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# Study on best practices in Third Party Monitoring

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# Good practice in conducting Third Party Monitoring in conflict settings

## A research-based handbook for donors and practitioners

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## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **AMEL** | Accountability, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning |
| **COI** | Conflict of Interest |
| **CSSF** | Conflict, Stability and Security Fund |
| **DC** | Data Collector |
| **DEVCO** | Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development |
| **EME** | Early Market Engagement |
| **EOI** | Expression of Interest |
| **FGD** | Focus Group Discussion |
| **HSS** | Health, Safety and Security |
| **IcSP** | Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace |
| **IP** | Implementing Partner |
| **KII** | Key Informant Interviews |
| **LA** | Lead Agency |
| **M&E** | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| **MEL** | Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning |
| **NFI** | Non-Food Items |
| **OTI** | Office Of Transition Initiatives |
| **PoC** | Point of Contact |
| **PSS** | Psycho-Social Support |
| **QA** | Quality Assurance |
| **QC** | Quality Control |
| **RAG** | Red, Amber, Green |
| **RFID** | Radio Frequency Identification |
| **ROM** | Results Orientated Monitoring |
| **ToR** | Terms of Reference |
| **TPM** | Third Party Monitoring |
| **UAV** | Unmanned Aerial Vehicle |
| **VFM** | Value For Money |

# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1 Main findings

On one hand, Third Party Monitoring (TPM) can be described in simple terms as the conducting of monitoring by a third party – i.e. neither the donor not implementer. Alternatively, it can be seen as a complex, fast-growing field characterised by **a wide variety of forms,** all shaped by highly diverse donor needs, reflecting myriad local contexts. That said, it can still be distilled into two main types – the **monitoring of the views of people,** which is seen as more commonplace than **the monitoring of assets**. TPM is not only used by donors; it is used by some larger INGOs in high-risk areas where they themselves lack access.

Two main models of TPM are explained in the report. The '**conventional model'** sees an international TPM implementer working as the main interlocutor with the donor. A second '**alternative model**' sees donors work directly with local organisations. Those who have been involved in various TPM projects tend to believe that while it is possible to think of a 'core' methodology, each TPM programme's design tends to be quite unique, because of the diverse requirements (technical, social, political) placed on the monitoring.

Donor's **motivations** for undertaking TPM centre around a lack of access, which is underpinned by a desire (i) to be accountable (to communities and taxpayers) (ii) to optimise performance and (iii) to mitigate financial and other risk. There is a school of thought that it should be used only in this 'last resort' sense.

There are clear **benefits** concerning TPM that go beyond the providing access, in part because TPM contracts tend to incentivise the private sector to demonstrate considerable levels of innovation, also through technology. The main benefits are considered to include: the power of high calibre and independent data, the reduction of project and fiduciary risk, and the ability of TPM to enable improvement in programming design and refinement. A certain degree of **scepticism** exists about TPM, which is driven by the cost, and also by concern around the risk of disempowering of project managers.

Donors and TPM implementers tend to believe that they enjoy good relations, but face a range of difficult **challenges**. The core challenge is that implementing partners (IPs) will naturally be alert to the accuracy of the TPM findings since (i) they will see it as potentially harming their prospects of future funding and (ii) TPM implementers are unlikely to have the same level of understanding of the context and challenges that are faced by the implementing partner in the area visited.

There is a sense that TPM is on the cusp of an acceleration in its **evolution through two specific forms of technology**. Respondents noted that aerial imaging data (through satellites and drones) and 'big data' could expand the range of data insights that TPM provides while reducing costs, but that these methods are only now crystallising as users test and validate their utility. Aerial imagery in particular is expected to provide a lens on visible phenomena on the ground that can be taken as proxies for behaviours within communities. Dashboards are fairly widely used in addition to reporting methods, but have seen mixed results in terms of their usefulness.

While most donors acknowledge and appreciate the quality of insights that commercial TPM providers can bring, they remain highly **sensitive to cost**, and perceive that TPM implementers can improve in thinking creatively around this issue.

## 1.2 Recommendations

**General advice to donors**

Generally, donors should:

- Prepare to play an **active role** in driving such contracts, ensuring that there is frequent interaction and a level of trust between all actors.
- Strive for **mutual benefit** from the data – meaning putting more focus on helping IPs to feel *they* receive benefit, encouraging TPM implementers to prioritise the needs of the IPs as much as the needs of the client.
- Favour **up-front-planning** including maximal engagement with TPM implementers before issuing ToRs, including 'Early market Engagement' (EME), if in line with the donor's procurement policies.
- Choose TPM **implementers who have the attitude, chemistry, and local connectivity** to succeed, taking the time to understand as well as possible the internal dynamics and collective experience of the team under consideration, their interpersonal skills and vision, and being wary of TPM implementers referred to as 'body-shops' who offer a collection of individual experts, but who may not be well set up to work well together effectively.
- Create **exemplar reports** (i.e., the deliverable that will be expected of the TPM implementer) before locking down a Terms of Reference (ToR), as this has been found to be extremely useful in enabling donors to think through in detail what they do and do not need, so that this can increase the utility of the ToR.

**Donors working in sensitive contexts and/or with sensitive interlocutors**

Donors are often obliged to operate in especially fragile and/or sensitive contexts. This raises a number of challenges, including necessitating operating with a variety of atypical interlocutors, ranging from UN peacekeeping operations, to niche state security actors (such as intelligence services), senior and/or niche members of military and police institutions, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), politically motivated groups, and armed Non-State Actors (NSAs). Such organisations have very unique internal dynamics (DCAF, 2015) and may have little or no incentive, motivation or capacity to be involved in the donor's TPM/MEL requirements. In such settings, care is taken by donors to adapt to the circumstances, including by: being alert to the hindrance of the delivery of aid, pushing for compliance with humanitarian norms, remaining conscious of unique risks (such as safety of partners), and the heightened risk of misappropriation of funds. In such settings donors are advised to:

- **Be realistic in terms of TPM expectations:** Since motivation or capacity to engage with TPM can be low among some of these actors, donors have to be willing to lower their expectations. This can mean (i) choosing a narrower range or smaller number of indicators for the partner to follow – as few as one indicator or measure or (ii) putting a greater focus on simple, categorical output indicators over complex or qualitative outcome indicators.
- **Push for buy-in and access, at a high level**: Donors may face resistance in deploying the standard MEL techniques, or access may be denied to locations or respondents. In such cases, donors may want to place TPM on the agenda at high-level discussions, perhaps to ensure that senior leadership commits to a certain basic level of collaboration from the outset. While such partners may be unaccustomed to TPM, MEL or even evidence gathering, this does not preclude the possibility that they might be persuaded to play a role. It may be worth asking them to attend and/or become involved in fieldwork (plausibly to provide logistical support), and/or to play a role in the dissemination of results. It may also be worth seeking 'champions' within the organisation upon whom success might hinge.

- **Change the language:** Terms such as 'TPM' or 'MEL' may work well in donor context, but they may be unappealing to other kinds of actor. Instead, more basic language might be used such as 'evidence', 'proof'.
- **Choose the right representative**: Some such actors will listen more closely to personnel on the donor side whose background mirrors their own. It can be prudent for donors to ensure, for example, that senior donor military personnel make requests around TPM to senior military partner personnel.
- **Consider aerial technology**: Such fragile areas are the environments in which technology seems to blossom for TPM. Satellite imagery can be used in numerous ways as a proxy for indicators that might otherwise be captured by monitors. For example one donor is using satellite imagery to monitor access to a hospital in such a setting, taking this as a proxy indicator for the flow of its aid to that hospital.

**Donors focussed on short-terms interventions**

Donors and IPs undertaking shorter-term interventions face a unique set of challenges in terms of MEL, including that outcomes may only be measurable after the intervention in question has ended. In these situations, donors should react to this by:

- **Increasing the use of qualitative indicators**: By its nature qualitative research is better-placed to pick up on early reaction to an intervention; although the smaller sample sizes used mean a lack of robustness relative to quantitative methods, the richer, more insightful data, and ability to use specific sampling, allow for the production of earlier glimpses of real effect.
- **Budgeting to return:** Donors are encouraged to consider planning to return to certain locations for one or more subsequent visits in order to undertake further monitoring. Such visit may seek to (i) evidence if adequate progress has been made (where poor performance or difficult conditions were previously noted) and/or (ii) identify outcomes and/or impacts that are attributable to the intervention. Such visits might be conducted by the Third Party Monitor or, if access has become viable for the donor, by the donor's own programme management personnel.

**Donors focussed on political outcomes**

Donors attempting to realise political benefits face the challenges of trying to measure something that is of vital importance, yet somehow ethereal and often under-appreciated by the TPM implementers and implementing partners alike. In these settings donors are encouraged to:

- **Be overt about these ambitions**, communicate why this is important to all other actors for example through workshops, and explain that politics equates to power dynamics, and so is not an 'ugly' issue to monitor
- Push the TPM implementers to adapt MEL tools to embrace this issue i.e. **build the political aspect into Theory of Change and logframes.**

**Third Party Monitoring Implementers**

TPM Implementers should bear in mind that:

- **Cost** remains a key barrier to donors. TPM implementers should dare to push for a clear budget, but then strive to offer a range of costs that do not only hit the ceiling budget but offer lower-cost options, and above all make very clear the value and reasoning behind different options. Ensuring clarity on *what is not included* in a proposal is also key, so as to avoid avoidable frustration during the inception phase.

- **Mind-set** – a culture shift is needed by TPM implementers. For these contracts to work, TPM implementers must consider implementing partners a 'client' as important as the donors. TPM implementers must acknowledge that finally the donor-implementing partners is usually a more profound and long-term relationship than the donor-TPM implementer, as there are only a limited number of UN bodies and INGOs.
- **Team cohesion**: TPM implementers must put more effort on choose teams that are genuinely cohesive. Various methods may work, such as choosing Team Leaders first, and encouraging them to develop a vision and build teams from people whom they know will work well together towards that vision.

# 2 Context

## 2.1 Background of this paper

Development, stabilisation and humanitarian workers professionals operate in increasingly conflict-affected environments. This places limits on donors' ability to safely visit projects, meaning that visibility of projects in many vital locations is diminishing. As a result, the importance of Third Party Monitoring (TPM) is growing (Herbert, 2013), as donors require confidence that their investments are producing the desired outputs, yielding the desired outcomes and impact, and adhering to humanitarian norms. The Unit in the EU Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) responsible for the management of the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) commissioned this handbook to add to the body of knowledge on this subject, and to help those who need to rely on TPM to understand the reality of the field, and to engage in it with confidence.

## 2.2 Objectives of this paper

The principal strategic aim of this paper is to help donors who lead TPM to do so more efficiently and effectively. TPM involves a range of actors working in highly challenging settings, and this naturally places considerable pressure on those involved and on the processes they use to collaborate. FPI sought to facilitate this process by bringing to light the principal issues, challenges and constraints faced by all those who are involved in TPM.

The specific aims of this paper are to:

- Analyse what constitutes 'good' or 'best' practice in TPM, as well as identifying practices to avoid
- Investigate how to identify, procure and work successfully with a TPM implementer
- Understand how TPM Implementers operate – enabling donors to work with TPM providers in a manner that is as convenient as possible to TPM implementers
- Assess what practices can and should be put in place that will facilitate a healthy cooperation between TPM implementers and Implementing Partners (IPs)
- Risk and technical issues connected to this practice of TPM

**Other key reading on TPM** (click to view)

EU Commission Results Orientated Monitoring Handbook

DFID Monitoring in Remote Areas

USAID TPM document (*available upon request*)

Third Party Monitoring in Volatile Environments - Do the Benefits Outweigh the Risks?

Instruction note for ECHO staff on Remote Management

Listening to communities in insecure environments

Technologies for monitoring in insecure environments

Between a rock and a hard place: Monitoring aid implementation in situations of conflict

- Explore how to build trust and further the prospects for long term collaboration between actors
- Highlight the current and potential role that technology plays in TPM.

## 2.3 Intended audience

This paper is designed principally to be read by donors who lead TPM projects – principally donors but also on occasions Implementing Partners. The specific target audience is those who are responsible for leading these projects, and in particular those who may be relatively new to the responsibility. However, FPI hopes that this report will prove to be of benefit to all involved in the process of undertaking TPM, by explaining the pressure points in the process, and so facilitating dialogue to simplify the conducting of good TPM.

## 2.4 Methodology

There were two components to this research; one primary and one secondary. The first phase was the desk research – the results of which are summarised in Annex B. This phase sought to understand what research had already been done on this subject.

The second phase was primary research, which took the form of qualitative Key Informants Interviews (KIIs). A total of 35 interviews were undertaken, which are categorised in the following table[1]:

| Respondent type | Number interviewed |
|---|---|
| Donors | 16 |
| TPM Implementers | 22 |
| Independent experts and academics | 4 |
| Total | 42 |

## 2.5 Limitations

Two principal limitations to this research are noted:

- A number of IPs were invited by the author to take part in this research, however none was able to do so. This is a limitation since it is logical that the opinions of those whose organisations are scrutinised by TPM implementers are a key part of the full story of how best TPM should be undertaken. In an attempt to offset this, TPM implementers who were interviewed were asked to provide their thoughts on the views of IPs, at least as they see them. While TPM implementers were willing and able to do this, there is no reason to believe that the most important views of IPs on this matter are well expressed in this report. This introduces a risk that this report does not adequately speak to the views of those who are in the field, and their experience of being monitored in this way. Further research in this area would therefore be welcomed.
- Owing to COVID 19, which took hold at the same time as fieldwork began, all interviews were undertaken remotely. Had this not been the case, IcSP may have opted to hold one or more in-person meetings and/or workshops in Brussels and/or other locations where large numbers of stakeholders are present.

[1] I still hope to interview: Danish MOFA and at least one IP, so this could still go up.

## 2.6 Notes to the reader

- In order to make the report easy to read, the authors have adopted the following key acronyms for the different actors in the process:
    - Implementing Partners 'IPs'
    - Lead Agencies 'LAs'
    - Data Collectors 'DCs'
- This paper uses the term MEL which may be known by other terms (M&E – 'Monitoring & Evaluation', AMEL 'Accountability, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning' and DMEL 'Design, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning'). These terms are not synonymous but for the purpose of this report are effectively interchangeable with the term MEL.
- All the quotations in this report were provided by the interviewees.

> *"TPM is most successful when you find a way to make the information it creates genuinely useful to all parties"*
>
> Academic

# 3 Considering undertaking TPM

TPM is not as complicated as its name might suggest. Simply, it is MEL done by a third party. However, there are many forms of TPM and you should situate yourself and your intervention in the broad spectrum of TPM before starting to consider taking action.

## 3.1 Why do TPM?

> *"Before writing the ToRs, sit down and discuss as a team for hours what you really want. The rest all flows from there".*
>
> Donor

At the most basic level, the principal reason why a donor may want to undertake TPM is a simple lack of access (Sagmeister et al, 2016). In its guidance note on the subject, USAID for example writes:

> *'Third-party monitors are contracted by USAID to act as our eyes and ears when we cannot ourselves access activities'.*

Interviews explored the reasons why donors have initiated TPM project – beyond this simple starting point of access. The main reason given are summarised and shown in Figure 1. While they may be seen as interconnected, some explanation of each is provided:

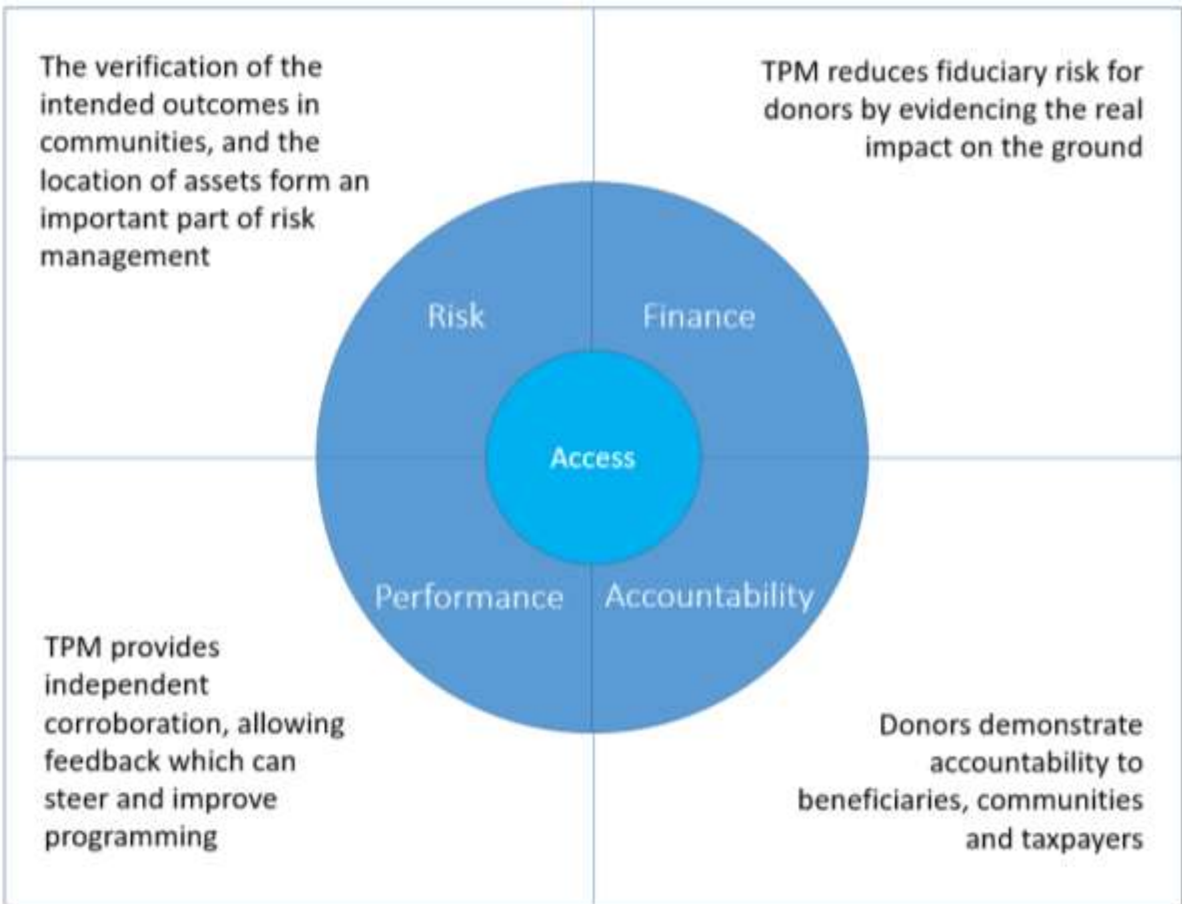
**Risk**: All development and humanitarian projects carry risk, typically managed through a risk register. The kinds of risks that are addressed by TPM include inadequate design and implementation, misappropriation, unintended consequences, and conflict sensitivity. To the Project Manager and those focused on risk management, TPM can become the principle tool to help mitigate risk (Kelly et al, 2017).

**Finance**: Invariably, the budgets of programmes considered for TPM are significant, and donors will be keen to be sure that they are delivering reasonable value for money. With limited or no visibility, TPM is sometimes undertaken in order to provide a more robust assessment of the financial delivery of the project. This may extend into the undertaking of VFM analysis, a specific field of MEL, which assesses the '4Es' of economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity.

**Accountability**: Donors strive to be accountable to communities and taxpayers (Chaudri et al, 2017). IPs invariably have their own MEL systems, but funding and access to qualified local staff for these can be limited, and the donor cannot easily rely on these IP systems delivering perfectly accurate insights. If then a donor has neither access nor TPM, and rests only on the data from an IP, this obligation to communities and taxpayers is placed at some risk. Independently produced and robust evidence is then helpful in asserting the actual impact of an intervention. It was also emphasised that it is good practice to link such data to IPs own MEL systems.

**Performance**: Donors work with IPs to help them to meet the outputs and outcomes committed to in their proposals. The oversight of these projects is challenging for the IP as well as the donor, and the contexts in which TPM is undertaken are typically more challenging than a typical project. Donors and IPs have a shared interest in objectively understanding progress, so that any necessary improvements can be taken.

**Figure 1: Fundamental reasons for undertaking TPM**




These four needs are of markedly different importance to different contexts, and, as a result, TPM interventions take very different shapes (van Beijnum et al, 2018). This makes it challenging for donors to create 'libraries' of templates and tools for the various TPM projects that they manage. This diversity may also contribute to the difficulty that donors face in collectively understanding and undertaking TPM.

IPs perceive that different donors have different ways of setting about TPM, and that this reflects the differing context and pressures that each faces. Some donors favour a more scientific and methodical approach, others attach more weight agility and flexibility. Practitioners see arguments for both, and favour a case-by-case consideration of the right approach for each TPM programme.

## 3.2 Definition(s) of TPM

There is no single definition of TPM. Different donors have different definitions of third party monitoring. The definitions of USAID and DFID, two of the biggest users of TPM are:

| **USAID:** | **DFID:** |
|---|---|
| *Third Party Monitoring (TPM) is the systematic and intentional collection of performance monitoring and/or contextual data by a partner that is not USAID or an implementing partner directly involved in the work.* | *'The practice of contracting a third party (neither a donor nor implementer) to collect or verify monitoring data. It is increasingly used to overcome the challenges of monitoring in remote or restrictive environments'.* |

For the purpose of this paper, and leaning on the inputs summarised in Figure 1, we will use the following definition, which combines aspects of the above and other thoughts provided by the experts interviewed:

> *'TPM is the use of an independent organisation – typically in areas where a funder does not have access - to collect monitoring data in order to reduce risk and maximise performance and accountability'.*

## PUTTING TPM INTO CONTEXT

How to 'understand' TPM in the context of …..?

### vs. MEL generally?

- MEL is a broader term that describes *any* monitoring, evaluation or learning undertaken by *any* actor.
- Therefore, we might say that TPM is a *subset* of MEL.
- TPM is MEL which is undertaken neither by the donor nor the implementer, and so the independence of the data is a distinguishing factor. That is not to say that TPM data is necessarily 'better' – IPs will usually know their environments better, and it is the responsibility of the TPM provider to ensure that it has ample contextual understanding.
- Learning could be described as reflection which builds institutional memory and so facilitates better decision making. Donors increasingly expect IPs to have Learning systems. TPM then can and should *feed into* overall Learning.

### vs. Evaluation?

- TPM is essentially a process of monitoring, not evaluation. The key distinction is that monitoring (and so TPM) is designed to be on-going.
- That said, the two do in practice overlap; this is seen as inevitable and healthy.
- Evaluation is formative and so tends to draw 'summative' conclusions over a longer period of time. Monitoring meanwhile aims to be 'formative' i.e. to help to form or shape a programme while it is happening.
- Evaluation is normally less resource-intense and so less costly but only offers feedback from one moment in time, and – in the case of end-line evaluations (the more common type) too late to adjust a project to enhance performance.
- TPM and evaluation however are compatible – for large portfolios/programmes it is considered normal to do both TPM and evaluation.

*"Monitoring should be separate from evaluation because the skill sets are very different; if you bundle them together, it means that compromises will need to be made"* **Implementer**

### vs. 'ROM'?

- TPM is somewhat broader than Result Oriented Monitoring ('ROM')
- ROM is a term that is used by the EU Commission (DEVCO, NEAR), and is specific to beneficiary-related TPM
- TPM however can include the monitoring of 'people', 'assets' and 'systems' – this is the crucial difference between them.

### vs. Project Management?

- Project Management is a function that is vital to any intervention, and equally vital to the commissioning of any TPM
- Where TPM is not undertaken, the oversight provided by Project Managers can be seen as striving to provide a similar function to TPM – i.e. to objectively assess the work of an IP.

## 3.3 When and why to use TPM?

**When to use**

Donors and TPM implementers who were interviewed agreed that the principle drivers to using TPM is **access**, i.e. that risks of physical safety and/or travel restrictions (linked to security) often create a situation where conventional monitoring is not possible. While access is considered the most obvious and often the fundamental reason to use TPM, it is not the only reason, according to those interviews. Respondents also put forward the views that TPM should be considered when:

- The location or setting is thought to be especially **susceptible to corruption, misappropriation or theft**
- The aid provided includes **high-value assets,** especially those that could more easily be stolen

- The IP has expressed **difficulty in undertaking MEL** or TPM
- Other niche scenarios – such as threats to the supply chain – e.g. (specific to medicines), where there is reason to believe that the 'cold chain' may be hard to maintain.

**Benefits of TPM**

In addition to the visibility afforded by TPM where access is otherwise not possible, respondents pointed to the following core additional benefits of TPM.

- **Independence** – Information provided by a third party specialising in data collection and reporting should bring enhanced credibility as the provider is independent and so has no reason to be unduly favourable to the donor or implementer.
- Technical evidence **quality** – There is an acknowledgement that – if commissioned well and functioning well as a team, TPM implementers should be capable of providing at least as high a calibre of data than an IP's MEL team. While the MEL team of an IP may be stretched to appease multiple donors, and may be stretched for funds, the (typically private sector) LA should have the resources, means and focus to deliver to a very high standard.
- **Credibility of results** – The combination of independence and quality should add weight to the robustness of findings. This should help the donor and IP to feel they can use the results.
- **Teamwork** – Some involved in TPM felt that when TPM is done well, it can help to establish a culture of agility and responsiveness between all three key actors – the donor, the IP, and the LA. If the donor can instil a shared belief that TPM benefits all, then it is conceivable to enhance programme quality and even enhance the team morale.
- **Outsourcing efficiency** – Another argument for using TPM is to make the work of the donor more streamlined, alleviating pressure on the donor.
- **Local insight** – Commissioners of TPM have found that the local teams of enumerators offer local insight which can add substantial richness to the donor's understanding of a context. However, in donors' experience this needs to be actively harnessed.

> *"I have done evaluations as a donor and an implementer and I can tell you, it's totally different - independence is everything"*
>
> Implementer

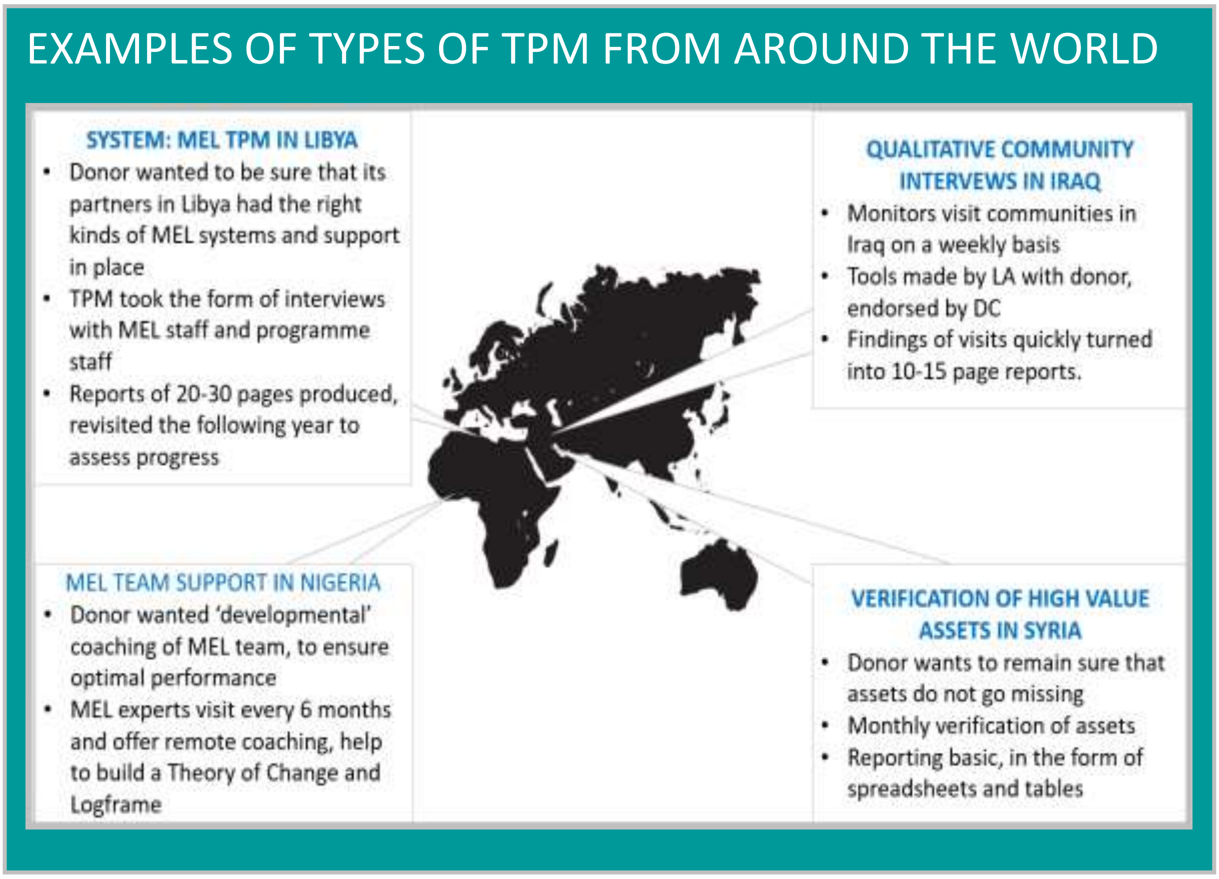
**Reasons to be cautious about using TPM**

Reasons provided for not proceeding with TPM included:

- **Risk of disempowerment** - it was argued that commissioning TPM can be demotivating unless carefully handled, and that this would be especially true in situations where the donor does have access – as this can undermine and damage the role of the Project Manager
- **Risk of damaging relationship with IPs** – TPM will typically result in issuing a view of IPs' work. Sometimes, this view can contain more negative feedback than expected. Naturally then, there needs to be an ample resource to handle this feedback with due sensitivity
- Where the burden on the **budget** would be too high – commissioners of TPM reported of occasions when they had no choice but not to undertake TPM because of the unexpectedly cost
- When there is **no reputable provider –** examples were given of when a provider simply could not be found, however it was acknowledged that this could be due to a lack of familiarity with the market (See Annex B for a list of TPM providers who took part in this research, and for advice on maintaining a roster)

- When the real **need can be solved in another way** – donors were able to give examples of when the conventional form of TPM - i.e. sending monitors into the field, can be addressed in other ways, such as the use of technology. An example was given of using satellites to show traffic around hospitals to evidence the functionality of a funded facility.

**Figure 2: Four varied examples of TPM**



## 3.4 General advice on leading TPM

Overarching advice to those commissioning and working on TPM is shown below.

### 10 KEY TIPS FOR LEADING TPM PROJECTS

1. ***Actively* lead**: Donor will enjoy the best results if they actively take the lead in the work; pushing to create a collaborative sense of trust, urgency, and a collective interest in the use of the data.
2. **Overindulge on ToRs:** Donors should put all the effort they can into the development of the ToRs, explain why the project matters. Donors should be open and candid about the real objectives, what they do and do not want to be told in the report.
3. **Last things first:** Donors are recommended to draft the report before even drafting the ToRs. While this may sound counter-intuitive, the intellectual process that this obliges can be highly illuminating, as it forces team members to think through their expectations. Describing or even sharing glimpses even of the desired report can make the task of the bidding agencies far easier.
4. **Favour Early Market Engagement:** Donors can feel that they sometimes have to issue ToRs without enough time, information or knowledge of TPM. If and when tendering procedures allow, donors are advised to take advantage of the option of Early Market Engagement - i.e. direct interaction with potential bidders as this can and invariably does significantly increase the quality of the ToR and/or the bids received, and can serve to reduce costs.
5. **Demonstrate accountability to communities and monitors:** This is where TPM overlaps with the notion of humanitarian imperatives. In essence, this mean ensuring a constant radar on the potential for TPM to remain as 'small' as possible, to be built on good HSS practices, and to ask questions that reveal risks to the community.
6. **Choose a partner with attitude** - as in - the right attitude. Beyond the more obvious requirements of experience in TPM, methodology, and cost, donors are advised to choose a TPM partner who has the right attitude towards IPs, towards communication, and can offer evidence of cohesion within the team and any consortium members (UN, 2015).
7. **Don't let perfect be the victim of good:** TPM tends not to operate at the scale of IP monitoring – as it would be unusual for donors to allocate more funding to 'verifying monitoring' than 'doing monitoring'. As a result, donors will have to make compromises, and experience suggests it can be more useful to look more broadly with smaller sample sizes (Taptue et al, 2017) than to remain fixed on large sample sizes in a fixed set of locations.
8. **Visualise**: A picture paints a thousand words, and donors can bring reports to life and help senior stakeholders grasp the key points by evidencing findings through photography, adhering to standards such as avoiding taking photos of people (or blurring), and removing meta data.
9. **Prioritise vulnerable groups**: Donors should encourage TPM implementers to make sure that they include innovative approaches to ensure ample accessing to women, children and vulnerable groups.
10. **Aim for intimacy**: Close and regular, senior communication, on a weekly basis will yield dividends. Minutes of meetings should be action-orientated and shared quickly.

## 3.5 Types of TPM

TPM practitioners interviewed agreed that a useful way of looking at the field of TPM is that, fundamentally, it typically sets out to monitor either *people* or *assets*.

*People*: TPM projects more commonly set out to engage with 'people' through qualitative and quantitative research with:

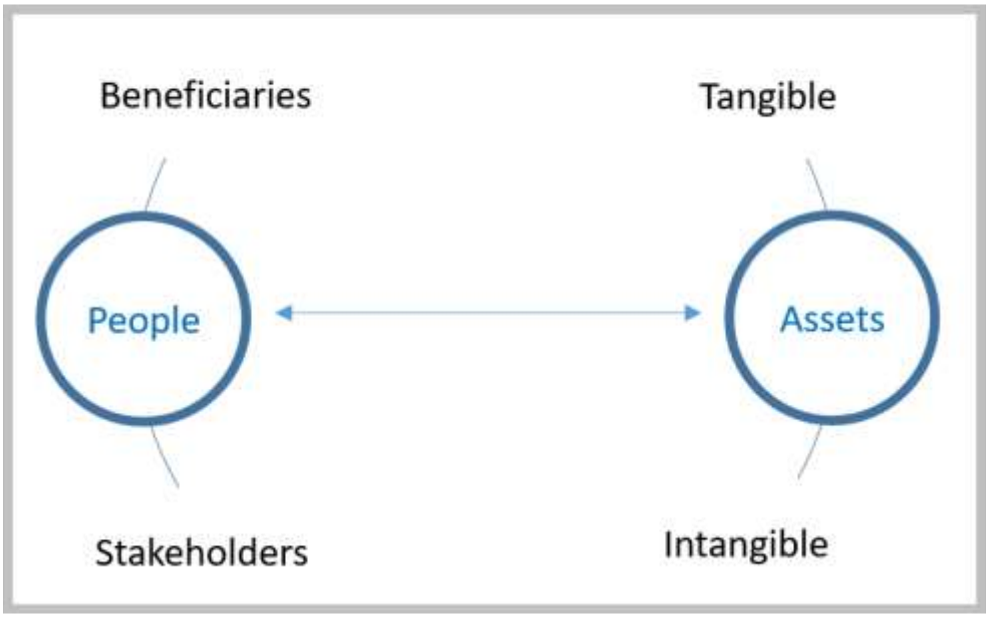
- **Direct beneficiaries** – immediate recipients of the aid

- **Indirect beneficiaries** – those who benefit indirectly
- **Programme management** – the key staff from the implementing partner
- **Other stakeholders** (such as community leaders, thematic experts) through 'Key Informant Interviews'.

**TPM practitioners consider that the use of TPM to monitor the opinions of people is significantly more common than the use of TPM to monitor assets. For this reason the remainder of this report defaults to discussion of TPM of people, with reference made to assets where applicable.**

*Assets*: In the sorts of fragile and conflict-affected places where access may be impossible and so TPM more likely to be useful, medium value Non-Food Items (NFIs) or high-value infrastructural assets may be distributed, and the donor may want to be confident that these remain in the possession of the intended party/ies. In addition to tangible assets, TPM can set out to look at intangible assets such as the systems and processes of the IP itself. One relatively common form of TPM is to assess the strength of IPs' MEL systems – the logic being that if the donor can be confident that the IP has the ability to report data well, then there is less need for a high-cost, long term version of TPM.

**Figure 3: Types of TPM**




## 3.6 Models of TPM

### 3.6.1 The 'International' model

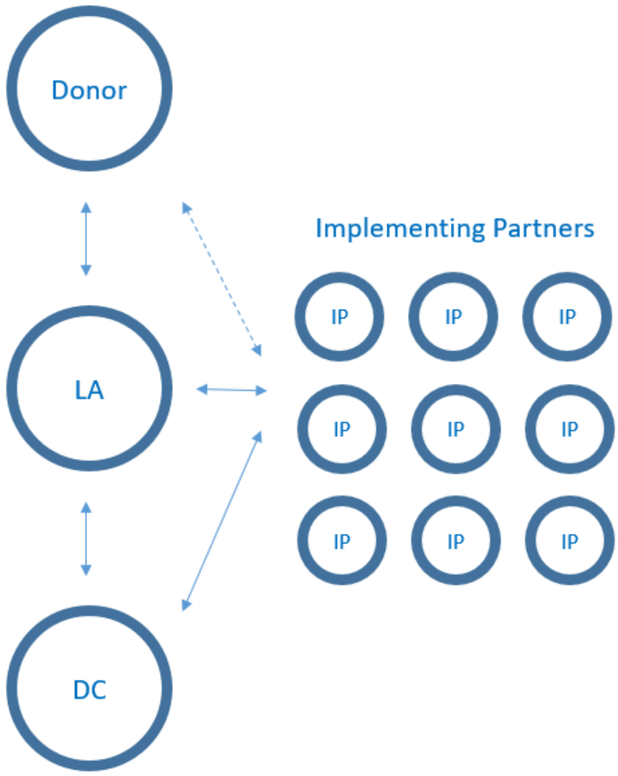
Figure 4 shows what practitioners feel has become the 'standard', 'international' TPM model – i.e. the one that donors most commonly fund. In this model, the donors sets out to commission a reputable and experienced lead TPM agency ('Lead Agencies' or 'LAs') typically in Brussels, Washington or London, who in turn work with one or more local 'data collection' firms ('DC's) to visit the donor's Implementing Partners (IPs). The number of IPs involved in a typical programme was described as ranging in number from two to a dozen.

In this set-up, the LA will typically consist of:

- A **Team Leader** and/or Technical Lead

- **Experts** (often consultants who may be expert in writing, or thematic areas)
- A **Project Manager**
- A **Project Coordinator** or Officer
- **Cross-cutting experts** (such as on Social Inclusion and/or Gender / vulnerability, Finance, Conflict Sensitivity).

**Figure 4: The 'International' model**




The LA will direct and be accountable for the work. It will usually receive the majority of the funds. It will have prepared (and so absorbed the cost and risk associated with the proposal-writing), and identified possible data collection partners, relying on its networks to understand which providers are well suited and have the best reputation for providing quality data. The LA will normally also provide the intellectual aspects of the deliverables, and ask the DC to limit its remit to collecting data, and it will or should put in place processes to verify the quality of the data collector. Hence – typically the LA and the DC will intentionally set up between them something of a governance structure, in which an 'invisible line' is draw between the two, across which data is handed. DCs tend to be well-established private sector companies, often with 5 to 10 or more years of operation. They have dozens or hundreds of monitors. A small number of regional DCs are thought to exist, and perceptions of their quality vary. DCs rarely are involved in the writing aspects of the proposal.

### 3.6.2 The 'Local' alternative model

In the 'local' model, the LA is cut out. The donor works directly with a DC to collect the data.

The principal advantages of such an approach are (i) the saved cost of not having an LA, and (ii) the intimacy between the donor and those in the field.

The model however does create a risk, which is that DCs may lack the skills and capacity to do the work to the standard required. Many feel this can be remedied by the inclusion of one or more experts. Careful assessment of DCs, and their financial status, becomes key. Procurement teams may need to assess them in more detail.

When working with a DC directly, the donor needs to be mindful that it will implicitly become responsible for checking data quality. The inclusion of an expert then becomes crucial to this model. This person is typically very experienced in working for LAs, and can play the role of monitoring their operations, and fulfilling this governance role.

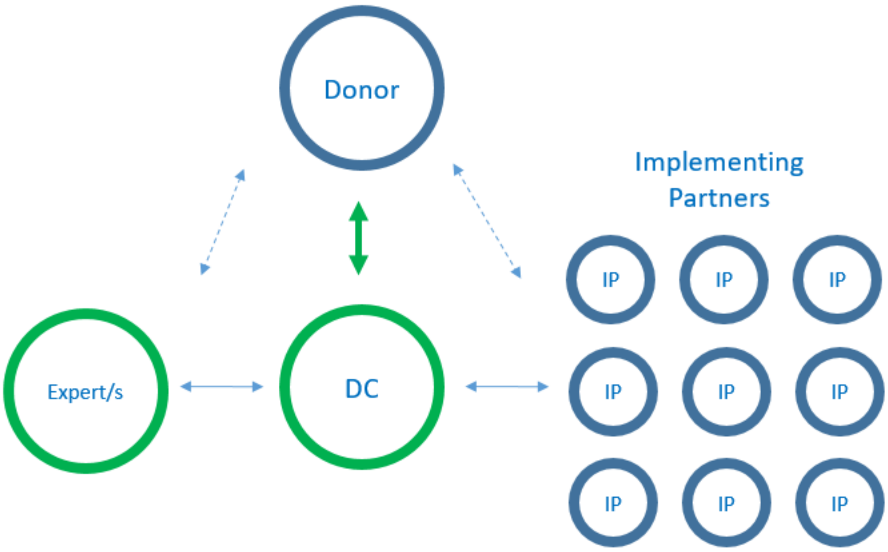
Some put forward a view that donors have an obligation to nurture the development of DCs in this way; that there is such a potential

> *"We need to look at a working intimately with local* [TPM] *companies. It's not just a question of empowerment, it's about shortening the distance between the reports and the field"*
>
> Implementer

> *"The way the system works now makes it very hard for Southern TPM implementers to win contracts. There is an argument that donors have a responsibility to capacity-build local TPM providers*
>
> Academic

here to contribute to the localization and participatory development agenda.

**Figure 5: 'Local' Model of TPM**




Respondents were able to compare and contrast the relative benefits of both these approaches, and these perceptions are summarised in the below table:

**Figure 6: Pros and Cons of 'international' vs. 'local' models**

| | **Pros** | **Cons** |
|---|---|---|
| International model | • Depth of experience, and so credibility<br>• Calibre of work, especially writing and insightfulness<br>• Ability to work internationally | • High cost<br>• Risk of insights from the field being lost during report writing |
| Local model | • Lower cost, even higher value<br>• Local insights (less filtering of the data) | • Weaker reporting skills<br>• More risk to donor of being pulled into data processing<br>• Need to ensure financial viability |

TPM Implementers were also asked to self-critique themselves, to reflect on where they feel they can improve in terms of their service provision to donors.

## HOW DO TPM IMPLEMENTERS THINK THEY CAN IMPROVE?

TPM Implementers were asked how they feel they can improve. They said:

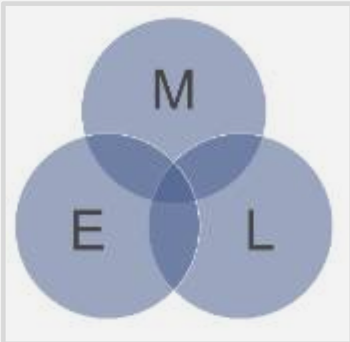
- Focussing on **monitors and their wellbeing**; giving them a clearer stake in the process
- Shifting to **see the IP as just as key a 'client' as the donor**, adopting more of a coaching attitude, and avoiding coming across as patronising
- Playing an **active role in shaping the ToRs**
- Working with donors to **co-imagine the end deliverable** at the beginning of the process
- Helping donors to **make the most of Inception phase**

TPM Implementers were keen to note that their work is tightly interlaced with the normal work of MEL and the MEL systems of IPs. They are invariably closely scrutinising logframes and Theories of

Change. For this reasons, overleaf, the reader will find a 1-page refresher on Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, in order to put issues into context.

**Basics of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning**

The field of 'Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning' is not without its complexities, but it may still be paraphrased to a simple question: *'how is our intervention doing'*? In essence, MEL is a set of perspectives or tools that development and humanitarian actors have developed and refined over a period of decades to answer this simple question. The field of MEL is constantly evolving; in the 70s and 80s many spoke of 'evaluation' only, then monitoring took shape - underlining the importance of an *ongoing* understanding of an intervention's progress. More recently 'Learning' has emerged. Here is a brief description of what these three inter-linked elements are, how they differ from each other:




- **Monitoring** – *Ongoing* measurement of an intervention or programme, typically taking the shape of data collected by TPM implementers' own MEL teams, with some oversight by a donor, in accordance with key MEL documents, such as the logframe. Conclusions drawn tend to be based on relatively short interactions. Data may flows from the project's own administration, or may be produced by primary research with beneficiaries, or by field visits to observe or verify the locations of assets, or the functioning of a process or system.
- **Evaluation** – The intermittent assessment of an intervention in a summative manner. MEL practitioners typically think of 'baseline', 'mid-line' and 'endline' evaluations. These are often carried out by external consultants, companies or academics, because commissioners see it as essential to ensure that the more 'summative' judgments are truly independent. Often, evaluations will be based around 'OECD-DAC criteria (see Section 6).
- **Learning** – Reflecting from external and internal successes and failures to develop institutional memory to aid better decision-making in future.

Others feel that *accountability* is another aspect of the work; i.e. that those undertaking MEL are well placed to then use that information to ensure that an organisation to remain accountable to its beneficiaries and taxpayers. Hence, the alternative acronym, 'MEAL' that you might be aware of.

Most donors use 'Theories of Change' and 'Logframes' to underpin their MEL work. The former present the 'vision' of how the intervention will meets its aims, by considering (i) the problems faced (ii) the outcomes desired, (iii) the outputs and activities that will be needed to bring about this change. Logframes then detail these elements very specifically, by converting the intended aims into 'indicators' which, using 'SMART' rules, and by stipulating targets and the 'means of verification', finally provide a solid process which is constantly maintained through each financial year.

- **Inputs**: The resources to hand to undertake activities (principally: funds and time)
- **Activity**: Work done to produce each output (some may serve multiple outputs)
- **Output**: The 'deliverable' (a product or service, such as a training session or a document)
- **Outcome**: The short-to medium-term change intended (also thought of as 'behaviour change') – which the intervention aims to play a significant role in realising.
- **Impact**: The long-term change intended – acknowledging that other interventions / social phenomena will play a role in achieving these

# 4 Tendering and awarding a contract

**To the extent that tendering procedures allow, TPM implementers should be brought into the process as early and as closely as possible, as it helps them to put forward methodologies that will work and be affordable.**

## 4.1 Criteria for selecting a TPM partner

Donors and TPM implementers were asked to say what they think are the key criteria for choosing a TPM implementer. Responses are divided into 'conventional and 'emergent'.

**Figure 7: Criteria for selecting a TPM Partner**

| Conventional | Emergent |
|---|---|
| • **Experience** of running such contracts in the location of interest<br>• **Knowledge** of the donor, the country or region, the thematic area are all seen as vital<br>• **Language** skills should be strong across the team<br>• A genuine **presence on the ground** is to be expected<br>• Adequate **capacity** including for when people are on leave | • **Team cohesion** – have the team members being put forward worked together before?<br>• **Assertiveness** – do they take your ToR and demonstrate an ability to tell you what could be improved?<br>• **Attitude** – in donors' experience not all Team Leaders have the right characters to instil a sense of confidence in the IPs, and this is seen as vital. |

*"The personality of the TPM team members is everything. Our consultant has been able to communicate positively and earnestly with our partners without causing problems, and that's key"*

Donor

## 4.2 Advice on writing and optimising ToRs

The key components of a Terms of Reference are shown below.

- **Context**
  - A good ToR will include a robust but engaging description of the context through the eyes of the donors. Most importantly, the context should speak to the donor's particular view of or link to the context. Most TPM implementers will be highly familiar with the context in a generic sense.
- **Rationale**
  - The genesis for the project needs to be clear; the problem that the donors wants TPM to solve. There cannot be enough detail here. It is ideal if the rationale is as open and candid as possible (i.e. practical or political considerations).
- **Objectives**

**With ToRs, what frustrates TPM implementers?**

- Unrealistic timelines
- Lack of vision on the end deliverable
- Inadequate detail
- No opinions on methods that might be used
- No view on how the end product should look

- Too often, the objectives are insufficiently thought-through. Implementers are keen to get under the skin of donors' real needs, but often sense that there is 'hidden meaning' beneath donors' stated 'objectives'. On the one hand the word 'objectives' itself has different underpinnings ('drivers', 'triggers', 'influences', 'impulses', 'rationale' etc.). On the other, it can be possible to think in terms of short vs. long-term thinking, and strategic vs. tactical thinking. TPM implementers want donors to express the fullness of their intention, to go into as much detail as possible. One simple solution is to split the objectives into 'strategic' objectives and 'technical' objectives. The box below demonstrates the different kinds of objective.

| | Strategic objectives | Technical objectives |
|---|---|---|
| **Summary** | What **senior management** will do with the findings OR the **long-term** aims OR **high-level** decision making | What **project management** will do with the findings OR the **short to medium-term** aims OR **project-level** decision making |
| **Examples relating to the monitoring of *people*** | • Ensure accountability to communities<br>• Validate claimed IP results<br>• Underpin discussion with Implementing Partners about future programming decisions<br>• Feed into funding decision-making | • Assess the percentage of beneficiaries who are satisfied<br>• Understand the extent to which the intervention is realising benefits in terms of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, coherence, impact and sustainability |
| **Examples relating to *assets*** | • To reduce the risk of misuse and/or theft<br>• To improve the supply chain | • Percentage and value of lost items<br>• Usability of supplied items |

- **Non-objectives**
  - It can be very useful and revealing to TPM implementers to know what a donor does *not* want to know, because they feel they already know it. For example, it could be that the donor feels there is no need to explore for example the sustainability of a project, or its conflict sensitivity, if this information is gathered in other ways.
- **Criteria**
  - Most donors will explain the % of importance that is applied to each aspect of the proposal, of each of the technical and financial sections. If a little detail can be given on the reasoning behind this allocation of weighting, this will be appreciated by TPM implementers.
- **Conflict of Interest (COI)**
  - The ToR should instructs the respondent to be clear on which projects if there is any, they are already undertaking – either as a TPM implementer or as a delivery implementer, in the relevant country / region.
- **Issues open to debate**
  - It is tempting for a donor to write a ToR in such a way as to give the impression that everything about the intended TPM is clear in terms of how it should be done. However, TPM implementers appreciate that these projects are complex, and it is very hard to be clear on all matters at the point of

## Caution around Conflicts of Interest (COI)

Some of the large international firms act both as IPs and third party TPM Implementers. This can create a Conflict of Interest, and you should be sure to include in your selection process a thorough understanding of whether the candidate organisations undertake implementation in the area in question, or have any other links that make them inappropriate for the work.

writing the ToRs. They would welcome some indication of where there is uncertainty, or whether there is flexibility to be creative.

## 4.3 Early Market Engagement

TPM implementers were asked for their views on the process through which engagement happens with donors in relation to TPM tenders, and what they feel might be done to improve it. The question was asked in such a way as not to encourage reference to the specific processes and requirements that each donor has for tendering and bidding for TPM projects.

A key finding from this research is that TPM implementers very much welcome opportunities to interact directly with donors on the intended work, even to be part of the discussion underpinning the creation of the ToRs, either in person or remotely. A consensus was found among TPM implementers for a preference for an invitation to a session at which the project can be discussed openly – potentially with all interested and/or short-listed bidders present.

**Figure 8: Explanation of Early Market Engagement**

| | |
|---|---|
| **What it is?** | A physical or online meeting attended by those interested in bidding for the work. |
| **When does it happen?** | Usually, in advance of the formals ToRs being published, if allowed by tendering procedures. |
| **What is the format?** | Typically donors will start by presenting draft ToRs. These may or may not be shared in advance. If an Expression of Interest (EoI) was issued, it may be sensible to show the basic ToRs likely shared at that point. |
| **Who is involved?** | Any TPM implementer – depending on how large a field the donors wants to invite. Donors may choose to invite only those who have passed a 'first round' of consideration, perhaps through the submission of EoI that looks at basic criteria such as track record, financial health, presence on the ground. |
| **Why it is useful?** | It provides a chance for donors and TPM implementers to genuinely discuss the issues at hand. It can greatly increase the chances of donors feeling that the formal, final ToRs are well constructed. It gives TPM implementers a chance to ask questions that can help them to reduce their costs. |
| **Any risks?** | TPM Implementers feel these meetings can be less useful or less appealing to them when the format tries to oblige or coerce the attendees to share their ideas, and so lose their competitive edge. Large LAs have often established leadership positions by developing intellectual property around TPM which they want to protect. |

## Maintaining a roster of TPM consultants and firms?

An option that has been considered and used by some is to maintain rosters of firms of TPM implementers, and/or rosters of consultants who could play a role in a 'local' model. Interviewees felt that for this to work it has to be actively managed i.e. assigned specific responsibility to an individual who coordinates with commissioners to (i) search on an ongoing basis for providers – including through asking contacts (ii) collating financial and technical scores of those who submit bids and (iii) making available the database to everyone interested in commissioning such work. The possibility of creating and maintaining a roster of consultants should, however, take into consideration EU regulations on data protection; TPM implementers should ensure that they comply with EU rules on this subject.

## 4.4 Handling questions

Both donors and TPM implementers understand that – no matter how thorough the ToRs are – bidders will want to ask questions during the bidding process. TPM Implementers perceive that donors commissioning TPM generally do invite the asking of questions, which is welcomed. Without being asked to draw comment on the specific processes and requirements that individuals donors have in place for tendering and bidding TPM projects, TPM implementers were asked for ideas for how the process for asking and answering of questions could be improved, and have these suggestions:

- A commitment to a transparent process in which responses to all questions are shown to all bidders
- Donors allowing at least a 2-week window in which questions are asked and answered
- Donors aiming to respond to each question within 3 working days
- Consideration of a web-based multi-user interface to (i) allow for clear communication of the answers and reduce reliance on emails (which can cause confusion around the most recent response to each question) and (ii) reduce the risk of donors receiving the same question from multiple bidders
- Allowing follow-up questions (within the pre-agreed timeframe).

# 5 Inception phase

**Nearly all TPM projects have to adapt considerably from their initial design – as these are highly complex environments. Piloting the methodology is vital, and if the donor team is going to invest heavily at any point in the process, it should be here.**

## 5.1 The need for Inception phases

Most donors and TPM implementers are used to the idea of pilot or inception phases, and these are seen by TPM implementers and donors as vital for TPM projects also. Respondents felt that inception phases are vital because:

- The basic **context in which the TPM operates is so volatile** that even the best-informed bidder will not be able to put forward a planned methodology in which having full confidence;
- It is plausible that bidders did not genuinely have enough **capacity to think through every aspect of their proposal**, and they will need more time to test their own assertions in the proposal; and
- TPM implementers admit that they may sometimes put **innovative ideas** into their proposals that are included to attract donors' attention and help them win – these cannot always be fully thought-through or fully-costed out, and this needs to be acknowledged and explored together with the donor.

TPM implementers understand that donors need to ensure that the procurement process is fair, which means in effect 'keeping bidders at arm's length' during the process. A side-effect of this approach however is that – as a result - there tends to be no substantive direct contact between donor and bidder at any point in the process (unless there is an EME). In turn, this can result in dissonance or even misunderstanding between the 'winning' bidder and donor, especially if the donor lacks capacity in the weeks after the bid is won.

### Good documentation

For a TPM implementer to be ready to go into the field, they need to have in place a set of documents that will ensure that everyone – and the monitors especially – has the same thorough understanding of their roles and responsibilities. It can be tempting for an implementer to let these documents evolve during the inception phase. Experience shows it is better to push for TPM partners to prepare a full 'V1' set of these documents before fieldwork, and then to formally review them after a reasonable number of visits is undertaken.

Also, since these documents can be so time-consuming to make, it is a good idea to have them in place during the relative calm before implementation.

- ✓ Methodology manual
- ✓ Monitor manuals
- ✓ Health, Safety & Security manual
- ✓ Monitor training plan

TPM implementers then hope to have the opportunity for a highly collaborative approach to inception, during which they and the donor acknowledge that they have (typically) arrived at this point with limited contact, and need to spend time together and have an open, candid discussions about the proposal.

In the TPM field, unlike some others industries (such as advertising) where large contracts are tendered for, bidding companies are not paid for their time in preparing the proposal. As a result, they have no choice but to absorb the cost of bidding. They do not have limitless capacity, and cannot be expected to put forward a 'perfect' methodology. Therefore, at the point at which a tender is awarded, it is obvious that the winning company itself may well be aware that it might have gone further, been clearer, or costed more precisely, some aspects of its bid.

## 5.2 A blueprint step-by-step approach for managing Inception

Respondents were asked for their views on how to navigate the inception phase, and gave the following thoughts.

**Figure 9: Blueprint step-by-step approach for managing Inception**

| | Stage | Content |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Provisional award | One of the sensitivities of this part of the process is a possible tension between (i) the 'winning' bidder being announced and (ii) a likely need to make concrete changes to the methodology that may result in additional costs. Specifically, this situation can result in the LA being asked to provide further quotations for costs what has by then become a non-competitive setting. For this reason, it may be the case that donors will want to retain some control in the process by awarding only a 'provisional winner' and announcing a final decision only once a full dialogue has been undertaken. **This allows both parties an opportunity to make sure that they are a good fit, and to 'iron out creases' in the putative methodology**. Such a phase is also useful as it allows for appeal against the decision (if the donor operates such a system). In any case, at this point, IPs should be made aware of the provisional award, and ideally they would be informed ahead of any public announcement, as a courtesy. |
| 2 | Cost clarification > formal awarding. | As described above, it may be in the interest of the donor, having nominated the 'provisional' winner, to enter into detailed discussions about the proposal and the costs, inviting reflections from the winning bidder about anything that they were unsure about. The donor may want to bring in MEL experts to scrutinise bids, possibly to help the donor team to ask questions to **make sure that every aspect of the financial side of the project has been well thought-through**. |
| 3 | Methodology development | Once the financials are complete, and the donor has confidence that there are no surprises in terms of finances, and the formal award has been made, **the donor and LA should come together and discuss in detail the methodology.** If viable, follow-up technical meetings may be agreed to finalise these. **A suite of tools should be developed**; this may take some weeks to prepare. An initial communications plan may also be drafted during this time. It is also sensible to consider a detailed documentation of the steps of fieldwork including precisely who is expected to do what, and when. |
| 4 | IP Engagement | Once the 'pilot-methodology' is readied, it should be shared with the IPs. This is a crucial moment in the chronology of the project – it is the first time that the donor will present to the IPs the real nature of the project. **IPs may have many useful ideas about the proposed methodology – they may well want to share these**. This engagement should be done in such a way as to send a signal to the IPs that the donor treats both parties equally and requires a proactive and cohesive approach. This stage may include one-to-one meetings, a workshop or a combination of both, whether in person or online. |
| 5 | Fieldwork begins | With the methodology now endorsed by the IPs, and the expectations on them clear, a first visit to the field should be undertaken. This would ideally be undertaken with more experienced monitors (who are briefed to feed back in a fulsome way) and with **plenty of time to reflect afterwards on potential improvements**. Once this is done, a second and if needed third wave of piloting is recommended, testing also a frequency of fieldwork that it likely to reflect normal speed of operation. |
| 6 | Finalising of methodology | Once the team believes that ample fieldwork has been undertaken, all tools should be revised and formalised with donor approval. **A formal 'methodology' handbook should be approved and signed off by the donor.** This should include clarity on all important process such as scoring and definitions (see Implementation section). |

Through all of the above, TPM practitioners emphasise that this Inception phase provides a crucial first opportunity for coalescing of the 'full team' that is the donor, the LA and the IP. In this sense it is vital that the donor sets the right tone, and makes time available, including by senior colleagues.

## 5.3 Communication plans

The inception phases is a good point at which to consider rolling out a Communication Plan; i.e. a simple – possibly 1 or 2-page agreement around who will contact, and when. The key rationale for a Communications Plan is that:

- IPs are busy and it may help them to be presented with a very clear plan, which aims to minimise the logistical burden on them
- TPM reports are often sensitive in nature
- It can happen that the DC finds an urgent problem (See Section 5 for more on 'Red Flags') and clear communications is needed for such situations
- In the more fragile settings, where monitor security is a concern, clear communications plans are essential to make it clear who will play what role in an emergency

That said, not all projects are thought to require such a plan, and it may be a good strategy to wait and see if this is even needed. Experience shows however that TPM of larger programmes, of more sensitive work, or ones where more challenging information may be expected to be shared (especially between LA and IP) may benefit particularly.

A good Communications Plan should:

- Be as concise as is reasonable
- Be scenario-specific
- Account for all scenarios that relate to safety
- Involve senior decision makers.

*"TPM will only work if the donor sets the right tone – explains with conviction why this is important, and what everyone needs to do and not do to make it work"*

Implementer

# 6 Implementation phase

During implementation, frequency of communication between all parties is crucial; try to emphasise the need for open, frequent communication around a clear fieldwork plan, and to instil a common appreciation of the main aim – performance improvement to the benefit of all

## 6.1 The typical process

The implementation of TPM typically involves months or years of interaction between the donor, LA, DC and IPs. As described in Section 2, there are many types of TPM. In this section, we will look at how implementation may look for two of the principal forms of TPM; that undertaken with beneficiaries, and of MEL systems.

Overleaf we see a description of a typical flow of each kind of project.

*"The most successful TPM I ever worked on brought everyone together frequently to discuss improvements and learning often and authentically"*

Implementer

**Figure 10: Typical TPM implementation process; with beneficiaries, and of MEL systems**

| | Example: TPM with beneficiaries | Example: TPM of MEL system |
|---|---|---|
| Preparatory work | Generic tools are developed for the specific project, shared with the IP as a courtesy, feedback welcomed | |
| | Direct contact between the DC and IP on logistical arrangements | |
| Fieldwork | Senior DC lead manager with Duty of Care responsibility approves deployment | DC calls IPs Point of Contact to explain process |
| | Monitors deploy and undertake interviews over a period of hours or days | |
| | Monitors remain in touch with DC management confirming safety | |
| | Data is transferred back to DC before quality checking /sharing with LA | Interviews conducted with various IP staff connected to MEL system |
| | Where safety is a concern, LA confirms safe return of monitors to donor | |
| Analysis and reporting | DC sends LA quality-checked data | Analysis is done and report drafted |
| | LA may opt to undertake independent verification of fieldwork quality of DC | |
| | Analysis is done and report drafted | Report is sent to IP for review, feedback provided |
| | Report is sent to IP for review, feedback provided | |
| | Report is sent to donor for feedback, donor discussed with IP. | Report is sent to donor for feedback, donor discussed with IP. |

## 6.2 Methodological options – pros and cons of each

Donors and TPM implementers both understand that primary (qualitative and quantitative) research is often a necessary aspect of TPM. The table below expands on perceptions of each and their utility in the field of TPM.

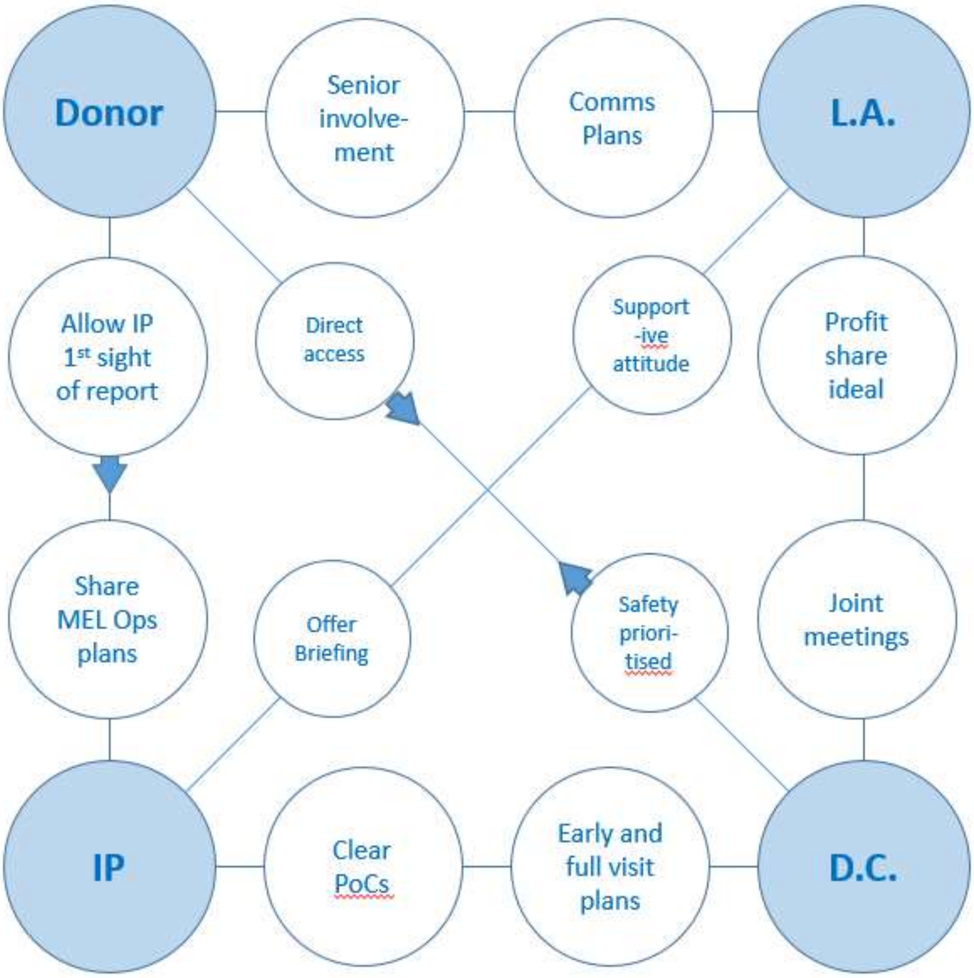
**Figure 11: Generic explanation of methodological options, pros and cons**

| | Why and how to use | Challenges in using |
|---|---|---|
| **Qualitative: Depth interviews with community members** | • These have become the most common approach to obtaining the views of beneficiaries and community members during TPM, because they provide rich insights, allowing respondents to tell the full, sometimes complex story of their engagement with the intervention. | • They can take a long time to administer; even if the intention is to speak for just 20 to 30 minutes, individuals may want to speak for longer, and so completing a daily quota can be difficult.<br>• In highly conflict-affected areas, open conversations can be especially likely to open up feelings that may even require Psycho-Social Support (PSS). |
| **Qualitative: Depth interviews with project team members** | • When undertaking TPM regarding the progress on an intervention, it is sensible and necessary to speak with those implementing the work. No TPM can claim to be balanced without this.<br>• Project team members can be interviewed remotely, and it can make sense before a deployment with one or two key individuals. | • The right balance of individuals is key; it is unhelpful to speak to only senior or only junior colleagues.<br>• Where the intervention relies on highly technical staff (such as a surgeon in a field hospital) – interviewing this person is key.<br>• Tools have to be carefully crafted, and monitors trained, to avoid overly-defensive responses. |
| **Qualitative: Key Informant Interviews** | • Key Informant Interviews with other actors (such as community leaders, other INGOs) are crucial to understanding the broader context and so highly useful for enabling the donor to be confident about the relevance and impact of an intervention. | • These can be difficult to arrange in certain settings, and on occasion politically sensitive. |
| **Qualitative: Focus Group Discussions** | • FGDs 'strength in numbers' may make it easier to talk frankly.<br>• Quality of discussion can be higher as a result of interaction of numerous people. | • In some communities men and women cannot come together.<br>• Logistical challenge of scheduling multiple people at one time |
| **Quantitative: Surveys** | • Robust, categorical evidence of progress of an intervention. | • Cost and time of large sample sizes. |

## 6.3 How to enhance relationships between all parties

Figure 12, below, summarise the key ways in which respondents suggested that relationships between each party could be enhanced. The diagram is then explained below.

**Figure 12: Ways to strengthen relationships between actors**




### 6.3.1 Relationship between donors and LAs

Senior involvement is key to this relationship working. TPM implementers feel that if the donor ensures that senior management are occasionally involved, they have the ability to ensure that all stakeholders understand that the work is important. As a result, the perception is that actions are more commonly taken.

In addition to this, the use of a Communication Plan is essential to guarantee that there are no significant miscommunications. The relationships in this situation are sensitive – the donor will be mindful of assuring that the relationship with the IP – which will likely extend to other programmes and regions – is not unduly affected by miscommunication. Therefore, the donor must stress to the LA and/or DC that the Communication Plan, if one is in place, must be understood by all and followed to the letter, to avoid any damaging of relationships.

*"One IP said to me – can you please tell the donor how hard this data collection is? It's more powerful coming from you"*

Implementer

Financial matters often run at the heart of this relationship. The LA will have won the project either at a margin that it is pleased with or, perhaps in order to gain prominence in the field, at a lower margin, and so may be sensitive to any new work or requests that are not funded. It is essential then that the donors and LA talk openly about finances, and although the profitability of the LA is no concern of the donor, it will be beneficial if both parties can achieve an open and frank discussion on the underlying state of finances. Ideally, LAs are invited to explain what their cost drivers are, and for a conversation to be ongoing around how both parties are seeing the financial side. The degree to which budgets are flexible – i.e. the donor's tolerance for the LA to make unilateral decisions, should also be made clear.

### 6.3.2 Relationship between donors and IPs

The relationship between the donor and the IP is arguably the most important and can be highly sensitive (Rivas et al, 2015). Crucial to this, practitioners feel, is allowing the IP to have first sight of, and a fair amount of time to review, a first draft of the report. It can often be the case that the DC will not have had all the time it would like to understand the project it has visited; these projects would ideally involve a day or more of briefing from the IP but this is not realistic for most IPs. Therefore, reports can be submitted with flaws due to understandable resource issues, and the IP should be given the chance to counter any such flaws, before the reports go to the donor and create misunderstanding. TPM implementers hope that donors can help to work with the IPs to create an intimate, efficient environment that is perhaps more dynamic than a normal MEL environment, creating a shared interest in guiding and shaping a programme through the use of independent, insightful, recent data. They hope that donors can encourage IPs not to look at TPM team as 'the policeman', but rather as a partner in building the legitimacy of the programme.

### 6.3.3 Relationship between donors and DCs

In the 'conventional', 'international' approach, where a project has an LA and a DC, there is less clear reason why the donor and the DC would interact as the LA typically plays the role of the intermediary. It is advisable however that the donor insists on a clear line of slight to the DC, perhaps on the basis of joining monthly or quarterly meetings, to ensure that the DC feels that its views, and any problems, are fully known to the donor. Given that the LA and DC, as explained in Section 2, usually default – in a governance sense – to the roles of 'data provider' and 'data checker', tensions can arise between the two. Finances can also be an issue – the LA is likely to have a number of expensive international consultants working in safe locations, while the DC is managing a range of relatively low-paid monitors and managers. It is important that the donor be cognisant of the potential tension, and at least keeps the line of communication open with the DC in order to mitigate this risk. Where the donor is working directly with a DC, there is a greater likelihood that the data received by the donor will be in a more basic form, or less polished. If this is the case, the donor will need to ensure that it dedicates ample project manager or coordinator-level resource to work more closely with the DC to explore the data.

> *"The best learning I have seen is done over coffee"*
>
> Implementer

**RED FLAGS**

Sometimes TPM implementers may find something seriously wrong, such as an observation of a clear risk to children. For this reason it is sensible to consider putting in place a process through which such findings are 'red-flagged' – i.e. the DC is instructed to send an immediate notification either to the IP or donor.

### 6.3.4 Relationship the LA and the IP

There is a clear potential for tension between the LA and the IP, as the latter is being evaluated by the former. The donor can assist this relationship by:

- Communicating clearly and as soon as possible about the purpose of the TPM programme, and how the information will be used, ideally as soon as the programme is decided upon. This may involve the use of a workshop with other IPs.
- Ensuring that any scoring (See Section 6) e.g. any RAG-ratings are well defined and justified, and that the tools that the programme utilises are well thought-through.
- Setting up processes and meetings during the course of the TPM programme in which the donor actively plays a role in emphasising the importance of TPM, and the creation of a culture of feedback and learning, to improve performance.

### 6.3.5 Relationship the IPs and the DC

Relationships between the IP and the DC centre around the visit itself. Often the IP's staff at the location to be visited will be very busy, and may struggle to guarantee being free during the visit itself. The donor can help by stressing the importance of the IP's management asking the local team to be free, and urging them to make sure that to the extent possible, all key stakeholders are present, and that key activities can be observed.

## 6.4 Consideration for monitors

**Monitors are the most essential part of the TPM process.** They are the ones that undertake the core work – the data collection - and in war-affected settings, put themselves in harm's way to do so. Therefore, their wellbeing is a clear 'Do No Harm that' priority for everyone involved in the TPM.

Monitors are typically well-educated and expert in administering qualitative or quantitative interviews. They are – these days – used to working with devices, but may sometimes work with audio recording or paper if there is need.

Given the risks that monitors take, **the culture of the team needs to be geared around their safety**. Monitors must have the right to refuse to deploy, and must not be coerced into doing so. In conflict-affected areas especially, particular care must be taken to produce a full set of Health, Safety and Security (HSS) documents that make clear to the

**MEET THE MONITOR - TYPICAL DAY OF A THIRD-PARTY MONITOR INSIDE SYRIA**

**7am** – *I woke up and checked Twitter and Signal to see what's happening around my area, to see if it's safe to head out. Yes, there have been a few strikes over night, but nothing on the route I plan to take.*

**8am** – *I called my supervisor, as agreed. We compared notes about the strikes, we'd heard slightly different things, and we agreed to message a few more people before we decide whether it's safe for me to head out and do the visit or not.*

**9am** – *I should have left already but needed that time to make sure things are safe – I feel they are and so does my line manager and male colleague.*

**9.30am** – *Say goodbye to family and head to the destination. I remind myself how to delete all my data if I get stopped at a checkpoint.*

**11am** – *Arrive 45 minutes late at the location, as I missed the bus I was expecting to get. Had to take a taxi. Need to know if I can reclaim that cost, The IP PoC is upset as I'm late and she doesn't really have time to brief me. We struggle through.*

**12 noon to 3pm** - *We did the fieldwork, everything went basically fine, but we achieved fewer interviews than we'd hoped.*

**3pm** - *Return home on time, early because travelling at night is not wise. Confirm my safe arrival back home. Start analysing the data.*

monitor every aspect of the process, and what they must do in certain settings, such as if they are asked who the donor is, or if they are questioned at a checkpoint. Technology can be used to help monitors – for example there are now software that can hide the apps if monitors are stopped by the authorities or threatened.

No matter how experienced they are, monitors will crave **high quality briefings and trainings**. These are essential and donors may want to ensure that these are well executed. Trainings typically take two forms – initial 'generalised' training on the project, and safety protocols and 'visit specific' training on the IP and their work, the tools, and what to expect on the day. Donors can help by reviewing the materials, or even joining some trainings to make sure they are to standard.

## 6.5 Implementing Partners and TPM

Implementing partners are seen as being open to TPM, and usually making earnest effort to make best use of the data. They understandably object strongly to anything they consider to be inaccurate, citing examples where TPM implementers have failed to take into consideration either the full context of the work either in terms of the local reality, the thematic subject matter, or the modality of the implementer. There is an acknowledgement on the part of TPM implementers, that they can go further in terms of favouring the needs of implementing partners, and so creating a more balanced relationship, which is crucial to the overall success of such projects.

Respondents were asked about accountability to communities and came up with the following points.

## 10 WAYS DONORS CAN DEMOSTRATE ACCOUNTABILITY TO COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE TPM PROCESS

TPM implementers were asked how they feel they can improve. They said:

1. Above all, think in terms of monitor **safety**, especially in conflict-affected areas, making sure that sensitive data, such as the locations of targeted hospitals are never placed online unless in a highly secure, regimented way.
2. Prioritise **gender and social inclusion** when discuss the methodology (including sampling) with partners. It is challenging to reach vulnerable groups, but this has to be taken by all as a priority.
3. Ensuring that **consent** is gained and signed-for for any interview or action is essential. If monitors use and carrying devices, this can be done on the screen or using the audio function.
4. Ensure that your TPM provider and your own team are aligned and robustly adopting best practice with regards to **conflict sensitivity**. This should focus on monitors being alert to conflict risks in the community, but also includes being alert to the conflict risks presented by the TPM itself.
5. Ensuring that any **questionnaires are as short as possible** is key. It can be useful for the donor team to go through the questionnaire piloting process, putting themselves in the shoes of being a beneficiary or community member.
6. Keeping **sample sizes** to a practical minimum is important because communities often feel inundated by such interviews. Take advice from experts on sampling, but also use your own instinct – statistical reliability is important, but so is the impact of your TPM on communities and the time they dedicate to helping you.
7. Providing **feedback on findings to communities** where possible – this may or may not be wanted or sensible (depending on the topic), and where it is wanted, it may require a little creativity, such as finding a pre-existing meeting where the community comes together, at which to share

findings verbally. A brave donor may consider in particular sharing learnings and decisions around what it can do better in a given area. An abridged version of a report can also be considered.

8. **Liaising with other donors** to reduce the overall burden on communities is also worthy of consideration. It is unlikely that cooperation of this kind will eliminate the need to go to a particular community, but sharing data, and so knowing some general facts may allow you to shorten questionnaire lengths, or to understand the attribution of your intervention.
9. Ensuring that **GDPR** practices are followed; put someone in charge – inside the TPM implementer – of rigorously following GDPR.
10. Ensure that **data is end-to-end encrypted** wherever necessary. In some settings malicious actors may benefit from accessing data such as the location of projects. Most TPM providers are not using end-to-end encryption; while this is justifiable in certain settings in others it can create unreasonable risk.

## 6.6 Technology

Technology can be used in a range of ways to assist TPM.

**Data collection - devices**

Data collection through devices became mainstream around a decade ago. Such devices offer a wide range of benefits, in particular faster interviews and more efficient processing of data (Dette et al, 2016). They also offer other functionality that donors should be aware of and may want to discuss with their TPM partners;

- Supporting the Quality Control (QC) process by using audio clips to listen to and check at least parts of interviews
- Supporting the Quality Control (QC) process and evidencing that the interviews are bona fide through geo-tagging the location in which the interview took place.
- Improving reporting quality by using devices to take photos of any pertinent positive or negative findings at the location, or of verified assets.

> *"Embrace technology wherever you can, but be old-fashioned when you have to"*
>
> Implementer

**Surveying through telecoms providers**

Much of the costs and time included in larger-scale TPM relates to the deployment of monitors to engage with beneficiaries in remote areas. A company called GeoPoll has established direct relations with telecoms providers allowing the pre-targeting of community members, which may be useful for broad-scale surveys at a fraction of the cost and time required by conventional surveys, albeit with reduced reliability of sampling quality. Meanwhile the establishment of call centres for phone surveys is now far cheaper that it was ten years ago, it was said.

**Big data**

'Big Data' may be defined as the secondary analysis of very large datasets. At present, its usage in the field of TPM appears negligible, driven by factors such as interoperability (Price, 2018). However, the influence of Big Data on MEL and TPM may be significant. This 'real-world' data, for example from mobile phone usage, can provide telling insights into the actual social outcomes of interventions. For example, it is easy to imagine phone usage being taken as a proxy in a given geographical area for the impact of an infrastructure project. For now, donors may instead want to encourage LAs to make sure that they make reasonable effort to triangulate their findings with other available data sources.

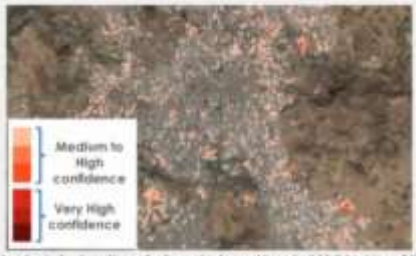
**Aerial options**

At present, the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or drones and satellite technology is not established in the TPM environment. Of note is that UAVs are illegal in some countries, and can also be seen as antagonistic.

Possible applications for this are however emerging; UAVs could be sent to undertake interviews, or more likely, to visually verify assets.

Use of satellites, however, has started to play a role. One expert in this field stated that there has been a rapid increase in the availability of satellite-based data, and that such data is increasingly used for contextual analysis, such as in the example from Iraq, to the right.

In this case, a specialist imaging firm used satellite to provide a donor with information of destruction around sites where investment had been made.

Detected destructions in Sana'a from March 2015 to May 2017

**Tracking devices**

For verification activities, in particular with regards to high-value assets, the attachment of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) or similar devices can be considered in place of the deployment of monitors.

# 7 Analysis and reporting

Reporting should ideally have been tried and tested before and during Inception. Beyond the basics considerations of OECD-DAC and Red Amber Green (RAG) ratings, it's key to think about contextualising and sharing of findings, i.e. to consider the use of dashboards, and how potentially to collaborate and share with other donors.

## 7.1 Options for reporting

While reporting will be very-much situation-specific, respondents were able to express the following general advice:

> *"Getting data is only half the battle; the challenge is getting actionable intelligence"*
>
> Implementer

- Think carefully about the balance of **frequency vs. depth**; many reports are too thick and too old
- Try to imagine or even **draft the report as early in the process as possible** – it can be highly illuminating to put oneself through the process and can greatly enhance the ToR
- **Speak to colleagues in other regions** first to see if they have templates that you can use, or that help you to understand better what you really want the reports to say
- Do include **photos** as these can drive credibility and interest, and make all the difference in driving traction of the report with key stakeholders
- Think about the **comparability of your data** – are there other data sets that you would want to compare to? How about disaggregation of data? Is showing age and gender breakdown enough, or can more be done?
- Consider asking your agency for a **'video-presentation'** so you can share the findings in a more visceral way
- Try to retain consistency in the report writer used, insisting on one person for regional work, for example.

## 7.2 RAG ratings

For certain kinds of TPM, in particular where IP performance is a main focus, respondents favoured the use of RAG (Red, Amber, Green) ratings. This is a simple visual device that provides a powerful, objective judgment of the performance of a programme. There is not as yet a standard definition for these three categories, and the norm is that each RAG rating is defined in a way that is appropriate to the individual project.

**Figure 13: Typical RAG-rating definitions**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 🔴 | **Red** | Serious issues identified that could fundamentally impact programming |
| 🟡 | **Amber** | Significant issues identified - but not severely impacting programming |
| 🟢 | **Green** | Strong performance, negligible or no issues identified that require action |

Respondents said that the key to using RAG-rating are that:

- The use of the RAG-rating approach be **discussed with IPs in advance**
- The **definitions for each of the three colour codes are robust**; mutually exclusive and precise
- That IPs have the **opportunity to challenge** any RAG rating (or other form of scoring).

Annex 3 includes a structure for a standard TPM report which blends RAG rating and OECD-DAC criteria.

## 7.3 OECD-DAC criteria

A compelling combination is to use RAG rating on each of the OECD-DAC criteria.

### OECD-DAC CRITERIA

These six criteria have become a backbone of evaluation and are often used in TPM, regardless of it being a form of monitoring (rather than evaluation) because they nonetheless provide a straight-forward and meaningful perspective on what needs to change.

1. RELEVANCE: Is the intervention doing the right things?
2. COHERENCE: How well does the intervention fit?
3. EFFECTIVENESS: is the intervention achieving its objectives?
4. EFFICIENCY: How well are resources being used?
5. IMPACT: What difference does the intervention make?
6. SUSTAINABILITY: Will the benefits last?

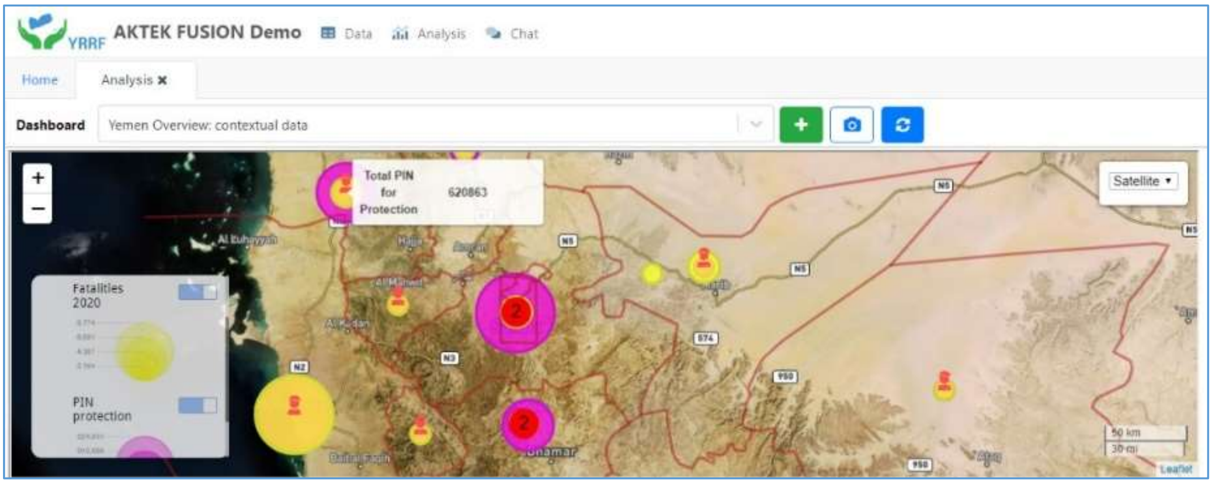
While these six are an established and widely-used set of lenses on performance, donors typically feel free to adapt these also to the circumstances. For example, value for money may be included. Or, depending on the project, it may be considered useful to include as standard 'cross-cutting' elements such as gender and social inclusion or conflict sensitivity.

## 7.4 Online reporting dashboards

'Dashboards' and data visualisations are increasingly created and used to share the results of a project (Corlazzoli, 2014). Such dashboards often take the form of showing RAG-rated scoring of a visited site, with access to the site being designed in such a way that each IP only sees their locations and reports. TPM practitioners feel that this increase in interest reflects these benefits:

- **Increased engagement with stakeholders**, especially senior stakeholders on the donor-side, thanks to a more insightful and usable interface, and more recent data
- **Ability to contextualise the data** against the broader situation
- **Opportunity to engage directly with IPs** and the LA and DC in once space
- That said, not all experiences with dashboards have been positive.
- Where dashboards have been trailed as a means of sharing reports, **editing and commenting on files collaboratively can prove challenging**
- It can be **difficult to drive users to the site** if the user journey away from and back to their own network is not simple, and if there is any considerable lag between fieldwork and uploading.

**Figure 14: Reporting dashboard example**




## 7.5 Collaboration between donors

Donors and TPM implementers agree that there is a clear and fairly pressing opportunity for donors to collaborate better with each other to undertake TPM. The principal reasons for this are:

- **Efficiency and Value For Money (VFM)** – avoiding duplication
- **Accountability to communities** – donors and TPM implementers alike are mindful of the burden they place on
- **Accountability to IPs**

Some reflection was put forward of a future situation in which donors create an integrated TPM system which allows donors to:

- Share their planned TPM **activities**
- Share standard TPM **templates** in order to
- Allow **comparison** between reports

At the same time, different actors are conscious that there are real-word practicalities which make this difficult. First of all, much of this data is sensitive, and sharing it may require a very safe, potentially end-to-end encrypted database. Secondly, there is the practicality of shared cost.

To this end, respondents view allowed the distillation of a 'phased' approach to collaboration for donors to consider.

> *"I know one implementer who is getting really tired because everyone is monitoring them, really … everyone should just come together."*
>
> Donor

> *TPM needs to stop being about value for our money, but everyone's money."*
>
> Implementer

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Awareness only | • In an effort to drive some efficiencies, donors share, in a systematic way, whom they plan to monitor, when and where. No explicit intention to share data presumed. |
| 2. Partial integration | • In addition to the above, an explicit agreement to share reports systematcially, albeit on certain conditions. Moreover, agreement to meet and discuss areas of concern and potentially to take collaborative action. |
| 3. Full integration | • A vision for the future that would entail common tools (so as to allow benchmarking), an integrated fieldwork plan to avoid duplication, and even shared costs. |

# ANNEXES

## ANNEX 1 – Bibliography

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## ANNEX 3 – Exemplar report structure

The structure below is one that is suitable for a TPM report describing the findings from a visit to an implementation location in order to assess performance.

| **Section #** | **Section name** | **Main purpose** | **Other information** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Context | To provide the reader with the background they need to make best use of the report. | This section should provide the necessary background on: (i) the rationale for the TPM itself (ii) the environment in and around the location (maps may be useful here) including the security situation and role of any key actors, (iii) the aims of the IPs work (iv) any challenges that the IP has experienced (v) a summary of any existing MEL data, and (vi) the objectives of the visit, assuming already agreed. |
| 2 | Executive summary | A summary of the main findings, conclusions and recommendations. | It is recommended to separate the summary (specific, evidenced findings) from conclusions (the inference from those factual findings) from the recommendations (what should be done in the light of the summary and conclusions.<br><br>Experience suggests that this section benefits from being no longer than 2 pages, and that recommendations are kept focussed, and that there is an indication of the perceived importance of each recommendation. |
| 3 | Main findings | To provide the detail on what happened during the visit. | Typically this will follow the OECD-DAC structure (relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability), adapted as the donor sees fit.<br><br>One option is for the TPM implementer to describe separately the case for, and then against, the IP having delivered on each OECD-DAC element. |
| 4 | Annexes | To supply any other pertinent additional information. | This should include the tool/s (discussion guide, questionnaire etc.) used and any other materials that may be pertinent, such as (i) relevant news article/s (ii) names of interviewees, if consent was given, and (iii) photographic evidence supporting contentions in the report. |