

EVALUATION IN HARD-TO-REACH AREAS

CYCLE OF LUNCHTIME CONFERENCES: FEBRUARY TO JUNE 2019

PRESENTATION PAPER, UPDATED 15 APRIL 2019

Introduction

Around **2 billion people live in countries affected by fragility, conflict and high levels of violence**, and around half of the world's poor live in fragile or conflict-affected states (FCAS)¹. The percentage of the poorest living in FCAS increased from 20% in 2005 to 43% in 2015², and the World Bank estimates that, by 2030, their number will rise to nearly 50%³ while OECD considers that - without action - this number will be higher than 80%⁴.

The **EU and its Member States** have committed to pay **particular attention to fragile and conflict-affected states and to support the most vulnerable**⁵; this has **been one of the key priorities of both EU development and foreign policy over the last decades**. In 2016 the EU's development cooperation with countries in situations of conflict and fragility represented EUR 4.970 billion in commitments, or 52.8% of total commitments of DG DEVCO.

In terms of commitments, the yearly engagement in 2016 was 76% higher than in 2015 and 249% higher than in 2014. To limit the analysis to just five fragile countries (Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen), the EU disbursed over the period 2010 to 2018 EUR 4.195 billion; with 73% financed by DG DEVCO and 27% by DG ECHO⁶.

A traditional approach to evaluation in fragile or conflict-affected states and, more generally, in hard-to-reach areas is destined to fail: the number of professional evaluators available to travel to these countries is limited and the security risks during in-country travel make conventional field missions unrealistic, particularly in the most remote areas. In response to this, various development partners have started encouraging the use of methods and **techniques that are innovative in an evaluation context**. These include use of geo-spatial data, surveys administered by non-specialised local enumerators, phone/tablet voice or data surveys, location tracking, communication through online platforms, etc.



¹ https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/policies/fragility-and-crisis-management_en

² Same as footnote 1

³ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/overview>

⁴ OECD (2018), States of Fragility 2018, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264302075-en>

⁵ European Consensus on Development, 8 June 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/new-european-consensus-development-our-world-our-dignity-our-future_en

⁶ DEVCO's Statistical Dashboard, viewed on 12 November 2018 (EC internal)

It is now time to learn from the experiences of these early pioneers, and **reflect on some paradigms that are often overlooked**, such as the importance of integrating conflict sensitivity as an area of analysis when evaluating in FCAS, and the impact of these techniques on the ethical standards of the evaluation profession.

With this initiative, organised by the **Evaluation Support Service** of DG DEVCO, the **Unit 'Results, Monitoring and Evaluation'** of DG DEVCO invites interested colleagues in both Headquarters and EU Delegations to reflect on the possibilities offered by innovative evaluation methods to respond to the difficulties that traditional evaluation missions inevitably face in hard-to-reach areas.

This initiative is open to other **EC services** (notably **DG NEAR, ECHO and FPI**), other **development partners** and to **professional evaluators** working in development cooperation and in the humanitarian field.

This reflection started with a **cycle of lunchtime conferences** that is taking place **from February to June 2019, from 12:30 to 14:00 CET**; the conferences are **hosted by the External Cooperation InfoPoint of the European Commission (43 Rue de la Loi - 1040 Brussels, Belgium)**.

All the conferences are webcast in order to allow **remote, live participation of colleagues based in EU Delegations** and in other locations outside of Brussels; the livestreaming links are available on the dedicated page of each conference, accessible at https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/infopoint_en (under 'Upcoming events'.)

Interested in participating and not included in the distribution list of the InfoPoint? Please **register here** to receive from the ESS a reminder a few days before each conference: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/F7PHYHS>

Missed some of the conferences? Interested in the presentations? Do you need further references and reading? **Video recordings of past conferences, slide presentations, pictures, references documents** and much more are available at <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/devco-ess>



At the end of the cycle, a **call-to-action paper will present the key highlights from the conferences**.

The **latest version of this presentation paper** can be downloaded from <https://web.tresorit.com/l#5ZZoMG3EfZ8MOThfLrDcPA> – please **check back frequently**, as dates may change.

Should you need **any further information** about this initiative, please contact the ESS at conferences@evaluationsupport.eu

Outline of the conferences

Conference 1

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|--|---|---|
| <p>Combination of satellite imagery with traditional evaluation techniques: the evaluation of the IFAD's Agricultural Support Project in Georgia</p> <p><i>Monday 4th February, 12:30 to 14:00</i></p> | |  |
|  | <p>Mr Hansdeep Khaira - IFAD, Independent Office of Evaluation (IOE), Evaluation Officer</p> <p>Since 2016, Mr Khaira has led evaluations in Georgia, Kenya, Guyana and Sri Lanka and has pioneered the use of geo-spatial analysis in IOE. Prior to IOE, he worked in IFAD's Programme Management Department on monitoring, evaluation and performance analysis of development projects. His work experience covers over 35 developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Near East and North Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Mr. Khaira has an M.Sc. in Agricultural Economics from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS).</p> | |
|  | <p>Mr Giancarlo Pini – UN-WFP (IFAD-WFP Climate Analysis Partnership) – Remote Sensing and Climate Data Analyst</p> <p>Giancarlo Pini has joined UN-WFP in 2013 as remote sensing and climate analysis expert. He works in the VAM Unit and he is now coordinating the IFAD-WFP Joint Climate Analysis Partnership. Prior to WFP, he has worked in the MARS-Unit of EU-JRC, IBIMET (Italian NRC), WMO and Italian Cooperation. He has over 15-year experience in research and development projects in sub-Saharan Africa. His work is mostly focused on the analysis of multi temporal EO and climate data-sets and modelling supporting food security analysis and decision making.</p> | |
|  | <p>Mr Dustin Gilbreath - The Caucasus Research Resource Centers, Deputy Research Director</p> <p>Mr Gilbreath is a researcher with strong background in evaluation, (quasi) experimental methods, survey research, research design, and a substantive knowledge of the South Caucasus, and of issues such as think tanks, and transparency. He is experienced in advocacy, fundraising and #wonkcomms. He has published (among others) in the Washington Post, Eurasianet, New Eastern Europe, and Liberali (a Georgian publication) and some of his academic work is published in Caucasus Survey.</p> | |

The speakers will discuss the lessons from the integration of analysis of satellite imagery into the recent impact evaluation of the IFAD's Agricultural Support Project in Georgia. The project (2010 to 2015) had the main objective to increase the assets and incomes of the rural poor through commercial agricultural and rural enterprises. As part of its activities, the project provided loans to agro-enterprises and undertook the rehabilitation of small-scale infrastructure such as irrigation schemes, bridges and a drinking water scheme.

The impact evaluation deployed two innovative approaches: (1) genetic matching method for matching the treatment with the comparison group, and, (2) time-series satellite imagery for comparing the change in vegetation cover between treatment and comparison group farm plots before and after the rehabilitation of the irrigation schemes. The findings from the use of these techniques were triangulated with findings from traditional evaluation methods such as impact surveys, interviews, and, focus groups. This method of analysis proved to be particularly effective when assessing the impact of the interventions in hard-to-reach areas in Ossetia.

Introduction: Mr Anders Henriksson – DEVCO, Head of Task Force Knowledge, Performance and Results

Conference 2

Improving international development evaluation through geospatial data and analysis

Video and
slides now
available

Tuesday 12th March, 12:30 to 14:00

Ms Geeta Batra - Global Environment Facility, Independent Evaluation Office, Chief Evaluation Officer

Mr Anupam Anand - Global Environment Facility, Independent Evaluation Office, Evaluation Officer



Before joining the Global Environment Facility as Chief Evaluation Officer and IEO Deputy Director, Ms Batra worked in the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) of the World Bank Group since 2010, most recently as Manager in the Country, Corporate and Global Evaluation unit and, before that, as Chief Evaluation Officer in the Strategy unit. Prior to joining IEG, she spent several years with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), notably as the Global Head of Results Management for IFC's Advisory Services. In all, she has been with the World Bank Group for about 17 years.

Ms Batra holds a PhD in economics and has a strong background in international economics, econometrics, and development. Apart from her excellent evaluation and research skills, she has gained extensive operational experience both in the Bank and in the private sector.

Mr Malte Lech, independent Evaluator



During his permanence at DEval (2016 to 2018), Mr Lech worked on a mixed-method impact evaluation centered around a land-use planning and disaster risk management intervention in the Philippines and was engaged in the application and development of geospatial and remote-sensing methodology in evaluations. Presently a freelance consultant and evaluator, before joining DEval he worked as research associate for the Institute of Economic and Cultural Geography at the Leibniz University. He holds a major in economic geography and a PhD at the Leibniz University.

Ms Catharina Bamps and Mr Ola Nordbeck, Policy Officers European Commission, DG for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs - COPERNICUS Unit



Ms Bamps is the policy officer of the Copernicus Land Monitoring Service and in situ Component and the contact person within the Copernicus unit for the 'Copernicus' support to the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals'. She holds a M.Sc. in Economics from the Catholic University of Leuven and has ample experience in working with geospatial data to support EU policies (ex-ante analysis, monitoring implementation, ex-post verification).

Mr Nordbeck works with the Emergency Management Service, the Arctic and access to satellite data. Prior to this, he worked for the United

Nations as well as in the private and public sector in Scandinavia. In the UN he worked among all with satellite imagery and other geospatial data for monitoring the reconstruction work in post-conflict areas.

Increasing availability of new types of data strengthens geospatial research in different scientific fields and opens up opportunities to better measure results and evaluate the impacts of development interventions. A [recent paper](#) (published in the International Journal of Geospatial and Environmental Research in October 2018) presents examples where [geospatial approaches have been applied in evaluations](#) and thus demonstrate the potential use in informing policy design through scientifically sound evidence as well as learning.

In particular, the paper discusses the [impact evaluation of the Global Environment Facility \(GEF\) support to protected areas and protected area systems](#); and the [evaluation of GIZ's land-use planning and disaster risk management programme in the Philippines](#).

The first two speakers -who co-authored the paper- will present the methods used in these two evaluations and the main lessons learnt; they will furthermore discuss the possible use of geospatial evidence in evaluating interventions in other contexts.

The third speakers will present the [full, free and open data policy that Copernicus has adopted for its satellite data and service products](#).

Copernicus is the European program for monitoring the Earth and is coordinated and managed by the European Commission. Today, it is the [most ambitious Earth Observation programme in the world](#).

The development of the observation satellite infrastructure is performed under the aegis of the European Space Agency. It consists of a constellation of satellites carrying a range of technologies dedicated to land, ocean and atmospheric monitoring. Around 20 satellites will be launched during the first phase of the program, 7 satellites are already in orbit and fully operational.

Copernicus processes also these data and provides users with reliable and up-to-date information through a set of core and on-demand services related to environmental and security issues.

Introduction: Mr Pavel Borkovec – DEVCO, Head of Unit 'Evaluation and Results'

Conference 3

- Use of mobile phones / tablets for evaluation in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries
- The work of the IDEAS TIG on 'Evaluation in the contexts of fragility, conflict and violence'

Video and
slides now
available

Friday 29th March, 12:30 to 14:00



Mr Hur Hassnain – International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS), Board member and Chair of the EvalFCV (Thematic Interest Group on evaluation in the contexts of Fragility, Conflict and Violence

Mr Hassnain is a design, monitoring and evaluation, accountability and learning expert. He has 15 years of experience working in and on fragile and conflict-affected states and is the Founder of the Pakistan Evaluation Association. He has lived and worked in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, China, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Jordan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Thailand and Uganda. Hur has designed, commissioned and conducted research and evaluations for UN agencies, European Commission, private donors and governments of the UK, Canada, Switzerland, Netherlands and Norway.

In fragility and conflict, ICTs can offer creative solutions to compensate for the lack of face-to-face interactions e.g., carrying out surveys from a distance using appropriate technology but it also carries new risks. During the first part of this conference the speaker will present his experience of gathering, analyzing and disseminating evaluative evidence generated by using mobile phones and tablets in some of the worst conflict-affected countries. The speaker will discuss examples of child and youth led data collection, analysis and closing the feedback and evaluation learning loop with the help of tablets or mobile phone technology. In his presentation, Hur will talk about both the pros and cons of using technology in volatile contexts including risks such as, increased attention, sensitive data getting in wrong hands, sharing of GPS locations etc. and the steps needed to avoid any unwanted interruptions. During the second part he will present the work of the EvalFCV launched by IDEAS. This Thematic Interest Group aims to promote evaluation in contexts of fragility, conflict and violence (FCV). Specifically, it will consider new and innovative methods, approaches and tools that lend themselves to challenges faced by evaluations in situations that are fluid, complex and volatile.

Introduction: Mr Franco Conzato - DEVCO, Deputy Head of Unit 'Evaluation and Results'

Conference 4

Use of qualitative and quantitative techniques in remote evaluations

Video and
slides now
available

Thursday 11th April, 12:30 to 14:00

Mr François Dupaquier - Frontview, CEO and evaluator



Mr Dupaquier is a senior manager expert, with a strong protection and operation strategy-oriented approach. He has over 15-year experience in overseeing large-scale qualitative and quantitative evaluations, analysis and research projects in more than 20 countries and in dozens of political crises and armed conflicts.

He worked with many NGOs and multilateral and bilateral agencies to model evaluation using a diversity of methods and analytic techniques, and development plans including performance evaluations. Since 2011 he is working on conflict sensitivity and protection issues related to the Syrian and Iraqi crises.

Ms Margie Buchanan-Smith – Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Senior Research Associate and Tufts University, Visiting Fellow



As an experienced evaluator of humanitarian action (30 years), Ms Buchanan-Smith has led numerous evaluations, often in conflict environments, for UN agencies, NGOs and governments. She co-authored the ALNAP manual on the evaluation of humanitarian action, is regularly requested to peer review humanitarian evaluations and has been co-facilitating trainings on the evaluation of humanitarian action (EHA) for eleven years.

She is a Sr. Research Associate with the Humanitarian Policy Group at ODI and is a Visiting Fellow with the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University.

Margie Buchanan-Smith will share her experience of gathering information and evaluating UN programmes in 'hard to reach' areas in Somalia, South Sudan, Darfur, Sudan. In each context part of the evaluation involved field work with local researchers, using qualitative methods and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approaches in locations where it had been judged very difficult or impossible to do ongoing monitoring. In Somalia evidence was collected iteratively, with photographic and audio recordings made by the local researchers, and key informants were interviewed in a safe environment. In South Sudan, field work by local researchers preceded the main evaluation phase. In Darfur, three teams worked simultaneously in different parts of the region. A robust methodology, yet flexibility and adaptation, were key to success.

Mr Dupaquier will present his experience and key lessons from the use (both in a development and in a humanitarian context) of local researchers and enumerators with no or little evaluation experience in gathering qualitative and quantitative evidence by using different techniques and triangulating findings.

Introduction: Mr Andrea Alfieri - DEVCO, Head of Sector 'Results, Monitoring and Evaluation', Unit 'Evaluation and Results'

Conference 5

Conflict sensitivity: a criterion for evaluating projects and programmes in the contexts of violent conflicts?



Friday 17th May, 12:30 to 14:00

Ms Lucia Montanaro – Saferworld, Head of EU office and EU advocacy manager



Ms Montanaro has over 25 years of experience working on peace, security and conflict issues, including peacebuilding, mediation, conflict sensitivity, governance, security, armed groups, organised crime, early warning, early response, conflict and systems analysis, risk and threat assessment, resilience and recovery. She has worked for the UN, EU, NATO, League of Arab States, Ecowas, OSCE, ASEAN and other organisations in numerous fragile and conflict-affected contexts across the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe.

Mr Marco de Gaetano – consultant with FAO



Mr de Gaetano is an economist with over 10 years of experience in managing food security and rural development programmes with several NGOs throughout East Africa, South America and South East Asia. In October 2015, he joined FAO and has since been working in South Sudan and Myanmar as a Natural Resource Management specialist focusing on the design and implementation of livelihood and conflict mitigation interventions in protracted crisis areas.

He holds a bachelor's degree in Development Economics from the University of Naples Parthenope, a Master's degree in Food Security and Rural Development from the University of Architecture in Venice and a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Naples Parthenope.

Mr André Kahlmeyer – Conflict Management Consulting (CMC), Director



Since 2007, Mr. Kahlmeyer has worked on monitoring and evaluation in fragile and conflict affected states, initially as Senior Planning Officer - Peace and Conflict for GIZ (2007-2010), as the EU CSDP Missions Monitoring Officer in Iraq (2010-2011) and as Director and Founder of Conflict Management Consulting (CMC) since. André has led several dozen monitoring, evaluation and training assignments for the EU, UNDP, USAID, DFID, SIDA, DANIDA, GIZ and other international actors. With the CMC team, he currently works in 15+ conflict-affected states in MENA, Africa and Asia on data collection, M&E and external evaluations, integrating conflict sensitivity approaches into the design, implementation and evaluation of projects/programmes at every stage. Mr. Kahlmeyer has degrees in Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, Political Science, and War and Conflict Studies.

Conflict Sensitivity is the ability of an organisation to:

- a. understand the context in which it is operating in, to understand local conflict dynamics such as relations between stakeholders, the “divisive” issues with a potential for conflict, and the “connecting” issues with the potential to mitigate conflict and strengthen social cohesion;
- b. understand the nature of an intervention;
- c. understand the interaction between the intervention and the context, and;
- d. act upon that understanding, in order to avoid unintentionally feeding into further division and conflict dynamics, and to maximize the potential contribution to strengthen social cohesion and peace.

During this conference, Ms Montanaro and Mr de Gaetano will share the current state of thinking on conflict sensitivity, deepen its understanding of what it means in practice and they will present their experience in implementing and advocating for conflict sensitivity. They will share how lessons can be used to ensure the conflict sensitivity of an intervention and discuss whether this can be integrated as a further criterion to be considered when evaluating in situations of violent conflicts, at risk of violence and in situations of post-violence.

Mr Kahlmeyer will present his experience in integrating and measuring conflict sensitivity into evaluations of projects and programmes in fragile and conflict affected areas.

Introduction: **Mr Andrea Alfieri** - DEVCO, Head of Sector ‘Results, Monitoring and Evaluation’, Unit ‘Evaluation and Results’

Conference 6

- ‘Technologies for monitoring in insecure environments’, presentation of the 2016 SAVE toolkit
- Project Drawings: an innovative remote evaluation technique in a recent DG ECHO’s evaluation



Thursday 6th June, 12:30 to 14:00



Ms Julia Steets, Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi), Director

Julia Steets is director of the Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi) in Berlin. Her research and consulting work focus on international development, humanitarian assistance, public-private partnerships, as well as monitoring and evaluation. She currently represents GPPi in the INSPIRE Consortium, which supports Policy Development for DG ECHO. Julia also serves as a member of the board of the International Humanitarian Studies Association (IHSA) and as a member of the editorial board of Routledge’s newly established humanitarian studies series.



Ms Daniela Ulicna, Kantar Public, Evaluation Director

Ms Ulicna is active in the field of policy and programme evaluation since 2006, primarily delivering services to the EU institutions. Her main areas of expertise are social policies and programmes both within and outside the EU. She has a keen interest in innovative data collection techniques striving for stronger robustness, deeper insights into “why” a policy or programme works (or lags behind) and making sure the findings reflect the situations of a variety of beneficiaries. The evaluation designs and methods she chooses are selected pragmatically bearing in mind the intended use and users of the evaluation.

Ms Steets is co-author of the Toolkit ‘Technologies for monitoring in insecure environments’, which was produced in 2016 by the research project SAVE (Secure Access in Volatile Environments), based on field work in Afghanistan, South Central Somalia, South Sudan and Syria. The toolkit -which Ms Steets will present- provides an overview of different technological tools for monitoring in insecure settings based on lessons from existing experience and pilot projects, as well as of their key advantages and downsides.

Ms Ulicna participated in the recent Evaluation of DG ECHO’s Actions in the Field of Protection and Education of Children in Emergency and Crisis Situations (2008-2015), where she led the analysis of children’s perception of school and education activities financed by the EU by using an innovative Project Drawings technique. This approach was innovative in two ways: on one hand the use of drawings as source of evidence enabled to gather unique insights into children’s connections to funded schools and, on the other hand, the administration of the technique was done by the kids’ teachers and NGOs in the programme locations, under the remote methodological guidance of the evaluation team. This was done as the access to project locations was impossible to evaluators.

Introduction: **Mr Andrea Alfieri** - DEVCO, Head of Sector ‘Results, Monitoring and Evaluation’, Unit ‘Evaluation and Results’

Conference 7

Evaluation in hard-to-reach areas and use of innovative technologies: new frontiers for ethical standards and codes of conduct in evaluation?

Thursday 20th June, 12:30 to 14:00



Mr Ziad Moussa – EvalPartners, Co-Chair and IOCE (International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation), immediate past President

Mr Moussa is a multi-disciplinary development professional with a proven track record in the fields of local governance (design, execution & evaluation of programmes and projects) with an intellectual and professional passion for Evaluation.

Mr. Moussa has a 22 years long working history in various development projects covering the entire Middle East and North Africa countries, the Mediterranean countries involved in the Euro-Med process, as well as significant parts of the African Continent.

He conducted several large-scale evaluations for IFAD, ILO, the European Union and IDRC among others and has been particularly active in promoting the emergence of an “indigenous” M&E culture in MENA.



Mr Neil Dillon – ALNAP, Research Fellow and lead of the Evaluation, Accountability and Learning workstream

Mr Dillon is Research Fellow at ALNAP, and leads the Evaluation, Accountability and Learning workstream. His interests lie in improving evaluation systems to meet the evidence needs of all stakeholder groups as the humanitarian system evolves and adapts to change. He is currently overseeing a research project on monitoring humanitarian response, and leading work on the challenges, opportunities and future direction of travel of humanitarian evaluation.

Before joining ALNAP, Neil was an evaluation consultant in Belgium, where he conducted numerous evaluations for the EC / DG DEVCO and ECHO. He also holds a PhD from King’s College London.

This cycle of conferences will demonstrate that -if appropriately selected, planned and used- evaluators and commissioners of evaluation have at their disposal some innovative technologies that can help understanding the effects of projects and programmes in hard-to-reach areas, including in fragile contexts.

During this last conference the two speakers will guide us in a reflection on the new challenges that the use of these technologies in an increasing number of fragile areas pose to the traditional ethical standards of the evaluation profession.

Introduction: Mr Pavel Borkovec – DEVCO, Head of Unit ‘Evaluation and Results’

Call-to-action paper

An evaluator, social researcher and novelist will accompany our reflection all along this cycle of conferences and may interact with speakers in view of the preparation of a final, short paper that will identify the key lessons from this cycle, in the format of a call-to-action addressed to commissioners of evaluation, evaluators and the public at large.

Tom Kenis



Tom Kenis is an all-round monitoring and evaluation professional with more than 12 years of experience implementing and managing large-scale evaluations, stakeholder engagement and social impact assessments in fragile areas, including several years on the ground in the Middle East and Central Africa.

Recently he has published two novels, worked as communications specialist for the Belgian Federal Migration Center, written articles on international affairs, democracy, and renewable energy, and completed various writing assignments aimed at capturing complex human development processes.

Conception and design of the cycle of conferences: Marco Lorenzoni – Evaluation Support Service, senior evaluation expert

With thanks to all the speakers that enthusiastically accepted to share their experience; the entire ESS team; the Sector ‘Results, Monitoring and Evaluation’, Unit ‘Evaluation and Results’ of DG DEVCO; and the different officers of DG NEAR, ECHO and FPI met during the preparation of this cycle of conferences for their ideas and suggestions. A big thanks to the European Evaluation Society (EES), IDEAS (International Development Evaluation Association), IOCE (International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation), EvalPartners and Monitoring and Evaluation News (<https://mande.co.uk/>) that kindly helped us in spreading the voice about this cycle of conferences to their respective communities.