



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL HUMANITARIAN AID AND CIVIL PROTECTION – ECHO

## **Instruction note for ECHO staff on Remote Management**

## Table of Contents

|      |   |   |
|------|---|---|
| 1.   | DEFINITION: WHAT IS 'REMOTE MANAGEMENT' FOR ECHO? .....   | 1 |
| 2.   | DIRECT MANAGEMENT: THE PREFERRED OPTION .....   | 2 |
| 2.1. | ECHO is a field-based donor .....   | 2 |
| 2.2. | Remote management entails significant risks .....   | 2 |
| 2.3. | Building acceptance remains the best access strategy .....  | 3 |
| 3.   | REMOTE MANAGEMENT: A LAST RESORT .....  | 3 |
| 1:   | Is there an access problem? .....   | 3 |
| 2:   | Does the proposed action include acceptance-building measures? .....                                      | 3 |
| 3:   | Is it a direct life-saving action?.....   | 4 |
| 4:   | Can the action be implemented without risking the lives of those undertaking the work on the ground?..... | 4 |
| 5:   | What is the source of the needs assessment in a remotely-managed action? .....                            | 5 |
| 6:   | Are the staff adequately qualified? .....   | 5 |
| 7:   | Are monitoring arrangements adapted for remote management?.....   | 6 |
| 4.   | ASSESSING THE LONGER-TERM IMPACT OF REMOTE MANAGEMENT .....   | 7 |
| 1.   | FOR ACCEPTING A REMOTE MANAGEMENT COMPONENT IN AN ECHO-FUNDED PROJECT.....                                | 8 |

## **1. DEFINITION: WHAT IS 'REMOTE MANAGEMENT' FOR ECHO?**

ECHO defines remote management as:

*An operational approach used to provide relief in situations where humanitarian access to disaster-affected populations is limited.*

Typically, this involves humanitarian agencies transferring operational responsibilities, usually carried out by expatriate staff, to national and local employees or external partners. The aim is to enable relief projects to be implemented in places where expatriates cannot go. The main reasons for this are likely to be either:

- security concerns, or;
- bureaucratic obstacles imposed by governments or non-state 'authorities' (for example, a refusal to grant visas or travel permits).

It can be difficult to establish a clear dividing line between direct implementation and remote management. Some locations may be temporarily off-limits for non-local staff simply because seasonal rains have made the roads impassable. Hostilities might affect one location covered by a project while other areas remain peaceful and accessible. Authorities may prevent travel to one region but allow it to others.

Many humanitarian actions therefore combine elements of remote management with direct implementation. An action may, for example, include training and capacity-building that are managed directly, while the distribution of relief supplies in unsafe areas is implemented by local staff or partners and supervised remotely.

## **2. DIRECT MANAGEMENT: THE PREFERRED OPTION**

ECHO does *not* fund actions using remote management, other than in the most exceptional circumstances. This strict stance is premised on the following three considerations.

### **2.1. ECHO is a field-based donor**

ECHO staff in Country and Regional Support Offices make every effort to visit project implementation sites and engage with the operational staff of partner organisations, and civilian populations, in face-to-face discussions. Being able to visit field projects not only serves to monitor progress and verify whether activities are implemented in line with agreed modalities. It also helps ensure that ECHO staff are aware of the humanitarian dynamics on the ground. Direct exposure to operational realities enables ECHO to set overall funding priorities and select individual projects accordingly.

Remote management limits the ability of ECHO staff to access field locations, as partners are less able to provide logistical support and facilitate contacts with local stakeholders. Clearly, the access limitations that prompt partners to consider the remote management option are also likely to affect ECHO field staff.

### **2.2. Remote management entails significant risks**

The use of remote management and outsourcing of aid delivery may entail a transfer of security risks from international to national staff. In the most insecure contexts, nationals are often the main victims of fatal security incidents.

The transfer of managerial and monitoring responsibility to local staff or partner organisations can also compromise the quality and relevance of humanitarian projects.

Humanitarian organisations need to undertake impartial needs assessments on the ground. It can be difficult, sometimes impossible, to carry out such preparatory work without the participation of 'external' humanitarian aid workers who have no personal stake in the selection of beneficiaries.

In some contexts, humanitarian organisations also find it difficult to recruit skilled and experienced national staff.

In addition, remote management may compromise commonly accepted accountability standards. The longer operations are managed remotely, the more restricted implementing organisations and donors are in their ability to judge whether goods and services reach targeted beneficiaries and ensure that humanitarian funds are not diverted.

Finally, humanitarian organisations can easily fall into the remote management 'trap'. Once they start to implement activities in certain areas remotely, it can be difficult to reverse the process.

### **2.3. Building acceptance remains the best access strategy**

Building acceptance of humanitarian actors and activities among governments, non-state authorities and beneficiaries continues to be the most effective and sustainable way of gaining and maintaining access to vulnerable populations. This can be best achieved by strictly adhering to the humanitarian principles of impartiality, independence and neutrality, and by delivering high quality, needs-based aid. ECHO therefore strives to support humanitarian organisations that seek to build, maintain or regain acceptance.

## **3. REMOTE MANAGEMENT: A LAST RESORT**

ECHO will consider funding for actions involving remote management where the questions set out below have been answered. Each question includes one or two assessment criteria. Proposed actions that fail to fulfil these criteria are *not* eligible for ECHO funding.

Where remote management is proposed by a partner for an *ongoing* action, due to a change in circumstances that hinders or prevents direct implementation, ECHO staff will use the same criteria to assess whether the action should be (a) continued using remote management; (b) suspended or (c) terminated.

There may be situations where an action involving remote management is predicted to deliver substantial humanitarian benefits, despite the non-fulfillment of one or more of the assessment criteria. Such actions may, exceptionally, be funded (or continue to be funded) but only after referral of the case to the ECHO Director of Operations for decision.

### **1: Is there an access problem?**

When a partner proposes remote management for an action, it is important to verify the existence and extent of access problems in the locations concerned. ECHO needs to be satisfied that the circumstances are such as to justify considering a remote management approach, and that the partner has done what it can to ensure access before proposing this approach.

As long as alternative options for direct delivery exist, support for remotely managed operations will be excluded.

#### *Specific assessment criteria*

- (1) It is clear that access problems exist that cannot be resolved by the partner, and that these are sufficiently serious to prevent humanitarian delivery unless a remote management approach is adopted.
- (2) No other humanitarian organisation eligible for ECHO funding, with the required capacity and experience, is willing and able to meet humanitarian needs identified in the proposed action through direct implementation.

### **2: Does the proposed action include acceptance-building measures?**

The most effective way to mitigate security risks for humanitarian aid workers and gain access to vulnerable populations is to build acceptance of impartial and

independent humanitarian action among local communities, government actors and non-state authorities. This requires thorough stakeholder mapping and the direct involvement of senior staff who possess the necessary experience and skills to facilitate access negotiations with local actors.

Efforts to build acceptance can also help humanitarian organisations avoid falling into the remote management 'trap'. Local government actors and non-state authorities become easily accustomed to the fact that humanitarian projects are implemented with limited direct oversight from relief workers who are not part of the local community. To break this cycle, humanitarian organisations need to regain the confidence of all actors controlling humanitarian access.

*Specific assessment criteria*

- (1) The proposed action identifies actors at local, provincial, national or international level who have or could have an impact on humanitarian access in the proposed geographic area(s) of intervention.
- (2) Where possible, the action includes concrete steps to gain, regain or maintain acceptance of neutral and independent humanitarian action.

**3: Is it a direct life-saving action?**

In view of the risks associated with remote management operations, they should only be supported where justified by a life-saving imperative. Humanitarian actions not essential to saving lives including early recovery, preparedness and linking relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) will not be supported if their management is to be undertaken remotely.

*Specific assessment criterion*

The action subject to remote management is designed to implement direct, life-saving operations.

**4: Can the action be implemented without risking the lives of those undertaking the work on the ground?**

Where access for expatriate staff is hindered because of security risks, it is possible that local staff will face similar, or even greater risks. Risk 'displacement' is not acceptable. Where remote management is indicated for security reasons, it can only be contemplated where access is not possible due to the existence of a specific threat to expatriate humanitarian workers.

*Specific assessment criterion*

There is clear evidence that the security risks linked to project monitoring undertaken by local staff/partners are substantially lower than the risks identified as the reason for withdrawing, or limiting access by, expatriate staff.

## **5: What is the source of the needs assessment in a remotely-managed action?**

ECHO delivers needs-based humanitarian aid. Preparing accurate and impartial needs assessments, however, is a challenge where 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 using staff with close social ties to targeted communities may help boost acceptance in some cases, arms-length verification and control is also desirable (this could be done by national staff from a different region of the country). In conflict situations, partners must, as a minimum requirement, crosscheck assessments conducted by local staff or implementing partners, through trusted third parties. This may include community representatives, elders, other humanitarian organisations or civilian government representatives and *de facto* authorities.

The use of aerial surveillance and satellite imagery can be useful in rapidly assessing needs. Such information can help humanitarian organisations make rough estimates of the scale of the crisis. But assessments from the air need to be supplemented by direct verification on the ground.

### *Specific assessment criteria*

- (1) The proposed action specifies which sources of information have been used to estimate needs.
- (2) In conflict-affected environments, data collected remotely (e.g. through local staff, external partners or aerial surveillance) have been confirmed through cross verification from direct sources (e.g. IDPs who have fled affected areas, traders or community representatives).

## **6: Are the staff adequately qualified?**

The success of remotely-managed actions depends on the skills and experience of national staff who implement and supervise them. ECHO encourages partners to recruit national staff with international humanitarian experience. Exposure to more than one humanitarian context is a key asset.

Where adequate skillsets are difficult to find at national level, the action will need to incorporate extra training and capacity-building. This may be of a general nature (project management, monitoring and evaluation) or more technically specialised (for example targeting health personnel, nutritionists or civil engineers). All staff, not just security officers, should receive security training.

It is for partners to decide whether to organise capacity-building 'in-house' and 'on-the-job' or through external training. Where feasible, ECHO encourages partners to organise joint training or take advantage of existing training events offered, for instance, by NGO coordinating bodies.

### *Specific assessment criteria*

- (1) 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 area(s) of intervention.
- (2) The action identifies potential qualification gaps and explains whether necessary technical, analytical and managerial skills can be found on the national labour market. If skill gaps have been identified, the proposal includes relevant training measures to address them.

### **7: Are monitoring arrangements adapted for remote management?**

Effective monitoring requires a minimum of face-to-face contact between senior project or programme coordinators, field-based staff and beneficiaries. In remotely-managed operations, partners should seek ways of organising such direct encounters. For example, even when senior staff cannot go to implementation sites, it may be possible for some beneficiaries to travel out to a location, such as a sub-office, where a meeting can be organised. If this is too expensive, or impossible for security reasons, actions relying on remote management must, as a minimum requirement, include measures to organise face-to-face discussions between senior staff and other local stakeholders from the area of intervention, such as community representatives, traditional authorities or traders.

Other ways of indirectly monitoring activities that humanitarian organisations can use include:

- photographic evidence to document progress;
- telephone complaint mechanisms enabling beneficiaries to report allegations of corruption or mismanagement;
- triangulation of information collected internally through discussions with other organisations operating in the same area (peer monitoring);
- using 'third-party' monitors: external consultants who visit project sites that are off-limits to senior staff. Humanitarian organisations must ensure that external partners are not affiliated with a party to the conflict or in any other way compromised in their objectivity.

The effectiveness of the different monitoring methods will vary from one situation to another. Humanitarian organisations need to decide which combination of methods is most suitable to the particular context.

#### *Specific assessment criteria*

- (1) The proposed action includes arrangements to facilitate direct contact between senior staff in charge of remotely-managed operations and beneficiaries or other local stakeholders.
- (2) The action does not rely on third party monitoring provided by private firms or individual consultants that offer or have offered their services to military organisations or any other party to the conflict.

#### **4. ASSESSING THE LONGER-TERM IMPACT OF REMOTE MANAGEMENT**

The negative effects of remote management may only become apparent over an extended period, perhaps beyond a single implementation cycle. Many of the risks increase over time: needs assessments become outdated, risk levels can no longer be assessed properly and expatriate staff lose touch with the situation at implementation sites.

The longer humanitarian organisations rely on remote management to deliver assistance to civilian populations in an entire country or a particular sub-region, the greater the risk that aid will become less effective. In extreme cases, it may not even reach the targeted beneficiaries.

To address these issues:

- information on the implications of remote management in specific projects must be provided by the relevant ECHO staff in their reporting throughout the project cycle;
- ECHO Regional Support Offices will analyse and report regularly on the broader consequences of remote management in crisis zones where there is an ongoing problem of humanitarian access;

Systematic evaluations will also be carried out, applying methods that are conflict-sensitive and suitable for analysing the aggregated and longer-term effects of ECHO support. When feasible, ECHO will conduct such evaluations in collaboration with other donors and share the results with its operational partners.

## ANNEX NO. 1: CHECKLIST

### 1. FOR ACCEPTING A REMOTE MANAGEMENT COMPONENT IN AN ECHO-FUNDED PROJECT

- A. Proposed actions that fail to fulfil the criteria are *not* normally eligible for ECHO funding. Where a partner submits a proposal whose implementation depends wholly or partly on remote management, each of the seven questions and linked criteria must be addressed in the single form, for it to be considered for funding.
- B. When unforeseen changes in the environment entail a shift from direct implementation to remote management, while an action is ongoing, ECHO staff will use the same criteria to assess whether support should be continued.
- C. Actions that do not fulfil all the criteria, but are nonetheless predicted to deliver substantial humanitarian benefits, may exceptionally be funded (or continue to be funded) but only after referral to ECHO's Director of Operations for decision. The unfulfilled criteria must be specified, and a full description of the expected benefits provided, at the time of referral.

#### 1.1. Question 1: Is there an access problem?

##### *Specific assessment criteria*

- 1. It is clear that access problems exist that cannot be resolved by the partner, and that these are sufficiently serious to prevent humanitarian delivery unless a remote management approach is adopted.
- 2. No other humanitarian organisation eligible for ECHO funding, with the required capacity and experience, is willing and able to meet humanitarian needs identified in the proposed action through direct implementation.

#### 1.2. Question 2: Does the proposed action include acceptance-building measures?

##### *Specific assessment criteria*

- 1. The proposed action identifies actors at local, provincial, national or international level who have or could have an impact on humanitarian access in the proposed geographic area(s) of intervention.
- 2. Where possible, the action includes concrete steps to gain, regain or maintain acceptance of neutral and independent humanitarian action.

#### 1.3. Question 3: Is it a direct life-saving action?

##### *Specific assessment criterion*

The action is designed to implement direct, life-saving operations.

**1.4. Question 4: Can the action be implemented without risking the lives of those undertaking the work on the ground?**

*Specific assessment criterion*

There is clear evidence that the security risks linked to project monitoring undertaken by local staff/partners are substantially lower than the risks identified as the reason for withdrawing, or limiting access by, expatriate staff.

**1.5. Question 5: What is the source of the needs assessment in a remotely-managed action?**

*Specific assessment criteria*

1. The proposed action specifies which sources of information have been used to estimate needs.
2. In conflict-affected environments, data collected remotely (e.g. through local staff, external partners or aerial surveillance) have been confirmed through cross verification from direct sources (e.g. IDPs who have fled affected areas, traders or community representatives).

**1.6. Question 6: Are the staff adequately qualified?**

*Specific assessment criteria*

1. 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 area(s) of intervention.
2. The action identifies potential qualification gaps and explains whether necessary technical, analytical and managerial skills can be found on the national labour market. If skill gaps have been identified, the proposal includes relevant training measures to address them.

**1.7. Question 7: Are monitoring arrangements adapted for remote management?**

*Specific assessment criteria*

1. The proposed action includes arrangements to facilitate direct contact between senior staff in charge of remotely-managed operations and beneficiaries or other local stakeholders.
2. The action does not rely on third party monitoring provided by private firms or individual consultants that offer or have offered their services to military organisations or any other party to the conflict.

## **2. N.B MONITORING**

ECHO staff must provide information on the effectiveness and wider effects on remote management in their reporting throughout the project cycle.

Information on the implications of remote management to be provided by the relevant ECHO staff in their reporting throughout the project cycle;

ECHO Regional Support Offices should analyse and report regularly on the broader consequences of remote management in crisis zones where there is an on-going problem of humanitarian access.