Tools for Community Engagement, Feedback and Complaints Mechanisms

Tool	Description	Pros	Cons	Tips
Key informant interviews (KIIs)	• Ideally, cluster partners should interview key informants from affected communities directly. • In some situations, it may not be possible to speak directly to community members, so you may need to find alternatives sources of information, such as teachers, health care workers, community representatives, etc. • Many of these people should be interviewed in any case, as they will have a specific knowledge and perspectives about the community and its needs. • Normally, 5-10 key informants per community or region will provide enough basic information about the community's priority needs and preferences for initial assessments and planning.	• Quick way to get advice and feedback from experts and people who know the community and the specific issues of vulnerable or marginalised groups- • Can help test and validate assumptions about needs and proposed intervention strategies. • Can also provide tips on the most appropriate engagement strategies with communities. • Easy to compile and analyse data.	• Key informants may have biases and their opinions may not reflect the views or experiences of the community. • Information provided by key informants can be contradictory and difficult to validate.	• Try to ensure that the key informants are a representative cross-section of the community (women, men, different ages, etc.) • Whenever possible, interview people from the most vulnerable or often excluded groups • Keep interview times to a maximum of 20 -30 minutes to avoid over-burdening people. • Interview teams should include women and men to facilitate conversations.
Focus Group Discussions	• Focus groups are a good means to collect information about needs, priorities and concerns of the community. • Focus groups can also be used later in a response to test and validate intervention strategies and monitor the quality and effectiveness of activities. • Normally, focus group sessions should not have more than 6-10 participants, and depending	• A good way to complement other information sources on needs in the communities. • Allows aid providers to better understand the perspectives of the community and identify factors that might facilitate or impede an effective response • Can also help understand the power dynamics and relationship within a community	• Information collected is not confidential, and some participants may be reluctant to openly share sensitive information. • Limits the number of people who can be selected, so other feedback or serious complaints may not be collected. • Requires clear guidelines and trained facilitators to function	• In the early stages of the crisis, the objective should be on generating general information on needs, priorities and preferences, rather than on a specific technical issue. • The cluster should define in advance the questions and facilitation methods to ensure consistency. • Also define how data will be recorded, shared and analysed.

	on the situation, separate groups for women and men. • A small number of focus groups (not more than 2 - 6 per community or region) will likely be enough to generate quality data on needs.	• Can be adapted to focus on specific topics or interventions (nutrition, WASH, etc.) or groups in the community • Is useful in populations with low literacy	well. • May not be appropriate in some cultures in which public criticism is not acceptable, or where there are security and protection risks. • May have certain people dominating the group, diluting the value of their feedback	• Use special care when organising focus groups with children. Special techniques for creating child-friendly and safe spaces for child participation should be used.
Community meetings	• Community meetings are different than focus groups in that the size of the group is larger and not necessarily a representative cross-section of the populations. • They can be another good means to collect information about needs, priorities and concerns of the community. • Community meetings also provide an opportunity to share information with affected people about what clusters and partners plan to do, or what criteria are used to prioritise assistance.	• Useful for sharing information more widely in the community • Provides an opportunity to explain and clarify response objectives and activities, selection criteria or address rumours. • Also a good way to feedback to communities on how aid providers have adapted responses to address the community's issues and concerns. • Can also be used to mobilise communities and promote their engagement and participation in response activities.	• Risk that some people may dominate the group and limit the participation of other group members. • Can become a source of conflict if there are disagreements on project selection criteria or dissatisfaction with quality of assistance. • May raise issues beyond the scope of the ability of the cluster or the overall response to address, or unrealistic expectations.	• Important for clusters to agree on a common approach and key messages to avoid misinformation and misunderstanding • Also important to track and report back on issues raised by communities, and to manage expectations or rumours, etc. • Cluster should also define to report and use the data from these meetings.
Community Management Committees or similar approaches to participation	• Community committees can be an excellent way to ensure affected people have a voice and can participate in decision-making processes. • Community committees can provide valuable inputs on the design of response activities, monitor the quality of responses, and in many cases, take direct responsibility for management of resources, in line with the Grand Bargain	• Gives communities a greater sense of ownership and empowerment in the response. • Is a good way to ensure activities are relevant and appropriate for the community and the context? • Supports more equitable relationships and trust between communities and aid providers. • Can be used in all phases of	• There is a risk that composition of a committee can reinforce or challenge existing social and power dynamics in a community. • Aid providers may be reluctant to cede power, resources and decision-making to communities. • Committee structures and decision-making responsibilities may not be familiar or appropriate in	• Clusters should define the most appropriate level and types of participation are best suited to the response and context. • Having clear objectives and roles and responsibilities linked to project objectives will help committee's function more effectively. • Be careful to avoid creating committees without any meaningful voice in decision-making - this undermines trust

	participation and localisation commitments. • Committees can also be a good means to support a transition to early recovery and development as well as strengthen and support local capacities.	the response and for most types of interventions.	some cultures and contexts.	and local capacities. • Participatory management of aid resources may be unfamiliar to both communities and aid providers - take time to build familiarity and capacities to make it work, and allow for mistakes.
Household surveys	• Many clusters use household surveys for needs assessments to collect information on needs and establish a baseline for response planning. • These surveys can provide a comprehensive set of data on specific needs from a technical perspective (for example, people in need in WASH). • Provides an opportunity to incorporate AAP-related questions	• Larger sample sizes can provide more statistically reliable data from the affected population • Data can be processed relatively quickly and efficiently • Can be easily adapted to include more qualitative questions to complement technical questions	• Household surveys can be very costly and time and labour intensive • Surveys are often very long and can over-burden communities • Poor survey design and data collection can bias results and reduce confidence and reliability. • Surveys often neglects open-ended questions to understand the reasons behind responses or identify other issues	• Cluster should consider including a set of 4-6 core qualitative questions to be included in all surveys to assess people's perceived needs and priorities. • Carefully assess the time and resources needed for full-scale surveys compared to the value of the data collected. There may be more cost-effective ways to get equally reliable data. • Test and validate survey designs with communities in advance to avoid errors or potential biases.
Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Surveys (KAPS)	• Some clusters use KAP surveys to try to understand the behaviours of affected people, particularly around healthy behaviours or life-saving information. • KAP surveys can be helpful to establish a baseline to assess if interventions have contributed to changes in behaviours of practices. • Usually uses smaller sample sizes that household or other surveys, making it easier to administer.	• Helps collect qualitative data that can complement and explain quantitative data. • Can be useful to track outcome level changes in attitudes or behaviours, and the contribution of project activities to those changes. • Can be easily adapted to most sectors and programming areas, with many examples from the development sector.	• Requires specialised knowledge to design a good survey questionnaire. • Aid providers may have pre-determined ideas of what practices to change that may be contrary to what is appropriate in certain contexts and cultures. • Short time frame of many emergency projects makes it harder to track and measure long-term changes in knowledge, attitudes or practices.	• Clusters should carefully define the purpose of a KAP survey, and the types of knowledge, attitudes or practices that they want to change. • Test and validate survey designs with communities in advance to avoid errors or potential biases. • Also define the most appropriate means of information sharing and communications channels to ensure behaviour change messages are clear, understandable, accessible

				and relevant for target audiences.
Satisfaction Surveys	• Many clusters are using regular perception and satisfaction surveys to assess needs, monitor trends and satisfaction with the quality of responses. • Normally, these are very short surveys with a maximum of 10 questions, repeated over regular intervals (for example, every 1-3 months) to track trends. • The sample size can be relatively small compared to household surveys.	• Provides a good overview of how overall aid efforts are going, and can be used to shape operational and strategic decision-making. • Can be easily adapted to support all phases of the response, and sectors and programming areas, • Can be complemented with other methods like surveys of frontline aid workers, key informant interviews, focus groups to have a good understanding of the effectiveness of the response from the perspective of affected people. • Regular monitoring allows for more rapid course correction and adaptation of responses.	• Can require specialised support to design and implement. • Decision-makers are often not prepared to use satisfaction data to orient intervention strategies. • Aid providers are often reluctant to accept criticisms or low levels of satisfaction.	• Clusters should decide in advance the specific elements of quality and satisfaction they want to measure (timeliness, consistency, protection, etc. • Questions should be limited in number and repeated frequently to avoid response bias and fatigue and track changes over time. • Also important to clarify how satisfaction data will feed into and be used in decision-making - and to feedback to communities on corrective actions taken.
Barrier Analysis	• This is a relatively simple methodology to understand why or why not certain groups in a population have adopted good practices. • Normally, this is used to better orient and/or adapt behaviour change activities (for example, health promotion), but it can also be applied to understand why or why not response activities are successful in a community. • Frequently used in food security and nutrition programmes, but equally relevant for other sectors.	• This method only requires key informant interviews and focus groups with up to 90 community members to generate valid and reliable information. • The information collected can provide valuable insights on the social, economic, political or cultural barriers or incentives to certain practices and behaviours. • This can help design and validate more appropriate and effective response strategies. • Can be a very useful complement to other consultation tools and methods, and	• The method is not as well known in the humanitarian sector and requires some training and support to implement correctly. • Aid providers may be reluctant to adapt existing pre-defined approaches to address the specific barriers faced by certain groups in the population.	• Cluster should analyse in advance the specific behaviours or practices that they want to change, as well as specific groups in the community that may face barriers to adopting them.

SMS, U-report and other mobile phone tools	• More and more cluster partners are using mobile phones and other IT tools to collect and gather information from communities. • Like household surveys this can be an important way to collect information on needs and establish a baseline for response planning. • Can also be used to share life-saving information rapidly and widely in a population. • Can use both closed and open-ended questions to get feedback on a variety of issues, such as monitoring if planned activities have taken place, or the satisfaction with the quality of assistance.	• Normally not expensive to develop and implement, with lots of tools and experience to draw on. • Can collect large data sets with a fair degree of confidentiality. • Quick means to gather information and if used frequently to track and monitor responses. • Can often include geo-tagging to identify problems in specific regions or communities. • Questions or content can be adapted to track responses type, quality, satisfaction, or other issues. • Relatively easy to use with access to a mobile phone. • Can be more accessible for people in remote areas or where access is restricted.	• Highly dependent on access to mobile phones, power sources, networks, etc. and may not be appropriate for some contexts. • Poor design and implementation may lead to response biases and unreliable data. • Often difficult to check and validate data, particularly in areas with restricted access. • Multiple partners or clusters using different approaches can limit the effectiveness of the approach and create confusion. • Often more difficult to capture more sensitive or nuanced information about a response.	• Cluster should define a common approach and questions and coordinate with other clusters to avoid confusion. • Using a common IT database or platform to collect and analyse data can be very cost-effective and provide analysis to inform decision-making.
Telephone Hotlines	• Cluster partners frequently use hotlines as part of their complaints and feedback mechanisms. • There is growing experience using a common hotline for multiple organisations, such as at the cluster or at the inter-cluster level. • Hotlines can provide a safe, confidential way to provide feedback or complaints.	• Can collect anonymous and confidential feedback. • Relatively easy and affordable to use for affected people with access to a phone and a toll-free number. • Can provide a means for people in remote areas or with restricted access to share their concerns with aid providers. • Also provides a means to capture wider information beyond the scope of a project or activity.	• Depending on complexity, can require more set-up time and in some cases can be costly. • Depends on a working phone system in the community • Requires staff to be available to answer the phone. • Calls can raise issues beyond the scope of the cluster's work or the response. • Requires a good system for classifying issues and directing them to the right person or organisation to resolve, particularly sensitive issues. • Sometimes difficult to provide individual follow-up. • Multiple hotlines by different organisations can be confusing to communities.	• Clusters should consider using a common hotline and sharing resources (including staff to operate the hotline). • A system to classify the types of calls and protocols to respond to sensitive issues needs to be in place. • Clusters should check and monitor that hotline information is clearly visible and accessible to all groups of the community, and that hotlines are functioning as intended.

			• May require several languages and dialects to attend the population. • Can be difficult to check and validate feedback or complaints.	
Help Desks	• Help desks are often set up for specific projects or activities (such as food distribution). • In most cases project staff or volunteers are available during planned activities to provide project information, explain and clarify activities, and collect feedback and complaints from community members.	• Relatively inexpensive to set up. • Can be linked to other program activities, such as distributions • Can help aid providers clarify information and find immediate solutions to problems raised by affected people. •	• Harder to collect information confidentially • Requires some training and orientation of staff, and clear protocols to deal with sensitive issues. • May be difficult for individual follow-up of issues in later visits. • Often temporary and not a permanent presence in the community. • May require staff with several languages and dialects to attend the population.	• Clusters should consider using a common hotline and sharing resources (including staff to operate the hotline). • It is often better to have help desk staff independent and not directly linked to the project activity or organisation for more trust with the community. • Clusters should define in advance how requests to help desks are classified and shared, and what follow-up actions are required at the cluster or inter-cluster level. • Also important to have clear protocols in place for collecting and responding to sensitive issues.
Social media	• Affected populations are increasingly active on social media platforms to connect with families, share information and raise issues and concerns. • Tracking social media use can help identify issues quickly, and where to focus response activities. • Aid providers can also use these platforms to share life-saving information and engage with communities.	• Social media can often reach a large number of people directly affected by a crisis, as well as others with strong connections to the population (for example, diaspora communities). • Information is often real-time and geo-tagged, allowing a more detailed analysis of where to focus responses. • Can be useful to mobilise communities, promote behaviour change, or share information.	• Like other technologies, social media may have a strong user bias, so data may be skewed or biased against those who do not use social media frequently or at all. • Both affected people and aid providers may not be familiar enough with social media to fully use its potential as a communications tool. • Often difficult to check and validate information from social media. • Potential for misuse such as	

			spreading rumours or misinformation. • Can require more specialised knowledge to set up and integrate effectively into responses.	
Community radio	• Community radio is still a widely used and trusted medium in many parts of the world. • Most often it is associated with specific community or geographic area, and is often non-commercial and volunteer run. • Community radio can be used to transmit life-saving information, two-way communications and community engagement.	• Radio is a very cost-effective means of reaching a specific population. • Existing radio stations are often trusted sources of information in the communities. • Communities can be directly involved in defining key messages, and participating in planning and producing programming. • Very adaptable to local contexts, language and dialects. • Relatively easy to set up for populations in camps or other situations. • Can be used as a space for especially vulnerable and marginalised groups to voice their experiences, concerns and aspirations. • Also a good means to validate and strengthen local knowledge and capacities. • Can use a variety of creative formats to convey messages (radio dramas, announcements, music...)	• Can require some specialised technical knowledge to set up a station where there is no existing one. • May require special licenses and approvals from governments. • Can be misused or controlled by special interests to disseminate misinformation and rumours.	• Clusters should assess affected people's most trusted communication channels before deciding to use community radio. • Defining in advance what information and key messages and linking this to programming activities is important. • Test and validate programming content in advance whenever possible, and post-transmission to continuously improve content.
Mainstream media	• National or regional television or radio stations can be a good means to share information with a large population. • Journalists can be a trusted communications channel between aid providers and communities.	• Can be relatively cost-effective if radio and TV stations contribute air time and production support. • Can be a good way to ensure clear, consistent messaging around life-saving information. • Can also be a good way to raise	• Traditional media often represents government or elite interests and not the most vulnerable groups in a society. • Media are not always a trusted source of information. • Possibility of media outlets providing inaccurate or	• Clusters should coordinate any liaisons with media outlets to ensure coherency and consistency in messaging. • Also coordinate at the inter-cluster and HCT level to prioritise messages and ensure consistency.

		awareness of issues and mobilise the general population. • Media can uncover and highlight good and poor practices in the response, or issues that require the attention of decision makers.	contradictory information. • Also a risk that negative media portrayals of the response undermine trust between all aid providers, and not only those that have made mistakes.	• Open, transparent and honest relationships with the media can help build trust and minimise negative coverage. • Have a contingency plan and protocols in place to deal with sensitive issues and deal with media.
Suggestion boxes	• Many project use suggestion boxes to gather feedback and complaints from affected people. • This can be a relatively simple way to gather feedback, but it is an impersonal and passive approach and depends on the trust and confidence of communities that feedback will be acted on.	• Are very inexpensive to set up. • Can sometimes be a more confidential means for people to express views and opinions. •	• A passive feedback mechanism, sometimes not understood or accepted in certain contexts • Sometimes difficult to ensure confidentiality, and harder to provide individual follow-up. • Requires	• Cluster should look for consistency in how suggestion boxes are used. • Also regularly monitor boxes and ensure follow-up actions are taken.

Other tools and approaches to consider:

- **Participatory videos** where affected or marginalised groups produce their own videos with the messages they want to convey
- **Community theatre** where affected people use theatre to explain their issues and concerns
- **Aid marketplaces** where aid organisations showcase their work and proposed different solutions and affected people can chose the ones they feel most appropriate.
- **Third party monitoring and verification** where an independent organisation consults with communities on how well aid providers are addressing their needs.
- **Benchmarking and shared learning exercises** where cluster partners and communities define targets and benchmarks, and conduct joint learning activities where aid providers and communities from different projects or regions share experiences and learning.