GBV data collection and sharing

Kristy Crabtree

While information can attest to the severity of need and call people to action, it can also be collected, stored and shared in a way that violates safety and ethical standards for data collection. These challenges are particularly acute when it involves survivors of gender-based violence. Not only is survivor consent often missing in the data collection process but identifying details about the survivor and service provider are also often shared.

To meet the demand for data while protecting survivors and service providers, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), UNFPA and UNHCR collaborated to create a data management system that would enable service providers to safely and ethically collect, store, analyse and share data on reported incidents of gender-based violence. This inter-agency initiative is known as the Gender Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS). With the help of a consent form, the system emphasises survivors' control of their information beginning with the initial client meeting.

The GBVIMS also provides a mechanism for service providers to share compiled data in a safe and ethical manner through the development of an information sharing protocol that clarifies what data will be shared, with whom, and for what purpose.

Taking into consideration the resources available in humanitarian settings, the GBVIMS was developed to employ simple, long-existing technology. By using Excel as the hub of the system, instead of an elaborate database, the technology can be more easily utilised in the field, in particular in settings where there is infrequent access to the internet and computer skills may be basic. Utilising simple resources such as Excel ensures the system's sustainability even with staff turnover. Furthermore, to accommodate the need that some offices have to transfer files between locations, IRC developed a carbon copy data intake form that allows

the safe transfer of paper files, removing all identifying information but still allowing for data entry.

The challenge ahead is to ensure the systematic uptake of the GBVIMS that will allow the humanitarian community to establish new norms for client protection and generate valuable information.

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Disabled persons database after Pakistan floods

Niaz Ullah Khan

During the rescue and rehabilitation phases following the 2010 Pakistan floods, Sightsavers and its partners knew that certain groups of marginalised people, such as people with disabilities and older persons,[1] would be at greater risk of neglect. In response to this, Sightsavers supported one of its partner organisations, STEP (a disabled persons' organisation), to establish the Information Resource Center on Disability (IRCD) as a point for information sharing and dissemination for the two districts of Nowshera and Charsaddah.

This comprises a computerised database which is connected to STEP's online web portal and linked with the central crisis centre of the Red Crescent Society of Pakistan. The database includes the national identity card number of every person with a disability on the database and can also provide a detailed

STEP team members collect information from affected PWDs.

profile, including the nature of their disability and their location, of the person and his or her family if required. The use of this database has proved very helpful for identification of people with disabilities and in providing a coordinated service for disseminating information to these people and their families regarding food distribution systems, medical outreach services, distribution of cash and food grants, cash-for-work programmes suitable for people with disabilities and so on.

STEP used the information received through the IRCD to provide technical advice to the WASH and Shelter clusters in terms of making their services more accessible for all – in particular for people with disabilities and older persons.

In the future, STEP and Sightsavers will be able to utilise the IRCD as a resource centre for building the capacities of these people with disabilities, such as getting them organised in the form of Displaced Persons' Organisations, making them aware of different career and educational opportunities and getting them connected with other relevant like-minded organisations working for promoting their rights. The ICRD is already enabling marginalised and vulnerable groups who cannot raise their voice during the aftermath of natural disasters and emergencies to be heard.

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1. See FMR 35 on 'Disability and displacement' at www.fmreview.org/disability/

From the local community in Colombia into cyberspace

Juan David Gómez-Quintero

New technologies of communication allow new types of action and partnership between social movements in Colombia and international NGOs, who support them in claiming their rights or in denouncing abuses. International cooperation and advocacy have allowed the suffering of victims

to be seen by the outside world and have led to justice being done and reparations being made.

The growth of globalised means of communication allows the global accompaniment of communities affected by violence. Peasant communities displaced by violence, for example, are enabled to become visible outside, while they have always been rendered invisible within their state borders. Information and communications technology has turned the local into the global.

The ability to take collective action without being physically present in the same place has transformed solidarity, assistance and cooperation programmes, through blogs, online campaigns, etc. Online records of abuses of rights, or of the numbers of people displaced by conflict, are an extremely valuable resource. But information technology does not automatically give visibility to excluded groups – it also requires the existence of social networks and the ability to create the technical infrastructure for organisations to be able to participate in the virtual spaces.

Grass-roots organisations in remote areas of Colombia, such as in Chocó in western Colombia (home to a large Afro-Colombian population), have created and strengthened means of communication with Spanish counterparts. Organisations in Spain then forward reports of abuses to the appropriate authorities of both governments. This kind of networking is proving useful in preventing or denouncing human rights violations – although one consequence of their success is that armed actors have begun to target those means of communication that connect local organisations and communities with the outside world.

"In Pereira, the riot police weren't letting people enter [the town], they were shooting and threatening women and children, one person was killed… So I phoned the Belgian Embassy, the Spanish Embassy, all the NGOs in Zaragoza that I knew, saying that people were being attacked… and please would they protest, please would they contact the Provincial Governor.

The NGOs and Embassies made phone calls, wrote messages, sent reports to the Governor. The fact that it was people from the international community contacting him had a real impact on the Governor…" (Spanish aid worker)

According to both Spanish and Colombian NGOs, the support of European activist NGOs has a positive effect for vulnerable communities, and a deep impact on both civil and military authorities in Colombia. This is a political strategy to make visible and denounce in the outside world violations of human rights, particularly where there is armed conflict. The virtual spaces within which this happens are flexible, adaptable and immediate across local, national and global spaces.

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Mobile phones used for public health surveillance

Kebede Deribe

In Darfur, the Ministry of Health, WHO and partners have developed a mobile phone-based infectious disease surveillance system designed for use where resources and facilities may be limited. Traditional pen-and-paper methods of disease reporting are not efficient or practical in complex emergencies in developing countries. Instead, reporting formats can be provided on mobile phones, making it easy for health providers to enter data and send reports. Such a system will help reduce errors, decrease the time used in reporting and facilitate compliance with reporting schedules.

An early warning system has been established in 103 health facilities across South Darfur with over ten diseases to be reported on a weekly basis and four diseases reportable on a daily basis. The health facilities were equipped with mobile phones; after having been briefed on the use of short text messages, the health providers send a short daily text

message to the focal points, including zero reports.

There are some challenges. Despite recent improvements, not all areas have mobile network coverage, resulting in an incomplete picture of the health situation. However, combining the mobile phone service with a paper-based reporting system in areas where there is no network access gave good coverage. The use of satellite phones in areas off the network would help to strengthen the system further. Even in areas where the network is working, there is a shortage of electricity supply to recharge the batteries; future interventions should consider the use of mobile phones with a silicon solar panel embedded into the shell of the phone.

Whenever possible mobile phones with geographic information system (GIS) capacity should be used. The reporting system can be programmed to automatically generate coordinated data for each text message, which could help to track the disease reported with more specified locations.

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Community Technology Access project

Daniela Ionita

In today's world, 'protection' cannot be complete without access to technology. We must use new tools and technologies to empower refugees, given the importance of the internet, social media and distance learning. In recognition of this, UNHCR is striving to ensure that access to technology – primarily, the internet, mobile phones and solar lights – is strongly incorporated into its protection and operations model.

Since 2010 UNHCR has opened 31 Community Technology Access (CTA) centres for refugees and IDPs both in urban areas and in remote field locations in 13 countries in Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. Some 10 additional centres will

Community Technology Access (CTA) programme, Georgia.

UNHCR/S Mskeradze

open later in 2011, including in Sudan, Nepal, Kenya, India, Malaysia, Republic of Moldova and Costa Rica. CTAs provide access to the internet even in the remotest settings to connect communities, families and individuals, to provide distance learning and livelihoods opportunities and to raise awareness of rights.

In Armenia, Ramella took part in the CTA programme and has now found employment teaching basic computer skills to children at a school in the neighbouring village. In Georgia, Mari, who fled her home in South Ossetia in 2008, enrolled in a CTA course: "I was an accountant but not IT-literate and couldn't find a job. Now I have a job as a cashier."

In Kiziba camp in Rwanda, some 145 teachers are learning basic computer skills at the centre during school holidays. And in Kenya's Kakuma camp, Somali refugee Suad uses the computers in Kakuma's CTA to "research specific problems affecting my immediate community in order to work on a plan to solve the problem – for example conducting research on why the rate of the girls' enrolment in schools is very low in our community." Suad also follows courses in an American university via the internet.

As with other projects, CTAs may be affected by operational problems such as limited financial resources or restrictive state policies (for example, limited or lack of access to internet and new technologies) but they can at least help remove geographical restrictions and barriers to education, job creation and family reunification.

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Android phones for mosquito net surveys

Sarah Hoibak and Marian Schilperoord

UNHCR has been investigating collecting data using smartphone technology for many areas of its operations such as site assessments and refugee profiling. In 2010 it carried out a pilot to assess the advantages and disadvantages – including feasibility, cost, time and human resources – of using mobile phones compared to existing paper-based data collection for a mosquito net coverage survey in Dadaab in Kenya.

The available applications ('apps') for Android phones[1] allow the collection of a variety of data types: audio, GPS, image, video and barcode. Uploading and saving the data records were done easily and the data collected were validated and saved in a convertible format that could be analysed in standard statistical software – epiinfo, STATA, SPSS. The phone offered additional features for validation of data that are not found in paper surveys: a) the surveys recorded the time of data entry; b) households visited were tagged with GPS coordinates; and c) photos of mosquito nets showed that a net was actually present.

The time to complete the data collection was significantly reduced using the phones and the phone technology eliminated the additional days required for data entry, data cleaning and shipment of data sets. With a faster implementation of the survey and the elimination of data entry, the phone method is less reliant on human resources, though a direct comparison of the quality of the data by comparing paper and mobile technology at the same household would be worth making.

Ifo camp, Dadaab, Kenya.

UNHCR/S Hoibak

The cost comparison – not including the costs involved in or preparation – was not unfavourable. Start up costs for surveys were US$3,578 for paper and $1,363 plus $3,928 for purchase of the phones for Android. Assuming that all items for the paper-based survey would need to be procured again for a second round but not the phones, this would show an overall combined cost savings in two rounds of surveys of $501 for the Android phones over paper surveys. For every subsequent survey the cost savings for smartphone use would increase, although their lifespan is assumed to be approximately 18 months of field use before they require replacement. It is also important to consider and budget for spare parts and repairs.

There was overwhelming support for the use of the mobile phones in Dadaab, from both the interviewers and the UNHCR staff, for providing timely data to make decisions with. Besides the other advantages, interviewers found the use of phones less cumbersome than paper surveys and less prone to losing data, and the format helped them to follow the questions in order.

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1. An open source mobile smartphone technology.

Refugees enjoy freedom to surf

Angella Nabwowe-Kasule

The Refugee Law Project (RLP) in Uganda has set up an internet café to enable refugees in Uganda to link up with family and friends back home and those resettled to other countries, to help them to keep in touch with conditions in their countries of origin, as well as to allow free access to the world-wide web more generally.

Made possible through the generosity of friends of the RLP, the project was launched in July 2009 and is housed in the RLP's Information Centre. The café is open 9am-5pm Monday-Friday. It works on a 'first come, first served' basis to avoid argument, and

each user is allowed a maximum of 40 minutes on a computer.

The café has seen ever increasing usage, with refugees coming to prepare all kinds of documents, type application letters and their curriculum vitae, and read news online about their countries of origin. On average, 25 clients use the free internet access point daily. As female clients are unfortunately still scarce, with an average of four women a week, efforts are being made to encourage more women to use the facility.

Future plans for the café include a dedicated space (separate from the Information Centre), the provision of short courses in basic use of the internet, and linking to the Refugees United web-based programme designed to help refugees locate missing or lost relatives through the internet.[1]

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1. See article by Galya Ruffer pp20-1.

Satellite phones help rescue of refugees

Virginia Signorini

The first phone call came at 04.30 in the morning one day in 2006. It was summer – usually the most intensive period of migrants' landings on the Italian coasts. They were in trouble out at sea in the Mediterranean and were calling for help. The Eritrean woman who received the call, and who had migrated to Italy some years before, had no idea how these people could have got her phone number. Despite the possibility of it being considered as aiding and abetting illegal immigration, she immediately called the local police and informed

them about what was happening. They contacted the coastguards who then ensured that the boat reached safety on the island of Lampedusa. After this event she kept on receiving phone calls from migrants at sea and the coastguards always responded. The last time she was contacted for help was in November 2009 but this time the boat never arrived.

Mussie Zerai, an Eritrean priest living in Rome, has received similar phone calls. The migrants contacting him were initially Ethiopians and Eritreans living in Italy but from 2002 he started receiving phone calls directly from the boats crossing the sea. Despite telephones generally not being trusted for confidential communication by Eritreans, they are fundamental for the Eritrean diaspora in moments of emergency. In late 2010 Mussie Zerai started receiving calls from refugees living in Europe whose migrating family members had been kidnapped in the Sinai area and who were being asked for up to US$8,000 dollars per person in ransom. Those being blackmailed gave him their relatives' phone numbers and he was able to talk directly to the kidnapped migrants. Armed with their first-hand accounts, Father Mussie has not only been supporting the relatives but has also been campaigning through his organisation, Habeshia Agency (http://habeshia.blogspot.com) to get the European Union and other organisations to create 'humanitarian corridors' and increase provision of resettlement to help avoid more refugees taking such risks.

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Three people died on this boat, which ran aground on Lampedusa after the journey from Libya. May 2011.

The networking Tibetan diaspora

Emma Tobin

Since the internet first came to Dharamsala – capital of the Tibetan exile community in India – in the late 1990s, Tibetan exiles have forged an active online community, with Tibetan 'netizens' hailing from around the world. In a period of just over ten years, Tibetan exiles have created a heavily-used network of discussion boards, chat rooms, blogs and more. As a result, Tibetans in Australia stay informed on Tibetan government-in-exile politics, people from the same village in Tibet can reconnect in Taiwan, college students in South India can chat with counterparts in New York… In essence, the Tibetan exile community online is a prime example of the growing phenomenon of what has been deemed the 'digital diaspora'.

The internet has become increasingly important in the lives of many refugees but not all diasporic networks are as well established as the Tibetans'. In many ways, the Tibetan exile digital network is both a result and an illustration of what the 150,000 Tibetan exiles have achieved in the 'real world': the maintenance of a collective community, even after fifty years of exile.

The exile community has limited contact with the six million Tibetans in Tibet, who are largely cut off from the activities of the exiled government. However, in recent years, digital technology has allowed for increased connection between the two groups. In 2008, when protests erupted all over Tibet in response to the Beijing Summer Olympics, Tibetan exile activists and journalists relied on mobile phones and the internet for information that was then distributed throughout the exile community, and the world; in periods of calm, Tibetan exiles stay connected to their families and friends via Skype and other technologies. Security risks for Tibetans in Tibet itself remain high, however, and communication is still limited.

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