

Summary of Lessons from an Informal Conversation: Challenges of Conducting Remote Evaluation Missions

September 9, 2020

In this webinar, IEG staff shared early experiences and lessons with conducting evaluations under COVID-19 restrictions. The conversation focused on the main lessons learned from conducting the Chad Country Program Evaluation and the evaluation of World Bank's Support to Nutrition¹.



KEY LESSONS

Identifying the Right Stakeholders

- Reviewing relevant documents to identify stakeholders helped pinpoint key stakeholders who worked with the World Bank before. For this purpose, the Chad CPE team reviewed Country Program Frameworks, ICRs and project preparation documents to locate names and contacts of government officials, academia, CSOs.
- Like in regular missions, conducting contact tracing to identify stakeholders allowed for the “snowball” effect to find and interview key people. Several layers of contacts were identified and shared with the country office for further interviews.
- Setting up cascading country teams. The team conducting the Nutrition evaluation set up a cascade of teams in each of the countries. The team recruited local consultants who helped identify relevant stakeholders, set up remote interviews, and gather relevant government documents. The local consultants also worked from home due to COVID-19 restrictions in their respective countries.

Working with local consultants

- It is essential that local consultants have a good network of people to rely on. If a local consultant is well connected, teams were able to contact a larger number of stakeholders and even beneficiaries using remote technologies.
- When using local consultants, it is important to ensure that consultants' biases and political views don't get reflected in the responses. In the case of Chad CPE, the team did not find a local consultant who was bilingual so the team recruited a consultant from a neighboring country and it helped reduce this bias.
- Teams need to weigh pros and cons of hiring seasoned consultants or more junior consultants. Experience shows that hiring more affordable local consultants may not always yield needed results.
- The Nutrition evaluation team hired consultants with a mix of skills, not necessarily evaluation background, since the evaluation has a multisectoral focus, and sector specific knowledge was desired (health, agriculture, social protection). The team also hired more senior consultants to conduct interviews since the 8 case studies were conducted in parallel and team members were not able to participate in all of them.

Ethical and bias considerations of remote interviews

- Teams had to adapt to technological requests from and preferences of stakeholders. For example, if a group of stakeholders had a preference to one platform versus another, teams used the preferred channel.
- The Nutrition evaluation team did not request local consultants to record interviews conversations, yet instructed them to request permission to record some interviews and use judgement to decide whether

¹ The moderator of this session was Jeff Chelsky, Manager; Presenters were: Jenny Gold, Sr. Evaluation Officer, Maria De Las Mercedes Vellez, Evaluation Officer, and Felix Oppong, Economist. Closing remarks were provided by Oscar Calvo-Gonzalez, Director.

recording is needed for all interviews. Consent on recording was granted in all cases where they were asked.

- The Chad CPE team, prepared government officials for interviews by: a.) sending a one-pager introduction to the evaluation; b.) clearly stating that the evaluation is focused on World Bank's work not the government; c.) sending questions (in local language) in advance, so the officials could arrange for the right person to be present during the interview; and d.) alerted respondents ahead of time that their responses will remain confidential.
- Teams relied on local consultants to interpret non-verbal communication in the remote interviews.

Budget and Time Considerations

- Data collection through interviews took longer in the new environment than in a regular mission that condenses most of the interviews into a 2-week period. Relevant internal and external stakeholders were more difficult to reach. Additionally, staff had to adapt to differences in time zones to conduct the interviews, sometimes early in the mornings or late at nights, which only allowed for two hours of meeting at a time.
- Like regular missions and depending on the evaluand and the complexity of the case study protocol, additional collection of secondary data and review of documents could increase budget for staff and/or consultant time.



UNEXPECTED POSITIVE ASPECTS

- Some respondents were more open and willing to share information online than they might have been in a formal office environment.
- Working closely with local consultants and having more time to identify stakeholders made it possible to find the right people.
- Interlocutors working from home due to COVID often had a higher level of comfort.
- The availability to listen to the recording of an interview multiple times is an advantage.
- TTL and team members have a chance to join remote meetings in different countries, where otherwise they would have been away on business travel or mission.
- Missions can be cost-effective reducing travel expenses for multiple team members.
- Interviewees during remote interviews are able to pull up documents and share them on the screen during interviews, which help with responses.



MISSING PIECES & OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE EXPLORATION

- Field work (particularly outside of capital cities) and direct observation are missing pieces of evaluation work under COVID restrictions. It is important to find new ways to directly observe project impact and outputs.
- Working with the CLEAR Centers helped identify some stakeholders.
- IEG teams need to identify and employ new methods and technologies for evaluations to conduct data collection remotely. This may have implications for the scope of some of the work and methodologies. It also may require greater leveraging of local resources, including media and tools to reach out to stakeholders in a more cost-efficient way.