WHAT DIGITAL SOLUTIONS FOR FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINT MECHANISMS?

Introduction

Impact of COVID-19 on feedback and complaint handling

Accountability is "the process of using power responsibly, taking account of, and being held accountable by, different stakeholders, and primarily those who are affected by the exercise of such power" (CHS, 2015). Most aid organizations use feedback and complaint mechanisms to ensure that their main stakeholders, and more specifically aid users, can express their views and engage in project management. Feedback and complaint mechanisms allow organizations to receive, treat and follow up on situations of dissatisfaction and breaches of codes of conducts (fraud, corruption, harassment, sexual exploitation and abuse) and on feedback and requests for information. Most mechanisms function with multiple channels that people can use to communicate their inputs, some of them face to face (interviews, walk-ins, boxes…) and others dematerialized (hotline, call centers...). By hampering travel capacities and physical contacts, the COVID-19 pandemic, and more precisely the measures that went with it, had significant consequences on the functioning of these mechanisms.

Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on complaint and feedback mechanisms were analyzed by Samantha Melis in a study commissioned by the CHS Alliance (to be published in 2021). Melis' analysis showed that "lockdown had a huge impact on complaint mechanisms because contact was broken". Organizations had to rely on remote modalities but most of them were not ready to switch completely to remote management. Besides, marginalized groups "have a lack of trust in the confidentiality of remote mechanisms" so "organizations had to find ways to reach out to those people". Finally, the research showed that in order to adapt to situations like the COVID-19 pandemic, "preparedness was crucial" and the existence of well-used multiple channels prior to the crisis was an essential enabler.

The present document is a review of digital remote systems that are available to aid organizations and that should be considered in contexts where travel and physical contact is reduced. It does not aim to provide an exhaustive list of all existing options but rather a list of relevant options at the present time, seeing the rapid evolution of methodologies and technologies. It relies on a desk review of digital systems and solutions that were tried out in the past or during the current pandemic.

Part 1

Benefits and risks of digitalization

How can digitalization help improve accountability?

Digitalization of accountability means using digital tools to manage some aspects of the feedback and complaint handling. In fully digital systems, aid users submit their inputs through a digital channel (for instance a phone or a computer) and data is managed through a software for processing, referral and follow up. Organizations also often choose to digitalize part of their systems: having access to people with no phones can be impossible through a fully digital system so a mechanism can involve another party (a woman's husband for instance) to make sure targeted people can voice their feedback or dissatisfaction.

Benefits and assets of digitalization

Digitalization of feedback and complaint systems can have several benefits:

- √ **More consistent workflow and controlling function** as digitalization implies clearer roles and processes, as well as **better quality-checks and validation procedures**. This can make induction of new staff easier.
- √ **Increased security related to confidentiality** if the right data protection measures are used. Digital mechanisms **can better manage encryption and permissions levels**.
- √ **Better data for analysis and learning** and **more accessible reporting forms** (available for all levels of the organization) as digital systems allow for more rapid visualization (quantity of feedback and complaint, type of complaint, follow up status).

Risks and challenges of digitalization

Nevertheless, digitalization comes with its own risks and challenges, here are the main ones to consider:

- x **Technical conditions at field level may differ** and **constraints should be taken into account:** internet and phone coverage, access to phones or computers including costs and societal aspects.
- x **Exclusion of digitally illiterate people**, who are very often the most vulnerable, is a significant risk when moving to digitally remote channels. Alternative ways of giving access to these people is essential, even if this can take time to set up.
- x A **responsible data approach** and **different Data Protection regulatory frameworks must be taken into account from the start**. Best practices exist in terms of personal data protection[1].
- x There is a **higher tendency to mistrust dematerialised channels** (hotlines, call centers, SMS…), as opposed to face-to-face media. Although this can be mitigated, It is recommended to offer access to the two types of channels.

[1]*Refer to the ICRC handbook for more details - https://www.icrc.org/en/data-protection-humanitarian-action-handbook*

A few concrete tips to make sure digitalization is a success

- **Digitalization comes with a cost:** make sure you have the right budget line to purchase the licenses, ensure the tool is maintained and that enough time is dedicated to its management.
- **Digital tools mean digital know-hows:** check out the types of expertise you will need to manage the tool(s) and make sure you will have access to these (either internally or externally).
- **"More digital" often means greater risks for the protection of personal information:** make sure you have procedures in place and data protection roles clearly assigned within your team.
- **Digital data tends to go upward, and only upward:** digital systems allow you to better visualize and communicate your feedback data to upper levels of the organization, but keep in mind that it is equally important that field staff and affected people themselves get the information.
- **Digitalization goes well with multiple channels:** multiply the channels from the start. No matter what stages you are at in terms of digitalization, having multiple channels will make the switch to remote modalities easier. During the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations working in conflict-affected contexts adapted easier because they already had set up several media.
- **Digital tools can create or increase mistrust:** analyze the potential consequences of using such tools and make sure you have thought of a strategy to mitigate such risks.

Part 2

What systems are used?

One of the most common ways to remotely collect feedback and complaints is to set up a hotline that will be available to aid users. Toll free lines have become very common in the aid sector. Most of the time they are managed internally, but they can also be outsourced to a service provider.

1 Hotline services: using a phone number that anyone can call

1.1 Internal hotline service: internal set up and management of a hotline

Hotlines are usually deployed at project, organization or response level. Hotlines can be set up quite easily in most contexts[2] but they will require:
1/ A good enough phone for the hotline focal point within the organisation (smartphone with good quality headset is a must).
2/ One or several focal points who will answer the phones and record the inputs (if the system works well, this can easily become a full time position).
3/ An input management system. If the hotline functions well, digitalizing the management system becomes necessary. Using a plain password protected Excel database can be a good start but data protection and referral might quickly become an issue- it can then be encouraged to use a more sophisticated data management software or application.

[2]*Some countries require heavy procedures to get access to a toll-free line. An option can be to set up a normal line while the toll-free one is being set up, as it is better than having no channels.*

When to use this system?

Large scale programs (with several hundreds or thousands of aid users), programs where there might be a lot of technical issues (such as cash programming), contexts where access to phones and phone coverage is good.

Functionalities that are a plus

- √ Multichannel available
- √ Integrated workflow for team collaboration
- √ Differentiated access rights
- √ Integration with other apps
- √ Reports and dashboards creation

Potential limits and barriers to consider

- x Cost - as this scope can be considered easy to cover with Excel
- x Necessity to adapt current practices to the system (workflows for instance)

Example of solution

Zoho is a suite of software that can cover several aspects of business management (sales & marketing, email and collaboration, finance etc.). Feedback and complaints handling is done through an online complaint system that provides multichannel capabilities, reporting functionalities as well as a platform for cross-functional collaboration and immediate customer feedback system. Available channels include: email, social media, live chat, telephony and web forms.

1.2 Independent third-party hotline provider: use of service providers who offer several reporting channels

Some organizations choose to externalize the management of their hotline. This has the advantage of externalizing the set up and management of the line to professionals. Independent hotline providers can also be seen as more neutral and more likely to record feedback and complaints as they are voiced.

When to use this system?

Mostly adapted for internal reporting lines (or whistleblowing mechanisms) at organisational level.

Functionalities that are a plus

- √ Multiple reporting channels: Toll-free number, Customized website, Email, Mobile app, Fax, Postal mail
- √ Levels of reporter anonymity
- √ Incident report submission
- √ Case Management System (CMS)
- √ Monthly summary reports
- √ Consultation with subject matter experts

Potential limits and barriers to consider

- x Potential difficulty for focal points to understand the context
- x Cost can be a barrier to some organizations

Example of solution

Lighthouse is one of the international service providers offering reporting hotlines management, from inputs to case management.

2 Mobile case management system: phone or computer-based referral systems

With mobile case management systems, some organizations have found a way to improve data collection (using mobile data collection applications) and the referral process of feedback and complaints. On a specific software or application, inputs are referred to programme / technical teams who log into the system to find open cases. Team members can then input updates or resolution to close the case. Data can be collected by members of the field team if physical access is still possible. In situations where access is no longer possible, organization's staff can set up a call center by proactively calling a sample of the targeted population. The case management system is then used as a computer-assisted telephone interview[3].

[3]*For more technical guidance, check out CartONG's* ***comparative analysis of remote data collection for call-base surveys*** *and their related* ***case study****.*

When to use this system?

Field data collection option: Any type of programming where physical access to aid users is still possible, by staff, local partners or community facilitators- particularly relevant in contexts where the use of smartphones is democratized.
Call center option: Any type of programming where physical access is no longer possible but where phone coverage is high (in terms of ownership of phones and network). Both options require a certain level of skills for setting up the solution and for data management.

Functionalities that are a plus

- √ Integrated workflow for team collaboration
- √ Differentiated access rights
- √ Integration with other apps
- √ Reports and dashboards creation

Potential limits and barriers to consider

- x The inclusiveness of the mechanism can be challenged if access to certain groups is restricted
- x This system does not substitute itself to internal whistleblowing channels

Examples of solution

Oxfam uses **SurveyCTO** as a mobile case management system and **PowerBI** for data visualisation (connected through Oxfam's programme DataHub). This system is for Oxfam a way to increase and improve the services and accountability to refugees in Za'atari Camp in Jordan. This was done by recording complaints via written summary, audio recording, or photo into a mobile application which were then assigned to the relevant technical team to follow up and respond to the feedback.

3 Feedback surveys (including Constituency Voice): use of quantitative surveys to get feedback

With feedback surveys, organizations ask a limited number of questions (2 to 5) on a periodic basis across a representative sample of aid users. This technique has been specifically conceptualized by Keystone in the so-called "Constituency Voice" methodology. Collected data is analyzed and feedback is compared over time (or with similar organisations). This methodology includes a continuous dialogue with aid users, especially those that are unsatisfied with the work.

When to use this system?

For any operations and contexts, can be particularly relevant at area or response level.

Functionalities that are a plus

- √ Support for choosing the questions (tried and tested questions, benchmarks, methodological support…)
- √ Field test of the instrument and modification as needed
- √ Survey data management so that responses can be compared over time and with others
- √ Results analysis and charts or dashboards generation

Potential limits and barriers to consider

- x Feedback surveys should be complemented with other permanent channels
- x Costs as this type of surveys can also be done internally. Organizations sometimes choose to mutualize feedback surveys

Examples of solution

Feedback Commons by Keystone is a feedback management system which allows users to build and send feedback surveys using the Constituent Voice methodology. It uses tried and tested questions by Keystone. Users can benchmark responses against others who have asked the same questions. Keystone provides different ways to share findings and support through free online tutorials and step-by-step guides.

60 decibels is a remote survey solution that organizes mobile data collection surveys services in 34 countries (using mostly voice) using researchers. It used standard survey with tested questions (called "social impact benchmarks"). A toolkit is available on the website in exchange for releasing your email address. An interesting example of online survey visualization is visible (COVID-19 dashboard).

Viamo offers mobile surveys services using multiple channels: IVR, SMS, web app, instant messenger bots, social media, etc. Viamo aims at helping organizations reach out to their constituents on any phone and in any language. The survey instrument is designed with the client and Viamo team makes recommendations to optimize it, maximize engagement and reduce bias. Viamo translates the instrument and users can record in the relevant local language. Viamo can call any phone anywhere in the world.

Ground Truth Solutions is an international non-governmental organization that aims at helping people affected by crisis influence the design and implementation of humanitarian aid. It provides response-wide and individual aid agencies support via feedback surveys (using Voice Constituency methodology) or user journey mapping. Ground Truth Solutions team has a robust methodological background and its team is known to be very responsive. The organization has become known and recognized in the humanitarian sector.

Kuja Kuja is a global feedback platform that collect feedback using face-to-face surveys using 2 questions: are you satisfied with the service? Do you have any ideas to improve? Kuja Kuja works with team of local (and apparently highly trained and motivated) team. The team analyses inputs and creates global dashboards.

4 Virtual Mobile Discussion Groups: use of virtual group discussions to monitor feedback

In this type of systems, organizations set up virtual group discussions using phones' or computers' applications. Discussion groups are used to share information, monitor feedback and complaint and follow up on these. Groups should be relatively small in order to be manageable. Participants should have the capacity to interact (collectively) on the application.

When to use this system?

In programs with few aid users or for keeping the link with a sample of end-users or with other actors (professionals, community leaders…).

Functionalities that are a plus

- √ Possibility for group participants to connect for free
- √ Communicate with people anywhere in the world (using phone or computer)
- √ Easy to set up and use
- √ Voice and video calling available
- √ Possibility to send document files

Potential limits and barriers to consider

- x Requires a smartphone or a computer and an internet plan
- x Usual inclusiveness issues: applications have a significant entry cost and should only be considered for participants already accustomed to computers

Examples of solution

In many contexts, **WhatsApp** groups can be set up. WhatsApp is one of the largest platforms in the world and is used by 2 billion people. In some countries, access to WhatsApp can even be easier than regular phone messaging as service providers offer low cost internet plans. In the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, humanitarian agencies such as RNW Media and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) implemented WhatsApp groups with at-risk audiences, drawing on a pre-existing blogging network with youth, and setting up groups to cascade life-saving information to at-risk communities in insecure areas.

Zoom can also be an option for discussion groups. Zoom is one of the leaders in video communications. Zoom is based on a unique technology that significantly reduces the incoming video flow and enables video conferencing with limited internet connections. An interesting use of Zoom during COVID-19 was the organization of Webinar Discussion Groups with CSOs. These webinars were used to convene the main stakeholders and discuss how COVID-19 impact them and what feedback they have and the programmes. It should be noted that Zoom recently patched major security flaws.

5 Global feedback platform: using existing global feedback platform to encourage aid users to submit feedback

In the past ten years, several service providers and charities have developed global online platforms where aid users can post feedback, review or complaints. These platforms can be used at an organizational level or only for a specific project. They are good ways to promote collective accountability. Different models exist in terms of channels and moderations.

When to use this system?

In countries where platforms are available (some of them offer advanced services - see below for examples), fit for all types of programmes but seems more suitable for non-emergency activities.

Functionalities that are a plus

- √ Lightness of the platform
- √ Multi-channel (walk-in options are a plus)
- √ Moderation of inputs
- √ Integrated workflow for referral
- √ Possibility for participants to input anonymously

Potential limits and barriers to consider

- x As in the hotline service provider option, organizations should be willing to externalize the moderation (triage and referral) functions.
- x The delays incurred by the moderation and referral step might make this type of system less suitable to emergency activities (but this needs to be verified)

Examples of solution

Loop[4] is an independent charity who proposes a tech enabled platform for people to feedback on the humanitarian and development aid that they have received. The platform is a safe space for anybody to initiative feedback, especially if they feel they cannot do it elsewhere. After it passes through a moderator who decides if the feedback can go public, service providers and donors can see and reply to what has been posted. Loop can be used by organizations for day to day project course correction and metadata can be analyzed to identify trends. The platform is being piloted in Zambia and the Philippines at the moment and will be scoped in Somalia in 2021. Feedback is translated automatically in other key languages. The platform works on 2G networks. Upcoming features being developed in the first half of 2021 include being able to integrate with Loop through Facebook messenger, text messaging as well as the current phone or computer internet connection.Loop will also be developing a Closed Loop facility for safely receiving and referring on serious complaints or reports of Sexual Exploitation and abuse.

[4]*Interested to know more? Contact Loop info@iloop.io*

Uwajibikaji Pamoja is a solution developed by Transparency International Kenya. Launched in 2014, Uwajibikaji Pamoja ("Accountability Together" in Kiswahili) is a web-based Integrated Complaint Referral Mechanism. The service enables members of the public to submit complaints or feedback concerning aid and service delivery through three channels: a toll-free SMS line, a web-based portal, or by filling out paper forms. People with no access to a mobile phone or internet can visit the nearest office of a participating organisation to lodge their complaints.

6 Recording stories or customer experience: through several methodologies, service providers can support organizations to record users' stories

Getting feedback can also be done by recording aid users' experience of the different assistance and service delivery. Through different channels (audio or video recording, photos…), these systems allow aid users to share their experience and allow organization to identify problems and continuously improve their programmes.

When to use this system?

For programs where users' experiences should be analyzed. This can be particularly relevant for individual or household-based activities: cash assistance, case management etc.

Functionalities that are a plus

- √ Cloud-based application
- √ Access to transcripts of audio recordings
- √ Strong capacity to analyse qualitative inputs (no data aggregation, no scoring of surveys…)
- √ Result mapping services
- √ No integration requiring an IT team

Potential limits and barriers to consider

- x Mostly qualitative analysis, not fit for dashboard requests

Examples of solution

Memria is a web-based platform for organizations and companies to capture and share feedback and stories through audio and text. Clients can invite participants via email invite, social media, or a direct link.Participants (called Storytellers) record audio or write, preview, and submit their story and, if they choose, upload relevant photographs. Users can post feedback stories directly to Facebook and Twitter or use the story URL in an email newsletter. A "mini player" can be embedded into other content such as a blog post or website, or download audio clips and compile them into a podcast.

Journimap aims at helping organizations and businesses lacking a budget for customer experience. It provides services to collect patient journey, journey maps and impact journeys. Organisations decide on a customer scenario they wish to better understand, use the embedded research tool and through a first battery of qualitative research (at least 18 surveys), they can see results in Journimap. A Journimap project includes a picture of a journey across five phases showing at least 10 customer touch points, an emotion measurement showing feelings across a good-to-bad spectrum, a research-based thumbnail of a persona, and aggregated results of research responses including comments from the participant. All completed surveys return into Journimap and algorithms take over to produce meaningful results.

7 Community Radio Programming and Radio Engagement: using existing radio to broadcast message or programmes

Interactive local radio can be another way to establish a community dialogues and a feedback loop, and to provide answers to common questions using trusted experts and influencers.

When to use this system?

In large scale operations, in contexts where radio programmes are popular, in contexts where phone coverage is low. To be integrated into projects' activities.

Functionalities that are a plus

- √ Audience of the radio and radio programme
- √ Quality of the radio programme

Potential limits and barriers to consider

- x Radio coverage should be high

Examples of solution

In South Sudan, UNHCR coordinated with **Jamjang FM radio** to disseminate information on COVID-19 prevention, including a talk show that brings on board medical doctors from UNHCR and partners. Programs also run to respond to questions, quash rumors, and address misconceptions about COVID-19. Humanitarian organizations and other NGOs and UN agencies working in Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh have used **interactive radio and radio magazine series** in different ways to connect with refugees on COVID-19. Many examples are available on the Communication with Communities in Bangladesh webpage.

Also see **Repurposing Established Radio and Audio Series to Address the COVID-19 Educational Crises** and **The new coronavirus radio show guide and running order**

Available online resources

Many resources are available online to guide through your decision-making and set up of systems. Here is a list of suggestions:

1) Guidance on how to set up a mechanism

- **Listen4Good** - Listen4Good is a Fund for Shared Insight initiative designed to help nonprofits build sustainable, high-quality, client-focused feedback loops that lead to meaningful change. It provides guidance, coaching and access to grants.
- **Hotline in a box** - Hotline in a box is a set of tools, case studies, and tip cards, that will help you assess, set up, and manage different types of channels to communicate with communities during humanitarian crises.
- **Joint initiative** (GOARN Risk Communication and Community Engagement, IFRC, WHO and other contributors), **Tips for Engaging Communities during COVID-19 in Low-Resource Settings, Remotely and In-Person**. This brief provides key considerations for engaging communities on COVID-19 and tips for how to engage where there are movement restrictions and physical distancing measures in place, particularly in low-resource settings.

2) Tool repository and resource platforms

- **Feedback Labs' tool repository** - Feedback Labs has created a tool repository where organizations can find tool providers who are also core contributors to the Feedback Labs' community and have demonstrated expertise in helping organizations collectingfeedbackandengagingwith constituents along the feedback loop.
- **IASC's COVID-19 Resources Relating to Accountability and Inclusion** - The resources have been gathered to improve the accountability and inclusivity of the humanitarian response(s) to the COVID-19 outbreak that encourage active participation of all affected people, regardless of their gender, age, disability and other diversities; adapt to their feedback; encourage, listen to and act on their complaints, without fear of exploitation or abuse by any aid worker and provide information that enables affected people to make informed decisions about their own lives.
- **Resource and Support Hub** - The Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH) aims to support organisations in the aid sector to strengthen their safeguarding policy and practice against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Sexual Harassment (SEAH).The Hub is an open-access platform bringing together relevant guidance, tools and research, and signposting quality-assured safeguarding support. It creates opportunities for meaningful engagement through Communities of Practice, discussion forums and live events.

3) Webinars

- **Accountable now, How to keep up with the digital customer feedback revolution?** With Oxfam and Transparency International Kenya

4) Studies

- **DRC Learning Brief, Obstacles and opportunities for DRC to address commitment 5 of the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS)**

h——h H2H Network Humanitarian Action Support

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