

## GUIDANCE NOTE FOR MANAGERS AND EVALUATORS

# Planning and Undertaking Evaluations in UNODC During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Other Crises

## INTRODUCTION

Evaluations undertaken during crisis, including the current COVID-19 Pandemic require standard processes and approaches to be reconsidered to address new challenges and constraints. These evaluations may require real-time information and assessment, evaluation of on-going programming to identify areas to adjust or ways to respond and adapt. The current pandemic has introduced new constraints and restrictions on evaluation and evaluative activities, including restrictions to travel and field missions for data collection and the potential for overburdening capacity of UNODC field offices and national stakeholders. However, the need for accountability and learning remain relevant and the role of evidence in policy and programming become even more imperative during a crisis. The Independent Evaluation Section (IES) of UNODC has developed this guidance to assist in determining when and how evaluations can be undertaken and provide the most utility to the organization and its work. This guidance note follows and builds upon the earlier paper “[UNODC’s Approach to Evaluation during Crisis](#)”. It will identify the expected risks and challenges to providing evaluative evidence during the COVID-19 Pandemic, reinforce the principles which must be adhered to when conducting evaluations and offer options for the contribution of evaluative work to ensuring evidence-based programming. This guidance note has been developed based on UNODC lessons learned as well as shared experiences and guidance of UN evaluation functions and evaluation and research networks and should be consulted during all evaluations. While this note aims to provide overall guidance, IES is committed to being responsive and flexible and will work in close collaboration with programme managers and evaluation teams to determine the best evaluation option. Finally, while evaluations undertaken during crisis must be adaptive and responsive, they must continue to meet both the [UN Evaluation Group \(UNEG\) norms and standards](#) and [UNODC evaluation quality standards](#).

## PURPOSE

The specific purpose of this document is to summarize the implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic on evaluations in UNODC and provide guidance for the planning and conducting of evaluations in UNODC during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as during other times of crisis or emergency. This guidance addresses continued contribution of evaluation and evaluative evidence to the organization including planning new evaluations. It also provides insight and support for undertaking evaluations, including identification of data collection methods and approaches, and guidance to ensure that evaluations started before the COVID-19 Pandemic can still be useful and adapted to the current situation. This note will help to ensure evaluations, planned and on-going, continue to meet UNEG and UNODC norms and quality standards as well as offering options when these norms and standards can’t be guaranteed. Finally, guidance will be provided to identify situations where, given the constraints and challenges raised by the COVID-19 Pandemic, the best option might be to postpone or cancel the evaluation.



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Specifically, this guidance note will:

- Establish the principles and considerations required for undertaking a UNODC evaluation during the COVID-19 Pandemic as well as during other crises or emergencies;
- Identify criteria for consideration when determining whether an evaluation can be undertaken;
- Identify evaluation options, tools and approaches which can be used for remote data collection and address the constraints and challenges of evaluation during a crisis;
- Ensure full representation of all stakeholders, including end beneficiaries, within the evaluation and safeguard the mandate of no one left behind; and
- Provide options for meeting evidence and information needs when an evaluation cannot be undertaken.

## AUDIENCE

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This guidance note has two primary audiences.

Programme and Project Managers (page 3): This guidance will ensure evidence and information needs are met during the current COVID-19 crisis and in future crises. It is meant to assist project and programme managers to plan for evaluations, determine the necessity for an evaluation, and identify appropriate options for meeting their evaluative and evidence needs. In the case of evaluations undertaken during the crisis, managers are advised to refer to the guidance provided in this note in the Terms of Reference of such evaluations.

Evaluation Teams (page 7): The guidance also supports external and independent evaluation teams undertaking evaluations in UNODC by clarifying many of the constraints and challenges of undertaking an evaluation during a crisis and offering options for addressing those challenges and formulating an evaluation design that will ensure a high quality and useful evaluation. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the evidence and information needs of UNODC as a whole and of individual project/programme managers are met.

## PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS

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All evaluations and evaluation activities should ensure a **do no harm approach** and adhere to **UNEG Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation**. This includes ensuring the health and physical safety for stakeholders, national and international evaluators and staff throughout the evaluation process. In addition, evaluations must avoid overburdening and/or off-loading work onto field offices. As many organizations will be relying on national capacity it is important to avoid overburdening national evaluators for data collection as well as national stakeholders with expectations to respond to data collection requests.

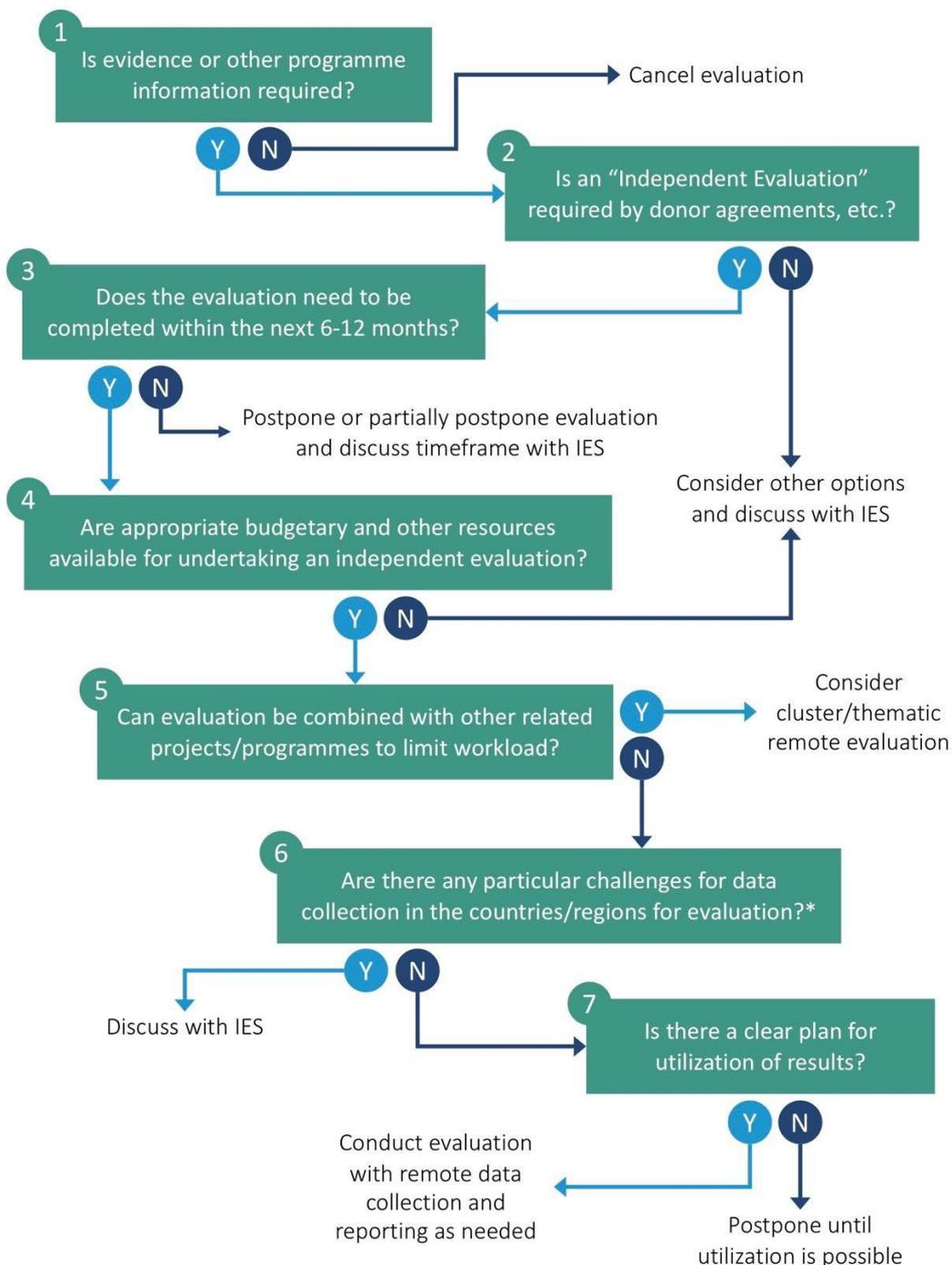
IES will continue to meet information and evidence needs of UNODC and its implementing partners. However, an independent evaluation should only be undertaken when there is a clear plan for utility and the needs for the evaluation results outweigh the risks and costs associated. To support these efforts IES has developed an evaluation decision matrix and is working to identify and develop methods that will meet the evidence and information needs, both real-time and traditional, applying diverse and innovative methods, including effectively using information technology and remote data collection.

Accountability, transparency and learning remain the core principles of evaluation work carried out by IES. All efforts will be made to safeguard the quality standards of evaluative work including representation of all stakeholder groups, leaving no one behind and adhering to UNEG Norms and Standards for evaluation. When this is not possible, the decision to undertake an evaluation will be weighed against the benefit of the evaluation results and all limitations will be clearly identified in the final results.

# GUIDANCE FOR UNODC PROGRAMME AND PROJECT MANAGERS

## PLANNING FOR AN EVALUATION DURING A CRISIS

### EVALUATION PLANNING DECISION TREE FOR PROJECT MANAGERS



**INDEPENDENT EVALUATION SECTION**

\* e.g. security issues, limited monitoring data, overburdened counterparts, unavailable contact information for stakeholders.

In the case that evaluative evidence is needed, but an independent evaluation is not required, the below options should be considered. However, these need to be discussed with IES to identify the best and most appropriate option and to confirm available support. It is important to note that while the below options can assist in meeting information and evidence needs, they do not constitute independent evaluations and the specific criteria for each will need to be determined:

- Thematic meta-synthesis<sup>1</sup> covering UNODC programmatic evaluations;
- Thematic meta-synthesis covering UNODC/Non-UNODC evaluations and studies;
- Expanded desk reviews, focused on the identification and analysis of key documents in relation with a specific project or programme;
- Evaluability assessments, focused on determining the extent to which a project, programme, or policy can be evaluated in a reliable and credible fashion at a future date; and
- External review/assessments carried out by external experts with minimal remote data collection and managed directly by the commissioning entity (project/programme manager);
- Please note that IES is not involved in the process of any of these evaluative activities as they do not constitute independent evaluations. While general evaluation guidelines may be consulted in planning and implementing these evaluative activities, no IES templates may be used and no reference should be made to an “evaluation”.

## ADDRESSING COVID-19 AND OTHER CRISES IN ON-GOING EVALUATIONS

Please note that this section only applies to UNODC evaluations which started with the data collection before the crisis. All other evaluations should refer to the previous section on planning evaluations to ensure that data collection tools are fully responding to and considering this crisis.

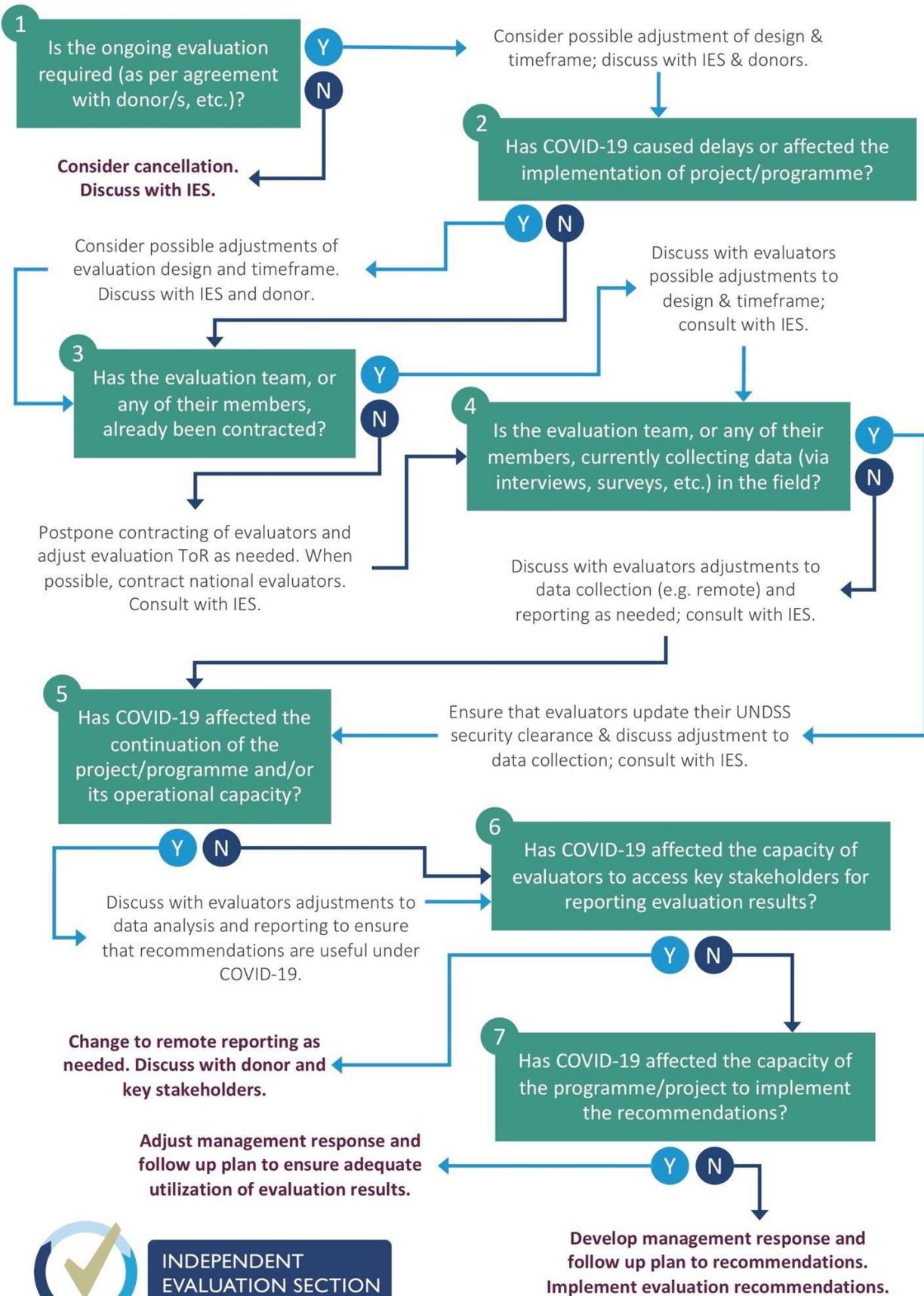
To ensure relevant and utilization focused evaluations, on-going evaluations in IES has developed areas for consideration and accompanying guidance for Project and Programme Managers. Depending on the stage of the evaluation, different responses and actions may be required. The decision matrix below will help guide the specific actions based on the stage of the evaluation.



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<sup>1</sup> A meta-synthesis is a systematic approach to searching, assessing, extracting and synthesizing evidence on a specific topic or thematic area from multiple evaluations, reports or studies. Options for meta-syntheses can be found at [https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/rainbow\\_framework/synthesise/synthesise\\_across\\_evaluations](https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/rainbow_framework/synthesise/synthesise_across_evaluations)

EVALUATION MANAGEMENT DECISION TREE FOR UNODC PROGRAMME/PROJECT MANAGERS OF ONGOING EVALUATIONS DURING COVID-19 AND OTHER CRISES



During the data analysis and drafting of the evaluation report the programme/project manager should communicate in an open dialogue with evaluators and IES on the information needs and any changes from the original ToR based on COVID-19. They should share any relevant data on COVID-19 responses and or impact to the programme as soon as available. Throughout the evaluation process the programme/project manager should remain open to innovative data collection tools and methods to respond to COVID and actively engage with IES and the evaluation team to ensure an evaluation design and final report that meet the evidence needs, adequately reflect the current situation to the extent possible and ensure adequate representation, leaving no one behind.



# GUIDANCE FOR EVALUATION TEAMS

## PLANNING FOR EVALUATIONS DURING A CRISIS

### COVID-19 AND CRISIS RELATED RISKS FOR EVALUATIONS

The global COVID-19 pandemic has led to changes in how UNODC as an organization operates and undertakes programming<sup>2</sup>. In addition to how UNODC operates, COVID-19 has also changed how evaluations are conducted worldwide. Indeed, evaluation sections across the UN system are currently adjusting evaluation approaches, postponing or cancelling field missions, and moving towards remote data collection methods, such as online surveys and virtual interviews with stakeholders. COVID-19 and the changes triggered by the pandemic pose important methodological, financial, and health-related risks to the conduct of evaluations, and it is important to put risk mitigation measures in place. IES is developing new and innovative evaluation approaches that decrease, as far as possible, the negative environmental impact of field missions in the long-term, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

In the context of crisis, where close engagement between IES and evaluators is necessary, this section provides concrete guidance on how to adapt evaluations to the changing context. Based on a qualitative assessment of the literature on evaluation during COVID-19 and of internal IES documents, table 1 below highlights some of the most important potential risks when conducting evaluations in the context of the current pandemic (and beyond) and proposes potential measures that can be taken to mitigate these risks. While table 1 identifies general risks and mitigation measures, table 2 below provides more concrete examples of how remote data collection and analysis methods can potentially be used in the context of COVID-19 and other crises.

Table 1: Risks and Mitigation Measures for evaluation design during crisis

Potential risk	Potential mitigation measures
Bias against under-represented groups in the selection of respondents as a result of convenience sampling due to travel restrictions and shifting institutional priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Select respondents in an inclusive manner that takes into account persons who are at a disadvantage due to discrimination, place of residence, socio-economic status, governance and vulnerability to shocks.</li> <li>• When appropriate, disaggregate data by individual characteristics (e.g. sex, age, income, disability, religion, ethnicity and indigenous status), economic activity and spatial dimensions (e.g. urban and rural).</li> <li>• Phase out and adjust data collection planning in order to ensure that under-represented groups (i.e. those affected by difficulties to collect data in the field) will be included in the data collection once travel restrictions are removed.</li> </ul>
Data gathered during evaluation is lower both in quantity and quality as certain data collection methods are not feasible due to travel restrictions and lockdown measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wherever feasible rely more on existing monitoring data collected prior to COVID-19.</li> <li>• Increase scope of desk-based review of programmatic and administrative data.</li> <li>• Explore usability of publicly available data, e.g. from UNODC RAB (World Drug Report, etc.), National Statistical Offices, other UN entities, NGOs.</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> UNODC Response to COVID-19 can be found here: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/covid-19.html>

Potential risk	Potential mitigation measures
Inability to conduct on-site data collection due to lockdown measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of remote data collection and analysis methods (see table 3 below for more details).</li> </ul>
Limited access to field sites for international consultants due to travel restrictions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While ensuring that safety requirements are fully met, rely more heavily on national evaluators, ideally in teams with international consultants providing guidance and quality assurance.</li> <li>• Leverage field office staff more actively to facilitate data collection from beneficiaries (while not involving field staff in the data collection itself to ensure independence).</li> <li>• All of the above should be considered in conjunction with avoiding the overburdening or off-loading of work onto others. Care should be exercised when considering roles and responsibilities for national evaluators and field office personnel.</li> </ul>
Limited availability of national evaluators due to growing demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temporary lowering requirements for national evaluators.</li> <li>• When needed, provide (online) training on remote data collection and analysis techniques.</li> </ul>
Limited availability of field office staff and counterparts due to COVID-19 response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liaise early in the planning process with field office to reach clarity about roles and responsibilities.</li> </ul>
Health-related risk of exposure to infection and spreading of COVID-19 by staff, evaluators, CLOs, and beneficiaries where on-site data collection is possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct in-person surveys outside and follow local social distancing and hygiene guidelines (e.g. 2 meters distance from key informant; fever checks/hand washing/personal protective equipment).</li> <li>• Only piggyback on activities and travel that are planned anyway for project implementation to minimize additional exposure through exclusive evaluation-related activities.</li> </ul>
Some core learning partners (CLPs) might be hesitant to partake in novel methodological approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All evaluation reports should have an extensive methodological section in which reasons for choice of novel data collection and analysis methods as well as their advantages and limitations are clearly stated.</li> <li>• Some of the more conservative CLPs should be engaged via more traditional methods (e.g. email instead of WhatsApp survey).</li> </ul>

## ADAPTING EVALUATION METHODS TO COVID-19

Considering the abovementioned COVID-19-related risks for evaluations, the current situation provides a window of opportunity to diversify the portfolio of data collection and analysis methods used by IES. Based on a qualitative review of the literature on new technology and ICT-based solutions in monitoring and evaluation as well as internal documents, table 2 below identifies remote data collection and analysis methods that could be used in the context of COVID-19 and beyond, as well as their limitations and specific requirements.

The table is not exhaustive but is rather intended to facilitate reflection within evaluation teams as to how evaluation methods can be adapted to crisis situations and what novel methods could be considered. Additional methods that are not covered here but could be potentially useful in the future include geospatial data analysis (e.g. use of satellite images to track crop production in alternative development programs) and the use of

anonymised mobile phone data (e.g. to extract and visualize movement and migration patterns among populations groups). Resources for these additional methods are included in the annex.

In addition, IES is currently developing a concept note on innovative data collection methods in emergencies. Once finalized this concept note will be included in this guidance and available on the IES website<sup>3</sup>.

The below data collection methods should be considered during the inception phase of the evaluation and should be used to inform the evaluation design. The evaluation design should ensure a robust methodology and a variety of data collection methods to ensure full representation of all stakeholders, including those who are hard to reach. The below table provides some options for doing this, but the evaluation team should consider all options available to them based on the specific evaluation.

Table 2: Evaluation Data Collection Options during a Crisis

Method	Remote use in context of COVID-19/Crisis	Limitations and requirements
Surveys	Surveys via mobile phone, email, online tools (SurveyMonkey, LimeSurvey, MS Forms etc.) or messaging apps (WhatsApp; etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emails or phone calls are preferable in areas with limited internet connectivity;</li> <li>• Data quality checks should be run daily to supervise enumerators and correct errors in questionnaire design and programming;</li> <li>• Mobile phone surveys and online tools require additional funds.</li> </ul>
Focus group discussions	FGDs via online discussion platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams (video calls) or WhatsApp (group messaging) and similar software.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group messaging applications are preferable in areas with limited internet connectivity;</li> <li>• Keep sessions to 60–90 minutes and limit the number of each group to 4–5 participants.</li> </ul>
Key informant interviews	Semi-structured KIIs via video calls (Skype, Zoom, MS Teams) or by phone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone interviews are preferable in areas with limited internet connectivity but require additional funds.</li> <li>• Evaluation team needs to fulfil all language requirements or identify interpreters who are not part of the project team.</li> </ul>
Text analysis	Pattern/content/ discourse analysis of programmatic and administrative documents (potentially using machine learning).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specialized software (e.g. NVivo) requires additional funds.</li> <li>• Machine learning requires high computational power and advanced coding skills.</li> <li>• Requires specific language skills for translation and interpretation.</li> </ul>
Direct observation	Remote observation of implementation of program activities (e.g. trainings) via online feed or video footage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online feed requires stable internet connectivity.</li> <li>• Video footage requires buy-in and support from program staff.</li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/de/evaluation/index.html>

Method	Remote use in context of COVID-19/Crisis	Limitations and requirements
Social Media Analysis	Web scrapping with crawler bots to see what has been posted on social media; sentiment analysis/opinion mining of the so collected content.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Web scrapping requires specific coding skills e.g. in Python or Julia (Open source).</li> <li>• Specialized software for sentiment analysis (e.g. NVivo) requires additional funds.</li> </ul>
Web Search Data Analysis	Changes in search query volume related to relevant topics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty to differentiate attribution vs contribution in search query-related changes.</li> </ul>
Crowd-sourcing	Remote application of participatory methods to engage final beneficiaries (e.g. compiling opinions of communities on development priorities; monitoring trends in indicators through local citizen reporters)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficult to set up and get buy-in from beneficiaries remotely, whenever possible existing networks and channels should be leveraged</li> </ul>

In the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic and other crisis, evaluation teams may need to rely heavily on remote data collection methods. Such methods entail intrinsic potential biases (i.e. under-representation of groups with limited or no access to the Internet and/or mobile networks) that should be mitigated (e.g. respondents who cannot read may not be as easily reached through online surveys as by phone). When no mitigation measures are possible, this should be clearly stated as a limitation to the evaluation in the methodology section.

## FINALIZING THE EVALUATION PROCESS AND REPORT

Evaluation teams have the responsibility to consider the current context when conducting the data analysis and developing the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations. To the extent possible findings and conclusions should reflect the current context of the programme or project. Recommendations should be adapted to the current and expected future working environment with recommendations that are implementable. While it is not expected that additional data collection should be conducted, the following actions should be completed when finalizing the evaluation process and reporting.

- Schedule briefing and discussion with project management and IES to determine any immediate changes to the programme or project due to COVID-19.
- Any limitations to the evaluation results based on COVID-19 should be clearly spelled out in the limitations section.
- Text boxes should be added to identify any changes or impacts to the evaluation and/or the programme that may be expected given COVID-19. This should be based on discussions with programme managers as well as the data analysis and be included as outlined below:
  - Executive Summary: acknowledging COVID-19 and identifying any effect on evaluation;
  - Findings: Identify whether or not COVID-19 considerations were able to be applied to the findings and what they were;
  - Conclusions: Overall consideration and/or incorporation of COVID-19 in the evaluation and, if possible, the impact of COVID-19 on the programme and how the programme responded.
- All recommendations should be developed to be implementable within the current context of the programme or project, including any constraints or changes related to COVID-19. Therefore, increased discussions with programme/project management will be necessary to ensure utility of recommendations.

For further information or any questions you may have please consult the IES website, IES staff or send an email to [unodc-ies@un.org](mailto:unodc-ies@un.org)

## ANNEX 1: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ON EVALUATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

UNODC Independent Evaluation Section (2020) *COVID-19: UNODC's Approach to Evaluation During Crisis*. Vienna: UNODC

OECD/DAC and IEO/UNDP (2020) *Guidance Note: Good practices during COVID-19*. New York and Paris: Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP and the OECD/DAC Network on Development Evaluation

UNICEF Evaluation Office (2020) Technical Note: Response of the UNICEF Evaluation Function to the COVID-19 Crisis. New York: UNICEF

WFP Office of Evaluation (2020) Technical Note for Planning and Conducting Evaluations During COVID-19. Rome: World Food Programme

UNFPA Evaluation Office (2020) *Adapting evaluations to the COVID-19 pandemic*. New York: UNFPA

UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (2020) *Evaluation planning and implementation during COVID-19*. New York: UNDP

ILO Evaluation Office (2020) Implications of COVID-19 on evaluations in the ILO. Geneva: ILO

FAO Office of Evaluation (2020) Risk analysis and guidance for the management and conduct of evaluations during international and national level COVID-19 crisis and restrictions. Rome: FAO

Lynn Lieberman Lawry, Paul B. Spiegel and Shannon Doocy (2020) *Guidelines for Adapting Third-Party Monitoring in the Context of the COVID-19 Outbreak*. Alexandria, VA: International Advisory Products and Systems

Jos Vaessen & Estelle Raimondo (2020) *Conducting evaluations in times of COVID-19 (Coronavirus)*. Washington, DC: World Bank

Jeff Chelsky and Lauren Kelly (2020) *Bowling in the dark: Monitoring and evaluation during COVID-19 (Coronavirus)*. Washington, DC: World Bank

Veronica Olazabal, Michael Bamberger and Peter York (2020) *Rewiring How We Measure Impact in a Post-COVID-19 World*. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation

Deborah Lupton (editor) (2020) *Doing fieldwork in a pandemic* (crowd-sourced document). Available at: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1clGjGABB2h2qbduTgfqribHmog9B6P0NvMgVuiHZCl8/edit>

### ON ICT IN EVALUATION

Pete York and Michael Bamberger (2020) *Measuring results and impact in the age of big data: The nexus of evaluation, analytics, and digital technology*. New York: The Rockefeller Foundation

Nigel Simister and Dan James (2017) *ICT in Monitoring and Evaluation*. Oxford: INTRAC

UN Global Pulse (2016) *Integrating Big Data into the Monitoring and Evaluation of Development Programmes*. New York: United Nations

UN Global Pulse (2018) *Experimenting with Big Data and Artificial Intelligence to Support Peace and Security*. New York: United Nations

Rahel Dette, Julia Steets and Elias Sagmeister (2016) *Technologies for monitoring in insecure environments*. London and Berlin: Humanitarian Outcomes and GPPi

INTOSAI Development Initiative (2020) *IDI's SDGs Audit Model (ISAM)*. Vienna: International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI)

## ON PHONE SURVEYS AND INTERVIEWS

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Naomi F. Sugie (2018) "Utilizing Smartphones to Study Disadvantaged and Hard-to-Reach Groups". *Sociological Methods & Research*, 47(3), 458–491.

Kristen Himelein, Stephanie Eckman, Charles Lau and David McKenzie (2020) *Mobile Phone Surveys for Understanding COVID-19 Impacts: Part I Sampling and Mode*. Washington, DC: World Bank

Kristen Himelein, Stephanie Eckman, Charles Lau and David McKenzie (2020) *Mobile Phone Surveys for Understanding COVID-19 Impacts: Part II Response, Quality, and Questions*. Washington, DC: World Bank

Maria Jones, Roshni Khincha, Florence Kondylis and Lysca Uwamariya (2020) *Practical tips for implementing remote surveys in the time of the Great Lockdown*. Washington, DC: World Bank

Sarah Kopper and Anja Sautmann (2020) *Best practices for conducting phone surveys*. Cambridge, MA: J-PAL

Sarah Hughes and Kristen Velyvis (2020) *Tips to Quickly Switch from Face-to-Face to Home-Based Telephone Interviewing*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica

## ON SURVEYS AND FOCUS GROUPS VIA WHATSAPP

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Julienne Chen and Pearlyn Neo (2019) "Texting the Waters: An Assessment of Focus Groups Conducted via the WhatsApp Smartphone Messaging Application." *Methodological Innovations*, PREPRINT

Katja Kaufmann and Corinna Peil (2020) "The Mobile Instant Messaging Interview (MIMI): Using WhatsApp to Enhance Self-Reporting and Explore Media Usage in Situ." *Mobile Media & Communication*, 8(2), 229–46.

Leila Ullrich and Haitham Khoudary (2018) *WhatsApp Surveying Guide: Lessons Learnt from Two Qualitative WhatsApp Surveys in Lebanon*. New York: UNDP