European Commission

evaluation support service

Evaluation in hard-to-reach areas

Constraints, techniques, and ethical aspects

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- Around **2 billion people** and **half of the world's poor** live in fragile or conflict-affected states (**FCAS**).
- **2016**: EU's development cooperation with **FCAS** represented **52.8% of total DEVCO** commitments.
- **2019**: commitments of **DAC members in FCAS = 60%** of overall expenditure.
- **Logistic and security risks make the travel to some areas of FCAS particularly challenging – sometimes impossible.**

- Apart from **FCAS** there are **other areas** where traveling is particularly challenging:
  - ✓ Post-disaster areas (*natural, man-made*)
  - ✓ Areas with other physical, logistical, security or health-related obstacles
- We define these regions of the world "**Hard-to-reach areas**".
- This definition includes but is larger than FCAS

- A traditional approach to evaluation in hard-to-reach areas is destined to fail:
  - ✓ professional evaluators available to travel to these areas is limited
  - ✓ security risks make conventional field missions unrealistic
- DEVCO evaluations in these areas are very few
- However, there are solutions, requiring the use of specific methodologies and tools
- They are being used since a few years by different agencies
- They are innovative in an evaluation context, but consolidated in other contexts

Recently (Feb to Jun 2019) the ESS of DG DEVCO organized a cycle of conferences to share with DEVCO/EUD staff and the global evaluation communities some lessons from the use of these techniques.

Ultimate goal: to **encourage OMs in Delegations and HQ to evaluate their interventions in hard-to-reach areas** by calling their evaluators to use suitable evaluation techniques that have been tried and tested by further agencies in similar contexts.

Some lessons from this initiative

(video recordings, slides, reference literature are accessible from here)

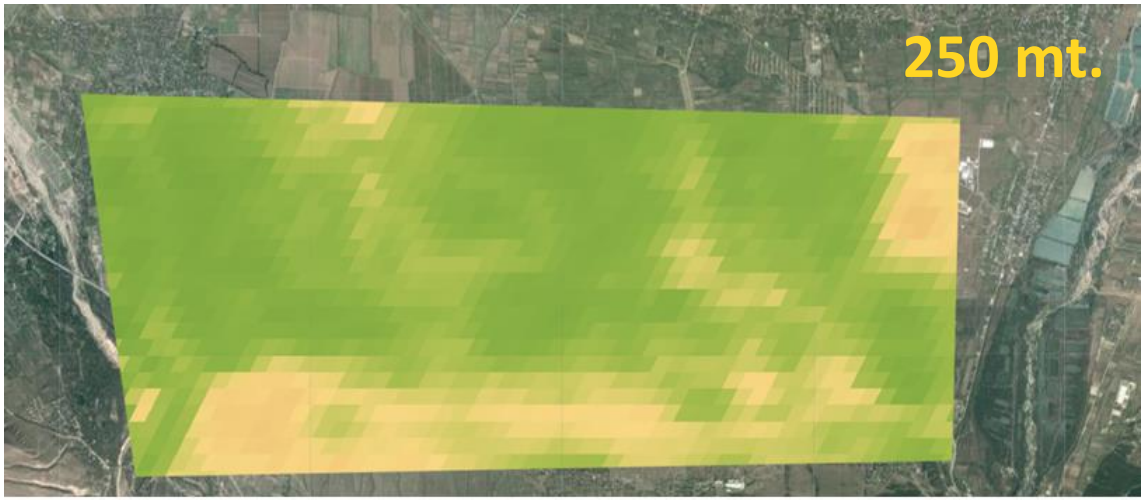
Use of geo-spatial data

- Satellite data for both outputs and outcomes analysis
- Of immediate application in some contexts *(land use and planning, forestation, agriculture, environmental projects…)*
- Require substantial interpretation work when applied to other contexts *(migrations, impact of civil infrastructures on wealth of local populations…)*
- Sometimes they can support analysis in unexpected fields *(violent extremism…)*
- Important to validate findings with field visits
- No need for skilled evaluators for validation work

Use of geo-spatial data

The resolution of free satellite images increased enormously over time (from 250 to 10 mt.)

Commercial satellites deliver images with even higher definitions (up to some cms.), but their cost is extremely high and the coverage may be lower.



Use of geo-spatial data

Satellite data are available in **time series**

- They allow to see changes over time
- They allow to reconstruct missing baselines *(with limitations)*

Important **analysis work** is needed to interpret data

Public satellite data are free; main providers are:

- Copernicus (delivering also 6 core services: Climate Change, Marine Monitoring, Atmosphere Monitoring, Land Monitoring, Security, Emergency Management)
- NASA

Mobile-phone based feedback mechanisms

- Allow gathering of a large amount of data
- Used to administer:
  - ✓ SMS-based surveys
  - ✓ Messaging-based surveys *(require smartphones)*
  - ✓ Interactive voice recording surveys
  - ✓ Interviews through call centers
- Benefits
  - ✓ Mobiles are widespread, easy to use and cheap
  - ✓ No need to use smartphones for SMS surveys
  - ✓ Versatility
- Problems
  - ✓ Bias to phone owners
  - ✓ Literacy bias *(for text surveys)*
  - ✓ Privacy risks
  - ✓ Trust

Surveys by local enumerators

- Administered in the field, face-to-face
- Allow gathering of a large amount of data
- Can be administered by local enumerators
- Require preparation and training time
- Different supports to be used depending on security conditions
  - ✓ Tablets
  - ✓ Smartphones
  - ✓ Paper-based

Surveys with tablets / smartphones

- Specialised sw allows offline data entry – online transmission or online-online
- Handhelds and software are cheap
- Data collection is fast
- Data automatically transmitted to server
- Post-collection processing is largely automatic, fast, reliable – but requires control
- Handhelds can be reused
- Requires logistics' planning
- Discreet but visible; smartphones are less visible than tablets
- Not to be used in case of security threats, where these tools are banned or culturally inappropriate

Surveys by local enumerators

Paper-based surveys

- To be used when use of handhelds is not advisable
- Thought, not exempt from risks in extreme situations
- Lengthier data collection process
- Very time absorbing post-collection process

Surveys by local enumerators

Some **common issues, different solutions**

- Data anonymization is imperative, irrespective of the support used
- Data to be destroyed in case of hostility: easy with handhelds, more difficult with bunches of paper
- Verification of the work of enumerators: easy with geo-tracking in secure environments, need for random phone calls or a ghost coordinator in insecure environments

Further opportunities

Radio programmes; to inform local beneficiaries of a survey, providing them with contacts for complaining with the work of surveyors etc.

Monitoring of social platforms; additional method to inform about a survey, gathering and analyzing reaction to an event etc.

Additional, non-tech opportunities exist and proved very effective in some contexts *(child drawings…)*

Situation in constant evolution

What we have learnt (1)

- **Never, ever, under any circumstance put at risk the security of beneficiaries and of surveyors – not even unconsciously.**
- Need for trade-offs between data robustness and no evidence at all
- Limits and reliability of the evaluation to be acknowledged and reported
- Adequate preparation time to be planned for in the ToR
- ToR must already include indications of the approach we seek; timeline and efforts must be consequent: the ESS is here to help!

What we have learnt (2)

- Some common ToR underestimations:
  - *Non provision for context-specific methods*
  - *Preparation time (including tool development)*
  - *Training time of enumerators*
  - *Time for developing the surveys*
  - *Time for data processing*
  - *Expertise for statistical / image analysis*
  - *Equipment costs (if needed)*
- Never rely on one single method of evidence gathering: this is always true, even more when evaluating in these contexts
- Don’t over-focus on technologies: they are a mean to achieve an end, not a mean *per se*

What we have learnt (3)

- When evaluating in FCAS, **conflict sensitivity** is a **further evaluation criterion**
- All interventions in FCAS should be designed with CS in mind but this is not always the case.
  - ✓ Even in these cases, CS can and shall be assessed

Do you or any of your colleagues plan to launch an evaluation in a hard-to-reach area?

If you are staff of an EU Delegation, contact the ESS as early as possible for a customised support – *helpdesk@evaluationsupport.eu*

If you are not a EUD staff, feel free to use the materials of our conference cycle and the further literature as references and monitor the library frequently, as we will add further references even in the future.

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Thank you !
Questions ?