



Executive Summary

Remote Control Project Management

Attacks upon aid workers have been [on the rise](#) for much of the past decade, according to the Aid Worker Security Database. The last two years, 2010 and 2011, have seen significantly elevated levels of attacks on aid workers in Afghanistan. Such a trend has increasingly led international organisations, NGOs, donor agencies, private firms and other implementing agencies involved in insecure environments to develop [“remote” programming](#) models. These rely upon host-nation personnel to undertake ground-level activities while enabling certain elements of management, oversight, fundraising and operations to be coordinated from a relatively more secure location (e.g., Nairobi in the case of Somalia or Amman in the case of Iraq). Such a topic is of increasing relevance to Afghanistan. *Outlook Afghanistan* and others have reported that aid agencies in Afghanistan are concerned about [future security conditions](#) and that some are already [undertaking remote programmes](#) in particularly insecure parts of the country.

This reviews key approaches to remote programming, particularly those identified by the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI), which has been particularly active in studying remote programming. NCCI identified the following [“remote programming modalities”](#): (i) remote control, (ii) remote management, (iii) remote support and (iv) remote partnering. Remote control programming involves the centralisation of all decision-making authority among expatriate personnel based in a safe location and the delegation of on-the-ground implementation to host-nation staff in a conflict-affected location. Remote management is similar but generally involves increased delegation of decision-making authority to personnel in the field. The third approach, remote support, enables the “local” staff members on the ground to manage day-to-day activities; the remote managers primarily oversee financial management, donor reporting and capacity building. Lastly, remote partnering allows the international institution to serve as a financial intermediary, raising funds for activities which are completely managed by an experienced, accountable in-country partner.

The approaches noted above are reflected to varying extents in case studies of Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia which are included in the full report. However, given the complexity of these cases, this summary limits itself to reviewing overarching good practices and lessons learnt which emerged in several contexts. These key points, which are summarised below, may be useful for stakeholders in Afghanistan if they continue to consider the potential introduction or expansion of remote programming methods.

- **Plan for Remote Management:** According to one NGO, programmes should be designed with a contingency plan for remote management which can be activated if programme managers are re-located to a safer context.
- **Develop Accountability Networks:** Many organisations remotely managing projects establish [relationships with stakeholders](#) that can help to independently verify that projects are being implemented well and as intended.
- **Build Capacities for Remote Management:** It is important to [build the capacities of local counterparts](#) to ensure host-nation staff members are prepared to make many day-to-day decisions regarding project activities.
- **Establish Networks to Share Good Practices and Lessons Learnt:** The report “Once Removed” highlights the importance of establishing [coordination bodies and networks](#) that allow agencies involved in remote programming to share good practices and lessons learnt. In Iraq, for instance, this task was largely taken up by NCCI.

In addition to such technical issues, the full report also reviews issues such as the ethicality of remote-control management and concerns that the departure of foreign, expatriate programme staff in places such as Afghanistan may in fact increase the threat faced by their national counterparts.

WANT TO READ MORE? The full report on “Civil Society in Transitional Contexts” delves into further detail. To read the full report and others from the CFC, visit our Afghanistan Homepage at: www.cimicweb.org/cmo/afg.



Remote Control Project Management in Insecure Environments

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This document provides an introduction to “remote programming”, which is the management and oversight of aid activities in an insecure or inaccessible context from a relatively safer location such as a national capital or neighbouring country. It builds upon experience from Afghanistan as well as Iraq, Somalia and other contexts. Further information is available at www.cimicweb.org. Hyperlinks to source material are highlighted in blue and underlined in the text.

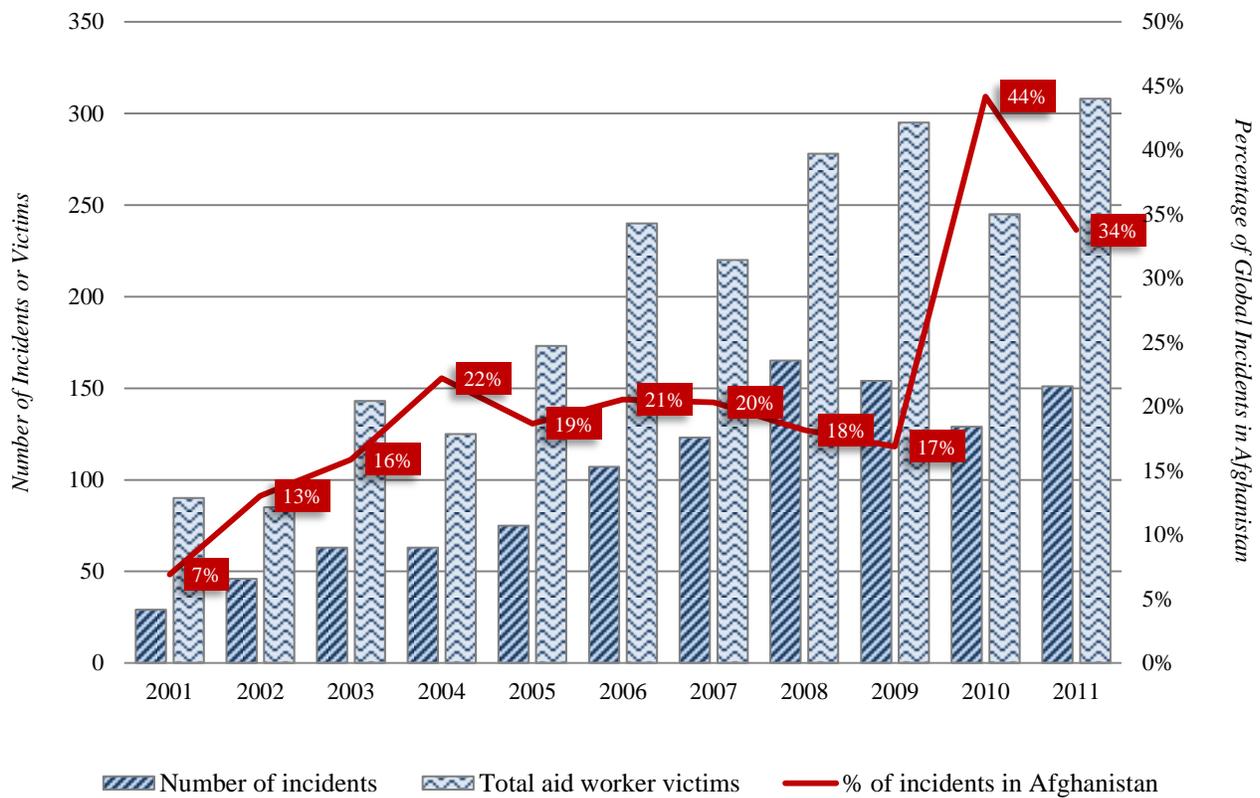
Attacks upon aid workers, including national and expatriate personnel, have been [on the rise](#) for much of the past decade, according to the Aid Worker Security Database. The last two years, 2010 and 2011, have seen elevated levels of attacks on aid workers in Afghanistan (*see Table 1, next page*). Humanitarian Outcomes highlights that the rise in attacks is partly driven by the role of international organisations (IOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in [insecure and insurgency-affected contexts](#) such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, Sudan (Darfur), Sri Lanka and Yemen. Such incidents have also been in part driven by international donor agencies’ increasing focus upon conflict-affected countries which commonly experience mid- and post-conflict violence, high rates of criminality and attempts by armed groups to either capture or discourage aid provision. For instance, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) says that aid to fragile and conflict-affected states grew from [USD 12 billion per year in 2001](#) to USD 46.7 billion in 2009, at which point it equalled [37% of worldwide development assistance](#).

Such a trend has increasingly led IOs, NGOs, donor agencies, private firms and other implementing agencies involved in insecure environments to develop new and “remote” programming models, according to a 2006 paper on [“Providing Aid in Insecure Environments”](#). These rely upon host-nation personnel to undertake ground-level activities while enabling certain elements of management, oversight, fundraising and operations to be coordinated from a relatively more secure location (e.g., Nairobi in the case of Somalia or Amman in the case of Iraq). Such a topic is of increasing relevance to Afghanistan. *Outlook Afghanistan* and others have reported that aid agencies



in Afghanistan are concerned about [future security conditions](#) and that some are already undertaking remote programmes in particularly insecure parts of the country. For instance, two NGO country directors in Afghanistan told researchers from Humanitarian Outcomes that they had received instructions from their respective headquarters to develop plans for the [remote management](#) of their operations from neighbouring countries.

Figure I. Attacks against Aid Workers Globally and in Afghanistan, 2001-2011¹



Source: Humanitarian Outcomes, [Aid Worker Security Database](#), 2012.

Note: The numbers of incidents and victims reflect global figures and are not specific to Afghanistan.

This report begins with a discussion of the main approaches to remote programming employed by humanitarian and development agencies before turning to the following case studies: Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. It concludes with a selection of lessons learnt, which have been identified by researchers, IOs, NGOs and others, that may apply to particular stakeholders in contemporary Afghanistan. While the report primarily addresses the technical elements of remote programming – the “how” – it is important to note that researchers and humanitarian practitioners have also raised concerns regarding the ethicality of these approaches. For instance, a 2009 report on [“Trends in Violence against Aid Workers and the Operational Response”](#) says that international stakeholders often – and without evidence – believe that local staff members are less likely to be attacked or that they fully recognise

¹ “Victims” include those who were killed, injured or kidnapped during the incidents. It should also be noted that reporting of security incidents involving aid workers is reportedly handled inconsistently, and organisations may not report such incidents in public databases such as the Aid Worker Security Database. Hence, statistics here should be taken as indicative and partial rather than as comprehensive.



the security threats that they could face under a remote programming arrangement. However, national staff (e.g., Afghan personnel of IOs or NGOs) and their families reportedly face significant security risks. Furthermore, research suggests that there may be a correlation between growing adoption of remote programming and an increase in [attacks against national staff members](#). That is, it becomes more likely that armed groups will target local staff members when fewer international personnel are present. Hence, research from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and other organisations suggests that [ethical dilemmas](#) must be carefully considered – and the threat posed to national staff members must be carefully considered and mitigated, if feasible – before such arrangements are put into place.

Options for Remote Management

One of the organisations that has been most active in considering issues of remote programming is the NGO Coordination Committee in Iraq (NCCI). Several of NCCI's members undertook remote forms of programming during particularly insecure periods in Iraq over the past nine years, at least in particular locations, and thus developed a degree of experience in this area. NCCI identified the following "[remote programming modalities](#)": (i) remote control, (ii) remote management, (iii) remote support and (iv) remote partnering. The content below, unless otherwise stated, emerges from Greg Hansen's 2008 briefing paper for NCCI on "[Operational Modalities in Iraq](#)", which provides a succinct description of each approach.

Remote Control

Remote control programming involves the centralisation of decision-making among expatriate personnel based in a safe location and the delegation of on-the-ground implementation to host-nation personnel in a conflict-affected location. Hansen wrote that this involves "the wholesale transfer of risk to national staff with no meaningful responsibility being placed in their hands". That is, the individuals taking risks on the ground by undertaking humanitarian or development activities are not formally authorised to make decisions about the project or programme in question. Correspondingly, little emphasis is placed upon building the long-term capacity of local personnel. Such an approach is reportedly undertaken only for short periods of time in extremely volatile contexts. For instance, an organisation may attempt remote control approaches in order to establish a short-term foothold in a particular location before it is able to set up full-fledged operations there. Or, remote control could be put in place if international personnel are evacuated for a very short period of time. While remote control programming could reportedly be attempted for lengthier periods of time, Hansen writes that it is not ideal given that personnel managing activities do not get to know the context, may not recognise the need for changes in programme design or delivery and little ability to ensure that aid is being used either effectively or as intended. Aid ineffectiveness and corruption thus become increasingly likely.

Remote Management

Remote management bears many similarities with remote control programming given that many of the key managers and decision-makers are located in a safe environment far from where implementation is taking place. However, remote management generally involves increased delegation of decision-making authority to personnel in the field once systems have been put in place to ensure "communications, accountability, and effectiveness". Hansen writes that such an approach is commonly employed – and prepared in advance – by organisations which believe they may need to re-locate expatriate staff to safer areas in the same country or abroad for weeks or months at a time due to deteriorating security conditions on the ground. Given the preparation that strong remote management requires, NCCI says that it is "not for newcomer agencies" but could be employed by those with "a certain depth of experience in the context and some reliable organisational infrastructure already in place".



Remote Support

While both remote management and remote control give primary decision-making authority to expatriate project managers sitting in a safe location, remote support enables the “local” staff members on the ground to oversee day-to-day activities, according to Hansen. The remote managers, who tend to be expatriate personnel, engage primarily in financial management, donor reporting and capacity building. Such an approach requires either highly capable programme managers in the insecure context or sustained attention to capacity building, perhaps by arranging trainings either “in the field” or in a third location (e.g., a neighbouring country). Such an approach is described as being particularly applicable to organisations which have been operating in a particular country for extended periods of time and have trusted local personnel, particularly managers, in place to oversee activities on the ground. A paper published by the Somalia NGO Consortium further notes that the stakeholders implementing projects via a remote support arrangement must not only be capable but also [politically or socially neutral](#) such that their work is not seen as in any way partisan or supporting any particular side within an on-going conflict.

Remote Partnering

While remote support involves continued engagement by an international humanitarian or development agency, remote partnering essentially allows the international institution to serve as a financial intermediary. A local organisation engages in all on-the-ground management and oversight. In this case, the international partner primarily engages in fundraising and administrative backstopping for the local partner but would likely not engage in capacity building given that the local partner would need to have [substantial internal capacities](#) and accountability mechanisms in order for remote partnering to function, according to a 2010 report on international NGOs in Iraq. While remote partnering most commonly involves local NGOs to undertake activities, Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer and Jean S. Renouf from Humanitarian Outcomes also note that [similar partnerships](#) may also be established with national or local government institutions, with private companies (international or national) in the area or with community-based organisations such as traditional councils or bodies such as Community Development Councils² (CDCs) in Afghanistan.

Country Case Studies

The approaches noted above are reflected to varying extents in the following country case studies of Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, three countries which have past experience with remote programming.³

Afghanistan

A 2009 document from the ODI Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) highlights that, in recent years, Afghanistan has been more affected by [attacks against aid workers](#) than any other country except Sudan (the Darfur region, in particular). Between 2006 and 2008, the Aid Worker Security Database highlights that there were approximately [eight times as many attacks](#) on aid workers in Afghanistan as in Iraq. The causes of these attacks are also reportedly changing. The Afghanistan NGO Safety Office (ANSO) finds that nearly two-thirds of attacks had, before 2008, been “economic” in nature, often involving [robbery or disputes over contracts](#) or employment. Since 2008, aid workers have reportedly been affected by political violence; two-thirds of all attacks on aid workers are

² CDCs are [community-based councils](#) focused upon decision-making regarding local development priorities, projects and planning. These were established under the National Solidarity Programme, which was funded by the international community, managed by the Afghan Ministry for Rural Rehabilitation and Development and implemented primarily by NGOs and some IOs.

³ However, it should be noted that these countries primarily involved the remote management of humanitarian activities intended to relieve immediate suffering rather than the sorts of reconstruction, development and stabilisation work which has been the focus of many international actors in Afghanistan today.



believed to be political in nature and perpetrated by insurgents. For instance, [ANSO's final 2011 report](#) says that 100 attacks against aid workers were perpetrated by insurgent groups, 48 by criminals and 15 by international military forces. The aforementioned 2009 [HPG report](#) states that insurgent fighters in Afghanistan understood that the counter-insurgency strategy included a significant focus upon civilian humanitarian and development assistance and, thus, came to see “all Western-based international humanitarian organisations [...] as partisan”.

However, organisations in Afghanistan have reportedly resisted the adoption of remote programming and have instead attempted to maintain a [low profile](#) to avoid being targeted, according to the 2009 HPG report. In a 2006 study, Farahnaz Karim finds that NGOs had, at that time, pursued a [“localisation” strategy](#). This tact, which was reportedly used by NGOs during the 1990s, involved a combination of “low visibility”, “increased reliance on local staff” and “partnering with local agencies”. All activities were undertaken by local staff members, who were increasingly recruited from the specific areas where aid was being delivered rather than from nearby cities or neighbouring provinces (to help ensure that they would not be attacked by their fellow community members). Local *shuras* (councils) and, in a small number of cases, governmental bodies were also given roles in projects to enhance local acceptance. *Shuras*, being widely accepted venues for local decision making, were seen as helping protect and legitimise aid projects.⁴ In 2006, when Karim’s report was published, localisation was increasingly being adopted, but [sub-contracting](#) was more common. Whereas partnership involves a capable local organisation able to implement programmes, sub-contracting more often involved local organisations or firms which delivered concrete and narrowly-construed services.

A subsequent study by Humanitarian Outcomes published in 2010 found increasing evidence that [remote programming had increased](#), though the extent of its use was unclear and contested. For instance, one individual involved in humanitarian coordination in Afghanistan said that two-thirds of international NGOs employed some degree of remote programming. A donor representative said that one-third of its resources were going to projects which were being remotely managed. NGO representatives, however, said that remote management only accounted for a minute percentage of their projects. Such different assessments of the status of remote programming may in part stem from different perspectives regarding the practice, with some only classifying a project as remotely managed if the manager is based outside of the country where activities are being implemented. Aid agencies in Afghanistan told the researchers from Humanitarian Outcomes that, unless assistance was deemed necessary to save or sustain lives, they were more inclined to shut down operations than adopt remote programming approaches, which they considered ineffective and difficult to monitor with any degree of confidence.

One of the only organisations in Afghanistan to actively share its current [remote management strategy](#) is Tearfund, an international NGO which moved its expatriate area coordinator from Kandahar to Kabul due to security concerns. As Stoddard, Harmer and Renouf found, the NGO was concerned that tribal differences among key Afghan staff members in Kandahar would cause problems for the organisation in the absence of an on-site expatriate programme manager. To blunt such tensions, Tearfund established a *shura* which included the five programme heads from its Kandahar office. This *shura* was a management structure rather than the sort of traditional *shura* used in Afghanistan to facilitate decision making. All other staff members were also permitted to participate in *the shura*’s deliberations. The role of *shura* coordinator rotated among the members, thus preventing any one individual from controlling the body. This approach reportedly helped to manage conflicts and tensions among staff members, showed respect for the local forms of governance, prevented fraud or corruption by ensuring all *shura* members oversaw one another and prevented any one individual from being over-burdened. In

⁴ As The Liaison Office in Afghanistan writes, informal bodies such as “shuras solve most of the country’s disputes, from the very minor to those threatening to security and stability. These bodies can enjoy [impressive reach and local legitimacy](#)”.



addition, the expatriate area coordinator in Kabul was able to get multiple perspectives on any situation by contacting the five senior members of the *shura* separately. However, the *shura* also created some challenges. Decision-making slowed given the need to gather multiple views and allow discussion, and the *shura* system itself was slow to take off until its modus operandi gradually developed into a workable form. In addition, some staff members from particular Pashtun sub-tribes reportedly called for the appointment of a single and strong *shura* leader, which they felt would be more effective than the rotating position of *shura* coordinator.

An [evaluation of Tearfund's remote approach](#) from 2011 specifically focused upon monitoring and accountability issues. It noted that the *shura* system was overall effective and mirrored Pashtun approaches to management while yielding documentation, including minutes of *shura* meetings and weekly reports, that could be utilised in more structured management and monitoring processes by the Kabul-based coordinator. That report further noted that several other accountability mechanisms and sources of data were also instituted, including photos of project sites and activities, input from project beneficiaries, data (e.g., from surveys) collected by Tearfund staff members and information gathered by Kabul-based specialists during periodic visits to Kandahar. Such an approach is largely validated by the 2011 evaluation, though the evaluator noted problems such as: (i) visits to project sites were rare; (ii) external experts who visited project sites were not necessarily given accurate information given that they were seen as outsiders; (iii) local staff in Kandahar continue to require training on monitoring and donor reporting; (iv) mechanisms for collecting informal feedback and comments from beneficiaries and others during project implementation were not in place; and (v) beneficiary feedback was almost exclusively channelled through project staff rather than to an independent monitor.

Despite the sorts of challenges noted above, Tearfund's example demonstrates that at least some aid agencies in Afghanistan are actively developing approaches to remote programming which are adapted to the local context. That said, other examples are relatively more difficult to identify given that remote programming has not been as thoroughly studied in Afghanistan as in Iraq, where NCCI and other organisations actively sought to capture and articulate good practices and lessons learnt.

Iraq

Remote management within Iraq increased sharply in 2003 after facilities belonging to the United Nations and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) were bombed, according to a seminal 2011 study on aid delivery in insecure contexts, "[Stay and Deliver](#)", from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). That study notes that the vast majority of international aid workers re-located to Jordan after those bombings and suggests that expatriate personnel only gradually began to re-deploy to the field in recent years.

A number of different approaches to remote programming were reportedly adopted in Iraq, according to an [NCCI briefing paper series](#) on "NGOs' and Others' Humanitarian Operational Modalities in Iraq". Yet, despite the widespread coverage of remote programming in Iraq, few details are available about how remote management actually operated in practice. One document that does provide [case studies](#) for how NGOs approached remote programming in Iraq comes from Colin Rogers while at the University of York. Rogers's report provides case studies of three organisations that attempted remote programming, and he specifically looks at the following items: (i) types of implementing personnel in Iraq; (ii) background of international staff; (iii) approach to Iraqi staff capacity building; (iv) project management methods; (v) reporting; and (vi) monitoring and verification. What he found were three different cases which reflected the practical variations within and options for remote management.



Table I. Case Studies of Remote Programming from Iraq

| Element | NGO A ⁵ | NGO B | NGO C |
|--|--|--|---|
| <i>Types of Implementing Personnel</i> | Iraqi staff members (without humanitarian experience) | Iraqi staff members (mostly with humanitarian experience) | Other international NGOs and Iraqi NGOs (with humanitarian experience) |
| <i>Background of International Staff</i> | No experience in Iraq or Arabic language skills | No experience in Iraq or Arabic language skills | Middle Eastern, with native Arabic language skills |
| <i>Capacity Building of Iraqi Staff</i> | Initial training in Iraq when the situation was more secure; follow-on training in Jordan | Initial training and mentoring in Iraq when the situation was more secure | None, but NGO C provides funds for partners in Iraq to obtain training |
| <i>Project Management Methods</i> | No management guidelines exist, but international staff consult Iraqi personnel before making decisions. | Administration, logistics and local security decisions made by Iraqi staff. Project decisions are made jointly by Iraqi staff and remote managers. | Projects are managed by partner NGOs in Iraq; technical assistance is provided by NGO C if asked. |
| <i>Reporting</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weekly written reports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Periodic written reports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ None |
| <i>Monitoring and Verification</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visits by senior Iraqi staff to project sites | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visits by Iraqi staff to project sites ▪ Photographs of project sites ▪ Check-ins with local stakeholders (e.g., community leaders, officials) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local/partner organisations handle all monitoring |

Source: Adapted from Colin Rogers, “*Accessing the Inaccessible: The Use of Remote Programming Strategies in Highly Insecure Countries to Ensure the Provision of Humanitarian Assistance*”, 2006.

As Table 1 suggests, the remote arrangements shared some similarities, such as the use of standard communications methods. However, the nature of expatriate personnel differed, with one NGO hiring international staff with Arabic language skills in order to avoid the misunderstandings which other NGOs encountered in communicating with Iraqi personnel. Other organisations were able to hire Iraqis with past humanitarian experience, which reportedly helped facilitate training and collaborative decision-making, while others relied upon individuals newer to NGO work. While some NGOs kept all decision-making with international personnel, others gave all or parts of management responsibility to Iraqis. As Table 1 shows, remote programming varies widely depending on specific approaches to hiring, training, decision making and so on.

While few reports discuss the practicalities highlighted by Rogers, many donors, implementing agencies and oversight bodies noted below have sought to assess the overall impact of remote programming in Iraq, which they commonly found to be negative. A number of statements extracted from studies, audits and evaluations of remotely-managed activities in Iraq are described below.

- The US Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR) noted in 2007 that many [private contractors](#) employed by the US government had used remote management methods which undermined project completion and accountability. A SIGIR “lessons learned” study says that “Bechtel and others moved many of their full-time staff to Amman, Jordan, where managers continued to provide oversight remotely. In some cases [...] this oversight proved too limited to ensure proper project completion.”

⁵ In the original report upon which this table is based, the NGOs were labeled C, D and E.



- A United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) evaluation states that all of its projects in Iraq were [negatively affected](#) by “remote control” management, which it describes as particularly inefficient due to increased costs. A separate UNIDO evaluation of a micro-enterprise support programme went further, stating that remote management through a project management unit (PMU) based in Jordan meant that [problems were reported late](#) or not at all to managers. In addition, external evaluators later found significant discrepancies between the data they collected in Iraq and the monitoring and evaluation data reported by personnel implementing the project in Iraq, thus raising questions about the veracity of information provided to project managers in Jordan.
- A [2007 Oxfam study](#) found that several donor agencies were hesitant or unwilling to finance aid delivery when the projects would be remotely managed. For instance, the European Commission reportedly was obliged to avoid financing [humanitarian de-mining](#) activities in Iraq given that its internal regulations limited its ability to fund such activities when they were remotely managed, according to an evaluation from the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD).
- The withdrawal of many expatriate aid workers [complicated capacity building](#) among Iraqi NGOs, according to the UN-affiliated *Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)*. *IRIN* cites a Basrawi NGO worker as stating: “Most Iraqi NGOs lost a golden opportunity to be in touch with international aid workers...to learn international standards of aid work.” Cécile Génot articulates a similar theme in a 2010 report for NCCI, noting that “cooperation between the highly structured INGOs, which generally have at least 20 or 30 years of experience in various contexts, and the newly created, often nebulously operationalized Iraqi NGOs could have been an [opportunity for learning](#) and development, particularly on the Iraqi side.”
- Lastly, NCCI’s Hansen writes that the challenge was not only how to remotely manage projects but also how to determine [when a situation had improved](#) to the point where remote management could be ended and international personnel could re-enter Iraq. Hansen believes that the decision to return to Iraq was poorly managed by organisations which had “[i]nadequately nuanced understanding of insecurity” in Iraq. Hence, he finds that many organisations remained outside of the country beyond the period when improved security would have permitted them to return and more closely manage their programmes.

While several stakeholders have presented recommendations for making remote programming more effective, as discussed in the following section of this report, others have noted that it may be [the only option](#) aside from ceasing aid delivery altogether. A report from the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University, for instance, cited an official from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) as stating: “Remote management is not ideal, but what is the alternative? It is the best possible solution – as long as we still have sufficient indicators and we can see the impact of what we are doing.”⁶

Somalia

Somewhat less information is available regarding the use of remote programming in Somalia. An inter-agency evaluation of UN activities in Somalia notes that [many NGOs and other organisations](#) had long maintained their head offices for Somalia outside of the country, particularly in Nairobi. For instance, *Médecins Sans Frontières* published an article in 2007 which indicated that “[m]any programs by [most agencies in Somalia](#) are set up in this ‘remote control’ or ‘hit’n’run’ as an operational starting point with no planned supervision other than occasional visits every few months.” Remaining international staff reportedly left Somalia in 2008 and 2009, at which point

⁶ This quotation reportedly appeared in the Tufts University study and was quoted in an Oxfam document. The source report does not appear to be publicly available at this point in time.



remote programming became a core of many organisations' approaches there. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) says [all of its projects](#) are remotely managed from Nairobi due to the "very special operating environment" in Somalia.

A report from the Somalia NGO Consortium further notes that "international actors are using [different programming modalities](#), including distance management, remote partnerships and remote support, to continue their operations and assure a certain level of programme quality". That same document notes that all forms of remote programming were applied in Somalia. Remote control approaches were reportedly applied in the case of straight-forward interventions, particularly the distribution of food and non-food items. Yet service delivery and social development activities employed remote support and remote partnership. For instance, two NGOs, Merlin and Action Against Hunger, had partnered with Somali health institutions (primarily in the relatively more secure Puntland region) to build their capacity and help them build trust with local communities.

As in Afghanistan and Iraq, the use of remote programming has also led to complaints and challenges. For instance, an evaluation of UNDP activities in Somalia found deficits in terms of [access to information](#) regarding the local context, the effectiveness and efficiency of aid delivery and the use of aid. The report stated: "Working from a distance or applying 'remote management' to a situation such as the one in Somalia means not only reduced access, but more importantly reduced information, a more limited capacity of analysis and an increased exposure to operational risks regarding effectiveness, cost efficiency and accountability." More simply stated, remote managers find it difficult to understand the local context, how their aid may be affecting conflict dynamics and whether or not assistance was being siphoned off by staff members or others. Limited knowledge regarding the use of foreign aid to Somalia has also exacerbated concerns that donor money could be feeding into militant groups such as *al Shabaab*, according to an article on "[Remote-Control Development](#)" published by Johns Hopkins University. The US government and others have, thus, reportedly sought to prevent the diversion of aid to armed groups in Somalia. Yet *ABC News* reports that many NGOs found the [anti-terror provisions](#) so strict and difficult to enforce that they essentially left them concerned that providing any aid in Somalia would open them to legal liability. To enable NGOs and others to respond to a severe famine in Somalia in 2011, for instance, the US government had to temporarily relax the anti-terror provisions in Somalia so that aid groups would be comfortable operating there. Of course, such accountability-related concerns become even greater in the event that remote programming approaches are adopted.

Another criticism levied against remote programming in Somalia is that some organisations do not pay adequate attention to the safety of their national staff members. An *IRIN* article from as far back as 2007 says that Somali staff is often instructed by foreign project managers based in Nairobi to go into [unsafe areas](#). The *IRIN* article quoted one Somali NGO worker as saying: "We cannot even say, 'look, this is too dangerous'. We simply become the new targets." While Somali staff members say they could perhaps have refused the instructions, doing so could have cost them their jobs. An evaluation by an inter-agency UN body, the IASC, concluded that such concerns were valid and that "[t]here is considerable scope for humanitarian organisations to provide national staff with [adequate security resources](#)" in Somalia.

The evidence regarding remote programming in Somalia also highlights some innovations. An article in *Humanitarian Exchange* magazine, for instance, states: "Although most agencies agree that remote management is far from ideal, some organisations have accumulated [knowledge and experience](#) that others could usefully learn from, given that remote management appears to be here to stay." For instance, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has led a project in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to monitor aid delivery using [SMS \(or "text"\) messages](#) from beneficiaries' mobile phones in Somalia. A *Reuters* article about the initiative says that the phone number for the SMS feedback system has been widely disseminated and that it is used both by



existing [project beneficiaries](#) to provide feedback and by individuals, particularly those displaced by conflict or drought, hoping to receive aid from the DRC for the first time. All messages are handled confidentially, and a dedicated team is reportedly in place to process the messages – thus allowing beneficiaries to be honest in identifying deficits within programmes or staff performance.

Lessons Learnt & Good Practices

As the case of SMS-based project monitoring in Somalia shows, remote programming has been the subject of innovation and lessons learning. Numerous reports and evaluations have also identified recommendations for remotely managing aid projects more effectively. A number of such recommendations, which may be useful for stakeholders in Afghanistan, are noted below.

- ***Plan for Remote Management:*** According to Tearfund, programmes are rarely designed with [the potential need for remote management](#) in mind. Yet the circumstances which commonly lead to the adoption of remote methods, such as large-scale attacks against aid workers, often arrive unexpectedly and leave organisations with little time to consider the details of how they will adapt activities to enable remote management. Instead, programmes may be designed with a contingency plan for remote management which can be put into place quickly while expatriate programme managers are re-locating to a safer context. In many cases, experts indicate that programmes will need to be simplified when remote management is put into effect. In addition, contingency funding may also need to be set aside – whether by the donor or the implementing agency – given that remote management comes with increased logistical and administrative costs.
- ***Develop On-the-Ground Networks to Enable Accountability:*** Many organisations remotely managing projects find it useful to have [strong relationships with key stakeholders](#) on the ground that can enable remote verification and monitoring if remote programming is implemented, says a report from Humanitarian Outcomes. These may include ties with local government officials, community leaders or influential locals (e.g., doctors, school principals or religious figures) who can be contacted via phone to ensure that on-the-ground staff is continuing to provide aid, avoiding corrupt practices and otherwise performing well.
- ***Build Partnerships for Third-Party Monitoring and Evaluation:*** Local NGOs, private firms and university departments, where they continue to operate, can undertake [independent monitoring and evaluation](#) of activities and report the results to remote managers, thus enabling aid agencies to receive relatively objective data on programme performance. Such monitoring and evaluation should reportedly be built around pre-determined indicators and should utilise, to the degree feasible, standardised data collection tools (e.g., surveys, questionnaires, etc.).
- ***Build Capacities for Remote Management:*** Good humanitarian and development practice emphasises the need to [build the capacities of local counterparts](#), according to Rogers’ report on “Accessing the Inaccessible”. Doing so is deemed particularly important in cases of remote management, where local staff members will be obliged to make many day-to-day decisions regarding project activities. Capacity building should reportedly focus both on technical project components (e.g., engineering, community mobilisation, etc.) and upon basic problem-solving and management skills. Research also suggests that there may be a need to build the confidence of national programme managers who may have become more accustomed to following directions than making decisions with relatively little support.
- ***Establish Networks to Share Good Practices and Lessons Learnt:*** The report “Once Removed” from Humanitarian Outcomes highlights the importance of establishing [coordination bodies and networks](#) that



allow agencies involved in remote programming to share good practices and lessons learnt. In Iraq, for instance, this task was largely taken up by NCCI, which issued several publications and organised events concerning remote programming and monitoring. Such networks can also serve a crucial function in helping international actors to identify proven local partners with whom to collaborate; such partners are often exceptionally difficult for remote managers to identify and assess.

The recommendations above are just a small number of those included within studies of remote programming, several of which have been cited throughout this document. Further ideas are presented in each of the reports and studies cited throughout the preceding sections.

Conclusion

As this report has demonstrated, international stakeholders have considered the need for remote programming in secure activities and have developed a range of options for continuing assistance delivery amidst daunting security conditions. Each has benefits and drawbacks any may apply to differing security conditions and organisational types. Issues such as ethics, security, aid effectiveness and continued assistance delivery all factor into such discussions and will likely continue to be weighed and discussed in Afghanistan as the transition process there progresses.