

Oxfam Management response to the review of the Humanitarian Informal Feedback Project in Za'atari camp, Jordan

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1. The context and background of the review

The Humanitarian Informal Feedback Project, supported by Elrha’s Humanitarian Innovation Fund, was conceived to provide a mechanism to electronically capture, refer, and resolve informal/qualitative feedback, and to add value to Oxfam’s existing formal feedback mechanisms. The project was developed in Oxford, with an initial plan to pilot in South Sudan. When this became impossible due to the security situation, the pilot was moved to the Za’atari Camp in Jordan. The pilot project in Za’atari Camp Jordan began in July 2016.

The tool envisaged that a computerized system would reduce data-collection and data-entry times, to decrease the likelihood of feedback being lost or misplaced, and could be used to track the progress of how feedback is handled.

In order to determine, through recommendations from the field teams, how Oxfam can improve the next pilot of the tool, the evaluation of the pilot project took place during October 2016. The objective of the evaluation was to study the attitudes towards using the tool from data collectors and refugees, and to provide recommendations for improvement as well as learning for other teams.

2. Summary main findings and recommendations

The feedback tool has been well received by staff and has increased the trust of community members in Oxfam’s ability to handle feedback appropriately. Throughout the course of the design and pilot period, the feedback tool has moved from being conceived as an informal feedback mechanism, to being used as a formal feedback mechanism. The way technology worked in Za’atari Camp has been affected both by external (no 3G coverage in the camp to transmit the data in real time) and internal (Oxfam IT coverage for WiFi) factors. Overall, the evaluation demonstrates that the feedback tool has been an effective way to increase capturing the feedback, and that a significantly higher number of people are providing their feedback in person to over the phone, and that both men and women are using both mechanisms.

The evaluation recommends continuing the utilization of the tool both in Jordan and in other countries, since the use of such mobile technology is a valuable addition to Oxfam’s accountability

toolkit.

The primary recommendation raised by management in Za'atari during the evaluation is for more investment in this project. There needs to be an investment in staff time and expertise and help for the team to work through issues of developing a stronger accountability culture. Human Resources should be involved to adjust job descriptions to include accountability as a standard line for all staff, and to include complaints handling and accountability in performance management – not just the funding of the technology access. There needs to be a softer package to accompany the rollout of the technology, and it is recommended that future pilots place a heavier focus on ensuring that a culture of accountability is fostered from the outset. Going forward, the rollout of the feedback tool needs to be owned by an accountability specialist (such as the MEAL Officer) and supported by a technology specialist, who can provide a thorough induction and ongoing support for setting up the mechanism and using it to inform programme decision making.

Given the short timeframe, this pilot has not been long enough to see any major changes in attitudes towards accountability across the Za'atari project. More time and resources are required to enable the MEAL team to analyse the data collected and provide reports to inform managers on trends and problems. During this pilot period, there has not been sufficient time to analyse the issues being recorded, including, among others, how long various issues take to follow up, and how much time is taken by Oxfam staff to respond to problems and capture the information to close complaints.

If there is a desire within the Jordan country office to expand the use of the tool to the Host Community Programme, more resources would be required to roll this out, and a costing of this should be undertaken. However, given the different context and nature of the work, and that increasingly more work in host communities is directly delivered through partners, the country team will not be looking to roll out the tool in the near future. The Jordan team should consider including cost recovery for MEAL work in future proposals, to provide oversight and support to this, and other accountability mechanisms. This is particularly important for an accountability project which is in a pilot phase, because it has absorbed around 20% of the work time of the MEAL Officer, which was not previously expected.

Whether the feedback tool ends up having a continued use, because it is a familiar way of working, is not yet clear. It is recommended that trials in other countries use different approaches (e.g. technical field staff, and MEAL staff being given phones to use during their normal interactions with communities) to test whether it can operate as an informal mechanism, as was originally intended. The way the operation was run in Za'atari meant complainants approached staff in the community centre, rather than find field staff to talk to, so if an expansion is envisaged in Za'atari, the original idea of having field staff carry the mobile phones can be revisited.

3. Main Oxfam follow-up actions

The current evaluation aimed at the assessment of the Humanitarian Informal Feedback Project specifically in whether the technology served a purpose and whether the tool should be used in other contexts. Thus, while the evaluation provided insights on how to improve the use of the tool, the Za'atari camp MEAL team has decided that a more comprehensive internal assessment of the accountability system as a whole is needed to decide whether the tool is really fit for purpose as a time saving, cost effective and efficient tool. The main actions which will be taken in Za'atari camp are presented below and are the reflections of the Jordan PMEAL Coordinator and Za'atari Programme Manager, who should now be recognised as the core “owners” of the project going forwards. The recommendations are however built not only from the formal evaluation, but also on other known internal factors, which together are required to make a sound judgement of the tool in the specific context of Za'atari camp.

- Assessing accountability at Oxfam

The MEAL team will invest more time into learning what accountability means for Oxfam

specifically in Za'atari camp context and ensuring that the ways of working are addressing the existing environment. In order to improve the internal ways of working, and promote the culture of accountability, the team will look at the specifications in the job profiles of various team members as well as seek financial contribution from other projects.

- Using data to inform decisions

Data coming from the feedback tool should be analysed to inform future programmatic decision making. The first step of this has already started to happen and a management dashboard for the past three months should soon be available. The MEAL team will work with management to ensure the data presented is simple and meaningful, and that trends to inform decisions will easily be spotted. This is expected within the next one month.

- Evaluation

The MEAL team will carry out an assessment to see whether complainants were satisfied with the way their complaint was handled and to assess the average number of days each team takes to close complaints. This will take place once the data is of a good enough quality to make an assessment. A much deeper analysis on accountability can be done once the required data (e.g. types of complaints and the socio-demographics of the person giving complaint, comparisons with hotline, etc.) is available. This will inform whether and how accountability is or isn't working. The phases of rollout should have milestone indicators to see whether the development of the tool is progressing in the ways required to make it fit for the purposes which will be pre-defined.

- Ensuring the tool categorisation is the best fit

The MEAL team will revisit the classifications used, ensuring that proper distinctions between urgent cases, feedback, complaints, mandated/not mandated, no response required and categorizations are clear. When there have been mistakes in categorizations the new system allows focal points to re-assign the feedback to other technical teams as needed. This will be done as a priority, before the tool is brought back online to be used.

- Ensuring all staff and volunteers are adequately trained

Refresher training will be continued to ensure that all Community volunteers and Oxfam staff are fully aware of the correct processes and procedures, this will include going over the Standard Operating Procedures and ensuring everyone knows and agrees to the details on it. This will happen as soon as the tool is live again, with any of the required technological changes already completed.

- Improving the way referrals are handled

Oxfam, in collaboration with other Za'atari agencies, need to work out what to do with complaints received which are not within their own mandate to respond to. A Standard Operating Procedure should be produced so everyone is clear on what to record and how to pass things on properly. This is a general camp wide issue and there needs to be greater coordination with the other agencies in a joint response for referrals. Until further assessment is done, it is not yet known whether such referral cases will be recorded on the same accountability tool or not. It is expected that this issue will be explored within the next three months.

- Review of the interfaces (phone app and laptop) to ensure best fit

The platform has shifted from CommCare to SurveyCTO – however due to the ongoing WiFi problems the re-launch is not yet tested. Once it is live, a thorough review of the user interface, both on the mobile phone app and the desktop version will be needed. This can include ensuring that search functions and filters work properly. The way that data comes off into spreadsheets should also be explored to ensure that data is coded and ordered in such ways that will reduce manual time needed at a later stage. As the system is currently off line this will happen in the next one month before the system is brought back online.

- Costing review of the tool

Given the tool has taken 20% of the working time of the Za'atari MEAL Assistant, and unknown time from the team based Focal Points, a costing of the time during each phase (pilot phase, second development and re-roll out phase, and normal running phase) needs to be considered. Once the required resources are known, resource mobilization will be required to continue the expansion of the pilot.