

The Independent Evaluation Office has gathered experience from its own implementation of remote evaluations to help guide programme units in the implementation of evaluations during COVID-19. This note covers various potential approaches to consider, the limitations and challenges identified in implementing evaluations using remote data collection and stakeholder interviews and offers some approaches to address these issues.

Underlying this guidance is a principle of “do no harm”, and a consideration that the safety of staff, consultants, stakeholders and communities is paramount and the primary concern of all when planning and implementing evaluations during the COVID-19 crisis.

1. Desk review and data collection

Desk review	
Challenges	Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited data and documentation on project implementation may continue to constrain evaluations. COVID-19 may make it more difficult to get data since colleagues are busy with other pressing priorities (“regular” and new COVID-19 work) and less available due to work commitments given COVID-19 or as they work from home. Data and documentation may not be readily available as they may be stored in offices inaccessible due to the confinement restriction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a thorough evaluability assessment during the evaluation design and planning phase. Expand/ explore a wider range of documentation for extended desk reviews, including internal operational data (BTOR, etc.), national reports and data, evaluation reports by UN agencies and donors, as well as information from non-traditional sources, e.g. social media, GIS satellite imagery Re-define or narrow the scope of the evaluation as required due to any limited availability of data or/ and documentation. Evaluators and UNDP should agree on clear methodologies for collecting evaluative evidence considering all constraints. Ensure that the required data and documentation are collected prior to the start of an evaluation to the extent possible. Approaches and methodologies should be outlined in the inception report of the evaluation.



Data Collection	
Challenges	Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Types of data collection methods (e.g. interviews, questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, observations) available to evaluators may be limited depending on local circumstances.• Limited likelihood of field visits due to travel restrictions.• Limited and constrained validation of results through desk reviews without proper data to triangulate and without observation and limited contact with beneficiaries even with virtual stakeholder interviews.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In identifying the options for data collection methods, assess how the evaluation can remain feasible, credible and useful, examining the availability of stakeholders, potential external factors (e.g. political, cultural, security) that may hamper data collection activities, timing and budget of the evaluation.• Consider the use of a flexible team approach include remotely use of International experts (if travel is not possible), national consultants and/or locally based think tanks, research/academic institutions for data collection who are already in country and who may be less affected by travel restrictions.• Plan for a high likelihood of remote data collection. Consider conducting remote interviews, pre interview surveys, evaluation questionnaires.• If needed, limit the scope of evaluations and focus more on analysis of whether what is being done is the “right” thing to do (e.g. assess design of initiatives with a TOC) instead of measuring results.• When using national consultants have a principle of “do no harm” ensuring their safety and the safety of staff, stakeholders and communities is paramount.





2. Remote engagement with stakeholders

Accessibility to Stakeholders	
Challenges	Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interviewees may face a lack of access to the required technology for interviews outside their offices, as well as technical issues such as poor and unreliable connectivity or lack of connectivity. Technical knowledge of evaluators and interviewees to engage with virtual platforms may be limited. Phone interviews will lose “non-verbal” communication with interviewees. Some interviewees may be reluctant to be interviewed online or by phone due to potential cultural, political sensitivity. Potentially limited or challenging access to sub-national government authorities (provincial, district). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide evaluators with up to date stakeholder contact detailed including email and telephone numbers and preferred method of access (if possible). Inform interviewees in advance of the evaluation with clear purpose and overview of the evaluation, evaluation team and interview expectations. This will also save the evaluators time during interviews. Ensure and explain the principle of full anonymity of all interviews. Share a list of questions with interviewees in advance to speed up the process and facilitate interviewee preparation. Consult with the interviewee on which virtual tool the interviewee is more comfortable with (Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, telephone etc.) Ensure that evaluators have good connectivity and good understanding of the tools being used. Interviews by telephone, rather than VOIP, may be more acceptable and reliable in some circumstances.

Evaluation Schedule and Conduct of Interviews	
Challenges	Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unresponsiveness of stakeholders to interview requests due to work commitments or reluctance may reduce the number of interviewees. Virtual interviews being undertaken from different time zones can be a major issue reducing windows of opportunity for virtual meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carrying out interviews virtually allows for more flexibility in timing of interviews but may also require a longer interview schedule and timescale to ensure coverage. Flexibility and extended length/timeline of evaluation to accommodate slow responses with the interview period needing a longer window than normal (4 weeks+).





- Use of translators may be problematic for remote interviews.
- Difficult to have focus group discussions and meet with communities.

- During interviews ask those being interviewed for suggestions and/or support to expand the stakeholder's interviews and also to gain direct access and introduction to other interviewees.
- Scheduling interviews in blocks (by project or by sub-area) helps the evaluator gain insights and creates less confusion than when the evaluator has to jump from topic to topic.
- Develop interviews with smaller groups, 1 -2 people, to ensure all voices are heard.
- Evaluators should be willing to engage and set up meetings directly.
- A local consultant is an advantage in overcoming time differences and support in country interviews.

Beneficiary interviews and field visits

Challenges	Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to observe changes or document results on the ground if the opportunities for field visits are limited. • Difficult to communicate with field beneficiaries, in particular, those from vulnerable groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased use of national consultants, local research/ think tank/ academic institutions, CSOs for reaching out to community-level stakeholders and beneficiaries. • Extensive use of monitoring visit reports (including the third-party monitoring reports) and other reports for beneficiary feedback.





3. Role of National and international consultants

Evaluators	
Challenges	Approaches
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It may be challenging to find good local consultants that understand UNDP evaluation needs as well as being able to operate in a limiting environment.• There may be greater demand on national evaluators due to a greater demand and reliance on national consultants for evaluations by all UN agencies.• There will need to be greater flexibility in team composition and skill structure with a need to use thematic experts who may have little evaluation experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Change of approach and methodologies including remote interviews means more capable national consultants will be required.• Evaluations will benefit from evaluators with a greater prior understanding and knowledge of the country, region and thematic areas under evaluation.• Evaluations require experienced teams with individuals that are able to work by themselves, especially as the team is working remotely and virtually.• A more detailed and more comprehensive TOR may be needed to guide the work of the evaluators.• Recruitment may require more time to identify appropriate evaluators.• National evaluators in country can be teamed up with international evaluators (operating remotely) who can help to guide evaluations.• Consider joint in country data collection with other UN agencies to lower evaluation/ interview fatigue amongst stakeholders.



Evaluations during COVID-19

