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Red Cross 121 Digital Cash Aid Platform: Grant project lessons and outcomes

GRANT PROJECT DATES

18 June 2019 - 31 March 2021

As part of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the British Red Cross is a non-profit dedicated to the prevention and alleviation of human suffering throughout the world and does this by supporting people in crisis globally.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION:

The British Red Cross received a GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation Fund grant to develop and pilot the '121 Platform', which aims to make cash-based aid easier, safer and faster, helping people affected by crisis meet their own needs. The GSMA funded pilot created inclusive digital identities for individuals from vulnerable households in Oldonyiro and Kipsing locations in Isiolo county, Kenya, reducing costs and inefficiencies in delivering cash and voucher assistance. Isiolo faces chronic under-development combined with persistent drought, pockets of conflict and cyclic sudden-onset floods. In remote areas like Isiolo, the percentage of people registered for national ID can be as low as 20%.[1] By focusing on Isiolo county, the project built upon an existing Red Cross led mobile cash transfer programme in that location and was able to reach populations vulnerable to complex disasters where floods, droughts, epidemics, conflict, political unrest and other issues interact.

The open-source mobile platform integrated a blockchain-based digital identity module aimed at giving people in need a borderless identity that could be used by various humanitarian organisations without the need to register more than once. The project distributed 3.2 million Kenyan shillings (Ksh) to 350 individuals after they successfully registered with the 121 Platform. As well as enabling low-cost and transparent international transfers, the innovation included a common cash ledger that anonymously records details of cash transfers to optimise coordination and transparency for donors.

The project was delivered in partnership with the Kenyan Red Cross Society (KRCS), 510 (an initiative of the Netherlands Red Cross), Safaricom and Tykn.

1.   World Bank (2016) 'ID4D County Diagnostic : Kenya'

KEY STATS

44 community co-design sessions

produced a human centred designed pilot

1,575 people reached

Created and validated digital identities for

350 people

3.2 million Ksh distributed

100%

of recipients were satisfied with the timely delivery of cash

90%

of staff and volunteers were satisfied with using the 121 Platform

The project has been replicated 4 times in **Ethiopia, Lebanon, Ukraine and the Netherlands**

Human stories

Betty* is 63 and cares for her three grandchildren in a rural village in Isiolo county, Kenya. She has a physical disability and is widowed. She receives a small annual grant from an international NGO for the education of her grandchildren, and once received a one-off payment from a UN agency for accessing food. Other than this, she says that she has not previously received support from humanitarian organisations.

Due to her economic and household situation, Betty was one of 350 people in Isiolo county to be included in the 121 Digital Cash Aid Platform pilot. With support from Red Cross volunteers, she was able to register, creating a digital identity which enabled her to receive 9,134Ksh into her M-Pesa account.

Betty said that she felt contented having received the support and intended to use it to purchase food for her and her family.

*Names have been changed.

Project Outcomes & Lessons

LESSON

Human centred design strengthened the platform

The project encompassed co-design session workshops with communities in Isiolo county where wireframes (the desired interface or 'storyboard' of the user application) were developed. The workshops included 20 people affected by disasters and poverty in the county, five aid workers from British Red Cross and KRCS, and two members of the Safaricom Mobile Financial Services team. After the workshops, a minimum viable product was produced using the wireframes as a design source. Because of the community's involvement in the design thinking from an early stage, the community engaged with the system that was rolled out, allowing for a pilot and final product that reflected the needs and requirements of the target users.

OUTCOME

Digitising cash assistance makes aid more efficient

The 121 Digital Cash Aid Platform provided a quick turnaround in delivering aid to individuals, which is very valuable during or after emergencies. Cash was distributed to recipients twice, firstly on 9th December 2020 and secondly on 11th December 2020. The platform allowed these two payments to be conducted in one week with a few clicks of a button. The platform also allowed for aid to be transferred securely since the resources went directly to the recipient, which was also more accurate, cost effective and faster compared to a manual process.

User experience (UX) work helped with inclusion of marginalised groups

Those living in Kenya with a lack of digital literacy (17% of the population), speak a minority language or have a visual impairment, can face significant barriers engaging with written content on a mobile device. Some people had challenges registering on the 121 Platform due to lack of digital literacy, but the integrated voice assistance functions helped these individuals to complete the registration process. Inclusion was further enhanced by taking cultural and contextual factors into account. The user experience (UX) was constructed by carefully selecting the text that appeared on the platform as well as adjusting the tone of voice by reviewing co-design interviews to mirror language used in the local context. The spoken user interface functionality allowed those with a lack of digital literacy, or those with visual impairments, to keep track of the registration process and to understand what was being asked from them. Finally, the translation function on the platform resulted in registration of individuals in multiple languages which increased trust and digital engagement through this localised approach. Therefore, the UX work of the project enhanced inclusion through local language provision, integrated voice response capability and tailored text and tone-of-voice.

OUTCOME

GSMA supported the Red Cross to advocate for regulatory change

A key element of this project was aimed at providing people with a digital identity which could be used to register for, and receive, humanitarian cash assistance. However, it could not include people who did not have legally recognised identification documentation. This is because in order to receive digital cash transfers, people must have an account with a digital financial service provider, which is subject to 'Know Your Customer' and anti-money laundering regulations.

The GSMA worked together with the British Red Cross and project partners to advocate for regulatory change. While the Government of Kenya provided guidelines during the project life-cycle for those who don't have IDs to access digital cash and voucher assistance, joint advocacy efforts are still underway to ensure that this becomes a reality, so that the underserved can gain access to essential services. The GSMA Policy team continue to advocate for the implementation of the framework for registering people without national ID, while adhering to anti-money laundering and combating financial terrorism concerns, among other live concerns that may threaten the integrity of digital identity.

Advocating for a regulatory environment that is inclusive for those affected by humanitarian crises is vitally important, given that an estimated 850 million people worldwide lack an officially recognized ID and humanitarian organisations struggle to identify those in need and validate those who qualify for humanitarian cash transfers.

LESSON

An international precedent is needed for self-sovereign identity

The original project scope intended to build a system where people in need could take control of their identity, in the absence of national ID documentation, through a borderless ID that could be used by various humanitarian organisations without the individual needing to register more than once. The concept puts the individual in control of their ID and enhances digital financial inclusion. Unfortunately, the creation of digital identities without formal documentation was not possible during the life-cycle of the project. The project team is aware of the precedent self-sovereign identity will create in Kenya, and so continues to work with the policymakers and regulatory authorities to ensure that this occurs, while ensuring financial and security related concerns are attended to. Therefore, while the timing is not right to implement the concept of self-sovereign identity (where individuals can self-register) within the 121 Platform, the development of self-sovereign identity could be a crucial tool in a pandemic, such as the previous global COVID-19 pandemic, or any other emergency that requires remote registration to avoid community transmission of infectious disease.

Since the pilot:

➔ The KRCS has continued to advocate for policy changes to include persons without legal ID to receive aid with a digital identity. This will facilitate smooth integration of KRCS and Safaricom operations using digital identities among those in **need** while balancing financial and security related concerns.

➔ This innovation has been replicated in other countries, including in the Netherlands as part of a COVID-19 voucher programme for undocumented migrants. Hundreds of people received a weekly supermarket voucher through WhatsApp, using the 121 Platform innovation.[2]

DATA SOURCES
- British Red Cross final report and project reporting
- M4H Innovation Fund Portfolio (2017-2022) Report
- World Bank (2023) ID4D and G2Px 2022 Annual Report
- IFRC (2021) The Promise and Peril of Digital Identification for Aid Distribution Report

2. https://red-social-innovation.com/en/solution/the-netherlands-red-cross-digital-cash-aid-for-undocumented-migrants/