



## **2021 Asian Evaluation Week**

Transformational Evaluation: Moving  
from Uncertainties to Resilience

6-10 September 2021 | Virtual Event

# **Two years of evaluations under COVID: lessons and opportunities**

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# Key constraints and challenges from COVID

## General challenges to Evaluation Offices of International Organizations

- Ensuring data accuracy and quality of analysis, limiting bias (e.g., digital divide)
- Ensuring credibility with stakeholders (Board, Management, national government and other national partners)
  - Challenges also mean opportunity to innovate
- Commanding attention from governments (amidst emergency and competing priorities)
- Preserving internal organizational functionality

Situation in 2021 similar if not worse than in 2020 (because of COVID further spread)



# IFAD – Independent Office of Evaluation

- In 2020, general responses to the challenges:
  - 1) Deeper dive into secondary data (e.g. surveys conducted by projects)
  - 2) Remote interviews with national counterparts, in some cases remote surveys to local organizations (e.g., cooperatives in Dominican Republic)
  - 3) Geographic information systems and remote sensing
  - 4) Review of existing thematic literature (done by ‘human’ consultants, not yet artificial intelligence)
  - 5) For most evaluations, it was feasible for national consultants to visit the field (increasingly challenging in 2021)
  - 6) Additional reviewers with knowledge of country context for further ‘reality check’ of evaluation reports



# Example: Evaluation of the Coastal Climate Resilient Infrastructure Project in Bangladesh, 2020

- **Overall objective:** Improved livelihoods for poor households; enhanced climate resilience of coastal road and market infrastructure in project districts
- **Cofinanced:** IFAD, ADB, KfW, GoB
- **Implementer:** Local Government Engineering Dept, of Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development & Cooperatives
- **Components (outcomes):**
  1. Improved road connectivity
  2. Improved market services
  3. Enhanced climate adaptation capacity

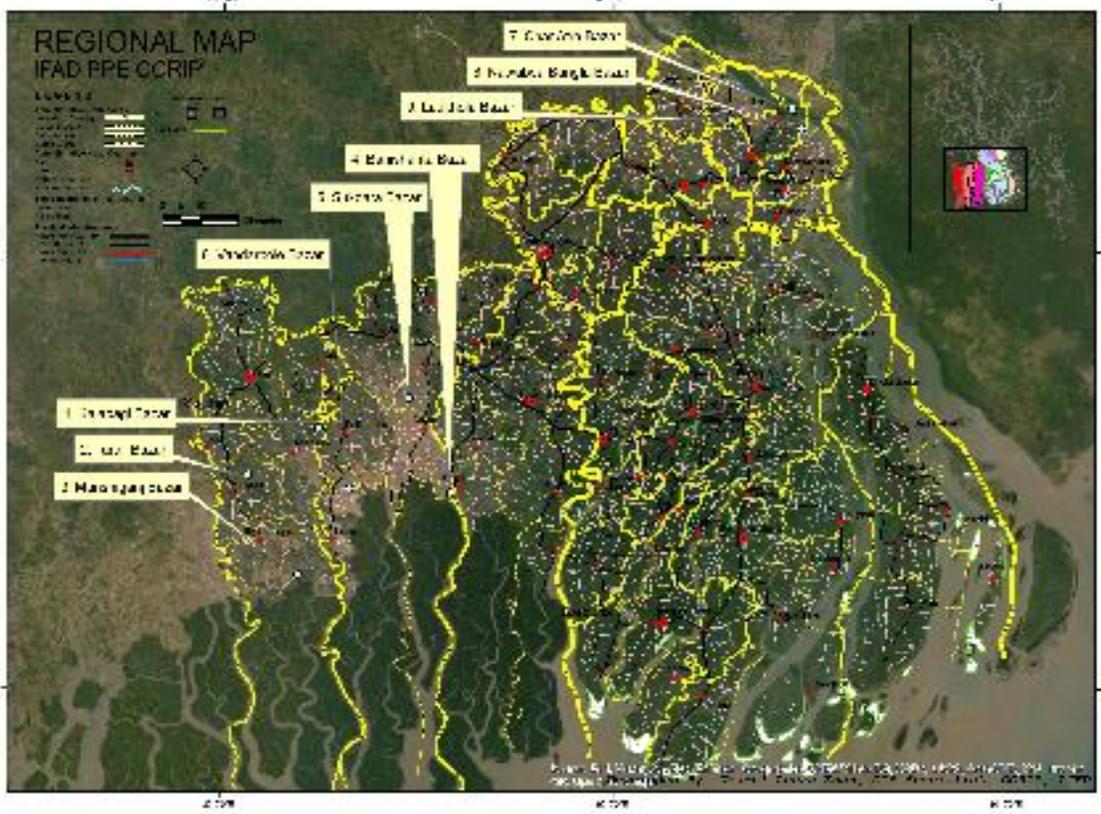


# Adapted Methodology and process

- **Pandemic: growing from March to June (peak)**
  - No travel possible, also for national consultants
- **Shocks (natural experiment)**
  - Amphan Cyclone – 20 May 2020 (post project)
  - Floods (late May – early June 2020) in other districts
- **Changes to adapt the approach to the pandemic**
  - Enhanced and deeper desk review
  - No field mission - Remote mission only with Skype/Zoom interviews
  - Hired more (4) national consultants on:
    - livelihoods, GIS, process facilitator, (infrastructure) engineer
  - Remote interviews – also by national consultants
    - About 75 people: > 50% local beneficiaries
    - Snowball sampling – “tracing the contacts”
    - Short videos / photos taken by local people



# Use of GIS Spatial data imagery



# Ground images triangulated with evaluator team's expertise

Gathered 103 ground images, 11 videos, several (Google) maps

Roads and embankments  
Market infrastructure

Observations

(by the infrastructure engineer):

- construction, quality, materials, damages etc.
- probed via interviews with local users and - at times - local engineers



Munshiganj Bazar,  
Shyamnagar, Satkhira

Banishanta Bazar,  
Dacope, Khulna



# Selected insights

- ❑ **Virtual interviews** work well with many stakeholders (central government, agencies based in the capital, some local governments). Now **socially accepted** by senior government officials
- ❑ **GIS data and images:** useful for projects on infrastructure, irrigation, pastoral corridors, agroforestry
  - But some changes are not detectable “from the sky” (e.g., power relationships, gender equality)
  - Some issues on image quality (e.g., high gradient slopes) and comparability
- ❑ GIS data or artificial intelligence may need **expert’s interpretation** to ensure relevance
- ❑ **Totally virtual** evaluations (without national consultant visits) only in **extreme cases** and when development intervention has no field activity
- ❑ Evaluation important in **turbulent times** but need to be aware of **national situation and constraints**
  - Disruptive effects of COVID on several government agencies, risk of overburdening
  - Evaluators may need to set up their own admin mini task-force (meetings, field visits)
  - Timeline, interactions with national counterparts need to be adjusted



# And what next?

In 2022 restrictions to international travels likely to apply in many developing countries.

Beyond COVID, what do we need to know / do?

- 1) Increase use of **ICT for evaluation** (satellite images, AI for meta-data analysis, coding / classification of information from secondary sources), triangulating with **human expertise**
- 2) **Vicarious field visits** (can train local people to collect basic information, photos, short videos)
  - No perfect substitute for country and field visits
- 3) **'Green' the evaluations:** some missions (e.g., reconnaissance) and interviews may be conducted virtually
  - Fewer missions per evaluation; less time in the (traffic of the) capital, more time in the field
- 4) Reduce **national counterpart workload** on mission organization
- 5) Evaluation **priorities:** continue project-level evaluation (can slightly reduce numbers). Can shift resources to synthesis, meta-analysis, corporate evaluations

