

Summary of Lessons from the Knowledge Series on Using Technologies and Tools for Remote Data Collection: Experiences from Evaluation Offices of Multilateral Development Banks

October 5, 2020


In this webinar, staff from the Evaluation Departments of the African Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank shared their experiences with conducting evaluations under the COVID-19 restrictions. The conversation focused on the main lessons learned from conducting country evaluations and validations in Burundi, Maldives, Mongolia, Gabon, and Bangladesh by both of the institutions¹.



KEY LESSONS

- Countries have had varied level of impact of COVID on their restrictions and ability to work in the office or from home. In countries where the restrictions were not as strict and stakeholders were able to be in the office and interviewed in person, teams relied on local consultants and were able to retrieve more in-depth knowledge.
- In most cases, evaluators spent time finding seasoned local consultants who are well connected to country stakeholders. To succeed in finding the right consultants, evaluators tapped into their networks in other development agencies and worked with their organization's local resident offices.
- In virtual environments, it is more challenging to rely on translators who don't have experience in development work or in evaluation, and who may bring their own bias in translations. In some cases, local consultants played a role of translators as well, while in other cases teams had to rely on translators to conduct interviews.
- Flexibility in the data collection approach and interviewing of stakeholders is necessary to adjust to current realities and restrictions. For example, in some countries where documents or data were not readily available, teams had to rely on draft documents or explore secondary sources for data.
- To adapt to time requirements and limitations of remote interviews, teams focused on creating priority stakeholder lists to interview and interviewing them to the best of their ability.
- Finding sources for secondary data has become more important than it was before, as the collection of primary data is challenging and may take longer time. Some of the additional data sources that the teams looked at included:
 - Data and knowledge from other development institutions, including existing evaluations.
 - Relying on data from mature or mostly completed projects to understand how the countries are doing. For example, the evaluators from the Asian Development Bank relied on government's own project completion reports, even if they were drafts.
 - Scouting local media for mentions of development
- It is critical to involve local country offices of parent institutions in evaluation processes earlier to better prepare for conducting remote evaluations and to understand country context. If before, evaluation teams may have consulted country offices after consulting government and other stakeholders, current situation shows that there is a need to rethink this model.
- Evaluators need to understand the context more thoroughly before starting evaluation data collection as it helps with better scoping of critical stakeholders, secondary data sources and other analytical work.

¹The moderator for this session was Brenda Barbour, Manager, IEGKC, World Bank; Presenters were Mr. Clement Banse, Principal Evaluation Officer, African Development Bank; Mr. Samson Houetohossou, Evaluation Officer, African Development Bank; Mr. Tomoo Ueda, Principal Evaluation Specialist, Independent Evaluation Department of the Asian Development Bank; Ms. Joanne Asquith, Principal Evaluation Specialist, Independent Evaluation Department of the Asian Development Bank. Closing remarks were provided by José Candido Carbajo Martinez, Director, IEGSP, World Bank.

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- Evaluators need to account for time needed to manage teams virtually, particularly if team members are located in different time zones and have varied level of expertise and tasks. Teams should be encouraged to have regular check-ins as part of their routine and focus check-ins not only on updates but also on identifying and collectively addressing challenges and critical issues.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE EXPLORATION

- Due to the travelling restrictions, teams were not able to meet larger number of local stakeholders and gather additional information as it typically occurs during field visits. There is a danger of not understanding the full picture of local conditions and political economies and there is a need to find better ways of connecting with local players on the ground.
- There is a need for a better understanding and guidance on how certain techniques, such as recording a meeting or using former staff members as local consultants, may or may not affect the candor in stakeholder responses.
- There is a need for vision and strategy on remote data collection and use, including its ethical and bias implications.
- Evaluators will need to make more use of alternative sources of data and account for the implications of their use. For instance, using geospatial data has become more frequent in evaluations, but it has consequences on budget and delivery time, among other issues, which evaluators need to plan for. Evaluators also need to account that alternative sources of data collection, such as satellite data collection and others, require highly specialized expertise, which in many cases can be found through external companies and firms.
- Better coordination among development agencies and stakeholders is needed to share data and information in order to understand country context and impact of development projects, as well as coordinate in early stages of evaluations.