2022 CLA CASE COMPETITION

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Case Title:

The voice of the Community at the Center of Decisions of Humanitarian Response

Name: Kate Pickett

Organization: Alight Kuja Kuja

Miroslava Zavala, Insight Associate of Kuja Kuja, talking to migrants from Venezuela at the Venezuela and Colombia border.
Credit: Alight Kuja Kuja

Summary:

The case study presented here examine the evolution of Kuja Kuja as a humanitarian feedback tool in the context of Venezuelan migration in Colombia during 2019 and 2021. The main objective is to present the effect of the community-based feedback systems on humanitarian responses, and to demonstrate related improvements in decision-making that lead to positive effects on the final beneficiaries.
Case studies are explored related to the use of Kuja Kuja in program management practices in general, and to specific program interventions in the health and cash-transfer services areas.
Lessons learned related in particular to the capacity of the aforementioned system for humanitarian organizations to act based on evidence within complex contexts.
This study emerges from the evolution of Kuja Kuja in the specific context of Venezuelan migration in Colombia; which by January 2021 amounted to 1.8 million migrants in different economic and legal situations.
And it flows from a process of co-creation with local partners and the ease of the community to provide feedback.
The case aims to answer the following question: In what ways have communities and humanitarian organizations responded to real-time feedback systems based on the direct participation of final beneficiaries?

Which two subcomponents of the Collaborating, Learning & Adapting (CLA) Framework are most reflected in your case? Please reference them in your submission.

- Internal Collaboration
- External Collaboration
- Technical Evidence Base
- Theories of Change
- Scenario Planning
- M&E for Learning
- Pause & Reflect
- Adaptive Management
- Openness
- Relationships & Networks
- Continuous Learning & Improvement
- Knowledge Management
- Institutional Memory
- Decision-Making
- Mission Resources
- CLA in Implementing Mechanisms

1. WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?

Colombia has recently experienced a humanitarian crisis linked to the massive migration of the Venezuelan population seeking to improve their socioeconomic conditions deteriorated by the internal crisis of their country. Due to the magnitude of the migration and the absence of installed capacities to meet the needs of a growing community, humanitarian agencies of different nature have sought to respond safeguarding essential goods and services.

One of the many challenges faced by humanitarian agencies in this context has been to efficiently include the participation of communities in the decision-making process of humanitarian services. Transforming the vision of the final beneficiary as a passive community to be helped into an active community with valuable ideas that contribute to address a crisis without precedent in the region and with complex particularities.

The two subcomponents we think reflect the CLA framework are Adaptive Management and Decision-Making.

2. WHY: Why did you decide to use a CLA approach? Why was CLA considered helpful for addressing your organizational or development challenge(s)?

Acknowledging this need, Kuja Kuja began operations in Colombia in 2019. Kuja Kuja was born in 2016 in Uganda with the mission to recenter humanitarian response around the voice of affected people. In this journey, Kuja Kuja has developed a series of real-time data collection tools focused on collecting the satisfaction of end beneficiaries with humanitarian services as well as their ideas on how to improve these services. This information is processed with artificial intelligence tools and is then fed into the decision making processes of humanitarian agencies, enhancing their capacity to serve populations with Adaptive Management tools that allow for more precise, more effective programming.

This study sought to explore the effect that community-based feedback approaches have had on humanitarian response systems, understanding this effect as the actions that humanitarian partner organizations take in response to the information transmitted through the Kuja Kuja technique and how communities subsequently react to these actions.

3. How: Tell us the story of how you used a collaborating, learning and/or adapting approach to address the organizational or development challenge described in Question 2.

To analyze this effect, two lines of services offered by current partners (health services and cash-transfer) were addressed through a methodology composed of the analysis of conversation trends where the feedback submitted by the community members (to be referred to as “ideas”) are categorized and aggregated to be related to partner actions under transversal and temporal dimensions. The change in the conversation is also established through the Pairwise Method, which allows converting the "differences" of conversations into "distances" (distance matrix) and thus mathematically evaluating the similarity of conversations at different time periods. Along with this analysis focused on community changes, an external consulting process was carried out based on direct interviews and focus groups with members of the staff of our allies related to the two lines of service mentioned. This illustrates how organizations used the information and insights provided by Kuja Kuja to improve their actual processes and future projects.
The main value of the Kuja Kuja feedback proposal is given by its methodology that combines two simple but powerful responses with the specialized processing of information and data in real time. The two-question methodology seeks to encourage a culture of learning and decision-making that allows the adaptation of programs at the lowest possible cost and focused on the voice of the beneficiaries.

This study seeks, in essence, to account for how and in what way community conversations are transformed when their ideas are taken into account for the implementation of actions in the humanitarian services they receive. Thus, it is distinguished on the one hand that a conversation changes by its composition and also its frequency over time. Hence the importance of having a methodology composed of four components:

The analysis of conversation trends where ideas are categorized and aggregated to be related to partner actions under transversal and temporal dimensions. For this purpose, Machine Learning strategies based on Natural Language Processing (NLP) are used to group large amounts of text through analysis of categories of interest for each sector, which have been established through consultation and learning with each partner.

The change in the conversation is also established through the Pairwise Method, which allows converting the "differences" of conversations into "distances" (distance matrix) and thus mathematically evaluating the similarity of conversations at different time periods. This allows us to know the behavior of particular conversations over time by distinguishing the differences between the previously classified topics. For example, a conversation with recommendations to the pediatrics service that later becomes a conversation about congratulations to the same service. In this case, classification by itself makes it difficult to see the change within the ideas.

On the other hand, the Action Amplifier system makes it possible to establish the key places and moments where allies transformed a group of ideas into specific actions. This system makes it possible to recognize the conversations on which an expectation of change is generated in response to the action taken. This system is fed back independently by each partner in a qualitative form.

Finally, three rounds of interviews and focus groups were carried out with nine members of the four partners involved in the service lines of the case studies with the purpose of verifying the perception of the staff on the link between the feedback system of Kuja Kuja with the decision making and finally the actions for the community. All interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the general analytic procedure: First, a deductive approach was developed across Kuja Kuja's data collection, analysis and presentation, as well as allies’ data use for each service. Second, an inductive approach identifying common themes across types of project and expertise with the service was used. This allows us to obtain the assessment in a more comprehensive manner, thereby offering an enhanced understanding of the topic.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT: How has collaborating, learning and adapting affected your team and/or organization? If it's too early to tell, what effects do you expect to see in the future?

Kuja Kuja's journey in Colombia allows us to consider the potential of integrating community-based feedback into humanitarian agencies. Although the project has been developed in a highly volatile environment, the partners have managed to find value in the proposed system both for the improvement of their current services and for the structuring of new humanitarian services. However, this journey also allows us to identify a series of challenges that must be met in order to consolidate the communities at the heart of the feedback:
With Humanitarian Organizations: The remaining challenge for the value co-creation possibilities rely on keeping fluent communication across all organizational levels. Current positive outcomes are also the result of an interactive process where each organization learned from each other.
Projects' flexibility to make service improvements. Kuja Kuja's service relies on a tacit agreement in which beneficiaries provide information and in exchange the service improves for them. If service does not improve, beneficiaries lose motivation to continue providing information.
The mechanisms for transmitting ideas by Kuja Kuja must avoid falling into attrition and repetition. This implies an additional effort to innovate in the ways conversations are connected and build the narrative that allows understanding the data for each context. From Kuja Kuja it is important to continue accompanying partners in their process of managing the ideas that are out of project scope or those that are too expensive to implement and the ideas that despite the solving actions taken continue to emerge in the reports.
From Kuja Kuja to the communities: challenges in this process rely on Kuja Kuja's continuance of gaining trust on the communities and the new beneficiaries. They might be reluctant to provide information due to concerns about identification, information confidentiality, or a potential phone scam; developing inclusive remote collection tools, building up the flexibility demanded by the communities who are willing to express another kind of ideas not only when reaching the saturation point of some conversations but also the possibility of having feedback for specific services, among many other challenges.

5. DEVELOPMENT IMPACT: How has using a CLA approach contributed to your development outcomes? What evidence can you provide? If it's too early to tell, what effects do you expect to see in the future?

Promoting direct and open listening with the communities as a feedback mechanism is in itself a way to dignify the final beneficiaries and make them active subjects in the decision-making process. Even before turning ideas into actions, listening processes work to prevent harmful effects not considered in the implementation of humanitarian services and to facilitate trust within the community, perceiving the listening approach as a way to communicate directly and without barriers with the agencies. A final effect is the improvement of the reputation of the organizations and their adaptive management culture, key assets at the new projects formulation process.
Adaptive Management Leads to Positive Program Evolution: a pattern has been found in the application of the feedback system. Ideas that are transformed into actions generate satisfaction in the community on the issue addressed. However, when a saturation point is reached conversations will be based on new needs such as topics outside the scope of the services provided (for example, requesting food aid from health providers), or specific adjustments to the organizations and/or mentions around new issues raised from the same theme the action was made. This can be seen as an opportunity to learn about the needs of vulnerable communities for the eventual opportunity to formulate new humanitarian projects.
Specific and low-cost actions such as signage, digital bulletins or standardizing the information collection, usually have a marked effect on the community.
Our CLA approach has evolved in the sense that our initial operation was based on 100% physical contact with the communities to obtain first-hand input on external collaboration and knowledge of available resources and culture, but the COVID-19 pandemic and the transformation of some services (such as cash transfer) led us to expand our collection mechanisms and make a faster transition to information processing in order to speed up action and decision-making in volatile contexts. However, there was no change or evolution in terms of our goal of raising community voices or the purpose of creating conditions that stimulate adaptive management.

6. ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?

BHA's commitment was to put people at the center of conversations, and adaptive management is a fundamental part of the process. As an organization, Kuja Kuja will continue to establish conversations with potential partners in the humanitarian, public and private sectors. Because the response to the migration crisis has generated the need for a cross-cutting and articulated response, Kuja Kuja aims to continue adding allies to generate value to organizations with the integration of a feedback system that dignifies communities and facilitates the adaptive management approach. This necessarily implies that Kuja Kuja adapts its processes to new services such as education, livelihoods, housing or employment systems; maintaining the essence of community integration in the decision making process.