



elrha

CASE STUDY

Hotline in a box:

Dalberg design and partners

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ACRONYMS

BRC	British Red Cross
CDAC Network	Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network
GSMA	Global System for Mobile Communications Association
HIAB	Hotline in a Box
HCD	Human-centred design
HIF	Humanitarian Innovation Fund
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KII	Key Informant Interview
MVP	Minimum Viable Product
TWB	Translators without Borders
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UX	User experience
VfM	Value for Money
WFP/ETC	World Food Programme – Emergency Telecommunications Cluster

CASE STUDY SERIES: CONTEXT AND APPROACH

Since 2011, our Humanitarian Innovation Fund (HIF) has been supporting increased innovation practice in the humanitarian system. This case study is one of four that have been produced to evaluate the HIF's portfolio of funded projects. These projects seek to deploy innovative approaches to addressing a specific humanitarian challenge aligned with one of HIF's four thematic funding priorities:

- Humanitarian Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)
- Gender-based Violence (GBV)
- Disability and Older Age Inclusion (DOAI)
- Accelerating the Journey to Scale

Each case study examines the **impact of the innovation** and aims to identify evidence at two levels:

- Primary:
 - Assessing the project's impact on humanitarian outcomes.
 - Evaluating the project's contribution to or influence on shifts in humanitarian policy and/or practice.
- Secondary:
 - Understanding the project's contribution to increased learning and evidence, driving adoption and scale, and what the innovation's Value for Money (VfM) is.

They also consider briefly:

- the **approaches and tools** grantees have developed, tested and implemented to innovate in the humanitarian system and address one of the four priority areas
- future **scope, scalability and opportunities** to embed lessons learned and emerging best practices
- **changes, challenges and barriers** during the innovation process and how they can be overcome to inform further innovation.

The case studies seek to contribute to a better understanding of what successful innovation looks like in the humanitarian sector and identify ways to evolve, disseminate and sustain best practices and innovative programming.

CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

This case study uses a qualitative approach. It begins with an explanatory analysis framework which looks at existing data and information (secondary data) from documentation such as regular reports submitted to the HIF.

The analysis framework is used to identify opportunities for building on existing information on outcomes using a primary data collection method: key informant interviews (KIIs).

A purposive sampling method was used to find informants with the greatest potential for sharing rich and relevant information on outcomes to shape future opportunities, scalability, policy, and practice. The use of primary and secondary data sources aims to reduce the risk of bias for comprehensively identifying the contribution of the innovation's activities towards achieving positive, negative, intended, and unintended outcomes and/or impact.

Bodhi Global Analysis, an independent consultancy firm, conducted the initial document review and additional data collection through KII. They interviewed four key informants across the innovation team for this case study. Based on the draft they produced, the Elrha team restructured and edited the document to complement the main findings identified with additional, recent information provided by our grantees.

CASE STUDY LIMITATIONS

No baseline or endline and/or test vs control data was available to conduct a comparative analysis of before and after and/or test vs control project results to show whether the Hotline in a Box (HIAB) is an improvement or not in comparison to existing toolkits.

The innovation project was completed at the end of 2017, with an 'Insights Workshop Recap' conducted in early 2018 – some five years before the authoring of this case study. Many key informants struggled to recall specific information relating to the innovation. Some KII participants were also extremely busy, as they are frontline staff, and consequently, some interviews were shortened to half the planned time (from 60 minutes to 30).

1. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Lead organisation

Dalberg Design

Partners

Working group partners – International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA); International Organization for Migration (IOM); World Food Programme – Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (WFP ETC); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Advisory partners – Communicating with Disaster-Affected Communities Network (CDAC Network); Global System for Mobile Communications Association (GSMA); Microsoft Philanthropies; Translators without Borders (TWB); United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)

Pro-bono support (user experience [UX] and brand production) – Method (GlobalLogic)

Problem addressed/ Thematic focus

- Accountability and participation
- Assessments, monitoring and evaluation
- Capacity development
- Coordination
- Disaster preparedness, resilience, and risk reduction
- Emergency education
- Information management, communication, and technology

Location/s

Field-testing – Burundi: Bujumbura Mairie, Ruyigi, Muyinga

Virtual testing – Middle East: Iraq, Afghanistan, Jordan; Africa: Yemen, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya; Asia: Bangladesh, Philippines; Europe: Greece; Americas: The United States

Desk research – Middle East: Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan; Africa: Burundi, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan; (Darfur), South Sudan, Yemen; Asia: Indonesia, Nepal; Europe: Greece, Ukraine; Americas: Haiti, Peru, United States

Project period

September 2017 to December 2017

Total HIF funding received

£82,000

2. INNOVATION OVERVIEW

This case study evaluates the HIF-funded innovation project: Hotline in a Box (HIAB), a set of web-based tools and guidance to allow for setting up locally relevant, low-cost hotlines in emergencies. The case study briefly summarises the evolution of the innovation but focuses mainly on results and evidence.

HUMANITARIAN PROBLEM BEING ADDRESSED

In humanitarian contexts, feedback mechanisms, such as hotlines, are essential to support accountability, transparency, empowerment, monitoring and evaluation, and programme enhancement. They also provide early warning of impending problems, contributing in turn to improving the quality of aid delivery to crisis-affected populations.¹

Humanitarian hotlines have been part of the humanitarian accountability toolbox since the first Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) standard in 2007.² By the time the project was designed, some humanitarian blogs and thought pieces touched upon the use of hotlines,³ broad general guidance on feedback mechanisms could be found⁴, and some examples of humanitarian hotlines were documented for humanitarian responses.^{5, 6, 7}

However, no comprehensive literature or analysis existed on the range of tools available to humanitarian organisations; there was no publicly available guidance or documentation on their rationale and operationalisation, no robust assessments of their impact had been conducted, and no clear best practices for community engagement to ensure that they are appropriately designed.

Despite this lack of comprehensive guidance on good practice, existing tools or lessons learnt, the humanitarian community witnessed a proliferation of humanitarian hotlines.⁸ Still, these were often set up without first understanding if they were the most relevant and appropriate mode of disseminating and gathering information, such as feedback and complaints.

¹ Bonino, F. with Jean, I. and Knox Clarke, P. (2014). Humanitarian feedback mechanisms: Research, evidence and guidance. ALNAP. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

² Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) (2007). HAP 2007 Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management (2007). Available [here](#) 31 October 2022.

³ Van Praag, N (2015). Do humanitarian helplines help? (2015) Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

⁴ Bonino, F. with Jean, I. and Knox Clarke, P. (2014). Humanitarian feedback mechanisms: Research, evidence and guidance. ALNAP. Accessed [here](#) on DATE.

⁵ Cornish, C., (2015) Dial A for Aid – Iraq's new humanitarian hotline. The New Humanitarian. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

⁶ International Organization for Migration (2015). Partners Launch Burundi Community Hotline. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

⁷ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2015). Darfur, improving lives one phone call at a time. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

⁸ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a Box Project proposal (June 2019).

“People think it’s easy to have a hotline, but it’s not as simple as they think. It takes time. There is no guidance at all.”⁹

Aware of these challenges and considering the vast potential of hotlines to more effectively serve the information and communication needs and the accountability demands of people affected by crises, the project partners decided to use their experience and expertise to fill some of these gaps through the development of the HIAB.

THE SOLUTION

The proposal of a toolbox, or HIAB, evolved from an open-sourced idea on the ICRC RED Innovation platform that came directly from humanitarian practitioners with wide-ranging experiences and a shared frustration with the deployment of humanitarian hotlines. The message was clear:

“We seem to keep reinventing the wheel and still seem unable to get it right.”¹⁰

UNOCHA and ICRC, together with other CDAC Network members, sought to address a gap in humanitarian research and response by developing and testing an intervention to streamline communication channels and the accessibility to them for organisations working with people affected by crises. In partnership with Dalberg Design, who led its design, and with support from the HIF, they developed the HIAB innovation.

The two primary objectives of the HIAB were to:

1. Support humanitarian organisations to determine the conditions in which a HIAB could be useful as a mechanism to improve their engagement with affected people, given their context, capacity, and data needs.
2. Provide relevant and streamlined human-centred communication tools and supporting guidance that can be adapted to different contexts and making this guidance readily available and relevant for stakeholders to review before they are faced with an urgent need to set up a hotline during a humanitarian crisis.

Using a participatory and highly collaborative approach, Dalberg Design sought to understand the main factors contributing to difficulties accessing relevant communication channels by people affected by crises. With a better understanding of these factors, the project partners developed a solution in the form of a

⁹ Dalberg Design. HIF Human-Centered Design Insights Workshop Recap (2019).

¹⁰ United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2015). Community Engagement 2015 Highlights. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

communication toolkit aimed at improving access to relevant information and services.

The HIAB – the first HIF innovation project that addressed the areas of social accountability and humanitarian communication – used a human-centred design (HCD) approach to tackle the issues those affected by crises face when accessing quick and relevant information and services for their protection and wellbeing.

The HIAB innovation was intended to have a global design that could be used anywhere in the world. Its development was, however, solely trialled in Burundi.

Dalberg Design and their partners pursued a two-pronged approach to achieve the project objectives:

1. Target the underlying social, cultural, and behavioural determinants of hotline use by using a human-centred participatory research and design approach.
2. Create a space for engagement for all project partners throughout the project cycle.

There were four distinct phases to the HIAB development, as follows:

1) User research

The development phase largely focused on research, which consisted of a mix of virtual and in-country methods to engage participants in data collection.¹¹

For virtual research, Dalberg Design engaged thirty-three participants through Skype, ranging from local and global contact centre staff and humanitarian partners to tech providers, across twenty-six interviews, research sessions or email surveys.¹²

Coverage included:

- Middle East: Iraq, Afghanistan, Jordan.
- Africa: Yemen, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Kenya.
- Asia: Bangladesh, Philippines.
- Europe: Greece.

The team travelled to Burundi for in-country data collection through community visits in three locations – two rural (Ruyigi and Muyinga) and one urban (Bujumbura Mairie). The research was carried out with 52 participants across 23 sessions through small-group interviews, which included humanitarian partner staff who are ‘citizen-facing’ – for example, call operators and end-users (including people affected by crises and volunteers who make calls on their behalf), as well as members of the Burundi national government.¹³ Dalberg Design also conducted a participatory workshop with Burundi’s 109 hotline team.¹⁴

¹¹ Dalberg Design. HIF Human-Centered Design Insights Workshop Recap (2019).

¹² Dalberg Design. HIF Human-Centered Design Insights Workshop Recap (2019).

¹³ Dalberg Design. HIF Human-Centered Design Insights Workshop Recap (2019).

¹⁴ Dalberg Design. HIF Human-Centered Design Insights Workshop Recap (2019).

2) Minimum viable product (MVP)¹⁵ toolkit development

Based on user research outcomes, all partners started the development phase by coming together to agree on the toolkit's essential contents rather than exploring each area in full detail, i.e., what the MVP could look like.

The project partners had initially envisioned some sort of digital toolkit. Still, the research conducted suggested that, in an emergency setting, this would not be as useful or accessible as a more straightforward guide.

This phase consisted of creating a select few prototype templates that partner organisations, such as the IOM, could then adapt and use within their own contexts. Templates were tested with partner organisations to determine the MVP for production and delivery.¹⁶

3) UX design and branding

The HIAB grantee team solicited support from a design firm – Method – to develop a strong UX plan and brand image to ensure successful engagement and uptake of the toolkit across the sector.¹⁷ The grantee team and Method worked “collaboratively and passionately”¹⁸ through a UX design process to create a product (HIAB toolkit) that was both meaningful and relevant to users.

Although Method was engaged towards the later stages of the innovation process, they nevertheless implemented a ‘whole-systems’ approach to design, from determining end-users’ needs to understanding the toolkit’s function and usability.¹⁹

4) Partner-led refinement and publication

Dalberg Design’s final product was tested by partners who compiled feedback for further refinement to finalise the HIAB toolkit,²⁰ which was launched in 2020 and shared in a [dedicated site](#) on the British Red Cross (BRC) Community Engagement Hub and includes the following collection of tools and resources:

1. **Phase-based tools:** These provide support across the distinct phases of the design of channels to communicate with communities. They cover assessment, definition, implementation, and evaluation.
2. **Case studies:** The toolkit also includes a collection of case studies containing lessons learned from different contexts and stakeholders from which users can draw for their own projects.
3. **Tip cards:** These cards aimed to provide users with humanitarian sector learnings from past responses.

¹⁵ A minimum viable product (MVP) – as defined by the Macmillan online dictionary – is “a new product, such as a website or an app, which has enough features and functionality for initial users whose feedback will help complete the development of the product”.

¹⁶ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a box project proposal (June 2016).

¹⁷ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a box project proposal (June 2016).

¹⁸ Key informant interview. 19 August 2022.

¹⁹ Key informant interview. 19 August 2022.

²⁰ Key informant interview. 26 August 2022.

The HIAB toolkit has, since its completion, been translated into Spanish and also made available on other specialised websites and compendiums of resources, such as:

- CDAC’s COVID-19 resource portal.²¹
- ALNAP’s Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Accountability and Inclusion Resources Portal.²²
- The Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH) resources library.²³
- MEDBOX – The Aid Library.²⁴

Image 1: A sample of the HIAB content

The tools

• ABOUT THESE RESOURCES

Worksheets and tools are split into four phases that can help you plan and develop your operation.



Assessment

Understanding the landscape to make informed decisions about when / when not to launch a channel for communicating with communities, and how to set it up for success.



Definition

Selecting the feedback mechanism and channels to ensure it efficiently targets affected people, and is operationally feasible.



Implementation

Preparing the service operationally, and bringing it to life in affected communities.



Evaluation & Transition

Adapting as the situation changes, which may involve scaling up or down, shifting the focus, or concluding the service entirely.

Source: BRC Community Engagement Hub

Case studies

• ABOUT THESE RESOURCES

Case studies are great to have on hand while planning, implementing, and assessing your channel for communicating with communities. Print them out and keep them in your office to spur discussion. What stories would you tell about your own community communication channel learnings?

1. Sierra Leone 117
2. El Jaguar - UNHCR, Central Americas
3. UNHCR Call Centre, Jordan
4. Tawasul, Yemen
5. FRRM Inter-Agency Helpline Uganda, UNHCR

Tip Cards

• ABOUT THESE RESOURCES

The humanitarian sector is filled with learnings from past responses by other practitioners. Learn from their experience with these helpful reference cards. Print and share cards that are most relevant to your efforts with your team:

1. Community engagement tips for health epidemics
2. 10 things to know about Data Protection
3. Dealing with difficult callers
4. Getting language right: A case study
5. Operator skills & techniques
6. Information management practices

HIF SUPPORT FOR THE SOLUTION

In 2015, the HIF launched a call for expressions of interest (Development and Implementation Phase Grants) from organisations to develop and/or “implement an innovation in a humanitarian setting to produce real examples of changed practice, testing the innovation to see how it compares to existing solutions”.²⁵

After considering Dalberg Design’s HIAB potential and alignment with the call’s objectives to create practical plans and guidelines and take designs from the drawing board and transform them into real-world solutions, the independent funding committee awarded an £82,000 grant.

²¹ CDAC Network. CDAC COVID-19 Resources portal. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

²² IASC Accountability and Inclusion Resources Portal. Accessed [here](#). 31 October 2022.

²³ The Safeguarding Resource & Support Hub (RSH). Resources library. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

²⁴ MEDBOX. The Aid library. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

²⁵ HIF (2015). HIF call for proposals. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

INNOVATION PROJECT LIMITATIONS

High innovation project team turnover rate significantly impacted the project timelines – the inception phase was pushed back by one year (from 2016 to 2017).²⁶

There was no official launch of the final toolkit online due to project start delays and insufficient budget.²⁷

3. OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

IMPACT ON HUMANITARIAN OUTCOMES

For Hotline in a Box, humanitarian outcomes are realised once organisations make use of it by enhancing their hotlines and call centres to improve access and channelling of relevant and valuable information to better support communities during crises.²⁸ Further below, we explore the extent to which humanitarian organisations have adopted the innovation to achieve its intended impact.

As this is a 'humanitarian-to-humanitarian' innovation, demonstrating direct outcomes for people affected by crises is complex and would require extensive research beyond the scope of this case study. Instead, further below, we seek to understand from the users – humanitarian organisations – of Hotline in a Box what difference the innovation has made to their work.

CONTRIBUTION TO, OR INFLUENCE ON, CHANGES IN POLICY OR PRACTICE

In terms of the HIAB's influence on changes in policy or practice, it is important to make the distinction between (1) changes identified during the project implementation process, mainly related to an increased understanding of hotline users' needs and increased coordination among key stakeholders, and (2) those taking place after the publication of the toolkit, which relate to its use and uptake.

See further detail in the sections below.

1. Changes identified during the project implementation process

Increased understanding and focus on user needs

The HIAB innovation, research and design process are highlighted by grantees to have been drivers in initiating conversations among them about problematising the actual needs of crises-affected people and humanitarian response staff in different contexts in order to provide them with more tailored, relevant, and effective support.^{29, 30}

²⁶ Key informant interview. 19 August 2022.

²⁷ Key informant interview. 26 August 2022.

²⁸ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a Box Final Report (July 2019).

²⁹ Key informant interview. 24 August 2022.

³⁰ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a Box Final Report (July 2019).

As noted in a final report submitted to HIF, Dalberg Design and their partners were very engaged with and eager to continue using Human-Centred Design (HCD) approaches. Key informants provided no information as to whether HCD and/or co-designing participatory approaches to product, project or programme design have occurred since the project’s end.

Increased collaboration and knowledge sharing across the sector

A significant practice-related outcome – according to each of the four key informants for this case study – is what they believe to be an increase in collaboration across the humanitarian and private sectors for co-designing humanitarian tools, projects, and programmes. They note that this has been the hallmark of the innovation development process and has continued since the project’s conclusion at the end of 2017; however, no specific examples and robust evidence were provided to support this claim.³¹

Dalberg Design and partners underscored that the “determination of a group of people to support this [the hotline toolbox innovation]”, coupled with a highly collaborative approach, led to the sharing of knowledge, resources and tools which were likely not to have been shared previously.^{32, 33} An example of this knowledge-sharing is when IOM shared a draft report of their hotline in a working group session.³⁴

2. Use and uptake

Beyond the above changes perceived among innovation partners, since the toolkit’s publication, several organisations within the humanitarian and development sectors have been referring to the HIAB as one of the key guidance resources for designing accountability and communication mechanisms - see summary table below.

Publisher	Document	Focus
ActionAid	Community-Based Complaints Mechanisms for SHEA and Safeguarding during COVID-19	Safeguarding; COVID-19
Catholic Relief Services	Emergency Field Operations Manual – Communicating with Communities on PSEA	Community engagement
Catholic Relief Services	Emergency Field Operations Manual – Developing a Referral Path for Essential Protection Services	Social protection

³¹ Key informant interview. 26 August 2022.

³² Key informant interview. 26 August 2022.

³³ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a Box Final Report (July 2019).

³⁴ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a Box Final Report (July 2019).

Catholic Relief Services	Strengthening Partners in Protection Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A Toolkit for Local and National Organisations	Social protection
Child Protection Forum	COVID-19: Working with communities to keep children safe – List of practical guidance and tools	Safeguarding; COVID-19
CDAC	COVID-19 Resource Portal	COVID-19
Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) Helpdesk	COVID-19 Guidance on Remote GBV Services Focusing on Phone-based Case Management and Hotlines	GBV; COVID-19
IFRC	Community engagement and accountability toolkit – Tool 19: Communication methods matrix	Community engagement
International Medical Corps	Remote MHPSS Service Delivery in Humanitarian Settings – Training	Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)
Save the Children; HIAS; IFRC; Terre des hommes (Tdh); International Association of Schools and Social Work (IASSW); The MHPSS Collaborative	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support for People on the Move during COVID-19 - A revised multi-agency guidance note	MHPSS; COVID-19
socialprotection.org	Strengthening Gender Equality and Social Inclusion During the Implementation of Social Protection Responses to COVID-19	Social inclusion; COVID-19
Tdh	Child Protection Hub for South East Europe – Info sheet COVID-19 – Child Protection Services: Choosing Modality	Child protection
Compact for Young People in Humanitarian Action	Technical Guidances and Briefs site	Hotlines general guidelines
Georgetown Outbreak Activity Library (GOAL)	Establish public hotline or call center – Case studies	Hotlines general guidelines
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	Guidelines for Establishing Hotlines to Support Survivors of Gender-Based Violence	Gender-based violence
UNFPA	Invisible But Not Forgotten: Risk Communication and Community Engagement with Young People Left Behind During COVID-19 – Technical brief	Social inclusion; COVID-19

UNFPA	My Body, My Life, My World, Through a COVID-19 Lens	Sexual and reproductive health (SRHR); COVID-19
UNHCR	Guidance for Call Centers during COVID-19	COVID-19
UNHCR	Guidance on Engaging Communities Remotely in East, Horn Africa and Great Lakes region	Community engagement
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	Gender Digital Divide – Closing the Gender Digital Divide to Improve USAID Sector Outcomes – Gender Analysis Technical Resource	Gender digital divide
World Health Organization (WHO)	Setup and management of COVID-19 hotlines	COVID-19

An analysis of the above-listed documentation pointed towards some key trends to highlight:

A helpful toolkit during the COVID-19 pandemic

The challenges experienced globally by communities during the COVID-19 pandemic were exacerbated, and the impossibility of accessing these communities due to mobility restrictions increased the need for humanitarian and development organisations to establish mechanisms to reach them remotely. In this context, the HIAB became a highly relevant resource for many stakeholders who recommended the toolkit in many of their operational briefs as part of their guidance.

Beyond serving as a good indicator of the HIAB's reaching the right stakeholders, these references constitute evidence of the high relevance of such a resource and the gap it is filling within the sector. It is also an excellent example of how innovations can become highly relevant solutions when a crisis starts, even in a pilot stage. Understanding the extent to which these references resulted in the local use of the toolkit would require further research.

A relevant resource across multiple thematic areas

It is also important to highlight the relevance of the HIAB for organisations and programmes focused on a wide diversity of thematic areas. The toolkit has been referenced in papers focused on issues such as child safeguarding, GBV and protection against sexual exploitation and abuse, MHPSS and social protection.

That the HIAB has been referenced in relation to such a variety of topics demonstrates its relevance as a flexible resource that responds to the real needs of the broad humanitarian and development community.

A useful resource for a wide selection of humanitarian and development stakeholders

Another important reflection is how the HIAB has become a valuable resource for a diverse range of stakeholders – evidenced by the fact that it has been referenced in guidance produced by UN agencies, such as UNFPA, UNHCR, WHO and many international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), including ActionAid, Save the Children, Catholic Relief Services, Terre Des Hommes, International Medical Corps and Community World Service Asia. Networks such as CDAC, Humanitarian Action Support (H2H), The MHPSS Collaborative and other highly influential actors like USAID, IFRC and the GBV AoR Helpdesk have included the HIAB in their guidance as well.

The number of times different stakeholders have referenced the HIAB indicates their interest in such a resource and how it was filling an existing gap in the sector. It is also important to acknowledge how the consultative process throughout the HIAB's design phase might have contributed to its flexibility and usability, which in turn led to its adoption and endorsement.

Beyond the references listed above, in terms of the HIAB's use and uptake, it is also worth noting the following points.

Amendment to IASC policies and standards on communication practice during humanitarian crises

In terms of a broader influence on accountability to affected populations standards, a key informant interviewed as part of this case study stated that the IASC was working on updates and changes to the Accountability to Affected People (AAP) standards. Although these were ongoing discussions when this case study was being developed, the interviewee³⁵ said they had reason to believe the lessons learnt and enhanced collaboration achieved through the implementation of the HIAB project could have contributed to informing some of these changes.

Since these changes have yet to materialise³⁶ and be made public, it is hard to provide a more specific account of how the HIAB project and stakeholders might shape the outcome. However, the fact that project partners IFRC and WFP/ETC also co-lead IASC's Task Force 2 on Accountability to Affected People might indicate some degree of plausibility to this claim.

Opportunities for further adoption at scale

At the time of submitting a final report to HIF in 2019, Dalberg Design and partners mentioned that UNOCHA in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were keen to support field trials of the HIAB with their partners as part of a plan to adapt their hotline into an "inter-agency call centre."³⁷ They also mentioned that over 30

³⁵ Key informant interview. 26 August 2022.

³⁶ Please note – the exact change in the IASC standards is yet to be made. The key informants interviewed for this case study were not certain on what the change is and where in the IASC standards it will be made.

³⁷ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a Box Final Report (July 2019).

WFP/ETC country offices enquired with their headquarters about rolling-out community engagement contact centres,³⁸ indicating an increased interest in that sort of mechanism. Key informants interviewed for this case study were unsure whether these opportunities were taken forward; therefore, the extent to which the HIAB was used remains unverified.

Beyond these instances of interest from humanitarian organisations, the project partners have been sharing the HIAB toolkit in various meetings across the sector.³⁹ This, along with the above-listed references – and the fact that since its publication, the toolkit has been downloaded 430 times (May 2020 – August 2022) – demonstrates the resource is reaching key stakeholders, which is a good indicator of its current use. Still, assessing how many of these downloads resulted in specific improvements or implementations of a hotline and other feedback mechanisms remains challenging.

4. VALUE FOR MONEY (VFM)

We use FCDO's '4Es' Vfm criteria as a framework for this case study:

- **Economy:** Are we (our agents) buying inputs of the right quality at the right price?
- **Efficiency:** How well are we (our agents) converting inputs into outputs? ('Spending well')
- **Effectiveness:** How well are the outputs produced by an intervention having the intended effect? ('Spending wisely')
- **Equity:** How fairly are the benefits distributed? To what extent will we reach marginalised groups? ('Spending fairly')

ECONOMY

The Hotline in a Box toolkit was built with match funding from project partners (contributing 36% of the total budget), including their ability to mobilise a consultancy firm under a pro-bono scheme. No significant cost reductions could have been achieved through better procurement or other saving strategies. Hotline in a Box is free to use for the humanitarian community.

EFFICIENCY

Considering (1) the potential of the toolkit to shape the work of many other organisations by improving their accountability mechanisms, (2) the number of people who could benefit from such improvements and (3) the potential savings due to enhanced programme effectiveness, an investment of £82,000 for the toolkit can be considered efficient.

³⁸ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a Box Final Report (July 2019).

³⁹ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a Box Final Report (July 2019).

Moreover, taking into account the number of stakeholders benefiting directly and indirectly from the HIAB, the number of people affected by crises is the only variable that has the potential to increase (at no additional cost to the HIF), exponentially multiplying the project's social return. While achieving a more significant impact might require investing additional resources in dissemination and promotional activities, no other significant costs would be needed to achieve higher value per output.

EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness of the HIAB could be approached from three distinct perspectives. First, how well the project outputs responded to humanitarian organisations' needs by providing helpful guidance to improve their feedback mechanisms; second, how these improvements lead to cost-effective humanitarian outcomes; third, how the HIAB compares with other existing mechanisms.

Considering the project outcomes and impact described in section three, the project has seen marked positive behavioural changes among partners within the humanitarian sector, such as increased collaboration and appetite for inter-agency knowledge sharing for improved communication during crises.

There is also evidence of its use and adoption among key stakeholders, although with important limitations to determining all the instances in which the HIAB contributed to specific improvements. Therefore, even if the evidence regarding the HIAB's adoption is limited, it can be concluded that it effectively responded to the needs that motivated its development.

In terms of how improvements as a result of the use of the toolkit led to improved humanitarian outcomes, it is important to note that, while there's a general consensus on the links between enhanced engagement with affected populations and better outcomes, robust evidence is limited: 'very few publications and reports directly link cost-effectiveness with AAP and just a few papers and reports make a brief (more general) mention that AAP has led to better cost-effectiveness in their intended humanitarian outcomes – and often no details are given on how this has been exactly achieved'.⁴⁰ A detailed analysis beyond the scope of this case study would be required to assess the HIAB's impact on humanitarian outcomes and its cost-effectiveness.

Similarly, considering the uniqueness and novelty of the toolkit as guidance material, it does not seem feasible to identify an analogous resource to assess how differently it performed. It is also important to highlight that similar cost-effectiveness

⁴⁰ Megersa, K. (2020). Accountability to Affected Populations and Cost-Effectiveness in Humanitarian Outcomes. Institute of Development Studies. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

comparison exercises do not even exist for specific accountability mechanisms used by different aid agencies.⁴¹

EQUITY

In approaching the HIAB project from an equity viewpoint, it is essential to highlight that the primary users of the toolkit were intended to be international and local humanitarian actors and government stakeholders, and marginalised groups were the indirect intended users.

With this fact in mind, the current accessibility of the toolkit being only online (no distribution of printed copies) and the limited languages in which it is available (English and Spanish) might restrict the number of potential stakeholders benefiting from it.

Regarding the toolkit's content, the section 'Assessing the Cultural Context' highlights how the needs of distinct groups of people might differ and therefore need to be considered in defining the best approach to developing channels to communicate with them.

Finally, the 'Channel Directory' includes some very brief references to groups that might not have access to specific channels. A more detailed reflection on the inclusivity of marginalised groups among people affected by crises could have been considered.

CONCLUSION

Assessing the Value for Money of Hotline in a Box is difficult: more research is needed to determine its impact on humanitarian outcomes. However, there is evidence to suggest that there is significant demand for the solution amongst its intended users (humanitarian organisations). *If* that is translated into better communication with, and accountability to people served by, these organisations, *then* the innovation will have offered exceptionally good value for money.

To test this hypothesis, the innovation team will need to track the uptake and use of the toolkit in more detail to understand how it is being used to improve humanitarian programming.

⁴¹ Megersa, K. (2020). Accountability to Affected Populations and Cost-Effectiveness in Humanitarian Outcomes. Institute of Development Studies. Accessed [here](#) 31 October 2022.

5. THE FUTURE: EMERGING LESSONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

LESSONS LEARNED

Simplifying and humanising existing tools

Upon starting the first phase (inception) of the innovation project, the project team soon realised that the innovation did not just lie in the content of the hotline toolkit but also in its structure and accessibility, i.e., the team found existing toolkits to be “too complicated”, and they needed to focus on simplifying it.⁴²

Curation is important in a complex data and information world

Upon conducting research virtually and in-country, the project team realised that user experience – including ease of navigating toolkit content – was important. As a result, the team recognised that content should be curated systematically to ensure an easily comprehensible and logical flow to accessing relevant information.

Simple approaches to problem-solving for hotline users

Development of this innovation has led to the design of ‘tip cards’, which are simple cards intended to provide people with quick and easily digestible information on, for example, using the hotline.⁴³

Challenges

The toolkit, although a product for global use, excludes people who do not have access to or know how to use the internet. Even if small local organisations experiencing internet access limitations are unlikely to implement complex hotlines, they could still benefit from some of the resources developed as part of the HIAB.

Innovation field testing was only conducted in Burundi due to the time and monetary constraints of the HIF grant. Despite virtual testing, the HIAB might have benefited from additional testing in multiple settings to maximise its generalisability and transferability potential.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Firstly, the HIAB innovation is a concept that could easily be adapted by other actors within the humanitarian sector, mainly because of its simple open-source design and availability through an online platform.

Secondly, Dalberg Design, ICRC and partners might re-group to plan to further promote the toolkit within and outside the sector. Partners could commission an assessment to test for the innovation’s effectiveness vs other toolkits, using, for example, randomised controlled trials or a quasi-experimental approach to its evaluation; the resulting evidence could contribute to incentivising the adoption of the toolkit.

⁴² Dalberg Design. Hotline in a Box Final Report (July 2019).

⁴³ Dalberg Design. Hotline in a Box Final Report (July 2019).

Finally, HIAB partners such as IFRC and WFP/ETC could look at integrating the toolkit into their existing and/or future programmes to learn how effective the toolkits are not only in improving accessibility and relevance of communication tools and services for humanitarian organisations but also for those affected by crises – for example, testing if and how the toolkits impact their safety, wellbeing and livelihoods.