# Between a rock and a hard place

## Monitoring aid implementation in situations of conflict

Mariska van Beijnum
Willem van den Berg
Erwin van Veen

CRU Report

**Clingendael**
Netherlands Institute of International Relations

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# Executive summary

Achieving development results through the provision of aid is challenging in any situation, but is challenging to the extreme in situations of conflict. Aid organisations have come up with innovative and pragmatic ways to carry out and monitor their activities nonetheless. The purpose of this short study is to map key practices of how donors monitor the implementation of activities funded by their aid in conditions of conflict. Combining a literature review, in-house expertise and key informant interviews focusing on Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia as case studies, the study develops a basic yardstick that donors can use to assess the monitoring designs of projects to be implemented in situations of conflict when they are making funding decisions. Specifically, the study explores how monitoring can help ensure that aid funds are correctly spent, that is, how monitoring takes account of the fiduciary and accountability risks of programme engagement in conflict settings, and identifies response mechanisms for when such risks arise.

Modern conflict has characteristics with serious implications for aid implementation, and that render the type of monitoring typically used for aid interventions in more stable developmental contexts either inadequate or unfeasible. Among other things, informal political systems of rule with significant levels of exclusion are the norm; dispute resolution takes place via the rule by law or (under the threat of) the rule of the gun; there can be extreme fluidity in terms of allegiances and support for activities; and competing conflict narratives and misinformation are elements of the fog of war. Development interventions in conflict settings are subsequently faced with problems of polarised narratives, mutually exclusive identity images, reduced access, security threats, and nepotistic and corrupt practices that arise out of years of rule by the gun and warfighting.

As most of these issues are beyond the control of aid interventions, and cannot be directly influenced by programming, most aid organisations focus their risk management and mitigation strategies on programmatic fiduciary and accountability risks, as these can be most directly addressed in programme design. There is no standard framework or checklist for programmatic risk, as the main risks encountered in conflict settings will depend on the nature of the activities being implemented. However, the most common programmatic risk categories are: diversion of funds (e.g. informal taxes); diversion of equipment (e.g. appropriation by armed groups); diversion of activity (e.g. corrupt selection processes for event and training invites); co-optation of counterpart (e.g. using aid activity as a front for other activities); non-delivery of outputs but funds claimed nonetheless (e.g. forged paperwork proving delivery); partner is unknowingly affiliated with reputationally damaging groups (e.g. affiliation with a blacklisted group);

and misalignment of programme and local needs (e.g. procurement influenced by contractors seeking profit rather than based on a needs assessment).

In addition to these programmatic risks, there are challenges to monitoring in situations of conflict that need to be taken into account, such as remote management and lack of physical access due to security risks, low capacity of implementing partners to monitor, low trust in implementing partners to truthfully monitor, lack of trustworthy existing data, and intangible variables that activities try to change (such as legitimacy and security) but which are hard to measure. Aid organisations will rely on third-party monitors and on remote monitoring with technology, which creates challenges of a technical nature (e.g. does the partner organisation have adequate (financial) capacity, is the technology used the appropriate one, has data been gathered?), as well as issues of trust (e.g. is the partner organisation trustworthy, is the data accurate, does the third-party monitor have a conflict of interest?).

For donors, there are, roughly speaking, three options for monitoring the progress of programme implementation in conflict situations where they do not have a (semi-)permanent presence themselves: (1) (self-)monitoring conducted by (local) implementing partners; (2) third-party monitoring; and (3) monitoring via modern technology. In practice, donors can choose any one of these options, or a combination of them, as they are not mutually exclusive. This study identifies good practices for all of the options.

The study also identifies general good practices for gathering monitoring information, which should be considered by donors and their implementing partners. An important caveat in this regard is that donors need to reflect on what information would be useful to them, to ensure they do not unnecessarily burden those responsible for monitoring and in order to receive relevant and digestible monitoring reports. With this in mind, two groups of general good practices can be distinguished. The first group includes ensuring that basic monitoring housekeeping is in order at donor headquarter level, enabling donors to engage meaningfully in discussions about programme and monitoring design in conflict situations:

• There must be a procedure for ensuring that monitoring strategies and practices are incorporated into the planning phase of aid programmes and kept both alive and useful during implementation. This includes clarity of purpose of the proposed monitoring (what will be done with it), options for the appropriate frequency of monitoring (including resource requirements) and the creation of a decision-making body that will meet frequently to review monitoring results and decide on programme adjustment when needed.
• A minimum set of clear, simple and pre-determined indicators and data collection procedures is required for effective monitoring of aid activity in conflict contexts. Such indicators should include links to key donor policies and/or theories of change.

> A good monitoring system also requires several layers of checks and filters for continuous verification.

- Monitoring must be made relevant to learning and continuous improvement in addition to its programme accountability purposes. In other words, the inevitable trade-off that will occur between monitoring-for-improvement, monitoring-for-accountability and monitoring-for-learning needs to be mapped, discussed and mitigated as much as possible.
- Long-term partnerships need to be built for both political-economy analysis in the service of programme design and implementation, and for third-party monitoring in the service of programme monitoring.

A second group of general good practices is intended to put key heuristics and practices in place at field level, as this will strengthen the ability to monitor programmes operationally:

- Develop on-the-ground networks to provide greater local insight, better monitoring and higher levels of accountability. Well-maintained networks and relationships with key stakeholders are essential for effective monitoring and triangulation. This requires a mix of analytical and diplomatic resources and will be a time-intensive endeavour.
- Ensure that aid activity contracts contain sufficient incentives to enable and encourage implementing organisations to be transparent regarding the progress of their work to both donors and beneficiaries.
- Where modern technology is applied as a monitoring tool, ensure there is adequate investment and research into the pitfalls and challenges of local data collection and analysis software.
- Ensure that monitoring work is conducted with the full knowledge of implementing partners; share reports to validate work and justify monitoring activities; and ensure there is a feedback loop between implementing partners and monitoring partners that is mediated by the funder.

On the basis of these insights, this study has developed a basic assessment framework that outlines analytical, organisational and procedural elements that donors need to have in place for adequate monitoring in situations of conflict. The limited evidence gathered for this study suggests that more consistent use of such a framework in funding decisions for aid activities in conflict settings – as well as in subsequent implementation where a positive decision is made – could play a significant role in upgrading the quality and utility of monitoring efforts, reducing risks in the process.

# Introduction

Stimulating progressive developmental results through the provision of aid is challenging at the best of times, that is, even when there is a capable government in place, with its eye on key matters of national development, supported by a constructive civil society and adequate, as well as coordinated, external support, numerous interventions are likely to fail. At least two factors are at play. First, developmental interventions are highly political in the sense that they create winners and losers. This means they will also create resistance and pushback – and it is on the rocks of vested interests and entrenched power structures that many interventions founder. Second, achieving socio-political and economic modernisation also demands well-developed cultural, strategic and operational capabilities for change that are often in short supply – including in higher-income countries.

Against this backdrop, realising results through the provision of aid in situations of conflict is challenging in the extreme. Obviously, none of the benign conditions outlined above are even remotely present. Instead, development interventions are faced with additional problems of polarised narratives, mutually exclusive identity images, reduced access, security threats, and nepotistic and corrupt practices that arise out of years of rule by the gun and war. Moreover, many donors are woefully underequipped to understand the situation in which they operate and to translate political insights into programming.[1] It is, in a sense, a miracle that any developmental results are achieved in such settings. Expectations should be extremely modest.

To their credit, aid organisations have come up with innovative and pragmatic ways to carry out and monitor their activities nonetheless. The purpose of this short study is to map key practices of how donors monitor the implementation of activities funded by their aid under conditions of conflict. The study is exploratory in nature and based on a mix of literature review, in-house expertise in Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit and key informant interviews focusing on Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia as case studies.[2] The study develops a basic yardstick that donors can use to assess the monitoring designs of projects to be implemented in situations of conflict when they are making funding decisions. Specifically, the study explores how monitoring can help ensure that

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1   Van Veen, E. and V. Dudouet (2017), *Hitting the target, but missing the point? Assessing donor support for inclusive and legitimate politics in fragile societies*, Paris: OECD.

2   Interviews were conducted between May and July 2018 with staff from non-governmental organisations, government agencies, intergovernmental organisations and independent consultants. The interviews were conducted by telephone and under the explicit condition of anonymity.

aid funds are correctly spent, that is, how monitoring takes account of the fiduciary and accountability risks of programme engagement in conflict settings and identifies response mechanisms for when such risks arise.[3] This is not the same as exploring whether aid funds are effectively or meaningfully spent, which will need to be the topic of other reports.

Section 2 of this report presents a short overview of the nature of modern conflict to outline the contextual challenges to aid delivery and remote monitoring in conflict settings. Section 3 then presents an overview of the main risks affecting programme implementation and monitoring in conflict situations. Section 4 presents the key options for donors in monitoring programme risks in conflict settings, with a specific focus on fiduciary and accountability risks – including an overview of how they can best respond when irregularities occur. Finally, Section 5 presents a basic assessment framework that outlines analytical, organisational and procedural elements that donors need to have in place to enable adequate monitoring in situations of conflict.

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3   This specific focus results from the dominance of value-for-money considerations – in the narrow sense of efficiency – in contemporary aid debates and practices.

# 2 The nature of modern conflict

Modern conflict of the intra-state variety in the setting of fragile states has characteristics that have serious implications for aid implementation. These characteristics render the type of monitoring typically used for aid interventions in more stable developmental contexts either inadequate or unfeasible.[4] Without pretence at comprehensiveness, four such characteristics seem particularly salient in the context of this report:

**Characteristic 1: Contemporary intra-state conflicts feature informal political systems of rule with significant levels of exclusion and corruption.** Practically, this means that the political economy of conflict environments has rather different operating rules from those used by organisations that provide aid in such settings. This leads to clashes of expectation, administration and impact. There are two ways in which this gap can be bridged, with most current aid practice being situated between the two:

- Conducting sustained political-economy analysis alongside programme design and implementation so that insights into local rules, interests and relations are fed into programming as they become available: This approach aims for greater harmonisation over time between analysis and programmes and hence requires an adaptive approach to programming.
- Dealing with incompatibilities between local conflict rules and external aid rules in a more ad-hoc manner and mostly when they reach a state of 'crisis' (e.g. corruption goes off the chart as in the Kabul bank scandal) or trigger parliamentary debate in donor countries (e.g. regime entrenchment in Burundi leads to parliamentary questions to the minister): This approach perpetuates different realities that unfold in parallel with occasional points of connection and unintended effects.

To provide an example to illustrate how this can work in practice, consider the case of providing (humanitarian) aid to Syria. Any basic analysis would have clarified early on that providing humanitarian aid in Assad-held areas of Syria would be controlled and partially appropriated by the Syrian regime, given the latter's socio-economic control, warfighting difficulties and systematic corruption. Instead of conducting such

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4    World Bank (2014), *Pilot Toolkit: Measuring and Monitoring in FCV Environments*, Washington: World Bank, p.14.

an analysis, scandal broke out in 2016 alleging that the United Nations had basically thrown President Assad's regime a financial lifeline through its humanitarian operations.[5] Perhaps the UN had simply accepted the risk and considered the alleviation of humanitarian needs a higher priority than informally strengthening the regime, but the point is that the trade-off does not seem to have been recognised or made transparent. This risks institutional reputation, as well as popular and political support for, in this case, humanitarian aid.

In a similar vein, it was also clear that when the Syrian uprising turned violent, opposition-held areas could be overrun by either the regime or extremist groups and would feature increasing levels of corruption and diversion by either opposition, regime or extremist forces due to a growing war economy. On the one hand, this means this significant attrition and financial loss of aid programmes is unavoidable and must be recognised – even with the best monitoring and implementation mechanisms in place. On the other hand, it makes recurrent and high-quality political-economy analysis an essential approach to navigating or monitoring a dynamic and complex conflict environment, as it does for adaptive programming as a tool.

In short, mitigating aid implementation risks effectively starts by knowing the political order in which an activity is implemented.

### Characteristic 2: Dispute resolution in contemporary intra-state conflict settings takes place via the rule by law or (under the threat of) the rule of the gun.[6]

The logic of survival and coercion that arises from conditions of conflict means that institutional and socio-cultural morality will gradually regress as conflict continues, with a reduction of integrity and ethics as a result. Practically, this means that disputes about project space, means, activities and implementation in conflict settings are unlikely to be resolved by the rational, rule-based logic of log frames, administrative regulations or legal provisions of aid activities. Instead, informal negotiations, mediation and probably even coercion or threats are more likely to take their place.

The recent exposure of the practices of the French-owned Lafarge cement factory in northern Syria provides a good example. The factory's management was able to keep its premises and production prospects intact by facilitating, negotiating and bribing a wide

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5    Leenders, Reinoud (29 Augustus 2016), 'UN's $4bn aid effort in Syria is morally bankrupt', *The Guardian*:
     https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2016/aug/29/uns-4bn-aid-effort-in-syria-is-morally-
     bankrupt (accessed 9 July 2018)
6    Van Veen, E. (2017), A shotgun marriage: Political contestation and the rule of law in fragile
     societies, The Hague: Clingendael (https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2017/a_shotgun_marriage)
     (accessed 18 June 2018)

range of armed groups – from the Free Syrian Army to the Islamic State.[7] The rational-technical language of Western aid project management is sometimes used to re-frame the results of such practical settlements in ways acceptable to the funder (in the more commercial Lafarge example, this would, for example, amount to additional 'security' and 'consultancy' expenses) – until it is exposed in public or in court as an unacceptable distortion of reality.

In short, mitigating aid implementation risks effectively requires knowing what rules or mechanisms will determine access, operational space and dispute settlement (e.g. in case of disagreement over funds, activities and/or purchases *in situ*). Only when these rules or mechanisms are known, can an aid activity be designed to include a menu of pre-authorised response options that can help it navigate the inherent ethical dilemmas swiftly and with some legitimacy. Alternatively, if such rules or dispute settlement mechanisms cross red lines for a donor – for example, it involves the need to deal with groups that have been explicitly formed as terrorist groups – it should probably choose not to fund a particular activity.

### Characteristic 3: Contemporary intra-state conflicts are extremely fluid in terms of amities and enmities.

For various reasons beyond the scope of this report, both 'status' and 'actor' ambiguity are very high in intra-state conflicts. The consequence is that the environment in which aid activities are implemented is not only different in terms of its (in)formality, political order and rule structure, but also constantly changing in terms of its cast of actors. In terms of 'status', contemporary conflicts are often 'internationalised', that is, they are primarily domestic in nature, but domestic parties are in turn supported by external actors (Russia in Ukraine or Iran/Russia/Gulf states and the US in Syria), and yet this internationalisation is often denied or poorly grasped. Moreover, battle lines exist not only on the map but also between socio-ethnic groups and within armed groups as well as within communities. In terms of 'actors', the distinction between civil, military and commercial organisations tends to blur as conflict persists, as does the distinction between rebel and government forces. Hybrid actors become more prominent while rent-seeking actors inject themselves into the (war) economy. Allegiance becomes a political commodity in the service of shifting war-time objectives. A good example is the kaleidoscope of armed groups (pro and contra regime) in Syria and their shifting alliances.[8] But this phenomenon is by no means limited to Syria, as evidence from Afghanistan, the DRC, Mali, Somalia or Sudan shows. This means that aid organisations must deal with local conflict actors who will at some point have re-oriented themselves

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7    Lund, A. (2018), *The factory: A glimpse into Syria's war economy*, The Century Foundation (https://tcf.org/content/report/factory-glimpse-syrias-war-economy) (accessed 18 June 2018)

8    See, for example, the work by the Carter Centre (https://www.cartercenter.org/syria-conflict-map) or by ACLED (https://www.acleddata.com/tag/syria).

in terms of their allegiance, and as a result might be less (or more) positively inclined towards a particular intervention than they were before.

It can happen, for example, that an aid-supported civil society organisation suddenly finds itself in an area now controlled by violent extremist groups. It is subsequently likely that this armed group will enforce some form of (financial) contribution from that organisation. As one interviewee put it: 'In Somalia you do not gain humanitarian access, you buy humanitarian access.'[9] Thus, the problem of fluid relationships (characteristic 3) compounds the problem of alternative dispute settlement mechanisms (characteristic 2) in relation to aid activity implementation. Put differently, a benign operating environment with a certain set of dispute resolution rules can change overnight into a more hostile operating environment with a different set of rules through a re-alignment or change of alliance of conflict stakeholders, especially armed groups.

In short, mitigating aid implementation risks effectively requires the permanent mapping of the main conflict-related actors relevant to the intervention. It is also necessary that an intervention have the ability to adapt to shifts in stakeholder alliances and enmities. It is here that adaptive programming comes into play once more as a key response to monitoring findings.[10] As both continuous monitoring through actor mapping and executing adaptive programming correctly are hard to accomplish, programmes tend to conduct standard, one-off conflict assessments and stick to the implementation of the resulting log frame instead. This, however, has the inevitable consequence that programmes become unmoored from at least part of the socio-political reality in which they operate.

### Characteristic 4: Contemporary intra-state conflicts feature many possibilities for making the fog of war denser through misinformation.

In any conflict, donors face a 'fog of war', which leaves them operating with a high degree of uncertainty and possibly also a high level of misinformation. Apart from the fact that information relevant to the programme might be difficult to obtain due to political sensitivity, while life-threatening security conditions impede the collection of additional data, conflict parties also have an interest in framing conflict events to their advantage.[11] Modern communication platforms, including Twitter and YouTube, have greatly increased the possibilities for creating convincing alternative conflict narratives. Where such information is of an operational nature, this can have direct or indirect

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9    Clingendael interview with independent Somali humanitarian consultant, June 2018.

10   See, for example, https://twpcommunity.org or Van Veen, E. (2017), *Re-perceiving results: Aid programs and change in fragile settings*, The Hague: Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law.

11   Sartorius, R. and C. Carver (2011), *Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning for Fragile States and Peacebuilding Programs*, Arlington: Social Impact, p.1; De Bruijne, K. and E. van Veen (2017), *Pride and prejudice: Addressing bias in the analysis of political violence*, The Hague: Clingendael.

consequences for activity implementation. On the least harmful side, it can generate misinformation that confuses but is ultimately uncovered without adverse effects. But it can also lead to incorrect funding allocation decisions, tactical implementation errors, programme termination without good cause and incremental muddling through when activities should have been terminated.

In short, effectively mitigating aid implementation risks requires that activities feature a permanent and well-resourced protocol for the triangulation of (mis)information that lays out common information reliability problems, information asymmetry challenges, the kind of political pressure or decision-making difficulties that can occur as a result, and how these can be resolved.

Table 1 summarises these four characteristics of contemporary, intra-state conflicts and their implications for aid activities.

**Table 1     Common characteristics of contemporary conflict in relation to aid activity implementation**

| Characteristic | Implication for aid activities |
| --- | --- |
| (1) Informal political systems of rule with significant levels of exclusion and corruption are the norm | Aid-funded activities are designed in a different political-legal reality than the conflict context in which they will be implemented. This creates challenges of feasibility and relevance. |
| (2) Dispute resolution takes place via the rule by law or (under the threat of) the rule of the gun | Disputes about activity implementation (operational space, access, resource allocation) will not be resolved as indicated in activity contracts, legal rules and administrative regulations. |
| (3) There can be extreme fluidity in terms of amities and enmities | Actors that are relevant to an activity's success may change their attitude towards an activity because of war-time allegiances and pressures. |
| (4) Many possibilities exist for making the fog of war denser through misinformation | Competing conflict narratives may cast doubt on the relevance, sense and/or progress of activities. |

On a final note, while the needs of local populations in conflict-affected environments are much greater and more urgent, the nature of contemporary intra-state conflicts has profoundly limiting effects on the nature and extent of outcomes that can be expected from aid-funded activities in such settings, and how they should be designed and implemented.[12] Programming in conflict settings is not business as usual and requires additional steps, forethought and more human resources.

12   Humanitarian Policy Group (2008), *Need and greed: corruption risks, perceptions and prevention in humanitarian assistance*, London: ODI, Policy Brief 32, p.1.

For the specific purpose of fiduciary and accountability monitoring, conflict settings present two types of challenges that need to be addressed: (1) increased fiduciary and accountability risks that need to be monitored, and (2) unique challenges for effective monitoring itself. The next section examines these points in more detail.

# 3 Risks to programme implementation and monitoring

The OECD differentiates three overlapping categories of risk that aid interventions in fragile situations need to consider and monitor: contextual, programmatic and institutional risks. Contextual risks are factors over which external actors have limited control – like the risk of state failure, progress or failure of a peace process, military interventions, and humanitarian crisis. Programmatic risks focus on the failure to achieve aims and objectives, and the risk of causing harm through intervention. Institutional risks are risks to the aid provider that arise mostly out of programmatic risks. These are typically expressed in terms of (in)security, fiduciary failure, reputational loss and domestic political damage.[13]

As contextual risks are mostly outside the control of aid interventions, and cannot be directly influenced by programming, most donors focus their risk management and mitigation strategies on the combination of programmatic and institutional risks (the so-called aid risks). However, contextual risks should be considered as they affect programmatic and institutional risks – and hence all three risk categories should be closely monitored. The OECD points out that risk management is not just about risk reduction or avoidance: it's about balancing risk and opportunity, and balancing control and flexibility.[14] Engaging in conflict settings demands a significant degree of risk taking, which in turn requires programming to be based on solid analyses and continuous monitoring.[15]

For this study, we focus specifically on the monitoring of programmatic fiduciary and accountability risks, as these can be most directly addressed in programme design. There is no standard framework or checklist for programmatic risk, as the main risks encountered in conflict settings depend on the nature of the activities being

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13  OECD (2012), *Managing Risks in Fragile and Transitional Contexts: The Price of Success?*, Paris: OECD.

14  *Ibid.*

15  Programming should be designed based on a sound political economy or conflict analysis and take conflict sensitivity into account. For more information on conflict sensitive programme design see, for example: http://www.conflictsensitivity.org/how-to-guide or http://local.conflictsensitivity.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Conflict-Sensitive-Approaches-to-Development-Humanitarian-Assistance-and-Peacebuilding-Resource-Pack.pdf

implemented. For example, activities involving a significant volume of material goods, such as constructing a police station or delivering food aid, run a high risk that funds and equipment will be diverted. Nevertheless, projects without significant funds and materials, for instance dialogue or training programmes, can still see corruption and diversion, albeit typically to a lesser extent, for example in the form of corrupt selection processes for event invites (e.g. nepotism).[16] Given these differences, table 2 below provides an overview of the most common programmatic risk categories along with specific risks and examples from Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria.

**Table 2**  **Programmatic fiduciary and accountability risks to donors and implementing organisations in conflict settings**

| Risk category | Specific risks involved | Example from case studies |
|---|---|---|
| **Diversion of funds** | - Ransom<br>- Checkpoint payments<br>- Informal taxes<br>- Corruption | Having to pay 'taxes' to both (local) government and informal groups like Al-Shabaab to transport food aid from Mogadishu port at multiple checkpoints. |
| **Diversion of equipment** | - Appropriation by armed groups<br>- Unauthorised sale<br>- Theft | Constructing an airstrip in a territory later taken over by Al-Shabaab; tens of Humvees in Afghanistan that simply 'go missing'. |
| **Diversion of activity** | - Corrupt selection processes for event and training invites | Hosting an event that is hijacked by a certain family or clan to the detriment of the intended beneficiaries. |
| **Co-optation of counterpart** | - Use aid activity as front for other activities<br>- Infiltration by replacing key staff with stakeholders in conflict | Security staff hired for the project can be part of a local militia with an active stake in the conflict. |
| **Non-delivery of outputs but claiming funds nonetheless** | - Forged paperwork proving delivery<br>- Delivering a minor part without ability to monitor the whole | Without the ability to directly check the projects, donors must rely on the word of their partners. This can lead to conflicting reports on the progress of projects. Only during field trips conducted much later on is the ongoing deception discovered. |

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16   Clingendael interviews with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Somalia and Syria, May-June 2018.

| Risk category | Specific risks involved | Example from case studies |
|---|---|---|
| **Partner is unknowingly affiliated with reputationally damaging groups** | - A local partner (individual or group) is somehow affiliated with an internationally designated terrorist or other blacklisted group | Organisations in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria mentioned that different donors have blacklisted different groups, which presents challenges. For example, in Syria EU donors agree to work with Kurdish partners, but Turkey does not. This lack of consensus is especially problematic when there are multiple donors or donors change. Similarly, groups first greenlighted for cooperation can later be listed as terrorist organisations (e.g. the Nour al-Din al-Zenki movement was once seen as a moderate group in the Syrian civil war and received US support, but later was involved in atrocities). |
| **Misalignment of programme and local needs** | - Goods and services provided are not used, leading to wasted resources<br>- The decision to provide certain goods and services may be influenced by contractors seeking profits rather than being based on a needs assessment | In Afghanistan the US army spent USD 468 million on transport aircrafts that were unused because maintenance was difficult. The aircrafts were left to rust on a runway and were eventually sold for USD 32,000 as scrap metal. |

Looking at table 2, what becomes clear is that regardless of the type of project, there are numerous risks for aid activities, including failure to achieve 'value for money', funds and assets ending up in the hands of conflict parties, and the reputation of a donor or its implementing partner being damaged.

As indicated in the introduction, there are many other risks related to programme implementation in addition to key fiduciary and accountability risks. These relate mostly to effectiveness, including divergent national interests and politically sensitive information increasing donor competition or blocking adequate coordination, and also to meaning, including inadequate conflict analysis or an incorrect understanding of the local political economy. Such risks are discussed elsewhere.[17]

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17  In particular, the Development Leadership Programme (http://www.dlprog.org/), Political Settlements Research Programme (http://www.politicalsettlements.org/) and Thinking and Working Politically (https://twpcommunity.org/) discourse offer valuable insights, case studies and experiences.

In addition to these programmatic risks, there are unique challenges to monitoring in situations of conflict that are summarised in table 3 below.

**Table 3    Monitoring challenges in situations of conflict**

| Challenge category | Specific challenge involved | Example from case studies |
|---|---|---|
| **Remote management and lack of physical access due to security risks** | - Restrictions on (staff) field visits<br>- Scope for visiting often limited<br>- Reliance on single sources of information<br>- Limited community engagement<br>- Limited understanding of wider impacts[18] | Most organisations interviewed did not have staff on the ground but relied on other parties with occasional staff field trips (usually very short and limited to heavily guarded locations like hotels and embassies). |
| **Low capacity of implementing partners to monitor (see 4.2.1)** | - Implementing partners cannot provide proper monitoring (e.g. no receipts and no paper trail) | Some implementing partners in Somalia did not have the capacity to provide financial records at the start of the programme and had not worked with receipts before. |
| **Low trust in implementing partners to truthfully monitor (see 4.2.1)** | - Implementing partner deliberately misinforms donor<br>- Monitoring reports are ignored because they cannot be fully trusted | Organisations in Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria all reported that monitoring information informed decision making when it was trusted; however, when there was little trust (as was often the case at the start of a new relationship) information was collected but frequently not used. |
| **Reliance on a third-party monitor (TPM) (see 4.2)** | - TPM may not have the capacity to properly carry out monitoring<br>- TPM often runs into same security restrictions as implementing partner<br>- TPM may not be entirely impartial and may have a conflict of interest<br>- TPM may damage relations with the implementing partner or the local community | TPMs in Somalia were reluctant to leave the big cities and put heavy demands on the implementing partners.<br>The impartiality of TPMs in Syria was questioned and they have on occasion acted in conflict-blind ways and damaged relations with the local community.[19] |

| Challenge category | Specific challenge involved | Example from case studies |
|---|---|---|
| **Reliance on remote monitoring with technology (see 4.2.3)** | - Technological approaches are susceptible to systematic bias or errors<br>- Can be capital intensive and require steep learning curves as well as creating new security concerns<br>- Issues with data verification, interoperability, privacy and interpretation | One organisation specifically requested that their partners use satellite phones, but the expensive and conspicuous equipment turned the users into targets and the local staff using it felt less safe than without the satellite phones. |
| **Lack of trustworthy existing data** | - Some information is politically sensitive and therefore unavailable<br>- Data is politically sensitive and therefore has been manipulated<br>- No baseline data | Population data in Somalia is politicised, as funding given to regional states by donors can be tied to population size. |
| **Intangible variables** | - The variables that one tries to change (such as legitimacy or security) are intangible and difficult to measure | Organisations working on the peace process in Somalia through dialogue training struggle to accurately measure 'value for money'. |

As table 3 highlights, the main challenge of monitoring in conflict situations is the reliance on information by others. This reliance is problematic because of technical challenges (e.g. does the partner organisation have adequate (financial) capacity, is the technology used the appropriate one, has data been gathered?), as well as issues of trust (e.g. is the partner organisation trustworthy, is the data accurate, does the TPM have a conflict of interest?).

18   Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2016), *DFID's approach to managing fiduciary risk in conflict-affected environments – A performance review*, London: ICAI, p.31.

19   Building Markets (2018), *What is the point… if nothing changes? Current Practices and Future Opportunities to Improve Remote Monitoring and Evaluation in Syria*, New York: Building Markets, p.22.

# 4 Effective monitoring in situations of conflict

## 4.1. General points of attention

The OECD defines monitoring as 'a continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and the main stakeholders of an on-going development intervention with indicators of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds'.[20] It is an ongoing process of data collection in which the data collected must be used not only for accountability purposes, but also to inform programming decisions and improve programme implementation in real time. Effective monitoring plays a crucial role in making programmes flexible and adaptable to changing contexts, which is particularly relevant in complex and volatile situations of conflict and violence.[21]

For this reason, monitoring programme implementation progress in situations of conflict goes beyond simply reporting on planned versus actual activities and results. There is much more to monitor than programme indicators, and when donors and implementers create a monitoring plan, they should include a variety of monitoring processes, such as: conflict monitoring; implementation and quality monitoring; monitoring theories of change and assumptions; risk monitoring; monitoring value for money; and monitoring for learning.[22] Yet, if often happens that donors and implementers base their monitoring process largely on programme log frames, indicators and M&E plans. If these are not updated regularly to address the changing dynamics of a conflict and to trigger activity adjustment, they are not appropriate for guiding monitoring efforts and cannot inform effective decision making.[23]

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20  OECD-DAC (2010), *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management*, Paris: OECD, pp.27-28.

21  OECD-DAC (2012), *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility – Improving learning for results*, Paris: OECD, p.30.

22  Corlazzoli, V. and J. White (2013), *Back to Basics – A Compilation of Best Practices in Design, Monitoring & Evaluation in Fragile and Conflict-affected Environments*, London: DFID, pp.35-38.

23  Corlazzoli, V. and J. White (2013), *Back to Basics – A Compilation of Best Practices in Design, Monitoring & Evaluation in Fragile and Conflict-affected Environments*, London: DFID, p.34.

Data and information are the foundations of a good monitoring practice. However, too often people confuse data collection with monitoring. Programme managers need to exercise the discipline to routinely collect, analyse and reflect on information about their programme at both activity and outcome levels.[24] In other words, a monitoring strategy must include elements to allow for information uptake and utilisation. A robust and adequate monitoring plan that informs flexible and timely decision making on programming in situations of conflict should therefore contain analytical, organisational and procedural elements that both donors and implementing organisations need to have in place.

## 4.2. Monitoring in conflict settings in practice – options for donors

In conflict settings where security challenges are so severe that donors cannot be physically present on a (semi-)permanent basis, there are roughly speaking three options for monitoring the progress of programme implementation: (1) (self)-monitoring conducted by (local) implementing partners; (2) third-party monitoring; and (3) monitoring via modern technology. In practice, donors can choose either one of these options, or a combination of them, as they are not mutually exclusive.

### 4.2.1. Monitoring through (local) implementing partners

Notwithstanding the fact that there are many guidance documents and toolboxes that provide overviews of different tools and best practices to monitor programme implementation in fragile and conflict-affected settings, there is no standard framework. Also, the politicisation of aid and the high security risks of implementing aid activities in conflict zones mean that organisations are reluctant to go into detail about their monitoring practices or share examples of risks they did not adequately monitor or respond to.[25] The majority of the implementing organisations we spoke with rely on local implementing partners to conduct their monitoring of implementation. There are several challenges that need to be taken into account (also see table 3), two of which we highlight here:

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24   Church, C. and M.M. Rogers (2006), *Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict-Transformation Programs*, Washington: Search for Common Ground, p.83.

25   Building Markets (2018), *What is the point… if nothing changes? Current Practices and Future Opportunities to Improve Remote Monitoring and Evaluation in Syria*, New York: Building Markets, p.6. Also confirmed by Clingendael interviews with NGOs in Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, May-June 2018.

- The implementing partner can lack the capacity to properly monitor, for example it may have no experience with receipts or lack other similar documentation and training.
- The implementing partner could be incentivised to inflate its monitoring reports to make itself appear in a more positive light.

In line with this, the two key factors for effective monitoring that were underlined time and again were trust and continuous capacity building. As one interviewee put it, 'We have to have strong relationships of trust and respect between us and our partners.'[26] Situations will inevitably arise where implementing partners need to be pragmatic – for instance, when they must get around a roadblock and pay a fee – and it is key that partners are able to have an open conversation with the funder about how to engage in such situations. As these are oftentimes not black-and-white issues, emphasis is placed on creating an environment where partners can talk about the challenges and work through them together. However, that begs the question whether there is enough 'distance' between the partners to critically assess processes and results. Tools that are typically applied to balance this are internal anti-corruption policies, codes of conduct, whistle blowing policies, and vetting and compliance procedures for partners and contractors.

The interviews underlined that for this approach to be workable, continuous training of local staff is a must. An NGO active in Somalia, for instance, explained that they invest in their partners and train their senior staff in financial management and new financial systems. Every year they invite the finance officers of local partners to their headquarters in Nairobi and train them there. They underlined that they are involved in building the financial management capacity of their partners over time and did not simply provide one-off training sessions. They also developed new monitoring instruments in collaboration with their partners. For instance, they developed a standard receipt for the implementing partner to use in areas where there are no receipts and partners struggle to account for expenses.[27]

When asked about what happens when irregularities occur, interviewees indicated that a limited degree of aid diversion tends to be reluctantly endured as part of the cost of providing aid in conflict settings – by donors and implementing organisations alike. While formally zero-tolerance policies apply, in the day-to-day reality at activity level, aid diversion is tolerated in certain cases to achieve more important objectives, such as gaining the acceptance of host communities and key stakeholders, and access to beneficiaries. Conflicts always feature gatekeepers (e.g. militia, armed actors, former warlords becoming 'deputy governor', government actors, etc) with whom donors and

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26   Clingendael interview with NGO operating in Somalia, May 2018.

27   *Ibid.*

implementing organisations must negotiate, and who will expect some sort of payment.[28] Implementing organisations have come up with innovative accounting solutions, where payments for passing checkpoints for instance are shown as 'transport costs'. Just as commercial entities may account for payments to armed groups as additional 'security consulting' costs.[29] Interviewees emphasised that aid diversion is not only linked to activities built around the delivery of hardware and cash transfers, but also applies, for example, to capacity-building activities where the costs for people participating in training or a workshop are covered.[30]

There has been debate in the aid community on the trade-offs between aid diversion and aid impact in the knowledge that, in certain situations, some of the former may be necessary to achieve the latter. In the end, it is a matter of priorities. Funders, such as the Netherlands, who have a zero-tolerance corruption policy, will inevitable face corruption at the level of programme implementation – whether they like it or not. This cannot be sanctioned but it is nevertheless a persistent reality and therefore it makes sense to discuss upfront how to deal with it. 'Principled pragmatism' seems a sensible way to go about it but such a label needs to be operationalised to serve programme implementation purposes.[31]

For now, responses to irregularities that might come out of monitoring exercises related to aid diversion are mostly of an internal, forward-looking nature – for example, re-assessing corruption protocols, training staff once more in rules and regulations on procurement, etc. In essence, this is a management holding response to a persistent and structural phenomenon that will not disappear, based on the assumption that regular attention will reduce frequency of occurrence. There is little evidence that the assumption is warranted, however. Another option would be to turn to external auditors and third-party monitoring mechanisms to ensure independence and compliance. However, there are limitations to this as well, as explained in section 4.2.2.

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28  The UN's humanitarian operations in regime-held areas in Syria offer an extreme example. See: Leenders, R. (2016), 'UN's \$4bn aid effort in Syria is morally bankrupt', *The Guardian*, online: https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2016/aug/29/uns-4bn-aid-effort-in-syria-is-morally-bankrupt, 29 August 2016 (accessed 9 August 2018).

29  See, for example, the experiences in relation to the Lafarge cement factory in Syria: Lund, A. (2018), *The factory: A glimpse into Syria's war economy*, The Century Foundation: online, https://tcf.org/content/report/factory-glimpse-syrias-war-economy/, 21 February 2018 (accessed 9 August 2018).

30  Clingendael interviews with NGOs in Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, May-June 2018.

31  Clingendael interview with independent Somali humanitarian consultant, June 2018. DFID describes the trade-off as follows: 'Risk management entails trade-offs among competing risks, including missed opportunities to help people with urgent needs or to achieve longer-term stabilisation and development outcomes. An excessively risk-averse stance would not be consistent with the UK's strategic objectives.' See: Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2016), *DFID's approach to managing fiduciary risk in conflict-affected environments – A performance review*, London: ICAI, p.16.

Good practices for monitoring through local implementing partners include the following:

- Focus on building up long-term partnerships and trust relations.
- Invest in continuous capacity building, especially in terms of financial management.
- Create an environment where donors and partners can talk openly about the challenges and nuances of operating in conflict settings.
- Put protocols and procedures in place that reduce risks, such as anti-corruption policies and training, codes of conduct, whistle blowing policies, and vetting and compliance procedures for partners and contractors.
- Develop specific and pragmatic guidelines for dealing with corruption and nepotism that take relevant protocols, procedures and policies as starting points, but adjust them to the local context.

## 4.2.2. Monitoring through third parties

One common approach to remote monitoring is third-party monitoring, in which donors contract external third parties to collect and/or verify monitoring data. Third-party monitoring has several advantages: it provides independent eyes and ears on the ground, allows validation of monitoring data from implementing partners where confidence in partner reporting is lacking, and can sometimes allow for more cost-efficient field monitoring. It is typically most useful for verifying quantitative and physical outputs of aid projects. However, there are downsides and challenges to take into consideration as well (also see table 3):

- The time and resources required to make third-party monitoring work are often underestimated by commissioning agencies.
- Third-party monitoring can lack the technical understanding to design effective monitoring tasks.
- The quality of reporting is often seen as sub-par (and objectivity may be questioned).
- There are reputational risks from third-party monitoring staff actions that need to be mitigated.
- There is a significant risk transfer to monitoring staff (especially where monitoring providers lack adequate security systems).
- Third-party monitoring can negatively affect context understanding and acceptance where aid agencies use it as a substitute for regular internal monitoring.
- The use of third-party monitors (TPMs) has been perceived by some implementing partners as contributing to donor micro-management.[32]

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32 Price, R. (2018), *Approaches to remote monitoring in fragile states* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1420), Birmingham: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, pp.10-11.

Organisations that have used TPMs in Syria and Somalia and which were interviewed for this study reported having run into these challenges. Aid workers with experience in Syria mentioned that TPMs are not always neutral, as repeat visits to the same area or repeat contracts with donors can compromise impartiality. One aid worker asked, 'How do I know my staff is not bribing the TPM to write down a positive report? I would rather rely on the implementing partner that I personally know than a TPM that I haven't met. You don't know who you are giving your money to or who can influence them. TPMs are often locals so how can you verify that they don't have conflicts of interest or take bribes?'[33] In Syria TPMs have also at times damaged existing trust with the local community, as monitoring staff are often not trained in the do-no-harm principles. There have been cases of third-party monitoring staff taking photos and asking questions that have confused and troubled local beneficiaries to the point where they later refused assistance.[34] Similarly, organisations operating in Somalia have run into challenges with TPMs. One aid worker mentioned that in their experience most third-party monitoring providers were unwilling to travel outside of the larger cities like Mogadishu and Kismayo, while their monitoring capability is basic: a TPM can check whether a road has been built or a well dug, but struggles with monitoring less tangible results of, for example, peacebuilding processes.[35]

Although existing literature and the interviews conducted for this study are more critical of third-party monitoring than of local implementing parties monitoring, both share the same broad limitations: capacity, professionalism and trust can all at times be less than desired. Capacity might be inadequate or limited (e.g. technical and financial skills, staff training, geographic coverage) while the professionalism of the monitoring party to monitor objectively could be called into question. This (lack of) professionalism subsequently feeds into the relationship of trust with the donor and affects the way monitoring information is used. It is also important to note that some of the criticisms specific to TPMs come from local implementing partners, who are understandably reluctant to have an external party brought in to evaluate their work while they themselves might be experiencing similar limitations.

Overall then, TPMs can strengthen compliance in areas where access is limited, and can therefore meaningfully contribute to monitoring. However, third-party monitoring should ideally complement rather than substitute for monitoring conducted by an agency's own staff.

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33  Clingendael interview with NGO operating in Syria, July 2018.

34  Building Markets (2018), *What is the point… if nothing changes? Current Practices and Future Opportunities to Improve Remote Monitoring and Evaluation in Syria*, New York: Building Markets.

35  Clingendael interview with NGO operating in Somalia, May 2018.

Good practices for monitoring using TPMs include the following:

- Ensure there is clarity on roles, tasks and expectations vis-à-vis other monitoring entities.
- Focus on acting as sparring partner and active feedback rather than control and accountability only.
- Anticipate the need for time and resources to set up and maintain effective third-party monitoring systems.
- Ensure that the information collected can be used to inform decisions.
- Use technological devices to increase control over field monitoring.
- Strengthen security protocols and duty of care.
- Coordinate use of TPMs and exchange on emerging lessons.
- Regularly reassess third-party monitoring and its alternatives.[36]

## 4.2.3. Monitoring via modern technology

New developments in technology allow for remote monitoring of projects. Yet, technology in conflict settings faces several constraints and needs. For example, it must be able to function without constant electricity supply, without reliable mobile and Internet access, across large distances, and without advanced computing skills. Bearing those restrictions in mind, four technology applications are well suited for conflict settings: handheld devices for digital data collection, mobile phone-based feedback mechanisms, remote sensing with satellites or delivery tracking, and broadcasting with radios and other forms of media.

The benefits of these types of technologies include the following:

- rapid and near real-time monitoring;
- ability to collect different types of data to asses programming;
- a chance to track indicators more systematically;
- costs savings (no costs for transportation, printing, staff hours, etc);
- opportunity to improve capacities and collaboration (it is easy to share a wide range of documents online – both monitoring information as well as training – though there are security constraints to consider here as well).

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36   Price, R. (2018), *Approaches to remote monitoring in fragile states* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1420), Birmingham: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, pp.10-11.

However, there are also several challenges associated with the use of technology-based remote monitoring:

- systematic bias or errors;
- selection bias, safety and security;
- training, logistics, privacy and security;
- complexities of data and interoperability;
- interpretation of data;
- verification of data.

Technology-based approaches are, for instance, being used in Syria to improve the accountability of international NGOs and civil society organisations to their beneficiary populations. In one example, beneficiaries were able to take photographs of supplies given to them by an implementing partner that they judged to be of low quality, and then uploaded the photos to social media and wrote to the funder of the programme. The funder subsequently followed up with the implementing partner to improve the quality of the goods.[37] Similarly, satellite imagery provided by companies like Planet Labs and Digital Globe is being used in both Syria and Somalia to track developments in the conflict (e.g. destroyed infrastructure) as well as humanitarian developments (e.g. construction of new shelter or agricultural project).[38]

Good practices for remote monitoring using technology-based approaches include the following:

- Take the time to study the context before choosing tools.
- Involve all users actively and establish informed consent practices.
- Provide back-ups and alternatives.
- Use security-conscious, free and open source software.
- Minimise and limit data.
- Invest in building acceptance and training.
- Pool funds and risks.
- Apply humanitarian principles to technology.[39]

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37  Building Markets (2018), *What is the point… if nothing changes? Current Practices and Future Opportunities to Improve Remote Monitoring and Evaluation in Syria*, New York: Building Markets, p.16.

38  Building Markets (2018), *What is the point… if nothing changes? Current Practices and Future Opportunities to Improve Remote Monitoring and Evaluation in Syria*, New York: Building Markets, p.21.

39  For more details see: Price, R. (2018), *Approaches to remote monitoring in fragile states* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1420), Birmingham: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, pp.3-9.

## 4.3. General good practices for gathering and using monitoring information

The good practices listed above are more or less specific to each of the three options for monitoring programme implementation in conflict contexts. Yet, our review of existing resources and our interviews also point to the existence of several *general* good practices for gathering monitoring information that should be considered by donors and their implementing partners.

Moreover, it became clear from the same sources that monitoring is only helpful when there are specific mechanisms in place to act upon its results. As one interviewee for a study on remote monitoring in Syria put it: 'What is the point… if nothing changes?'[40] This means that donors need to reflect on what information is useful to them, in order to ensure that they do not unnecessarily burden those responsible for monitoring and that they receive relevant and digestible monitoring reports. One interviewee working for a large donor in Syria reported: 'We only really use 20% of the monitoring information we get. It's a hell of a lot of work and often nothing gets done with it.'[41]

With these points in mind, two groups of general good practices can be distinguished. First, ensuring that basic monitoring housekeeping is in order at donor headquarter level. This enables donors to engage meaningfully in discussions about programme and monitoring design in conflict situations. Second, putting key heuristics and practices in place at field level. This strengthens the ability to monitor programmes operationally.

Ensuring basic monitoring housekeeping is in order at donor headquarter level:

• A procedure must exist for ensuring that monitoring strategies and practices are incorporated into the planning phase of aid programmes and kept alive and useful during programme implementation. This includes clarity of purpose of the proposed monitoring (what will be done with it), options for the appropriate frequency of monitoring (including resource requirements) and the creation of a decision-making body that meets frequently to review monitoring results and decides on programme adjustment when needed.

• A minimum set of clear, simple and predetermined indicators and data collection procedures is required for effective monitoring of aid activity in conflict contexts. Such indicators should include links to key donor policies and/or theories of change.

40  Building Markets (2018), *What is the point… if nothing changes? Current Practices and Future Opportunities to Improve Remote Monitoring and Evaluation in Syria*, New York: Building Markets, p.2.

41  Clingendael interview with donor organisation in Syria, May 2018.

A good monitoring system also requires several layers of checks and filters for continuous verification.

- Monitoring must be made relevant to learning and continuous improvement in addition to programme accountability purposes. In other words, the inevitable trade-off that will occur between monitoring-for-improvement, monitoring-for-accountability and monitoring-for-learning needs to be mapped, discussed and mitigated as much as possible.

- Long-term partnerships need to be built for both political-economy analysis in the service of programme design and implementation, and for third-party monitoring in the service of programme monitoring.

Ensuring that such basic housekeeping is in order will reduce risks enumerated in table 2 across the board and increase a donor's ability to respond to the monitoring challenges listed in table 3. This is because such sound basic housekeeping increases the stock of donor capabilities to think through and engage in effective programme monitoring.

Putting key heuristics and practices in place at field level:

- Develop on-the-ground networks to enable greater local insight, better monitoring and higher levels of accountability. Well-maintained networks and relationships with key stakeholders are essential for effective monitoring and triangulation. This requires a mix of analytical and diplomatic resources and will be a time-intensive endeavour.

- Ensure that aid activity contracts contain sufficient incentives to enable and encourage implementing organisations to be transparent with regard to the progress of their work to both donors and beneficiaries.

- Where modern technology is applied as monitoring tool, ensure that adequate research, and associated investment, takes place into the pitfalls and challenges of local data collection and analysis software.

- Ensure that monitoring work is conducted with the full knowledge of implementing partners. Share reports to validate work and justify monitoring activities, and ensure there is a feedback loop between implementing partners and monitoring partners that is mediated by the funder.[42]

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42  Price, R. (2018), *Approaches to remote monitoring in fragile states* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1420), Birmingham: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, p3.

# 5 Assessment framework

On the basis of the preceding sections, figure 1 below offers a basic assessment framework that outlines analytical, organisational and procedural elements that donors should have in place for adequate monitoring in situations of conflict. The limited evidence gathered for this report suggests that more consistent use of such a framework in funding decisions for aid activities in conflict settings, as well as in subsequent implementation where a positive decision is made, could play a significant role in upgrading the quality and utility of monitoring efforts, reducing risks in the process.

**Figure 1    A basic framework to assess monitoring provisions of proposed aid activities**

**Monitoring checklist and good practices**

**1 General**

The risks of operating in conflict have been considered and accepted

*Risks include:*
- Diversion of funds, equipment & activity
- Co-optation of counterpart
- Non-delivery of outputs but claiming funds nonetheless
- Partner affiliated with reputationally damaging groups
- Misalignment of program and local needs

The program has been designed with conflict sensitivity in mind

**2 Monitoring challenges and general good practices**

The challenges of monitoring have been considered and accepted

*Monitoring challenges include:*
- Remote management
- Low capacity of implementing partners
- Low trust in implementing partners to truthfully monitor
- Reliance on third-party monitors (TPMs)
- Reliance on remote monitoring with technology
- Lack of trustworthy existing data
- Intangible variables

*General good practices at donor headquarter level*
- Monitoring strategies and practices must be incorporated into the planning phase of aid programmes and kept alive during implementation
- A minimum set of clear, simple, and pre-determined indicators and data collection procedures is required for effective monitoring
- Monitoring must be made relevant to learning and continuous improvement in addition to program accountability purposes
- Long-term partnerships need to be built with third parties

*General good practices at field level*
- Develop on-the-ground networks to enable greater local insight, better monitoring and higher levels of accountability
- Incentivise transparency for implementing organizations
- When using modern technology, research and invest in the challenges
- Ensure that monitoring work is conducted in the full knowledge of implementing partners, ensure a feedback loop exists

**3 Monitoring tools and good practice**

Only pick indicators that are relevant for uptake and usage

Choose tools that are available and appropriate given your indicators

Recognise and discuss trade-offs among accuracy, practicality and cost of different methods & tools

| **Own staff** | **Partners and contractors** | **Third-party monitoring** | **Technological approaches** |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Staff training in anti-corruption<br>• Codes of conduct<br>• Security protocol<br>• Whistle-blowing policies in place<br>• Open discussion on various (corruption) challenges and the trade-offs involved in conflict settings | • Investing in building up long-term high-trust relationships<br>• Investing in long-term capacity building - especially financial<br>• Open discussion with partners on various (corruption) challenges<br>• Vetting and compliance procedures of all partners and contractors (e.g. designated terror lists, etc) | • Anticipate the need for time and resources to set up and maintain effective third-party monitoring systems<br>• Keep expectations and plans modest<br>• Use technological devices to increase control over field monitoring<br>• Pay attention to security protocols and duty of care (humanitarian principles) | • Take the time to study the context before choosing tools<br>• Establish informed consent practices<br>• Provide back-ups and alternatives<br>• Use security-conscious, free and open source software<br>• Minimise and limit data (collect only on a 'need to know' basis)<br>• Apply humanitarian principles to technology |

**4 Monitoring uptake and usage**

Monitoring has little value without a clear purpose and protocol for usage

Provide frequent monitoring

Have a clear protocol on what monitoring is for and what is done with the information

Have a decision-making body that frequently meets to review the monitoring and discusses whether action is needed