Interviewer
Zoe Hamilton, Insights Manager at GSMA
Guests
Mark Kamau, Head User Experience Designer at BRCK
Aline Alonso, Design Researcher at Butterfly Works

Intro	*You're listening to the GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation programme's podcast.*
Zoe	Welcome, everybody to our podcast on Mobile Connectivity and Innovation in the Humanitarian Space. My name is Zoe Hamilton and I'm an insights manager on the M4H team, here at GSMA.

Today we're looking at methodologies for inclusivity. M4H works to understand how mobile technology can be used to accelerate the delivery and impact of humanitarian assistance. As more of that assistance is delivered through mobile channels, it's important to take into account people with disabilities to ensure that they're not further marginalised.

Recently we've been working on a project with refugee communities in Nairobi, with seeing and hearing impairments, alongside UNHCR and Safaricom. We've been using human-centred design methodologies to better understand their lived realities, challenges they face and their relationship with mobile technology.

We're here today with the design research team from Butterfly Works, that worked on this project, Aline and Mark. Aline is Brazilian, based in Amsterdam and Mark is Kenyan and conducted the research in Nairobi. Mark is also the user experience lead at BRCK, a Kenyan social enterprise.

Welcome to both of you. |
Mark	Thanks for having us.
Aline	Thank you, Zoe, it's a pleasure to be here.
Zoe	Great, thanks everyone. So I think we're going to start with a few questions for Mark. Mark, can you tell us what design research means?

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Mark   Well, the premise of design research is the understanding that unlike traditional methods, where experts will come up with solutions to challenges that affect people, that people closest to the problem have a lot of contextual intelligence and design research allows for us to indeed centre those people in the process of creating solutions.

That's essentially what design research is. Leveraging contextual intelligence with a view of co-creating solutions for the people who are closest to the problem.

Zoe   And can you tell us why you think it was important to use this methodology for this project in particular, working to understand the relationship that people with disabilities in Nairobi have to mobile technology?

Mark   I think that it's particularly important because, especially when you consider people with disability, finding tools and ways for them to communicate their experiences directly, rather than just trying to validate hypotheses is very important because they have very, very particular experiences, they have very, very particular perspectives on their own lives and there are things that traditional, conversational tools and methodology perhaps wouldn't work, because if you think, for example, when somebody has hearing impairment or visual impairment, then it requires a different approach, it requires a different methodology, to actually get insights and talk to them.

And so then, it was a process of really understanding, what is the best way, what are the best tools to actually really have them express themselves and them contribute to the challenge that we were trying to address together.

And so, human-centred design lends itself very well, because it's deeply participatory and engaging and we picked this methodology because it allows for us to really engage and it allows for them to really express themselves. And therefore, in that expression, in that participation in the process, is where you find the most insight.

Zoe   So, Mark, you mentioned some of these tools that we used to engage users. Can you tell us about one of them and why we used it?

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Mark   Yeah, that's a very good question. For example, one of the tools we had to use, is communication maps. And with communication maps, you're able to understand the communication landscape. Who are the people that the different participants interact with on a daily basis/weekly basis and people they don't communicate with frequently.

You can imagine by trying to understand that, then you actually have formed the ecosystem of who is important to them. And so, a communication map is one such tool.

Zoe   Great, thanks. And from my understanding, communication maps, normally draw them, so how did we adapt this tool to make it more accessible, for example, to the visually impaired?

Mark   Yeah, so, for the visually impaired participants, you can imagine that you're looking at rings. So the inner circle is people you talk to daily, the second circle is people you talk to weekly and then there's an outer circle of people you talk to monthly and you can keep going - people you talk to less frequently...

And so you can imagine for a person with visual disability who can't see the rings on paper, we had to come up with a method of making them be able to feel. And so, we had to adapt and get tactile tape, which has ridges. So then they can feel on the sheet of paper and then they can be, "Oh, I'm touching the inner circle." And after they could feel all the three circles, then they had the concept of where the different circles were. And then, based on that, they could now start discussing who they talked to on a weekly, daily and monthly basis.

Zoe   And I know we used some other research tools in this process as well. Can you tell us about one of those?

Mark   Yeah. For example, we also... You can imagine as well, if you're trying to understand the context of somebody who lives with disability, it's very interesting to understand, what is their day like? What do they do on a daily basis? What are their concerns in the course of the day? Who do they interact

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with? And do they have to move from one place to another? And when they do, what are they going to do there? And so on.

So, having that clear and very detailed view of their lived experience, requires a very engaging tool. And so we had this lifestyle diary, which in each day, for example, the participant then would say, "These are the things I did today. These are the things that concerned me. These are the things that I enjoyed. And this is how I felt in the course of the day."

It also includes pictures, them recording visuals and also talking about their thoughts. You can imagine you can get a lot of deep insights into their lives. So the lifestyle diary was a very, very important tool.

Zoe   So you mentioned a couple of different ways that people were able to record this daily information about their lives.

What were the other options? How did we make this accessible to people with different abilities and needs?

Mark   Yeah, good question. For example, if I have a visual impairment, obviously it becomes difficult for me to take pictures, or it becomes difficult for me to visualise my daily experience. And so, some adaptations we had to do, for example, is to involve the caregiver.

So, before we started the process, we had of course the consent of the person of visual impairment and of course, we had their caregiver come through. And we had a conversation around what we're trying to understand and the role the caregiver could play. So at the end of each day, we had a conversation with the caregiver and the caregiver was responsible to record on the sheet of paper, on the daily diary, if there are any visuals, then they would help coordinate capturing the visuals and entering the information.

Zoe   Yeah, thanks, Mark. So one of the things that we talked about through this research process, a few times, was the importance of these tools as a kick off-point to start conversations for that deeper engagement.

How did you make people comfortable to have those conversations?

Mark	I think that one of the things that was really interesting to observe is the sense of community.

We had physical meetings in a specific place where we had this community starting to form. For example, people with a visual disability hardly ever come together in one space. And people being in one space, talking about their lived experiences and having one-on-one conversations before people go out and do exercises... having to be able to actually, indeed have conversations beyond just carrying on with exercises, but sharing experiences, having conversations, having one-on-one conversations, and then allowing people to express themselves, really helped.

Because in those conversations, we realised in fact in certain situations you almost become an outlet for things that are going on, situations that people are facing and challenges that they're facing, actually, which are not sometimes even related to their prevailing exercise. But still, it's really important conversation because it gives insights into what frustrates them and what they're going through, and all that comes in handy for the process. |
| **Zoe** | Mmm, a more holistic view. Great, thanks so much, Mark.

I'll just now turn to Aline, to ask you a few questions about the process, because you were obviously involved remotely, throughout the entire process as well.

What struck you, Aline, as the most interesting part of this research process? |
| **Aline** | Ah that's such a hard question. This project was interesting, definitely in so many levels. But besides this conversation that you were having with Mark, I would have to say that the aspect of the trust and the engagement in the process across the partner organisations and between countries, was really impressive for me.

All the adaptations that Mark was mentioning, were developed in a collaborative way, with several rounds of feedback and iteration, and the diversity of the team involved also played a big role in this. |

Some of these adaptations were also made on the spot, during the sessions, like quickly adjusting to the reality of the moment. And the team would also meet after every session to share the main research findings of the day and also, what worked well, which barriers were found....

This way, it was as if the team was there in Kenya, and it was possible to collectively respond to the challenges and adapt to the sessions for the following days, for instance.

And we have to say that the original plan was indeed to have the team together, with representatives of the different partner organisations, gathered in Kenya to do part of the research, also the analysis and co-create together.

However, in the final days of the research for this project news increased about the COVID-19 pandemic, and within days the borders were closed and lockdowns were imposed and it became impossible to keep the project plan as intended.

But rather than postponing the activities, we took the restrictions as an opportunity to innovate - to innovate the approach, to methods and to learn together, to find new ways of working together remotely.

And having this agile mind-set, being open and comfortable to change the plans, to adapt to the unknown circumstances along the way, is very important when using human-centred design. The process is rarely, or never actually a clear path from A to B. And the actual beauty of it is to be able to be responsive to the reality and benefit from the opportunities along the way.

So there was a very intrinsic motivation across the partner organisations to really learn from each and every step of the process, and to explore the methodology as a team, together, was very interesting to do it completely remotely and yet in such a collaborative way.

Zoe	Thanks, Aline. I have a few follow up questions on that.
	One, you mentioned getting feedback throughout the process and adapting these tools. Can you talk us through a little bit... who we collected feedback from and how we used that to iterate the tools and the process itself?

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Aline   Sure. As you mentioned earlier, this was a collaborative project between different organisations. So we had feedback from Safaricom and from UNHCR, from people in the field working with the refugee communities, people working with people with disabilities, not only in Nairobi but also from other organisations, and also across different teams within GSMA we also collected very valuable feedback from other researchers doing activities and research previously with these populations.

So it's even hard to say where the actual results of how the tools were implemented came, because it was really a true co-creation among different people involved.

Zoe   **Great, and then I know throughout the process, of course, we were working with end users and co-creating with them as well that became more challenging once we had to move the process to a remote format because of COVID-19, as you mentioned.**

How did we continue to integrate end-users voices in this process?

Aline   Yeah, definitely it was, I'm sure, an unforeseen change of plans for a lot of organisations and for sure for this project. But these changes also gave new insight and new perspective about the target populations context, including how hard it was to reach them, if not in face-to-face activities, or how much they were excluded from information and even from emergency reporting channels, for instance.

So it just brought us to a very, almost like an extreme point of really understanding how their challenges were, to communicate and how mobile technology could actually support them a lot.

Well, we can say that digital technology is a part of our lives. We cannot deny it, our phones are almost an extension of our body, right. If we forget it somewhere, it's like something is missing. And with the COVID pandemic, I think it brought the situation to a level that we depend more and more in technology to be part of society. And this is also accelerating a digital transformation, in terms of work, education, access to service, access to basic needs, that otherwise would happen in a much slower pace, bringing all these aspects to the digital side of it.

And this acceleration actually increases the gap of inclusion of these people. So, people that are not nowadays included in the digital world, if we don't have this transformation in a more mindful and inclusive way, they will be more and more excluded. And that's true for people living with disabilities or refugee communities, people that are illiterate or elderly, for instance.

Mark   Yeah. Zoe, just to jump in one second. That's very true, and I'll give you a very specific example. For example, when COVID started, the government said, "Hey, every Kenyan should be aware of COVID," and so on, so they would actually make YouTube videos to give daily updates on what's happening with COVID.

And then they also said, "If you have anybody or any symptoms, please call this number." Now, consider this, at this time I was part of this community of people with visual impairment and people who cannot hear. And so, they were complaining, the people with visual disability were saying, "oh. There are all these YouTube videos that are giving information, but we cannot access that information because we can't see." And then the people who cannot speak, they're like, "Yeah, they're giving us a number to call, but we cannot speak. And so, we feel excluded from this process." And that's just to give a very specific example of what Aline's saying.

Zoe   Thanks, both of you. Were there any overarching lessons for you about, in this challenging context, how to make these activities more inclusive?

Aline   Definitely. I think one of them, Mark mentioned, or touched briefly upon it, it's to build meaningful connections with the population that you're actually designing with, instead of designing for. And another one would be leveraging on local experience, especially within the COVID process, adapting to new ways of working that really made a big difference in making the process more inclusive.

So for instance, we recruited a translator and sign language interpreters from the community and they made the participants much more at ease during the sessions and helped to bring a lot of trust to the room, for them to really share personal things, as they already knew each other.

And on the other hand, they also gave access to the local networks and supported in recruiting more participants for the sessions, the face-to-face sessions, but also for remote engagement, especially during the lockdown.

We also had local researchers co-creating and conducting the activities with the participants, and also participating through the analysis of the results and co-creating the concepts. That's really important when working with different cultural backgrounds and communication formats, to have this representation for each of the groups that we are working with through the different phases of the process. So the cultural translation goes beyond the actual language, but it also takes into account the practices, the locations, the social norms and the local perception of a topic. And having this diversity in the team really helped to reach this level of inclusivity.

Of course, it's important to be aware that no single person or group can represent a full cultural diversity of a community, but it really helps to have them involved as much as possible. For instance, helping to flag early on, inappropriate activities that would not make the flow of the session in the best way or even be disrespectful for some cultures. And on the other hand, also suggest more inclusive practices.

Zoe	**Now a question for both of you about how do you think that the wider, both mobile technology and humanitarian sectors, can use design research methodologies in their work?**
Aline	It's interesting, because we usually show case studies about design research and human-centred design methods. We tend to show projects that start from a question and end up in an implemented, final service or product. But that's not always the case, right? And design research can also be seen as a mind-set, that can be applied in very different levels and stages of ongoing projects and actual daily work. So that means that you don't necessarily need a huge budget or a structured timeline or a separate project to apply the methodology.

Design research is about empathy, inclusion, it's about inviting and honouring different points of view, allowing adaptation and iteration according to feedback, as we've been talking about. It's about visualising processes and systems, that engage other people to give input to transform them. It's about being optimistic, while recognising the challenges of course, but also being able to see and benefit from the opportunities.

I think the most important thing is to adopt a learning posture kind-of. It's the idea that none of us is smarter than all of us. So we can really learn a lot from each other and from exchanges and from inputting different points of view in the decision making, in the questions we ask.

So adopting this mind-set, or using this methodology can start in very small steps. It can start within the organisation, for instance, sharing more across different teams and learning from each other. Or testing different mechanisms to learn from the people that are using what your organisation is providing. It can be by giving feedback and suggestions, or even allowing users to be part of the solution.

Another thing that is really important is to, even before having set-in-stone ideas and decisions, bring it to the community, bring it to the people that will actually use it. They will provide very valuable insights early on, before you spend a lot of money on a pilot or a lot of resources to make something more tangible. Start this conversation, this is really important.

It can be a mind-set shift in small, daily operations and decisions that really incorporate the context of the end user of the target population of the partners that you're working with. And in the report of this project, I think it's possible to find different ways to use and adapt the tools and methods that we used for this research. So everybody can also see how we adapted to overcome and to benefit from the challenges along the process and the main lessons that we learned.

And I think both Butterfly Works and GSMA would love to hear back about the challenges and the successes and the adaptations of using this methodology to create real, genuine, human-centred solutions to populations, that usually don't have their voices heard.

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Zoe	Absolutely. I love that quote than none of us are smarter than all of us. Mark, do you have anything to add?
Mark	I agree with everything that Aline said. It's funny because I was called into this panel of experts by, I won't mention their name, but it's this basically donor funding agency and they were saying, you know, "We realise that the way we do our work right now - the traditional way of doing humanitarian work - doesn't seem to work very well. And we have you here in the room and would like to hear your views on how we can get better." And one of the challenges that I've recognised, working in the humanitarian world for a while, is even the way that projects are set up, it's set up almost from having a solution in mind, where you have to feed information into templates and those templates are very rigid. For example, you have to provide this X service to 500 people and so on, as a basis for measuring the project and therefore funding. And then, people end up focusing on meeting metrics rather than really solving the problem, together with what is happening on the ground. And that provides an atmosphere…or an environment that can be quite rigid. But human-centred design invites us to say, "We don't know. And there is a lot we don't know," and then it's an anti-expert mentality. Where you have the humility to say there's a lot that you don't know and there's a lot that you will learn. And because you will learn this, as long as there is valid reason to actually shift perspective and to shift the way you're doing things, then you should be able to do that. But the traditional model where there's a template that fits rigidly makes it very difficult. And so people end up having to fulfil commitments that feed into templates rather than adapt and adjust to the reality on the ground. So my sense is that if project design and the way projects are structured in the humanitarian sector are from the perspective that there's a lot we will learn along the way, and there's a lot that we'd have to adapt along the way and therefore provide that flexibility, I think that's a good start. And I think that that would really help in allowing space for human-centred design.

Zoe Great. Yeah. I love both of those answers, I think it's so important to shift away from the "experts", to really allowing the users to guide us through their needs and their perspectives, because really, they're the experts on their own lives, right?

Mark Absolutely!

Zoe So, just before we wrap up, I think it would be interesting to hear maybe some examples of this. I don't know if Aline or Mark, if you have any concrete examples of a place in this project where we were really led by the users to somewhere that we didn't know we'd go…

Mark Yeah. So, if I go first, we did the exercise of just trying to understand the movement of people. So, mapping their environment, where they go and what they go to do in different places. And so, in this exercise you had things that people did that were close to where they live, but then things that they did that were quite far away from where they live.

So, for example, you have many M-pesa agents near them, but they would rather go much, much further. Like this particular individual would go much, much further to an M-pesa agent that was literally a thirty-minute walk away from where he lived and sometimes an hour's walk from where he lived, yet, there's M-pesa agents literally right outside his door.

And so trying to understand why they would prefer to go that far, two things emerged. That this person actually could speak sign language, the agent there could speak sign language, therefore he could sign with him. So he could go there.

And then the second thing, is that it was close to a community of fellow people who have the same disability. So beyond that, they would go and actually be together. So they would walk, one guy actually would walk one and a half hours and in fact, several times was stopped by police and so on, because he's a refugee, but still risks all this inconvenience just to be part of a community.

And so, that for me is why I was earlier saying the power of the need to belong and the need to be part of a community came out strongly.

Beyond just this service that an individual needs, this sense of belonging to a community is very important. And so, designing services, not just for the individual, but different ways that people can engage and collaborate and be part of a community, is something that came out of this that's really useful for the people with this disability, but not necessarily something that we would have thought initially as to regard as a key point.

Zoe   Thanks, Mark. Anything to add to that, Aline?

Aline   Yeah. I think one nice example and maybe a higher level of how the findings and the insights directed our way also of prioritising the idea. In a process like this we end up with a lot of different possibilities, of solutions and concepts, and that was definitely the case here as well.

And I think the insights that the lockdown and the challenges of reaching these people and the challenges of these people not really belonging to a community and being excluded from society on some level, also brought us to this kind of urgency of finding a way that they would be able to report an emergency, if that was the case.

So, a couple of people in the research, while filling in their diaries, would mention that if they would feel pain or something bad would happen they would go back to bed and sleep - in one case, because the lady didn't have a phone and couldn't reach out to someone else. And then the other case, it was just a passive way of dealing with their own health, for instance. So in the case of COVID, that would bring things to an even more extreme case.

So that insight, in these different levels, of also how some of them could not really receive information about COVID and how to prevent or how to act, in some kind of emergency, brought the team to a place of, "Okay, we really need to do something about it."

So one example is, how mindful and aware now people or UNHCR are in giving information about COVID to this population, they became really aware of these gaps of information that could be in this population. So having someone that actually can video call with someone and explain in sign language better, or record an emergency… it's one of the gains, I believe, of this project.

And some of them are not that explicit, but for sure, being part of the process and really understanding better the context and the lives of this population, can really shift this mind-set on the small decisions of the daily work of these organisations to remind that not all the people can read, not all the people can see, not all the people understand things in the same way.

So becoming step-by-step, a little bit more inclusive and taking those needs into account as well.

Zoe   Thanks to both of you for joining this conversation today and to all of our listeners for joining this episode of our M4H podcast.

If you want any more information about our work, or you want to hear more about this project and the methodologies we used, please visit www.gsma.com/m4h and stay tuned for the next episode!