



“INVESTING IN LISTENING”

International Organization for Migration’s experience with humanitarian feedback mechanisms in Sindh Province, Pakistan

Isabella Jean
with Francesca Bonino

ALNAP-CDACASESTUDY

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the outstanding support of the International Organization for Migration and the Shelter Cluster in engaging with this research initiative, and for hosting them in Pakistan. The visit to Pakistan would not have been possible without the support received from Maria Moita, Amina Saoudi, Manuel Pereira and Izora Mutya Maskun. The research team would also like to thank the One Room Shelter programme staff and Shelter Cluster staff working in Sindh for facilitating their stay in Sukkur and Hyderabad.

Incredibly useful insights into the practice, challenges and use of feedback were also shared by a number of colleagues from operational agencies, cluster lead agencies and donor offices. Many thanks go to staff from ACTED, DfID, ECHO, HelpAge, Oxfam, Save the Children, UNHCR, USAID - OFDA, the Protection Cluster and WASH Cluster, who dedicated time to meet the research team and share their observations and experiences with feedback practices in Pakistan.

From the ALNAP Secretariat, Paul Knox Clarke and Alexandra Warner provided broader research support. Carry Keay provided logistical and administrative assistance, while Patricia Curmi led on communication and design for this publication. We would also like to thank Dayna Brown from CDA for support in this research initiative.

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Suggested citation

Jean, I. with Bonino, F. (2014) 'Investing in listening': International Organization for Migration's experience with humanitarian feedback mechanisms in Sindh Province'. ALNAP/CDA case study. London: ODI/ALNAP.

Illustration credit

Front and back cover image, all inside illustrations: Frits Ahlefeldt, <http://hikingartist.com>.

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ISBN 978-0-9926446-5-9



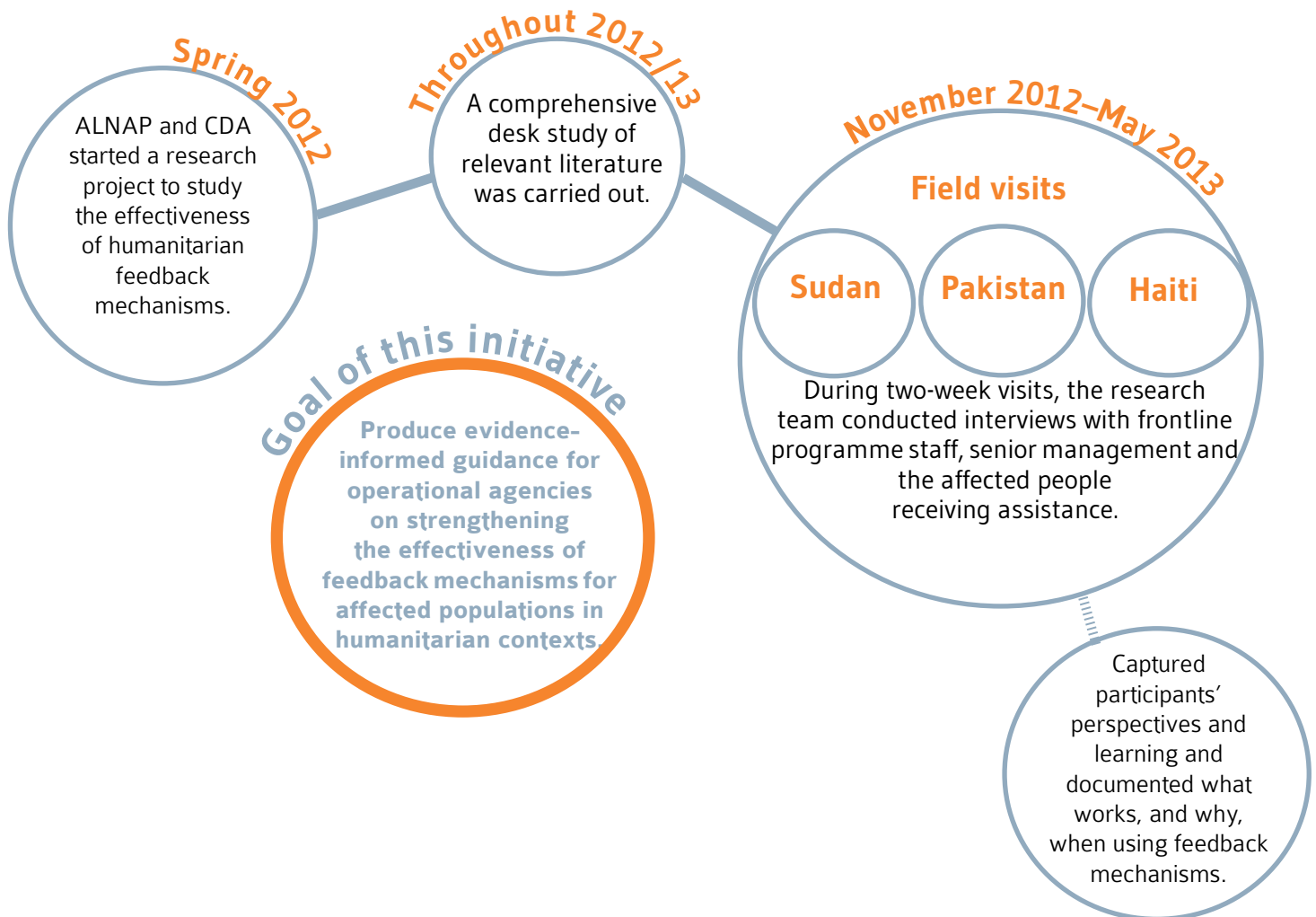
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1. About this case study

This case study is part of an initiative to produce evidence-informed guidance for operational agencies on strengthening the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms for affected populations in humanitarian contexts.

This is the second in a series of three case studies leading to a synthesis report and a guidance document on effective humanitarian feedback mechanisms. The Pakistan field visit was conducted between January 7 and 18, 2013, and was hosted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This case study primarily focuses on feedback processes within IOM's shelter programme and by extension, the feedback loops within the Shelter Cluster led by IOM. Interviews were conducted with IOM programme staff, Shelter Cluster Focal Points, and IOM's implementing partners (IPs) in Islamabad, North Sindh, and South Sindh provinces, where IOM is providing assistance in flood-affected communities.



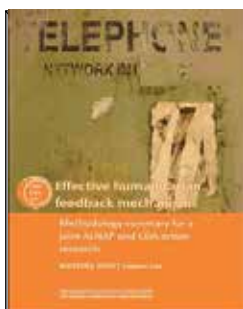
Box 1: This case study and the broader 'feedback' landscape

The last two decades have seen a growth in research that seeks to understand and diagnose the challenges of improving humanitarian performance (Adinolfi et al., 2005; ALNAP, 2005; Donini et al., 2008; ALNAP, 2010; Ashdown, 2011; ALNAP, 2012). Many in the humanitarian system have suggested that the quality of programming and aid delivery would be improved by allowing a more active, accountable and meaningful engagement of aid recipients (Borton, 2008; Anderson, Brown and Jean, 2012; Barry and Barham, 2012; Darcy, Alexander and Kiani, 2013).

These observations are in line with those from a desk study by CDA (2011) that focused on feedback mechanisms in international assistance organisations and highlighted some of the opportunities, constraints, demands, incentives and problems related to seeking, gathering and utilising feedback from affected populations. The study showed that despite a commonly held view that feedback from aid recipients is valued as essential to improving accountability, there are very few 'continuous feedback loops' (CDA, 2011, p. 2), and where present, these tended to focus on 'project-level information, not agency-wide policies, strategies or programs' (ibid., p. 14). CDA noted the patchy and scattered nature of descriptive reports, analysis, lessons learned and good practices reviews drawing from the various types of feedback processes that have been tried to then conclude that recipient feedback mechanisms largely remain an area of emerging research and practice (ibid., p. 26).

The present research builds on the earlier work by CDA (2011), DRC (2008), HAP (Levaditis, 2007), SCF (Sameera, Hassan and Akram, 2010) and WV (Wood, 2011a; b) that attempted to systematise practices and develop benchmarks and guidance on complaints handling and feedback mechanisms for affected populations. It attempts to continue reducing the gap in the literature by focusing on the effectiveness of feedback mechanisms and pushing further the boundaries of available evidence-informed guidance on feedback mechanisms to be utilised by affected populations in humanitarian contexts.

This research project will produce a synthesis and guidance document aimed at programme staff and programme advisors in humanitarian agencies, complemented by field practice insights on designing, setting up and using recipients' feedback mechanisms. Researchers' and practitioners' insights and emerging findings from this case study – potentially leading to the identification of good practices – should be treated as preliminary, and the overall nature of this research as exploratory.



You can find out more about the methodology of this case study, and the overall research process, in the *Effective humanitarian feedback mechanisms: method paper* (www.alnap.org/feedback-loop).

2. Field visits and the research process

This case study included numerous interviews with different stakeholders to better understand the role of feedback mechanisms.

Our research team met with community members who received assistance after the floods of 2010, 2011 and 2012 in several rural areas of North and South Sindh. Regrettably, we were unable to reach remote communities in South Sindh due to security concerns and restrictions enforced by the United Nations Department of Safety and Security in the aftermath of a bombing in Balochistan Province, and also due to a large-scale political demonstration in Islamabad, which reverberated across the provinces.

Among other stakeholders, we met with Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in Islamabad and spoke to government officials at the district level in North Sindh. We interviewed staff from the following organisations:

- Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
- Department for International Development (DFID)
- Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department of the European Commission
- International Rescue Committee
- Oxfam GB
- Protection Cluster
- Save the Children
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees
- UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
- UNICEF
- US Agency for International Development/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
- WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) Cluster

These interviews enhanced our understanding of the overall operational context and the typical challenges that aid agencies face when they institutionalise feedback processes. Since this case study focuses on IOM, we are not able to summarise findings from all of these interviews, but we have included their insights where relevant. We do highlight the findings from our interviews with Save the Children (SC) staff in Islamabad and North Sindh and with community members in their targeted areas, because SC is an IP to IOM in the emergency shelter programme.

Box 2: The scoping criteria

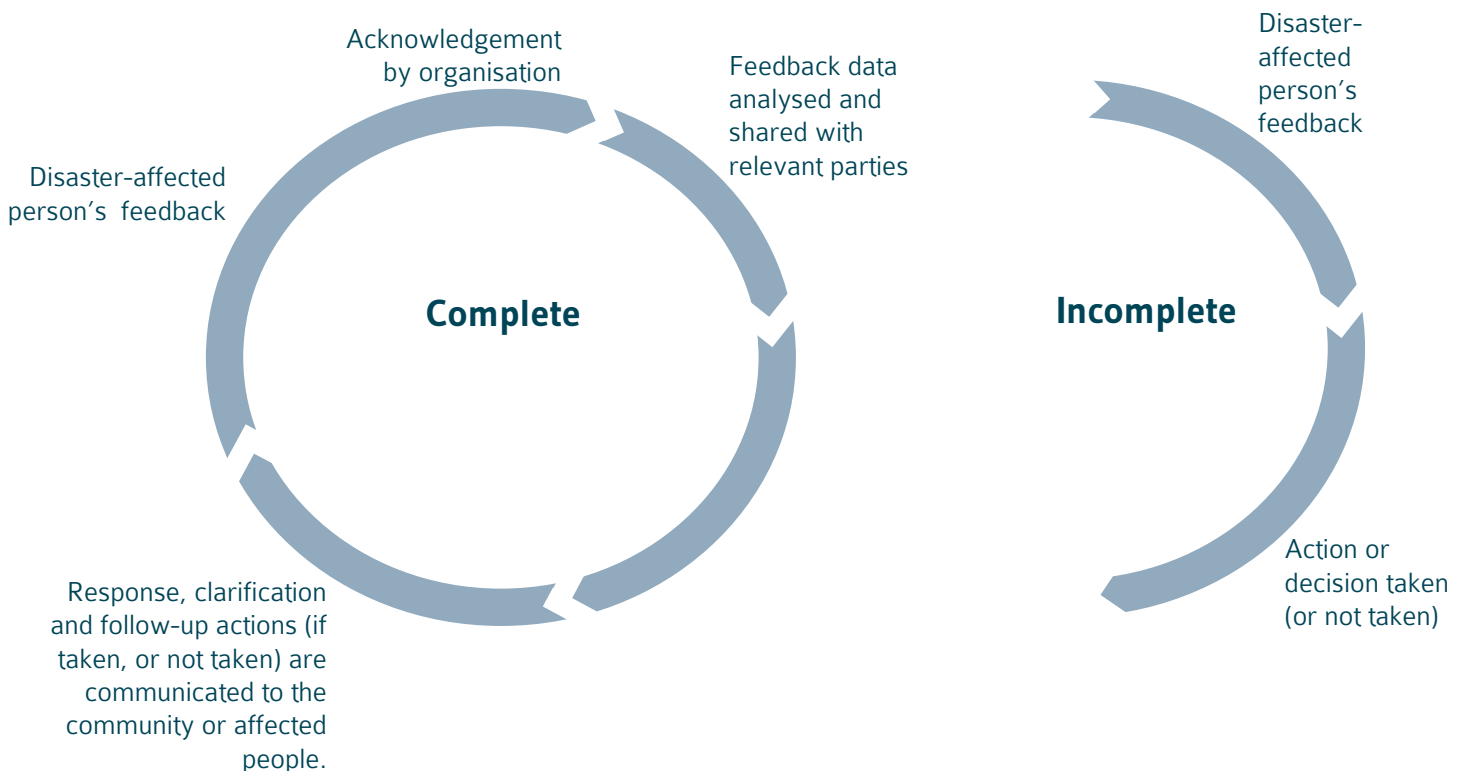
The scoping criteria called for the selected feedback mechanisms cases to do the following:

- Operate at project, service delivery, programme implementation level.
- Operate in the context of ongoing humanitarian operations or humanitarian programming, but not necessarily in the immediate phases of relief and response after a sudden-onset crisis.
- Aim at adjusting and improving some elements of the actions carried out and services delivered.
- Aim at dealing with a broad caseload of non-sensitive issues (feedback) in addition to sensitive ones (complaints). Mechanisms only dealing with sexual exploitation and abuse allegations were excluded.

Another focus of our research and this case study is on utilisation of feedback for programme modification and decision-making. As past research has demonstrated, accumulated feedback does not necessarily lead to utilisation (for example, see CDA, 2011). We aim 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, most importantly, the factors that contributed to utilisation. As much as possible, we trace the pathways through which feedback (from a single person or aggregated from multiple voices) leads to a response and/or action, and we identify the factors that enable this process.

A distinctive feature in the Pakistan case study is the role of the Shelter Cluster in sharing feedback and enabling feedback loops. At the time of the field visit, there was no explicit or formalised feedback mechanism instituted across the cluster system in Pakistan or within any particular cluster. However, it became evident from our conversations in Sindh and Islamabad that the deep presence of the Shelter Cluster at the district level and the day-to-day work of the Cluster Focal Points, who routinely share feedback and information through multiple channels at the district and national level, are notable features that enable and enhance feedback loops.

Figure 1: Complete and incomplete feedback loops



3. Feedback in the Pakistan context

In flood-affected regions, IOM implements through national and international NGOs and in close cooperation with the district and provincial government and the Shelter Cluster, which it currently leads.

The Government of Pakistan invited IOM to respond to the needs of Afghan refugees in 1981. In recent years, IOM has also served as Shelter Cluster lead in Pakistan during several past and ongoing emergency responses and maintains an extensive presence at the sub-national level with offices throughout the country (IOM 2012b, p.1). The Government of Pakistan became a Member State of IOM in 1992 with a standing cooperative agreement signed in 2000.

Pakistan has experienced several devastating floods in recent years. In 2010, one-fifth of the country was covered with flood water and 20 million people were directly affected (DEC, 2010). The scale of displacement and loss of property was staggering and was aggravated by the subsequent floods in 2011, which affected some of the same areas as well as other regions. The flash floods of 2012 affected an additional five million people in Sindh, Balochistan and Punjab. The recurrent flooding has had a devastating impact on the economy, as millions of acres of arable land and rural infrastructure were affected (UN OCHA Pakistan).

IOM took a leading role within the humanitarian community in providing assistance to displaced people after the 2010, 2011 and 2012 floods in Pakistan. According to IOM programme documents, approximately 2.7 million flood-affected individuals were supported following the 2010 Pakistan floods. Related recovery programmes on disaster risk reduction (DRR), shelter, community infrastructure rehabilitation, grants to women and provision of agricultural tools reached an additional one million people (IOM, 2012b, p. 1).

The flood emergency response is operating concurrent with an ongoing response to the complex humanitarian emergency in Pakistan's tribal areas and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, where agencies are responding to the needs of people affected by both conflict and natural disasters. IOM's Pakistan Transition Initiative in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas focuses on improving relationships and understanding between the Government and local communities. The Migration Health Unit works on health promotion and HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention for migrants, and provides medical assistance during emergency response (ibid., p. 3).

IOM provided shelter and non-food items to 153,297 households in South Sindh as part of its response to the 2011 floods, and to 101,250 vulnerable families affected by the 2012 floods, mainly in North Sindh and South Punjab. Non-food items included winterisation and roofing kits. As part of its early recovery programme, IOM supported 23,450 families in rebuilding their shelters in South Sindh as a response to the 2011 floods. IOM has already started a new early recovery programme in North Sindh to support families to reconstruct 15,750 shelter units (programme details received from IOM staff - at the time of writing [2014] IOM has 13,627 committed under DFID and CIDA). IOM's One Room Shelter (ORS) programme is focused on recovery and since January 2011 has supported more than 60,000 households in Sindh to rebuild low-cost shelters with DRR features. One of the objectives of the ORS programme is to increase local people's awareness and knowledge of alternative, locally appropriate and improved construction designs and 'to catalyse self-recovery with minimum external input' (IOM, 2013). Households are selected based on IOM's vulnerability criteria.

In the current shelter programme, IOM and its partners provide the selected communities with several research-backed design options for each household to select a shelter design based on their needs and preferences. Partner agencies conduct trainings on construction techniques and provide supervision while members of the affected population reconstruct and repair their own homes. Each eligible household receives three cash transfers to support the construction process. In order to maintain a collective steady pace to the construction process, the disbursements are made to a group of households for every construction milestone achieved. This process is supported by an appointed local Focal Point in each village. IOM and partner agencies regularly monitor the construction process to ensure compliance, and to support the households selected for shelter assistance with troubleshooting related to shelter designs and technical requirements throughout all phases of the construction process.

Transitioning from relief to recovery and rehabilitation

The examples presented in this case study should be read against the overall backdrop of how the response evolved. The humanitarian response to the 2010 and 2011 floods was embroiled in a number of debates over time frames and phases. It took some time for the government and the humanitarian agencies to reach consensus on when to phase out the emergency response and transition to early recovery, a phase typically focused on shelter and livelihoods. International aid agencies together with the Humanitarian Country Team advised the Pakistan government and NDMA to adopt a measured pace and to recognise the need for continued provision of emergency assistance to households that were unable to return to safe living conditions in their original settlements. The government's position was to close the temporary camps that housed displaced people as soon as possible due to heightened sensitivity over Pakistan's national image and concerns about potential political mobilisation in the camps. IOM and OCHA requested that NDMA base its decisions about dispersal of camps and transition to early recovery on field assessments.¹ People talked about a history of disagreement and tensions between the Humanitarian Country Team, individual aid agencies, and the government over such high-stakes strategic decisions.

¹Assessment tools included Multi-sector Initial Rapid Assessment, field reports from the Temporary Shelter Support Unit, and later the Assessment of Conditions of Return Areas.



Positions become entrenched

As one **observer** put it:

‘Agencies who operate within an emergency setting are uncomfortable with rapid transition. Their operations are affected. When supply chains are activated and goods are purchased and donor expectations are set about how their money will be spent, positions become entrenched.’

Shrinking humanitarian space

The humanitarian response and reconstruction process is greatly impacted by the presence of extremist groups in the tribal areas and the increased levels of crime, banditry and kidnapping on the roads in Sindh and Balochistan. The perception of humanitarian workers, both international and national, has been negatively affected due to the ongoing war on terror, US drone strikes, and the involvement of a Pakistani medical aid worker in counter-terrorism operations conducted by US intelligence agencies.² Due to heightened insecurity and real and perceived threats to their international and national staff, donors and operational humanitarian organisations have adopted increasingly restrictive policies and procedures for field operations and field visits. Aid workers are often advised to travel with police escorts, ride in armoured vehicles, and remain in their guarded offices and guest houses due to frequent security lockdowns.

As a result, regular face-to-face interactions with community members in the affected areas are limited and are organised around agencies’ assessment, monitoring and verification visits, which are typically conducted by monitoring and evaluation (M&E) staff and, in the case of the Shelter Cluster, also by district-based Focal Points. Most donor agency staff based in Islamabad reported having very few opportunities to visit operational sites and engage in conversations with affected communities. As one **donor agency staff member** noted:

‘We are working through third-party contracts. We outsource assessments, monitoring and implementation. Then we sit in our office in Islamabad wondering if we are making a difference.’

We heard a lot of frustration expressed by donors and aid workers about the limited access to the affected communities and people that aid agencies aim to support:

Programme Director in a humanitarian donor agency:

‘The human factor is becoming difficult to maintain in humanitarian assistance because we are delivering assistance from armoured vehicles. “Human” is becoming increasingly detached from “humanitarian.”’

²Twenty health workers have been killed in Pakistan, essentially halting the anti-polio vaccination campaigns (NBC News, 2013). In addition, during our security briefing in Islamabad we heard that aid workers in tribal areas, where US military drone strikes are operating, are increasingly seen as spies by some segments of the population. Militants allege that several times after vaccination visits, which are done household by household, there were drone strikes in the same communities.

Country representative of an international humanitarian agency:

'We have programme staff based in Islamabad who have never seen refugees except on the posters that hang on the walls of our offices.'

Shelter Cluster representative:

'How can we solicit honest feedback and engage people in open and trusting conversations about the quality of the response when we ride into their village with a police escort and blaring sirens?'

Programme Director for humanitarian response in a bilateral donor agency:

'Local NGOs are closer to the ground, and gather all kinds of data [which are] shared at the district level. They are closer to the people; they live among them and recognise these issues. As it moves up to the capital level, the process becomes more political and obstructionist.'

Another significant constraining feature that was repeatedly raised by aid workers and affected community members was the limited access to women in rural areas, in particular in the tribal areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Northern Sindh. In many conservative tribal areas, women are not allowed to step outside the family compound without a male relative accompanying them. In some areas of Northern Sindh that we visited, honour killings are still practiced. Women who are seen talking to a male who is not a relative are threatened and attacked. In most areas of North Sindh, only female staff members are allowed inside the compounds or homes. Local women in tribal areas are rarely invited to community meetings and don't typically participate in public discussions.³ These cultural norms and practices have obvious and serious implications for the extent to which international humanitarian agencies and their local partners are able to engage women and regularly gather their feedback.

³Assessment tools included Multi-sector Initial Rapid Assessment, field reports from the Temporary Shelter Support Unit, and later the Assessment of Conditions of Return Areas.



4. IOM's different feedback channels

In 2009, IOM launched its Humanitarian Communications Project (HComms) in response to the large-scale displacement of conflict-affected people in North-West Pakistan.

Within a year, the programme was expanded to reach people affected by the 2010 floods with important information about assistance. Its purpose is to provide timely, accurate, and relevant information to affected communities and to highlight gaps and needs for aid providers. It serves as a two-way communication tool between the humanitarian clusters/working groups, the Government of Pakistan, and conflict- and disaster-affected populations (Humanitarian Communications Project).

⁴The Watan Card Project, launched and managed by the Government of Pakistan and donors including the World Bank, is providing cash assistance to flood-affected households for recovery and rehabilitation. HComms is working to close the information gap on the Watan scheme by enhancing information outreach and deploying information officers to support local government departments.

HComms relies on formal and informal communication and media channels such as radio, public service announcements, TV infomercials, newspaper advertisements, SMS text messages, and community-based social mobilisers. It also publishes an annual Yellow Pages directory of humanitarian services in Pakistan. For the 2010 flood response, HComms supported information-provision and communication needs of the massive government-run compensation programme that targeted 1.1 million people affected by the floods.⁴ HComms deployed a team⁵ to the affected areas and provided technical assistance to disaster management authorities at national and sub-national levels by developing messaging tailored for mass media and for face-to-face community awareness sessions.

⁵Two hundred staff were deployed, including one communication specialist, 50 information officers, 25 information associates, male and female social mobilizers and humanitarian call centre staff.

The HComms team worked with the Government's National Database and Registration Authority to disseminate essential information to the affected population about eligibility for cash compensation and to facilitate the information flow around complaints and feedback on the cash compensation schemes. At the height of the 2010 response, HComms deployed 200 people to 29 districts⁶ with heavy grievance caseloads (IOM, 2013). As part of this large-scale initiative, IOM set up a humanitarian call centre (HCC) as one of the primary channels for enabling two-way communication between humanitarian agencies with the affected population (Humanitarian Communications Project). By late 2011, the call centre operation primarily served the information and communication needs of ongoing IOM programmes, especially ORS. At the time of the visit in January 2013, the broad, comprehensive information sharing mandate of HComms had been greatly reduced due to funding constraints.

⁶The districts were Bhakkar, Dadu, Dera Ismail Khan, DG Khan, Lower Dir, Upper Dir, Ghotki, Hangu, Hyderabad, Jacobabad, Jamshoro, Kashmore, Khairpur, Kohat, Lahore, Larkana, Layyah, Mianwali, Multan, Muzaffargarh, Nawshero Feroz, Peshawar, Qambar Shadadkot, Rahimyar Khan, Rajan Pur, Shikarpur, Sukkur, Tank and Thatta.

Humanitarian call centre

The HCC is IOM's primary feedback and complaints channel. It is based in Islamabad, operates from 8 am to 5 pm on working days, has nationwide coverage, and is used in 30 districts around the country where IOM operates. The HCC's purpose is to establish a direct communication channel between IOM and the people supported by its programmes in affected areas. In addition, according to IOM's programme documents: 'The objective behind setting up the HCC was to ensure that aid is provided free of cost and all support provided by IOM effectively reaches the vulnerable community. The HCC is a communication channel specifically designed to allow beneficiaries to voice their opinion and feedback by simply picking up their phone and dialling the toll free numbers ... The HCC is a mechanism to ensure transparency and report irregularities of programme implementation by beneficiaries, implementing partners (IPs) and IOM Staff' (ibid., p. 2).

Beyond merely functioning as a complaint hotline, HCC continues to maintain its critical information provision role, targeting both aid recipients and aid providers with the most up-to-date information about the response. Call centre staff respond to queries about

the current situation on the ground, requests for assistance and questions about the distribution of non-food items and shelter support.⁷ For example, it provides information to callers regarding aspects of different IOM projects: how eligible households are prioritised and what criteria are used to determine selection of areas for intervention (IOM, n.d., p. 2). The HCC provides this information in several regional languages and dialects.

The toll-free number for the call centre is distributed widely using stickers attached to assistance packages such as winterisation kits containing household items, personal care items, plastic sheeting and so on. In addition, small cards and posters with the toll-free number are distributed to village Focal Points and residents. IOM staff and partners routinely remind community members about the HCC during public meetings. People are encouraged to call with complaints and feedback related to any assistance programme and in particular if they detect fraud or mismanagement by local IPs or observe unfair selection and distribution practices. The functions of the feedback loop enabled by the HCC are described in more detail in section 6, which describes the feedback mechanism in more detail.

IOM monitoring process

The feedback data collected by the HCC is integrated into IOM's M&E system to ensure timely and reliable follow-up and documentation of responses. IOM's M&E team oversees all data collection related to its ongoing programme interventions and incorporates information that arrives from the Shelter Cluster Focal Points. IOM monitors typical implementation activities such as the selection of eligible households (verifying whether the IPs selected people who indeed meet IOM's vulnerability criteria); cash transfers, construction progress, and quality as part of its ORS Programme; the relief item distribution process; as well as technical assistance and administrative and fiscal procedures related to IPs. M&E teams carry out needs assessment visits, vulnerability assessments, baseline data collection, and impact assessments. Within this broader M&E mandate, the team is also responsible for verification, investigation (when necessary) and response to the bulk of the complaints received through HCC, post-distribution monitoring visits, partners, and other channels. We describe some of these processes in more detail.

Shelter Cluster coordination mechanism and Focal Points

The Shelter Cluster in Pakistan coordinates emergency and early recovery shelter response, conducts needs assessments and establishes strategies, policy, and advocacy messages to ensure non-duplication of assistance to the most vulnerable groups (IOM, 2013). The Shelter Cluster members support the deployment of Focal Points at the district level to ensure timely and reliable mapping of needs and activities, and information sharing with operational agencies, the cluster system as well as authorities at the district, provincial, and national levels. The Shelter Cluster lead person for Sindh is embedded within IOM and is responsible for supervising a team of six Focal Points working at the district level in Sindh who are also embedded within different cluster member organisations. The proximity of the Focal Points to the affected communities, implementing agencies and local authorities enables the cluster to continuously assess needs and verify gaps in coverage during an ongoing response. According to one **Shelter Cluster Focal Point**:

'We make recommendations to agencies on areas where they should intervene and how they could fill the gaps better.'

Information provision and sharing are central to the coordination role of the Shelter Cluster Focal Points. At the time of the visit, there was no formal feedback mechanism in place at the cluster level. Instead, local people used several informal channels, including sharing feedback during face-to-face conversations with Focal Points and sending SMS messages to

⁷Other call centres that provide similar information are run by Pakistan's NDMA and National Database and Registration Authority. In Islamabad, international NGO and UN staff often raised concerns about confusion and gaps in information sharing between the various channels.

their mobile devices. Complaints and feedback documented during community visits and those that occasionally arrive through SMS messages or phone calls are referred by the Focal Points to the relevant operational agencies and district officials.

District-level cluster coordination meetings are co-chaired by the District Commissioner and Shelter Cluster District Lead. Often, other district officials participate (such as a District Disaster Management Agency representative or Assistant Commissioner) and communicate the messages from the affected population to the cluster and to agencies present at the meeting. Cluster coordination meetings are often attended by representatives of affected communities and serve as an important additional venue at which community members and district officials can raise concerns and issues and present specific complaints and other feedback.

These district-level coordination meetings are by no means calm and measured events. Cluster team members often face people's frustration, demands, and allegations of preferential targeting by some of the agencies. An important objective of the Focal Points is to maintain their neutrality vis-à-vis the implementing agencies and authorities, especially in cases where verification and assessment visits are required. Cluster Focal Points report to the Cluster Lead and not to the implementing agencies that host them. A district update based on the latest situation is regularly included in the agenda for the Inter-Cluster Coordination Meetings in Islamabad. Also in Islamabad, IOM, as the Shelter Cluster lead, provides technical guidance for shelter activities and provides capacity development and technical assistance to peer organisations in the cluster.



Information posters, stickers and business-size information cards with key messages in Sindhi and Urdu

5. IOM feedback loops in action

IOM's overall humanitarian response and specific procedures have been modified as a result of the steady stream of feedback.

IOM programme **staff member**:

'The norms have been changing based on our learning from past experiences. We make decisions about how many blankets to provide, at what time of the year and during which seasons, and adjust to the realities in different areas of the country based on local feedback, not a "blanket approach" using only SPHERE standards.'

IOM's overall humanitarian response and specific procedures have been modified as a result of the steady stream of feedback arriving through the call centre, monitoring visits, and face-to-face conversations with community members. IOM has also incorporated into its project manual a beneficiary feedback learning exercise, which aims to listen to the views and experiences of the people who benefit from the ORS programme. We highlight several concrete examples here, ranging from modifications to the contents of emergency kits and revised cash transfer procedures, to strategic decisions about shelter programming in a context constrained by land ownership and property titling. The subsequent sections look at the features in the feedback mechanism that enabled these changes.

Modifications to emergency kits. During the relief phase, people across the affected regions communicated their thoughts on what is most and least useful among the relief items provided by aid agencies and the government. Since 2010, IOM has made modifications to a number of household items it provides, such as kitchen sets, hygiene kits, temporary shelter kits (i.e. tents, plastic sheeting, bamboo sticks), based on people's feedback. For example, IOM used to distribute pans for cooking bread to temporary camp residents, but many aid recipients complained that the pan had only one screw and broke easily. IOM modified its procurement process and improved the kitchen sets. Solar lamps and bamboo poles for temporary shelters have also been added. In addition, IOM changed the process by which it stocks items and made it easier and quicker to transfer these from warehouses.

During our interviews, staff voiced concerns that some learning and feedback is eventually lost if it is not recorded or if no tangible decision is made to establish a new precedent. As one IOM **staff member** lamented:

'Due to rotation of staff, during the next emergency this information will be lost. So someone will probably go out and buy the wrong sanitary napkins again – wrong type, colour and size – and we will have to learn again that this item is not accepted by local people.'

In response to this common organisational challenge of retaining institutional memory, IOM has been building a repository of knowledge for each country mission. This captures a summary of feedback from the affected people during the relief and emergency phase on the most culturally and contextually appropriate contents for kitchen sets, hygiene kits and shelter. IOM staff suggested that this sort of record in the form of a factsheet should be continuously updated and shared with agencies and relevant government authorities.

Modification to cash transfer procedures. Based on feedback gathered during monitoring visits and through the call centre, IOM has made changes to its cash disbursement procedures. The initial procedures were designed to align with the financial accountability policies of IOM and the programme's donors. It included a requirement to use specific nationwide bank establishments and to collect five to six signatures each time IOM made a payment. Many households participating in the ORS complained about late cash disbursements due to bureaucratic steps involved in collecting each payment and the complicated bank procedures. Some families reported having to borrow funds to continue construction, incurring interest, while waiting for the ORS payment to clear. Community members took every opportunity to request that IOM and its partners expedite the payment disbursement process.

According to one **programme staff member**:

'We knew why the money did not arrive on time from daily progress reports. The main bottleneck was the clearance process between multiple banks, which can take up to 80–90 days due to Internet problems and paper bureaucracy. Our solution was for IOM to open a project account in a local bank where IOM beneficiaries would also open their accounts, making the transfer process controllable within one banking system.'

ORS staff presented a set of recommendations to senior management about how IOM could streamline the payment process, and these efforts were approved.

The same **staff member** added:

'There are fewer complaints about payments now. The change was made during a transition between two phases of the One Room Shelter programme. We presented beneficiary complaints to senior management as pressures and protests needing immediate attention. There was continuous feedback and grievances recorded by Village Focal Points⁸ and the implementing partners, which led us to change the payment process several times. Initial adjustments were not enough. When transitioning to the next phase, we knew that some more significant change was necessary, and that is why we suggested for Village Focal Points and IOM to have an account in the same bank.'

⁸Village Focal Points, appointed by village committees and beneficiaries, are responsible for receiving and distributing the cash tranches to a group of households with a maximum of 25 members.

This practice has since been institutionalised across all IOM shelter programmes in Pakistan and integrated into the revised ORS manual.⁹

Changes in payment amounts: The total cash payment for shelter construction per household is 26,000 rupees. Initially, ORS payments were disbursed to participating households in the following amounts: 6,000, then 10,000, and finally 10,000 rupees.¹⁰ What IOM soon learned from conversations with villagers was that many households did not have sufficient funds left from the first tranche to buy lime for construction. Consequently, when they used the second tranche to buy the lime, it did not have enough time to slack. ORS staff realised that giving people a larger amount from the start helped to ensure that they used lime throughout all the construction steps, which is critical for a solid structure in a flood-prone area. A programme staff member said, 'We decided to put a little more money in their hands. In Phase I, the amount was a bit arbitrary, later it was a process of trial and error and learning and adjusting.'

The changes were informed by feedback gathered from beneficiaries and IPs after the enrolment of the first 5,000 households. Villagers also reported that 6,000 rupees was not enough to build a strong foundation (the first step), and that 10,000 was not enough for the roofing. ORS staff collated the aggregated feedback and recommendations gathered from monitoring visits and shared it with the senior management, suggesting a switch to the following amounts in payment tranches: 8,000 (once the plinth has been constructed), then 8,000 (for construction of walls), and a final amount of 10,000 rupees (for roof construction). Community members felt that the revised payment schedule and amounts were a lot more realistic and feasible. An ORS staff member summarised their feedback this way: 'The increase in the initial amount allowed them to buy more materials and gave them a boost of confidence right from the start. Some were not sure if IOM will actually come through given how small the first payment was in the past!'

Most recently, IOM has adopted further changes to the payment process based on accumulated evaluation findings and feedback on Phase I activities. Both beneficiaries and field teams had consistently reported that the overall cash support of 26,000 rupees was not realistic in light of current market prices. IOM conducted a market analysis and took into consideration price inflation and rupee depreciation against the US dollar. The market analysis verified that the allocated cash amount required augmentation if the programme was to stay true to its 'build back better and safer' motto. To better match the cash support to the real needs of beneficiaries, an increase of 4,000 rupees was approved and provided to all Phase II beneficiary households and is now the standard amount in the programme. This increase was added to the last tranche of Phase I. This tranche now amounts to 14,000 rupees, which enables beneficiaries to purchase higher-quality materials for roof construction. IOM continues to conduct market analysis during ongoing implementation to keep track of fluctuations in prices for raw materials.

Contract termination with an IP. Due to IOM's heavy reliance on local IPs as intermediaries in the implementation and monitoring process, their credibility and professionalism is of critical importance. In the past, IOM had to make the difficult decision of severing ties with one of its IPs due to mounting evidence that there were major problems in their management of and conduct during programme activities. Initially, IOM received a troubling report from engineers working for a Sindh-based non-profit in charge of the shelter design options. The report alerted IOM about poor construction safety and quality in several villages monitored by one of IOM's partners. ORS staff who visited the same villages also reported problems with poor construction quality in the shelter's foundation, which is a critical DRR feature in flood-prone areas. Household members in these villages called IOM's call centre and regular office phone line to report that the IP did not provide them with proper technical training and were late in implementation steps.

⁹According to the Pakistan Shelter Cluster, aid agencies providing shelter assistance in Pakistan have been sharing lessons learned from their implementation since 2010. Cash transfer practices and modifications made in procedures are also shared but have not yet been systematized at the cluster level.

¹⁰According to the Pakistan Shelter Cluster, aid agencies providing shelter assistance in Pakistan have been sharing lessons learned from their implementation since 2010. Cash transfer practices and modifications made in procedures are also shared but have not yet been systematized at the cluster level.

An IOM **Programme Manager** explained:

‘We are pressuring implementing partners to ensure completion of the shelter construction. But we still have to follow an honest process. The best way to keep the process transparent is for IOM to keep a direct line of communication with affected populations. We open the door and invite honest feedback from the community through this communication channel for community members to be able to raise concerns. Feedback is linked to the performance of implementing partners. There are direct consequences if they violate trust.’

The redress process which was subsequently adopted by IOM involved terminating the contract with the above-mentioned partner and assigning IOM programme staff to oversee the training and monitoring of these villages mid-course. In total, IOM staff had to adopt direct supervision and support to 500 households. At a programme policy level, IOM made further modifications in its contractual agreements with all existing partners and in the next programme phase assigned fewer households to each partner and instituted more stringent monitoring. According to one **staff member**:

‘We now practice scrutiny at a much closer range.’

Box 3: Feedback utilisation – advocating on land issues at the cluster and national levels

Senior Shelter Cluster member:

‘The land issue is like a ticking bomb ... It is linked also to the feudal system in Pakistan and there are multiple layers to this question. Humanitarian organisations asked the Shelter Cluster for recommendations and information to understand the issue better.’

Beyond the changes at the operational and programme implementation levels highlighted above, input and feedback from affected community members and district officials has had a significant influence on strategic decisions taken by IOM and other Shelter Cluster members. In 2011, IOM held discussions about early recovery needs with the government and the Shelter Cluster in Islamabad. Recognising that land ownership is a significant issue in Pakistan with the potential to hinder shelter-focused interventions, the cluster asked IOM to provide evidence-based guidance on how to handle specific land issues, such as what the shelter cluster’s vulnerability criteria should be, what specific factors about land ownership and titling aid agencies needed to understand, how to engage with landowners, and finally, what the real and perceived constraints are when it comes to assisting landless households affected by the floods. IOM relied on HComms and other clusters to gather real-time feedback, which was used to advocate with key government ministries and aid agencies on protection issues.





IOM set out to adapt their shelter intervention based on discussions with and input from key stakeholders at the district and provincial levels. Initially, the national government's policy stipulated that Shelter Cluster members would be allowed to construct shelter only on land owned by the government. IOM advocated for policy decisions to be based on real evidence from the field. As one **Shelter Cluster member** recalls:

'There was pushback by the agencies on these restrictions. Most of our caseload would disappear. We discussed the needs assessment data with PDMA [Provincial Disaster Management Authority] and NDMA. IOM and other agencies said, 'if you limit shelter assistance to government land only, we would need to relocate all these people – more than a million.' We held very similar discussions at the district level with cluster members, Shelter Cluster Focal Points, and key informants and stakeholders to try and understand if land was in fact a real issue that would affect the main objective of the shelter intervention, which was to enable affected people to recover and to provide them with safer shelters. But we discovered that it would not be as big of an issue as we thought it would be. Many families have been settled on these lands for a very long time and landlords were unlikely to push people off the land. There were only a few such isolated cases in 2010.'

In fact, IOM's Temporary Settlements Support Unit (TSSU) conducted an Assessment of Community Coping Capacities in Return Areas directly with residents in temporary camps and with returnees in affected communities and found that only 6% of displaced people thought that land issues were obstructing or delaying their return. The main barriers were stagnating water and inability to finance reconstruction. Most people started moving back as soon as the water receded. Others temporarily moved to non-affected villages, and in some instances people were forcibly removed from camps, school buildings, and public buildings and sent home.

These findings were supported by regular visits that IOM TSSU staff conducted to temporary camps documenting gradual dispersal and return. After IOM presented the findings to NDMA officials, the shelter recovery programme was approved to proceed in South Sindh. Raw assessment data included local people's priorities and feedback regarding ongoing programmes, which were shared with all clusters to inform their strategic decisions about the next phase of the response.

In addition, IOM's Humanitarian Call Centre was also gathering feedback by phone from the affected populations during these early phases of the response. Summaries were regularly circulated to operational staff, Cluster Focal Points, and senior management in Islamabad, who brought important issues up for discussion at the cluster level. Speaking in retrospect, the IOM **staff member** who oversaw this process at the national level from start to finish said:

'Temporary Settlements Support Unit assessments served as the strongest mechanism at our disposal for gathering feedback and using it to impact policy and strategy decisions.'





During Assessment of Community Coping Capacities in Return Areas, IOM staff asked affected community members to provide feedback on the following:

1. levels of satisfaction with shelter, non-food items, and humanitarian assistance
2. whether any adjustments needed to be made to the design of the recovery shelter programme and other ongoing assistance.

The main findings were that people were dissatisfied with delayed assistance and the amount of aid that had been provided. Some people also expressed aspirations for upgraded housing designs, in particular requesting agencies to build brick or *pakka* houses. IOM also learned that most landlords would not accept written return agreements, which were seen as legally binding, and some even threatened to remove people from their land. **IOM staff** held numerous information sessions for concerned landlords and community members and explained:

‘We are not building brand new houses for new people arriving into an area. We are merely assisting people who lived on your land before and were affected by the floods to recover.’

At the district level, IOM programme staff continued to adapt the shelter programme design based on local realities and feedback. In the end, the ORS programme approach was designed with careful consideration after weighing the feedback from affected community residents and the concerns of landowners and the government. The decision to go with mud houses as opposed to brick or *pakka* houses was made based on several factors:

1. environmental (bricks require burning trees and trash to fire up the kiln)
2. human and labour rights (due to possible bonded labour involved in making and laying bricks)
3. protection (a brick house increases the value of the asset, making it more appealing to the landlord, who could confiscate it from occupants later).¹¹

Not all Shelter Cluster members follow a similar programme design approach, and some are building larger and more expensive houses with toilets. IOM has deliberately chosen the ORS approach in order to build capacity and knowledge about improved shelter construction with DRR features. ORS factsheets describe it as a self-help approach with an understanding that the cash amount ‘may not cover all of the expenses of building an ORS and that beneficiaries will have to build their own houses, so they can save on the costs and use salvage methods to produce new materials to make up the difference’ (IOM, 2012a, p. 6). In addition, as one **staff member** said:

‘IOM has made a strategic decision to assist as many people as possible instead of giving expensive houses to a few.’

Properly constructed, One Room Shelters are an improvement to people’s previous housing conditions, and the construction design allows for further improvement and additional construction, but also for easier maintenance and repairs post disaster. The limitations are also fully acknowledged by the staff. One **staff member** asked:

‘How much can you do to ensure disaster risk reduction with a mud shelter? A mud house standing in stagnating water for weeks will eventually collapse. What is still missing is the bigger national policy dialogue about flood-prone areas and plans to resettle people in areas with safe housing.’

¹¹Brick houses are seen as permanent structures that are occupied on private land, and mud houses are not considered permanent settlements. In light of these sensitivities, language used to describe the programme also mattered. IOM explained to all concerned stakeholders that it aims to support low-cost repairs and reconstruction of basic ‘shelter’ as opposed to a ‘house.’

6. Anatomy of a feedback mechanism

Our literature review pointed to several features that are commonly associated with effective feedback mechanisms, including design and expectation setting around the feedback mechanism; feedback collection, analysis, and presentation; internal functioning of the feedback loop; and individual and organisational capacities needed for establishing and maintaining the feedback processes.

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



CULTURAL AND CONTEXTUAL APPROPRIATENESS

IOM programme staff:

'Phone lines and technology are important but not a panacea. We need a change of mentality. Investing in listening to the people is critical.'

Woman in an affected village in North Sindh:

'Just like your research team, other agencies should visit and talk to us directly.'

Village residents at a distribution point in North Sindh:

'We are thankful to the implementing partner because we know this district is not safe. The main security concern is kidnapping for ransom. That's why we are thankful that they still come.'

IOM maintains the HCC as its primary feedback channel, complemented by monitoring and verification visits conducted by IOM staff, partners, and Shelter Cluster Focal Points. People's opinions about the appropriateness of the phone line differed based on gender, access to mobile technology, and how remote their villages were from urban centres. IOM's IPs in South Sindh told us that in their experience both men and women prefer face-to-face communication when seeking explanations, and they also prefer to have discussions with staff about ongoing problems.

A **staff member** in one partner agency told us:

'We live near the communities, they know us, and they call us [directly] and see us for face-to-face contact.'

In North Sindh, we spoke to men at a distribution point where emergency winterisation kits were being distributed and shelter construction had not yet begun. The **men** shared their opinions on the most appropriate feedback channel:

'The best way is using mobiles with a toll-free number because it is direct... the other good option is for a team to come directly on the spot and verify.'

The men appreciated having the option of a direct hotline to IOM because their areas are remote and unsafe, with increased incidents of banditry and kidnapping for ransom on the connecting roads. One **person** at a distribution point told us:

'Due to the dangerous situation, no one comes. No media, no NGOs, and no district officials.'

When asked about alternative channels for giving feedback to aid agencies, a few mentioned the radio, writing letters to the local newspaper, or going to an Internet café in a nearby town 'to look for the name of the agency and directly contact them by sending an email.' However, none of the people we spoke with had tried these methods. They had very low expectations of local media being a useful channel for raising their concerns. Conversely, some people have tried the suggestion box outside the magistrate's office where, on behalf of the Deputy Commissioner, complaints are collected. Some people have had to ask others to write the complaint or suggestion on their behalf due to low literacy levels.

Also, in North Sindh, one man openly admitted that he does not allow his wife to use a mobile phone, and others confirmed that this is a widespread social norm in their area. Another **man** responding to a question about women's use of the hotline added:

'They don't use it because their literacy level is zero. We would have to dial the number for them.'

He added that the most appropriate way to engage women would be to talk directly to them or 'to gather women at a women's event'. Women in nearby communities said that they communicate problems related to assistance to their husbands and confirmed that they do not call the toll-free line themselves. Several women said that their husbands do not share information with them. One **woman** added:

'If there are issues with assistance we would just keep quiet.'

Women in both North and South Sindh expressed a unanimous request to IOM and the Shelter Cluster to regularly send female staff to the villages and to sit down with them for a face-to-face discussion, which is their preferred method for communicating and sharing feedback.

These cultural constraints are well understood by IOM and other aid agencies working in Pakistan. However, ensuring regular face-to-face interaction with female household members remains a real challenge for most aid agencies due to cultural norms that dictate against young unmarried women living alone or travelling away from their families. An IOM **staff member** noted:

'The cultural constraints also limit how many women IOM can hire for positions based out in the field in the affected districts. In the affected areas, few female national staff are able to do the work required as part of our monitoring process.'

IOM's district-based female staff and female Shelter Cluster Focal Points are a rarity, and hence highly valued for their significant contributions to creating space and opportunities for marginalised and vulnerable community members such as women, children, and elderly people to provide input into the implementation process.



EXPECTATION SETTING AND KNOWLEDGE

Resident explaining the process at a village in North Sindh:

'If there is a complaint, we report to the Village Focal Point. The Village Focal Point comes to verify and then he calls the toll-free line.'

Man at a distribution point in North Sindh:

'The hotline is not used for feedback and engaging with agencies. If we submit a complaint, we expect that someone from the government, an NGO or media will come to verify.'

According to IOM, the call centre (also known as the hotline) 'means to receive complaints of irregularities but recently it has expanded into providing updates on the needs of those affected by floods. Furthermore it also provides information to beneficiaries regarding aspects of different IOM projects for example how project beneficiaries are prioritized and by what means an area is selected for intervention' (IOM, n.d.).

As the cornerstone of IOM's feedback mechanism, the call centre is also intended to provide a confidential and direct link between aid recipients and the IOM office in Islamabad.

One IOM **Programme Manager** explained to us:

‘For me, this beneficiary feedback mechanism works as insurance. I have to guarantee that my teams create the trust needed for beneficiaries to be open and share what is the reality in the field in a very complicated social environment of pressures and influences and coercion. I trust my implementing partners (IPs), all of them. But I need to have a mechanism to make sure that there are direct communication channels between IOM and beneficiaries, bypassing the IPs for those situations when it is needed.’

IOM’s staff and Shelter Cluster Focal Points described the purpose behind the overall feedback system and the various feedback channels as multi-faceted. IOM staff mentioned that ensuring open and trusted channels for feedback enables IOM to improve targeting and reduce gaps in coverage, ‘get a sense of whether IOM’s performance meets the targets’ and improve transparency and accountability towards both the beneficiaries and the donors. One staff member explained that his expectation from the feedback system is ‘to verify whether the system is reaching the most vulnerable people ... the ultimate purpose is that we are accountable.’

IOM considers it the responsibility of ‘all parties involved in IOM projects to ensure that the beneficiary feedback mechanism and process is known by all beneficiaries’ (IOM, n.d.). IOM programme staff, IPs and Shelter Cluster Focal Points all share this responsibility to inform community members about the purpose and functions of the call centre and to actively solicit feedback during assessment and monitoring visits. Information posters, stickers and business-size information cards with key messages in Sindhi and Urdu and the toll-free numbers are given to staff, IPs, and Village Focal Points to distribute to all programme participants. The cards are also attached to all distributed items (e.g., winterisation kits). Staff and partners are asked to take the opportunity during monitoring visits to stress important messages such as the right for all households to present a complaint in cases of misconduct.¹²

¹²IOM uses stickers, banners, and posters about fraud prevention in all assistance programmes.

Field staff and partners conduct role-play exercises during community meetings to better illustrate the complaints procedures and feedback processes put in place by IOM. People are regularly reminded of the following:

- Assistance is free and they should not have to pay for it.
- IOM does not tolerate fraud or discrimination and takes swift corrective action.
- People can report issues to IPs or IOM staff or call the HCC toll-free line.
- Confidentiality of the complainant will be assured as much as possible during investigations.

At the community level, the existence and purpose of IOM’s call centre was understood and explained clearly to us by male residents in several flood-affected communities. All of them had seen the stickers and posters and heard the explanations from IOM staff, partners and Village Focal Points. Some had used the toll-free line directly, while others had brought their concerns to the Village Focal Point and asked that person to make the call on their behalf. Most women we spoke with had heard about the toll-free phone line and understood its primary purpose, but none we spoke to had used it. Their experience with providing direct feedback was limited to discussions on the margins of assessment visits and when female staff members visited their homes. In general, people expressed

appreciation for having a direct link to IOM, especially in areas that are remote and where staff are unable to visit regularly. People also unequivocally stated that when they place a call to the toll-free number or speak to IOM staff, partners, and Shelter Cluster Focal Points, they expect to receive an explanation, further information, or concrete follow-up action.



FEEDBACK COLLECTION

Resident in ORS-supported community in Sindh:

'We are in contact through the Village Focal Point and the implementing partner. They are the ones conveying the messages we have to IOM.'

IOM **Programme Manager**, Islamabad:

'This is the basic idea: provide as many communication channels as possible. This was needed particularly in the most affected districts.'

The HCC was designed to be a triage mechanism for processing complaints and feedback submitted by phone. HCC staff log all received queries and complaints and send them to Focal Points at IOM once a week. Urgent matters requiring investigation and redress are forwarded immediately. Verification of complaints is done by IOM monitoring staff and Cluster Focal Points (see the section on verification below).

At the district level, Shelter Cluster Focal Points regularly visit affected communities to provide information and to document people's concerns and priorities. These community visits are not formal needs-assessment missions, and the information and feedback gathered during the visits is often shared informally and directly with the relevant actors during district-level cluster coordination meetings and/or by phone, email, and SMS messages. According to one Shelter Cluster **Focal Point**:

'When we visit field sites we ask many questions about needs, gaps, and priorities. The Focal Points see a lot, know a lot, hear a lot. The Shelter Cluster is not there to monitor the quality of each shelter project. We are not there to judge and evaluate. But we see one of our roles as gathering feedback from beneficiaries on whether or not the approach was appropriate and if they were satisfied with assistance.'

Daily verbal reports about the situation on the ground are captured in meeting minutes and are incorporated into reports shared with agencies at the district and provincial levels.

IOM IPs in North and South Sindh are yet another important conduit for feedback. For example, ORS partner agencies hold two-hour-long focus group discussions at each ORS village during the initial stages of shelter programme implementation to provide information, answer questions, discuss options, and gather immediate feedback on unfolding project activities (e.g. training in DRR construction techniques). Later, they conduct routine village visits to inspect construction and communicate closely with residents and Village Focal Points. Partners produce weekly progress reports to IOM detailing issues that have come up during monitoring visits, how they have been able to solve these, and what remains to be addressed.

For monitoring and verification purposes, IOM periodically deploys its own field staff and M&E team to collect data and feedback directly in targeted communities. During the emergency phase, checklists are used for verification, distribution and post-distribution monitoring. The following standard questions (taken from a longer list of questions) appear on the checklists for all three types of visits:

1. Are there any issues expressed by the community regarding the distribution? What are the issues?
2. Has anyone in the community been unfairly excluded from the distribution? What are the reasons for the exclusion?
3. Do you know about the complaints hotline? If yes, how did you hear about it, and do you think it is an effective tool?

The post-distribution monitoring checklist also features questions about the quality of aid and the relevance of the aid items to the needs of the affected population. Complaints, feedback, allegations of exclusion or misconduct and other issues are captured on these forms and are processed by the M&E team at the field level. The summary of monitoring, complaints, and feedback data that arrive through the hotline is available for review to all programme staff and senior management. In contrast, the content of direct calls to field staff on a mobile or informal face-to-face conversation is not logged or meticulously recorded. These are shared informally with relevant programme staff.

Residents in affected villages listed the following channels that they were aware of and have accessed to communicate with IOM and to submit complaints and feedback, especially when facing an urgent issue:

- placing phone calls to the mobiles of an IOM partner agency's field team
- visiting the IP's office
- calling IOM field staff on their mobiles
- calling the call centre to flag issues and to request a visit by staff
- speaking to IOM field teams face-to-face during their visits to the villages.

Overall, we did not hear any concerns about safety and confidentiality expressed by the local residents who have used the feedback channels. We heard examples of people using these channels to communicate about alleged cases of fraud, but did not hear examples of channels used for lodging sensitive complaints on sexual exploitation and abuse. Except for the strong preference expressed by women to have more opportunities to share feedback face-to-face with female staff (see the section on cultural appropriateness), most people we spoke with perceived the feedback collection channels as appropriate for the purpose for which they were established. Overall, all local residents with whom we spoke appreciated the fact that there are multiple channels for communicating and providing feedback.



VERIFICATION AND ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS AND FEEDBACK

Shelter Cluster **Focal Point** in South Sindh:

‘When we receive such complaints, we contact the agency and report to them the issues raised with us. We do not investigate. We are not the police, it is not our role, but we do verify what is going on.’

Shelter Cluster **Focal Point** in Sindh:

‘We have limited resources and aren’t able to verify all informal reports that we receive.’

IOM call centre logs are consolidated into a central database and are forwarded to four senior programme staff within IOM for further action. These staff members are the Shelter Cluster Lead, Head of Operations, Programme Administrator, and district-level Operations Director. IOM’s TSSU refers some of the feedback and general complaints to the Shelter Cluster, such as requests for assistance and complaints about being missed by needs assessments and about delays in receiving assistance. At the field level, IOM relies on its IPs and a committee comprised of three IOM field staff to verify complaints and requests for assistance that arrive through the call centre. A similar process is followed with complaints and feedback that are given informally to Shelter Cluster Focal Points during community visits.

Urgent and sensitive issues, such as allegations of fraud or staff misconduct, problems with vendors, and reports of incidents are forwarded to district-level IOM Programme Managers, who in turn ask a dedicated IOM M&E staff person in the field to investigate the complaints and to report back to management. Complaints alleging exclusion from beneficiary lists and misconduct are prioritised and trigger a verification visit within 72 hours. Specific timelines are agreed on for response and resolution of sensitive issues. Complaints about distribution of relief items and eligibility are documented, and progress in verification and response is tracked at the Islamabad Head Office level. This is done by requesting investigation reports from field staff with photographs and written affidavits from complainants that the issue has been resolved. For example, the call centre received a complaint that 30 people out of a total of 500 residents were left out of distribution in one village. The verification visit conducted by M&E staff uncovered that these people were out delivering condolences in a neighbouring village and were missed during the assessment and beneficiary selection process. Their situation was assessed, and IOM staff followed up to make sure they received assistance. When an investigation is completed, IOM takes all possible steps to inform the community members who raised the issue before the matter is closed (*ibid.*, p. 2). This is done by mobile phone or during a household or community visit. Programme Managers at the sub-office level regularly report to Islamabad management on remedial actions taken.

Shelter Cluster Focal Points play an important role in the verification of complaints and issues brought to their attention directly. For example, Focal Points in North Sindh documented complaints about specific agencies about which it had been alleged that they ‘were not assisting the right people’ and that their staff members ‘were bribing people in exchange for assistance.’ Verification visits conducted by Shelter Cluster Focal Points and/or by IOM M&E staff found that several of these complainants were not on any beneficiary list and that some of the calls came from villages that were not in the accused agency’s target

area. People submitted false grievances with the hope of attracting attention and assistance for their household and their community. The expectation is that when a local person files an accusation about a serious misconduct, IOM or someone else representing the aid agencies deploys a verification mission during which local people could raise concerns about eligibility and specific needs. This manipulative tactic¹³ has evidently achieved its intended result, since IOM and Shelter Cluster records demonstrate that indeed any complaint about serious misconduct triggers a timely verification mission. In all such cases, Shelter Cluster Focal Points have passed on information about the visited communities to agencies working in the area and brought the coverage gaps to the attention of the relevant clusters. When visits were conducted by IOM M&E staff, they have passed on the information about coverage gaps to Shelter Cluster Focal Points for broader sharing and coordination.

¹³Conversations with OCHA in Islamabad also indicated that many complaints and allegations were found to be false after a verification visit.

As a rule, IOM programme teams and senior management rely on multiple sources of information to verify reports from the field. These include Multi-sector Initial Rapid Assessment, TSSU assessments and field reports from staff and Cluster Focal Points. This verification process is applied across the board for all assessment data and feedback that arrives from multiple channels. As demonstrated in the utilisation example presented in box 3 on page 18, feedback from affected communities has also been solicited in order to verify certain assumptions that were shaping policy and programme decisions. This sort of verification process goes beyond specific complaints and attempts to mitigate concerns regarding the credibility of data about the situation on the ground. As one **senior team member** at IOM Islamabad told us:

‘In Pakistan you always need to question data, because you get contradictory messages and data requests. You always need to cross-check information. It is challenging to get baseline data, because political interests trump needs-based assessment.’



FEEDBACK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT, RESPONSE AND UTILISATION

Residents in an ORS supported village in S. Sindh:

‘We also share our difficulties related to the loss caused by the floods, and IOM and implementing partners listen carefully to our problems.’

IOM **programme staff** in Sindh:

‘We of course hear of other requests and needs and we refer these to relevant agencies. But it is rarely possible to respond to all such requests.’

The people we spoke with in the affected areas greatly appreciate the ability to reach someone by phone or in person and to share critical information about the immediate situation and the needs in their areas and to ask questions. Their requests for information

and assistance are acknowledged, when possible, with immediate information provision and clarification given by the call centre staff and by deployment of M&E and field staff to verify specific requests, concerns and allegations on the ground. In addition, the Shelter Cluster serves as the frontline representative of IOM and other aid agencies working on shelter in the affected area. Due to the urgent nature of some of the concerns raised by people in affected communities, Cluster Focal Points pass on time-sensitive critical information to other clusters (e.g. WASH or Protection) for follow-up and action by agencies better placed to respond to specific needs. In essence, by virtue of their regular presence on the ground, Cluster Focal Points are seen as a trusted feedback channel, and they see it as central to their role to refer, and when necessary to verify the details of complaints. Follow-up on every single referral of feedback would require a significant investment of time and human resources and a tracking system. Hence, most of the follow-up is done informally during district-level cluster meetings and calls placed directly to mobiles of field staff.

According to one district-based Cluster **Focal Point**:

‘Some information is never shared with the senior management because it is only relevant at the district and provincial level and is addressed locally with no need to refer it up the chain or to report on it in detail.’

Among the issues that do require attention of IOM senior management and the national cluster are targeting and coverage gaps, shifting needs on the ground, and issues related to land. Information is shared daily by district staff with the IOM Islamabad team seeking guidance on operational and policy-level issues, and requesting help to unblock bottlenecks in assistance provision. For example, there have been situations in which district and provincial government officials had contradictory views and were using conflicting assessment data. In cases where this becomes a major obstruction to the provision of assistance, Shelter Cluster Focal Points seek resolution at the national level.

Referral and sharing of feedback data was identified by many as ad hoc and in need of improvement. At the time of our visit, IOM did not regularly share call centre data with NDMA except if there were specific requests or complaints concerning district officials. Likewise, NDMA did not share the feedback data gathered through their channels with IOM. At the Inter-Cluster Coordination Meetings facilitated by OCHA, analysis and discussion of feedback from affected populations happens sporadically and is not a standing agenda item.

At the level of programme implementation in the field, feedback acknowledgment starts with internal information sharing and discussion, followed by problem-solving sessions among IOM field staff. The ORS Programme Manager in South Sindh holds a weekly meeting with staff to review progress in programme activities and to hear the latest updates, feedback, and complaints from communities. The feedback data reviewed are a compilation of what was gathered by staff, partners, and through the call centre. The Programme Manager typically asks each staff member to identify both specific cases and general issues and asks them to highlight any urgent issues that he needs to know about and take action on. He explained: ‘Field staff help me to prioritise by pointing out which issues are more likely to snowball into bigger complaints.’ When possible, after initial discussion, the ORS team makes immediate decisions on how to resolve a situation and assigns team members to follow through.

At other times, the IOM field team decides that additional time is required to gather more data, verify conflicting information, reflect, and seek guidance before making modifications

and major decisions. Programme Managers regularly share information about critical issues that affect the programme overall with senior management in Islamabad. One **manager** stated:

'It is up to me to compile information coming from the field to present a well-built case when advocating for a change in cash disbursement procedures or other programme implementation areas ... We have a method. Every situation is a source for learning. If we make a decision for a certain case, we agree that this will set a precedent.'

Several examples of modifications that were made using this problem-solving approach are provided in the box with utilisation examples (see page 18).

Feedback that IOM gathers through its many channels is also shared with programme donors. Some donors request it through reports, and others frequently accompany staff in the field to hear people's opinions directly. IOM's quarterly reports to major donors typically include voices and examples of specific beneficiaries. The reports do not include data on the number and type of complaints or feedback received or a summary of HCC calls. The donors have never requested this information to be included in the report. The section of the quarterly report called 'Challenges and Actions Taken' sometimes features examples of modifications made based on feedback from the affected population.



INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANISATIONAL SUPPORT

IOM **programme staff** in Sindh:

'We have a highly problem-solving environment and we share the risks. I have to trust my staff. The rapport with staff and partners and track record of transparency and accountability is important. Feedback is heard and it falls on the foundation of trust. When you give a suggestion, you trust I am receptive to listen and will consider it.'

Shelter Cluster **team member** in Sindh:

'Having skilled human resources is key. Where would we invest? In a strong network of implementing partners and strong Focal Points.'

Despite the fact that the emergency response has been significantly scaled back since its height in 2010 response, IOM continues to invest resources in maintaining the call centre and in supporting capacity building of its staff and partners to enhance two-way communication and feedback loops. Since the 2010 response, the HComms team has been training the call centre staff to assess the content of incoming feedback and

complaints and to use sound judgment about the urgency of the issues that are reported through this channel. Likewise, HComms information officers who were deployed on the ground during the height of the 2010 emergency were trained to provide information to affected people and to document their input and feedback. One **HComms senior staff** told us:

'We explained to staff that they were intermediaries and representatives of the beneficiaries. We asked them to think about what the senior decision-makers in the aid agencies and NDMA need to hear and to capture all of the relevant input from the affected people. We told them, "You really are their voice. If you don't represent them well, we wouldn't hear them."

Staff who are involved in feedback collection are selected using several criteria, one of which is the ability to build rapport with the population in affected areas. IOM provides similar training for all Shelter Cluster Focal Points emphasising listening skills and information analysis. HCC call attendants are trained to provide answers to general and recurring questions and to share information about specific programme details. IOM also trains its IPs in standard monitoring and data collection, which includes sensitisation on feedback practices. For example, the ORS team provides skills training to all IPs on technical construction specifications to enable them to provide oversight of the construction process as well as M&E and data management. One skill-building area that was identified as needing more attention is data analysis. IOM staff and Shelter Cluster Focal Points also suggested that IOM should invest further in strengthening the capacity of these partners and their Focal Points for effective engagement with stakeholders.

When it comes to the internal culture on feedback, IOM field staff reported feeling comfortable giving and receiving feedback within their programme teams and upwards to senior management. One person described his 360 degree appraisal and said that he 'can always access and talk to the supervisor.' Another **staff member** commented:

'IOM senior managers are well informed and request beneficiary feedback regularly. We discuss feedback data in several different forums and meetings internal and with international and government partners.'

Senior staff also explained that the practice of seeking feedback from a range of stakeholders often requires a nuanced understanding of the cultural, contextual, and institutional factors in conversations with local communities, authorities, implementing agency partners, and the Humanitarian Country Team. Within the Shelter Cluster Team, we heard that the national staff are seen as important advisers to the expatriate staff and national staff from other regions in Pakistan. Shelter Cluster Focal Points sometimes ask local organisations to accompany them during field visits, especially if there were complaints in the area and there is a need for better understanding of the situation from several perspectives.



PERIODIC REASSESSMENT AND READJUSTMENT

Interviews with staff and community members indicated that there has been a steady evolution in the methods that IOM has adopted and adapted to improve its communication and engagement with affected communities. IOM senior management and field-based staff strongly believe that to capture the voices of the different segments of the affected population requires multiple and diverse communication and feedback channels. No explicitly evaluative periodic reassessment process has been put in place for the feedback mechanism. Instead, incremental changes were introduced based on the shifting needs on the ground and the operational needs of the implementing agencies responding to the 2010, 2011 and 2012 emergencies. When adjustments to information and feedback gathering processes were made – e.g. the move by the TSSU from household-based assessments to key informant data collection exercises in order to verify discrepancies in the Multi-sector Initial Rapid Assessment figures – the primary purpose was not to improve the feedback system or broaden the scope of voices, but to improve the accuracy of information gathered.



To capture the voices of different segments of the affected population requires multiple and diverse communication and feedback channels.

7. Gender, formality and 'ownership' of feedback mechanisms

The field visit also highlighted additional areas that the research team believes would benefit from further inquiry.

Informal and formal channels

We documented a range of observations and opinions about the importance of setting up formal feedback channels such as IOM's HCC. Many people also discussed the value of maintaining informal channels for gathering and responding to feedback. This held true for both aid workers and aid recipients. In the initial design of the feedback channels, IOM took into consideration the scale of the emergency in 2010, the massive information needs, the growing number of mobile users in remote rural areas, and the security concerns about accessing remote areas on a regular basis. In addition to logistical and technological accessibility issues, programme staff wanted to establish two-way communication and to ensure a direct channel from communities to IOM that bypassed IPs. The latter remains the most important reason for maintaining the hotline in 2013.

The most important limitation of the hotline has been low usage by women due to the cultural constraints discussed above. Among other factors are the social norms and power dynamics that compel some to defer to the village leader to place the call. In such cases, the feedback essentially remains at the discretion of these local gatekeepers (such as Village Focal Points and husbands) who could have undue influence in the process of channelling it to IOM. With full acknowledgement of these challenges, IOM and the Shelter Cluster team feel that maintaining the menu of options when it comes to feedback channels is the most feasible way to address concerns about access and inclusion of marginalised voices (including but not limited to women's). Therefore, it is this combination of formal and informal, structured (e.g. monitoring checklists) and unstructured (e.g. informal conversations with Shelter Cluster members and field staff) feedback that allows IOM to capture urgent and sensitive complaints through the hotline as well as to achieve a more nuanced understanding of issues and feedback through community visits and verification missions. The call centre alone would not have been able to meet the objectives set by IOM for its recipient feedback mechanism.

For aid recipients, face-to-face interaction with the aid agency's representatives is important. We observed the ease with which people interacted with Shelter Cluster Focal Points, IOM staff, and IP staff who were present during our visit. It is also clear that the ability to quickly build rapport, the quality of the existing relationships and the level of trust are all significant factors in ensuring that feedback channels remain trusted and used.

Feedback mechanisms and information-sharing platforms

IOM is the lead agency for the Shelter Cluster and regularly coordinates and works with national and district authorities. A study of IOM's feedback mechanism raises the questions: how should a feedback mechanism be structured vis-à-vis these stakeholders, and who should perform its basic functions (collection, verification, analysis and response)? In fact, IOM's senior management raised this very question in discussions with the ALNAP-CDA team. The scope of this study and the briefness of our visit did not allow us to explore this question in great detail, but there are several important observations that we'd like to share to inform ongoing discussions at IOM.

As stated above, at the time of the visit, the Shelter Cluster did not have a separate feedback mechanism and instead relied on its coordination and information-sharing

channels to share and refer feedback to relevant agencies. Shelter Cluster Focal Points did not systematically solicit feedback and did not set up a separate collection channel. As discussed above, however, while feedback is shared and referred along with other important information, the Focal Points' ability to follow up on specific requests, complaints and other feedback is often limited. Naturally, cluster representatives in Islamabad and staff at the district level voiced concerns about ownership, responsibility, and accountability of the Shelter Cluster team as it relates to feedback and complaints. Should individual agencies continue to set up and run separate feedback and complaints mechanisms? Should they be expected to share relevant information with peer agencies and/or the government using the cluster platform? Or should the clusters establish comprehensive feedback mechanisms and processes to meet the needs of the affected populations in the areas served by aid agencies?

The trend we observed during our interviews in Islamabad (and elsewhere during this research project) is unequivocally pointing to the former. Many agencies are establishing their own complaints and feedback mechanisms in an effort to demonstrate accountability, to ensure timely responses to feedback from their programme participants, and to enable programme improvements. At the time of the visit, it appeared that less thinking was given to joint mechanisms shared across agencies and cluster members. Indeed, data gathered through complaints and feedback mechanisms are seen as sensitive, and the preference is to house data management systems internally. In parallel, concerns about proliferation of call lines, suggestion boxes, and duplicate community visits and conversations as well as gaps in sharing feedback data between the government and the aid agencies are also increasing and demanding attention.

These questions are certainly important for further research and experimentation. What would a cluster-level feedback mechanism look like? How would it be managed, and how would information sharing be set up to ensure timeliness and transparency? What level of trust and collaboration is required between agencies (some of whom compete for funding from the same donors) to invest in a jointly managed (and potentially open source) complaints and feedback system? Gathering feedback is a lot easier than responding to and acting on it. How could the Shelter Cluster ensure that the feedback loop is closed, since they are not in charge of programme implementation and can't steer programme decisions? There are very few examples of sustained joint feedback mechanisms and a dearth of evidence about what makes them effective. Our discussions with OCHA and other cluster leads in Islamabad point to the possibilities for feedback gathered by the cluster to inform broader strategy at the Humanitarian Country Team level, but we are not aware of any past attempts to test this in the Pakistan context. Given how much has been achieved with existing feedback systems, we are convinced that Pakistan would be an excellent place to pilot a cluster-level feedback mechanism focused on the quality and accountability of the overall response.

Discussions with IOM and Shelter Cluster Focal Points held in the process of finalizing this report highlighted important factors to consider in this particular context. Cluster leadership pointed out that the Pakistan context may be unique because the Shelter Cluster in Pakistan is very well resourced and has staff on the ground, which is not the case for all clusters. For an effective joint mechanism, field presence is critical, and neutrality is also an important factor. For example, IOM staff who are assigned to the Shelter Cluster never introduce themselves as IOM but only as Shelter Cluster staff when engaging with affected communities and district authorities. Another factor that seems to be critical is the shared leadership where Shelter Cluster staff come from UN agencies and NGOs, which, according to a seasoned Cluster Focal Point, 'considerably helps keeping a neutral stand' and which does not seem to be the case in other contexts.

8. Conclusions

IOM's relationship with IPs relies heavily on trust, transparency and information-sharing.

Pakistan's recurring floods and complex humanitarian emergency have affected millions of people across the country. Aid agencies have restricted access to many affected areas. This has direct implications for their ability to engage with the affected population in a meaningful and sustained way. IOM's decision to work through IP agencies, most of which are local NGOs, allows for proximity and regular contact with affected communities, including listening to people's feedback.

The relationship with the IPs relies heavily on trust, transparency and information-sharing. While IOM has been able to maintain this relationship with most of its partners, the staff strongly believe in maintaining a separate feedback channel that allows people in affected communities to contact IOM directly in a confidential manner if necessary. As the case study findings demonstrate, however, the strength of IOM's feedback system is in the multiplicity and complementarity of its feedback channels.

The overall feedback mechanism would not be effective in closing the feedback loop without the people involved at all steps in the process. We were indeed inspired to meet with and learn from so many dedicated and capable IOM staff, working in Islamabad and in North and South Sindh. In addition, we found the Shelter Cluster district-level team truly exceptional for their dedication, initiative and ability to work on the ground in this challenging and complex post-disaster context.

Most recently, IOM Pakistan was selected along with other DFID grantees to pilot an additional approach to gathering and responding to feedback from programme participants through focus group discussions. The ORS programme in South Sindh chose to pilot this approach during its completion phase and to use this additional data collection process to triangulate the reports from the IPs and the complaints and feedback raised through the hotline. Technical assistance was provided to IOM's M&E team on framing the questions for focus group discussions and facilitating the conversations. The approach was piloted in nine villages randomly selected from 800 villages where IOM ORS is working. Based on this initial pilot conducted in a compressed time frame, IOM plans to integrate periodic focus group discussions in a sample of its implementation areas as an additional feedback channel to supplement the data received through the call centre, the routine monitoring visits and other informal channels that people use. At the time of writing, plans were underway to use focus group discussions in North Sindh, where IOM is currently starting shelter construction in response to the 2012 floods.

Mini case study: Save the Children Pakistan complaint and response mechanism

SC Pakistan **Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning Team member:**

'[An] accountability system cannot be defined by the hotline only! ... For us, being in the MEAL team is like being "activists" on behalf of the community!'

SC Pakistan has designated accountability to beneficiaries and communities as one of its core values. In 2009, it established a complaint and response mechanism (CRM) to put this organisational value into practice and 'to affirm that beneficiaries and communities have a right to provide feedback or complain if we are not abiding by commitments we made to them' (Sameera et al., 2010). The CRM provides several channels for communities to voice their complaints and provide feedback on SC's programme interventions.

The data arriving through the CRM are considered an integral part of SC Pakistan's accountability practice and programme improvement. This is used for learning as well as for strong adjustments in programme designs and methodologies. SC staff based in the field regularly share information about SC's values, commitments and code of conduct with community members in its areas of operation. In addition, SC staff members inform people about the channels available to them for communicating with SC and what they can expect from the feedback and complaints process. Typically this information is shared in community meetings, during monitoring visits and through banners.

SC uses a specially designed 'accountability panaflex' – a poster or a chart that visually communicates emblems, images and phrases to explain project information and organisational processes – to explain the purpose and function of the complaint/feedback mechanism. These are made available in local vernacular languages and are posted at prominent places in intervention villages, health centres, education facilities, child-friendly spaces and community meeting points. Both verbal announcements and posters explain that the CRM invites people's honest feedback and guarantees confidentiality.

To meet the above commitment to accountability, the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) team at SC Pakistan has instituted two parallel feedback channels, a dedicated hotline and real-time feedback collection.

Dedicated hotline. The hotline is accessible in each district where SC operates. It is toll-free and allows staff to return missed calls. People are able to call or text their suggestions and complaints related to SC assistance provided in health clinics, food distributions and other interventions. People call with concerns about ongoing project implementation, SC staff conduct and cases of fraud during beneficiary selection and aid distribution. The hotline is staffed by both male and female SC MEAL staff to ensure that it is culturally appropriate for callers of both genders.

The SC hotline functions in both development and humanitarian intervention areas in Pakistan. The staff explained that over the years it became evident that the rate of use of the hotline in conflict-affected areas such as Peshawar was affected by fears and concerns about sharing personal information. Callers often withheld information about the district they were calling from. In these districts, deliberate attention is given to regular feedback

collection during face-to-face visits with field staff who are known and trusted in the communities.

Real-time feedback collection. Both MEAL staff and programme implementation staff routinely gather feedback during monitoring visits and field visits, soliciting feedback from community members on the implementation process and the progress of programs. There is a MEAL officer at each field office, and together with other field-based staff, they use a community feedback form to record solicited and unsolicited feedback during community visits. The form allows for on-the-spot categorisation of feedback (when applicable) as pertaining to livelihood, education, nutrition, non-food items, health, protection, food aid or other services. SC staff members record the feedback as well as their own initial observations about it on the form. Later, the form is updated with a plan for verification and the findings of the verification. After a response has been communicated to the person who provided the feedback, the staff members complete the process with comments on 'Satisfaction/dissatisfaction of petitioner with the feedback handling mechanism'.

Since 2009, the MEAL team has systematized its complaints and feedback collection, verification and response practices and procedures. During the last three years, SC recorded and processed 8,000 feedback and complaints messages. The MEAL team manages a database for logging and tracking all feedback and complaints received through the hotline and face-to-face meetings. The database is an integral part of the SC complaint and feedback tracking system. Besides documenting the nature of the complaint or feedback, it has required field tracking of how the complaint was resolved and the name of the staff member who communicated resolution to the complainant. The entry remains open until the issue has been resolved.

The following categories are used when logging each entry:

Category	Description
1	Request for Information
2	Request for assistance
3	Minor dissatisfaction with activities (e.g. missing items from kits, lack of follow-up, lack of timely information about training dates)
4	Major dissatisfaction with activities (e.g. issues about our programme approach, poor quality items, beneficiary selection issues, safety issues for children or adults)
5	Allegations of breaches of SC's Code of Conduct and/or Child Safeguarding Policy (e.g. inappropriate behaviour or misconduct by SC or partner staff or representatives including fraud; theft; corruption such as misappropriation of goods or requests for payment; verbal, physical or sexual abuse; sexual exploitation of beneficiaries; or behaviour which could be perceived as abusive, such as spending too much time alone with a child)
6	Allegations of child abuse or sexual exploitation of beneficiaries by non-SC staff or representatives, e.g. a member of the community or staff of another NGO or the UN.

The MEAL team updates the database daily and produces a monthly Accountability to Beneficiaries Analysis Report. Internally, the SC MEAL team has established a procedure for sharing summaries of feedback and complaints with relevant programme teams both at district level and with programme leads in Islamabad. The monthly report provides a detailed analysis of all feedback data received through SC's channels accompanied by numerical and visual breakdown by demographics, district, sector and project donors. In addition, a narrative comparing the data with the previous month and a listing of serious complaints by beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries is included. Quarterly and annual reports summarizing the aggregate data are presented to senior management as part of the organisational reporting process.



Serious complaints concerning fraud or staff misconduct are shared within 24 hours with relevant managers and field teams to prompt verification and investigation. In the case of allegations of misconduct on the part of SC staff, the MEAL team recommends an independent committee made up of three staff persons from other districts to avoid a conflict of interest.

In accordance with its mission of protecting and empowering children, SC involves children in its monitoring process. SC's internal case study on the use of feedback in Jacobabad district in North Sindh highlights that 'children being the direct beneficiaries of Child Protection initiative are in the best position to highlight achievements and gaps of the programme via providing feedback.' The MEAL team regularly visits Child Friendly Spaces and engages with children to gather their feedback about the quality and appropriateness of programmes.

The MEAL team estimated that 90% of complaints are addressed at the field level through verification, information provision and taking necessary steps to rectify the issues. A standard debriefing process is followed after each monitoring visit to implementation sites. This includes a process for recording findings (the community feedback form described above) and a planning process with concrete action steps assigned to specific staff members to complete within an agreed time frame.

The MEAL team highlighted several examples of how feedback and complaints prompted a modification to programmes. One such example had to do with food vouchers distributed to flood-affected households for use with authorized vendors in the area. A complaint indicated that local vendors were charging more than the standard government rate. The SC team was concerned about 'SC assistance disturbing the market equilibrium and being used to inflate prices which affects the broader community as well, not just our beneficiaries.' After an investigation and additional market surveys, SC entered into an agreement with all its vendors across all districts setting a price cap on standard items purchased with vouchers. This corrective measure was accompanied by a new process for independent monthly price monitoring, which is now followed in all districts.

The MEAL team functions independently of the programme teams, and MEAL officers in the field report directly to Islamabad senior MEAL management, who in turn report directly to the Deputy Country Director for Program Development and Quality. The MEAL team indicated that this structure allows them 'to advocate for beneficiaries and for changes and adjustments at the level of policy, standard operating procedures formulation and decision-making.' However, the MEAL team staff also added that 'establishing and running the [feedback] system is easy. Getting an agreement from programmes in-house and incorporating into the learning process – that is the real difficulty!' As in several other organizations, we heard about the perceptions of MEAL staff as 'internal police'. In order to establish trust and buy-in among staff members, the MEAL team had to establish strict confidentiality rules with respect to internal sharing of complaints data. The MEAL team does not share raw data or allow access to the database by programme staff. Programme-specific summaries are shared with each programme team separately. Senior management has access to all summary reports and to the database when necessary.

MEAL team members pointed to the team's relative autonomy and the procedures for handling sensitive complaints vis-à-vis each programme department as a key factor in the success of the CRM. The other factors were support of the feedback practices and the MEAL team's role by programme staff and leadership, and the resources allocated to maintain the system. SC hires staff with expertise in monitoring and knowledge of feedback collection and feedback management protocols gained in previous posts. SC provides additional on-the-job training, invests in ongoing capacity building and facilitates peer learning among staff. The MEAL team also pays attention to its staff composition in regards to gender, regional provenance and languages.



Reflecting on organisational support systems and external factors that influenced the investment in strengthening the accountability and feedback practices, the MEAL team felt that it was critical to establish evidence of how feedback can be used to improve programmes and to deliver on its organisational commitments. When the CRM was first piloted in 2009, one of the MEAL managers dedicated six months to establishing and testing the data collection process and making the case for continued investment and improvement. He added, 'Donors were also interested in the system, and us generating the evidence helped build their case for allocating resources to this important organisational feature. Managing donor support is key, if the MEAL system is to work. This means that donors need to have a margin of tolerance for mistakes in the programme implementation process. Overall, we see donor commitment to MEAL is increasing.' The SC team now includes its MEAL strategy in proposals, and the Pakistan MEAL team has been working with counterparts in other SC country offices to strengthen their internal systems as well.

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Annex: IOM complaint mechanism posters

The poster illustrates the IOM complaint mechanism through six panels, divided into two columns by a vertical line. The left column shows incorrect practices, and the right column shows correct practices.

- Top Left (Incorrect):** A man in a grey uniform is sitting at a desk, looking at a document. A man in a blue shirt is standing and talking to him. A red 'X' is above the man in the uniform.
- Top Right (Correct):** A man in a grey uniform is sitting at a desk, looking at a document. A man in a blue shirt is standing and talking to him. A red checkmark is above the man in the uniform.
- Middle Left (Incorrect):** A man in a blue shirt is standing and talking to a man in a grey uniform. A man in a brown uniform is standing next to a small green box. A red 'X' is above the man in the blue shirt.
- Middle Right (Correct):** A man in a blue shirt is standing and talking to a man in a grey uniform. A man in a brown uniform is standing next to a small green box. A red checkmark is above the man in the grey uniform.
- Bottom Left (Incorrect):** A man in a green shirt is talking to a man in a brown uniform. A man in a grey uniform is sitting on the ground, looking distressed. A red 'X' is above the man in the green shirt.
- Bottom Right (Correct):** A man in a green shirt is talking to a man in a brown uniform. A man in a grey uniform is sitting on the ground, looking distressed. A red checkmark is above the man in the green shirt. The number 0800 44422 is written above the man in the grey uniform.

جيڪڏهن اوهان کان امداد لاءِ پئسا گهريا وڃن يا ڪنهن به قسم جو امتيازي سلوڪ ڪيو وڃي ته اوهان
 IOM جي فلاحِي هيلپ لائن تي مفت ڪال ڪريو 0800-44422 ۽ 0322-5555737







The illustrations are arranged in a 3x2 grid:

- Top Left (Incorrect):** A man sits at a table with a sign that says "RS. 7,000". A group of people stands behind him, with a speech bubble saying "Rs. 10,000". A red 'X' is in the top right corner.
- Top Right (Correct):** A man sits at a table with a sign that says "RS. 10,000". A group of people stands behind him, with a speech bubble saying "Rs. 10,000". A red checkmark is in the top right corner.
- Middle Left (Incorrect):** A man in a yellow shirt is being pushed away by a man in a green shirt. A group of people is in the background. A red 'X' is in the top right corner.
- Middle Right (Correct):** A man in a yellow shirt is being embraced by a man in a green shirt. A group of people is in the background. A red checkmark is in the top right corner.
- Bottom Left (Incorrect):** A man is being physically abused by another man. A red 'X' is in the top right corner.
- Bottom Right (Correct):** A man is being physically abused by another man. In the foreground, a man is talking on a mobile phone. A red checkmark is in the top right corner, and the number "0800 44422" is written next to it.

جيڪڏهن اوهان کان امداد لاءِ پئسا گهريا وڃن يا ڪنهن به قسم جو امتيازي سلوڪ ڪيو وڃي ته اوهان IOM جي فلاحِي هيلپ لائن تي مفت ڪال ڪريو 0800-44422 ۽ 0322-5555737

Illustration 1 (Top Left): A man is speaking to a group of people outdoors. A red 'X' is in the top right corner.
 Caption: اداري اور محلي اداروں کے ذریعے سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 2 (Top Middle-Left): A man is talking to a woman at a desk. A red 'X' is in the top left corner.
 Caption: اداري اور محلي اداروں کے ذریعے سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 3 (Top Middle-Right): A man is talking to a woman at a desk. A red checkmark is in the top left corner.
 Caption: سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 4 (Top Right): A man is talking to a woman at a desk. A red 'X' is in the top left corner.
 Caption: سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 5 (Middle Left): A group of people are standing and talking. A red checkmark is in the top left corner.
 Caption: سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 6 (Middle Middle-Left): A man is talking to a woman at a desk. A red checkmark is in the top left corner.
 Caption: سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 7 (Middle Middle-Right): A man is talking to a woman at a desk. A red checkmark is in the top left corner.
 Caption: سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 8 (Middle Right): A man is talking to a woman at a desk. A red 'X' is in the top left corner.
 Caption: سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 9 (Bottom Left): A man is talking to a woman at a desk. A red checkmark is in the top left corner.
 Caption: سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 10 (Bottom Middle-Left): A man is talking to a woman at a desk. A red checkmark is in the top left corner.
 Caption: سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 11 (Bottom Middle-Right): A man is talking to a woman at a desk. A red checkmark is in the top left corner.
 Caption: سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Illustration 12 (Bottom Right): A man is talking to a woman at a desk. A red 'X' is in the top left corner.
 Caption: سرکار سے رابطہ کرنا اور اپنی رائے اور خیالات کا اظہار کرنا۔
 (Using government channels to express views and opinions.)

Logos at the bottom: Canada, Czech Republic Humanitarian Aid, IOM-OM, UKaid, USAID.

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
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ALNAP would like to acknowledge the financial support of the
Foreign Office of Germany in carrying out this initiative.

