

Special Themes Report 3: Programme Communications

January 2016

HUNGER SAFETY NET PROGRAMME: PHASE 2 EVALUATIONS

The Special Themes series allows HSNP to explore topics of interest in a systematic way. The Programme Implementation and Learning Unit (PILU) determines the topic from questions or concerns raised through other monitoring tools, field observations or current policy issues. The findings are based on multiple open-ended interviews with recipients, implementing agencies, pay agents, and county and national staff. This allows observers to triangulate data and provide colourful insights. Reports are led by Oxford Policy Management (OPM), an independent consultancy firm.

Introduction

Here we look at communication channels and the types of message that pass between stakeholders. The key objectives are to determine where messaging works well, identify breakages in the communication chain, and query stakeholders for solutions. The review takes into account the HSNP's 'field communication model' which specifies that chiefs, assistant chiefs and village elders are intended to be the main channel for communication with communities, conveying messages that cascade from National Drought Management Authority (NDMA) in Nairobi through their representatives at county level.

Key findings

Who communicates, and how?

- Stakeholders at all levels agree that key messaging through local chiefs and assistant chiefs, including at public barazas, is the most effective way of transmitting information to communities.
- The role of village elders in passing along information is frequently mentioned locally, these being the most localised community representatives through whom the chiefs operate.
- Trust is a common theme. Stakeholders who have built a relationship trust the message more. Examples are pay agents who praise the assistance of an Equity Bank officer and recipients who most readily believe information coming from their chief or from pay agents who live locally.
- The perceived value of radio varies. County- and national-level officials see radio as an important mode of message transmission, particularly for nomadic communities. Yet many recipients and chiefs that we interviewed do not have radio coverage. Those who do hear the radio spots find them informative.
- New methods that the HSNP is considering for conveying messages include the provision of a toll-free number and/or a recording device at kiosks that give key HSNP messages in different languages. Other suggestions from the field include participatory theatre.

Perceptions of key messages

- The most often cited breakage in messaging is around *emergency payments*: targeting, the Vegetation Condition Index (VCI), pay dates and amounts. Factors for this communication gap include delays in getting recipients lists to remote areas, and slow communication about the dates of emergency payment, which do not follow a set pattern.

- Other key messages that are not well understood deal with the process of replacements and how people can be registered for the HSNP and have cards but receive no benefits.
- The PILU notes that communication on pay dates has since been resolved and indicates that in future it will involve others who can better explain the more technical issues around the VCI.
- The most commonly cited reasons for miscommunication at community level are the challenge of translating complex concepts into local languages and low literacy, including of rights committees.

Communication with HSNP recipients

How recipients learn about the HSNP

HSNP recipients get programme information from many sources, reflecting the dynamic way that information travels in local communities. Across counties, general information on where and when to collect payments comes from the chief, rights committee or pay agent and spreads via word of mouth. Most respondents do not have to travel far to find information. At venues such as churches, mosques and markets recipients share what they know. A few individuals say they make an extra effort to communicate information to the elderly and the ill who are more isolated.

Recipients, and nearly all programme staff, generally agree that the best way to receive information is via a public baraza or through the chief. Others suggested informing the pay agents who can then spread word. For more complicated messages, the NDMA officer generally calls the chief to schedule a baraza and then comes in person to deliver the message. Information is often particularly trusted when delivered by someone closely linked with the community. For instance, in Mandera North one recipient most trusted the pay agent with whom they dealt regularly and who is continuously present. In Turkana North, respondents tended to feel that the chief was the best source of information because he could explain things simply in the local language. The theme of local translation and simple messages is revisited by many stakeholders.

To pass key messages to pastoral communities, several programme officers, chiefs and rights committee members say they focus on the local water points, asking those who stop to pass on the message. Rights committee members also mentioned markets where the herders bring in milk for sale as a good place to relay information.

Key messaging ... Do recipients know what they don't know?

Knowledge on regular communications is being internalised. Recipients are also appreciating and acting on new information when they learn it:

We were told to count two months and then check with the agent if the money is already in the card, so I know the routine. (Recipient, Marsabit)

There is [a] time these rights committee told us that you can withdraw money anywhere, so I once went to Marsabit and tried my card and I actually withdrew money. It is nice that way, now we don't have to depend on one agent. (Recipient, Marsabit)

Messages that cause the most confusion are around: (1) explaining emergency payments with the two groups and why they receive different amounts, (2) the rules around replacements, and (3) why some people have cards but are not being paid. An example of a typical miscommunication is:

When we use a person to pass information let's say to a beneficiary who is away grazing, the information passed might not be accurate, like I remember, there was a time information spread out that Care is doing another registration and people came back and started enquiring only to realise that those who had issues with their smart card were the only people required for the problem to be rectified. (Rights committee member, Marsabit)

Recipients appeared less concerned than other stakeholders about confusion over emergency payments, but this may be because the recipients we interviewed were all in Group 1, receiving a regular payment. The people we spoke with in Wajir had clearly been visited by an NDMA officer who spoke of the difference between Group 1 and Group 2 recipients and the amount each group was to receive. Several respondents in Marsabit and Turkana had heard a radio programme that discussed the emergency payment as well as recipient rights and how to use the payment:

Yes, I heard about financial literacy—how to use the money. The payments of emergency and when they get that payment—they only get it during a drought. (Recipient, Turkana)

Nonetheless, pay agents, rights committee members and chiefs observed that communities often struggled with the difference between Group 1 and 2 and related payment dates and amounts. Group 2 households are often confused as to whether and when they can get money from the pay agent. The pay agents themselves are not always aware of the distinction between the groups:

Beneficiaries [...] come to us day in, day out, but they do not have cash in their account ever. We don't know how to help them. I wonder why they are not helped out by whoever is concerned. (Pay agent, Wajir)

Pay agents indicated that NDMA officers were responsible for communicating more complex topics related to emergency payments. One recommended a community discussion of the VCI as people did not understand why the index failed to pick up their drought.

As for the other problematic key messages of replacements and account activation, in Mandera, the programme officer spent a good deal of time explaining why, despite being registered, recipients must get a national ID card to receive the benefit.

Implementers' perceptions of communicating to recipients

Until recently HelpAge and its partners provided key messages for the entire programme. In the last quarter of 2015 the NDMA and the government structures at local level agreed to take over messaging on awareness about the programme components, as per the revised 'field communication model', while HelpAge focuses on complaints and advocacy messages. HelpAge reports that it has begun to educate local chiefs on issues of advocacy.

Overall, the local chiefs and rights committee members interviewed believe they have a good grasp of the messages they pass to communities, in particular the simple messages about pay dates and locations. Chiefs report that they receive communications via phone or text and in turn communicate them orally to the community, mostly via public barazas. In these conversations, chiefs often refer to village elders as key messengers, since the chief covers a large area while the village elders serve a single community and are the regular channel through which the chief cascades any information to the most local level. Pay agents across all counties, too, pass on information on pay dates, amounts, and—in the case of mobile agents—where they will be paying.

Given the importance for the programme of education about balance enquiries—both pay agents communicating account balances and recipients requesting them—the perspective provided by one pay agent is insightful. He noted that pay agents should not be expected to inform every recipient about how to check their balance and determine a withdrawal amount as it takes time which can create even longer queues. The message about balance enquiries may therefore need to be spread by programme implementers other than the pay agents, if they do not have the incentive to reveal it.

Not surprisingly, agents indicated that recipients who are educated and who live near the pay points, attending public barazas regularly, are the best informed. Some main challenges in conveying messages to recipients, from the perspective of the implementing partners, are:

- Messages often get confused in translation. A common challenge expressed by programme staff, Equity Bank officers, rights committee members and chiefs is that of translating complex English ideas into the local language.
- Misunderstandings often result from the cascading of information down to elders and rights committee members. Many of the latter are not literate, and they may be given a compressed timeline to deliver messages. In Wajir North and in Laisamis, Marsabit county, a few respondents noted that some chiefs covering remote rural areas had to rely on rights committee members or village elders to communicate programme information to the communities that were hardest to reach. Others reported that key elders and rights committee members who lived far away might not attend barazas. Several chiefs recommended the provision of motorbikes to go out the communities to ease their access.

Recipients' experiences of communicating to the programme

Knowledge on where to register a complaint or address a query varies by issue, as is intended. Most recipients said they would report general complaints to a rights committee member or the chief. However, with regards to issues related to their bank cards or account the most common responses were pay agents and Equity Bank branch. Recipient responses to this question are consistent with the responses from the first three rounds of operational monitoring reports where the most frequently cited sources for registering a complaint or feedback were a rights committee member, local administration, Equity Bank or pay agent.

Experiences of communication between programme implementers

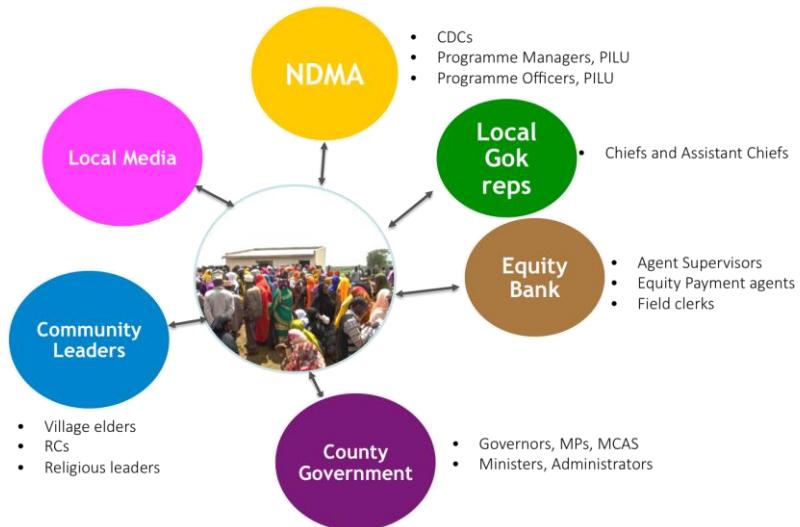
The main stakeholders who convey messages about HSNP locally are presented in Figure 1. We summarise here the views of some of these partners on their communication with one another.

Communication channels follow a regular pattern across the four counties. From the PILU most information is communicated via email to the county drought coordinators and HSNP programme managers who in turn forward the information, mostly via email and phone, to the HSNP programme officers. It is the responsibility of the programme officers to convey information to the communities. Programme officers, if not traveling in person, call or text local chiefs and sometimes rights committee members, if they are literate and own a phone. Then the chiefs, via public barazas, and the rights committee members, via word of mouth, pass information onward to recipients. The PILU communications specialist is also responsible for sending mass text messages periodically to programme implementers where they hold a mobile phone number for them. These can be directed to specific groups of implementers (pay agents, chiefs etc.) or to specific counties as needed.

The PILU communications specialist described the following training pattern for key messages. County drought coordinators and HSNP programme managers and programme officers are brought in for training and the key messages are understood. When key messages are developed the social protection rights organisations and Equity Bank branch managers and agent supervisors may also

be invited for training if relevant. Recently, there has been training on missing households—the 'untraceables and unsolvables'—and account opening. These organisations cascade the information to the field officers; NDMA and county HSNP staff cascade it to chiefs.

Figure 1 Stakeholders communicating about HSNP in the field



Source: HSNP PILU. Note: The previous version of this model also included HelpAge, the social protection rights coordinators and their field staff. These organisations are no longer formally tasked with communication at local level.

Perceptions of county drought coordinators and HSNP staff

County programme officials feel the channels of communication work well and believe that partners share a good understanding of key messages. In Mandera and Turkana the county drought coordinator, programme manager and programme officer all report that they are aware of the HSNP communications strategy and their role within this framework. All counties report that information sharing on HSNP occurs regularly at monthly or bi-monthly meetings. Several officials mentioned the positive impact of the training workshops in Nairobi.

Many county-level respondents indicated that they already received the information they needed and did not go into further detail. In Wajir, the county drought coordinator requests more information on the complaint process; his counterpart in Mandera requests more information from Equity Bank about account activation and card distribution. In Marsabit, county officials asked for detailed information from Equity Bank on timing on the release of funds, the number of accounts credited in a cycle, account activation, lists of genuinely active agents, and more information on mobile agents.

Equity Bank and pay agents' perceptions

Equity Bank officers generally pass information upwards about payments such as account activation and opening, card distribution and case management (mop-ups, replacements or agent malpractice). They feel that they communicate quite effectively with partners. Their communications with the Nairobi office and NDMA are done by email, phone, and through meetings.

The flow of information down to communities tends to run from the head office to branch managers to supervisors and other programme officers who in turn communicate with agents in the field. Equity Bank officers are the main source of information on HSNP for pay agents in all counties, and mostly use phone or text. Messages concern pay dates and amounts. Agents appreciate the regular communication, citing its importance for planning payments and ensuring they have cash on hand.

Yes, the information is enough because I get it a few days in advance. I am able to plan and go to the bank and get money and I can also tell people when I will make payments in a particular area and I can also communicate to the people in the bush at the water point so as to also tell the rest in the bush. (Pay agent, Mandera)

Agents agreed that phone / text was the preferred communication method along with information passed from chiefs via barazas. Two agents in Wajir North also report receiving information via posters and brochures that chiefs post in a central location. A strong relationship between stakeholders helps with communication. For instance, in Laisamis, Marsabit county, all pay agents interviewed spoke of a very good relationship with their Equity Bank officer who is available both in phone and person to work through challenges with machines, account activation, and even questions about Group 1 and 2 recipients.

Regarding key messages, most agents claimed that the basics of pay dates and amounts were well understood among agents and local administration. However, pay agents in all counties requested clarity on emergency payments—when they were to be released, to whom, and what amounts. Reflections on this communication gap by other stakeholders point to several issues: the compressed timing where recipient lists did not make it to remote areas prior to the pay date; slow communication between Equity Bank and the social protection rights organisations about the pay dates, and the challenges with translation of complex messages.

When asked about additional information they would like to receive, responses related mostly to unresolved specific issues. For instance, one pay agent in Wajir North requested an update on rumours about people waiting for a lump sum payment.

HelpAge and social protection rights coordinators

When messages from the PILU are directed down to the social protection rights coordinators and their assistants, these in turn communicate the information to field officers who travel to communities to share information with rights committee members. In the past the type of information received has included updates on account opening, pay points, Group 1 and Group 2 recipients, issues of agent malpractice, and updates on complaints. Nowadays this line of communication tends to be used for messages that are destined for the rights committee members themselves, rather than to convey messages onwards to the beneficiaries.

Overall, HelpAge believes communications of key messages at the national and county levels work well owing to regular meetings between social protection rights officers and NDMA. However, those interviewed noted some specific breakages. These included the commonly cited general avoidance of messages addressing targeting, and debates over the VCI. They also highlighted some practical communication glitches such as the extended time it took to produce some radio messaging owing to contractual issues between HelpAge and the radio stations; and a few instances where the HelpAge programme manager was not copied on a PILU message requesting social protection rights coordinators to conduct that impacted local budgets and work plans, causing some confusion.

Rights committee members' perceptions

Rights committees' roles are changing. Members no longer have formal responsibility for conveying programme information. Nonetheless, respondents in several counties report communicating directly with the social protection rights organisations, HelpAge, RACIDA, PISP and DPA, and with programme officers about their roles and the rights of recipients. Rights committee members argue that they understand most messages but it has been difficult or uncomfortable to explain certain things to the community, such as why some people get money and others do not. Sometimes the problem is a matter of recognition: in Mandera North, for instance, one rights committee member

complained that the community did not know them or their role. Another challenge is their limited authority. Several respondents report not hearing the resolution of complaints they have passed on. There remains a feeling that rights committees are not well respected, as one member in Loima, Turkana, described the relationship with the NDMA:

They don't value us as pillars of the community; NDMA is not involving us in communication. They bypass us and go directly to the chief. When we do updates they don't respond to us. [...] HelpAge has never given us key information to forward to beneficiaries, just that every one should get the correct money. (Rights committee member, Turkana)

Communications to county and national government

Briefing notes with attached key messages are prepared for governors, members of parliament, members of the county administration and some county ministers on emergency payments (approach, budget allocation). These are sent by email and county drought coordinators also present them to the steering group. At the national level a presentation is done at the Pastoral Parliamentary Group attended by parliamentarians, and to donors.

Can phones, radio and other technology help?

Enthusiasm for communicating HSNP information to communities via radio is mixed and depends on signal coverage. When recipients were asked directly about the use of radio, they were mostly positive but somewhat sceptical. They generally agreed that information on the radio can be good when in the local language. However, most respondents did not have a reliable signal or did not own a radio. In Wajir North all chiefs and pay agents that we interviewed reported that radio coverage was poor or absent and therefore not useful as a means of communication:

This part of the county is like dead. No radio, no telephone network. You have to walk to hilltops to search for network. (Respondent, Wajir North).

In Mandera North, Laisamis (Marsabit) and to a lesser extent Loima (Turkana), some chiefs, rights committee members and pay agents that we interviewed had heard, or knew of someone who heard, an HSNP message on the radio. HSNP and NDMA staff in Turkana, Wajir and Mandera report having used radio for communicating messages, and a few of the social protection rights organisations feel that radio offers a way of communicating with nomadic households, though the reflections of other respondents suggest this medium may not have the desired reach.

Where a mobile network signal is available, phones are considered to be valuable for exchanging information between programme partners, though our key informants did mention its limitations for reaching rural communities given limited literacy levels. Only three HSNP recipients suggested messaging via phone. In Wajir and Mandera the county drought coordinators mentioned the NDMA messaging system which uses text messages to alert staff and chiefs of important communications. Most chiefs spoke of the value of texting. In Marsabit and Mandera, Equity Bank officers mentioned the creation of a WhatsApp group where they shared information with all partners.

Suggestions from respondents on improving communications

Respondents, especially the HelpAge programme manager in Nairobi, offered several suggestions as to how to improve communications with recipients. In the light of the above observations about limited communications infrastructure some may be relevant only to better connected locations:

- Contact the community centres that are 'one-stop shops' for public information, the 'huduma centres', to reach literate people who can pass messages on
- Use multi-media clips / animations to disseminate HSNP information at public barazas
- Allow longer question-and-answer periods at the barazas
- Use a toll-free number or mass audible text service
- Add radio slots that include a question-and-answer period where people can call with questions
- Use participatory theatre to train communities to advocate about recipient rights
- Have a taped message in the town that plays a recording in the local language and repeats on request. The HSNP Communications officer confirmed that this type of voice messaging service in a local language would be piloted in June 2016 where an information kiosk at the sublocation level would play with key HSNP messages.
- Expand use of social media, giving the example of the Turkana County Professionals on Facebook as a space for dialogue, maybe adding the HSNP link to this and other similar sites.

Research methods

The research team conducted 59 interviews with stakeholders at all levels between 5 and 8 January 2016 (Table 1). Interviews at or below the subcounty level

Table 1 Number of interviews

Stakeholder	Turkana	Marsabit	Wajir	Mandera	Nairobi
National level					
PILU communications specialist					1
Equity Bank					1
HelpAge					1
County level					
County Drought Coordinator	-	1	1	1	
HSNP Programme Manager	1	1	1	1	
Equity Bank	1	1	1	1	
Social Protection Rights organisation	3	-	1	1	
Subcounty / local level					
HSNP Programme Officer	1	1	1	1	
Rights committee members	3	3	3	3	
Pay agents	3	3	3	3	
Recipients	3	3	3	3	
Total interviews	15	13	14	14	3

Source: OPM / RGA. Note: Interviews are intended to offer a light snapshot of the areas in which they were conducted. Each special theme is explored in four days. Interviews at the subcounty level or in local communities are undertaken in the same subcounties as the routine payment monitoring, ie. one subcounty per county. For January 2016 these were Loima (Turkana), Laisamis (Marsabit), Wajir North and Mandera North. Interviews for this briefing note, especially at the community level such as with recipients or rights committee members, are not intended to be statistically representative of the entire programme area.

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