'WE ARE HERE'

IFRC's experiences with communication and feedback channels for affected populations in Haiti

Isabella Jean
with Francesca Bonino

ALNAP-CDACASESTUDY

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About the authors

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Abbreviations and acronyms

ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
BCT	Beneficiary Communications Team
BRC	British Red Cross
CLO	Community Liaison Officer
CMT	Community Mobilisation Team
CRRP	Community Resettlement and Rehabilitation Programme
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
HRC	Haitian Red Cross
ICT	Information and communication technology
IDP	Internally displaced person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INA	Integrated Neighbourhood Approach
INGO	International nongovernmental organisation
IVR	Interactive voice response
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
ODA	Official development assistance
PMER	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting
RCRC	Red Cross and Red Crescent
SpRC	Spanish Red Cross
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Background

Between 2012 and 2013 the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) and CDA conducted a research project to study the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms in humanitarian settings.

The objective of this joint research initiative was to produce evidence-informed guidance for operational agencies on strengthening the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms for affected populations in humanitarian contexts. In addition to a comprehensive desk study of relevant literature, ALNAP and CDA conducted three case study visits to document effective feedback practices and mechanisms at the operational level in a variety of emergency humanitarian settings. The field visits to Sudan, Pakistan and Haiti were conducted between November 2012 and May 2013, during which the research team conducted interviews with frontline programme staff, senior management, and the affected people receiving assistance to capture their perspectives and learning and to document what works and why when using feedback mechanisms. The research initiative is supported by a grant from the German Foreign Ministry. The lessons and analysis emerging from the literature review and case studies would not be possible without the hospitality, dedication and generous support received from host organisations that opened their doors to our research team and shared their programme documents, experiences and analyses.

1. Overview

The Haiti visit was conducted between 12 and 25 May 2013 and was hosted by the IFRC. The Haiti Earthquake was the largest urban crisis that the IFRC had ever responded to.

Communication with the affected population was prioritised from the outset of the emergency response in Haiti (IFRC, 2011a). This case study primarily focuses on two-way communication and feedback processes in IFRC's Return and Relocation Programme, which supports people displaced by the Earthquake to move out from the crowded camps and informal settlements into safe housing. We met with affected community members who have received different types of assistance after the 2010 Earthquake in Port-au-Prince, Léogâne and Jacmel. We visited one of the temporary camps in Port-au-Prince and accompanied IFRC staff on monitoring visits to city neighbourhoods where former camp residents have rented housing using cash assistance provided by IFRC. In Jacmel, south of the capital, we met with former camp residents who used the IFRC relocation and livelihoods grant to resettle to one of the provinces outside the capital.

Our research team conducted interviews with programme staff at IFRC and several other Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC) National Societies that operate in Port-au-Prince, Léogâne and Jacmel, including Haitian Red Cross (Health Programme), Spanish Red Cross (Livelihoods Programme), Canadian Red Cross (Return and Relocation Programme), British Red Cross (Integrated Neighbourhood Approach (INA) Programme), French Red Cross (INA Programme/ Return and Relocation Programme), and American Red Cross (INA Programme). Since the focus of this case study is primarily IFRC, we are not able to summarise all the findings from each of these interviews. We have included two text boxes highlighting key elements in the design and implementation decisions made by the British Red Cross (BRC) and Spanish Red Cross (SpRC). At the time of our visit, the BRC had a fully fledged multi-channel complaints and feedback system in place that functioned separately from IFRC's. The SpRC was in the process of designing feedback and accountability mechanisms. In addition to RCRC agencies, we also spent a day with the staff of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Port-au-Prince and spoke to community members in several neighbourhoods where CRS implements its Community Resettlement and Rehabilitation Programme (CRRP). Our observations are included in a mini case study on CRS at the end of this case study.

A distinctive feature in the Haiti case study is the use of technology to enhance and expand communication and feedback loops. The humanitarian response to the Haiti Earthquake was characterised by an unprecedented degree and scale of application of new and innovative crowd-mapping platforms, mobile technology and call-in radio shows that provided information in real time (Wall and Chéry, 2010). IFRC invested extensively in developing communication tools and accountability mechanisms with a significant focus on supporting innovation and institutional learning in order to inform IFRC two-way communications programming globally.

As with the preceding case studies, another deliberate focus of our research and this case study is on the utilisation of feedback for programme modification and decision-making. Our review of many past research studies indicated that accumulated feedback does not necessarily lead to utilisation (e.g. see CDA, 2011; Bonino and Warner, 2014). We seek to highlight the features of an

effectively 'closed feedback loop' in which feedback from aid recipients has been acknowledged, documented and responded to. In our discussion of these feedback utilisation examples we do not judge or attempt to measure the magnitude of the change created as a result of feedback utilisation. Our focus is primarily on whether or not feedback has been used in decision-making, whether it has produced change and how. As much as possible, we trace the pathways through which information (from a single person or aggregated from multiple voices) leads to response and/or action and identify the factors that enable this process.

2. Operational context

Haiti and its people have a long history of receiving different types of international assistance and interacting with a variety of international actors.

The country has struggled with chronic poverty, weak governance and destabilising political violence for two centuries since gaining independence in 1804. The island nation has also experienced recurring and devastating cyclones and hurricanes. In 2010 alone the devastating earthquake was followed by a cholera outbreak and hurricane. According to a context analysis study commissioned by ALNAP in the wake of the 2010 Earthquake (Rencoret et al., 2010):

> Official development assistance (ODA) to Haiti has fluctuated over the past 20 years, rising sharply since 2002—mainly due to humanitarian aid flows following tropical storms in 1994, several hurricanes in 2008 and food riots in 2008—particularly in the areas of development aid and peacekeeping (OECD 2009). Humanitarian aid to Haiti reached a total of US$175 million in 2008—just over 20 per cent of total ODA (Coppard 2010).[1] Haiti's principal donors are the United States, Canada, the Inter-American Bank and the European Commission (OECD 2009).

> The earthquake that hit Haiti on 12 January, 2010 killed more than 200,000 people, injured 300,000 and left over one million homeless. With its epicentre only ten kilometres below the surface and close to the urban centres of Port-au-Prince, Leogane and Jacmel, the earthquake was the most powerful the country had experienced in 200 years. In response, a massive relief and recovery effort has been undertaken by a complex array of national and international actors, one of the largest since the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004.

> High levels of insecurity have affected aid efforts over the years, particularly during the mid-2000s, which saw a wave of abductions. Humanitarian actors in Haiti are confronted with a range of additional access related challenges. For UN agencies and programmes, and those who follow strict rules dictated by the UN Department for Safety and Security, Haiti is designated as a 'Phase III' duty station, with restricted access and mobility to certain areas of the country. Most NGOs also follow stringent security procedures and practices.

[1]In 2011 – a year after the earthquake – Haiti received $533 m. in international humanitarian assistance (GHA, 2013).

Emergency assistance in the wake of a large-scale natural disaster is fraught with many challenges. In Haiti, the earthquake response was characterised by typical coordination challenges due to an influx of many international organisations and charities; difficulties with aid provision in an overpopulated and disaster-affected urban context; poor infrastructure and weak national disaster management capacity; and the legal barriers around land ownership and property titling.

2.1 The challenges of shelter-focused assistance

The issues around land ownership lie at the heart of the persistent challenges facing shelter-focused programmes and relocation and resettlement efforts. According to an Oxfam report:

> In the wake of the catastrophe, many IDPs [internally displaced persons] found or created shelter on public land or on private land where landowners were willing to accommodate them. As the recovery has progressed, the inability of the Haitian government to significantly increase its capacity, the inability of the international community to underwrite its pledges,

and waning resources in the international nongovernmental organisation (INGO) community have contributed to growing unease on the ground. The problems with Haiti's land tenure system predate the earthquake and were in fact amplified by it.

Land rights in Haiti have long advantaged those with access to title, which is granted through surveyors, lawyers, and notaries. The legal system's inability to efficiently resolve land disputes and the outdated cadastral map all collude to further inhibit land rights. Data on the remaining IDPs show that a clear focus of remaining efforts must be on renters displaced by the complete destruction of their homes. The other challenge of reforming Haiti's land tenure system is creating opportunity for INGOs to create permanent housing, as well as foreign and domestic capital to create economic opportunity (Etienne, 2012: 7).

More than two years after the earthquake, several hundred thousand IDPs were still living in tent camps and informal settlements (Sontag, 2012). Since 2011 several international organisations, including IFRC/RCRC, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), CRS, Concern and World Vision, together with the Haitian government, had significantly expanded their cash grant programmes to help people move out of camps and rent housing elsewhere in the city or move to other provinces (Condor et al., 2013).The United Nations estimates that 89% of the 1.5 million people that were displaced by the earthquake have left the camps, among them 40,000 families supported by combined RCRC-led Return and Relocation Programmes (IFRC, 2014a).

2.2 IFRC's Return and Relocation Programme

Recipients of IFRC's Return and Relocation grants are expected to find safe housing verified by the IFRC programme team before the cash transaction is approved. The total amount of IFRC's relocation grant is among the largest compared to those of other organisations. The $500 cash grant is calculated to cover rent expenses for one year and is bundled with an additional $500 grant to support livelihoods (the latter is disbursed in two separate tranches). IFRC provides livelihoods training to help people identify entrepreneurial opportunities and decide on income-generating activities. Once the grant has been disbursed, IFRC programme teams conduct two follow-up visits during the first six months after an individual or a family relocates, and a final visit at the 12-month mark. According to IFRC, 'this intensive monitoring is put in place to help minimise the number of beneficiaries that relocate to other camps, which in turn creates a further burden on the already overstretched resources within the camps of Port-au-Prince' (IFRC, 2012). A range of channels for information provision, two-way communications, and complaints mechanisms are utilised throughout the implementation process to answer questions and respond to complaints about programme details, eligibility, and cash disbursement schedules and procedures.

3. IFRC's two-way communication channels in Haiti

The IFRC has an agency-wide commitment to improve two-way communications in all its operations (referred to as 'beneficiary communications' in IFRC literature).

The agency has taken practical steps to enhance communication channels with affected populations by allocating resources to develop and test innovative approaches and technology (IFRC, 2011b). The Haiti response 'was the first time a dedicated beneficiary communications delegate was deployed – and beneficiary communications activities included in the overall strategy from the beginning of the operation' (IFRC, 2013). In this section we briefly outline IFRC's two-way communication tools and channels for capturing solicited and unsolicited feedback that we observed during our visit.[2] Several of these channels serve a dual purpose of information provision and feedback and complaints collection and response. More details are provided in the section on **Feedback collection**, below.

[2] Because of our focus on feedback and two-way communication channels, we do not describe all other tools that IFRC uses for communication and information provision such as sound trucks, bill-boards, posters, flyers and social media channels such as Twitter.

Noula (toll-free line for questions and complaints). Noula, translated from Haitian Creole as 'We are here', is an external call centre whose staff are trained to answer questions and provide up-to-date information on payment schedules, rental grant amounts, and upcoming community meetings. The call centre was set up and is privately operated by a Haitian technology firm, Solutions. Noula acts as a crisis management portal and features a website with a searchable map using crowd-sourced data, a toll-free phone line and SMS platform accessible by calling or sending a message to *177. The call centre provides services to several other organisations on a contractual basis.

Noula is an external call centre with trained staff

Telefon Kwa Wouj (Red Cross Telephone) is a toll-free interactive phone line with pre-recorded messages about public health (e.g. cholera prevention), hygiene, disaster preparedness and violence prevention. Callers listen to recorded voice prompts and use the keypad on their mobile phones to select topics of interest and answer brief surveys. The service also periodically includes blast SMS messages with recorded information about programmes currently implemented by RCRC agencies and eligibility requirements. This interactive voice response (IVR) system was launched in late May 2012 and received more than one million calls as of 1 April 2013 in its first 10 months of operation (IFRC, 2013: 7).

Radio Kwa Wouj (Radio Red Cross) broadcasts weekly for several hours on two commercial radio stations reaching listeners in Port-au-Prince and across the country. It was launched in 2010 and produces a live call-in show featuring experts on health and sanitation. In addition, the host and guests on the show provide information on a range of topics, including disaster preparedness and domestic violence. Listeners call in with questions and concerns, which are answered in real time. Radio show transcripts are shared with relevant departments (i.e. the Haitian Red Cross (HRC) Health Department) to inform the preparation of community mobilisation teams and sensitisation messages.

Feedback collected during programme monitoring. As part of IFRC's routine monitoring processes, the Return and Relocation Programme staff conduct 'visites bien être' (well-being visits) to programme participants who have identified safe and affordable housing and have resettled from the camps. During the three scheduled visits staff ask participants about their new housing and living conditions, livelihoods and economic situation, and solicit feedback on programme activities to date. Exit interviews and focus group discussions with a sample of programme participants are also conducted.

Community mobilisation. Despite the substantial investments in information and communications channels described above, IFRC continues to rely on traditional methods for both conveying information and seeking people's input and feedback, in particular, through its close cooperation with HRC. Community mobilisation is a cornerstone of the HRC approach and its volunteers visit urban neighbourhoods on foot to hold face-to-face conversations with residents, to listen to their concerns and questions, and to share critical announcements and programme details. HRC does not have a formal feedback mechanism and coordinates with the IFRC Beneficiary Communications Team (BCT) on developing messages and adjusting content for the Telefon Kwa Wouj service.

4. Examples of feedback loops and utilisation

IFRC's process for gathering feedback and acting on it has been iterative and was not well documented at the start of the Haiti emergency response.

At the time of our visit in May 2013 Senior Managers and Programme Managers noted that, due to the nature of humanitarian response and staff turnover, there was a loss of institutional memory about important programming changes that have been made based on feedback over the last few years. Nevertheless, IFRC programme staff shared a number of examples of feedback utilisation in adjusting programmes and making decisions, some of which are listed here:

- The initial **design of the Return and Relocation Programme** was informed by a steady stream of input from camp residents who shared their opinions about ongoing relief operations in the camps and described their living arrangements prior to the 2010 Earthquake. This information was gathered informally by IFRC delegates who spent time in the camps talking to people about current and future programming in order to address the overcrowded conditions in the camps.

- The **temporary shelters** that IFRC constructed in the initial stages of the response were redesigned to include an additional door based on people's preferences related to safety. In addition, a veranda was added to the design to accommodate the local cultural norm of cooking outside. The improved design became the standard for all RCRC temporary shelter units in Haiti. The technical details of the redesigned shelter were shared with the Shelter Cluster and the IFRC Secretariat for the planning and delivery of large-scale shelter interventions in the future.

Temporary shelters were redesigned to include an additional door for safety reasons

- The **types of construction materials** were changed to improve the quality and durability based on suggestions and complaints from households that received temporary and permanent housing.

- The **content and messaging function of Telefon Kwa Wouj** (IFRC's IVR system) were adjusted based on user data analytics and feedback collected from users through touchtone surveys. Specifically, IFRC's national counterpart, HRC and its Health Department, have adjusted the content and targeting of health and disaster preparedness topics and sensitisation campaign messaging on public health topics developed jointly with the Ministry of Health. Analysis of the quiz responses allows for the identification of topics that receive lower response rates. Content is adjusted for clarity and level of detail, and to ease comprehension based on this secondary user data.

Mini case study: British Red Cross' (BRC) multi-channel complaints and feedback mechanism

'You need to use a system that is effective in transmitting and receiving communication. You need details … so that you can take an informed decision on how pertinent is the information and to put a system in place to improve activities and programmes.'

Accountability Coordinator, BRC

'It is critical to take into account the time it takes to develop and run such a community-based approach. Donors need to be aware of the time it takes.'

Senior Manager, BRC

Feedback tools. The BRC in Haiti utilises several channels to gather and respond to complaints and feedback from local residents and programme participants:

- In 2011 the BRC started operating an in-house toll-free call line and appointed two staff members as Accountability Coordinators to manage the incoming flow of questions, complaints and feedback. The call centre is part of the programme team (as opposed to a separate BCT) to ensure a timely and effective response process.

- BRC's Community Mobilisation Teams (CMTs) spend several hours each day talking to residents in the neighbourhoods where the BRC implements INA.

- Staff solicit feedback during weekly meetings with neighbourhood committees.

- BRC's satellite office located in the Delmas 19 neighbourhood has an open-door policy and local residents can submit questions, complaints and feedback in person.

- In addition, IFRC's Telefon Kwa Wouj system is used across all Port-au-Prince neighbourhoods, including Delmas 19. During large community meetings the BRC hands out megaphones for people to raise issues of concern. In the past, the BRC used sound trucks, but recently felt less need for this method due to the organisation's proximity to and regular face-to-face communication with residents in Delmas 19.

Analysis and trends. BRC Accountability Coordinators sort all incoming communication into four broad categories: (1) questions, (2) feedback, (3) complaints, and (4) allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). Typical categories include requests for training; questions about ongoing programmes, relocation grants and payment schedules; requests for eligibility verification; and feedback related to the livelihoods grants and micro-finance programmes. BRC staff also receive requests that go beyond the remit of the organisation's mandate. For example, when local residents have questions about insurance coverage, BRC staff liaise with Ministry of Health staff to answer the questions.

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CMTs keep a written log of issues documented during daily conversations in the neighbourhood. The logs are typed up and managed by the Accountability Coordinators, together with data from calls and office visits. A comprehensive database, maintained in English, consolidates input received through calls, office visits and CMT logs. Frequently asked questions and responses are typed up in Creole and collated into a spreadsheet that is updated weekly. This spreadsheet is displayed at the entrance of the satellite office in Delmas 19 for visitors to peruse while they wait to meet with programme staff. A summary of recent complaints, feedback, and previous meeting minutes is also shared at community meetings and staff meetings for tracking topic trends and reporting on action steps.

Internal information sharing. The BRC uses consistent procedures and distribution lists for the internal sharing and reporting of complaints and feedback. BRC Programme Managers receive notification about sensitive and urgent complaints on a daily basis, in addition to the weekly spreadsheet of questions and complaints. The BRC is promoting a policy of 'consistent messaging', and therefore answers to frequently asked questions are shared across all programme teams to ensure a coordinated response. Minutes taken at community meetings are shared with the entire programme team and Programme Managers for follow-up action. During weekly staff meetings pending operational and implementation issues are discussed, including those that were submitted through the feedback channels.

Organisational support. The BRC offers training on accountability and feedback skills to CMT staff using role play to demonstrate how to give and receive feedback. Accountability Coordinators provide this training as part of orientation for new staff, in addition to frequent coaching sessions for CMTs. The setting up of the accountability function required internal advocacy efforts with the BRC Headquarters in the UK. As one staff member commented, 'We had to sell this idea to London. This beneficiary communication and accountability function does not deliver any programme activities and it has a cost.'

Response and learning. When immediate answers are not available, CMTs and Accountability Coordinators take queries to programme teams for a detailed response to people's questions and complaints. Calls are returned if people provide their mobile phone numbers. Clarifications to recurring questions are provided during community meetings and through logs displayed at the office. BRC staff compile mini case studies showcasing how feedback has been acted on in programme implementation. These are shared verbally with local residents at community meetings.

Examples of changes and programme modifications at the BRC based on complaints and feedback

- The positioning of street lighting in public areas was changed based on people's recommendations.
- The size of the neighbourhood drainage crews was changed from five to 10+ people to increase the quality and timeliness of the work.
- The BRC supported the construction of a marketplace area in Delmas 19.
- The BRC surveyed community members on their experiences and preferences regarding cash grants. The analysis of data was taken into consideration when modifying the micro-credit programme.
- The residents of Delmas 19 had to travel long distances to register for health insurance. Based on their complaints and suggestions, the BRC asked the insurance company to hire local nurses who lived in the neighbourhood to provide a local and mobile team to complete registration.

Mini case study on the Spanish Red Cross (SpRC): designing a feedback mechanism

'The agency should come and let us know what they are planning to do and open the communication and dialogue with us …. We wish for more transparency.'

Local resident, Léogâne

'An effective feedback mechanism helps to bridge the distance between the community and our office.'

Accountability Focal Point, SpRC

'We started by conducting a satisfaction survey for all our programmes. We included not only elements related to WHAT, but also HOW. Part of HOW are elements related to communication and community expectations.'

Accountability Team member, SpRC

In May 2013 SpRC staff were in the process of designing a feedback mechanism as part of an organisational commitment to ensure effective two-way communication channels for and accountability to affected populations. During the early phases of the emergency response local residents and SpRC staff identified a number of challenges: unanswered complaints, perceptions of the SpRC, information needs, trust and unrealistic expectations. In 2012 the SpRC Headquarters deployed a full-time Accountability and Performance Delegate for the first time in its field operations. The SpRC conducted extensive consultations and surveyed local communities about their satisfaction with the organisation's assistance and their preferences for communication channels. People ranked preferences individually and in focus group discussions. The SpRC also assessed the feasibility of communication channels in terms of cost, accessibility for illiterate and disabled people, and functionality in terms of data processing and response time.

Context appropriateness. The SpRC hired national staff to serve as Accountability Focal Points. They helped to conduct the assessments and analysis of the survey data. The SpRC's goal is to design a feedback mechanism that is easily accessible and that generates useful information for both programme quality improvement and accountability purposes. Community members indicated that they prefer having access to several channels, some of which already functioned informally, but not systematically: (1) suggestion boxes, (2) a call line, and (3) regular community meetings. In the past people placed calls to the SpRC satellite office and to staff mobile phones and raised issues at community meetings, but there was no systematic documentation of feedback and complaints. The SpRC set out to formalise the process by which complaints and feedback would be recorded, verified, analysed, tracked and acted on. It consulted with peer organisations in the RCRC movement in Haiti and with World Vision to incorporate lessons learned in other humanitarian operations in Haiti into the design process.

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Expectations and ownership. SpRC staff placed significant emphasis on the issue of ownership of the feedback mechanism. One important element was to clearly set out the role of local community members in co-managing parts of the feedback process. For example, the Accountability Team explained their plan to train both programme staff and community members on the purpose of each communication channel. The suggestion boxes will be placed in central locations in 14 communities and will be publicly opened once a week. Copies of the suggestions will be shared with community committee members for follow-up on response and action. SpRC staff explained that, 'Community committee members should be the first port of call for complaints. We would like to involve them in the process of answering and following up on feedback, complaints and questions received.' However, both staff and community members shared a level of apprehension around the confidentiality and sensitivity of filing complaints about the conduct of community leaders or the community committee itself. For this reason, multiple channels were seen as critical to guarantee a safe and confidential process for submitting sensitive complaints.

Internal information sharing. Plans were put in place for a database to combine complaints and feedback received through calls, suggestion boxes and face-to-face meetings. Entries will distinguish items that are actionable in the current programme cycle from feedback that should be considered in the design of future programmes. Urgent feedback will be shared daily with programme teams and the local SpRC Base Coordinator in Léogâne. Monthly summaries will be shared with the Head of Delegation in Port-au-Prince and with the HRC Liaison in Léogâne, as well as with the SpRC Headquarters in Madrid. Feedback summaries will also distinguish between technical implementation issues from complaints and suggestions about staff conduct and communication issues.

Organisational support. The SpRC appointed two national staff members to manage the Accountability Team and feedback process and to replace the International Delegate whose term was ending in June 2013. Both staff will function independently from programme implementation teams. Clear expectations and an internal information sharing process were established for managing the incoming feedback and complaints in a collaborative and timely way. Programme teams were expected to be part of the overall feedback system due to their regular presence in communities. The Accountability Team will assume primary responsibility for the call line and suggestion boxes and will periodically attend community meetings to gather additional feedback. The newly installed Accountability Team was motivated to improve the overall accountability approach, but they were also aware of capacity gaps and requested training on community facilitation techniques, data analysis, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) skills, i.e. survey design, indicator development, data collection tools, and effective ways to present reports to internal and external audiences.

Even aid recipients reflected on the fact that community mobilisers and accountability-focused staff should be better supported by their agencies to effectively facilitate communication between the aid agency and local residents. As one community member in Léogâne said, 'Aid agencies could give more motivation to community agents and facilitators ... they [the aid agency] should tell all their staff that they do a good job ... [community agents] should be supported in the job they do!'

Examples of changes and programme modifications at the SpRC based on complaints and feedback

- **Mango plantation to mango production**. the SpRC solicited local input when designing its livelihood programme that was initially expected to focus on mango plantation. Local residents clearly indicated that planting and growing were not major issues and that, in fact, they needed help with the processing of raw mangoes. The SpRC adapted its programme to include support for mango processing.

- **Selection of those receiving support**. Community members were asked to advise the SpRC on developing an appropriate selection process for households receiving livelihoods support. Selection criteria, such as the minimum number of mango trees per family and priorities for large families, the disabled and the chronically ill, were jointly established in consultative meetings.

- The SpRC supported **the development of community committees** to address the gap in community-based decision-making mechanisms. The agency worked with residents in 14 communities to agree on the process for selection, election and formation; roles and responsibilities; and the setting of expectations for committee members and SpRC staff.

- **Training sessions** on health, disaster risk reduction, and agricultural techniques were developed and conducted by the SpRC based on suggestions and requests from local residents.

5. Effectiveness of IFRC's feedback mechanism: observations on specific features

Our literature review pointed to several features that are commonly associated with effective feedback mechanisms: design and expectations setting around the feedback mechanism; feedback collection, analysis and presentation; the internal functioning of the feedback loop; and the individual and organisational capacities needed for establishing and maintaining the feedback processes (Bonino and Warner, 2014).[3]

Below we discuss our findings related to these features gathered during our interviews and observations in the field.

CULTURAL CONTEXT AND APPROPRIATENESS

[3]Other relevant works discussing the characteristics of feedback mechanisms and other mechanisms such as complaints and response mechanism are Baños Smith (2009); DRC (2008); Featherstone (2013); and Ashraf et al. (2010).

'Red Cross staff came to ask us if this system would work.'

Resident of Afca camp in Port-au-Prince

'Before Noula we did not know how to talk to the Red Cross.'

Resident of Afca camp in Port-au-Prince

'When we establish a system to give and receive feedback, we have to pay attention and listen to the way they do it in the community.'

Accountability Coordinator, BRC

The practice of voicing complaints and offering suggestions is culturally acceptable in Haiti, and people's willingness to speak up, offer opinions and ask questions was readily on display during our meetings in and around the city. Given the urban context and the high number of mobile phone users in Port-au-Prince, it is not surprising that the earthquake response was accompanied by many technologically enhanced communication channels. Some of these channels, such as a toll-free hotline, are fairly new for Haiti, and people were not familiar with hotlines before they began

using IFRC's Noula service. In the early months of the response, after camp committees formed, residents in one camp recalled that they used to go to the committee members who would place the call on their behalf when questions or issues arose. Since then the call line has been promoted through posters, billboards, sound trucks, radio shows and community meetings, and user numbers increased significantly.[4]

Several camp residents recalled being asked about their communication preferences and whether or not a call line would be appropriate before Noula went into effect. Given the urban spread and scale of the disaster and the subsequent response, there was a clear need for a reliable way to receive information and quick response to immediate questions about ongoing programmes. Among those who have used Noula, people still indicated that when questions arose about the eligibility and specific circumstances of each household, they preferred to speak to Red Cross staff directly. Camp residents and those who relocated with IFRC's assistance appreciated having access to multiple and diverse communication channels, including the regular visits by HRC community mobilisers and by IFRC programme staff and the visites bien être for those who had recently moved out of camps. It was clear that people did not want face-to-face contact to be replaced by a call line, an SMS-based service or suggestion boxes. IFRC's Beneficiary Communication Review also noted that older people in particular felt less able to engage with technologically based communication channels and preferred a conversation (IFRC, 2013: 26).

Compared to the contexts of Darfur and Pakistan, where the first two of our case study visits were conducted, Haiti has no cultural restrictions on women participating individually or in group meetings and therefore even male aid workers were able to undertake extensive camp and home visits and speak to single mothers in their homes during routine monitoring visits.

[4]See Noula incoming IFRC call statistics in the section on 'Feedback collection', below.

EXPECTATION SETTING AND KNOWLEDGE

'I call Noula to know what is going on and because I want to move out from the camp. When I call Noula they ask for my ID number. I ask questions and I am told to be patient. '

Woman in a temporary camp, Port-au-Prince

'We use Noula to call Red Cross and ask for information, to share our problems, suggestions and ask about registration and ID cards. We call about relocation, health, livelihoods.'

Man in a temporary camp, Port-au-Prince

'Beneficiary communication at IFRC has developed into a platform for two-way communication, but we need to guarantee that what beneficiaries are telling us through these channels is passed on to programme teams and used to improve programmes.'

BCT member

'The Beneficiary Communications Team is there to make beneficiaries' views heard.'

BCT member

The IFRC's BCT in Haiti has a dedicated budget line and invests a significant amount of resources in raising awareness and the promotion of two-way communication channels. IFRC and HRC staff inform camp residents about the available communication and feedback channels during camp visits and community meetings. IFRC uses colourful posters in Creole and announcements during Radio Kwa Wouj radio shows for this purpose. In the camps, billboards with the toll-free number and posters explaining the Telefon Kwa Wouj and Radio Kwa Wouj services are displayed in public areas. During the hurricane response in 2012 IFRC distributed relief items in plastic bags displaying the Noula number.

IFRC uses colourful posters in Creole.

Camp residents we spoke to saw the main purpose for Noula as a source of up-to-date information. When serious complaints arise, their expectation is that the call centre staff will pass on the message and IFRC staff will get in touch with them directly. Noula typically receives requests for assistance, inquiries about eligibility and programme entitlements, and complaints about missed registration or delays in cash payments. Calls do not come exclusively from camp residents. City residents call to request information about eligibility and some call to demand rental grant assistance, claiming that they used to live in a camp and had moved out before the rental and livelihoods grant assistance became available. Call entries from non-camp residents are also logged and shared with IFRC. Among those who have called Telefon Kwa Wouj, its purpose was understood to be primarily as awareness raising and education on prevention topics pertaining to cholera, HIV, disasters and violence.

Internally, IFRC's BCT sees its primary role as an information and communication hub linking camp residents and returnees to programme staff. This function is closely linked to IFRC's commitment to accountability towards affected populations. Programme staff spoke about the importance of regular two-way communication and feedback for troubleshooting and de-escalating issues, and as being complementary to programme monitoring. The process by which questions, complaints, and feedback are collected and IFRC's internal procedures for sharing information was well understood by all those involved in receiving and processing the data. Senior programme staff engaged us in a fairly informed discussion about existing feedback channels and were particularly open and frank about their expectations from the continued investment in and support of the BCT's activities.

Specifically, several staff members saw a potentially greater role for the BCT to channel substantial input from programme participants into the implementation process. One senior staff member noted that with the use of Noula and the launch of the IVR system, IFRC achieved a definitive 'strength in numbers', referring to the high number of callers. Yet there was clearly an expectation and aspiration to see further enhancements in two-way communication channels and a 'strength in quality' of the feedback loop that effectively influences programmes beyond mere information provision, troubleshooting and small adjustments. It was repeatedly described to us as a work in progress.

FEEDBACK COLLECTION

'There are no challenges with Noula! Noula is easy … we have all the folders for each beneficiary, and we know where to find the document and where to find the answers!'

IFRC Community Development Officer, Return and Relocation Programme

'Our programme staff need to improve their listening and interviewing skills.'

IFRC Programme Manager

Feedback collection at IFRC involves a set of sophisticated instruments ranging from a call centre database to crowd-sourcing and SMS-based surveys and, more recently, a touchtone-based IVR system. The externally based Noula call centre provides IFRC with a key channel for collecting and responding to questions and complaints related to ongoing programme implementation. Call centre operators log all incoming questions, complaints and feedback into spreadsheets searchable by date, neighbourhood and status of the query (i.e. 'closed' or 'open').

Noula received 7,596 calls in 2012, which was a 350% increase from 2011 figures.[5] According to IFRC, 99% of the information queries, complaints and feedback concerning IFRC are related to its Return and Relocation Programme entitlements, scheduled activities and rental grant disbursements. The Noula team provides a weekly report to IFRC's BCT, INA and the Return and Relocation team with spreadsheets detailing the number and identities of callers (when follow-up has been requested), reasons for calls, and pending follow-up steps.

Radio Kwa Wouj and Telefon Kwa Wouj function primarily as channels for information provision where feedback collection is a secondary or tertiary purpose. The BCT manages incoming data from Noula, Radio Kwa Wouj and Telefon Kwa Wouj. Telefon Kwa Wouj periodically sends targeted SMS messages using its TERA system[6] to remind local residents about the service and to invite them to take quizzes that test their understanding of the information shared through Telefon Kwa Wouj. IFRC incentivises users to take the quizzes and surveys[7] and, according to staff, 'in addition to providing information, the system is also able to carry out automated surveys and collect feedback from callers' (IFRC, 2013: 7). Feedback on the content of the pre-recorded messages (Telefon Kwa Wouj) was also collected using touchtone surveys using the IVR system.

[5]Noula received 1,400 calls in first year of operation (Port-au-Prince statistics only), of which 100% were resolved. Between January 2011 and January 2013, 37,017 messages had been received through its SMS service (www.noula.ht).

[6]TERA manages outgoing and incoming SMS or text messaging between RCRC and disaster-affected people. Unlike traditional SMS services, which require broadcast messages to be delivered to every subscriber on a carrier's network, TERA allows the IFRC to specify a particular region or even a neighbourhood to which text messages will be sent to mobile phones. For more information, see https://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/beneficiary-communications/tera/.

[7]Telefon Kwa Wouj operates on the largest single mobile network in the country and allows IFRC to deposit phone credit into the account of users who complete the surveys.

Periodic monitoring visits (visites bien être and focus group discussions) provide another opportunity to gather feedback from programme participants with a few open-ended questions posed at the end of a standard survey. These conversations are facilitated by IFRC's Return and Relocation Programme staff and generate both quantitative and qualitative data. In addition, 'exit interviews' in the form of a focus group discussion with a sample of participants take place in locations across Port-au-Prince and in the provinces where people have resettled. The information is used for internal monitoring and reporting purposes. The Return and Relocation team manages the data gathered during these monitoring visits and these are stored in folders assigned to each individual programme participant.

The case of IFRC's routine monitoring process presents a particular and familiar challenge in terms of balancing quantitative data linked to pre-set indicators and categories with qualitative data that are gathered in response to open-ended questions, some of them directly soliciting feedback and suggestions from current and former programme participants. IFRC's visites bien être currently generate a great deal of paper-based data, and IFRC struggles with the documentation and analysis of large amounts of qualitative data. The responses to questions that are recorded on a paper survey during visites bien être are stored in a personal file for each resident who has received a relocation/rental grant. The responses that are easier to quantify (e.g. household demographics and economics figures)[8] are transferred from paper to an Excel or Access database. At the time of our visit, the Return and Relocation team was exploring the use of Samsung Galaxy smartphones for data collection during visites bien être. These are already used during camp registration and need to be tested for feedback collection as well.

[8] According to IFRC, donors increasingly require the tracking of specific indicators such as 'the number of female-headed households that have started a business'. Programme and monitoring teams spend time during the visits collecting data on these categories and logging them into the spreadsheets.

VERIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK INFORMATION

'[There is] blanket data collection and not much analysis. We need to build up our analysis process. We need to draw our own analysis … and we need to be able to draw our own conclusions.'

IFRC Programme Manager

'We need to ensure that whichever feedback we get from beneficiaries … if we keep getting similar instances over time, the information is compared over time.'

IFRC BCT member

'If one year ago it was enough to have user data and data about access to the beneficiary communication tools, now we want more. We want to know how beneficiary feedback is used for programme modification!'

IFRC programme staff

Several staff members across IFRC noted the difficulties with analysing large amounts of incoming (and accumulating) data that arrive through IFRC's two-way communication channels. This is particularly true of the qualitative feedback collected during face-to-face interactions. Much of it remains stored in hand-written form on paper surveys that are processed primarily for responses to the quantitative questions. IFRC's Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) team indicated that there is in-house capacity for data analysis and that it has trained staff from the HRC health team to do quantitative analysis. However, for the growing pile of hand-written surveys and qualitative data in general, PMER staff suggested the need to develop a coding system and to train staff to work with data. PMER and BCT are small and stretched to the limit with existing commitments and, given the anticipated phasing out of the Return and Relocation Programme, it was unlikely that the programme team would be engaged in coding data.

Staff described one recent effort to tap into already accumulated feedback through a 'lessons learned exercise' commissioned by the Shelter Programme Head to look back at past evaluations and monitoring surveys for recommendations gathered from community members on shelter-specific improvements that they suggested. To do this, a visiting IFRC Delegate was assigned to work through the reports and surveys gathered in the last six months to extract patterns and key points that were shared in a brief summary report with the programme team. This experiment was illuminating for IFRC in several ways. Firstly, it highlighted the need to do this more often and, secondly, that it is indeed possible to analyse handwritten feedback if there is a dedicated person and timeframe to do this. Several senior staff shared their aspirations to see reports and evaluations featuring richer analysis of the feedback and its utilisation in programmes. One person pointed out that the current Beneficiary Communication Review feature 'analytics' showcasing service usage, demographics and some satisfaction survey results, but lacks an extensive analysis of changes that were prompted and the resulting outcomes (IFRC, 2013).

Complaints and feedback gathered by Noula proved to be easier to manage and more accessible for sorting and analysis. Firstly, the data generated through Noula are categorised and easily sorted by thematic or programmatic area and the nature of the call in a database format. Programme Managers at IFRC are copied on the distribution list managed by the BCT for spreadsheets and summaries of feedback and complaints arriving through Noula. When necessary, programme staff visit the camps and neighbourhoods to verify and follow up on specific issues raised through the call line. Overall trends are generated by the BCT on demand by senior management, but this is not a routine practice. One of the Programme Managers estimated that 80% of complaints are related to financial issues such as grant payment schedules and perceived or real delays in payments due to banking or ID requirements.

Overall, staff felt that there is a lot of great potential for the data generated through the Telefon Kwa Wouj system and that some of the initial challenges, e.g. data overload and the generation of timely and usable data analysis, have been incrementally addressed. A database of user responses from the IVR system is maintained by the BCT at the IFRC, but the initial data analysis is performed by an analytics firm in Canada. The IVR team tracks how many people use Telefon Kwa Wouj, what options they activate from the main menu, what topics they select to listen more about, and how many minutes they spend on each topic. Quiz and survey data are included in the analytics. Staff stated that it took three months to download 53,000 responses related to violence prevention that accumulated through the IVR system. As one person said, 'it is too soon for us to talk about utilisation analysis …. At present, they just managed to download the data – which in itself, due to the volume, was a challenge!' The PMER team was in the process of data cleaning and cross-tabulation, which can allow for a very granular data analysis.

Senior staff felt that incentives for improving the data analysis process should be both internal and external. There is no requirement from current donors to report on or summarise the analysis of beneficiary feedback. The PMER Department was described by programme staff as focusing largely on reporting and was criticised by some for not spending enough time at the implementation sites engaging directly with people. The IFRC currently does not solicit feedback on its Plan of Action and staff felt that this would need to be done in a sensitive way by asking the right questions so as not to raise expectations. At the time of the visit IFRC staff were already preparing for an impending ex-post evaluation during which large quantities of data were expected to be gathered. There was some expectation that this process might help to assess and improve internal analysis steps. One of the aims was to introduce an appendix in upcoming evaluation showcasing the key trends in beneficiary feedback data and how these were used to improve programmes.

FEEDBACK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, RESPONSE AND UTILISATION

'The Red Cross number is good. Whenever we call, they respond!'

Resident of a temporary camp, Port-au-Prince

'We collect more than we use. Utilisation of written feedback data from visites bien être is very weak …. At this stage I don't see people acting on this type of beneficiary feedback. We have the information! Now we need to move towards utilisation.'

IFRC Programme Manager

'The two-way communication is happening; the closing of the feedback loop is not. The machine is there but we are either getting too much information, or too late. There is no analysis … and how do I trust the information? We need to make sure feedback is reliable … and that it is not pushing us in the wrong direction.'

IFRC programme staff member

'Ensure that when beneficiaries have complaints, when you collect it, it goes to the right person at the right time … ensure that their voice is really heard and they can see the changes.'

IFRC programme staff member

The IFRC aspires to provide timely and reliable information, both unsolicited (i.e. messages about cholera prevention and cyclone preparedness) and solicited (responses to requests for information). IFRC staff organise meetings and workshops with Noula call centre staff to share up-to-date information about programme activities (through a 'Frequently Asked Questions' leaflet) to enable immediate and reliable responses. All calls arriving through the Noula line are acknowledged and responded to immediately, or within a week if follow-up by IFRC staff is required. The Noula team is capable of fully answering approximately 60-70% of incoming requests for information, and these are summarised in weekly reports.

Outstanding questions and issues are referred to relevant IFRC departments for verification, investigation and follow-up. The Return and Relocation team and INA team at the IFRC receive a spreadsheet outlining the calls registered by Noula on a weekly basis. The Head of the Return and Relocation Programme is copied on the distribution list for the weekly Noula report. A staff member explained that:

> Every Monday morning the four Return and Relocation Programme team leaders, Community Development Officers and the Head of Programme meet to review outstanding questions and complaints received from Noula the week before. The Head of Programme is directly involved in cases where the staff have been unable to provide a resolution to the complaint and he also assigns people to follow up on any open complaints.

Camp residents told us that they receive response from the IFRC in a number of ways: through SMSs, direct calls on people's mobiles, and responses from staff during camp and community visits. For INA and the Return and Relocation Programme many incoming calls and queries are about the registration process, grant allocation process, and payment schedules. But camp residents also mentioned other topics they have called about. The former vice-president of one of the camp committees recalled that sanitation issues were greatly improved in his camp after residents called Noula and met with IFRC staff to discuss what would work better than the existing solutions. Conversely, he noted that camp residents placed many calls about poor lighting in public areas of the camp and spoke to United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti peacekeepers, but did not hear back from anyone for a very long time.

The Head of the Return and Relocation team holds a weekly team meeting to discuss programme implementation progress. Often, entries logged through the Noula system are reviewed and discussed, providing an opportunity for Senior Managers to check on the follow-up process and ask clarifying questions. However, it was clear from our conversations with staff that 'closing the loop' was often equated with the provision of information and responding to complaints that arrived through Noula. One Manager gave a frank assessment on the level of utilisation of feedback:

> At this point, we do not use feedback gathered during community visits for programme adjustments. We do look at comments arriving through Noula to see what is relevant and what the issues are. But we do not have a systemic way of reviewing and integrating feedback into decision-making.

A number of staff members described how the internal communications loops between BCT and programme teams could be improved to support better the utilisation of feedback and programme improvement. A BCT member told us:

> We would like to know how [programmatic departments] use feedback from beneficiaries … we would like feedback from them! Programme departments first put pressure on us to get beneficiary views for their reports, but then they don't tell us what do they do with this information. There are some departments that acknowledge the role of Noula from an accountability perspective … and this is important. But we could do more with beneficiary feedback that we gather, do more by using it!

Members of senior management at the IFRC were unequivocal about their interest in closing the feedback loops beyond responding to information requests and complaints, and that they would like to see the programme planning and modification process being informed by feedback from the affected population. One of the Programme Managers expressed his disappointment that the latest Beneficiary Communications Review (an external evaluation) did not present evidence of how feedback is influencing programme changes (IFRC, 2013). This question is now included in terms of references for the external evaluation of IFRC programmes. One Senior Manager said he could make review of feedback a regular item on the Operations Committee agenda, but he would like to see aggregated feedback presented in a more usable format, including action points, a summary of trends, an interpretation of trends, the implications of recurring issues, and visual representation.

INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

'We are developing a communication and accountability mechanism there, because Haiti is the only country where we could afford to support this work – where they had funding to resource this work. This included being able to allocate funding to create a [dedicated] position.'

IFRC staff member

'To strengthen skills required for the feedback mechanisms is not a problem of budget … it is a problem of finding someone who can offer that type of training … these days I would really like to send my teams through conflict resolution training, for instance.'

IFRC Programme Manager

The IFRC's investment in beneficiary communications in the Haiti operation has been significant and unparalleled across its global operations. This is the first country operation that introduced a full-time Beneficiary Communication Delegate position from the inception of the response and invested in developing and testing new and enhanced tools for two-way communications and institutional learning. The IFRC allocated funding to create the position of Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Movement Coordinator at the IFRC whose responsibilities included the coordination of a Performance and Accountability Working Group that reports to the RCRC Steering Committee in Haiti and engages with all Accountability Focal Points from across the RCRC societies working in Haiti. The group meets monthly to share tools and lessons emerging from each agency's work to improve accountability and programme performance. There have been significant investments in information and communication technology (ICT)-enhanced communication channels, as described above. We also heard staff observations on the decision to resource a stand-alone BCT, summarised below in the section on 'Additional observations'.

We asked senior management and junior staff to reflect about the feedback culture within the IFRC. Grievances raised by staff are handled through a separate complaints mechanisms run by the Human Resources Department. Feedback around programmatic changes is addressed internally in each team and vis-à-vis immediate supervisors. One Manager recalled when he proposed separating the registration process from sensitisation activities, which meant that these activities would be taking place on separate days and require staff to spend extended periods of time in the camps. He asked his team for honest feedback on this change in the implementation process, which prompted 'a good discussion with staff and recognition of the usual resistance to change and the reasons behind this'. The proposed change went into effect, but not until all staff members had a chance to contribute their perspectives and suggest some modifications to the new process. In the past there have been instances where negative feedback was openly shared in general staff meetings. Junior-level staff we spoke with unequivocally stated their expectations of open communication, dialogue with senior management and response to feedback from staff, because, as one staff member put it, 'otherwise frustration will increase and motivation will decrease.'

Across several RCRC agencies we heard that the role of staff tasked with accountability and feedback collection is seen as being that of acting as 'accountability police'. To address this perception and apprehension, several RCRC societies invest in internal awareness raising and training about the purpose of the accountability process and feedback channels. Nevertheless, there were concerns that programme teams remain reluctant to share implementation challenges or engage with complaints due to concerns that it would affect their performance standing with Senior Managers.

PERIODIC REASSESSMENT AND ADJUSTMENT

'We don't have suggestions. If Red Cross wants to improve the system, they should themselves think how to improve it!'

Temporary camp resident, Port-au-Prince

Since the January 2010 Earthquake IFRC Haiti has commissioned several publications on and external reviews of affected population communication work to highlight promising and innovative practices and to strengthen its two-way communication and feedback channels and practices (Sontag, 2012). At the time of our visit, the most recent evaluation report Haiti Beneficiary Communications Review was published (IFRC, 2013). This latest review was commissioned by the BCT specifically to look at the effectiveness of the IFRC's existing two-communications channels and tools, especially those enhanced by technology.

However, the question about effectiveness was largely defined in terms of functionality and accessibility by users, and in terms of user satisfaction with the communication and feedback channels. Indeed, the findings confirmed that residents of temporary camps and neighbourhoods where IFRC/RCRC operates are aware of Red Cross agencies and their work and satisfied with the channels that have been made available to them for seeking information and voicing complaints. For example, the evaluation report found that:

> Of all involved in the study who had registered a question or complaint with the Red Cross Red Crescent, more than 85 per cent said they were happy with how the query had been resolved. However, a significant number of people said they would have liked to lodge a query but did not know how (IFRC, 2013: 9).

The evaluation did not measure the effectiveness of these two-way communication mechanisms in relation to programme modification and improvement. Nevertheless, the report provided recommendations for furthering the impact of beneficiary communication channels in the future by highlighting the need for (1) data consolidation from multiple feedback mechanisms; (2) the timely analysis of data and the identification of recurring issues; (3) the regular reporting of findings to relevant operational teams; and (4) the identification of steps to address recurring issues and monitoring to ensure that any steps taken are effective (IFRC, 2013: 32). The lessons from the review were shared beyond Haiti to inform the IFRC's communications practices with regard to affected populations around the world.

In Port-au-Prince the work spearheaded by the IFRC's Performance Accountability Working Group provides another platform for ongoing assessment and learning facilitated among peers from all National Societies working in Haiti. The working group was tasked with supporting the RCRC movement in Haiti in developing effective accountability mechanisms and common indicators for measuring progress on accountability. According to members, the working group helped to create space for reflection that had not existed in the earlier phase of the emergency response and it meets regularly to share tools, effective practices and findings from internal assessments.

6. Additional observations and areas for further inquiry

6.1 Formalised/separate mechanisms vs. feedback solicited through ongoing programme activities

> **'There have been huge improvements. For us, keeping the programmes in the loop with what is happening with beneficiaries is key. It shows to programmes what role the Beneficiary Communication Team can play!'**

IFRC BCT member

Across all three case studies we documented a range of observations and opinions about the importance of setting up formal channels and the value of maintaining informal channels for gathering and responding to feedback. The experience of the IFRC, BRC, SpRC and CRS in Haiti proved to be a very useful addition to our data set and for further learning on this topic. All of these agencies have decided to formalise and institutionalise most of their feedback collection and feedback-handling functions by establishing and resourcing dedicated positions such as Beneficiary Communication Officers, Accountability Coordinators, and Feedback Database Managers, as well as creating a position for an Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Movement Coordinator position at the IFRC that served as a facilitator for learning across agencies. People in these positions have a direct responsibility for the design, oversight, and improvement of the feedback and complaints channels and overall feedback information-sharing process in their agencies.

The lessons and challenges of feedback utilisation that we highlighted above are similar to the ones we highlighted in previous case studies. Firstly, feedback collection using established channels such as call centres is indeed easier to manage and a small team can do basic data sorting and analysis. However, feedback of all types is regularly picked up by all staff who visit operational sites and currently it is not systematically documented for tracking and decision-making purposes. This does not mean that decisions are not influenced by informally gathered opinions, but that the impact on decisions is rarely captured for future review. Programme Managers increasingly wish to see richer analysis of the aggregated data, including qualitative data gathered during focus groups and brief conversations. IFRC staff in particular pointed out many areas for improvement where data sharing between BCT and programme teams is needed. The recommendations in the 2013 Beneficiary Communication Review included the need for the increased presence of BCT on the ground, and regularly accompanying operational staff in the field to interact with the community and gain a better understanding of the context and communities' communication needs (IFRC, 2013).

6.2 Location of beneficiary communications within the IFRC's organigram

'The Beneficiary Communications Team should be treated as an integral part of programmes and should inform participatory programme planning.'

IFRC BCT member

The BCT reports to the Head of Delegation and sits alongside programmatic/thematic departments at the IFRC. The team is responsible for managing data arriving through Noula and for operating the two-way communication tools such as Telefon Kwa Wouj (IVR system) and Radio Kwa Wouj, along with other information provision tools. Several staff on the BCT discussed the advantages and disadvantages of embedding a BCT directly in programmes. Some people felt that embedding a communications- and accountability-focused person in each programme would enhance internal information sharing and feedback utilisation in real-time decision-making. Others suggested that a more visible role on the Operations Committee would help to integrate beneficiary viewpoints into decision-making process.

Among other reasons for restructuring, staff suggested that it would help to sustain the investment of resources in communication with affected populations if its budget is linked with the general operational budget of programmes and enhance the perception of the utility of these mechanisms as integral to programme performance and improvement. At the time of our visit the process of downsizing the BCT had already begun due to decreasing funds dedicated to the Haiti operation, and the conversation about future scope and direction of the two-way communications mechanisms was pertinent. This conversation is part of a larger decision-making process about a gradual hand-over of IFRC programmes to HRC as the IFRC begins to downsize its presence in Haiti.

The latest external evaluation of communications with affected populations in Haiti includes recommendations regarding the further integration of beneficiary communications into communities and operational programmes (IFRC, 2013: 32). Among the various steps, the evaluation noted the need for the inclusion of affected population communications input into programme planning and the establishment of mutual operational/affected population communications milestones with clearly defined goals and indicators. Finally, the report called for more regular contact between affected population communications and operational teams to discuss mutual support.

7. Conclusion

The IFRC's impressive investments in multiple and complementary two-way communication channels have produced important lessons for its global affected population communications and accountability work.

In the autumn of 2013 the IFRC held its second Haiti Learning Conference in Panama. The event brought together more than 150 senior leaders, managers, and practitioners from headquarters and field and regional offices, and aimed at 'collectively defining the way the lessons learnt from this unique operation would contribute to organisational learning and change.' Accountability featured as an important topic throughout the discussions, and findings from the recent reviews on two-way communication tools were shared broadly with RCRC staff from other regional offices. The IFRC team provided us with an update on their affected population communication channels in May 2014 as this case study was being finalised for publication. As of December 2013 the IFRC's use of the Noula call centre has been discontinued due to the phasing out of the Return and Relocation Programme that the call line supported. For the remaining period of the programme participants were able to access information and provide feedback through other communications channels at the IFRC, such as the radio, Telefon Kwa Wouj and during community meetings. Telefon Kwa Wouj has received 2 million calls as of March 2014 (IFRC, 2014b). Since June 2013 Radio Kwa Wouj has been broadcasting on one radio station with national coverage, Radio One, with a one-hour live broadcast and one-hour retransmission weekly. This change was informed by the changes in the size of the IFRC operations and in the interests of cost-efficiency.

The IFRC's impressive investments in multiple and complementary two-way communication channels have produced important lessons for its global affected population communications and accountability work. IFRC Haiti operations greatly benefited from the expertise available through its global network of experienced delegates and local experts during the testing and design of the TERA and IVR systems. The increased attention on ICT application during the Haiti Earthquake response allowed for the testing of new communication channels and previously untested organisational structures. The evolving role of the IFRC's BCT during the various phases of the response is another important area for consideration in future responses. While in the immediate post-disaster response information provision and mass communication approaches are most helpful, in subsequent phases the BCT has the potential to support programmes in a much closer way by targeting questions to improve programme relevance and quality and to help with data analysis.

There are important lessons to be learned from the IFRC's decision to outsource the toll-free call line to Noula and from the way the incoming data is jointly managed by the BCT and the relevant programme team. Conversely, the BRC's decision to manage a separate toll-free call line and embed the team responsible for feedback management in the programme is important in light of its operational context in the neighbourhood satellite office. We would have wished to have done full case studies on both approaches in order to offer a deeper analysis of their advantages and disadvantages.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) programme in Port-au-Prince

'I am pretty sure that when I share feedback or complain about something, [CRS] people sit with my dossier in the office to find a solution. Besides, I also go to the CRS sub-office if I need. So far this has been working pretty well for me.'

Ti Biznis programme woman participant

'We help beneficiaries fill in the complaints form on the spot. The bottom part of the complaint form has a perforated detachable coupon that is given as a form of receipt to the beneficiaries.'

CRS Community Liaison Officer, Christ-Roi neighbourhood

Our visit to CRS office in Port-au-Prince focused on the feedback, complaints and response mechanisms (CRM) used by the Community Resettlement and Rehabilitation Programme (CRRP), which is an integrated approach linking shelter, water and sanitation, infrastructure, protection, and livelihoods solutions. The feedback and complaints channels and the incoming data are managed by CRS's Accountability Team. The team reports to senior management and has a presence in sub-offices located in several urban neighbourhoods.

In addition to the Accountability Team in the Port-au-Prince main office, most sub-offices employ Accountability Focal Points and Community Liaison Officers (CLOs). We met with the Accountability Advisors, Field Accountability Managers, M&E Specialists, Livelihood Programme Managers and CLOs from several sub-offices. We also spoke to residents in Christ-Roi who received basic business training and $500 grants as part of the 'Ti Biznis' (Small Business) Programme that falls under the overall CRRP umbrella.

CRS uses the following feedback and complaints channels for programme participants and partners:

- Formulaire de doleance (complaints form). All programme staff and CLOs carry the complaints forms with them during neighbourhood visits and can receive and record complaints on the spot and provide a receipt to the complainants for tracking and follow-up purposes.
- Tandem (toll-free call line). Local residents are invited to call or text their questions, complaints, and feedback to this toll-free call line and can inquire about the status of previously lodged complaints using the receipt from the formulaire de doleance. CRS rents the line for less than $50 a month and it operates daily from 8.30 am to 12.30 pm. Accountability staff rotate on a weekly basis to answer the calls and update the tracking database.
- Office drop-in visits. Local residents stop by the CRS sub-office in person to speak to staff.
- A suggestion box is available at all sub-offices for suggestions and complaints submitted during non-business hours.

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- Written letters are accepted through regular mail or by drop-in visits. Local residents often use this channel to send expressions of gratitude.
- SMS messages are accepted on the Tandem call line (which functions on mobile phones) and occasionally people message directly on staff members' mobiles in those cases where personal numbers have been shared. This practice is discouraged due to concerns about staff safety.
- Email communication has been mainly used by local partners, who are encouraged to submit feedback and complaints about any component of CRS programmes.
- Public community meetings are held in target neighbourhoods every two months and provide another opportunity to listen to residents' perspectives, gather their feedback and complaints, and promote Tandem.

Examples of feedback utilisation in CRS programming

- **Changes in latrine design**. Local residents complained about the design of the latrines, repeatedly pointing out that they are too small and become overheated in the sun. The complaints and suggestions were analysed by the Accountability Team and the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) technical staff at the sub-office level, who in turn consulted with the engineers in the CRS Port-au-Prince main office. One CRS team member recalled that

  > The engineers would not take CLOs words for a fact. They went back to the field to accumulate more evidence on the issue. The engineers needed to see for themselves and get the evidence. Local engineer based in the sub-office worked together with those from the main office to verify the information.

  The feedback loop was closed when the latrine cabin design was changed to accommodate the request for more space. The new and improved design became standard for all CRS WASH programmes. CRS shared the improved design with other members in the WASH cluster to inform the practices of other organisations who are constructing latrines in Port-au-Prince. Another modification related to latrines was made for members of the disabled community after CRS received complaints from several disabled persons who could not access the latrine cabin in a wheelchair. The WASH team installed a ramp leading to the latrine structure.

- **Changes in shelter-focused programming**. Local residents used the call line and face-to-face meetings with staff to inquire about insects living in the transitional wooden shelters. CRS produced a visual brochure explaining what to do to get rid of these insects and held information sessions in affected neighbourhoods. On a separate issue, local residents asked for advice on how to protect important document (including the shelter contract they signed with CRS) from heavy rains and cyclone storms. CRS distributed sealable plastic pockets and held information sessions to explain to residents what to do during a cyclone to protect their valuable objects and documents.

Notable feedback mechanism features. Based on our conversation with CRS staff and CRRP participants, we identified several perceived strengths of the CRS complaints and feedback system:

- **Proximity to beneficiaries and face-to-face communication**. CRS operates sub-offices in five different neighbourhoods in Port-au-Prince with staff who are focused on accountability and regular engagement with local residents, such as CLOs, who are based in most sub-offices. Part of the CLOs' role is to collect feedback and complaints from residents during their community meetings and household visits. They clarify programme details to community members; collect questions, concerns and suggestions; inform CRS programme staff; and relay information back to the community. The Accountability Team maintains a regular channel for sharing information between sub-office staff and programme staff and follows up on issues emerging from the complaints and feedback system that require attention from senior management.

- **A systematic process for handling complaints and feedback**. After receiving a call or completing a complaints form, CRS staff members document and submit the information to the Field Accountability Manager, who then forwards it to the relevant Programme Coordinator as necessary. If the call relates to sensitive content or touches on issues beyond the sub-office's remit, it is forwarded directly to the Accountability Team located in the main CRS office in Port-au-Prince. A monthly report is compiled breaking down the calls received by caseload: (1) calls received to ask for information; (2) complaints; and (3) expressions of thanks and appreciation.

- **Transparency and confidentiality** were seen as key for the data-entry and storage system and the handling of complaints data internally. Complaints and feedback data are entered and stored on a CRS-wide SharePoint platform in a database set up in way that grants different levels of access to different staff at CRS (e.g. staff in the Accountability Team can view all data, staff in programme positions have access to feedback data relating to their programme areas, etc.).

- **Following up and relaying information back to communities**. For issues that concern more than one individual or household, CRS uses community-wide meetings to: (1) relay information back on the status of the programme's progress; (2) clarify which follow-up actions CRS is working on; and (3) explain what the expected timeline is for addressing issues that were brought to its attention, including those that arrived through the Tandem system.

> **'Beneficiaries are often impatient! When you ask them if something is done, if something is changed based on their feedback and requests … they will often give superficial, shallow answers … that nothing has been done, that they are not listened to … for us, the Community Liaison Officers' job is to fix those problems!'**

CRS staff member

Following up on feedback received, acting on it, and showcasing positive examples. Some of the examples shared during our visit speak to issues related to verifying feedback received; passing on and referring feedback information to the relevant programme department in the organisation; initiating intra-departmental problem-solving to address issues; and making sure that solutions are internalised.

Perceptions and attitudes. As the Tandem system is continuously promoted and its functions explained to beneficiaries and programme participants (e.g. using posters, fliers, and verbally during integrated community meetings), so the overall CRS Haiti Accountability Framework is presented and promoted with CRS staff at different levels of seniority in the CRS office.

'We need to keep promoting the Tandem feedback system with beneficiaries, considering that there was no prior experience in Haiti with using hotlines for instance ... we need to continue emphasising that the system is not only for negative things, but also to give [beneficiaries] a voice.'

CRS staff member

'I don't have accountability in my job title, but my work is about creating transparency .... Accountability mechanisms are there to protect employees, not to check, or worse, spy on colleagues .... These more negative perceptions are starting to change now.'

CRS staff member

'For instance, if you receive a lot of calls at #277, the perception is that something in Christ-Roi is not working well ... but actually no! That is not it ... rather the contrary ... if you give beneficiaries a voice ... they will rightly use it!'

CRS staff member

'The feedback mechanism is a mirror that helps us understand our work better! That is why in the Accountability Team, in reporting what we do, we try presenting information generated through the feedback system in a positive light.'

CRS staff member

Lessons learned so far and work in progress

Introduce and embed accountability practices in the organisation beyond a single programme. The commitment to systematically implement feedback mechanisms for programme participants and communities is currently one of the six commitments of CRS Haiti Accountability Framework (CRS, 2012: 12-13). The CRS Accountability Team believes that adherence to the Accountability Framework is critical and requires a strong understanding, implementation, resourcing and use of the feedback system. With overall support and facilitation provided by the Accountability Team in the CRS Haiti office, some of the concrete actions taken to embed accountability practices in the work of the office include:

- *At the individual level (optional)*. Accountability-related commitments have been introduced in the staff performance management system (currently done for 70% of CRS Haiti staff).
- *At the individual level (optional)*. The Accountability Team offers support through individualised coaching sessions that are part of the CRS staff performance management system.
- *At the programme/department level (optional)*. Department-wide accountability plans of action have been introduced with a related objectives and monitoring plan, which includes accountability targets. These plans and related targets are jointly developed by the Accountability Team, the M&E team and the concerned department. Examples of targets: introduce a standing accountability-related question in the interview protocol used when hiring new staff; introduce a paragraph on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse in CRS staff job descriptions.
- *At CRS Haiti office-wide level (compulsory)*. The Accountability Team gives an orientation/ introductory session to all new employees to introduce the Accountability Framework.

Establish and use a complaints and feedback mechanism from day one of the programme. This would (1) allow the soliciting of feedback on the design of the mechanism itself and (2) ensure that the necessary human resources are allocated to maintain the system, e.g. funding CLO positions at the start of the programme.

Embedding affected population accountability practices in a programme to 'give voice' to crisis-affected communities through feedback and complaints mechanisms (Commitment 6 in the CRS Haiti Accountability Framework) is also a way to establish and promote community participation (Commitment 5 in the CRS Haiti Accountability Framework). At the start of a programme this can be particularly helpful in improving the selection of and targeting the criteria for defining affected population members. This lesson has been internalised and will be applied in the follow-on programme to the CRRP, in which the accountability component has already been planned and resourced to be part of the programme from its inception.

Stress the importance of celebrating progress, and highlighting and sharing positive examples of accountability in practice in all of the areas of CRS work covered in the Accountability Framework. This has been done by customising the periodic progress reports and feedback and complaints reports produced and collated by the Accountability Team to highlight success stories and positive examples, and to facilitate follow up from programme departments.

Undertake advocacy within CRS and with partners and community members. This refers to messaging about and sensitising affected populations on the importance and use of communication, feedback and complaints systems, while simultaneously messaging about and sensitising programme departments, managers and senior leaders about the role that accountability practices – including acting on feedback and complaints – can play in improving

programmes. In addition to advocacy in the Haiti office, the CRS Accountability Team in Haiti has also actively shared learning with peers elsewhere by presenting a series of webinars for all CRS offices globally to share the Haiti Accountability Framework, its application and lessons learned.

Recognising the importance of putting to use and internalising the experience of working with the framework in the past few years, the Accountability Team has also been developing a checklist and self-assessment tool to accompany each of the six accountability commitments of the framework that could be used by other CRS country offices working to strengthen their programmes' accountability features.

We observed that the complaints and feedback system currently in use as part of CRRP in Port-au-Prince is decisively **solution oriented**. It appears that the mechanism is well understood, used routinely, and maintained by staff who not only work with a collaborative and problem-solving attitude, but also appreciate the functions and benefits that such a system provides in terms of transparency and accountability, programme participation (i.e. greater acceptance and ownership), participatory programme monitoring functions, two-way communication with affected populations and a risk-mitigation function.

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Other ALNAP-CDA publications on feedback mechanisms

Humanitarian feedback mechanisms: research, evidence and guidance (2014)

Closing the Loop - Practitioner guidance on effective feedback mechanisms in humanitarian contexts (2014)

'We are committed to listening to you': World Vision's experience of feedback mechanisms in Sudan (2013)

'Investing in listening': International Organization of Migration's experience with humanitarian feedback mechanisms in Sindh Province, Pakistan

What makes feedback mechanisms work? Literature review to support an ALNAP-CDA action research into humanitarian feedback mechanisms (2014)

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