How digitalising our registration process has helped Oxfam to respond better

What is this program about?
Traditional paper based humanitarian registrations used to involve handwriting details about individuals and their households and manually flicking through stacks of paperwork. In 2013, Oxfam started exploring ways to digitalise this process and worked with World Vision and piloted their solution called Last Mile Mobile Solutions (LMMS).

LMMS software digitises and simplifies beneficiary registration, verification, distribution planning and management, monitoring and reporting. It allows humanitarian staff to capture crucial data about individuals and their households and generates identity cards which are then used to manage distributions.

The 'last mile' is the critical stage of humanitarian delivery where essential supplies reach the people most affected by disasters. LMMS improves remote data collection, helps manage aid recipients, enables faster and fairer aid distributions and delivers rapid reporting to aid workers.

What are its most significant achievements?
Introducing LMMS grew from an inter-agency pilot initiative to use at scale and different Oxfam programmes across the confederation. It has now been used in 12 countries in humanitarian responses ranging from food insecurity following Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines to the Nepal earthquake response. Chad, Mali and Niger have used LMMS in the current Chad Basin Response and its being used in the refugee responses in Greece. Oxfam also used LMMS as part of our Scaling Humanitarian ICTs Network (SHINE) project in DRC and Iraq.

Introducing LMMS in the Philippines saved Oxfam staff the equivalent of 233 staff days of data entry - equating roughly to 47% time savings for registration activities. When Norwegian Refugee Council used the same platform in Liberia they reported a 40% reduction in distribution staff and a corresponding reduction in related office and travel costs compared to paper-based processes. Salary savings of up to $50,000 were realised over a 6 month period and this money was allocated to other areas of concern. The value is most evident in missing out data input phases, removal of manual steps to search for data/ trends and use of analytics to conduct better targeting. In Solo camp, distribution used to take up to 3 days before the system was introduced. The number of days was reduced to one day with the introduction of LMMS. Thus time savings of up to 70% were recorded. In Bahn camp, the distribution used to last for 5 days. With the introduction of LMMS, the number of distribution days was reduced to 2 days. This represents 60% time saving.
A recent evaluation from our Iraq programme identified that beneficiaries perceived that the technology will ensure that their data is properly recorded and duplication-free - they reported that safe storage of data in LMMS made them feel that their rights are going to be well protected. The programme team said that the LMMS system helps to avoid duplication, to report (distribution activities, beneficiary details), and serves as a resourceful database to keep track of beneficiaries. LMMS makes donor reporting easier, as not only it gives accurate numbers but also provides detail demographics data and other criteria such as pregnant women.

**What factors have made it successful?**

Oxfam have navigated a new type of partnership with World Vision - who is technically a provider, but because of our shared interest and vision, we’re able to influence product development roadmap for common good. We have a good relationship and have been able to influence the functionality with this year seeing 2 new key features of the system developed from requirements raised by our teams. One was LORA (LMMS Offline Registration App) developed because Oxfam identified the need for offline data capture and this was named after a member of our team (Laura Eldon). Oxfam also supported the move to Android operating system allowing us to use more commonly available hardware rather than procuring specialist devices. The necessary hardware is also to be a part of the Humanitarian Equipment Catalogue, purchasable by other agencies via our Bicester Humanitarian Supply Centre.

Being able to provide central support has been key – initial support to implementations, training etc as well as ongoing support to the users. We can respond quickly to queries coming in and understand the context that our teams are working in. Having the expertise in the team also means we can better recommend when, and when not, to make use of LMMS. We got sign off from the international department and relevant boards with a full business case and board approval and developed a support mechanism around it. This involved working with colleagues across Oxfam from procurement, data security, humanitarian, IS, legal as well as across the confederation in the spirit of One Oxfam.

**What did Oxfam do differently?**

We listened. We took time to understand the needs of users. We explored options. We tried in small pockets and learnt from our experiences. In Nepal, at one point it looked like we’d failed but we realised this was due the way training had been implemented and support provided at the start. We tried to implement the system right at the start of the First Phase response when blanket distributions were taking place and this is not the point at which the system delivers large benefits and it’s difficult to implement any new system at this time. It is more suited to longer term

“The teams are finding working with (LMMS) a lot of fun and specifically in resolving transparency issues around beneficiary data.” – Programme Officer in Chad
programming where you’re working with and making distributions to the same community over 3-12mths and longer. The system has now been redeployed across 5 districts in country and has been supported well centrally and in-country.

**Where does Oxfam go from here?**

We will continue to roll out and explore ideas with World Vision about the integration with cash transfer options and are looking to build additional reporting capacity through use of the Data Hub. Digital Identity Standards for the sector is becoming a key part of inter-agency discussions which our experience with LMMS is helping to shape. We are looking to agree key components of what a digital Identity looks like and how this data can be shared securely and practically between agencies. We are also looking at new technology like blockchains and biometrics to establish their relevance and ethical appropriateness for humanitarian response. An identity can be an empowering thing as people feel they are being counted and heard – but it can be challenging too because of responsible data considerations. So we need to employ good design, systems thinking and get the balance right.