

## Making Voices Heard - How Digital Technologies Help Hear from People in Remote Areas

Blog by: Bahar Salimova and Hadil Ali Mohammed Al-Ashwal, World Bank, Geo-Enabling Initiative for Monitoring and Supervision



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The proliferation of technologies and access to them have enabled massive innovations in many areas of life. Often, these innovations are being praised for advancing medical field, science, robotics and others, but one thing that needs to be discussed more is how these technologies are equalizing voices of ordinary people. This is crucial to building social capital, identifying and addressing vulnerabilities, and promoting local knowledge and expertise which contributes heavily to building resilience in a country. Hearing from remote villages in Nepal, mountainous areas of Azerbaijan and even conflict-ridden countries such as Mali or Cameroon is not an easy task. Digital technologies, including geo-enabled technologies, have become useful tools for governments and development practitioners around the world to hear concerns, needs and attitudes of those living in hard to access areas.

The Geo-Enabling Initiative for Monitoring and Supervision (GEMS) that is housed in the Fragility and Violence Group of the World Bank has been working for the past 6 years exactly on this – equalizing voices and bringing beneficiaries and citizens in hard-to-reach areas to the conversation table.

The team started off by working with a few projects to implement easy to use and field appropriate digital technologies to do remote monitoring and supervision of project. This work quickly scaled up with GEMS supporting over 1,000 projects across the world as well as government agencies. The ease of use allowed to penetrate various sectors and diverse groups of beneficiaries. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo through the support of an [education project](#), GEMS helped train local

enumerators on the ground to collect and analyze detailed data to find out which schools were in dire need of construction or rehabilitation and ensure the targeted distribution of supplies. This work also led to successful mapping of the majority of primary, secondary, and kindergarten/maternal schools in the DRC widely used by the Ministry of Education.

GEMS also helped leverage the digital tools to break silos and taboos by allowing creating feedback loops and helping share critical data to solve sensitive societal issues. One such example is Gender Based Violence (GBV) where GEMS supports World Bank project teams to map service providers for GBV violence survivors and making such data publicly accessible. GEMS has been instrumental in facilitating the mapping of GBV service providers. This is through building stakeholders' capacity on the development of digital data collection methods. In Pakistan, GEMS has worked on helping set up the Gender and Social Inclusion Platform since 2020. In collaboration with the Social Welfare Department (SWD) of Pakistan, the mapping of GBV services exercise began with 7 pilot districts and was scaled up to include all 35 districts and led to mapping of over 200 service providers in granular detail. GEMS also helped enhance the client capacity for creating a Digital Referral Directory for GBV Service Providers that provides hot line access to the victims of violence.

Lastly, to be silent and not be able to participate in a conversation, one does not only need to live in a remote or conflict area. In many instances, people fleeing a conflict or violence settle in another country as refugees or in their own country as displaced people. They also may not have an equal voice. Through digital technologies it is easier to track the impact of development changes or receive feedback on their livelihoods as it does not require formalizing of their legal status or other complicated arrangements. For example, In Chad, GEMS support the Refugees and Host Communities Support Project (PARCA) implemented by the World Bank that aims to improve access to basic services and economic opportunities for refugees and host communities in 7 Provinces. By using digital forms, the project was able to register over 26,000 beneficiaries of the Productive Measure program and set up a Grievance Redress Mechanism that allows people file any complaints they may have. This helps the team monitor progress of project interventions, which often include construction of physical buildings, cash transfers and social protection support. It also helps provide quick solutions to grievances and issues as they arise without further marginalizing the disadvantaged refugee communities.

Making voices heard is a critical component of building resilience in a country. By involving communities in decision-making processes and providing platforms for them to express their opinions and concerns, countries can build stronger, more resilient communities that are better equipped to withstand and recover from shocks and stresses. There is a lot more to explore on how digital technologies can support various communities in bringing equality in public discourse participation. The good news is that the proliferation of technologies, ease of access and relatively quick and easy uptake of innovative tools have made a lot of previously hard to achieve tasks attainable.