



HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMMING AND MONITORING IN INACESSIBLE CONFLICT SETTINGS:

A Literature Review

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Background

The changing nature of conflicts has resulted in an increased risk to humanitarian actors, reducing access for programming and monitoring, as well as the humanitarian presence in emergency settings; this withdrawal of international organizations has a harmful effect on affected populations. Remote operations (defined below) provide an alternative method to continue programs and services while reducing the risk faced by program staff. Although remote operations have been in use for several years, this programming method has mostly been implemented on an ad hoc basis with limited guidance. This review aims to identify approaches, lessons learned, and best practices, which will ultimately aid the creation of formal evidence-based guidance that supports future humanitarian programming and monitoring activities in inaccessible conflict settings.

2. Methods

The peer-reviewed literature was identified through a systematic search of 6 search engines, resulting in 1,853 abstracts screened, 63 full texts reviewed, and 14 studies eventually included in the final analysis. The online systematic review organizer Covidence was used and two independent researchers from UNICEF and CDC agreed upon all screening and selection decisions.

Grey literature resources (all documents that were not published in a peer-reviewed journal) were identified via a Google search, requests to humanitarian organizations, and snowball sampling to obtain additional contacts. The same two researchers screened all resources, coming to consensus on which complied with inclusion criteria; all findings and themes were summarized in this document. All results presented in this review were entirely taken from the literature and do not include any opinions from the authors. Because this field is not yet well-developed or defined, much of the literature outlines concepts and definitions, and addresses the preliminary steps required to advance this burgeoning field.

3. Results

3.1 Causes and Motivators of Remote Operations

The main causes of reduced access include general insecurity or a specific security incident, and restrictions on the movement of aid workers imposed by authorities in power. Many factors affect an organization's decision to switch to remote operations, including: the length of insecurity (it may be more feasible to temporarily shut down operations if risk is perceived as brief), the size of the program (larger programs are more difficult to handover than smaller ones), the feasibility of program activities in the context, the capacity of local partners, and the vulnerability and need of the affected population.

3.2 Traditional Modalities of Remote Operations

There are four modalities of remote programming that exist on a spectrum, varying by depth of roles and responsibilities of both international and local staff. They are:

1. Remote Control: commonly a reactive stance (action in response to a situation that has already occurred) and a last resort with the least amount of delegation of authority to field staff, and little capacity development or skills transfer.
2. Remote Management: a reactive stance with some delegation of authority to national implementers, moderate investment in capacity building, and procedures in place for better monitoring and quality. Assumes that decision-making and authority will revert back to internationals following restoration of security.
3. Remote Support: a proactive strategy (action in preparation for a situation that has yet to take place) with full investment in national staff capacity building, mentoring, and planning for eventual full handover of authority.
4. Remote Partnership: a proactive strategy where equal partnership is fostered with a local partner that already has significant internal capacity. The international organization supports via administration, resource mobilization, and advocacy, while the operational partner focuses on context and implementation.

3.3 Other Remote Approaches

Other remote approaches include community partnership arrangements, government partnership arrangements, and outsourcing to commercial contractors. Neutrality and impartiality remain issues in all remote approaches, including the traditional modalities outlined above.

3.4 Remote Operations Challenges, Considerations, and Approaches

3.4.1 Need to Maintain Humanitarian Principles

The humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence are necessary, albeit difficult, to maintain during remote operations. Humanitarian actors must increase efforts to both be and appear neutral and not align with any side of the conflict. Impartiality can be a concern when relying on local actors who may be influenced by parties to conflict or community pressures. Capacity building on humanitarian principles is required for all national staff and partners in order to ensure the program is delivered safely and as intended.

3.4.2 Partnerships

Selection: Selecting a suitable partner to implement remote operations requires protocols and checks in place to ensure partners have sufficient capacity and experience in the context, and are not influenced by alternate agendas. Hiring third party accounting firms, deferring to community elders, and identification through contacts have all been described as potential partner selection methods. Ultimately, selection must be transparent and benefits from more active recruitment methods such as consulting local experts and utilizing pre-conflict networks.

Capacity: Building the capacity of local staff is important to ensure the fidelity of remote operations, autonomy, and project ownership. Training needs (operational methods, security protocols, etc.) and methods (planned site visits, staff secondments, etc.) are varied and complex; see the full text for complete details. National staff can be experienced and assuming all nationals require training can create an unequal relationship and should be avoided.

Communication and Trust: Building trust is key for partnerships and is intrinsically linked to communication. Useful trust building mechanisms include: maximizing face-to-face contact, regular sharing of ideas and information, enhanced interactions (for example, videoconferencing), transparent decision making, and joint agenda setting, among others. A minimum level of face-to-face contact between senior staff and implementers is required to build trust and capacity.

Sustainability: Sustainability is a growing concern where national staff are relied upon to deliver services for increasing lengths of time. Prioritizing the sustainability of local partners involves focusing on operational and organizational capacity building of entire institutions, supporting long-term projects, providing core funds, and supporting alliances among local groups, thereby building a strong civil society.

3.4.3 Coordination and Collaboration

Coordination and collaboration are essential to ensure cohesive remote programming, however, certain coordination structures can also compromise an organization's independence and capacity. Structures should be rooted in the cultural context, with coordinating bodies and leadership carefully selected to promote neutrality and local ownership. There is a need for coordination mechanisms and standards to be adapted to the realities of operating in conflict contexts, and to improve the efficacy of the cluster approach for remote programming.

3.4.4 Acceptance

Acceptance of the program, by both the community and the local implementers, is necessary to ensure the fidelity, execution, and uptake of remote operations. Acceptance is both a security measure and used to eventually regain access, however, it should never be solely relied upon to reduce security risk.

Regular contact and participatory management styles that include national staff in decision making increase trust and acceptance by local staff; while selecting culturally appropriate staff, using diaspora nationals, and community outreach and participation increase beneficiary acceptance. The fundamental prerequisite to acceptance is competent and committed humanitarian programming with tangible results.

3.4.5 Risks and Risk Management

Risks to Local Actors: Remote operations involve the transfer of risk from international to local actors, who are assumed to be at lower risk for targeting and therefore safer when implementing. This is often a false assumption as they face unique threats that are often not acknowledged in security assessments. Additionally, local actors are infrequently present at trainings on security, and are often left with minimal security-related equipment when expatriates evacuate.

Mitigation of this risk can be achieved via: conducting thorough risk assessments, preparedness planning that decentralizes authority and transfers security equipment to nationals, capacity building on security issues and protocols, and additional monitoring and triangulation with community members for risk updates.

General Risks: General risks in remote operations are many and include: inadequate and poor quality information management, credibility, coordination, monitoring, and programming; inciting conflict; casualties and fatalities; insufficient impact; limited or no program expansion or adaptation; compromised neutrality and impartiality; corruption and fund diversion; and reduced advocacy or speaking out on behalf of affected populations. These risks are exacerbated by inadequate risk perception and a decreased sense of urgency from remote managers who lose touch with the situation on the ground.

General strategies for reducing risk include: building strong relationships with communities, strategic coordination with partners, and detailed monitoring, among others. Additionally, donor and organizational reporting requirements need to ensure they do not put national staff at increased risk and clear contingency plans are required prior to deterioration in security in order to maximize risk management.

3.4.6 Advocacy

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https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_26555

