RISK MANAGEMENT IN FRAGILE SETTINGS
A TOOLKIT FOR FIELD PRACTITIONERS

RELIEF INTERNATIONAL

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the operating environments in fragile settings have become increasingly complex, presenting unprecedented challenges to humanitarian actors. Ranging from chronic to acute, these challenges may include disruptions in supply of basic goods and services, environmental stresses such as flooding or droughts, safety and security concerns, lack of functioning banking systems, breaks in communication, or political impediments to humanitarian access, among others.

Typically, these settings are where government systems, essential services, and markets are unable to absorb or adapt to the impact of crises, leaving a significant proportion of the population acutely vulnerable to disease, forced displacement, disruption of livelihoods, and death.

In the face of both known and unforeseen variables, international humanitarian organizations need to adopt new risk management strategies in order to manage these types of threats and carry out day-to-day operations when full access may not be possible.

Historically, humanitarian organizations have seen programming in fragile settings as a temporary adaptation in response to insecurity or limited access to the targeted population in need. However, as the scope and magnitude of crises has grown, risk management has become for many humanitarian organizations a core operational modality, especially for those working in environments such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sudan, South Sudan, and parts of Central Africa. Increasingly, risk management approaches are becoming standard operating practice in fragile settings.

Protracted crises create unique challenges that exacerbate problems over a long period of time. Conflict, weak governance/public administration, unsustainable livelihoods systems, breakdown of local institutions, and food insecurity prohibit local actors from being able to support themselves and expose them to new dangers.

Humanitarian actors are finding it increasingly difficult to distribute aid as local governance groups—often the same groups who have either created or aggravated the conflict to begin with—limit access to sites.

Organizations are faced with the choice of distributing no aid, or distributing less aid while risking violating the “do no harm” mandate.

Despite the pressing need for widespread adoption of risk management strategies in current humanitarian contexts, there has been little standardized or commonly accepted policy guidance on this subject across the international aid community. Organizations largely have relied on their own internal policies and protocols—often applied or modified in an ad hoc manner—to navigate operational and programmatic challenges in fragile settings where full access is impeded or restricted. This can result in confusion, lack of coordination, or duplication of efforts at the delivery site, and therefore an incomplete assessment and mitigation of risks.

With risk management approaches becoming for many humanitarian organizations the "new normal," the availability of a guiding framework on this subject is timely and critical. As every organization and situation is unique, a guiding framework of this nature must be flexible and sensitive to context-specific needs.

Relief International's *Risk Management in Fragile Settings Toolkit* offers a common and consistent sector-wide operating framework to support analysis and decision-making for aid organizations that are grappling with the challenges inherent to fragile settings. This approach is designed with the clear aim of providing practical tools and guidelines for field staff so that they may:

Clarify operational responsibility level;

Support field managers in making timely and appropriate decisions when the supervisor is unreachable;

Support quality monitoring and accountability;

Offer a uniform approach to facilitate coordination and avoid duplication of activities;

Provide actionable tools for project design, implementation, and monitoring; and

Offer alternative operating processes to guide key decision-makers and program managers in fragile contexts.

We wish to acknowledge the Operations Partnership for their expertise and support in creating early versions of this Toolkit, as well as the leadership and extensive field testing by Relief International's Middle East program staff.

Relief International Volunteer Iman Al Saddik provides mental health counseling to Syrian refugees in Arsal, Lebanon.
Photo: RI/Elie Gardner

OVERVIEW OF THE RISK MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT

The *Risk Management in Fragile Settings Toolkit* consists of a suite of tools and supporting guidance—designed to standardize practice and provide a structure—to enable managers to codify risk as a basis for decision-making in fragile settings. Used as intended, this framework can provide an effective roadmap for clarifying expectations at all levels of management, and empower staff to operate within agreed-upon parameters.

There are three main components that have been designed for use by practitioners at the field, regional, and global levels:

Risk Calculator,
a six-question,
Excel-based tool;

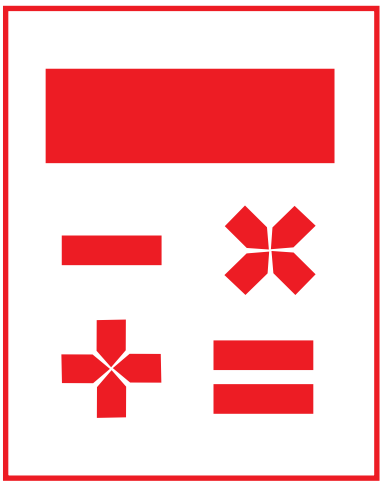
Risk Management Process,
consisting of three steps to guide
decision-making; and

Field Guides,
practical operating procedures
detailing additional guidance.

Rather than being seen as formulaic steps that have a clear beginning and end, these components are meant to be part of an ongoing process of situational assessment and adjustment as needed. Implementers are encouraged to establish periodic reviews to assess their risk management strategies and to revisit part or all of this framework as a means to continually update their strategies.

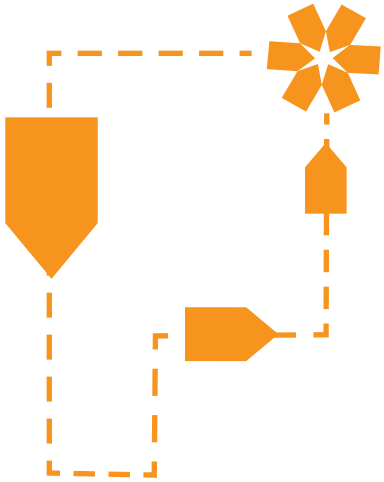
The Risk Management Toolkit is designed to enable practitioners to codify and standardize the nature and severity of the operational risks they face when implementing programs in fragile settings. However, it is important to note that this remains an inevitably subjective process.

COMPONENTS OF THE RISK MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK



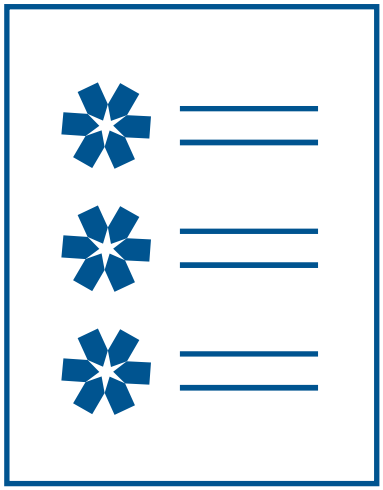
THE CALCULATOR

Calculate your risk rating by answering six questions.



THE RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Define the risks and implications, and determine decisions-makers and frequency of evaluation.



THE FIELD GUIDES

Use these practical handouts that provide guidance for conducting programmatic activities in remote settings based on risk rating.

RISK MANAGEMENT IN FRAGILE SETTINGS
A TOOLKIT FOR FIELD PRACTITIONERS

RISK CALCULATOR

Find the online Calculator here:
www.ri.org/risk-toolkit

ABOUT THE CALCULATOR

By using Relief International's Risk Calculator, the user is able to conduct a situational assessment of the key operational and organizational risks inherent to a particular program context. It is designed to assess the likelihood and impact of six key risk areas which have the potential to significantly disrupt effective program implementation. The Calculator combines users' responses to these six questions into an overall risk rating (1-5) for the context.

THE SIX RISK AREAS INCLUDE:

1. **Physical access**
The levels and demographics of staff (e.g., senior management, field staff, local staff, or none) who have physical access to the operational area;

2. **Means of delivery**
The delivery of programming through remotely managed staff, national partners, or a local third party, the type of partner (i.e., if the organization is resorting to working with groups that would not normally be considered as partners), the partners' capacity, whether partners can be assessed and vetted directly with regular access to partner staff for monitoring and training, or if the vetting and assessment process can only be done remotely;

3. **Oversight of financial flows**
The ability to directly manage, monitor, and verify flows of funding, prevalence of cash payments, and ability to ensure payments reach their intended recipients;

4. **Delegation of decision-making**
The level of delegation of authority for program implementation and operational decision-making;

5. **Communication**
The type, quality, and frequency of communication possible between program implementers and organization management; and

6. **Monitoring and verification**
The type of monitoring and verification of program delivery possible, the level and quality of data available to validate program implementation, the ability to maintain accountability to communities including feedback and complaints mechanisms and fulfilment of safeguarding commitments, and the use of alternative monitoring, such as third-party or peer monitoring.

RISK IN FRAGILE SETTINGS MATRIX

Illustrative risks to program delivery are shown by severity rating—ranging from 1 (negligible) to 5 (critical) in the Risk Matrix below. Given the subjective nature of assessments, the Risk Calculator and Risk Matrix can serve to anchor and cross-check each other in this process.

RISK RATING / RISK AREAS	1 NEGLIGIBLE	2 MINOR	3 MODERATE	4 SEVERE	5 CRITICAL
PHYSICAL ACCESS	Full for internationals and nationals	Partial for internationals, full for nationals	Impossible for internationals, partially possible for nationals of the country	Impossible for internationals and restricted freedom of movement for nationals from the country. Access only via local residents (besieged areas, hard to reach areas)	Limited access only via local residents
MEANS OF DELIVERY	Assistance is directly delivered under direct supervision of staff with the required managerial expertise. No partner work unless it warrants organizational policy approach	Assistance is directly delivered under direct supervision of staff with lower level of managerial capacity. No partner work unless it warrants organizational policy approach	Assistance is partially delivered directly and through other channels such as national partners, which can be assessed and vetted directly with regular access to partner staff for monitoring and training	Assistance is delivered through local network or local third party, which can only be vetted and assessed remotely with extremely limited direct access to partner staff for monitoring and training	Assistance is delivered through local network or local third party with no supervision, which can only be vetted and assessed remotely with no direct access to partner staff for monitoring and training
OVERSIGHT OF FINANCIAL FLOWS	Full and direct oversight of all financial flows, primarily bank-to-bank transactions, very limited cash transactions	Intermittent oversight of financial flows. Distributions are directly supervised by staff. Some cash transactions	Limited oversight of financial flows. High prevalance of cash transactions. Junior staff, partner, peer monitoring of distribution of funds	Extremely limited oversight of financial flows. Only cash transactions. No direct monitoring of distributions of funds	Extremely limited oversight of financial flows. Only cash transactions. No direct monitoring of distributions of funds
DECISION-MAKING	No or partial delegation of authority for program-implementation and decision-making	Partial delegation of program implementation to national staff. No delegation of authority for decision-making. Oversight from remote location	Delegation of program implementation and authority for operational decision-making to national staff/partner. Oversight from remote location	Full delegation of authority for program implementation and partial operational decision-making to partner	Full delegation of authority for program implementation and partial operational decision-making to partner
COMMUNICATION LEVEL	Very good with 3G functional networks, limitation mainly due to different time zones	Good, but network infrastructure limits the connectivity levels	Generally good, but some restriction may be faced such as legal limitation for the use of technology or IT solution such as satellites means or ODK platforms	Intermittent, through limited satellite means or hard copy carrier	Limited satellite means
MONITORING/ VERIFICATION OF IMPLEMENTATION	Regular monitoring operated by national and international staff	Regular monitoring operated by national staff. Peer monitoring and third-party monitoring (External Evaluation)	Limited, partial monitoring (spotcheck). Peer monitoring and third-party monitoring	Extremely limited, no direct monitoring, third-party monitoring, Peer monitoring	Extremely limited, no direct monitoring, third-party monitoring, Peer monitoring

RELIEF INTERNATIONAL RISK CALCULATOR

RISK LEVEL

1
2
3
4
5

RISK RATING

3

TOTAL RISK SCORE

227

COUNTRY OF OPERATION
Syria

PROJECT
XFGGHGHD

FIELD OFFICE
XXSSSSS

REGION
XXXXX

Is physical access possible?

LIKELIHOOD	PROG. IMPACT	RISK SCORE
5 Very Unlikely	10 Critical	**50**

Will direct delivery be possible?

LIKELIHOOD	PROG. IMPACT	RISK SCORE
5 Very Unlikely	10 Critical	**50**

Will direct oversight of financial flows be possible?

LIKELIHOOD	PROG. IMPACT	RISK SCORE
3 Moderately Likely	7 Minor	**21**

Will direct oversight be possible?

LIKELIHOOD	PROG. IMPACT	RISK SCORE
5 Very Unlikely	10 Critical	**50**

Will regular structured communications be possible?

LIKELIHOOD	PROG. IMPACT	RISK SCORE
5 Very Unlikely	10 Critical	**50**

Will direct monitoring/ verification of project be possible?

LIKELIHOOD	PROG. IMPACT	RISK SCORE
1 Very Likely	6 Negligible	**6**

USING THE CALCULATOR

First, the Calculator tabulates an individual risk score for each risk area based on two parameters: Likelihood and Impact.

LIKELIHOOD

The Calculator addresses each risk area as a question. This allows users to assess the likelihood that the risk will occur. The likelihood can range from just above 0% to just below 100%. To simplify, the following categories of likelihood are used, with each category assigned a numerical value:

Very Unlikely = Value 5
It is very unlikely but it is not impossible
Unlikely = Value 4
It is only very occasionally possible
Moderately Likely = Value 3
It is possible in some circumstances
Likely = Value 2
It is possible most of the time
Very Likely = Value 1
It is almost always possible

IMPACT

The Calculator also allows the user to assess the impact that a risk will have on the organization's ability to effectively deliver its program. The following categories quantify the scale of that impact, each with a numerical value.

Negligible = Value 6
There is almost no change in the ability to run normal activities and operations. Minor changes required can easily be handled by existing procedures.

Minor = Value 7
There are occasional disruptions to normal activities and operations, which have little impact on expected quality, beneficiary targets, timely delivery, and/or type of activities. Relatively minor changes causing some disruption in the program implementation are required, but with no measurable changes on the overall program goal achievement.

Moderate = Value 8
There are frequent disruptions to normal activities and operations, which have some impact on expected quality, beneficiary targets, timely delivery, and/or type of activities. Measurable changes requiring some time/resources are necessary so that no major impact on the overall program goal achievement is noticed. These changes are acceptable.

Severe = Value 9
There are very frequent disruptions to normal activities and operations, which have a major impact on expected quality, beneficiary targets, timely delivery, and/or type of activities. Program implementation must be altered significantly. The level of change is not acceptable to enable the program goals to be achieved.

Critical = Value 10
There are very severe disruptions to normal activities and operations, which make delivery of expected quality, beneficiary targets, timely delivery, and/or type of activities, extremely challenging. An extreme change to the program implementation, strategy, and structure is required that could lead to a total collapse of program and/or of the overall operation.

Relief International teams embark for remote program sites in Maban County, South Sudan.

HOW THE RISK RATING IS CALCULATED

The Relief International Risk Calculator generates the score for each area by multiplying the likelihood and impact values for each question, resulting in a score from 6–50. The overall risk rating for the program is then achieved by adding together the individual risk scores, resulting in a score between 36 and 300, which corresponds to a risk rating of 1 to 5.

PROGRAMMATIC IMPACT

PROGRAMMATIC LIKELIHOOD	6 NEGLIGIBLE	7 MINOR	8 MODERATE	9 SEVERE	10 CRITICAL
5 VERY UNLIKELY	30	35	40	45	50
4 UNLIKELY	24	28	32	36	40
3 MODERATELY LIKELY	18	21	24	27	30
2 LIKELY	12	14	16	18	20
1 VERY LIKELY	6	7	8	9	10

SEVERITY SCORING TABLE

180	210	240	270	300
144	168	192	216	240
108	126	144	162	180
72	84	96	108	120
36	42	48	54	60

SEVERITY RISK RATING

5
4
3
2
1

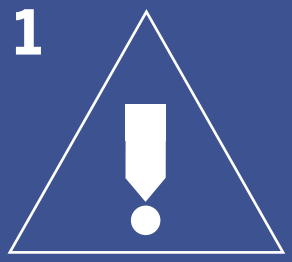
SEVERITY INDEX

210–300
234–275
124–233
34–123
0–33

RISK MANAGEMENT PROCESS

Once the risk score is calculated, the user moves into the risk management process. Within this process are three steps:

Step 1

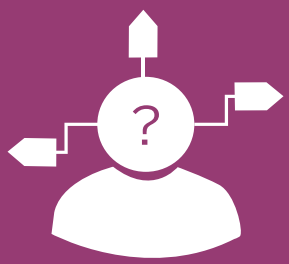


Defining the risks
across organizational, structural, and programmatic levels

Step 2

Assessing implications
and prerequisites for mitigating risks

Step 3



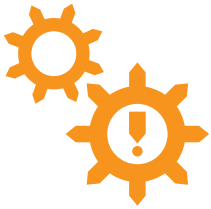
Determining decision-makers
in addition to mechanisms and frequency of review

Rather than formulaic steps with a clear beginning and end, these components are meant to be part of an ongoing process of situational assessment and adjustment as needed.

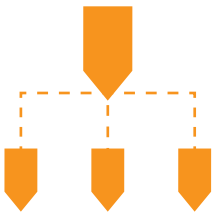
While following this process, be sure to explore the series of seven Field Guides found at the end of this document to support decision-making and mitigate risks.

STEP 1: DEFINING THE RISKS

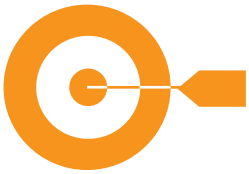
Many actors in fragile settings tend to highlight risks to the safety and security of their staff and the beneficiaries. While these are indeed critical, there are many other inherent operational risks and limitations that present serious threats to programming, including issues regarding compliance, accountability, quality of programs, and duty of care. These types of risks can be summarized in three main categories:



Organizational risks are inherent to the wider context and environment of the intervention. They can include reputation, fiduciary, legal, and compliance risks that may provoke a substantial change in the operation.



Structural risks result from disfunction and/or breakdowns of internal systems and procedures (e.g., finance, human resources, management, security, logistics and procurement, data/information).



Project/program risks are risks of failing to achieve programmatic aims and objectives and the potential resulting harm to beneficiaries (e.g., program design, partner choice, implementation, performance monitoring).

For each one of the risk ratings defined through the Relief International Risk Calculator, a certain level of risk is implied. The overarching risks outlined above will impact each organization and its programming in various ways and at different levels.

Use this table to define the potential implications for the organization, its operations, and its programs.

RISK DEFINITION

RISK RATING	1 NEGLIGIBLE	2 MINOR	3 MODERATE	4 SEVERE	5 CRITICAL
ORGANIZATIONAL RISK (REPUTATIONAL, FIDUCIARY, LEGAL, COMPLIANCE)	Little or no potential for loss of financial resources, negative internal or external reputation and/or compliance and legal issues	Potential for partial/ short-term loss of financial resources; damage to internal reputation or concerns; potential for minor compliance and legal issues (penalties that can easily be addressed)	Partial loss or potential for long-term loss of financial resources; extended local/ regional negative reputation; potential for major compliance and legal issues (donor penalties, sanctions of a lesser but still material nature	Total loss or potential for permanent loss of financial resources; widespread negative reputational risk; significant and serious compliance and legal issues (donor penalties, sanctions)	Permanent loss of financial resources; widespread negative reputational risk; significant and serious compliance and legal issues (donor penalties, sanctions)
STRUCTURAL RISK (FINANCE, HUMAN RESOURCES, MANAGEMENT, LOGISTICS, DATA/INFO)	Little or no potential for breakdown of internal systems and procedures; if it occurs it is minor and very limited in nature	Potential for partial or short-term breakdown of parts of the internal systems and procedures; disruption that is manageable with internal resources	Partial breakdown of internal systems and procedures; potential for loss of material, injury or health impact	Total breakdown of internal systems and procedures; potential for forced evacuation, significant injury or loss of life	Complete breakdown of internal system and procedures; potential for forced evacuation, significant injury or loss of life
PROGRAM/ PROJECT RISK (DESIGN, PARTNERSHIP, IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING)	Little or no potential for negative impact on design/ implementation/ monitoring	Some delays/issues with program design/ implementation/monitoring (work limitation with loss of time)	Significant delays/ issues or partial blockage of program design/ implementation/ monitoring	Total blockage or potential for collapse of program	Complete blockage or potential for collapse of program

STEP 2: ASSESSING IMPLICATIONS AND PREREQUISITES FOR MITIGATING RISKS

Each level of risk associated with the risk rating has operational implications, ranging from quite limited (Risk Rating 1), to major organization-wide impacts (Risk Rating 5). A comprehensive risk management response requires a level of organizational participation that is aligned with the likelihood, scale, and severity of possible impacts.

The table below identifies prerequisites in terms of participation at organizational, structural, and program/project levels for each risk rating. This helps managers determine the measures that must be put in place to maintain an efficient operational risk management modality and to reduce the likelihood of risks occurring.

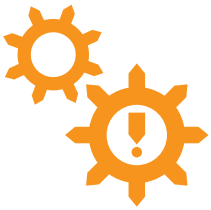
The Field Guides are a valuable companion to this process, articulating additional steps and adapted processes that organizations can implement in the context of a given risk rating.

Use this table to assess implications and prerequisites for mitigating risks.

OPERATIONAL IMPLICATIONS AND PREREQUISITES

RISK RATING	1 NEGLIGIBLE	2 MINOR	3 MODERATE	4 SEVERE	5 CRITICAL
ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL	Organizational Consent	Organizational Support	Organizational Commitment	Organizational Buy-in up to the highest level	CEO and Board sanction
STRUCTURAL LEVEL	Structural Guidance from Global Level	Dedicated resources to manage remote operations and associated risks	Dedicated resources to manage remote operation and associated risks	Dedicated Unit/ Resources for Remote and Risk Management	Dedicated unit for Remote and Risk Management that reports to CEO
PROGRAM/ PROJECT LEVEL	Policy/Technical Guidance	Policy/Technical Guidance	Framework of Operation	Framework of Operation	Framework of Operation and Framework of Accountability, with CEO and Board sign-off

Below are the three categories of operational implications and the corresponding prerequisites in terms of organizational participation:



ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

At the organizational level, prerequisites for participation range from CEO/Board sanction in critical contexts (Risk Rating 5) to organizational consent in negligible contexts (Risk Rating 1). **Organizations using this risk management process should define what organizational consent, support, commitment, buy-in, and sanction mean for their own purposes.**

Relief International defines them as follows, but each organization should define them based on its own context:

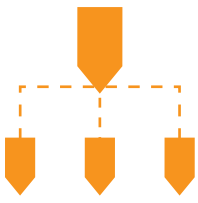
CEO and Board sanction requires decision-making to be sanctioned and signed off at all levels up to the CEO and Board.

Organizational buy-in requires decision-making to be sanctioned and signed off at all levels up to the CEO.

Organizational commitment requires decision-making to be sanctioned and signed off at all levels up to regional director. There is awareness and involvement up to CEO level through reporting.

Organizational support requires decision-making to be sanctioned and signed off at all levels up to Country Director. There is awareness and involvement up to regional leadership level through reporting.

Organizational consent requires decision-making to be sanctioned and signed off at all levels up to area or sub-country leadership. There is awareness and involvement up to Country Director level through reporting.



STRUCTURAL LEVEL

Dedicated unit/resources refers to additional resources that must be in place for remote and risk management (Risk Rating 2-4). At Risk Rating 5, a dedicated unit must report directly to the CEO.

Support guidance from global level refers to alternative procedures being in place to support remote and risk management (Risk Rating 1).

PROGRAM/PROJECT LEVEL

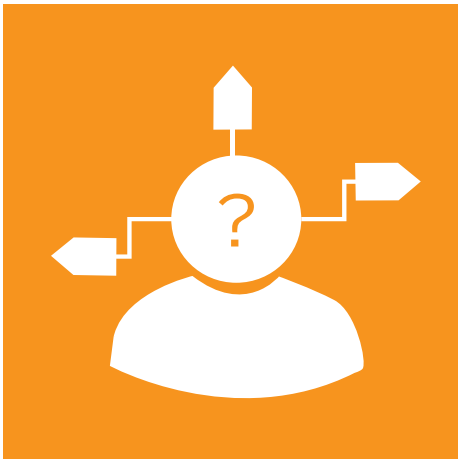
A framework of accountability refers to a specific model established to define accountability and roles and responsibilities within the fragile context. At Risk Rating 5 this must have CEO and Board sign-off.

A framework of operation refers to a specific model, including alternative operating procedures and protocols, established to manage operations within the fragile context. (Risk Rating 3-5).
At Risk Rating 5, the framework of operation must have CEO sign-off.

Policy/technical guidance refers to a specific organizational policy or guidance at organizational, regional, or country level to support specific processes and operating procedures (Risk Rating 1-2).

Protection officers interview a Rohingya refugee family about their most urgent needs in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.
Photo: RI Staff

STEP 3: DETERMINING DECISION-MAKERS AND FREQUENCY OF EVALUATION



This section outlines a process for using the risk rating generated by the Relief International Risk Calculator to determine who should be involved with decision-making, as well as when and how organizations should consider making those decisions.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

A manager must determine the level of programming required, and at what level decisions must be proposed, reviewed, and sanctioned. The levels are defined as follows:

Levels 1–2 operation are reviewed and sanctioned at the country level, through the Head of Office/Deputy Country Director or the Country Director.

Level 3 operation requires the involvement of the regional senior management team and must be sanctioned by the Regional Director.

Level 4 operation, which involves a high level of organizational risk, must be sanctioned by the highest level of management within the organization, e.g., the CEO or Board of Directors.

Level 5 operation, which involves a high level of organizational risk, must be sanctioned by the highest level of management within the organization, e.g., the CEO and/or Board of Directors.

Use this table to help determine who should be involved in decision-making.

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

RISK RATING	1 NEGLIGIBLE	2 MINOR	3 MODERATE	4 SEVERE	5 CRITICAL
PROPOSED BY	Relevant Area/Project Manager	Program Director, Deputy Country Director, Head of Office, or equivalent	Country Director	Regional Director	Regional/HQ Steering Group
REVIEWED BY	Area/Country Steering Group	Country Steering Group	Country/Regional Group	Regional/HQ Steering Group	CEO
SANCTIONED BY	Program Director or equivalent	Country Director	Regional Director	CEO, Board	Board

FREQUENCY OF EVALUATION

WHEN AND HOW SHOULD REMOTE PROGRAMMING BE EVALUATED?

Use this table below to determine frequency of evaluation.

Security and stability can deteriorate rapidly in many areas of humanitarian operations. Fragile settings pose an additional risk, in that the organization may have significantly less real-time awareness of changes in the context (particularly if the organizational participation guidelines described above are not followed). The assessment of risk programming modalities and risk allocation should therefore be planned well in advance and should be linked to the project cycle management of grants. It is best practice to conduct this during the design phase at the beginning of each project.

It is important that evaluation of the context, risks, and response modalities is planned and conducted on a regular basis. This table supports managers in determining the frequency of evaluations necessary at the different risk ratings, which will support them in integrating these evaluations into the programming cycle, and linking them to the project cycle management of grants. The frequency of calculating risk, assessing threats, monitoring, and internal and external audits is detailed in the table below and the process on the following page.

FREQUENCY OF EVALUATION TABLE

RISK RATING	1 NEGLIGIBLE	2 MINOR	3 MODERATE	4 SEVERE	5 CRITICAL
RISK CALCULATION	Yearly	At least biannually	Quarterly	Monthly	Bimonthly
THREAT ASSESSMENT	At least yearly	At least biannually	Biannually	Quarterly	Monthly
MONITORING AND INTERNAL AUDIT	At least every 2 years	At least yearly	Yearly	Biannually	Quarterly
EXTERNAL AUDIT	Every 5 years	Every 3 years	Every 2 years	Yearly	Biannually

TYPES OF EVALUATION

Risk calculation
This should be used at the inception of the program phase and frequently reevaluated as per the tool and guidelines provided above. The risk level is to be calculated for each area of intervention and for each project within a country operation. This is important because enormous variability can exist in contexts within the same country.

Threat assessment
This is an attempt to consider risk more systematically in terms of the threats in the environment, particular vulnerabilities, and security measures to reduce the threat or vulnerability. Assessment of risk is commonly conducted based on both the probability of occurrence and the likely impact, with the most critical risks logically being those that are both highly probable and expected to have a significant impact. As with the severity level, risks will vary across project areas within the same country. Therefore, threat assessments should be conducted for each new area of implementation and for each project.

Monitoring and internal audit
This is an independent, objective review and assessment designed to support operational improvement. This would be commissioned within a country program and conducted as per the guidance above.

External audit
This is an independent, objective review and assessment designed to support operational improvement. This would be commissioned externally to a country program at the regional or headquarter level and conducted as per the guidance above.

FIELD GUIDES

Relief International has developed a series of Field Guides to support decision-making in the context of a given risk rating. They can be found in the pages that follow.

This guidance does not replace any interagency, organizational, or sector-specific tools or processes, but rather defines additional steps and articulates adapted processes to follow. For each risk rating, the additional controls that are required are outlined within each field guide.

A
Stakeholder Mapping

B
Needs Assessment

C
Beneficiary Selection and Verification

D
Partner Management

E
Data Collection and Analysis

F
Complaint and Feedback Mechanism

G
Management of Third-party Monitoring

FIELD GUIDE A: STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

RISK RATING	MONITORING FREQUENCY	CONTROLS REQUIRED
1	– Once a year	– Follow regular stakeholder mapping process
2	– Every six months	– Follow regular stakeholder mapping process – Follow steps 1–3
3	– Every three months	– Follow regular stakeholder mapping process – Follow steps 1–3
4	– Once a month	– Follow regular stakeholder mapping process – Follow steps 1–3
5	– Twice a month	– Gain prior authorization from CEO and Board to operate at this risk rating – Follow regular stakeholder mapping process – Follow steps 1–3

Step 1
Include partner/ local perspectives in your analysis

Understanding stakeholders and field-level relationships may be a challenge in contexts where direct physical access is limited.

In these settings, ensure the stakeholder analysis team includes information and perspectives from local contacts and partners.

- Information and perspectives of remote staff should be confirmed through cross verification with direct sources;
- Information should be triangulated with multiple sources;
- Discrepancies in data should be investigated.

Step 2
Conduct the stakeholder mapping process before every project

This process should be conducted before a decision is made to engage in any new operational area. The stakeholder mapping should also be conducted at the onset of the project design phase for any new program/project before deciding with whom to engage.

Step 3
Increase the frequency of monitoring and revision

The stakeholders that influence any operation or project, and the power relationships therein, will be especially dynamic in conflict environments and complex emergencies. In these contexts, the stakeholder mapping must be reviewed and updated more regularly. The process of monitoring and revision depends on the risk rating, as shown below.

FIELD GUIDE B: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

SEVERITY LEVEL	CONTROLS REQUIRED
1	– Follow standard process
2	– Follow standard process
3	– Follow standard process – Conduct additional steps 1–4 – Ensure you meet minimum requirements in source verification and triangulation tool (See Annex)
4	– Follow standard process – Conduct additional steps 1–4 – Ensure you meet minimum requirements in source verification and triangulation tool (See Annex)

Needs assessments are situation dependent and therefore a number of challenges can arise during planning and implementation phases in fragile settings. In many cases, the operational context, such as restrictions in access and communication, will greatly limit the ability to adequately plan in advance and conduct a thorough needs assessment. Capacity of partners, as well as the amount of time and resources available, can also pose a challenge.

Step 1
Sources of information and verification of data

Conducting accurate and impartial needs assessments is a challenge when access is limited. Powerful local players may try to influence assessments, and local staff or partners may be more susceptible to pressure. They can also be more biased in their choices due to personal ties and loyalties to affected communities. While working with staff with close social ties to targeted communities may help boost acceptance in some cases, remote verification and control is also desirable. In these contexts, important considerations are:

- Remote verification of assessment by staff in a different location
- Crosscheck assessments conducted by local staff or implementing partners, through trusted third parties. This may include community representatives, elders, other humanitarian organizations, or civilian government representatives and de facto authorities.
- Specification of which sources of information have been used to estimate needs.

Step 2
Triangulation process

Triangulate all data in situations where it is difficult to rely upon the accuracy and quality of information. Important considerations include:

- Ensure all data collected remotely have been confirmed through cross-verification from direct sources. Where data are collected from one source (e.g., a survey of community leaders in a village), it should be crosschecked with another relevant source (e.g., interviewing displaced persons who have fled the village.)
- Information should be triangulated with multiple sources, including trusted third parties.
- Discrepancies in data from one source should be investigated (e.g., differing population numbers could be due to different levels of access for a partner compared to staff members.)

Step 3
Capacity of team conducting assessment

The success of remotely managed assessments depends on the skills and experience of local staff, partners, or residents who implement and supervise them. It is important to incorporate extra training and capacity-building in project management, monitoring and evaluation, and/or more technically specialized training if necessary. Minimum requirements should be:

- Steps have been taken to ensure that suitably senior and competent national staff, with experience inside and outside the country, are placed in key managerial positions as close as possible to the areas of intervention.
- Relevant training measures to address gaps identified in skill set have been included.
- Methods to conduct training in the fragile context have been identified.

Step 4
Accountability to beneficiaries

While general principles of accountability apply to all needs assessments, these are more difficult to apply in fragile settings. Lack of direct contact with beneficiaries and participants by the organization can leave the population feeling isolated from decision-making. The following are the minimum steps to ensure accountability:

- Training of assessors in humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence, and impartiality.
- Independent feedback mechanism, e.g., hotlines or email addresses managed directly by the organization, secondary local organization to do spot checks, allowing participants to feedback securely.
- Clear information exchange between assessors/organization and the target population, through written introductions on assessment paperwork or disseminated materials.
- Follow-up visits to the assessed population to inform them of the outcome.

Annex
Source Verification and Triangulation Tool

If data are collected using remote collection methods, answering the following guiding questions will support managers in verifying the accuracy and relevancy of the data.

This is not a replacement for secondary data review, which is outlined on the previous page.

GUIDING QUESTIONS	ANSWER
– How were your data collected?	
– How many sources do you have? Multiple sources are required for accuracy.	
– Have you been able to verify the validity of your resources? All sources must be verified.	
– How was the source validity verified?	
– What is the local bias of each source? Sources should have differing local links.	
– Have your data been confirmed through cross-verification with direct sources? All data should be cross-checked.	
– Which direct sources?	
– How many direct sources? A minimum of three sources should be used.	
– Have your data been triangulated with other trusted third parties? All data should be triangulated with a minimum of three sources.	
– Which third-party sources?	
– Why is the source trusted? Should be from a reputable source.	
– How many trusted sources? A minimum of three sources should be used.	
– Are there discrepancies in the data collected? If there are major differences then additional data collection is needed.	

FIELD GUIDE C: BENEFICIARY SELECTION AND VERIFICATION

SEVERITY RISK RATING	CONTROLS REQUIRED
1	– Follow regular beneficiary selection and verification process steps
2	– Follow regular beneficiary selection and verification process steps – Follow steps 1-4
3	– Follow regular beneficiary selection and verification process steps – Follow steps 1-4 – Complete verification tool
4	– Follow regular beneficiary selection and verification process steps – Follow steps 1-4 – Complete verification tool
5	– Gain prior authorization from CEO and Board to operate at this risk rating – Follow regular beneficiary selection and verification process steps – Follow steps 1-4 – Complete verification tool

Local interference from politicians, landlords, or tribal leaders, or limited access and control, can often hinder a principled approach to beneficiary selection in fragile settings. Indeed, organizations are often directly given lists of beneficiaries by local administration or local leaders. Often beneficiary selection is not done independently, but subordinated to political interference. Additionally, targeting is often weak because there is no systematic registration or verification process. Lastly, overall geographical coverage is often too focused on more accessible areas and concentrated in larger towns.

Step 1
Cross-check beneficiary lists

The organization should ensure that targeted locations and beneficiary lists are cross-checked by an independent monitor (e.g., a team comprising a local NGO, local authority, and community member with representation from both women and men.) Please refer to the Third-party Monitoring Field Guide for further guidance.

Step 2
Verification of most vulnerable groups

In fragile settings, it is more challenging to ensure selection of the

most vulnerable groups. The organization should conduct additional checks and verification with local civil society, NGOs, government authorities, clusters/sectors, and other humanitarian assistance providers to ensure that the most vulnerable groups have been identified. This can be conducted by:

- Using local contacts (UN, organization staff, suppliers, drivers), local networks (social media, advertising, newspapers), and local organizations and authorities.
- Where possible, face-to-face meetings can be arranged. However, in limited access scenarios, phone conversations or contact through proxies can facilitate access to data already compiled by these groups (e.g., lists of pregnant women from health visitors, or villages that other NGOs have not accessed.)

Step 3
Additional spot checks to verify beneficiaries

The organization should carry out spot checks and monitoring to ensure all beneficiaries have been properly selected based on the pre-defined beneficiary selection criteria. This can be done remotely by phone calls, or though community networks and cross-checking lists from multiple sources.

Step 4
Establish a grievance mechanism

Establishing a widely accessible grievance mechanism to allow affected communities to appeal decisions, lodge complaints, or make suggestions is also essential to identify any person or group that may have been excluded. This could be done through a hotline or through a social media/messaging platform such as WhatsApp.

Verification Tool

The following verification tool can be used to ensure good practice in beneficiary selection and verification.

GUIDING QUESTIONS	ANSWER
– Are there standard criteria for beneficiary targeting and selection?	
– Who is responsible for selecting beneficiaries?	
– Are there specific policies and guidelines developed for targeting vulnerable persons?	
– Are there guidelines developed for dealing with cases of discrimination or exclusion of socially marginalized groups?	
– What monitoring mechanisms are used to ensure that assistance is given based on need and vulnerability?	
– Is there an established mechanism for ensuring geographic coverage based on need and vulnerability?	

FIELD GUIDE D: PARTNER MANAGEMENT

SEVERITY RISK RATING	CONTROLS REQUIRED
1	– Follow normal process steps
2	– Follow normal process steps – Follow steps 1-7
3	– Follow normal process steps – Follow steps 1-10
4	– Follow normal process steps – Follow steps 1-10
5	– Gain prior authorization from CEO and Board to operate at this risk rating – Follow normal process steps – Follow steps 1-10

Step 1
Understanding of and adherence to humanitarian principles

An organization's ability to ensure adherence to humanitarian principles is more limited due to lack of access, oversight, and ability to monitor. In complex and protracted emergencies, availability of established national NGO partners can be limited and therefore partners are often local or community-based organizations, which may have limited knowledge and experience of humanitarian response. In all cases, adherence to humanitarian principles is fundamental.

Step 2
Peer references from other organizations/ informal verification of information provided by partner

It may not be possible to meet with potential partner organizations to complete the partner assessment, and potential partners may be unknown. An additional check to support the information provided is to request informal references and verification from other trusted organizations, such as INGOs that have worked with the partner, other local contacts, or donors. This process would be conducted on an informal basis but could be recorded, if appropriate, as supporting documentation.

Step 3
Additional fraud/ aid diversion policy and practice checks

The risk of fraud or aid diversion is significantly increased and donor compliance is significantly more stringent due to lack of access, inability to monitor, and the need to transfer risk or delegate to partners. In addition to the partner capacity assessment described above, it is important to include some further in-depth checks on the policies and controls any potential partner has in place.

Step 4
Examples of past performance

Partners may be unknown and/or access may be so limited that potential partner organizations are local or community-based organizations. Furthermore, as support, training, and monitoring are a challenge, it is important to have evidence of the partner's ability to deliver projects of a similar size, scope, and scale. Therefore at least one past performance statement should be completed.

Step 5
Mapping of partner's existing project commitments

Local and national partner organizations may become overstretched, and due to lack of access, expectations of their delivery capacity may become unrealistic. It is therefore important to ensure that there is good oversight over the existing project commitments of any potential partner. Together with other assessment information, this will help to determine the remaining available capacity of the partner.

Step 6
Identify alternative methods for capacity-building

Ensure that you consider what alternative methods will be needed in order to deliver the training and devise a capacity-building plan accordingly. Consider the following:

- Where will training be delivered?
- What methods will be used to deliver the training?
- What additional resources are needed? (e.g., security, money, human resources)

Step 7
Establish communications protocol for partners

- Ensure additional layers of sign-off and decision-making authority;
- Increase frequency of reporting to create greater accountability between local staff or partners and country offices, and ensure issues are highlighted in a timely way. Establish clear reporting schedule and associated templates.
- Increase the frequency of project review meetings: Plan for a minimum of quarterly face-to-face meetings (e.g., project inception, grant review meetings, learning reviews) either at the project location or at a suitable alternative venue (e.g., regional or country office). Establish agendas and template for the meetings.
- Conduct spot-check, unannounced monitoring visits to project offices: Senior program staff and technical specialists undertake ad hoc spot-check visits to project offices, without prior warning given to local project team or partner.

Step 8
Enhanced mobilization and monitoring controls

The resources and time required for risk management and support can be underestimated. Unrealistic planning can undermine effectiveness and safety of staff and partners. What is needed:

- A plan detailing the alternative methods and means for monitoring the logframe;
- Data collection and recording methods and frequency;

- Reporting frequency (including in what format and to whom);
- A plan detailing how end-of-project outcomes and impact will be measured;
- Timeframes for internal and/or external project review and evaluation;
- A clear budget to support the remotely led M&E activities;
- Simplified version of M&E frameworks and project logframe;
- Simple templates and guidance for all M&E tools.

Step 9
Use of remote monitoring tools

The following tools can enhance monitoring:

- **GPS shipment tracking**
  In which goods are barcoded and scanned upon delivery;
- **Regular debrief meetings**
  A technique used to gather information about partner activities and programs. With this method, the onus is on the local partner to be skilled in gathering pertinent data, objectively reflective in operations, and honest in communication with international partners;
- **Crowdsourcing**
  Obtaining information from large groups of people, usually via SMS or the Internet;
- **Broadcasts**
  Updates on planned activities to intended beneficiaries are another community-based method for M&E;
- **Photos/videos**
  Photos including geo-tagging to verify the date and location. This method is believed to decrease diversion, and allows for "real-time" monitoring. (Potential drawbacks of this method include: photos/videos do not confirm that the distribution occurred the way it was designed, nor if the intended beneficiaries were reached; it says little about the quality of work; photos may get circulated without subjects' consent; carrying this type of information or equipment might put monitors at risk; relying on this method where there is limited electricity and bandwidth may not be effective.);
- **Web-based remote project monitoring**
  A project tracking base can be used to monitor activities undertaken by local partners. Members of local organizations send geo-tagged photographic evidence of project progress;
- **Daily oral reports**
  Conducted with partner or field staff using key qualitative indicators that have been agreed upon in advance, and help to build a longitudinal picture of operations;
- **Peer observation**
  In which one local peer organization observes and evaluates the work of another.

Step 10
Increased frequency of review

In fragile settings, the frequency with which these processes are reviewed and updated should be increased.

FIELD GUIDE E: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

SEVERITY RISK RATING	CONTROLS REQUIRED
1	– Normal data collection and analysis process applies
2	– Steps 2 and 3 should be used for data collection – Normal data analysis process applies
3	– Steps 1-7 should be used for data collection – Step 8 should be used for data analysis
4	– Steps 1-7 should be used for data collection – Step 8 should be used for data analysis
5	– Gain prior authorization from CEO and Board to operate at this risk rating – Steps 1-7 should be used for data collection – Step 8 should be used for data analysis

Data collection is significantly more challenging in fragile settings. The operational context—with lack of access, restrictions on communications, reduced training for data collection teams and more complex program activities—can lead to a reduction in the quality of the data. Capacity of partners or field staff, as well as the amount of time and resources available for data collection, can also pose challenges.

Step 1
Selecting your data collectors

Direct access to targeted populations may be reduced, and well-trained organization staff often are not available or not able to access the area.

- While it is preferable for staff who have an awareness of the situation and understand the programs to carry out data collection, this is not always possible. Local partners are the best alternative; however, friends and family contacts of national staff, local suppliers, people who have recently moved away from an area, or other organizations that have secured access are all sources that could be used to collect data.
- To mitigate against security and data quality issues, create a checklist to ensure: collection teams have been vetted properly; live outside the area being assessed; reflect a gender and age balance; and have been trained in the relevant data collection tools.
- Incorporate extra training and capacity-building in project management, M&E, and/or more technically specialized training if necessary. Sessions over telephone or VOIP can be conducted, as long as communication channels have been verified as secure, and additional explanations on all paperwork can help data collectors in the field ensure they follow best practice. Support from country-, regional-, and HQ-level staff should be available. Also, other organizations may be able to provide trainings more locally.

Step 2
Adapting data collection methodologies to the context

Time may be limited for data collections, or the security of the population may be more fragile. In these scenarios, faster data collection will be needed, and the scope of the data may need to be reduced. Short surveys can be used, with multiple-choice answers to reduce the time taken in each interview. Increased reliance on direct observation can reduce the number of general questions needed in a survey. Finally, selecting secure locations for focus group discussions can increase participation.

Step 3
Additional considerations for data collection methodologies

Direct Observation

- Every data collection instrument (e.g., questionnaire, interview checklist) should make provision and space for direct observation comments and notes, as they help add context and meaning to the data collected.
- Data collectors should be trained in the value of their observations through pre-field visit preparation and understand how direct observation links with other data collection tools.
- Conditions and particular features should be observed from a range of viewpoints and places to provide a representative view of the affected area.
- Where culturally acceptable and the security situation permits, photos, video footage, and even sketches should be documented to verify written information.
- A debrief between assessment team members should be organized by the team leader to collect observations from the team, triangulate information, and wrap up final conclusions of the field visit. Areas where team observations and population responses do not match should be highlighted to enable further analysis of discrepancies and identify triangulation needs.

Key Informant Interviews

- A checklist should be provided of interviews with individuals of different genders, ages, and religious and/or ethnic minorities to ensure a full picture of the affected community. It is important that the assessors consider power dynamics within a community.
  The data collection instrument should be field tested and refined as necessary. A field test will provide a good indication of the complexity of the data collection instrument and the time required to complete it.
- Team members should be properly trained to achieve accurate and precise assessments. Team members should be briefed on and understand the objectives, methodology, and principles of the assessment. Translated field notes should be provided that define key terminology, explain the type of information required for each question, and outline site sampling.
- The different characteristics of people to consult should be categorized (e.g., those most affected by the crisis, IDPs, minority ethnic groups, etc) and a checklist should be provided to data collectors.
- A limited number of critical topics to discuss should be selected. Information should be limited to one key informant's response. Triangulate by asking other KIs until you are confident that there is consensus on this point.

Step 4
Accountability to beneficiaries

General principles of accountability apply to all data collection. However, in risk management contexts lack of direct contact with beneficiaries and participants by the organization can leave the population feeling isolated from decision-making. The following are the minimum steps to ensure accountability in these settings:

- Train local and partner staff in organizational codes of conduct, and humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, independence, and impartiality. An accountability mechanism should enable beneficiaries to address concerns or complaints about the use of their personal data. (See also Field Guide: Complaint and Feedback Mechanism)
- Ensure beneficiaries understand why and how data is being collected during assessment and monitoring.
- Digital technologies may be difficult to understand and trust for some communities. It is essential that beneficiaries understand that personal information is not shared outside the agency. Ensure data collection teams clearly explain the advantages that these technologies have in protecting people's confidentiality.
- Ensure all beneficiaries consent to their personal data being used and shared, developing and employing a template for obtaining consent to be used by local staff and partners.
- Conduct follow-up visits to the assessed population to inform them of the outcome.

Step 5
Dissemination of collected data

Where access is limited, and movement between areas is restricted, it is more complicated to transfer information once it has been collected.

- Methods of data collection should take into consideration the transfer of data to the end point. If access is completely restricted, information can be sent via Internet.
- Staff must be sufficiently trained to ensure this process can happen.
- If there is limited or no Internet connection, data can be passed on via telephone. However, corruption of data is greater in this method, and therefore the amount of data should be reduced, and the training for staff needs to be increased.
- Paper forms with large quantities of information are not suitable when all data will be passed on by telephone. Similarly, using tablets to collect information is not suitable where there is limited or no Internet access.
- Lengthy notes and transcripts are difficult and time-consuming to process. Realistically, efficient use of raw, narrative data will depend on the ability of the monitors to skilfully extract and relay the key information. Make a judgement call on the skills and time available to do this, and the potential bias or loss of important information through using processed data.
- Be aware of local rules and laws. For examples in some countries encrypted laptops are illegal. There may be a risk of confiscation and of devices falling into the wrong hands. Paper may also be viewed with suspicion.

Step 6
Ensuring privacy and confidentiality

Staff handling data must be able to recognize and protect sensitive information that directly links to individuals in an affected population. This data must only exist in a limited domain, since any breach could jeopardize the personal security of beneficiaries, staff, and partners.

- Maintain a security focal point who is in sole possession of the database password;
- Ensure all data is backed up, password-protected, and encrypted;
- Ensure partition is clearly defined so that those collecting data never have access to full beneficiary records; Establish data-sharing agreements and protocols with any third parties before any program or project is implemented. The agreement should define expectations concerning confidentiality;
- Conduct spot checks on data collection processes to identify errors by data collection staff and beneficiaries providing incorrect data;
- Conduct frequent spot checks to ensure data stored is relevant and current and that the amount of data is not excessive in relation to its use;
- Do not hold data longer than required without a clear rationale;
- Devise plan for disposal of data in exit strategy.

Step 7
Use of information and communication technology tools

Information and communication technology (ICT) tools can offer creative solutions when traditional approaches are not possible. ICT data collection and monitoring tools provide a digital platform for data collection and enable rapid analysis and sharing of information. Successful application of ICT requires great attention to the methodology, its appropriateness, and feasibility within the particular context.

The main ICT tools used for limited-access programming are:

- **Internet and mobile phone** (or tablet) based. Common uses are for assessments and monitoring, enabling remotely located staff to communicate directly with people (by telephone and social media) and to carry out surveys (e.g., monitoring questionnaires). For staff or partners who continue to have access, digital survey tools can replace traditional manual methods of recording responses by using software designed to run on mobile phones, including offline. They can increase the speed with which data is captured and analyzed, enable it to be easily shared, and reduce human error. They can also incorporate photographs and GPS data to show locations. GPS-enabled devices, such as mobile phones, are often viewed with suspicion by government and local conflict actors; their use could expose users and communities to unacceptable risk. The use of GPS must be carefully assessed before designing any methodology.
- **Remote sensing imagery and geographic information systems (GIS)**
GIS is a system designed to capture, store, manipulate, analyze, manage, and present spatial or geographical data. GIS can be used to map areas remotely, combining pre- and post-crisis data sets. Remote sensing data usually is collected by satellite, airplanes, or drones. Although less common in humanitarian response, remote sensing imagery is increasingly being used by the UN, particularly for natural disasters. The imagery reveals bigger picture information such as large infrastructure, conflict-related damage, and population movements such as spontaneous settlements.
- **The internet of things (IOT)**
An increasing number of everyday objects have network connectivity, allowing them to send and receive data. IOT can include sensors placed inside vehicles or infrastructure which monitor water flow or measure whether water trucks deliver the right quantity to the right place. Multiple human and environmental factors could

affect the reliability of data; factor these weaknesses into design.

Step 8
Verification and triangulation of data collected

Ensuring accurate, quality, and impartial data collection is a challenge when access is limited. Powerful local players may try to influence assessments, and local staff or partners may be more susceptible to pressure. While using staff with close social ties to targeted communities may help boost acceptance in some cases, remote verification and control is also desirable. In risk management contexts, important considerations are:

- Remote verification of assessment by staff in a different location.
- Ensure all data collected remotely by local staff or implementing partners has been confirmed through cross-verification from direct sources. Where data is collected from one source (e.g., a survey of community leaders in a village), it should be cross checked with another relevant source. This may include community representatives, elders, other humanitarian organizations, or civilian government representatives and de facto authorities.
- Information should be triangulated with multiple sources, including trusted third parties.
- Discrepancies in data from one source should be investigated (e.g., differing population numbers could be due to different levels of access for a partner as compared to staff members)

FIELD GUIDE F: COMPLAINT AND FEEDBACK MECHANISM

SEVERITY RISK RATING	CONTROLS REQUIRED
1	– Standard complaints and feedback mechanism can be used.
2	– Standard complaints and feedback mechanism can be used.
3	– Standard complaints and feedback mechanism can be used. Follow steps 1-5.
4	– Standard complaints and feedback mechanism can be used. Follow steps 1-5.
5	– Gain prior authorization from CEO and Board to operate at this risk rating. – Standard complaints and feedback mechanism can be used. Follow steps 1-5.

In highly tense political and security contexts, the population may fear repercussions for using a complaint and feedback mechanism (CFM). As such, there is usually a diminished participation and two-way communication between the affected population and the organization. This can result in a reduced understanding of the local changing environment, bad practices, and a slower reaction to feedback and complaints.

Step 1
Adapt the response structure to the context of the intervention

The CFM response structure described below is adaptable based on the context of the intervention and on available human resources.

- The CFM should designate an accountability focal point working at the field level or operating remotely, depending on the context.
- Depending on the context, an accountability focal point may need to be identified from the implementing partner.

- The response mechanism can make use of other field staff to collect feedback if needed.
- Methods of sharing data should be considered (e.g., emailing databases, telephone updates, or weekly collection).

Step 2
Offer additional support for field teams/ implementing partner

Field teams and implementing partners are responsible for managing the CFM in risk management settings. Ensure adequate training is provided and resources are allocated to ensure that they can fully understand the CFM protocols.

- An accountability focal point from the implementing partner should be identified.
- The organization's accountability focal point should provide initial training on this field guide. This should be followed up with coaching and mentoring at the time of the monthly report, either in person or remotely.
- The accountability focal point should support the implementing partner focal point in the categorization of complaints and decisions on the relevant responses.
- Regular meetings should be held between the relevant staff to analyze the CFM.

Step 3
Use technology-based tools

In settings where access to beneficiaries is difficult or impossible for security reasons, it is recommended to make use of technology-based tools. The importance of planning and budgeting for investment in equipment and training (e.g., phone, satellites, SMS servers, phone lines, online platforms, trainings) is also essential.

Step 4
Use the local social structures

Communities have their own coping mechanisms and usually recreate links and connection through which information is shared and collected. In a risk management setting, it is recommended to use the existing local social structures (e.g., CBOs, media groups, diaspora, community leaders, women groups) to collect information and complaints.

Step 5
Use third-party verification/ cross-checking system

People affected by a crisis tend to speak more easily to external actors to provide constructive feedback, criticisms, and complaints rather than to the local staff who are implementing the project. Use third-party verification/ cross-checking system/triangulation of information (e.g., visits by senior national personnel, peer monitoring by other agencies, visits by external monitors, and evaluators).

FIELD GUIDE G: THIRD–PARTY MONITORING

SEVERITY RISK RATING	CONTROLS REQUIRED
1	– Standard monitoring by the organization should be possible.
2	– Third-party monitoring may be required and steps below should be followed.
3	– Third-party monitoring will be required and steps below should be followed.
4	– Third-party monitoring will be required and steps below should be followed.
5	– Gain prior authorization from CEO and Board to operate at this risk rating. – Third-party monitoring will be required and steps below should be followed.

Third-party monitoring (TPM) is essential where direct monitoring is not possible or should be augmented due to higher risk. At a minimum, it can be used to verify whether projects were implemented, and if so, whether they are in line with basic planning indicators. It can also offer qualitative information to provide the donor with feedback loops from beneficiaries, as well as inform the donor about any changes in the environment that may affect the overall program's theory of change, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. The success or failure of TPM rests on the strength and clarity of the terms of reference, and the level of follow-up and monitoring undertaken during the implementation period.

Step 1
Defining the scope of the monitoring

Third-party monitoring can and should be used throughout the life of the project, either for regular M&E reporting, or for one-off evaluations at any stage of the project. In either case, the scope of TPM activities should be included in the overall M&E plan and engagement with the third party should begin as soon as possible. It is important to assess the adequate timing and feasibility to conduct such activity. The following criteria assess the feasibility of the evaluation.

CRITERIA	GUIDING QUESTIONS	YES	NO
– **Physical Access**	– Is the program location accessible for an external evaluator? Third-party contractors may have higher appetite for risk, or have religious or political affiliations that allow access that the organization doesn't have.		
– **Timing and Stakeholder Availability**	– Are the staff and other relevant stakeholders who will need to participate in the monitoring activities available?		
– **Program Design**	– Are the objectives, outputs, and activities of the program clear enough to evaluate progress, results, and impact?		
– **Available Information**	– Is adequate information available to engage in third-party monitoring?		
– **Financial Considerations**	– Are sufficient funds available to undertake third-party monitoring?		
– **Utility**	– Is there a high probability that the monitoring activity will be used to improve the program?		

Step 2
Budgeting for third-party monitoring

TPM activities require adequate resources and time that should be allocated at the time of planning, allocating budgets, and program design. The amount depends on the various needs for monitoring, the complexity of the program/portfolio, and the type of activities to be implemented, the duration of the program and the capacity of the external partner selected.

Step 3
Managing the solicitation process

Where there may be a lack of suitable organizations available, informal referrals from other NGOs or from previous projects can be used to identify organizations for limited competition RFPs. The procurement process for contracting a third party to conduct monitoring and evaluation activities must be done in accordance with the regulations of the grant covering the evaluation, if relevant. The procurement process, including references and note to file regarding specific companies, must be documented and kept on file.

Seek both formal and informal references. It is usual for a third-party contractor to work with multiple agencies, and it is possible to gain insight into challenges faced by other NGOs to inform the selection process and the terms of the agreement.

Step 4
Developing the agreement

In developing the contract with a third party, it is essential to ensure that very specific deliverables and timeframes are set in the scope of work. Approval of deliverables prior to payment is essential and provides a means for ensuring quality of the final products.

Step 5
Managing the follow-up process

Ensure that expectations are clear from the beginning and that systems for tracking progress of the work are established. Regular check-ins with the third party as the monitoring activities are underway and frequent communication with the third party outside of contracted engagements are vital.

The organization can also undertake informal monitoring of the third party. Other NGOs using the same company, other third-party monitors, or local contacts can give feedback on the company or the situation.

Step 6
Report writing

When writing reports, use clear and accessible language, providing evidence-based conclusions and clearly illustrating the findings of the monitoring and/or evaluation.

Step 7
Learning

The data collected should support institutional learning and evidence-based programming. Therefore, monitoring reports and evaluations should feed into the program cycle management at all stages to inform adjustments in programmes where needed, and improve program design, as well as organizational learning systems to inform strategic direction.

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Find the *Risk Management in Fragile Settings Toolkit* and online Risk Calculator here: www.ri.org/risk-toolkit

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