What is limited access?	Definition: Environments in which access by external agents is limited or unpredictable because of insecurity or political factors There are four operational modalities: Remote control Remote management Remote support/oversight Remote partnership
What does monitoring and evaluation cover?	On-going data collection Monitoring reviews Country learning reviews Community dialogue and feedback Process and impact evaluations
What is M&E in limited access areas?	Data collection and dialogue (including feedback) with members of the affected community, partners and the implementing organisation by various channels that do not rely on a consistent or guaranteed physical presence of Oxfam staff in the project area.
When it is an appropriate methodology?	In insecure environments where staff are unable (or only sporadically able) to visit affected communities but have some communication (direct or indirect) with community members It may also be an appropriate method for shorter periods of time during seasonally adverse weather conditions
Considerations:	The security of partners and the community (especially community monitors) is paramount Considerations for stakeholders will always take precedence over the desire for accountability and visibility It is important to avoid “tick box tokenism” (routine collection of data with no prioritization, analysis or action). There has to be a balance between collecting useful information that can lead to change and putting people at risk

	Limited access monitoring is very dependent on trust – in partners, community monitors and other actors. If there is little or no trust, monitoring will not be possible A suggestion could be a trust building exercise with Oxfam and partners and/or other actors prior to entering any agreements on monitoring Evaluation can be a challenge remotely, but with proper monitoring frameworks can be done Impact assessments are probably not fully possible More than anything, the decision to do remote monitoring must be based on the **Do No Harm**[1] principle

[1] This means that collecting information will not adversely affect either Oxfam staff, partners or members of the community

How to do it:	Decide on what minimum information is necessary for project planning, implementation, monitoring and learning: standard Oxfam frameworks and tools will probably have to be adapted. This includes programmes where access can be predicted to diminish overtime (preplanning for limited access) Identify channels for communication with the affected population and partners, taking into account the security issues that may be involved Carry out a risk analysis including for accountability mechanisms Where possible, work through existing traditional structures but explore levels of understanding and ability to monitor and evaluate Decide with partners and the affected population who will be responsible for data collection, analysis and reporting as well as dialogue with the implementing agency Carry out M&E training if required with partners and/or other stakeholders Adapt existing tools, frameworks, standards and indicators to the environment: do this with partners and monitors (both internal and external) Explore if a monitoring review is feasible and how it could realistically involve as many actors as possible Decide how a feedback mechanism will be put in place taking security issues into consideration; including feedback from Oxfam to the field monitoring teams Make sure all volunteers are informed of Oxfam's policy around compensation (in case of accident) and that it is written into all contracts Ensure that security guidelines (including contingency plans) are available for everyone and that all actors know how to act if there is an incidence during monitoring visits Factor in means for triangulation and cross-checking
Minimum standards (the absolute bottom line for information to be collected):	***Financial*** How funds have been used including receipts and contracts Asset retention and disposal

	Human resources Contracts and salaries (including security issues on how and where this information is stored) ***Use of resources*** Distribution lists with signatures or thumb prints Proof of facility construction Proof of usage and satisfaction ***Technical standards*** Proof of minimum standards being used (determined by technical advisers) Quality water testing Trends – disease patterns, prices, power cuts, agricultural yields and rainfall Changes in vulnerability in terms of increased numbers of people being classified as vulnerable ***Beneficiary satisfaction*** Feedback from randomly selected community members on issues such as privacy, safety and appropriateness Assurance of equity and appropriate targeting Impact may be difficult (or even impossible) to measure especially if it is around self-reported behaviour change. Managers need to weigh up the difficulties and cost of collecting information with the perceived reliability and usefulness. These constraints need to be made explicit in log frames and in dialogue with donors from the design phase.

Key points to note:	Indicators need to simple and understood by all those who will collect the data	If impact cannot be assessed, it is better to go for outcomes or outputs only Be realistic – if the information is not reliable then do not collect it Impact is often about judgement – this may be difficult for external monitors to do Communities may “skew” data if questions of continued support are perceived to be dependent on results
	Clear means of verification with quantitative tools and timing clearly defined	Give clear instructions to monitors and definitions for ambiguous words (such as “clean” or “safe”) Formats should be tested out with volunteers to ensure they are able to collect information without support Tick boxes are easier if a list of possible choices is given and enumerators are trained Differentiate between monitoring and verification (cross-checking)

	Qualitative data tools instead of sweeping generalised statements	If qualitative data are required on concepts such as “satisfaction” or “confidence” then a points system with clear instructions as to what is meant by the criteria may be a better way of doing it for people who may not be experienced in focus groups or other PRA methods An example could be on a transect walk where the monitor could be supplied with a list of possible observations that can be then checked and graded Tools need to be developed with volunteers – this should be done in all programmes but is even more important when there is remote monitoring. Monitors need to fully understand the reasons for data collection
	Clear guidelines as to what and when information is needed	It might be better to collect information at specific seasonal times such as just after the rains for malaria or household food consumption during the hunger period than doing it on a regular basis when people get bored or complacent.

	Technical structural monitoring should use photographs or diagrams that can be crosschecked	It is unfair to expect someone with no technical skills to verify construction work and approve payment. It can also bring volunteers into difficulties if contractors feel that it is them who are stopping payment Find other technical sources in country such as another NGO that can carry out cross checks Local government technical staff may also be able to verify completion and quality It may be possible for partner staff to come out of the area for technical training including Sphere If feasible use mobile phones (with camera) or web-cams but check security issues first
	Look for new and innovative means for data collection	Everyone gets bored with the same method in any programme but especially where there is limited contact with project staff, motivation may be a problem Accept that there will be limitations: for example, when phoning community members be clear that there is no way of checking whether the person at the other end is who they say they are If there is computer access and representatives from the community can come to the office, using Skype means that they can see the person asking the questions

	Use of external monitors	No group is ever impartial Be careful with using external (to the programme) monitors be it another INGO, local NGO or CBO, church leaders, teachers or private companies All actors have loyalties to another party and also have varying degrees of a vested interest Explain what the implications of negative reporting are (the need to know if things are not going well) and what is expected in terms of quality reporting Use several sources if possible Remember any kind of remuneration makes the monitor an Oxfam employee rather than impartial Private companies or consultant may have their own security guidelines, make sure these are compatible with Oxfam's Private companies will have limitations as to what they can monitor: probably verification of quantitative data is the best choice for these external monitors
	Transparency with trust building and mutual respect Ensure that the monitoring system is not creating more tension in the community	Make sure all monitoring is overt and that communities are aware of the process Any crosschecking and verification should be done openly in order to build up a transparent system If outside monitors are used, the community must know who these people are and what their remit is Use community monitors and cross-check with external monitors rather than relying on only one group

	The staff receiving the information need good facilitation skills and the ability to ask probing questions; not to just accept whatever is being reported	Not everyone is a good facilitator Time needs to be taken during meetings with partners, extension workers or other groups who can leave the field to meet Oxfam staff to challenge and to get a feel for what is happening. It is important to make monitors feel that what they are collecting is important to the programme and not just a routine exercise that has been imposed on them
	Documentation by Oxfam staff on meetings held that include follow-up and problem-solving solutions with dates and the person responsible as well as verification of information received	Monitors (partners, extension workers, community members or other groups) need to feel that the information and especially community feedback is taken seriously.
	Negative feedback should not only be recorded but the resulting investigation and solution should also be documented as well as being communicated back to the community	This is especially important in a remote implementation programme where the rapport with the community is missing and trust has to be built up from a distance
	Draw up clear guidelines on compensation for death or injury for partners and volunteers if travelling between home-base and the Oxfam meeting point and make sure these are included in all contracts and MOUs	Do not wait until something happens. Seek professional advice within the organisation and make sure everyone is informed about compensation rights. There are now clear guidelines[2] for volunteers on the intranet.
	The way names are spelt may be very different and it may be hard to know which villages people are talking about	Use GPS and GoogleEarth for consistency and code all villages

[2] http://intranet.oxfam.org.uk/support/hr/pay_benefits/insurance/personal_accident.htm

	Be realistic at all stages and make sure this realism is reflected in proposals and reports	Monitoring is difficult in all projects let alone when there is no access Sometimes we have to accept that we will never get the true picture We need to make our donors aware of this “Good enough” should be the goal
Constraints:	If security is an issue for staff, it will also be an issue for the monitors. Oxfam should not assume that partners/monitors would be less at risk than Oxfam staff just because they are from the location. We must ensure that we are not just transferring the risk from Oxfam to others Ensure that as much as possible, partners and volunteers receive security training Cameras, recorders, web-cams and other technology may put monitors at risk of theft and banditry They may also be seen as spies by warring parties or even government officials Impact assessment and beneficiary satisfaction may be difficult to measure Using Skype with webcams can be unacceptable for some communities especially if it is men talking to women	
Resources:	Remote monitoring can be expensive and should be adequately budgeted for. In normal circumstances where staff travel to the field the budget should cover travel and living expenses. In remote monitoring there may be double or treble the number of people coming to the meeting point. Expenses will have to be covered More technology such as phones or radios may be utilised and should be budgeted for	

Examples of lessons learnt

Somalia **Using a private company as a facilitator to deliver cash grants in a environment where NGO visibility is a security issue** Communities were given grants with conditions that had be demonstrably met:

- At least two committees elected by secret ballot, one for project delivery and one for monitoring and evaluation
- Use of the community grant to be approved by the majority of the community
- The most vulnerable identified by the community would be targeted
- Design of project and monitoring to be carried out in participatory meetings
- Accounts shared and posted in public places

Triangulation was done through peer review, telephone networks as well as the private company's own monitoring system

Some lessons learnt:
Donors are reluctant to accept the quality of data from remote monitoring
External monitors are seen as spies by partner NGO's
Capacity building of implementing partner staff and WASH committee members is key to distance monitoring
Using opportunistic field visits by national staff to carry out key informant interviews with the community gives good insight into community perceptions of the programme and areas for improvement. These visits are also means of triangulation of other data
Pictures of the constructed and operating infrastructures was useful for monitoring outputs and for showing progress to donors
A flexible approach and a professional relationship with implementing partners, facilitates the smooth monitoring and evaluation exercise of the programme
The diaspora is a potential monitoring partner but there has been resistance to pilot this approach by stakeholders
General feeling that information gained in limited access is unreliable

Iraq
Some lessons learnt:
Remote programming has improved with experience
Remote control remains an unsatisfactory long-term approach
Remote support & partnership arrangements have proved sustainable
Invisible / covert modalities are useful in unstable areas but ultimately undermine accountability, trust, acceptance, safe access and sustainability

Uganda
Experience from Uganda showed that accountability to the affected population was increased by default as communities had to take ownership

and to make decisions around programming The independent monitors were very loyal to Oxfam but were seen as spies by the community – the monitors mostly reported on distribution of goods Technical quality was sometimes poor as there was no one qualified to verify results Public health behaviour change was difficult to monitor and when the staff finally gained access, the situation was often different to that which had been reported
Darfur The key areas selected for minimum monitoring by community committees are: Disease outbreaks and changes in disease trends Water quality and quantity Access to latrines Changes in vulnerability of different groups
Afghanistan The external evaluator talked to women through Skype facilities in the local partner office. Although the women did not want the webcam on at their end, they were happy to see the evaluator and for her voice to be heard Having a male translator was a hindrance but by using Skype, he was not so prominent in the conversation and women could only hear his voice The evaluator used GoogleEarth and GPS to code villages that could not be visited so that everyone was sure they were using the same village names