

Presentation
outline & key points

Data quality in remote monitoring – a comparative analysis

Mona Fetouh (Co-author and Presenter), Christian Balslev-Olesen (Co-Author),
Volker Hüls (Co-Author)

International Rescue Committee

Global context

- diminishing humanitarian space – humanitarians working in conflict or post-conflict contexts with greater threats, shifting local perceptions, blurred lines between various actors in conflict areas
- increased need for remote monitoring and management
- greater reliance on local expertise, shifting of risks, loss of control
- remote practices still emerging, need for sharing of experiences and establishment of best practices

Comparable Contexts

Somalia

- classic remote management situation
- difficulty of access due to insecurity, heavy reliance on national civil society (NGOs, Communities) for aid delivery (managed from neighbouring Kenya)
- Risk to external monitors, monitoring relies heavily on local partners – risk of bias

Eastern Burma

- hard to impossible to access from capital because of internal political difference between ethnic groups in the East and the government (slowly changing)
- heavy reliance on national civil society (NGOs, Communities) for aid delivery that was managed from neighbouring Thailand.
- Risk to external monitors, monitoring relies heavily on local partners – risk of bias

Different data environments

Somalia

- main concern is **availability** of data.
- Little opportunity to collect data regularly, even for local partners
- local partners have varied capacity to produce quality data, severe education gap results in overall low staff capacity
- Focus of strengthening objective monitoring was through investment in covert systems (“third party monitoring”).

Eastern Burma

- Main concern thus was **management** of data
- Data are abundant, both direct monitoring data and regular output- and outcome level surveys. Local partner capacity is good – strong ethnic and professional exchange with Thai border area, better access to education
- Information remains in technical silos, local NGOs are largely confined to ethnic areas, access opportunities are often limited to a particular sector.
- Local NGOs operating inside Burma often don’t know precisely what else is implemented in their area in a different sector, and there are few mechanisms for independent verification of data.
- Focus of strengthening objective monitoring was on the verification of information,

Aim of Presentation

Similar contexts require different approaches, with details on

- Third Party monitoring in Somalia
- Quality assurance of monitoring information in Eastern Burma

Somalia – Third Party Monitoring (1)

First Level: Information from partners and networks

- Main source of primary performance data is reports from implementing partners
- Reviewed against:
 - Does the previous track record of the partner offer confidence in its performance, or are there specific concerns about partner performance?
 - Is the reporting complete and realistic?
 - Are there specific issues that are flagged in the report or can be deduced from the report as requiring follow-up?
- In parallel, field staff maintain network of contacts in programme areas which they use as a first line of verification of implementation in lieu of their own restricted travel to sites.

Somalia – Third Party Monitoring (2)

Second Level: Third Party Monitoring

- Any concerns are flagged and third party monitoring scheduled for this particular project / area.
- Third party monitoring systems use field monitors that are not affiliated with any implementing partner, and are often outside of the aid business.
 - The monitors can move more freely in restricted areas, and do not have the same risk as NGO or UNICEF staff as a consequence of their independence
 - However, they are not necessarily as qualified to judge details of implementation, and their tasking is therefore necessarily mostly for verification of easily verified targets
- Third party monitors, are ‘blind’ tasked to avoid fabrication of reports
- have also been successfully tasked to investigate leakages of relief goods into the markets, including quantities and pricing.

Somalia – Third Party Monitoring (3)

Third Level: Follow up on concerns from Level 1 and 2

- Third party information is kept confidential and assessed for the risk level of a particular performance issue.
- Depending on risk level, issues are taken up with the partner without revealing the source of information – e.g. dedicated overt monitoring mission at next opportunity
- The main reasons for staggering this system are:
 - The first level of information collection can flag issues, but is in itself not sufficient for ensuring reliable data on implementation.
 - It is necessary, however, as the next level, third-party monitoring, is costly and cannot be realistically used as a blanket mechanism for all projects.
 - Full overt monitoring missions are not always possible, and may have to be delayed if access is difficult. They are therefore not a solution in themselves. It is logical to trigger them with results of the more flexible and timely third-party monitoring.
- Low-level third party networks have worked well in Somalia for other purposes, e.g. for the food security and nutrition assessment unit of the FAO (FSNAU).

Eastern Burma – Strengthening Monitoring Quality (1)

Correlating data in geographical information systems

- Main limitation to data correlation / triangulation is sector-based management (health information system, education information system, relief-operation GIS)
- Traditional mistrust between groups has hindered sharing, but is changing
- these are the basis for a cross-sectoral mapping platform that is being established at the moment.
 - Platform maps service delivery data of all sectors on village location
 - allows to analyse performance data from all sectors per location

- allows sectors to engage in cross-monitoring. (previously not possible, as the information who else works in the same location was simply not available to local partners)

Eastern Burma – Strengthening Monitoring Quality (2)

Regular surveys are expanded in scope and feed into the information system

- Key strength of the Eastern Burma programmes is the history of conducting regular (sector) surveys.
- All partners are now supporting the expansion of the scope and the coverage of these surveys. Example: Upcoming Poverty Survey and health survey

Eastern Burma – Strengthening Monitoring Quality (3)

Data quality verification in the health sector

- Innovative example for data quality verification in this sector is a regular review of health centre logbooks and patient files.
- can be done remotely and is not time sensitive, but does reveal substantial information about the quality of support that is given to these health posts.
- Started by the IRC, and is now being expanded to be done by all partners in the health sector. Variations of this can be conceived for other sectors.

Eastern Burma – Strengthening Monitoring Quality (4)

Increased use of photographic and video evidence of implementation

- Where possible, local NGOs use photography and increasingly video to document their work. Use of video started with success by one local NGO who felt that this provides better representation e.g. of trainings and public awareness activities.

Conclusion: Similar Contexts, different data environments

- Somalia and Eastern Burma are good examples how at first glance very similar contexts warrant very different approaches
- The changes in Somalia may make the Eastern Burma lessons very applicable in the future, when the country increasingly opens up
- The experience in Somalia is valuable for similar situations elsewhere, Syria may presently require similar approaches if the situation prevails