

EES TWG 6 – Methods and designs

Minutes of the virtual TWG meeting on

“Evaluation in times of the corona pandemic”

Friday the 12th of June 2020, 1-2.30 pm, CET

Agenda:

1. Short welcome and Introduction to the TWG by Sven Harten
2. „Tour the Table“: Each participant outlines the main challenges he/she is facing due to the pandemic
3. Q&A and Discussion among all group members Brainstorming on the next steps
4. Agreement on the next steps and concluding remarks

In the meeting, the participants discussed a range of potentials and challenges in the context of the corona pandemic. The following points were raised across the participants:

In many evaluations, the participants face difficulties with the collection of primary data in the field. Fieldwork had to be postponed and in some cases, it was necessary to resort to methods other than methods that build in person contact among the evaluator and respondents. The TWG members realize an increasing interest in systematic desk studies such as systematic literature reviews but also the use of geodata/remote sensing, online surveys, machine learning/ text mining. Moreover, the pandemic also offers opportunities for evaluations with longer time frames to integrate methods in a sequential manner, e.g. by starting with desk studies in the first place followed by systematic case study selection (based on the results of the desk studies) and primary data collection later on. A critical question raised concerns the consequences of a shift from data collection and analysis at the micro level (e.g. from standardized household survey, group discussions, etc.) to secondary data at the meso- and macro-level.

The participants agree that many meetings that are now held virtually via Zoom or Webex can be conducted quite effectively and even more efficiently. The participants see an enormous increase of online webinars, exchange and virtual capacity building. Many people are now easier to approach and tend to have more time for spontaneous virtual meetings. Therefore, many things that were previously very complex and included longer journeys can now be organized very quickly.

With regard to data collection, which is now increasingly carried out virtually as well, the participants commented positively that contact persons were more approachable and that the conversation took place at the same level, which is not always the case in face-to-face meetings. Possible spatial barriers were also eliminated. As a consequence of the current situation and the measures taken, many participants have found that a large part of their work can comfortably be managed virtually, and have noticed a greater willingness to take risks in trying out new methods. But there were also a few voices that indicated that their work had not changed that much, because they had already worked a lot virtually before.

At the same time, the current situation is also resulting in some challenges for the work of the participants. For example, it was criticised that no more data collection can take place in the field and that interviews and focus groups have to be cancelled or held virtually. Despite some advantages, virtual interviews sometimes seem to be more difficult than face-to-face meetings, as it is more difficult to build a basis of trust. Some participants worry that this has also some specific

consequences for reaching especially disadvantaged or marginalized groups, e.g. elderly people in remote areas.

In a final point the role of the TWG and further steps have been discussed. Participants indicated that they would like to use the TWG as a group for peer learning and mutual support. Among other things, participants are interested in sharing work-in-progress and the discussion of ongoing evaluation projects with peers. Interesting methodological topics that were raised include exchange on macro-economic models, relational evaluation methods, systems thinking and network analysis, real-time evaluation, but also on specific approaches such as outcome harvesting of most significant change.