in areas that agencies could potentially access with their own staff, TPM can provide a low-visibility option with lower risks for communities and monitors than highly visible visits of staff who need to rely on hard protection measures to satisfy security requirements. In addition, TPM organisations are often able to access field locations on a more regular and frequent basis than staff of aid organisations due to the cost (for some organisations, outsourcing monitoring is more economical than deploying own staff, at least when additional oversight costs are not taken into account) as well as differences in security arrangements. While the quality of the data thus collected and the level of accountability achievable through third-

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Management for the Effectiveness and Accountability of Humanitarian Action in Insecure Environments'; J. Egeland, A. Harmer and A. Stoddard (2011), 'To Stay and Deliver'; Integrity Research & Consulting (2015) 'Cross Cutting Evaluation of DFID's Approach to Remote Management in Somalia and North-East Kenya – Evaluation Report'; B. Norman (2012), 'Monitoring and Accountability Practices for Remotely Managed Projects Implemented in Volatile Operating Environments'; WFP (2014), 'Third Party Monitoring Guidelines.'

party monitors remain disputed (see next section), the fact that independent monitors can help validate results and processes is clear. A similar finding was identified in Integrity's evaluation of DFID's remote management approach in Somalia, in particular that it was useful for programme oversight and verification.

As the online survey results found, satisfaction with implementing partners' M&E systems is generally low among international aid agencies. Against this background, TPM can provide a much-valued option for verification and triangulation of existing data provided by implementing partners or even own staff. As an interviewee put it: '*the turn to TPM came from the recognition of an increasingly difficult security environment with a large portfolio and a weak implementing partner'.*

The benefits relate mostly to the collection of quantitative information and simple verification of data. Agencies noted that TPM served as a control mechanism over processes in the field, rather than a means to collect enough data for a proper quality assessment. TPM was regarded to be most apt for verifying

- the total quantity of items that has been distributed, for example food aid
- how many people were reached by aid and who these people were
- asset creation and infrastructure development

Hence, the type of data collected by TPM providers is generally relatively simple, a fact that commissioning organisations explain is due to the low analytical and research capacities of many providers and the difficulty of managing more-complex data collection efforts.

Considerable potential of TPM seems to go under-utilised due to this assumption that data on higher levels of results requires more elaborate capacities. In Somalia, the DFID evaluation also found that it was not being utilised to its full potential, including that it had the potential to strengthen programme implementation. As one agency in Afghanistan noted, provided sound indicators are in place, verifying impact does not need to be more complicated than verifying outputs or activities. In the example case of hygiene awareness trainings, one could limit monitoring to whether sessions were conducted as planned (output), or directly posing sample questions to the target group to see whether attendants have internalised the content (outcome) or corresponding diseases have decreased (impact), even though it might be hard to attribute causality. One UN agency using this approach reported interesting findings at the impact level after asking not just whether the outputs were delivered, but also how they affected the lives of communities in that area. Importantly, this approach led to unexpected insights on local tensions and dynamics surrounding implementation that allowed the agency to adjust programming and the limited technical capacities of the third-party monitors were sufficient for this kind of inquiry.

The main reported strengths of TPM are that it provides

- increased monitoring access to insecure areas;
- a low visibility option to monitoring in areas of limited access;
- more regular and more frequent monitoring than with own staff; and
- independent triangulation of data from partners and own staff.

Constraints and risks of third-party monitoring

As outlined above, the potential benefits of TPM seemed relatively clear to most agencies consulted for this research. At the same time, the interviews confirm that current practice is far from being 'roses all the way', as one respondent put it. To provide a basis for discussion of how to mitigate potential constraints and risks entailed in the approach, this section reviews the shortcomings and trade-offs that should be considered before and when relying on TPM. Finally, tentative recommendations are suggested to mitigate constraints, which will be discussed further during consultations in Afghanistan and globally.

Quality of reporting

This study found satisfaction with existing capacities for analysis and reporting by TPM providers to be mixed at best. Asked to give a score out of 10 on the credibility and robustness of the monitoring data, most agencies gave a score between 5 and 7, acknowledging that they were taking into account the low standards of data collection in the country. Agencies have reported frequent experiences with irregularities in data collected, for example, data coming from areas where monitors had not been present or data contradicting agencies' own knowledge and observations. These results confirm the findings of a survey conducted by the Risk Management Unit.[8]

Written reports produced by monitoring providers have often been found unsatisfactory, and commenting on and/or refining written documents with external partners has proven difficult in multiple instances. Similarly, the quality and precision of statistical analysis is often found lacking. Where monitoring is outsourced, those managing data collection frequently don't know enough about the larger project framework, theories of change or the rationale behind certain indicators to detect flaws or to collect the most relevant information.

Against this background, agencies consulted have applied different strategies for quality assurance. One actor reported good experiences with hiring a consultant as an intermediary dedicated to checking and cleaning data and managing the data collection process. Others increasingly rely on technology such as GPS-stamped pictures. One agency has developed an elaborate tracking system for their field staff, which can be extended to third-party monitors. Another has GPS trackers installed in the vehicles that field teams use, to validate movement to agreed field locations. Where technology is not an option either due to a lack of capacity or the security risks its use can entail, systematic triangulation with multiple teams is being applied. One agency described how staff from government departments, staff from implementing partners and staff from monitoring partners are all asked to triangulate data and validate who was where.

Reputational risks

Whereas the quality of results of TPM exercises can limit its benefits and its value for money, the data gathering process itself and actions taken by monitors in the field can directly affect the reputation and indirectly affect the acceptance of commissioning agencies. All TPM providers consulted were adamant that their staff would only introduce themselves as independent from the agency they were contracted by, but staff from these agencies pointed out that having field monitors respect this rule was very

[8] Risk Management Unit (2015), 'Third Party and Collaborative Monitoring: Findings, Opportunities and Recommendations.'

difficult. As an interviewee put it: *'We try to make sure that monitors present themselves as separate, but many times in the field I observed that the field staff uses our name, simply because it is easier for the communities to recognise'.*

This can entail a serious risk especially for humanitarian agencies. Interviews conducted with TPM providers revealed a low understanding of humanitarian principles and what these mean practically for the agencies they work with and for their own work. This is true for both national and international for-profit monitoring service providers and non-profits and national NGOs. Most agencies also acknowledged that ensuring that monitoring providers had at least a basic understanding of their mandate and key principles was not very high on the list of briefing or training priorities.

As evidenced in Afghanistan and elsewhere, non-state armed groups such as the Taliban frequently justify their distrust of aid organisations with suspicions that agencies are 'spying' or collecting information that can be used against these groups.[9] Consequences can be serious, as the ban of polio vaccinations in Helmand province in 2014 demonstrated.[10] A recent study based on interviews with members of the Taliban and aid workers concluded that 'even routine tasks, such as surveys or gathering information for needs assessments, could be seen as attempts to compile intelligence and could arouse distrust'[11]. Hence, the risks that the behaviour of field monitors can entail for the reputation of contracting agencies need to be taken into account and agencies should work based on the assumption that neither armed groups nor affected communities are likely to distinguish between contractors and commissioning agencies.

Noteworthy in this regard is that monitors with greater access in a particular area can be perceived as less impartial and neutral, due to allegiances with dominant groups or individuals in that location. Whereas agencies broadly agreed that using personnel from different regions to allow for an independent and thereby credible assessment is preferable, the principle is challenging to apply where outsiders would be viewed with suspicion. A conflict-sensitive approach to monitoring thus calls for a thorough assessment of the access constraints and who these apply to in a disputed or insecure area. In Somalia, the evaluation of DFID's remote management and TPM experience also found concerns regarding the ethical practices of some TPMs. In response, DFID committed to increasing conflict-sensitivity training of its own staff to better manage TPMs.

Required investments of time and resources

Different estimations by stakeholders consulted for this study and previous studies put the cost of a single monitoring visit by an Afghan field monitor between USD 2,000 and 4,000.[12] However, such estimations should be interpreted with caution. The exact cost of TPM depends on the type of project to be monitored and, more significantly, the type of provider selected by the agency, its overhead and salary level. Rather than costing per monitoring activity, agencies using TPM services generally sign framework or flat rate agreements with monitoring providers that include a range of services such as

[9] See A. Jackson (2014), 'Negotiating Perceptions: Al-Shabab and Taliban views of aid agencies', HPG Policy Brief.
[10] Reported for example in the Guardian: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/08/afghan-taliban-bans-polio-vaccination-teams-southern-helmand-province.
[11] See Jackson, 'Negotiating Perceptions'.
[12] Cf. for example Schumacher (2013): 'Review of Issues for DFID Monitoring in Afghanistan post the 2014 Transition' [unpublished report commissioned by DFID Afghanistan]

assessments and liaison and evaluation visits, as well as monitoring. Overall, many of the organisations consulted initially underestimated the time and resources required.

First, contracting monitors in line with internal procurement regulations took agencies typically between two and four months, in some cases even longer. This time is well invested if it is allocated to a thorough check of references and due diligence, but it means third-party monitoring is no fix for a sudden deterioration of access to an implementing area.

A signed contract is then often required for third-party monitors to start recruiting field monitors, as most TPM providers consulted hire field staff on a project-by-project basis. This process can additionally delay the start of monitoring activities. Where specific skills are required, the search for suitable field personnel can prove especially challenging.

Second, adequate training of monitors cannot be readily assumed to be provided by the monitoring organisation alone. One commissioning organisation consulted therefore involves itself closely in the process and conducts trainings together with monitoring providers. Their training package includes various components, from techniques of monitoring and vulnerability mapping, to the introduction to the programme's specific modalities by programme teams. The training also includes a protection and gender component. Given relatively high turnover, training efforts need to be repeated regularly.

Third, all agencies recognised that they had to invest significant time and resources in triangulating and cross-checking the monitoring data received. Systems to 'monitor the monitors' had to be set up in order to use the data with a satisfactory level of confidence. Agencies then have to set up their own internal systems to record, process and use the data they are getting. It can be challenging to feed data coming from external sources into an agency's existing information management system. One agency reported that it took about a year to establish a system robust enough to make sufficient use of the data.

The above investments can provide valuable returns over a longer cooperation with third-party monitors. The costs imply a certain minimal threshold in terms of duration and size of contracts, though.

Potential conflicts of interest and trade-offs

Whenever services are outsourced to a third-party, the incentive structure changes and can present a conflict of interest. The fragmented and opaque landscape of TPM providers further increases this risk.

Common practices include cross-monitoring between different organisations implementing programmes. In this case, an implementing partner for one activity will be responsible for monitoring the implementation of another implementing partner of the same commissioning agency in charge of another activity and vice versa. Interviewees have expressed concerns that this can lead to organisations either being overly critical of their (actual or potential) competitors or – to the contrary – being less critical towards peer organisations. This issue was identified in the Somalia evaluation (Integrity, 2015). The exact effect could not be assessed empirically in this study, but consultations with TPM providers suggest a high level of competition and readiness to point out problems in competing organisations. In other cases, the same organisation is hired for monitoring services and for implementing programmes in different areas. Interviewees have also reported conflicts of interest in this arrangement.

A recent study by the Risk Management Unit (RMU) has triggered a debate on the potential for collaboration and information exchange on the use of TPM and individual national and international

service providers. A contractual management system has been put in place to document experiences, and pilots for collaborative monitoring programmes in selected areas are being discussed currently. While it is too early to assess the results of this process, respondents seem to broadly agree that increased collaboration could help mitigate the risk of conflicts of interest and improve overall efficiency and effectiveness of TPM.

Fluidity of access

The level of access is an important criterion in the selection of third-party monitors and one of their assumed comparative advantages. A major lesson that actors consulted shared, however, concerns the fact that the actual level of access is extremely difficult to assess. In the words of an interviewee: *'Some of our partners claimed to have access but then we realised that they were afraid to go to Taliban-controlled areas or ISIS-controlled areas. I can't blame them, but I do have to push for that. It is why we contracted them in the first place'.*

First of all, with limited own access to the areas in question and only partial knowledge of staffing structures and networks of TPM providers, claims about access were difficult to verify from commissioning agencies' perspectives. Besides references, the main proxy that commissioning agencies can use is the past experience that an organisation may have in a particular province. However, many found that past access is by no means a guarantee for future performance in the area, as access can change dynamically and change from project to project.

Moreover, organisations bidding for monitoring contracts face incentives to inflate their level of access and many commissioning agencies found the real level of access smaller than initially expected.

With regards to the quality of access, it is important to acknowledge that monitoring providers are also not immune to the larger challenges of data collection in Afghanistan. A frequently raised example is the inability to send female monitors to collect data in rural areas. Most TPM providers interviewed for this study acknowledged that this was difficult – and often simply impossible. For example, one provider has been working for four years in the east of the country and is receiving repeated requests to deploy mixed monitoring teams to improve access to female beneficiaries. Yet, they have no female monitors at all and consider it impossible to send female monitors to Kunar or Nuristan, despite the good level of access that the organisation generally has in these highly insecure provinces. There is thus a risk of overestimating the possibilities third-party monitors have based on abstract data requirements, which can put them in a difficult situation and create incentives to inflate capabilities to meet expectations.

Ethical concerns and risk transfer

A transfer of risk from commissioning agencies to monitors is a frequently mentioned, but overall tolerated consequence of third-party monitoring arrangements. In fact, contracting agencies openly acknowledged that this is one of the main reasons they chose to rely on external monitors in the first place. As an interviewee put it: '*I think you have to be honest and acknowledge that there is definitely a transfer of risks'.*

Only one contracting agency consulted has taken this transfer of risks into account in its own procedures and assumed responsibility for the security of monitoring missions. Monitoring plans were shared with the respective focal point and required approval. Security staff and field offices were responsible for security assessments before a field mission by the monitors. Finally, the agency shared

advice and security information with monitors in a formalised way (other agencies have reported they share security relevant information on an ad-hoc, non-formalised basis with their monitors).

More commonly, contracting agencies assume that TPM providers have their own internal procedures and risk mitigation measures in place and that they require less elaborate systems due to their local networks and community acceptance, as well as their ability to move around using low profile transportation and protection measures. The latter elements are undoubtedly a real asset for monitoring partners as they have the ability to contract local staff and most of them have built networks throughout the years. However, for the vast majority of TPM providers consulted, this study found no evidence that they had robust security procedures in place or any dedicated staff for security management.

Given the budgetary restrictions that most national NGOs or companies face, they generally do not invest in the kind of fixed costs that full-time security staff would entail. Most of their field staff reportedly does not receive particular security training. At most, TPM providers noted that they discuss appropriate behaviours and clothing before going to 'dangerous areas'.

The main security strategies that TPM partners have reported are

- relying, to the extent possible, on staff from the area;
- contacting district and local authorities for updates on the security situation in an area;
- when possible, talking to community elders before going to the field to get information and their protection while in the field; and
- using low profile transportation means and appearances.

All but one TPM provider interviewed for this study had a serious incident to report: staff being kidnapped (or closely escaping kidnap), staff being killed by landmines en route to monitoring activities, and staff receiving threats and warnings of various kinds. One monitor reported learning to conceal his real capacity at Taliban checkpoints. Another expressed how scared he was travelling by road in the very volatile districts of Faryab province. That the general level of acceptance of these risks among professional monitors is apparently relatively high – far beyond the threshold of their contracting agencies.

This problem of risk transfer is aggravated by the precarious economic conditions many TPM providers and the individuals hired find themselves in, combined with an overall reduction of funding going into Afghanistan. In a highly competitive market, TPM providers have incentives to overestimate and overstate their own capabilities. Interviewees repeatedly pointed out, for example, that organisations were not reporting security incidents and were overstating their access to secure contracts. As an interviewee stated: 'Wherever there is a project to conduct, we always say yes. We never say 'no, it is too dangerous'. We will always find ways to do it'. More exchange is thus needed on ways to manage and limit the risk transfer – both in Afghanistan and with experts from other contexts that see similar dynamics.[13]

[13] Further steps of the SAVE research programme will assess this problematic and potential mitigation measures in more detail.

Potentially adverse long-term effects of outsourcing monitoring

Finally, relying on external organisations for monitoring may be necessary in some areas, but agencies consulted see a clear risk that strong reliance on TPM – especially where TPM providers are used for additional tasks such as assessments or liaison – further undermines their links with communities. The practice that is intended to maintain access and presence in the short to medium term can thus undermine access in the longer run. Some actors have also reported a weakening institutional memory when TPM providers change and/or where they are managed by consultants. Generally, TPM seems most valuable as an (additional) measure of last resort but its indiscriminate use can distance agencies further from those they intend to assist, and thereby undermine acceptance. Moreover, the fine-grained information collected in the field is likely to remain outside of the organisation and not be included in the written communication from field monitors up the chain.

Requirements for successful TPM and recommendations for discussion

Considering the benefits and shortcomings outlined above, the third question of this research stream – What is required for TPM to provide a meaningful contribution to a broader M&E toolbox? – will be further discussed with partners in Afghanistan and other contexts, including Somalia and Syria. The points below and the recommendations suggested provide a basis for this discussion.

First, the following interim hypotheses can be summarised, arguing that TPM can provide a meaningful contribution in the following situations:

- The commissioning agency has the capacity to adequately vet, select, train and manage TPM providers to ensure quality and a productive long-term working relationship.
- Primary reliance on monitoring by third parties is limited to exceptional areas with constrained access and is not expanded to an across-the-board outsourcing of monitoring activities.
- The commissioning agency is well aware of the TPM provider's security procedures and systematically includes the provider in its own security-relevant analysis and communication where relevant for monitoring missions.
- At least partial field monitoring by own staff and/or implementing partners can be conducted in parallel to validate and cross-check data received by third parties.
- Acceptance-building measures are undertaken and measures are taken to avoid a reduction or crowding out of communication between agencies and key informants from communities. To this end, third-party monitoring should be flanked by community feedback systems and transparent communication towards communities (beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries).
- The commissioning agency adjusts its information management system to make sure externally gathered monitoring data can be absorbed, interpreted and retained in the organisation to allow for adjustments in programming. Agencies should thus closely manage TPM providers and prioritise personal exchange through oral debriefings from field missions, mixed teams and jointly planned monitoring where possible, and joint security analysis or sharing of analysis.
- The practice is regularly reassessed and options for internalising monitoring are regularly re-evaluated, maintaining primary reliance on third-party monitoring only in exceptional situations.

Finally, to mitigate potential negative effects and shortcomings of TPM, the following recommendations should be taken into account before and when outsourcing monitoring.

Anticipate the need for time and resources to manage TPM providers

Particularly important are investments in the training of monitoring partners. Moreover, frequent data checks should be planned to avoid finding out too late about irregularities and gaps in collected data. Finally, developing a robust system for using the data and feeding relevant information to those in charge of adapting programmes is critical.

Foster checks on potential providers

The findings of this study confirm the conclusion of the RMU report (2015) that more formalised information sharing system between agencies would be beneficial (similar to the finding regarding community feedback mechanisms), to avoid contracting providers who have performed poorly in the past. Successful working relationships require more than thorough selection of partners, though, as the mixed experience of different commissioning agencies with the same providers has shown.

Assess and manage reputational risks more thoroughly

The behaviour of TPM providers in the field will directly reflect on the contracting agency as most affected populations will not differentiate between the two actors. Adequate reputation as well as respect of key humanitarian principles by the TPM provider should therefore be a priority for agencies when selecting TPM providers. To avoid increasing tensions or undermining trust between all actors involved, commissioning agencies have a responsibility to communicate the need for independent verification early on and to be sensitive when communicating results of TPM to partners.

Avoid turnover of TPM providers

The most successful agencies dealing with TPM are those that have had a chance to develop and nurture a long-term relationship with their monitoring partners. Frequently changing monitoring partners should therefore be avoided.

Develop the use of technological devices to increase control

The few agencies relying on GPS to track teams in the field were satisfied with the level of confidence it gave them in the data. Using GPS-stamped pictures of the field enumerators themselves on the site requires neither a highly sophisticated nor expensive system and has proven quite effective for the organisations using it. While cameras may represent a threat in the field, simple smartphones or even smaller gadgets can be used for this function and are relatively inconspicuous.

Strengthen security protocols and duty of care

While TPM providers need flexibility to move around in the field without overly stringent security regulations, room for improvement is considerable regarding the application of duty of care by contracting agencies. For example, monitoring providers could get access to the security information available to contracting agencies; they could be incentivised to develop solid internal security architecture and required to fully disclose security incidents with their contracting agencies.

Keep expectations and plans modest

The overestimation of actual access and actual capacity to collect required data has been frustrating in many cases. It is therefore important to anticipate constraints early and develop parsimonious frameworks for data collection. Focusing on a few key indicators or geographic areas and ensuring data is valid can prove more effective than asking for too much, only to then find expectations remain unmet.

Importantly, complexity of data collection does not necessarily depend on the results level on which data is required (e.g. output, outcome or impact), so focusing on a few key impact indicators can be more useful than verifying multiple inputs and outputs.

4.3.3 Next steps

The research team will meet with selected stakeholders in Kabul to discuss interim results and to jointly refine tentative recommendations to make the best use of third-party monitoring as an approach to improve learning and accountability in insecure settings. The research team will also offer a briefing about these emerging findings to stakeholders in Somalia. Actors in Syria have indicated tentative interest in the topic as well, so the team hopes to further deepen the research in one of the remaining country cases, identifying opportunities for cross-country learning and exchanges of lessons learned among contexts. The results of efforts will be included in a final concept note on TPM, which will be shared with interested actors in all case study contexts and globally.

4.4 Back to Basics

4.4.1 Method and limitations

During the consultations conducted by the research team in Nairobi and Mogadishu, several organisations mentioned that the current M&E frameworks and requirements were too complex for organisations with limited capacities on the ground. At the time of writing this report, the team is conducting research to review this assumption and identify redundancies, overlaps and unnecessary requirements in the current monitoring systems overseeing humanitarian operations in South Central Somalia. In doing so, the research also aims to examine whether common minimum standards can be identified that show requirements needed by all actors to monitor their interventions adequately.

To implement this research strand, the team decided to track the flow of monitoring data of two humanitarian organisations from the field to the end-users at donor and headquarters (HQ) levels. Action Contre la Faim (ACF) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) partnered with the research team and provided case studies. The research is focusing on the monitoring of ACF's nutrition programme and NRC's food security interventions.

The research team will follow the data from the field up the chain of reporting with the objectives of (a) mapping the information flow from the field to the donors, HQ and external stakeholders; (b) identifying the M&E data collected at each stage of the process; (c) analysing how the data is actually used and for which purpose at each level; (d) identifying potential redundancies, gaps, overlaps and areas that could be simplified in the overall monitoring system for South Central Somalia.

This will be done through a series of in-depth interviews with staff members from each organisation and their external partners (donors, clusters etc.), from the field level in Mogadishu to the HQ of both organisations in France and Norway. A number of interviews have already taken place in Nairobi where both organisations have regional offices and a number of their staff overseeing their operations in South Central Somalia. A large amount of data, monitoring tools and monitoring reports were also collected to assess the actual use of the data collected in the field.

One limitation of such a study, as far as we can foresee currently, comes from the fact that both organisations are well-established large NGOs with relatively high capacity and long experience operating in South Central Somalia. Both organisations are in a better position to answer complex M&E

requirements from their HQ and donors than smaller, less-structured NGOs. This may represent a positive bias for the research that needs to be taken into account when reviewing the results.

4.4.2 Emerging findings

The team has received a large amount of field data and is currently in the process of reviewing the results. At this point, no findings can be reported yet.

4.4.3 Next steps

Based on the data received and emerging findings, additional global-level interviews will be conducted and results will be discussed with partners in Nairobi and Somalia. The team will consider whether these two cases allow for any more generalisable reflections that could be shared with DFID and interested stakeholders in the form of a briefing paper or report. Learning partners in South Sudan have also expressed strong interest in a similar issue, namely a mapping of different the expectations and need of different stakeholders with regards to monitoring systems and the analysis of a joint monitoring and reporting mechanism against these expectations. Results of this exercise would be included in the briefing paper.

5 Work plan for remaining country studies and completion

The coming tasks for the remainder of Component 3 will entail two parallel processes: The team will present interim results to partners in Afghanistan and Somalia/Nairobi in mid-August. The workshop in Afghanistan will focus on the themes of using feedback from affected populations and on the use of communication technologies for monitoring. Learning partners as well as other interested stakeholders, including donors and national organisations, will be invited to scrutinise, complement and discuss interim results. Separate meetings will be held with partners and selected organisations with an interest in the use of third-party monitoring. In Nairobi and potentially also Mogadishu (to be discussed with learning partners), workshops will focus on the topics of community feedback, back to basics and the use of technologies for monitoring. In both countries, workshops will be hosted by learning partners of Component 3.

In parallel, the team is currently initiating research in South Sudan and Syria/Turkey. Selected interviews were conducted and potential learning partners identified through an initial country visit to South Sudan in June 2015. Background research on Syria has started and learning partners as well as research topics will be identified over the coming months.

Table 7: Work plan

	Tasks	Month
1	**Country visits**	
1.1	Present and discuss interim findings in Kabul	August 2015
1.2	Present and discuss interim findings in Nairobi (and potentially Mogadishu)	
2	**Written outputs, Afghanistan and Somalia[14]**	
2.1	Finalise paper on third-party monitoring	August – October 2015
2.2	Finalise paper on community feedback in Afghanistan and Somalia	
2.3	Finalise paper on 'back to basics'	
2.4	Finalise catalogue of technological options for monitoring	
3	**Research in Syria and South Sudan**	
3.1	Finalise partner scoping and agreements with learning partners in South Sudan	August 2015
3.2	Implement country-based research in South Sudan	July – October 2015

[14] Written outputs from Afghanistan and Somalia will potentially be revised and expanded based on findings from South Sudan and Syria, depending on the topic / research areas identified by the Learning Partners in those contexts. For example, it is likely that TPM will be a priority in Syria, and 'back to basics' will be enhanced from the focus on M&E expectations in South Sudan.

3.3	Present workshops on preliminary findings in South Sudan	October 2015
3.4	Present workshops on final results in South Sudan	January / February 2016
3.5	Disseminate survey to aid actors active in Syria/Turkey	August 2015
3.6	Country visit to Turkey to finalise scoping of partners and to sign cooperation agreements	September / October 2015
3.7	Implement country-based research in Turkey / Syria	October – December / January
3.8	Present workshops on preliminary findings in Turkey	January / February 2016
4	**Synthesis and final products**	
4.1	Finalise all individual written outputs based on the country cases	February – April 2016
4.2	Final country visit to Turkey	April 2015
4.3	Global synthesis, including menu of options covering a summary of findings relating to the different M&E approaches analysed	May 2015
4.4	Final report to DFID	August 2016

6 Research uptake

In addition to the overall SAVE programme stakeholder engagement that was outlined in the Component 1 Interim Report, Component 3 has engaged specific stakeholder groups to discuss its research approach and to disseminate preliminary findings.

6.1 Stake holder engagement

Overall, the SAVE programme's stakeholder base has grown considerably since the inception phase through Component 3 interviews and consultations. During field visits, researchers have met with a wide range of stakeholders to brief them on the larger SAVE programme, as well as to collect information specific to Component 3.

Presentations and briefings

The Component 3 team has undertaken a wide range of presentations and briefings targeted at different audience. These are outlined below:

The Component 3 Research Coordinator presented the project during a brown-bag lunch with the **Nairobi Interagency Evaluation Network** (NIEN) in September 2014. An additional brown-bag lunch to discuss emerging findings will be organised in August 2015. The research team developed a PowerPoint presentation on specific technologies for M&E as an input to the Away Day of **DFID's Research and Evidence Division**, which was used in a simulation exercise on 9th June 2015. The Component 3 Research Coordinator also presented preliminary findings from three of the research strands to **DFID M&E experts** in London on 1st July 2015. The team also presented emerging findings of the research on community feedback at the **Learning Group Meeting on Beneficiary Feedback** on July 14th 2015, established by DFID-funded organisations. This group functions as a platform for cross-organisational learning. It focused on value for money (VFM) of beneficiary feedback, and barriers to accountability and feedback. The meeting included representatives from DFID as well INGOs with an interest and expertise in feedback mechanisms. In March 2015, the SAVE Director and the Component 3 team also briefed the office of the **US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction** on the research work in Afghanistan, and on remote monitoring practices generally.

The research team has been invited to present emerging findings on technologies to the **Global Food Security Cluster's Working Group** on Innovation (scheduled for August or September 2015), and will be presenting in early 2016 at the **World Conference on Humanitarian Studies**.

SAVE team member Rahel Dette has also discussed technology related issues at a range of conferences, including the Open Knowledge and Data Festival (June 2014); The Future of M&E and Technology (Washington, D.C., September 2014); M&E Technology Deep Dive (New York, October 2014), GeOnG CartONG (Chambery, September 2014); World Health Summit, (Berlin, October 2014); IFRC Dialogue on Emerging Technologies (San Francisco, November 2014); IFRC Global Dialogue Summit (Nyenrode, January 2015); Responsible Data (The Hague, February 2015); DigitalGlobe (London, April 2015); Humanitarian Innovation Fund Expert Meeting (London, June 2015); Oxfam workshop on ICT4H (Oxford, July 2015).

For the SAVE Blog, Component 3 posted on the use of technology for monitoring of humanitarian programs, highlighting benefits but also pointing towards risks and costs of different tools. Overall, the

post argues that technology can prove of value for monitoring in insecure settings, but only if there is a clear understanding of the information gap that it seeks to fill. Component 3 will contribute to the SAVE blog on average every one to two months.

6.2 Quality Assurance

6.2.1 Research Advisory Group

The SAVE Advisory Group has met once to advise the Component 3 team during the initiation phase. The meeting was held on 6th March 2015 in New York at the UK Mission to the UN. The Component 3 research team joined the meeting from London (DFID) to present progress on Component 3 and collect feedback on the research themes and emerging findings.

Three questions were outlined:

1. Are the topics and the research questions relevant?
2. Do you know any cases/examples the team should include in the research?
3. Are there any relevant processes/discussions the research should link to?

The separate meeting note summarises the results from this meeting, which were included in subsequent steps to refine the design and thematic focus of Component 3 research as outlined above in section 3.3.

A follow up meeting will be scheduled for September or early October 2015 to discuss the interim findings.

6.2.2 Peer review

Peer reviewers will be engaged in the next phase of the research. The interim report will serve as background material and the focus of the experts / peer reviewers will be on reviewing the various work streams (including the TPM, community feedback, and 'back to basics' papers, as well as the technology toolkit).

6.3 Monitoring research uptake

The SAVE programme tracks all aspects of research engagement and dissemination. The SAVE research programme also adheres to DFID 'green' open-access policy and all outputs will be distributed and made available without cost.

The SAVE programme has created a research uptake and dissemination log. The document is used to track all instances of engagement and uptake of SAVE research. The log includes all field missions, presentations, meetings and workshops, including those outlined above.

Dissemination and impact analyses will be undertaken after selected outputs and events, including through a short five-question evaluation for all stakeholder at the end of workshops and briefings. This questionnaire will be used during all Component 3 workshops. The first of these workshops will be held in Afghanistan and Somalia in August 2015. The evaluation includes questions to assess participant interest in and applicability of SAVE research findings, as well as logistical elements of the workshop (location and time of meeting).

Annexes

Annex 1: Interview Guidelines

The same introductory text as for 'back to basics' was used for all interviews (referencing larger SAVE project, ensuring confidentiality). Only the corresponding overview of research questions and process was adapted for each focus area.

'Back to basics'

Introduction:

- Has the interviewee already been informed about SAVE in general or this specific research?
- If not, provide a short introduction:
  - This is part of the larger SAVE project
  - The research topic was determined through consultations with partner organisations (including NRC and ACF) to ensure that the focus is relevant.
  - The interest in exploring how monitoring can be brought 'back to basics' stems from a concern that especially in insecure contexts humanitarian organisations do not have enough capacities to meet the various demands and expectations for monitoring.
  - Our research explores where there could be potential for bringing monitoring systems 'back to basics'. We do that by exploring at all levels where monitoring data are generated and used. We want to study:
    (1) What kinds of data do actors at each level need *as a minimum?*
    (2) What data are they collecting / receiving and how?
    (3) What data are they using and how?
    (4) Where are crucial data gaps and / or redundant / unused data?
- The results of the research will be used to a) provide specific advice to the two partner organisations participating in the exercise (NRC and ACF) and b) derive more general lessons on how to bring monitoring systems in insecure settings 'back to basics'.
- The interview will be confidential: We will not share interview notes outside of the research team; findings will not be attributed to any individual informant; we will not publish information about NRC's / ACF's monitoring system unless with the express permission of the organisation.

Interview questions

THEME	Questions	Target / remarks
Background	1. Please briefly describe your position and background	all
Why?	2. Why are you monitoring / collecting data? 3. What do you and your colleagues at this level need monitoring data for – what is the minimum you believe a functional monitoring system should deliver?	all

What and how?	4. What data collection instruments are you using? Could you please share samples of the instruments with us? 5. What kinds of data are you collecting? Precise list of indicators? 6. How and by whom is it determined which kind of data to collect for each project? 7. Do you collect different kinds of data for each project? How so? Why? 8. Who collects the data? 9. How often do you collect data? Based on what? 10. How large is the sample of people from which you collect data? How is this determined? 11. How do you ensure data quality and validity? 12. What are the main problems you encounter when collecting data? 13. From where / from whom are you receiving data?	M&E staff / data collectors All others
Insecure contexts	14. Do you collect different data in safer regions/situations? 15. Do you have different data collection methods or tools in safer regions/situations?	Especially HQ / global level
Data use	16. Are you analysing or directly using any of the data you collect / receive? 17. Who are you reporting the data to and do you know how they are using it? *18.* How is the data recorded? • Database? Format? Number? • Who is in charge of cleaning, updating and using the database? 19. Are you often receiving / using data from other organisations? 20. How strong is the willingness to share data with peer organisations?	All
Problem analysis	21. When you compare your ideas about the minimum requirements for monitoring systems and the current situation: Do you see any gaps or overlaps / redundancies in the current monitoring system?	All
Proposals	*22.* If you could change one or two things about the current monitoring system to adapt it better to insecure contexts, what would they be?	All

Third-Party Monitoring

THEME	Questions
Mapping	23. Why have you started working with TPMs? What is the purpose of TPM? 24. Please list the TPM providers you are working with or you have worked with over the past 5 years, indicating for which programme, in which area and with which purpose for each of them. 25. We would like to take precise examples of your agency's experience with TPM. Can you share: a. One example that you considered to be a (relatively) successful experience? b. One that you considered to be a (relatively) unsuccessful experience? c. What explains these different outcomes in your opinion?
Relationship between agency and TPM	26. How long have you been working with this partner? 27. What is their exact scope of responsibilities? 28. How many TPM staff are dedicated to your programme? 29. Who is in charge of managing that relationship within your agency?
Budget	30. What is the absolute cost of relying on TPM? 31. What share of the programme budget? 32. Could you estimate the number of man-days dedicated by your agency to the selection and training of TPM? 33. Could you estimate the number of man-days dedicated by your agency to the management of TPM, once selected? 34. Are TPM staff using some of the agency's resources to do their work: desk, transportation means, material (computers, phone etc.)? 35. Have you noticed significant difference in costs depending on the nature of the TPM provider (NNGO, INGO, Afghan private company etc.)? Would you have examples?
Contracting & assessment	36. Is there a vetting system for TPM? (details/examples) 37. How do you assess the level of access that TPM providers have? 38. How do you assess their staff's technical capacities? 39. How do you assess their reporting capacities? 40. Is there a restitution clause in the contract with TPM in case of under-performance?
Training of TPM	41. Who is in charge of training TPM providers and field monitors? 42. What type of training? (length, frequency, content) a. Are there components of the training focusing on humanitarian principles? b. How are TPM supposed to introduce themselves in the field? In insecure areas in particular?
Monitoring by TPM	43. Who is in charge of developing logframes & monitoring frameworks? At what stage in the project cycle do TPM typically come in? 44. What type of data are TPM providers supposed to collect for monitoring? a. Quantitative? b. Qualitative? c. Socio-economic indicators? d. Feedback and complaints from beneficiaries?

	e. What level of results is data collected on (outputs, outcomes, impacts)? 45. What tools are used for data collection? a. Standardised formats? → *Can you share these?* b. Use of ICT (GPS, stamped pictures etc.)? 46. How often do monitors visit each site per project? 47. Who is in charge of processing the data? 48. How is the data used by your agency? Examples? 49. Who is in charge of data analysis and reporting?
Quality of Monitoring	50. How do you judge the quality of the monitoring process conducted by the TPM? 51. How do you judge the quality of the data provided by TPM? 52. How would you rate the credibility of the data you get, on a scale from 1 to 10 (10 = completely trustworthy)? 53. Does your agency have means to triangulate and check the monitoring data provided by the TPM? a. How? b. How systematically is the data triangulated & verified? 54. What other monitoring mechanisms do you rely on?
Independence vs. access	55. Have you identified conflict of interest (e.g. TPM implementing & monitoring activities)? 56. Do you think the access of the TPM staff to certain areas means a lesser degree of independence? a. Do you have examples (if possible documented) of situations when this was a problem? b. Do you have examples when TPM were able to identify some issues of aid diversion, gatekeepers, issues of beneficiary selection in the field? 57. Do you have documented examples of fraud, misleading information etc. from one of your TPM provider?
Risk transfer	58. Do you consider that there is a transfer of risks from your agency to the TPM? 59. What mitigation measures are in place to limit the risk? 60. Have there been any security incidents? Please provide examples.
General assessment of the TPM system	61. What are the biggest benefits of TPM for your agency? 62. What are the drawbacks of working with TPM? 63. If you look at the total number of TPM monitoring experiences, how would you rate their usefulness (1-10)? 64. Is reliance on TPM increasing or decreasing? 65. For which types of programmes do you think TPM works best/worst? 66. Which type of TPM providers do you find best suited to conduct robust monitoring? (international companies, Afghan companies, Afghan NGOs, INGOs)
Further contacts	67. Who else should I talk to in your agency? 68. Other organisations I should talk to? 69. Can you share the contact of TPM providers you have worked with?

Community Feedback mechanisms
Section 1: General Information

Theme	Questions
General information	1. Where are you currently based and what is your position within the agency? 2. In which sector(s) does your agency operate? 3. In which provinces does your agency operate? 4. How does your agency collect feedback? 5. Have you personally used collected feedback in your work? 6. For which specific program(s) is feedback being collected? 7. Specifically for this programme, through which channels do you receive feedback from affected communities? 8. Since when is the FM running? Is it still running? 9. How was the FM introduced to the community?
Internal Factors (agency-specific)	10. Who is/are responsible for the FM within the agency? 11. Did the responsible staff receive training on how to establish and run the FM? 12. Please describe the feedback loop step by step 13. Are there specific guidance / standards in place to guide the staff that is responsible for the FM? 14. Is there a specific budget for the FM? 15. Does your agency have mechanisms in place to reassess / adjust the FM? 16. What are your expectations of the FM? What is its purpose? 17. Who is the main audience of the feedback that is collected within your agency? 18. Do you feel like feedback mechanisms are a priority for your agency's management? 19. How supportive is the management with regards to programme changes based on community feedback? 20. Is there a formal requirement for you to take feedback from communities into account?
Quality of the feedback mechanism	21. What is the amount of feedback that you collect? 22. How many people do you aim to receive feedback from? 23. What type of feedback are you mostly collecting? 24. Is the collected feedback representative according to gender and age? 25. Does the feedback represent minority groups? 26. How is the collected feedback shared with the relevant person in the agency? 27. Is the collected feedback analysed? 28. How many instances can you think of where community feedback led to changes in programming? 29. How many instances can you think of where relevant community feedback was collected, but not acted upon? 30. Are the response and follow-up actions (both if taken or if not taken) communicated back to the community / affected population? 31. Overall, would you consider your FM as effective?

Informal feedback	32. How regularly is the feedback collected? 33. How and by whom? 34. Can you estimate the approximate amount of feedback that your organisation is receiving? 35. What kind of feedback is collected that way? 36. Who is the main audience of this kind of feedback? 37. What does your agency do with the feedback it receives 38. Does your organisation have means to check that the informal feedback is taken into account? 39. Are informal feedback mechanisms inclusive in your case? (minorities, women etc.) 40. Do you consider this feedback valuable? 41. Do you think these informal ways of collecting feedback are effective? 42. Do you feel like feedback mechanisms are a priority for your agency's management? 43. How supportive is the management with regards to programme changes based on community feedback? 44. Is there a formal requirement for you to take feedback from communities into account (by donors or by management)?
External factors	45. To what extent is the usage of technology socially accepted by the beneficiaries in the catchment / implementation area? 46. Is insecurity problematic in the area of concern? 47. How often is the agency staff that is responsible for complaints / feedback able to visit implementation sites at the project level?
Additional information	48. Who else should we talk to within your organisation on the feedback from communities? 49. Who else outside your organisation? 50. Do you have additional documentation related to the topics that we just discussed?

Annex 2: Interview guidelines for consultations with affected populations and communities

Background / context

The third component of SAVE's research on aid in insecure environments focuses on monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Together with our learning partners, we have decided what the research will focus on. One of the focus areas will be options for conducting and implementing M&E in such a way that it centres on, or is even owned by, beneficiaries and communities.

We found that a lot of guidance exists already on how to design participatory approaches in general, including beneficiary feedback mechanisms and other participatory M&E methods. One of the generic recommendations in these guidance materials is that M&E systems should be adapted to the local cultural and political context. We therefore want to find out more about what this means in South Central Somalia / Afghanistan. In addition, we feel that the communities themselves are probably best placed to suggest what feedback and monitoring systems would best suit their needs and preferences.

We are therefore planning to conduct community consultations on M&E in South Central Somalia / Afghanistan.

Scope / audience

We suggest conducting focus group discussions with individuals who have been involved in consultations relating to humanitarian aid. This could include for example community committees (e.g. water committee; health committee etc.) or local authority structures (elders, village leadership etc.).

Focus group discussions should be held in 5-10 communities. Each focus group should involve approximately 5-20 participants, including women and minority groups. If you expect differences between different groups, arrange separate discussions. A focus group discussion is estimated to last between 1 and 2 hours.

Before you start, explain the research project and why we are holding these discussions (to give aid organisations advice on how best to get feedback on their work).

Questions

1. Are the aid organisations working here asking for feedback?

   [If the answer is no, ask why not and continue with question 4]

2. If yes, how can you provide feedback to them?
   [For example: Is there a complaints box where you can leave messages? Is there a phone number you can call? Are aid organisations calling people by phone or sending SMS surveys? Are officials of the aid agencies visiting and talking to people? Do you have a committee that checks whether organisations deliver what they promise and check the quality of services?]
   Suggestion: Write different feedback mechanisms participants mention on cards and place them on the wall or floor for everybody to see.
3. What do you like about the feedback mechanisms used here and what do you not like?
   Suggestion: Go through the different feedback mechanisms noted on the cards one by one to discuss them. Start with the mechanisms that were mentioned most often. You can also note comments on cards (for example using one colour for positive aspects, another for negative aspects) and place them next to the card with the relevant feedback mechanism. Take a photo of all the cards before you leave.
4. Can you think of a different way to monitor aid that would fit your preferences better or that would give you a greater say? If yes, what is it and how would it work?

   Reporting

For each focus group discussion, please prepare the following documentation as an email or word document:

- Location and date: When and where did the focus group discussion take place?
- Number and type of participants: How many people participated in total; how many men, how many women; what position do they hold
- Photographs of cards as placed on the wall or floor
- Write-up of answers and suggestions for each of the questions (especially 2, 3 and 4)

Annex 3: Online survey

The online survey was sent to M&E experts and managers of humanitarian organisations in Somalia and Afghanistan. A slightly adapted version of the survey was disseminated in South Sudan.

Introduction and type of organisation

Thank you for your time!

With this research project, we want to investigate how aid organisations can track and assess their work in insecure environments. More concretely, we want to: 1. Help donors and aid organisations decide on appropriate M&E approaches given the constraints in insecure contexts; 2. Identify practical solutions to monitor and evaluate despite insecurity, including strategies to increase the sharing of findings and lessons learned.

We understand Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) to include a range of systematic efforts to track and assess the progress and effects of aid.

All your answers will be analysed anonymously. If you have questions or comments, please write to esagmeister@gppi.net. For more information, see www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/save.

Yours, the SAVE research team.

Background

Where are you working?

	Donor	International UN agency	International NGO	National NGO	Red Cross / Private Red Crescent	company	Other
Please select	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Where are you currently based and what is your position?

	Country	Your position
Please select		

Please specify your position or type of work if necessary

General info & background

In which sector(s) does your organization mostly operate? (choose one)

- ○ All / multi-sector
- ○ Camp coordination and camp management
- ○ Disaster risk reduction
- ○ Early recovery
- ○ Education
- ○ Emergency telecommunications
- ○ Food security
- ○ Health
- ○ Logistics
- ○ Mine action
- ○ Nutrition
- ○ Protection
- ○ Shelter
- ○ Water, sanitation and hygiene
- ○ Coordination

Other (please specify)

How would you describe your organization?

- ○ Development organization
- ○ Humanitarian organization
- ○ Multi-mandate organization

Other (please specify)

My organization mostly implements...

- ...through local partners
- ...through commercial contractors
- ...through our own staff

None or a combination of the above (please specify)

Please rank your expectations of M&E in insecure contexts in order of importance using drag and drop

For South Sudan: What are the most important expectations of your partners' M&E? Please indicate using priority one, two, and three.

- M&E should show immediate outputs reached.
- M&E should show the longer term impact of aid.
- M&E should show unintended impact of interventions and help avoid harm.
- M&E should inform operational decisions.
- M&E should ensure accountability to donors / tax payers.
- M&E should ensure accountability to beneficiaries.
- M&E should help prevent fraud or corruption.
- M&E should show aggregated or country-wide effects.
- M&E should produce data that is disaggregated for gender and age.
- M&E should show efficiency or value for money.
- M&E should help to gain a better understanding of the conflict.

How well does your current M&E system and practice meet these expectations?

	poor	fair	good	excellent
M&E shows immediate outputs reached.	○	○	○	○
M&E shows the longer term impact of aid.	○	○	○	○
M&E shows unintended impact of interventions and helps avoid harm.	○	○	○	○
M&E informs operational decisions.	○	○	○	○
M&E ensures accountability to donors / tax payers.	○	○	○	○
M&E ensures accountability to beneficiaries.	○	○	○	○
M&E helps prevent fraud or corruption.	○	○	○	○
M&E shows aggregated or country-wide effects.	○	○	○	○
M&E produces data disaggregated for gender and age.	○	○	○	○
M&E shows efficiency or value for money.	○	○	○	○
M&E helps to gain a better understanding of the conflict.	○	○	○	○

How satisfied are you with your organization's ability to monitor and evaluate under conditions of insecurity?

- ○ Very satisfied
- ○ Satisfied
- ○ Not so satisfied
- ○ Not satisfied at all

Why? (please specify)

What hinders good M&E in your context?

	disagree	partly agree	agree	strongly agree
Security regulations of aid organizations are too strict.	○	○	○	○
Lack of M&E capacity in aid agencies.	○	○	○	○
Lack of M&E capacity in local partners.	○	○	○	○
Lack of willingness to share data or lessons between organizations.	○	○	○	○
Insufficient technical infrastructure (e.g. network coverage, internet access).	○	○	○	○
Lack of time to adequately plan and implement M&E.	○	○	○	○
Incentives from donors not to report negative results.	○	○	○	○
Cost of M&E is too high.	○	○	○	○
Lack of guidance on how to do M&E in insecure settings.	○	○	○	○
Existing guidance on how to do M&E in insecure settings is not being applied.	○	○	○	○

What else stands in the way of optimal M&E in insecure contexts?

How useful do you find the following M&E approaches to be in your context?

	not useful at all	not so useful	useful	very useful	no experience
Field visits	○	○	○	○	○
Field visits by agencies' own staff (face-to-face)	○	○	○	○	○
Field visits by third party	○	○	○	○	○
Covert monitoring or "ghost monitoring" (monitors not known to implementers)	○	○	○	○	○
Surveys	○	○	○	○	○
In-person surveys	○	○	○	○	○
Remote surveys (phone/SMS)	○	○	○	○	○
Technologies	○	○	○	○	○
Collecting GPS data of infrastructure projects or implementation sites	○	○	○	○	○
GPS tracking of goods	○	○	○	○	○
Foto or video documentation	○	○	○	○	○
Satellite pictures	○	○	○	○	○
Crowd-sourced data or maps	○	○	○	○	○
Unmanned aerial vehicles	○	○	○	○	○
Coordinated M&E and exchange	○	○	○	○	○
Risk Management Units (RMU)	○	○	○	○	○
Collaborative monitoring with other aid agencies (incl. peer monitoring)	○	○	○	○	○
Complaints and feedback	○	○	○	○	○
Call-centres	○	○	○	○	○
Complaints management systems	○	○	○	○	○
Other	○	○	○	○	○
Continuous conflict assessments and analysis	○	○	○	○	○
Integrating conflict sensitivity assessments or indicators in M&E	○	○	○	○	○
Integrating do-no-harm in M&E	○	○	○	○	○

What other approach did you find useful?

Which M&E options would you like to learn more about (pick up to four)?

***For South Sudan: Question left open-ended – Which M&E related issues would you like to learn more about? Which issues do you think will benefit most from research*?**

- [ ] Field visits by agencies' own staff (face-to-face) Field visits by third party
- [ ] Covert monitoring or "ghost monitoring" (monitors not known to implementers) Paper & pencil surveys
- [ ] Electronic surveys using handheld devices Phone surveys
- [ ] Recorded voice phone surveys
- [ ] Collecting GPS data of infrastructure projects or implementation sites GPS tracking of goods
- [ ] Foto or video documentation Satellite pictures Crowd-sourced data or maps
- [ ] Drones or other unmanned aerial vehicles SMS feedback or SMS surveys
- [ ] Risk Management Units (RMU)
- [ ] Collaborative monitoring with other aid agencies (incl. peer monitoring) Call-centres
- [ ] Complaints management systems Other feedback mechanisms
- [ ] Continuous conflict assessments and analysis
- [ ] Integrating conflict sensitivity assessments or indicators in M&E Integrating do-no-harm in M&E
- [ ] Other (please specify)

How satisfied are you with the ability of your implementing partners to monitor and evaluate under conditions of insecurity?

- ○ Very satisfied
- ○ Satisfied
- ○ Not so satisfied
- ○ Not satisfied at all
- ○ N/A

Why? (please specify)

Do you know an example of good practice concerning M&E in an insecure setting?

Country

Organization(s) involved

Please provide some details on the good practice

Please help us keep in touch.

	yes	no
May we inform you about the results of the SAVE research project?	○	○
May we contact you with follow-up questions?	○	○

Please enter your email address here

Thank you

Thank you for your time and interest in our survey. At this point, we are only asking for submissions from those working directly in or on projects related to Afghanistan, Somalia, and South Sudan which are the first two of our case studies. In several months, we will run another round specifically focusing on South Sudan and Syria.

We would, however, welcome any comments or questions from you, which you can enter below. In addition, we also will be very happy to send you insights outputs of this three-year research project on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in volatile environments if you leave your email address. Of course you can also always find updates on the project webpage at: http://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/save

Thank you!

The SAVE team.

Email address or contact information

Comments or questions

Annex 4: Maps of community and affected population consultations