

Learning Brief

CFRM Pilot Project

Implemented by People in Need
Nepal and Georgia

January 2023

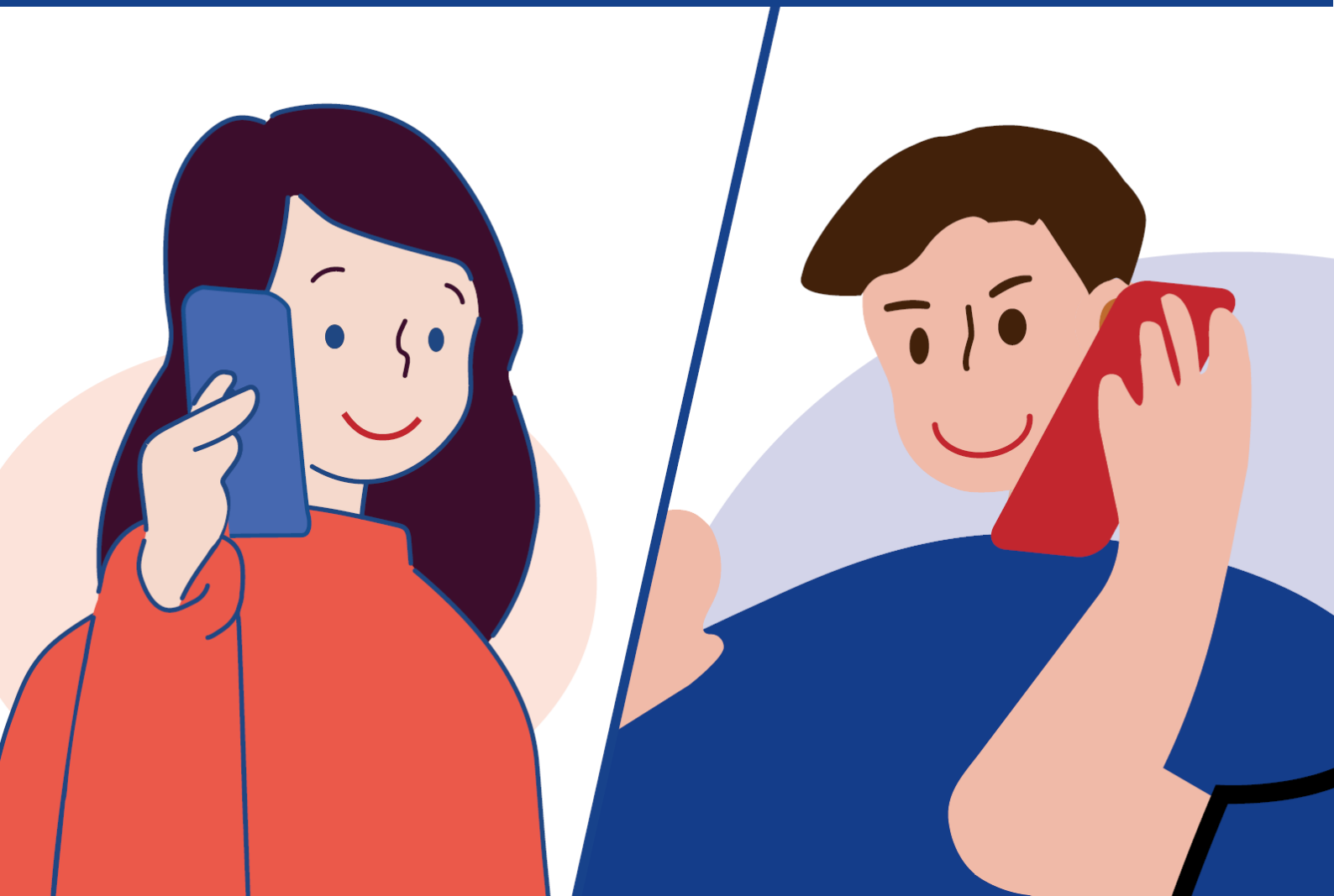


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1 Project background

In recent years, People in Need (PIN) has been strengthening its accountability processes and detailed Community Feedback and Response Mechanisms (CFRM) are now essential in all country programmes. CFRM allows project participants as well as other community members and relevant stakeholders, both local or national, to provide information about their experiences with PIN or with the wider humanitarian and development system. Receiving feedback helps PIN learn what is working and what is not working during a project. However, CFRM monitoring and consultation with CFRM focal points indicated that there are several barriers and gaps in the effective implementation of CFRM such as lack of appropriate and inclusive reporting channels, low level of awareness among stakeholders on the CFRM, cultural hesitancy to give feedback or complain, among others. In this context, PIN Nepal and PIN Georgia agreed to jointly implement a research project to explore the CFRM modalities, challenges, best practices as well as lessons learned such that findings could be used to improve the CFRM mechanism to further strengthen accountability, transparency and programme quality and services across PIN Country Programmes and Projects.

2 Brief on the Methodology

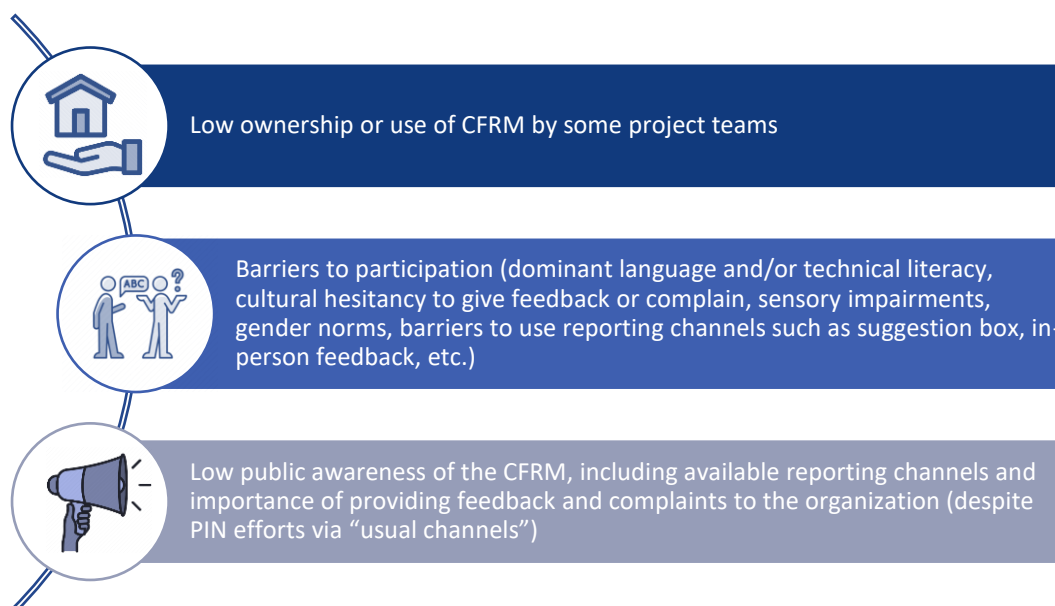
Primary and secondary data collection methods were applied in the research. It aimed at finding out the key barriers observed in the process of CFRM implementation at PIN and developing recommendations on how to mitigate them. Applying focus group discussion and in-depth interview methods, beneficiaries, partners, local governments and local (I)NGOs participated in the research in various regions of Nepal and Georgia. In addition, using desk review method, CFRM policy and other similar documents were studied to learn about PIN's and other organizations' practices.



Picture 1. Group activity during the CFRM research finding discussion with staff and Senior Management Team (SMT) in Georgia.

3 Project Design

A preliminary analysis and consultation with CFRM focal points has identified the following factors:



Communities are hesitant to report cases or provide feedback fearing negative consequences to them or towards the community. In addition, low awareness of correct CFRM channels puts PIN at risk of minor complaints and allegations being sent to headquarters and wasting the time of the investigation teams, or sent to donors. As per the CFRM policy, the communication channels are supposedly designed in consultation with communities, however the extent to which this takes place is uncertain. Yet, despite the national guidelines in most CPs, there remains a gap between policy, practice, and public engagement. Also, though there are already several feedback reporting channels established in CPs, the use of those channels is very minimum; only a few of them are being used while other channels are hardly used. For example, in Nepal CP, there are various reporting channels such as suggestion box, email, toll-free number, etc., however only toll-free number is widely used while other channels are not much used for feedback and complaints. So, the CFRM Pilot project was designed to explore the CFRM modalities used by different organizations along with best practices and barriers, etc.



Our preliminary needs assessment found that we have been focusing on the establishment of the mechanism but are less concerned about whether it is useful, effective and meeting its expected goals and objectives. Hence, the project was designed to contribute to address the problem of effective implementation of CFRM tools, approaches and system.

As the project was not typical, no theory of change or logical framework was developed for it. The project results were:

- Testing new and simplified training approaches for PIN field staff to increase understanding of CFRM theory and practice.
- Conduct consultations with community and stakeholders to identify effective communication channels for raising awareness of CFRM, and modalities for inclusive participation.

- Identify and develop new promotional channels and materials, and assess their contribution to increased CFRM awareness and participation in different contexts.
- Conduct quick assessments, including through FGD, interview or alternative playful and interactive qualitative research methods to identify and assess the barriers to using CFRM reporting channels.



Picture 2. Piloting of the CFRM training package in Nepal. Photo: Bina Bagale

4 Research Key Findings and Recommendations

According to the research findings, the following are main barriers on the way of CFRM implementation at PIN and other organizations:

- Lack of awareness about CFRM and importance of feedback in general among target community members and CSOs.
- Lack of relevant feedback communication channels.
- Lack of proper guidelines for PIN project staff to indicate their behavior in case of receiving face to face feedback.
- The Local government's complaint mechanism is active but not in a systematic way.
- Women do not reach out to the local government to raise their concern like men; they are behind in terms of raising their voice.
- People, mostly partner organisation staff, have the conception that complaint received are a negative factor that affects their performance.
- Lack of inclusive and accessible communication channels.
- Lack of use of centralized dashboard and electronic data collection tool.
- Lack of budget for CFRM activities, capacity building and materials (in organization as well as local governments)
- Community people feels that regular community visits by organisation's staffs, orientations, and group discussions are effective to collect complaints.

Likewise, the following recommendations were developed:



- Raise communities' awareness regarding CFRM through information campaigns;
 - Strengthen partner CSOs' capacity in development and implementation of CFRM or similar mechanisms;
 - Provide proper guidelines for the project staff and train them periodically in effective application of CFRM;
 - Allocate proper budget for effective implementation of CFRM in CPs.
 - Review the CFRM policy and, if possible, rename it for future interventions, as PIN staff from other departments had the concept that it is named as a community feedback and response mechanism, so it is only for community people.
 - PIN CPs must upgrade the CFRM data management system and digitize it.
- Explore and use more inclusive CFRM channels.
 - Conduct community consultations before introducing CFRM to the communities so that the accessible and community-friendly channels can be used.
 - With the consent of the complainants, conduct a survey with people who used the complaint mechanism to get feedback about their experiences and suggestions for improvement on a regular basis if possible.
 - PIN can assist local governments in establishing the CFRM by assisting with capacity building, policy and guidelines, budgeting, and so on. That will ensure the sustainability of the mechanism even after PIN leaves the intervention.
 - Conduct an evaluation of existing complaint and feedback mechanisms to see if they are functioning properly, meeting the expectations, community members' views on it, if it is accessible to everyone, if they are aware of the mechanism, etc. so that the mechanism can be improved.
 - Utilization of PIN's learning platforms (i.e. Website, Indikit, Civil society network) for the spread of CFRM resources and information so that other organizations like local NGOs or CSOs may utilize the platform to improve their knowledge and adapt it suitably.



5 Project Impact

Each of the above-mentioned results were achieved. The project started with planning and conducting desk review and qualitative research to identify main barriers of implementation of CFRM and develop evidence-based recommendations. The second step of the project was to create and disseminate the information materials about CFRM to increase target communities'

awareness and therefore usage of the mechanism. A three-minute video as well as story booklet was created by the HQ graphic designers that contain information about the CFRM including how the stakeholders can reach out to PIN for their any feedback and complaints, how the complaints are handled, what channels can be used for reporting, etc. The video was translated into the different languages (Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Bajjika, Ukrainian, Azerbaijani and Armenian) spoken in Nepal and Georgia and boosted through the respective social media pages and radio channels. The booklet was also translated into the local languages and printed for dissemination, that will take place in January, 2023.



Picture 3: CFRM Research Coordinator Bina Bagale consulting with beneficiaries about their knowledge and use of CFRM during the focus group discussion with adolescent girls in Nepal.

Based on the research finding and desk review upgraded training package on CFRM was developed for the project staff. The training manual was successfully tested in Nepal and Georgia country programs and was evaluated as useful by most of the participants. The trainings on the CFRM will be conducted periodically in the future using the manual. Furthermore, monitoring of the activities implemented by the project staff, will ensure regular recording of lessons learned and recommendations for quality implementation of the CFRM. The training manual as well as information materials will be useful not only for Nepal and Georgia, but also for other county programs, who might encounter the same problems in their everyday practice. Besides, several research findings and recommendations will be useful to effectively implement the CFRM in all Country Programs.



Picture 4: CFRM informational product/leaflet produced in English by the project.

6 Lessons learned

The deliverables created under the current project might be applied by other CPs at PIN. The training package can be used not only with PIN staff but also partner organizations. In addition, it can be adjusted for training the target community members, if needed. Similarly, the information materials such as video and story booklet can be translated into the local languages spoken in other CPs and disseminated to relevant target groups.

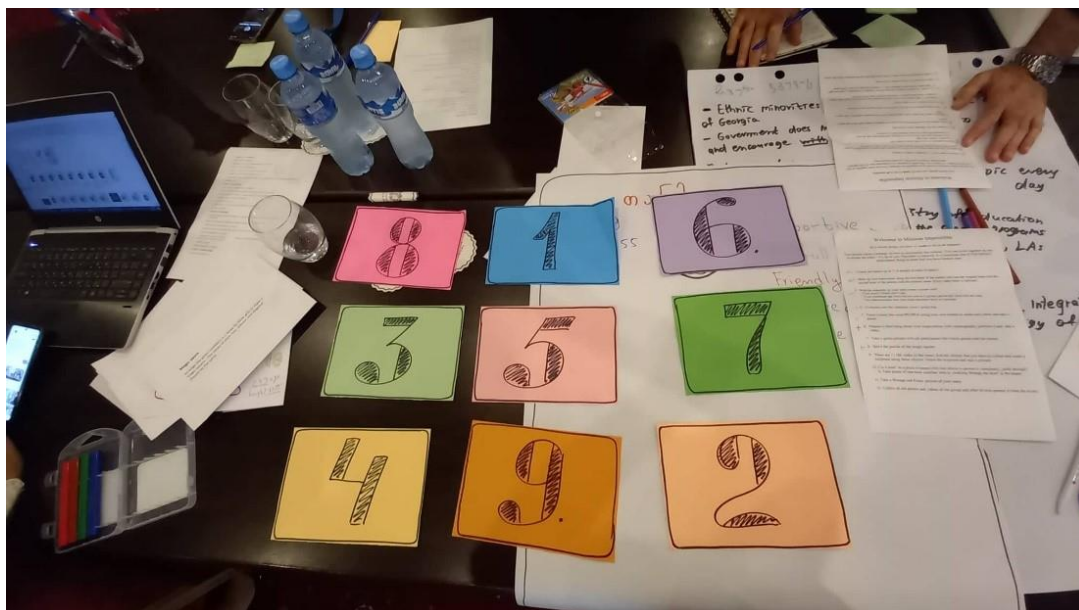
Key challenge during the implementation of the project was lack of time of the staff engaged in the project, who have other regular responsibilities at the same time. For the future it is recommended to have full-time staff who will be fully dedicated to multi-country management of the project implementation. The other challenge was related to limited time for project implementation. The number of activities proposed under the current project needed 2-3 months more for implementation than planned. In addition, implementation of the activities started later than planned, because of prolonged budgeting and staff recruitment. As a result, the activities were implemented under time pressure. However, the project team manage to complete almost all activities effectively.

Some of the lessons discovered during the project implementation are highlighted below:

Organizations should periodically re-examine how communication channels are established; sharing a phone number or reporting channel once is insufficient if marginalized people are not proactively supported in using it; the suggestion box or web-based complaint mechanisms might not be that useful for people who are illiterate and not technically sound. There is a need for the constant dissemination of information. While advertising about the feedback mechanism, organization should pay attention if the information reached out to everyone and delivered in right way. Need to use the proper methodology and techniques to cover all of the targeted communities.

Consultation done with community members before introducing any channels for complaint and feedback makes things easier and ensures accessibility and sustainability. In some instances, it was found that community members prefer to have face-to-face feedback. Before introducing

any medium for complaints and feedback, community members should be consulted so that mediums that are accessible to everyone can be made so that it will ensure inclusiveness and access for everyone.



Picture 5: Group activity during the CFRM research finding discussion with staff and SMT in Georgia.

A system for automatically notifying relevant people in organizations after receiving any concerns makes sure that attention should be paid to that, and it both lessens the risk of missing out on the case and saves time as the notification will go directly to the concerned person and s/he can start the further procedures without any delay. There should be a structured data management system for the complaint and feedback mechanisms so that all the complaints, feedback, and procedures are documented in one platform where the designated person can operate it while maintaining the security of the data and confidentiality of the information and informant. When data management system is in place it will save the time of the concerned



Picture 6: Participants group activity during the Piloting of the training package in Nepal. Photo: Bina Bagale

person on manually updating everything and the organization can have the visual data representations of the data so the organization can monitor the mechanism itself and the cases they are receiving and act accordingly. The use of KOBO and ODK, or the link between excel and the dashboard makes things much easier and more structured.

People lack confidence and fear that they are able to accurately relay their concerns. Organizations should pay more attention to the confidentiality and consent of the feedback provider. Responses should be provided personally. Community members feel encouraged to reach out to the complaint handling mechanism if their concerns are heard and addressed.

Timely sharing of the summary of the complaints and feedback with all of the staff is important so that everyone knows what kind of issues are being raised, how they deal with the situation, what is beneficial to keep the account in good standing, their ideas and views for future reference, etc. Sharing complaints and feedback (while maintaining the person's confidentiality) monthly within the organization team, and partner organization will allow everyone to know what kind of feedback and complaints they are receiving, where improvement is needed, what should be done to help the beneficiaries, what is going well, and so on. Also, budget constraints are affecting the effectiveness of the CFRM mechanism, as it has to depend on the budget from other projects.



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