NEW FRONTIERS IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
MAY 23, 2019
Post-Event Summary Report

Introduction

Development practice has evolved dramatically over the past 25 years. During this period, calls for improved accountability and transparency around spending and implementation decisions have led to a focus on tracking activities. Development implementers are expected to report on standard indicators and have personnel devoted to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) on almost every project. At the same time, donor agencies and philanthropists have emphasized the role of data-driven third-party evaluation to understand specific activity impacts to better inform future programming.

The nature of evaluation has meant that external methodologists, in many cases academics, have led with innovative and attention-grabbing approaches to understanding and improving development practice. In contrast, monitoring is often necessarily embedded in a larger implementation approach, where the activity's process, service, or input is promoted rather than the method of tracking the activity. This has led to a situation where M&E are grouped together, but the "E" has received more attention both within the development community and general public.

However, the M&E sector is changing, and monitoring is currently having its own moment. As data collection costs have steadily dropped, implementing partners and donor agencies have found new ways to observe activities as they happen and adjust accordingly. Recognizing the need for timely analysis, many of the leaders in complex evaluation methods have begun shifting their focus on how to better track and improve activities.[1] Across the sector, there is a broad understanding that monitoring can be more than an accountability tool (although it is still very much that). Rather than simply tracking activities across high-level indicators, practitioners recognize that sophisticated monitoring can be used to learn not just what is happening within a program, but how and why. We are now at a moment where "learning" is often explicitly included along with M&E.

There has been little formal discussion around monitoring on its own terms despite these recent developments. Even in cases where the potential of monitoring is highlighted, or innovative approaches have been recognized, it has often occurred within a broader discussion of how to improve evaluation.[2] Given these trends, MSI, A Tetra Tech Company, hosted a half-day event dedicated to the practice of monitoring on May 23, 2019 at its Arlington, Virginia office. By bringing together donors, practitioners, academics, and non-profit leaders, MSI sought to convene the people who would be deciding what development will look like over the next 25 years. The goal of the event was not to solve all of the challenges in monitoring, but to reflect on how monitoring has developed and to discuss "new frontiers."

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[1] For example, see Dean Karlan and Mary Kay Gugerty, *The Goldilocks Challenge: Right-Fit Evidence for the Social Sector*, 2018.
[2] Ibid.

Event Overview

In planning this event, MSI sought to convene a broad group of interested parties. The event featured two panels and a keynote address, but the format and overall goal of the day was to promote informal, honest discussion. With more than 90 attendees from almost 80 organizations, the event was designed to encourage audience engagement.

The first panel was completely discussion based—there were no formal talking points or slides—and was centered around reflection on monitoring as a discipline. The second panel took a slightly more formal approach to discuss innovative monitoring tools, with each panelist delivering brief opening remarks to highlight a specific tool or approach they think holds promise, or is worth letting go of, for monitoring development activities.

Photo 1. Keith Brown, MSI President, introduces the day's session, reflecting on the trajectory of monitoring in development, before presenting the keynote speaker.

Discussion Summaries

Keynote Address: Ann Calvaresi Barr, Inspector General for USAID

Ann Calvaresi Barr serves as the Inspector General (IG) for USAID, as well as for the U.S. African Development Foundation, the Inter-American Foundation, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and the Overseas Private Investment Corporation. Her keynote address highlighted the linkage and shared purpose behind accountability and rigorous M&E. In reflecting on the annual top management challenges for development aid work (see textbox), she shared how these challenges link to M&E, primarily in the shared mission between the IG, USAID missions, and implementers who are tasked with delivering effective humanitarian and foreign assistance. This "one-team" lens warrants a shared responsibility in which good M&E adequately protects resources. With better M&E, USAID and its implementing partners can account for the aid that they need and ensure aid is not misused, especially in high-risk environments. The IG also identified oversight gaps and highlighted several measures to address those gaps. She noted that a key remedy in high-risk environments is increased third-party monitoring (TPM).

In Ms. Calvaresi Barr's view, pervasive breakdowns and IG investigations that uncover issues signal that there are underlying systemic causes that affect programming as a whole: when the IG does a criminal investigation, it is a symptom of something that went wrong. It is not enough to identify a lapse, she noted, "we have to go back and ask why." As a result, the IG's office now engages more with performance-based audits rather than only tactical financial audits. In their recent work, her office won best in class for identifying management and performance challenges (for USAID and MCC, all of which are reported to Congress).

TOP MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES FOR FY19

The 2019 report on Top Management Challenges (published annually by the USAID Inspector General's office) highlights four key challenges, all of which relate to more rigorous M&E:

1. **Managing Risks Inherent to Providing Humanitarian and Stabilization Assistance.** Managing fraud and other risks in foreign assistance programs is difficult, particularly in environments beset by conflict or natural disaster.
2. **Strengthening Local Capacity and Improving Planning and Monitoring to Promote Sustainability of U.S.-Funded Development.** Promoting sustainability in countries that receive U.S. funding for development is central to USAID's goal to end the need for foreign assistance.
3. **Reconciling Interagency Priorities and Functions to More Efficiently and Effectively Advance U.S. Foreign Assistance.** Foreign assistance that involves multiple U.S. Government agencies presents significant challenges in managing short- and long-term U.S. objectives.
4. **Addressing Vulnerabilities in Financial and Information Management.** Effective and reliable financial and information systems are vital to the stewardship of U.S. Government resources.

For more information, see:
https://oig.usaid.gov/our-work/major-management-challenges

The top four challenges have a common thread: attribution of problems and challenges to M&E, which, she explained, better and increased usage of TPM could address. The challenges are primarily a lack of rigor in M&E, lack of access to do proper site visits, lack of documentation, and weak processes and planning. Ms. Calvaresi-Barr and her office found that baseline data to determine effectiveness was consistently missing from activities. To all of these challenges, M&E remains "absolutely critical."

In closing her remarks, the IG asked the audience to think critically about attribution of programming obstacles and their connection to M&E. To determine not just what challenges exist, but why and how they can be mitigated. She ended with a call to find ways to strengthen monitoring.

Discussion Panel: Elevating the Discipline of Monitoring

The first discussion was designed to open a dialogue with the audience in a thought-provoking and engaging conversation. MSI's Lala Kasimova moderated the three-person panel which included Travis Mayo from the USAID/PPL Bureau, Sonia Moldovan from Mercy Corps, and Kathryn Rzeszut from Integrity International (see Annex B for panelist bios).

Photo 2. Ann Calvaresi-Barr delivers keynote address

Reflecting on the state of monitoring and its broad challenges and uses, can the experts determine whether monitoring is a formalized, well-defined field? Yes and no. One panelist pointed out that development policy is ahead of action: in formulating USAID's guidance on monitoring, ADS 201, the Agency actually enables more learning-focused activities than implementers or activity designers may realize. Examples of this include room for adaptability, allowance for adjusting the program theory of change, and encouraging continuous revisions as information comes in. In reality, implementers and USAID operating units prioritize accountability above learning, leaving the ever-important learning component as "nice-but-not-required." Everyone agreed that performance indicators often remain stagnant and do not reflect the reality of the operating environment.

What are the implications of not putting learning first? As one panelist described it, this can mean one community receives one kind of service and another receives a different kind, while a third community receives yet another. On the whole, the monitoring system may indicate that all three services are delivered, but the reality tells a different story about equity and cohesiveness of the program results.

Photo 3. From left to right: Lala Kasimova (MSI), Kathryn Rzeszut (Integrity), Sonia Moldovan (Mercy Corps), and Travis Mayo (USAID/PPL).

The panelists noted that elevating monitoring practice is more than simply "bringing in common sense." Panelists offered a number of both complex and simple solutions to confronting this challenge:

- Dedicating adequate time and resources for "good" monitoring and development practices, beginning from the procurement stage and following through the program cycle. Frequent checks at all programming levels (starting from the beneficiary or community-level) up to a 30,000-foot view of the lessons learned to ensure that performance metrics reflect reality.
- A "Back to Basics" approach to building performance monitoring systems, starting with the knowledge of how to develop key indicators, an appreciation for developing and refining a theory of change, and, most difficult to achieve, empowering users of the system to put knowledge to action.
- Re-emphasizing the human element of development and humanizing the collection of data about people and what this means in the context of conflict or other stressors.
- Monitoring itself must be adaptability- and learning-oriented while also elevated by senior officials in such a way that ensures its use and relevance.

Kathryn Rzeszut summarized the key themes of the panel in a closing statement, "A lot has changed in the last ten years…things that wouldn't have been possible or practical ten years ago are now standard practice and help to make monitoring more reliable, rigorous, and efficient…However, with the increased use of technology in the sector, I see the risk of losing sight of what is ultimately at the center of good monitoring practice: people and rigor. Because while technology can help us monitor with greater accuracy, it often decreases the human-to-human interaction that is essential in getting answers to the 'why?' and 'so what?' questions."

Presentation Panel:
Building a Common
Monitoring Toolbox

Building on discussions and
topics emerging from the first
discussion panel, the second,
"Monitoring Toolbox" panel
focused on specific
technologies, processes, and
lessons learned that apply to
monitoring. Four speakers
joined to share their tools and
test cases for current and
future activities, including
Hans Hoogeveen from the

Photo 4. From left to right: Michelle Adams-Matson (MSI), Hans Hoogeveen (World Bank), Tim Shifflett (MSI), Sloan Mann (Development Transformations, Josh Mandell (IBM).

World Bank, Tim Shifflett from MSI, A Tetra Tech Company, Sloan Mann from Development
Transformations, and Josh Mandell from IBM.[3] The session was facilitated by MSI's Michelle Adams-
Matson, who encouraged the panelists to think about monitoring as a set of skills that can be
developed (including data collection, analysis, auditing, and management).

To start, Hans Hoogeveen posed a question to the audience: what if we treat performance like a
finance function and audit it likewise? To address this gap shown in Figure 1, the World Bank Group
uses a rapid appraisal tool called Iterative Beneficiary Monitoring, or "IBM." IBM is designed to collect
data directly from beneficiaries and produce short reports for project managers. Unlike traditional
monitoring mechanisms, the IBM approach does not require sophisticated methodologies,
mechanisms or even significant funding because it is designed to address the question of whether
something is working with a small sample size and by monitoring close to the source of the project.
The World Bank approach attempts to fix the "incentive" problem inherent to monitoring (i.e. the idea
that there is a conflict between embedded activity monitoring and objective and accountability-
based learning) by using an independent third-party department within the World Bank rather than
the one responsible for the project.

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[3] Because of the May 23 tornado and power outage, panelists walked the audience through each
presentation without prompts or PowerPoint slides as planned. Still, this opened the panel to a more
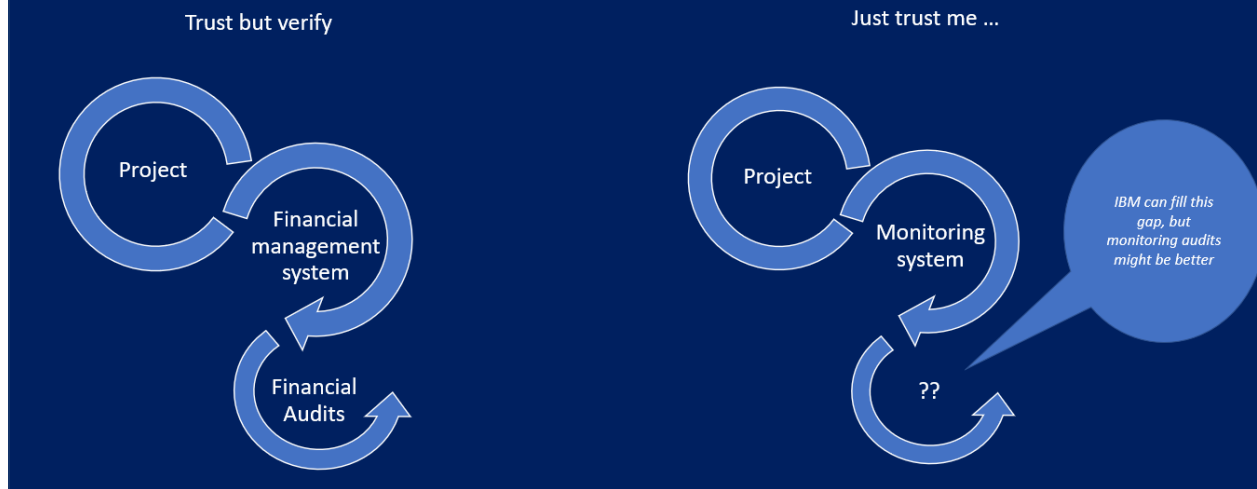conversational tone and engaged the audience after each panelist presented their test case.

Figure 1. Excerpt from Hans Hoogeveen's presentation.

After a brief question-and-answer period, MSI's Tim Shifflett discussed the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund third-party monitoring project, which includes complex data collection, synthesis, and an action-oriented help desk ticketing system used to pinpoint and address concerns for various Afghani ministries. Sloan Mann followed up with an overview of some lessons learned from Development Transformations' work in complex contexts. He spoke candidly about failures that resulted from not reassessing workplans, data, and data collection. He also conveyed the important lessons learned of using qualified enumerators and the value of contextualizing any given data collection method. Finally, Josh Mandell urged the audience to consider "the art of the possible" in conducting monitoring work, focusing on the USAID Global Health Supply Chain Program. Mr. Mandell explained how data collection and analysis can move from descriptive and predictive toward more prescriptive and ultimately to a cognitive use of data (see Figure 2).
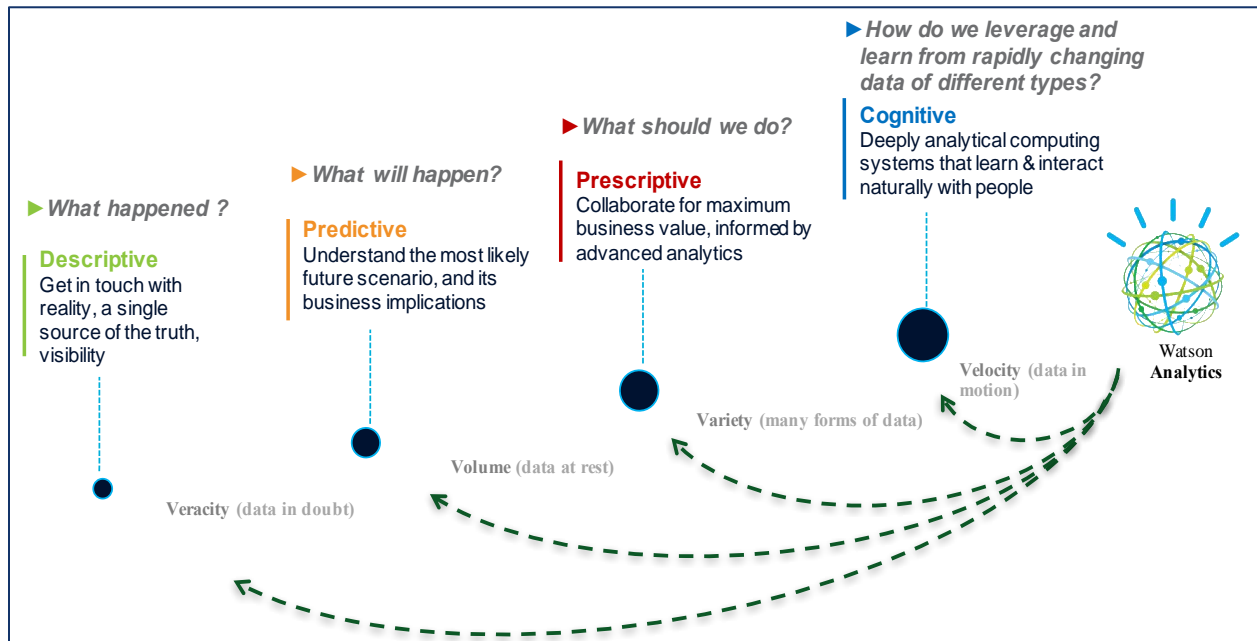
Figure 2. Excerpt from Josh Mandell's presentation on cognitive analytics.

Closing Comments

Larry Cooley, MSI's President Emeritus, delivered closing comments for the day. In his view, one key trend in development is that performance monitoring is at the forefront of a major period of disruption. He offered three reasons why:

1. Monitoring is driven and empowered by advances in IT and there is little chance of un-doing these advances.
2. Monitoring work is reinforced by an emphasis on senior policymakers and officials to expect evidence. Today, there is a greater emphasis on evidence-based decision making whereas in the past there was a default position of "instinct," "intuition" or other nebulous justifications.
3. Performance monitoring is heavily influenced by the changing and more circumscribed role of traditional bilateral donors, another change that is unlikely to be reversed. Central to these changes are rapid movements away from centrally controlled information systems tied to budget cycles and external reporting.

What are the operational implications of this trend? Larry offers six potential pathways, covering the ways in which monitoring systems have evolved, the inherent pressures to expand and establishing rigor in monitoring. (see text box).

All of this represents the first wave of a dramatic shift in the ways information and evidence are generated and used. The magnitude of this change is significant, and its influence will only grow.

What's Next?

Building on the momentum from the event, MSI is pursuing several avenues for continued discussion and leadership. As a follow-up to the event, organizers asked participants to rate their interest in various topics and fora:

- Quarterly lunches focusing on a deeper dive and smaller group of participants to address the technical specificities of monitoring work.
- Convene a working group or community of practice on a specific topic.
- Follow-up event on potential topics emerging from the day's sessions.

MSI is working internally and with sector peers to determine where to go next. A key takeaway from the New Frontiers event was that there is demand for an informal, yet structured forum to discuss critical issues in monitoring. The next stage will aim to keep the momentum going and elevate the practice of monitoring to improve development transparency, accountability, and effectiveness.

SIX IMPLICATIONS OF A RENEWED FOCUS ON MONITORING

1. Movement toward real-time data collection, communication, and use;
2. Increased use of distributed systems and more transparent, multi-user platforms (including blockchain and improved user interfaces);
3. Expanding the scope of "monitoring" beyond inputs and outputs, to include outcomes, context, assumptions, perceptions, and unexpected results (resulting eventually in fewer distinctions between monitoring and evaluation, especially as monitoring gets more rigorous about methodology, analysis plans and dissemination strategies)
4. Increased reliance on automation of data collection and machine learning;
5. A need for strategic communications;
6. Emphasis on utilization using a 21st century lens, with more focus on the *Adaptation* of "Collaborating, Learning, Adapting" and more effective learning from outlier cases.

Annex A: Event Agenda

Time	Session	Participants
01:00 pm	**Arrival and Check-in**	
01:30 pm	**Welcome/Opening Remarks**	**Keith Brown** | President | MSI, A Tetra Tech Company
01:40 pm	**Keynote Address**	**Ann Calvaresi Barr** | Inspector General | USAID
02:10 pm	**Discussion Panel: Frontiers in Data Collection and Management: Elevating the Discipline of Monitoring**	Moderator: **Lala Kasimova** | MSI, A Tetra Tech Company **Kathryn Rzeszut** | Integrity **Sonia Moldovan** | Mercy Corps **Travis Mayo** | USAID/PPL
03:20 pm	**Coffee Break**	
03:35 pm	**Presentation Panel: Building a Common Monitoring Toolbox**	Moderator: **Michelle Adams-Matson** | MSI, A Tetra Tech Company **Tim Shifflett** | MSI, A Tetra Tech Company **Johannes Hoogeveen** | World Bank **Sloan Mann** | Development Transformations **Josh Mandell** | IBM
04:45 pm	**Closing Remarks**	**Larry Cooley** | President Emeritus | MSI, A Tetra Tech Company
05:00 pm	**Reception**	

Annex B: Panelist Information

Moderator | Lala Kasimova | MSI, A Tetra Tech Company

Lala Kasimova is an M&E specialist in MSI's Strategy, Evaluation and Analysis practice area with ten years of research experience. Ms. Kasimova has a strong background in research methods, reporting, and managing learning outcomes. Currently she serves as evaluation specialist for a large-scale final performance evaluation of the Office of Transition Initiatives' 10-year program in Pakistan. She supported USAID's largest M&E support contract for USAID/Pakistan under the Evaluations and Assessments and the Performance Monitoring and Learning units, managing a range of analytical assignments and third-party monitoring activities. Prior to this, she was engaged with the firm's third-party monitoring efforts in Sudan as M&E Knowledge Manager; this role emphasized her skills in data collection, analysis, and client reporting to support learning and evidence-based decision-making in a conflict-sensitive environment. In 2016, MSI completed the Evaluation Utilization Study for USAID's PPL Bureau, under which she supported the study team as both researcher and team manager. She supported various USAID Missions and USAID's strategic planning and policy guidance efforts in a program management role for various support mechanisms between 2012 and 2016. Lala is fluent in Russian and German, and has conversational Azerbaijani and Arabic. She holds a B.A. from Cornell University and is pursuing a master's degree from The George Washington University.

Kathryn Rzeszut | Integrity Global

Kathryn Rzeszut is a Senior Expert in Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) who recently relocated to Integrity's Washington, DC office after spending four years working on the Syria crisis response. As a conflict and stabilisation specialist, she focuses primarily on MEL in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). Between 2014-2019, she led Integrity's Third-Party Monitoring of a multi-donor security & justice stabilisation programme in Syria. In 2017-18, she led ICAI's Review of DFID's Humanitarian Support in Syria. Prior to joining Integrity, she spent nearly four years as a Research Fellow at the University of York's Post-war Reconstruction & Development Unit (PRDU) where she was responsible for the management and expert delivery of applied research projects and evaluations. This position provided her with broad cross-sectoral experience in thematic areas as varied as aid financing and effectiveness, disaster risk reduction, education in emergencies, gender, governance, and resilience. Kathryn has worked in Afghanistan, Lebanon and Turkey amongst other countries in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Africa. She holds a BA in Political Science from Pennsylvania State University and an MA in Post-war Recovery Studies from the University of York.

Sonia Moldovan | Mercy Corps

Sonia Moldovan is the Senior Technical Lead for Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) at Mercy Corps. She is a development practitioner with more than a decade of experience implementing MEL systems, developing learning agendas and managing evaluations. At Mercy Corps Ms. Moldovan leads the MEL team, provides technical assistance to program teams, conducts annual learning workshops and contributes to thought leadership on resilience measurement and adaptive management. At RTI Ms. Moldovan developed the governance learning agenda, designed and led evaluations including a developmental evaluation for the Aspen Institute and impact evaluations in Uganda and Indonesia. Ms. Moldovan managed MEL teams for USAID and DFID-funded program in Afghanistan, South Sudan and the Sahel and trained teams on qualitative approaches including outcome mapping and Most Significant Change. She holds a Master of Economic Development and is an adjunct professor at George Washington University.

Travis Mayo | USAID, Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL)

Travis Mayo is an Evaluation Specialist with USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL). Within PPL Travis specializes in the use of monitoring and evaluation to support adaptive management and organizational learning. He's the Activity Manager for PPL's Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM) contract. His past professional experiences include working for the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group, USAID Global Health Bureau, and serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in South Africa. He has an undergraduate degree from Penn State Univ. in Political Science and a graduate degree from George Washington Univ. Elliott School in International Development Studies.

![MSI logo - A Tetra Tech Company]

Moderator | Michelle Adams-Matson | MSI, A Tetra Tech Company

Michelle Adams-Matson is a practice area lead for Strategy, Evaluation and Analysis (SEA). In this role, she provides leadership for 10 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) projects located around the globe and serves as the technical director for USAID's largest MEL platform in Pakistan. She is passionate about using strategic planning and M&E to improve organizational impact and has worked with numerous organizations to institute effective common sense, and results-oriented management systems. She is a highly experienced and recognized strategic planning expert who has worked with the U.S. government, host country institutions and small local organizations to help them plan and implement programs in a rapidly evolving environment. She has integrated approaches that are designed to foster and strengthen self-reliance and sustainability in local communities and institutions. As a former senior program analyst for USAID, Michelle was responsible for country strategic planning and M&E for two regional bureaus. During that time, she chaired an Agency team to improve strategic planning systems and authored the first Agency-wide policies on strategic planning. Since then, she has designed, taught and facilitated training courses and workshops on strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) and organizational development. She holds a master's degree in international development and U.S. foreign policy from American University.

Johannes Hoogeveen | World Bank

Johannes Hoogeveen is a lead economist in the poverty and equity practice of the World Bank. He prepared Systematic Country Diagnostic for Niger, Mali, Cameroon and the Central African republic and leads the Mali Development Policy Operations(DPO) series. His current research interest evolves around iterative (project) monitoring, particularly in fragile situations, and enhancing the ownership of productive assets by poor households.

Tim Shifflett | MSI, A Tetra Tech Company

Tim Shifflett leads MSI's Client Solutions team focused on applying technology to tackle difficult problems for development projects in the areas of data collection, management and reporting. Tim specializes in mobile data collection, usually in conflict zones, and geospatial analysis. Prior to his work at MSI, Tim worked for a large non-profit international organization and in the geospatial imaging industry. He has a master's degree in geographic and cartographic sciences and a bachelor's degree in administration of justice from George Mason University.

Sloan Mann | Development Transformations

Sloan Mann co-founded DT in 2009, after having spent fifteen years working in the military and international development spaces. His unique civilian-military background helped inform his broader vision that DT be an innovator that utilizes a holistic lens in training, program design, and implementation in the world's most complex operating environments. As the President, Sloan oversees DT's corporate strategy and operations at the home office in Washington D.C. and field offices abroad. A West Point graduate, Sloan served five years in the United State's Army during which he conducted peacekeeping missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. He later went on to graduate with distinction from Georgetown University's Master of Science in Foreign Service Program. Recently, Sloan worked as an adjunct professor at Georgetown where he taught a graduate-level course on war-to-peace transitions. In addition to his extensive overseas experience, Sloan has also provided expert commentary on post-conflict stability issues for a variety of news outlets including CNN, Fox News, and NPR. His work has also been published in journals including World Affairs, Small Wars, and the Journal of International Peace Operations. Sloan lives with his family in a timber frame home on a small piece of land in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. In his free time he runs with his dogs, competes in triathlons, and practices natural horsemanship with his horse, Draco.

Josh Mandell | IBM

Josh Mandell is a business executive on IBM's GBS Foreign Affairs team. He leads GBS's effort to partner with development institutions and apply IBM's vast resources to solve global development challenges. Prior to IBM, Josh led strategy and business development for DevResults, a small technology company focused on data management and M&E software. Before DevResults, Josh was on the delivery side, where he focused on global education and training. He has an undergraduate degree in Middle East and African Studies from Trinity College, as well as an MPA from NYU Wagner School of Public Service.