



**The GSMA Humanitarian
Positioning Strategy:**
A Catalytic Approach to
Cross-Sector Partnerships
in Support of Humanitarian
Assistance



GSMA

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The GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation programme works to accelerate the delivery and impact of digital humanitarian assistance. This is achieved by building a learning and research agenda to inform the future of digital humanitarian response, catalysing partnerships and innovation for new digital humanitarian services, advocating for enabling policy environments, monitoring and evaluating performance, disseminating insights and profiling achievements.

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Contents

01 Introduction	2
The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework	3
The GSMA Humanitarian Positioning Strategy	4
02 Humanitarian Positioning Strategies: Outcomes and impact	5
MNO and partner engagement	6
Outcomes and impact	6
Outcome 1: Increased availability, effectiveness and coverage of humanitarian services	8
Outcome 2: Increased digital literacy and adoption of services	10
Outcome 3: More collaborative longer-term partnerships	12
Outcome 4: Value of HPS for MNOs	14
03 Developing Humanitarian Positioning Strategies	16
Airtel in Uganda	19
Econet in Burundi	22
Safaricom in Kenya	25
Telesom in Somaliland	28
04 Conclusion	31

Acronyms and abbreviations

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development	FRC	Finnish Refugee Council	M4H	Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation
ARCT	Agence de Régulation et de Contrôle des Télécommunications	HCoC	Humanitarian Code of Conduct	MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
CSR	Corporate social responsibility	HOT	Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team	MNO	Mobile Network Operator
CVA	Cash and voucher assistance	HPS	Humanitarian Positioning Strategies	OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
DRC	Danish Refugee Council	IRC	International Rescue Committee	PSI	Population Services International
DVSLA	Digital village savings and loans associations	IVR	Interactive voice response	UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	KAFOC	Kampala Area Federation of Communities	UNHCR	The UN Refugee Agency
		KIIs	Key informant interviews	WFP	World Food Programme (WFP)
		KRCS	Kenya Red Cross Society	WVI	World Vision International

01

Introduction



The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework


Since 2018, the GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation (M4H) programme has been supporting partnerships between the mobile industry and the humanitarian sector. Combining the expertise of MNOs and humanitarian organisations through strategic partnerships, the M4H team has been able to improve the coordination and effectiveness of collaborative response and recovery efforts. This has resulted in more impactful outcomes for crisis-affected communities.¹


In 2023, the GSMA published [The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework](#), which articulates the M4H programme's approach to catalysing and supporting cross-sector partnerships. The report highlights several challenges partners face in identifying shared values and finding common


ground, such as unaligned objectives, ways of working and language. The framework identifies key areas of support when creating partnerships, as well as when and how partnerships can be supported as they develop.


This report intends to build on the GSMA's Humanitarian Partnership Framework by exploring the extent to which cross-sector partnerships supported by the M4H team have impacted the accuracy, effectiveness and efficiency of subsequently delivered humanitarian interventions. It also provides concrete evidence that private-sector involvement in humanitarian action can have a positive impact on projects and partners as well as wider digital humanitarian ecosystems.

The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework guides the facilitation and support of cross-sectoral partnerships through four key (non-linear) stages, with different entry points and needs depending on the partnership, project and context:

 **1. Engage**
Understanding the context and convening for purpose. Background research and validation workshops bring together stakeholders to understand the context and identify common interests, potential opportunities and key challenges.

 **2. Align**
Brokering partnerships and aligning projects. Supporting communication and collaboration between potential partners and aligning expectations.

 **3. Support**
Supporting project implementation and long-term viability. This includes technical assistance to keep projects on track and develop strategies to ensure they remain viable.

 **4. Amplify**
Collecting and disseminating evidence and learning. Assisting partners with monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), ensuring key lessons are available and communicating results with stakeholders.

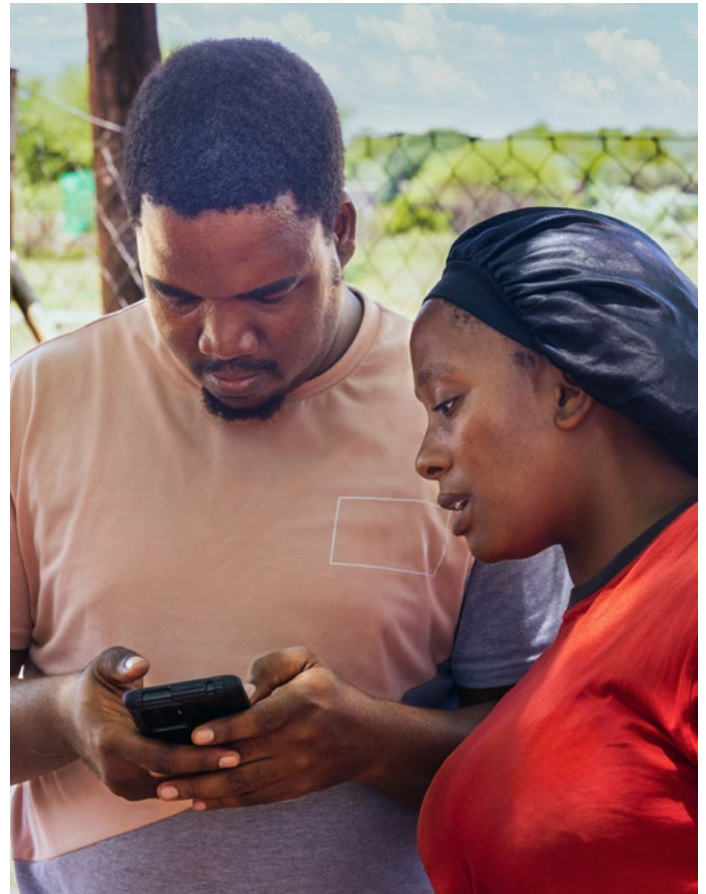
¹ GSMA. (2023). [The GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework: A Framework for Catalysing Cross-Sectoral Partnerships in Support of Humanitarian Assistance](#).

The GSMA Humanitarian Positioning Strategy

Several of the key outcomes identified in the Humanitarian Partnership Framework report were the result of the M4H team working with MNOs to develop strategies for creating and expanding partnerships with local humanitarian organisations. These humanitarian positioning strategies (HPS) were found to have helped MNOs prioritise areas of engagement with potential humanitarian partners and provide mechanisms and processes to support cross-sectoral collaboration and co-creation. HPS were also found to have helped MNOs formalise and reinforce their commitment to providing products and services tailored to different humanitarian contexts and needs.

In 2024, the GSMA commissioned IOD PARC, together with the original M4H consultants who supported the development of HPS with Econet in **Burundi**, Safaricom in **Kenya**, Telesom in **Somaliland** and Airtel in **Uganda**, to assess, identify and provide evidence of the outputs and outcomes of any subsequent MNO-humanitarian partnerships. Data collection included desk reviews as well as interviews and workshops with key MNOs and humanitarian stakeholders, who shared and reflected on outcomes at in-person validation workshops in each of the four countries.²

This report presents the findings of this assessment. The first section focusses on the overall outcomes and impact of M4H supported HPS to date, while the second focusses on the process of developing HPS and the support that MNOs and humanitarian partners have found most valuable. It is hoped that these outcomes, lessons and insights will be useful for other organisations playing an active or catalytic role in cross-sectoral humanitarian partnerships, and will show how the M4H programme can support these partnerships.



² Kenya workshop participants: Safaricom, Airtel Kenya, Finserve Africa, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (Acted), World Vision International (WVIK), Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS), Mezzanine Ware, World Food Programme (WFP), Humanitarian OpenStreetMap & Mercy Corps. Uganda workshop participants: Airtel, Nrabagereka Development Foundation, Food For the Hungry, AVSI, Spouts of Water, World Food Programme (WFP), Grameen Foundation, Community Integrated Development Initiative (CIDI), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), PHB Development, GIZ, World Food Programme (WFP), Dwelling Places, Spire Creative, Asante Africa Foundation, UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), Behaviour Change Initiative, Finnish Refugee Council (FRC), Kampala Area Federation Of Communities (KAFOC), The Lutheran World Foundation. Somaliland workshop participants: Telesom, CARE Somalia, Population Services International (PSI), HI Federation & TAAKULO. Burundi workshop participants: Sasai Fintech, Sacodé, Concern Worldwide, Organisation de Défense de l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (ODEB), World Bank, World Visio, Caritas Internationalis, Search for Common Ground, AVSI, Improvement of Early Schooling Learning (PAADESCO Shishikara), FVS-Amie des Enfants, Pathfinder International, Association Burundaise pour le Bien-Etre Familial's (ABUBEF), Christian Aid, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP), Fraternité Évangélique du Christ en Afrique au Burundi (FECABU), Abt, One Acre Fund, Merankabandi, Ministère de la Santé Publique Burundi (MSPLS), CEPBU, Terre des hommes, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Rescue Committee & SNE International.

02

Humanitarian Positioning Strategies: Outcomes and impact



The assessment found that, as of April 2024, the efforts of the M4H team to develop and implement Humanitarian Positioning Strategies (HPS) resulted in the four MNOs engaging with over 60 humanitarian partners and going on to develop more than 30 innovative, mobile-enabled humanitarian projects.

MNO and partner engagement



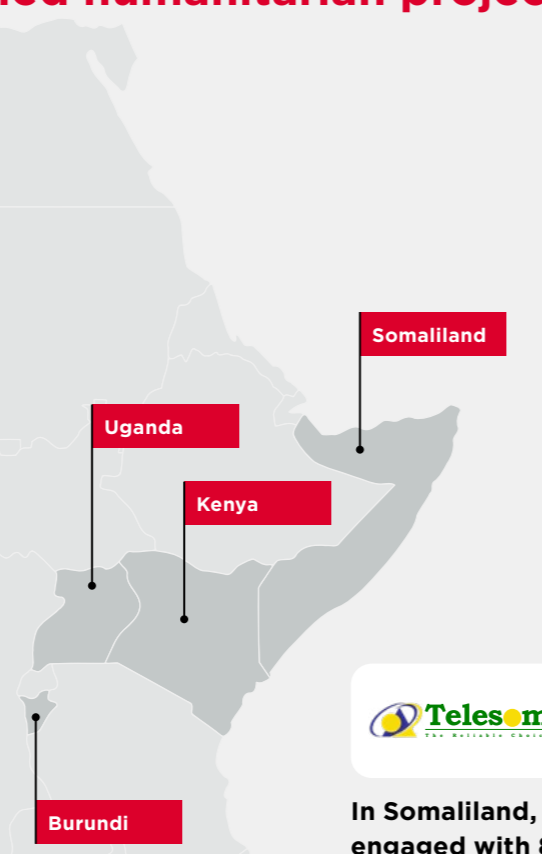
In Uganda, Airtel has engaged with 21 partners:

Asante Africa Foundation, AVSI, Behaviour Change Initiative, Community Integrated Development Initiative (CIDI), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Dwelling Places, Food For the Hungry, Finnish Refugee Council (FRC), GIZ, Grameen Foundation, IFRC, Kampala Area Federation Of Communities (KAFOC), ChildFund, Nrabagereka Development Foundation, PHB Development, Spire Creative, Spouts of Water, The Lutheran World Foundation, UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) & World Food Programme (WFP).



In Burundi, Econet has engaged with 28 partners:

Abt, Association Burundaise pour le Bien-Etre Familial's (ABUBEF), AVSI, Caritas Internationalis, CEPBU, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Fraternité Évangélique du Christ en Afrique au Burundi (FECABU), FVS-Amie des Enfants, Improvement of Early Schooling Learning (PAADESCO Shishikara), International Rescue Committee, International Rescue Committee (IRC), JSI, Merankabandi, Ministère de la Santé Publique Burundi (MSPLS), One Acre Fund, Organisation de Défense de l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (ODEB), Pathfinder International, Population Services International (PSI), Sacodé, Search for Common Ground, SNE International, Terre des hommes, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Bank, World Food Programme (WFP) & World Vision.



In Somaliland, Telesom has engaged with 8 partners:

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), CARE Somalia, HI Federation, Population Services International (PSI), Save the Children, TAAKULO, UNICEF & World Food Programme (WFP).



In Kenya, Safaricom has engaged with 7 partners:

Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (Acted), Humanitarian OpenStreetMap (HOT), Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS), Mercy Corps, Mezzanine Ware, World Food Programme (WFP) & World Vision International (WVIK)

Collaborative projects and initiatives

30+ mobile-enabled humanitarian projects developed:

- Digital inclusion (5)**
- Cash and voucher assistance (4)**
- Policy and advocacy (4)**
- Agent training (3)**
- Digital literacy (3)**
- Digital village savings and loans associations (DVSLA) (3)**
- Digital health (2)**
- Feedback mechanisms (2)**
- Payment platforms (2)**
- Early warning systems (1)**
- Fundraising (1)**
- Interoperability (1)**

Outcomes and impact

As well as identifying the number and range of new partnerships, projects and initiatives, the assessment sought to understand the changes and benefits brought about by the HPS in each country. In many instances, the assessment found tangible benefits experienced by MNOs, partners and end users alike, with clear evidence linking the outputs and outcomes to the initial HPS engagement and alignment activities. The assessment also identified longer-term impacts and contributions that

likely resulted from the HPS activities. These included, for example, projects that were not directly supported by the M4H team but that were subsequently developed and implemented as a result of the relationships or focus areas identified in the HPS. These outcomes were attributed to broader, lasting benefits, such as better working relationships between MNOs and partners and more enabling environments for mobile enabled humanitarian innovations.



Outcome 1:

Increased availability, effectiveness and coverage of humanitarian services

All four HPS resulted in new mobile-enabled humanitarian products and services being conceived, designed, co-created, piloted and, in some cases, replicated at scale. These innovations have, in turn, strengthened humanitarian assistance delivery in several ways.

As expected, the complementary competencies and expertise of MNOs and humanitarian organisations improved the coordination, effectiveness and outcomes of joint response and recovery projects in all four countries. Several humanitarian partners involved in HPS also reported that working with the MNOs had improved the provision of other wider mobile services for beneficiaries.

In **Uganda**, for example, humanitarian partners experienced a noticeable improvement in both the quality and responsiveness of their services and products developed with Airtel. One such solution was a bulk payments system that enables multiple mobile money transactions to be initiated from a single account to a predetermined list of CVA recipients. Airtel also further enhanced their service offering by enabling utility bill payments through designated agents and money transfers to mobile wallets on other networks. Finally, streamlining the cash-out process also helped improve end users' access to essential goods and services.

Humanitarian partners in all four countries also found that the HPS contributed to expanded MNO coverage and improved access to end users, including refugee communities and those living in remote areas. Following the HPS process in **Uganda**, for example, Airtel responded to issues raised by humanitarian partners by making noticeable improvements to their infrastructure serving remote refugee and host communities. The humanitarian organisations benefitted from the improvements and appreciated the reduction in network downtime – a direct result of the HPS. Airtel also supported the provision of handsets in some marginalised and refugee communities, which the WFP attributed to significantly expanding the reach and effectiveness of their operations.



Example 1

Improved mechanisms for cash and voucher assistance

Mobile money is now the modality of choice for cash and voucher assistance (CVA), and all four MNOs successfully leveraged mobile technology to deliver innovative CVA distribution mechanisms. Mobile money specialists from both the mobile and humanitarian sectors brought extensive contextual knowledge, expertise and capabilities to the implementation of mobile money-enabled CVA following the HPS, and in doing so were able to ensure that their interventions were appropriately designed for the specific contexts and needs of their end users.

In **Uganda**, Airtel worked with the WFP to enhance their traditional mobile money offering by providing additional features for users receiving CVA payments. By reforming the cash-out process and facilitating utility bill payments directly through their mobile money agents, recipients are now able to access essential goods and services more quickly.

Airtel also collaborated with the DRC to use bulk payments for mobile money CVA distribution. This process involves multiple payments being processed at the same time from one account to a predetermined list of recipients. It then produces a streamlined payment report, which was widely regarded as a more transparent, safe, convenient, effective and efficient process for CVA distribution. Other humanitarian partners that have subsequently used these systems have found them to be “transformative” and “game-changing” for CVA distribution.

“Airtel’s involvement and engagement was instrumental in facilitating our project and expediting the distribution of CVA to beneficiaries in an impressively short timeframe.”

- DRC, Uganda



Outcome 2:

Increased digital literacy and uptake of services

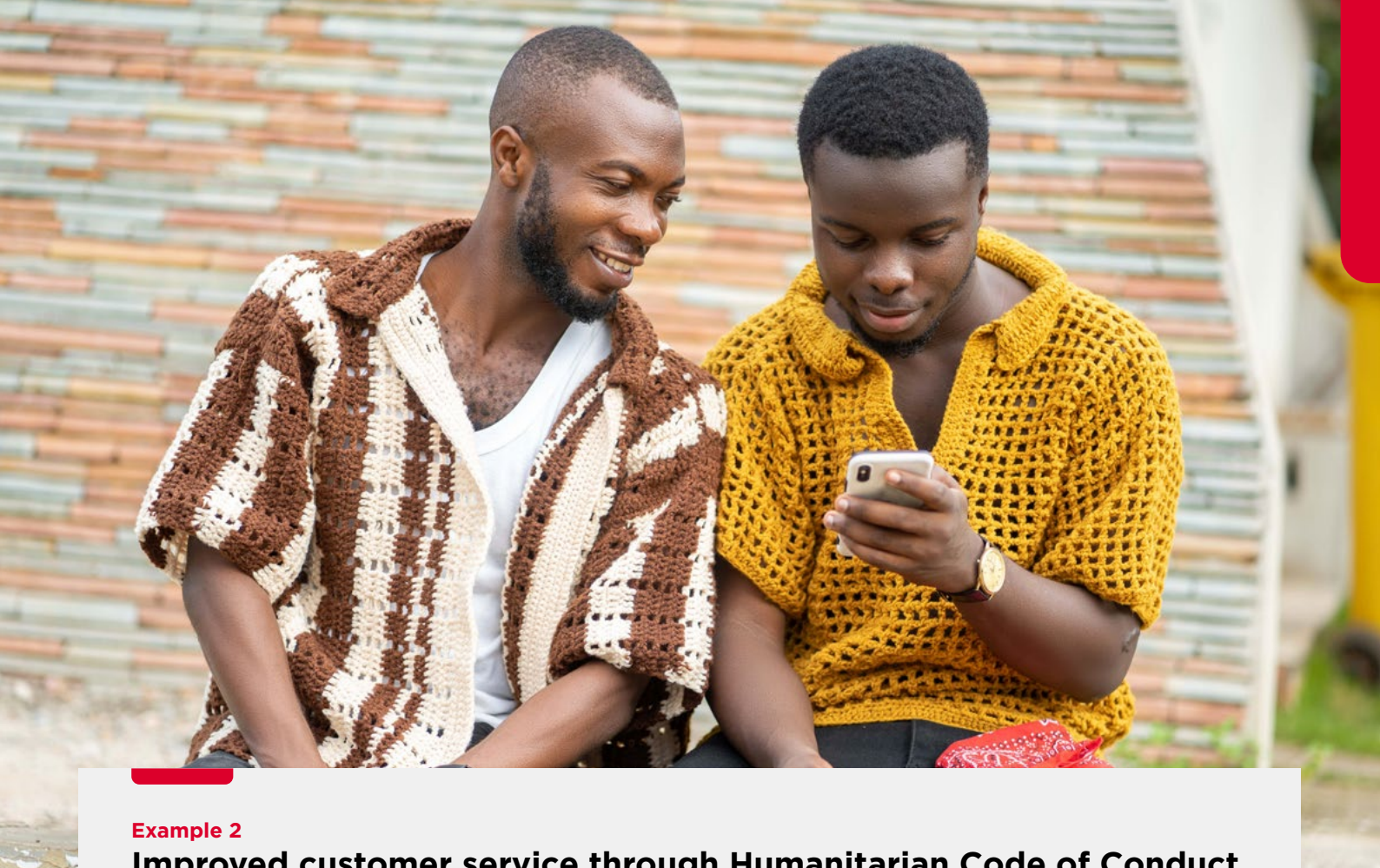
In addition to better coverage and access to mobile-enabled humanitarian services, the HPS have also resulted in higher trial and adoption of more advanced services like mobile money.

Following the HPS, a variety of projects have been collaboratively implemented by MNOs and humanitarian partners to deliver digital and financial literacy training. In **Burundi**, for example, Econet formed a successful partnership with the WFP, Concern Worldwide and UNHCR to deliver digital financial literacy training to their mobile money agents and end users. Following these activities, Econet reported a positive change in their customers' mobile money usage. Rather than immediately cashing out CVA payments, recipients started using their mobile money wallets and experiencing the wider benefits of mobile money for making payments and protecting their savings. The humanitarian partners also found that the training improved their user engagement and wider project outcomes.

Other innovations emerging from HPS have addressed wider accessibility challenges for mobile money users. For example, Telesom worked with humanitarian partners in **Somaliland** to develop and deliver a variety of projects that have made mobile

money more accessible and inclusive for users with limited literacy and visual impairments. Voice ID, for example, was co-developed with CARE using recipients' voices as identification for verification for CVA distribution. This was found to improve security for recipients, efficiency and transparency for humanitarian partners as well as overall transaction volumes for Telesom.

The HPS have also helped improve the tech-readiness and digital skills of recipients through agent and end user training activities. The findings show that, across the four countries and contexts, the MNOs have increased the number of people using more advanced mobile services, such as mobile money. In **Burundi**, for example, training sessions were conducted for recipients on mobile phone and SIM card use, as well as financial literacy, which were found to enhance the overall user experience.



Example 2

Improved customer service through Humanitarian Code of Conduct agent training

In three of the four countries where HPS were implemented, the M4H team worked with the MNOs and humanitarian partners to deliver mobile money agent Humanitarian Code of Conduct (HCoC) and Protection training. This training supports agents to educate customers on registration processes and the services available to them, to ensure that all agents working with refugee populations and host communities uphold core humanitarian principles.

For example, in 2024, the M4H team worked with Airtel and Viamo to deliver tailored HCoC training to their mobile money agents in **Uganda** using innovative interactive voice response (IVR) technology. The training proved particularly useful for agents serving vulnerable populations, as it raised awareness of core HCoC issues and

increased agents' confidence and ability to act when witnessing unfair treatment of their customers. The training has not only improved the delivery of mobile money services to refugee populations and host communities, but also strengthened MNOs' partnerships with local humanitarian organisations.

“The training initiative yielded a positive impact by enhancing the digital and financial literacy of targeted beneficiaries, empowering them to more adeptly utilize phones and mobile money services.”

- Airtel, Uganda



Outcome 3:

More collaborative longer-term partnerships

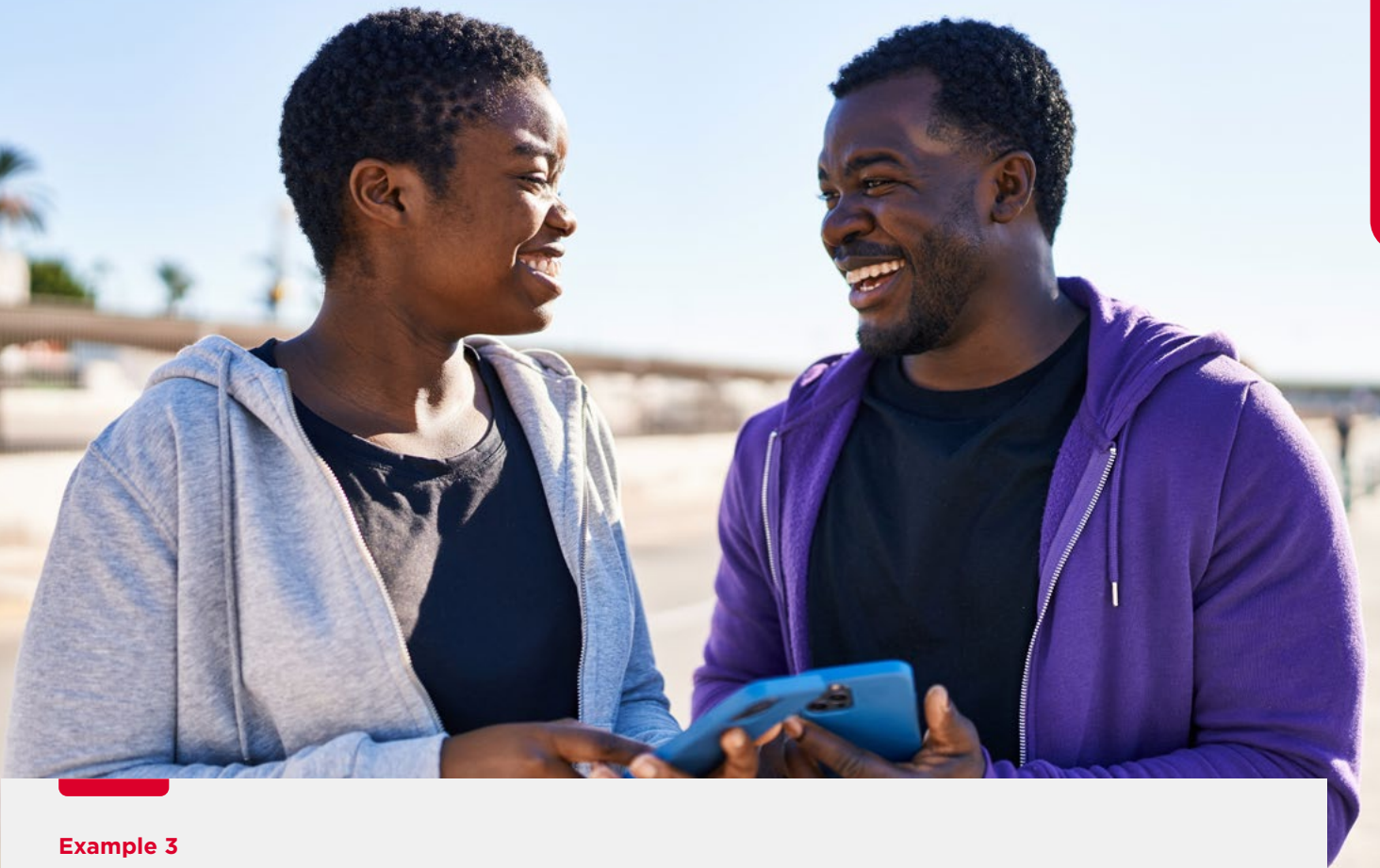
The assessment found that HPS have helped MNOs better understand their humanitarian partners and vice versa, creating longer-term and more supportive partnerships.

In **Kenya**, the HPS led to a recognised shift in how Safaricom perceive and approach their humanitarian partners. They now work more collaboratively, and together have overcome registration issues faced by recipients as well as co-developing a joint advocacy platform. Similarly, in **Burundi**, Sasai Fintech credited the HPS with helping them maintain relationships with key humanitarian partners WFP and World Vision when they were faced with unexpected regulatory issues.

The findings also show that partners from both sectors have developed the internal structures and policies that sustain relationships and help enable ongoing collaboration. This was reported primarily by MNOs, but also by humanitarian partners, with a standout example being the recently developed Telesom for Humanitarian Innovation unit in **Somaliland**. The unit specifically aims to promote financial and digital inclusion, enhance the delivery of technology-driven humanitarian response, foster co-creation and collaboration with humanitarian organisations and engage more effectively with local communities. This strategic move demonstrates Telesom's long-term commitment to engaging in

humanitarian partnerships that deliver and support positive social impact. Telesom's humanitarian partners also reported finding the MNO to be more embracing of innovation, which they said has helped drive positive change in the sector.

Strategic partnerships developed following the HPS were also found to have successfully influenced regulatory and policy change. Both MNOs and humanitarian partners were found to have leveraged their partners' positions, influence and relationships with policymakers to work more effectively with governments and jointly influence regulatory and policy decisions. Even without preexisting relationships, combined advocacy efforts between partners have brought about mutually beneficial policy change. In **Kenya**, for example, several of the humanitarian partners recognised the value of collaboratively advocating against data privacy issues. They felt that by working together, alongside the GSMA and Safaricom, they were more successful in bringing refugees' financial inclusion issues to the regulator. This shared social purpose was regarded as an additional benefit by all partners involved in the engagement.



Example 3

Additional long-term benefits of partnering with MNOs

In addition to supporting the development and delivery of mobile-enabled services, MNOs have also worked with humanitarian partners to provide a variety of other digital product management and monitoring systems. As technology providers, they have provided unique technical support to improve their partners' operational efficiencies and ability to build relationships and feedback mechanisms with end users. In **Somaliland**, for example, Telesom worked with Shaqodoon to co-develop an innovative approach to collecting and monitoring user feedback and complaints. By incorporating IVR technology in their communications and relationship management systems, they have been able to capture feedback more effectively, address issues more quickly and enhance the overall impact and effectiveness of their initiatives. Following this success, Telesom was able to encourage several other humanitarian partners to implement the same technology in their projects.

When a reduction in humanitarian funding in **Kenya** forced organisations to find new ways to raise funds, Safaricom responded by working with their humanitarian partners to develop an innovative funding stream. By repurposing an existing product, the Bonga loyalty programme, they allowed individuals and businesses in Kenya to donate their Bonga points to humanitarian causes. Initially co-designed and developed with UNHCR, the Bonga for Good platform was successful in generating diversified and digitised funding and was subsequently rolled out with several other Safaricom partners, including UNICEF.

“We collaboratively developed a really good solution, Bonga for good, which not only works really well for us as a loyalty programme but also now enables our humanitarian partners to raise additional funds.”

– Safaricom, Kenya



Outcome 4:

Value of Humanitarian Positioning Strategies for MNOs

All four MNOs in Burundi, Kenya, Somaliland and Uganda recognised the commercial impact of their HPS, reporting increased revenue from additional use of their existing service as well as new revenue streams from new services developed.

Several of the MNOs attributed the HPS to helping them and their humanitarian partners to better understand the opportunity for shared value. The commercial viability of partnerships with humanitarian organisations is also clear from the business contracts that have resulted from several HPS.

When Safaricom's HPS kicked off in **Kenya**, they had already been working with partners, but mainly on corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. The HPS process provided the opportunity to identify ways in which the two sectors could work together, not just from a commercial or philanthropic perspective, but with a new focus on shared value. The result was projects that have not only improved the efficiency and reach of humanitarian partners, but also provided commercial opportunities for Safaricom. Their partnership with UNICEF, for

example, began with the provision of connectivity for schools in refugee camps but expanded to support a range of other programming activities including connectivity, livelihoods and fundraising.

Previous research by the GSMA identified revenue as one of four areas for MNOs to consider when assessing the value proposition of engaging in humanitarian response.³ While revenue generation may not always be an MNO's primary motivation, sustainability and maintaining their bottom line will likely be a key consideration. It is not just immediate revenue streams that provide value, however, but also the opportunity for ongoing revenue generation as solutions are scaled up and adopted by other humanitarian partners. In **Somaliland**, for example, Telesom identified both their Voice ID platform and IVR hotline as key innovations that will continue to increase service use.⁴

³ Revenue, competition, reputation and influence. See: GSMA. (2020). [Partnering During Crisis: The Shared Value of Partnerships between Mobile Network Operators and Humanitarian Organisations](#).

⁴ GSMA Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation programme. (2021). [Verifying recipients of cash assistance through Voice ID: Pilot project lessons and outcomes](#).



Example 4:

Voice ID provides shared value for project partners

CARE International and Telesom developed and deployed an innovative solution that utilises user's voice as verification for CVA. The solution was designed to address key issues in verifying recipients of cash payments in Somaliland; getting timely responses from recipients for proof of payment and addressing logistical and security issues through regular outreach to recipient households in rural areas. Working together, the partners collaborated to develop 'Voice ID' for remote, voice enabled verification. Using a user's voice signature, instead of thumbprints and signatures, the solution collects verification data from all households ahead of distribution and acts as a trigger for the release of payments.

Following its successful pilot, the Voice ID solution proved to be a cost-effective and accurate solution for CARE, whilst also demonstrating commercial potential for Telesom. For CARE, the Voice ID solution presented value for money, demonstrating notable improvements

in both effectiveness and efficiency. For Telesom, the pilot project was an opportunity to work with a humanitarian partner to create and refine a technology solution that directly addresses an identified need. In working closely with CARE they were able to ensure that Voice ID was functional, whilst opening the door for future commercial opportunities with CARE and other humanitarian organisations as the solution scaled. As of July 2022, the solution had impacted 216,780 people with over USD \$5M dispersed through CVA in Somaliland alone.

“We are seeing more NGOs coming to use our voice ID platforms and as a result now have more transfers are coming, which is commercially good for us, and also our clients using the platform.”

- Telesom, Somaliland

03

Developing Humanitarian Positioning Strategies

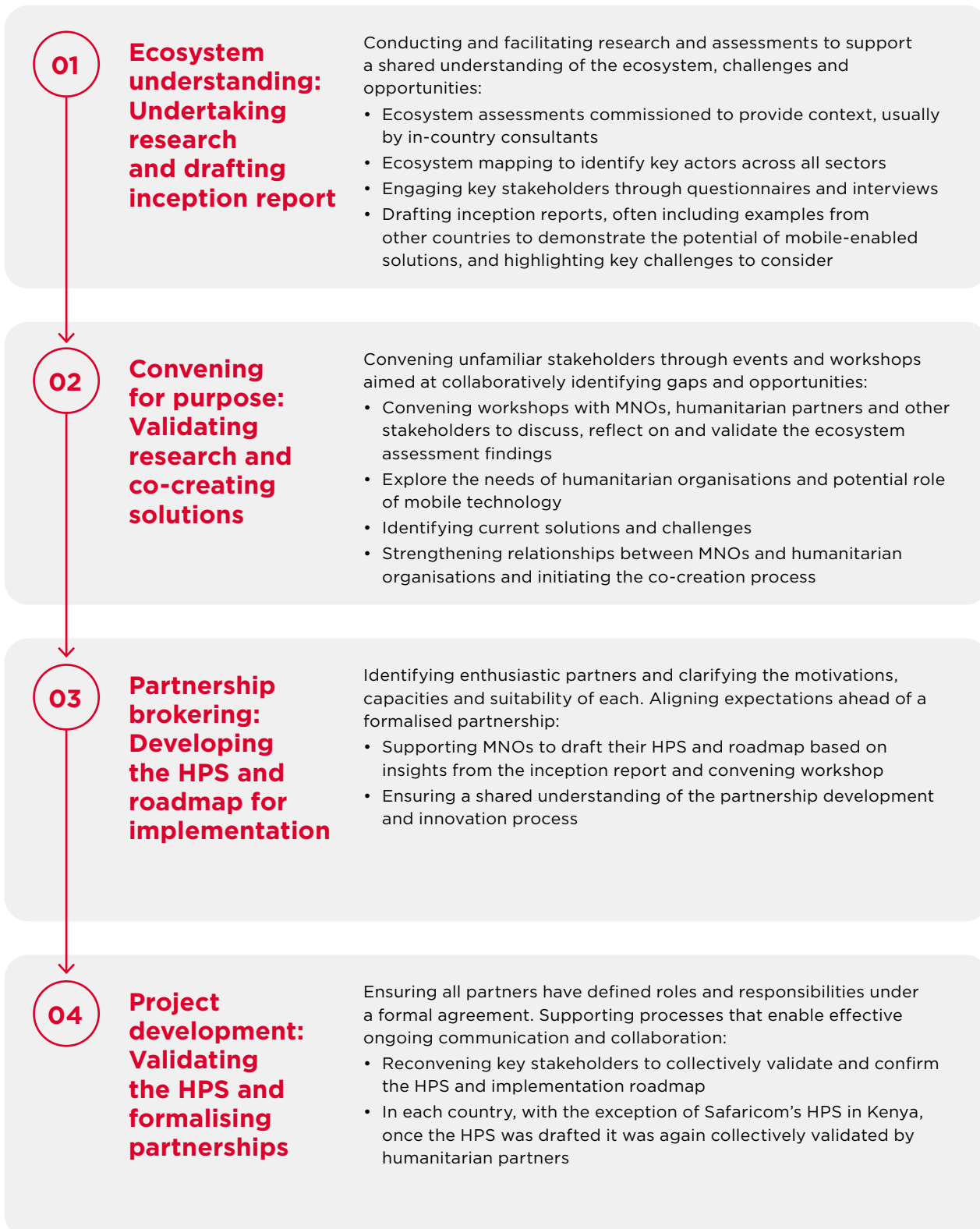


Humanitarian positioning strategies are often the first step in catalysing cross-sectoral partnerships, and the assessment found that this process tends to follow the four areas of support identified in the Engage and Align stages of the GSMA Humanitarian Partnership Framework. Although shown in Figure 1 as a step-by-step process, in practice they may overlap or follow a different order, with partners and partnerships progressing, pausing and even taking

steps backward. The commitment of the partners, along with the support of the M4H team to navigate the process, can be critical to successful collaborative projects. The assessment also confirmed the catalytic role played by the M4H team, and found that the support needed may diminish over time as partnerships and working relationships strengthen and become more sustainable.

Figure 1

Process of developing a Humanitarian Positioning Strategy



In all four countries, the MNOs successfully developed HPS for strengthening partnerships, products and services, and identified enabling factors for supporting digital humanitarian assistance in their respective country. In all cases, core problem statements and focus areas allowed the MNOs and humanitarian partners to target their efforts, forge partnerships and develop products and services to meet identified needs. The assessment found that understanding the ecosystem and convening for purpose played an important role in the development of an HPS. However, it was the validation workshops, where MNO and humanitarian partners came together to discuss the findings of the inception report, that were considered most valuable in creating the ownership and buy-in needed for their successful implementation.

The validation workshops enabled humanitarian partners to learn about and provide feedback on the contents of the HPS, as well facilitate the collaborative development of roadmaps, with core goals, activities and accountable responsibilities. Once the HPS were in place, the M4H team played more of a facilitative role, encouraging ongoing engagement and relationship development between the MNOs and humanitarian partners, as well as

supporting ongoing roadmap development and implementation. In Somaliland and Burundi, this process was quite systematic, with regular meetings and progress checks, while in Kenya and Uganda it was more ad hoc.

Where possible, ongoing monitoring and support for refining the HPS was also provided and found to be valuable. Additional support with policy and regulatory advocacy was also considered valuable in supporting the successful piloting and scaling of projects. It is worth noting the overwhelmingly enthusiastic response and engagement from MNOs and humanitarian partners at the workshops that were held as part of the assessment. It was evident that all of the stakeholders involved appreciated and valued the opportunity to meet and discuss the progress and results of the various HPS to date.

The following case studies draw on the findings of the assessment and provide examples from each of the four HPS to highlight key areas of support provided by the M4H programme. As well as providing an overview of activities at each stage of the HPS process, the case studies also provide examples of the outputs and support most valued by the MNOs and humanitarian partners.





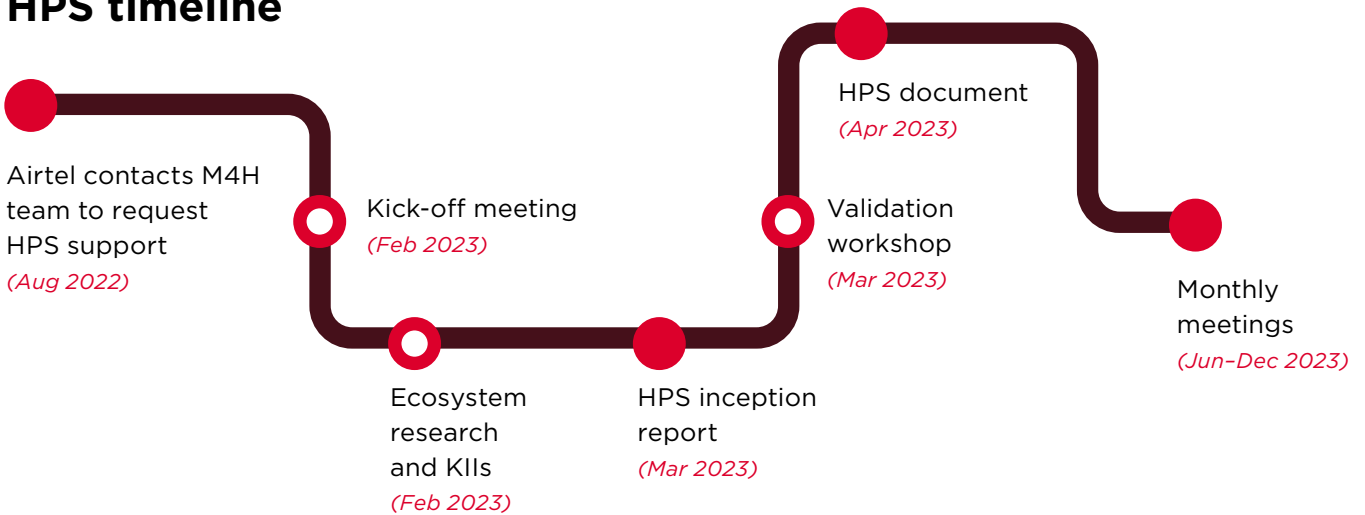
Airtel in Uganda

Background

In 2022, the M4H team was approached by Airtel, as they wanted to better understand and explore the growing opportunities for mobile-enabled services in the Ugandan humanitarian sector. They suspected a more strategic positioning of their products and services would increase opportunities to work with the many NGOs and humanitarian organisations across the region. Airtel also saw an opportunity to leverage the GSMA's experience and expertise

in digital humanitarian assistance to create a platform for engaging with humanitarian organisations to co-create and pilot new digital humanitarian solutions. They hoped their technological capabilities would be a good fit with the digital needs and interests of local humanitarian organisations, and that these new alliances would provide an opportunity to deliver enhanced digital humanitarian services.

HPS timeline



Activities and outputs

- Following a kick-off meeting, the M4H team conducted ecosystem research that included desk research and key informant interviews (KIIs) with Airtel staff and six humanitarian organisations: AVSI Foundation, DRC, Grameen Foundation, PHB Development, UNCDF and WFP.
- An inception report was developed that included key digital humanitarian challenges and priorities as a starting point for identifying potential digital solutions. A validation workshop was then organised, where all participants discussed the humanitarian needs identified and the relevant digital services Airtel could provide. It should be noted that, unlike in the other countries, initial support for developing the inception report and validation workshop in Uganda was provided by the GSMA Strategic Partnerships team rather than third-party consultants.
- As detailed in Figure 2, the subsequent HPS document included the technological needs of the partners, areas in which innovation might address these needs effectively, as well as the anticipated value proposition for humanitarian partners. The HPS included clear roles for the Airtel departments responsible for implementation, although a detailed workplan for the overall HPS was still due to be developed.

Figure 2:

Digital technology needs, availability and value propositions identified in Airtel's HPS in Uganda



Digital and technology needs of humanitarian partners

- Customised products using AI
- Digital solutions for preparedness
- Off-net APIs and USSD services
- Digital literacy programming
- Early warning systems
- Insurance
- Coordination with partners
- Mental health information



Areas in which partnerships can address these needs

- Walk the journey - partnerships at all stages of project stages
- Subsidised tariffs
- Building the knowledge hub
- Mobile phone ownership
- Digital literacy
- Network coverage
- Emergency response



What value proposition can Airtel provide to humanitarian partners?

- Resource sharing
- Interoperability
- Advocacy for policy amendments
- Cost structures on withdrawal taxes

Source: Airtel

Outcomes and impact

OUTCOMES

The assessment found that Airtel's HPS resulted in engagements with **21** partners and the subsequent development of **six** projects to deliver innovative, mobile enabled humanitarian products and services.

21 partners engaged:

Asante Africa Foundation, AVSI, Behaviour Change Initiative, Community Integrated Development Initiative (CIDI), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Dwelling Places, Food For the Hungry, Finnish Refugee Council (FRC), GIZ, Grameen Foundation, IFRC, Kampala Area Federation Of Communities (KAFOC), ChildFund, Nrabagereka Development Foundation, PHB Development, Spire Creative, Spouts of Water, The Lutheran World Foundation, UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and World Food Programme (WFP)

Six collaborative projects developed on:

- Digital inclusion
- CVA
- Agent training
- Policy and advocacy

IMPACT

These projects in Uganda were found to deliver tangible benefits for Airtel, their humanitarian partners and end users alike, including:

- The provision of more inclusive and efficient digital humanitarian assistance:
 - Improved overall humanitarian service coverage and accessibility
 - Increased digital and financial literacy and skills
- Value for Airtel from new products and more users
- More systemic and sustainable collaboration between Airtel and the humanitarian sector in Uganda:
 - A change in the way Airtel views the humanitarian sector, and vice versa
 - More formal and structured working relationships
- A more enabling environment for digital humanitarian assistance in Uganda

The assessment also found that since the HPS was implemented, Airtel has seen an increase in the number of humanitarian organisations approaching them to work together.

Lessons and observations

More systemic and sustainable collaboration

Since the inception of the HPS, Airtel has seen a significant increase in engagement and partnerships with the humanitarian sector. Airtel credited the validation workshop with initiating and solidifying several relationships with key humanitarian actors. Throughout the assessment, respondents highlighted the instrumental role of the HPS process in attracting new partners. In the 12 months following the HPS, Airtel signed several formal statements of commitment, including with the WFP, DRC, UNHCR, GIZ and FAO.

Value of commercial contracts with new humanitarian partners

Although the Airtel HPS was less than a year old at the time of the assessment, there is already tangible evidence of its commercial viability in the signing of commercial contracts with several partners, including WFP, DRC and GIZ. The WFP contract, for example, is for an all-inclusive service agreement covering the provision of training, SIM cards, registration, fund disbursement, the use of agents and utility bill payments.

“Airtel’s involvement and engagement was instrumental in facilitating our project and expediting the distribution of CVA to beneficiaries in an impressively short timeframe.”

– DRC, Uganda

“The training initiative yielded a positive impact by enhancing the digital and financial literacy of targeted beneficiaries, empowering them to more adeptly utilize phones and mobile money services.”

– Airtel, Uganda

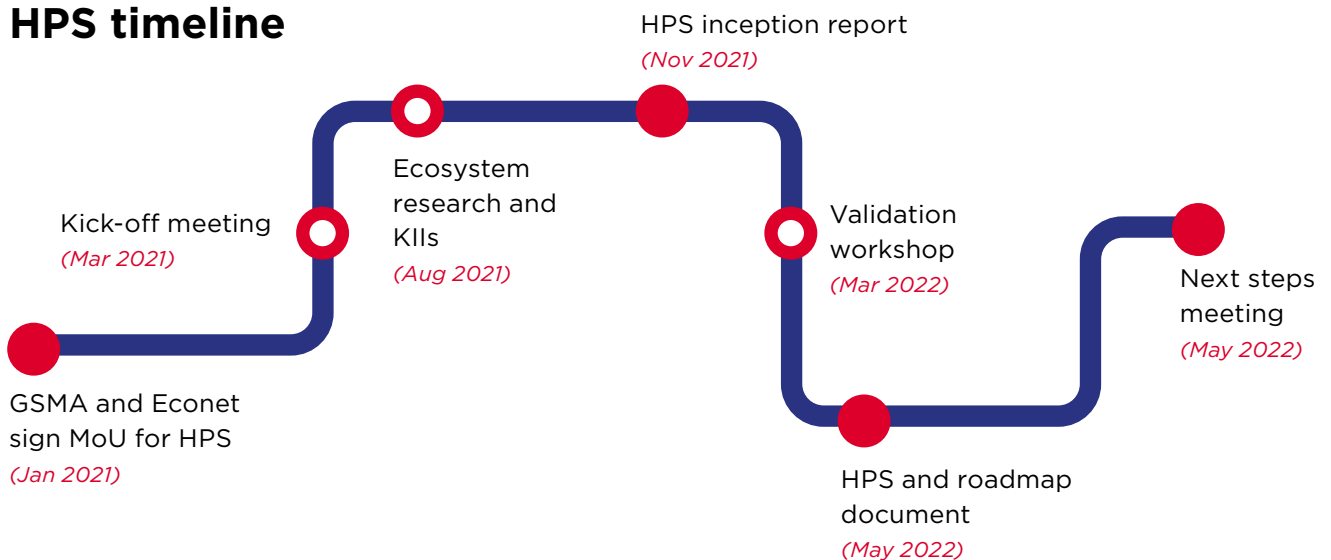
Econet in Burundi

Background

In 2020, Econet and its subsidiary Sasai Fintech, were working with several humanitarian organisations to provide a range of mobile money services and other digital solutions. However, they did not have dedicated resources to develop the innovative solutions their humanitarian partners were increasingly seeking. Econet approached the M4H team requesting

support to help improve their understanding of the humanitarian sector and engage in humanitarian partnerships more strategically. They also wanted to better understand some of the other common services being sought, such as mobile-enabled solutions for CVA, messaging for recipients, humanitarian agent training and innovative IVR applications.

HPS timeline

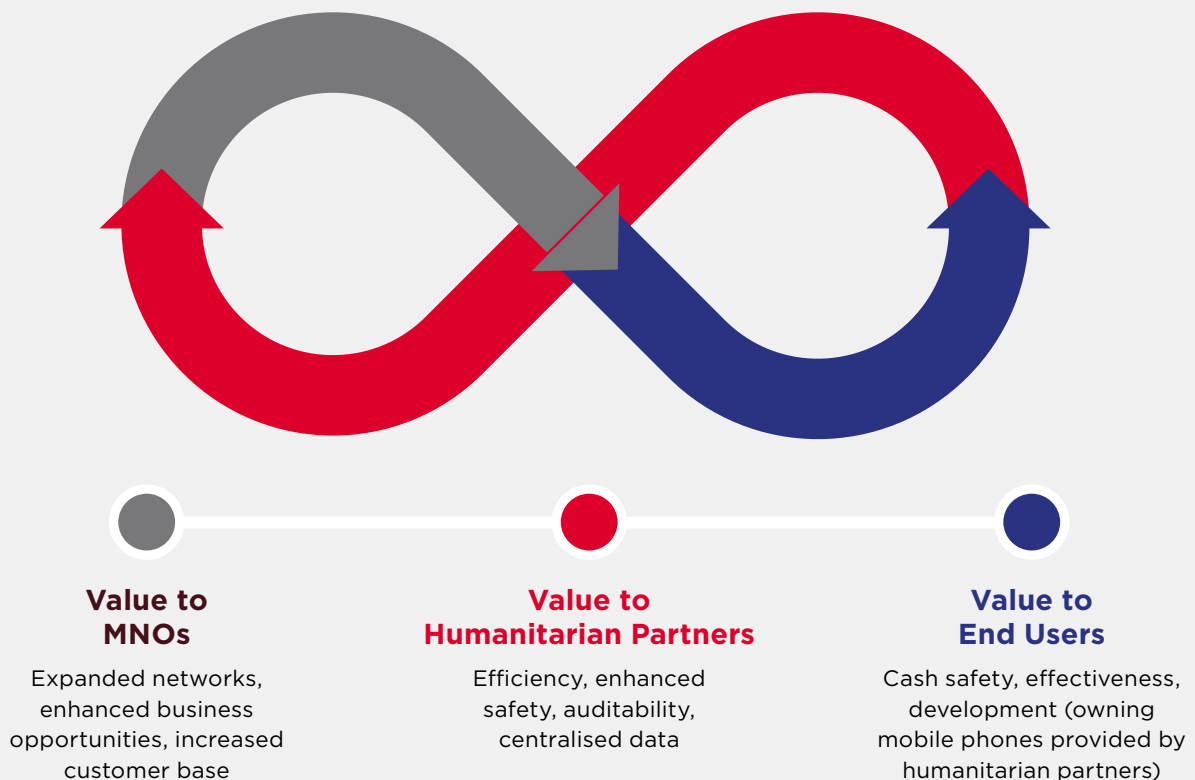


Activities and outputs

- M4H commissioned ecosystem research, engaging several humanitarian organisations in Burundi, including the World Bank as well as other local and international NGOs. A validation workshop was then convened where practitioners from both sectors had the opportunity to discuss the inception report and identify the benefits of collaboration.
- At the validation workshop in Burundi, participants identified key opportunities and benefits of collaboration, as detailed in Figure 3. They also discussed key questions around pricing and affordability, protection of vulnerable customers, liquidity of agents for increased transactions and creating sustainable value propositions for end users.
- The Econet HSP and roadmap were completed in May 2022 and included the formation of five taskforces, with all planned activities having a designated point of contact at Econet responsible for overseeing delivery.
- Following the HPS, M4H commissioned a consultant to support Econet with project management and technical assistance.

Figure 3

Benefits identified in Econet's HPS in Burundi



Source: Econet

Outcomes and impact

OUTCOMES

The assessment found that Econet's HPS resulted in engagements with **28** partners and the subsequent development of **seven** projects to deliver innovative, mobile enabled humanitarian products and services.

28 partners engaged:

Abt, Association Burundaise pour le Bien-Etre Familial's (ABUBEF), AVSI, Caritas Internationalis, CEPBU, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Fraternité Évangélique du Christ en Afrique au Burundi (FECABU), FVS-Amie des Enfants, Improvement of Early Schooling Learning (PAADESCO Shishikara), International Rescue Committee, International Rescue Committee (IRC), JSI, Merankabandi, Ministère de la Santé Publique Burundi (MSPLS), One Acre Fund, Organisation de Défense de l'Environnement et le Développement Durable (ODEB), Pathfinder International, Population Services International (PSI), Sacodé, Search for Common Ground, SNE International, Terre des hommes, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Bank, World Food Programme (WFP) & World Vision.

Seven collaborative projects focused on:

- Digital inclusion
- CVA
- Agent training
- Digital literacy
- Policy and advocacy
- DVSLA
- Payment platform

IMPACT

These projects in Burundi were found to deliver tangible benefits for Econet, their partners and end users alike, including:

- The provision of more inclusive and efficient digital humanitarian assistance:
 - Improved overall humanitarian service coverage and accessibility
 - Increased digital and financial literacy and skills
 - Improved mechanisms for mobile CVA
- Commercial value and revenue gains for Econet from new products and more users
- More systemic and sustainable collaboration between Econet and the humanitarian sector in Burundi
 - A change in the way Econet views the humanitarian sector, and vice versa
 - More formal and structured working relationships
- A more enabling environment for digital humanitarian assistance in Burundi

The assessment also found that since the HPS, both Econet and Sasai Fintech have seen an increase in the number of humanitarian organisations approaching them to work together.

Lessons and observations

Value of convening and partnership brokering

Bringing together Econet with humanitarian actors was considered crucial for initiating connections and generating the interest that ultimately led to successful partnerships and project development. The assessment also found that the detailed roadmap and early allocation of responsibilities were critical in ensuring that agreed actions and next steps were being implemented and followed up as planned.

Project development and ongoing implementation support

The consultant commissioned by M4H to support with project management and technical assistance was also found to play a valuable role in identifying and overcoming delays to keep activities moving. For example, when a new Head of Mobile Money was appointed at Sasai Fintech, they provided vital support to get them up to speed on the country context and encourage their engagement with the HPS.

“Users are managing their costs better, they have started to understand that there is no need to withdraw everything at once, it is an ongoing process but they are starting to appreciate how keeping the money on their phones can keep it safe.”

– Econet, Burundi

“World Vision have become a really important partners for us and since the HPS they seem very happy with the relationships we have developed. They are now the biggest user of humanitarian cash transfers in Burundi, and will continue to grow and open up new markets for us.”

– Econet, Burundi



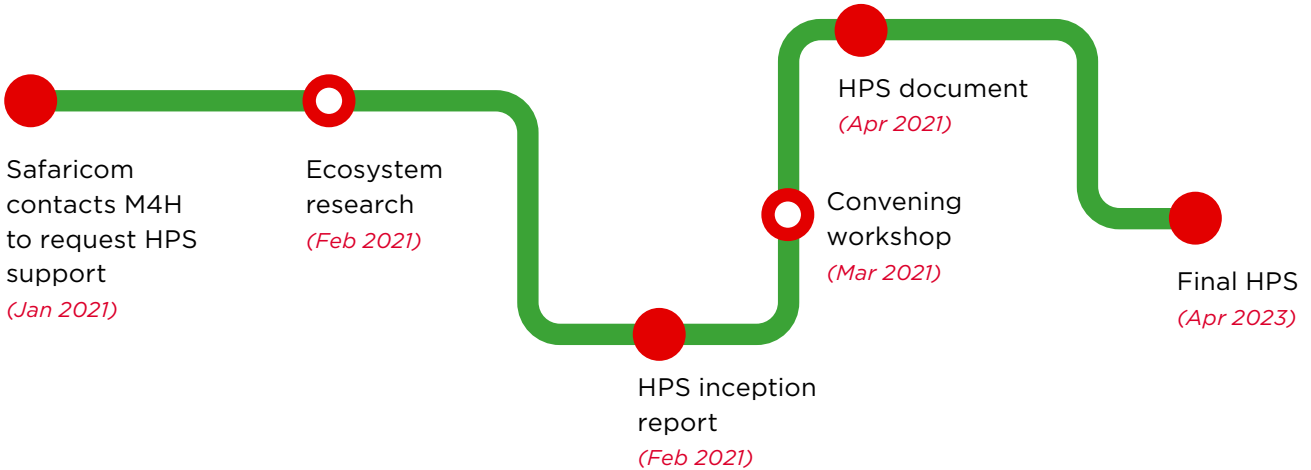
Safaricom in Kenya

Background

In 2020, Safaricom was already working with several humanitarian partners in Kenya on ad hoc solutions as needs arose. These efforts were spread across Safaricom's business units with a mix of commercial, consumer and CSR focussed responses. Safaricom contacted the M4H team to request support in understanding

the broader potential of using mobile technology in humanitarian response. They wanted to know what was being done by MNOs in other markets, the impact it was having and the opportunities there might be to improve their offering and better support the communities where they operate.

HPS timeline

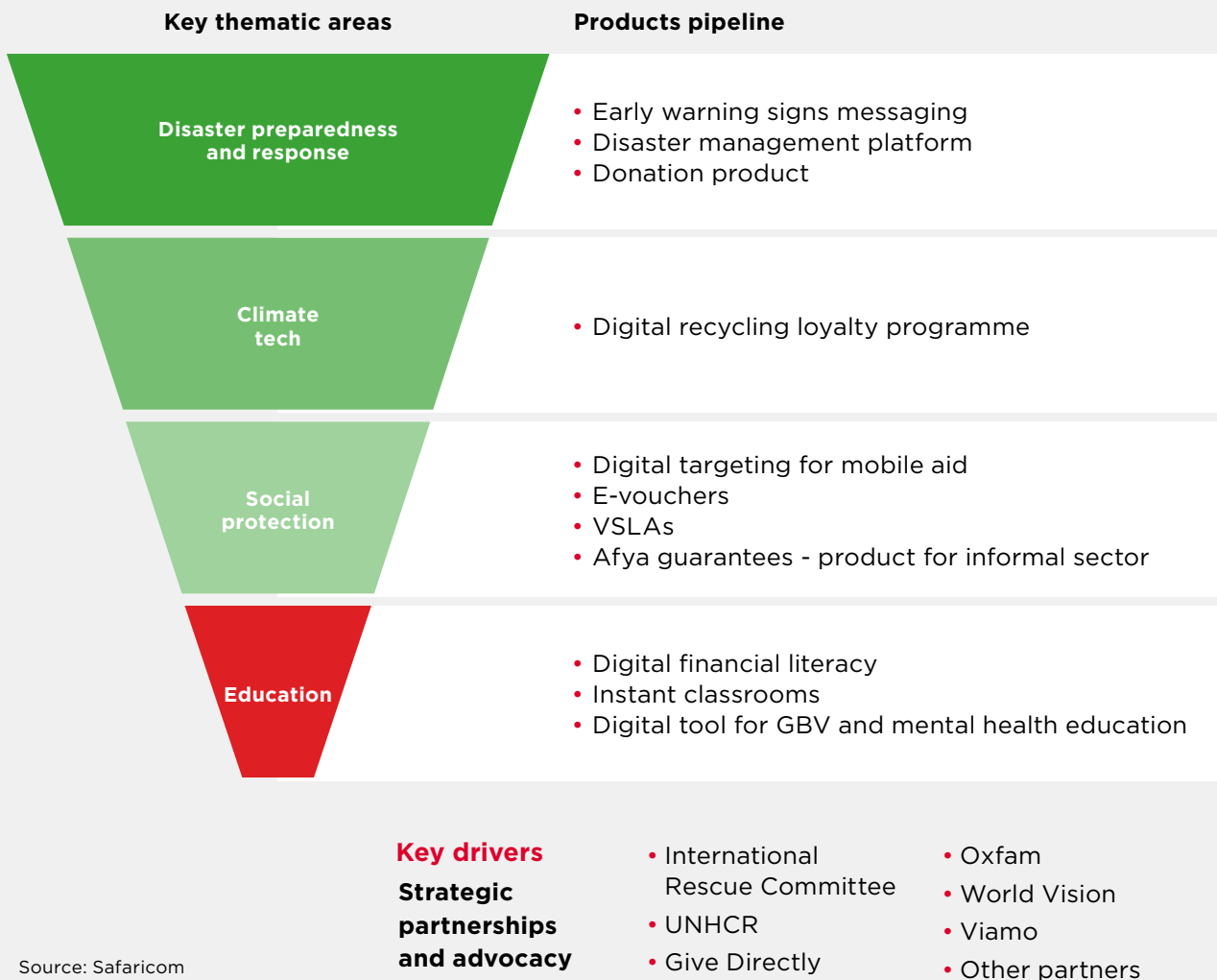


Activities and outputs

- The M4H team commissioned ecosystem research, appointing regional consultants to assess the humanitarian ecosystem in Kenya. They undertook a regional humanitarian response and stakeholder mapping exercise, focussing on the local operational and logistical challenges most commonly faced when implementing mobile-enabled humanitarian solutions.
- A draft inception report was produced and circulated among all contributors, relevant stakeholders and other interested parties, along with an invitation to a workshop to discuss the findings. At the workshop, attendees were encouraged to share and discuss the findings, along with their own challenges and experiences, so they could begin to prioritise areas for potential collaboration.
- These discussions were subsequently written up and developed in an HPS document that highlighted the immediate needs of local humanitarian organisations and provided initial thoughts on how Safaricom might provide services to address them. This included a “products pipeline” for humanitarian innovation, including disaster preparedness and response, climate tech, social protection and education, as detailed in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Safaricom’s product pipeline for humanitarian innovation



Source: Safaricom

Outcomes and impact

OUTCOMES

The assessment found that Safaricom's HPS resulted in engagements with **seven** partners and the subsequent development of **eight** projects to deliver innovative, mobile enabled humanitarian products and services.

Seven partners engaged:

Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (Acted), Humanitarian OpenStreetMap (HOT), Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS), Mercy Corps, Mezzanine Ware, World Food Programme (WFP) & World Vision International (WVIK)

Eight collaborative projects developed on:

- Digital inclusion
- CVA
- Agent training
- Digital literacy
- Policy and advocacy
- Early warning systems
- Fundraising
- Digital health

IMPACT

These projects in Kenya were found to have delivered tangible benefits for Safaricom, their partners and end users alike, including:

- The provision of more inclusive and efficient digital humanitarian assistance:
 - Improved humanitarian service coverage and accessibility
 - Strengthened project management and funding mechanisms for humanitarian partners
- Value and revenue gains for Safaricom due to new products and more users
- More systemic and sustainable collaboration between Safaricom and the humanitarian sector in Kenya:
 - A change in the way Safaricom views the humanitarian sector, and vice versa
 - More collaborative internal policies and structure
 - More formal and structured working relationships

Lessons and observations

Convening stakeholders to collaboratively identify opportunities

The assessment found that the convening workshop was critical for identifying and building humanitarian use cases for Safaricom's different products and services. Collaboratively prioritising thematic focus areas before co-creating solutions ensured mutual buy-in and addressed both humanitarian needs and longer-term commercial objectives to deliver shared value.

Reconvening key stakeholders to collectively validate the HPS

Unlike the HPS in the other countries, Safaricom did not validate their HPS with all stakeholders involved in the development process and instead chose to validate it with partners on an individual basis. While this led to several long-term partnerships, it did not address wider ecosystem-level issues or create a more enabling environment, as seen in Burundi and Uganda. It may have also resulted in lower awareness of the HPS among other local humanitarian actors, as Safaricom was the only MNO not to report an increase in the number of humanitarian organisations approaching them to work together following their HPS.

“We collaboratively developed a really good solution, Bonga for good, which not only works really well for us as a loyalty programme but also now enables our humanitarian partners to raise additional funds.”

– Safaricom, Kenya

“We really have been guided by the five pillars in our HPS, it helped us to map our existing products against the needs of our humanitarian partners, as well as identify areas where we can develop new services for the identified use cases”

– Safaricom, Kenya



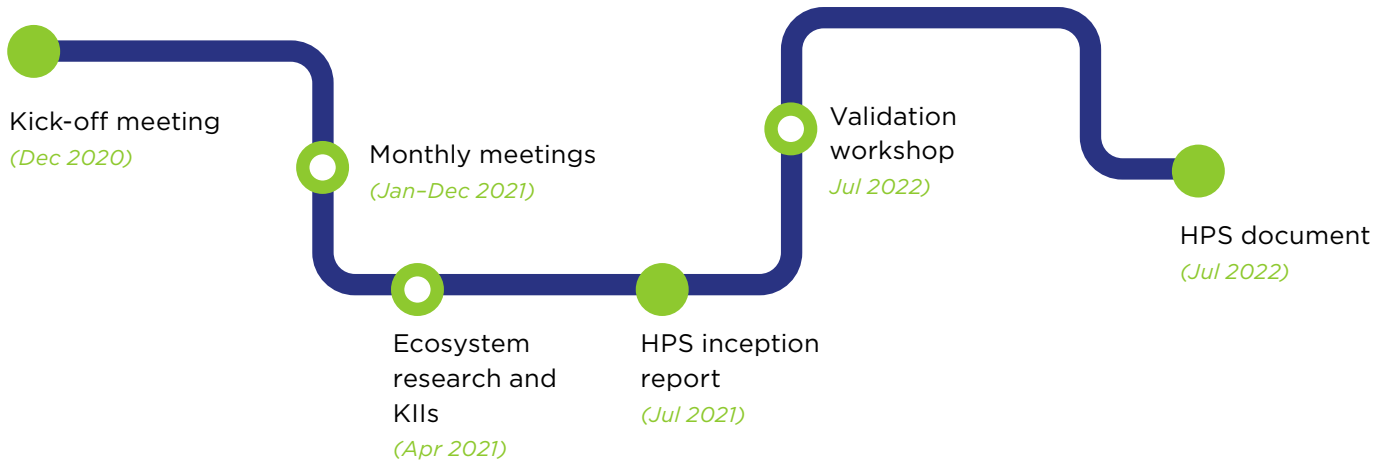
Telesom in Somaliland

Background

In 2020, Telesom, a leading MNO in Somaliland, became aware of issues facing humanitarian organisations related to the verification of cash recipients and knew they could help find a solution. They realised that this was just one of many issues facing local humanitarian organisations and understood the potential role they could play in enhancing the delivery of mobile-enabled digital solutions that support

humanitarian interventions across Somaliland. To develop effective solutions, Telesom knew they needed to understand the key local humanitarian challenges and approached the M4H programme for assistance. The team recommended that, in addition to identifying current humanitarian challenges, Telesom should work with them to develop a full humanitarian positioning strategy.

HPS timeline



Activities and outputs

- A thorough examination of the country context was undertaken to provide an understanding of the dynamics and challenges involved in mobile-enabled humanitarian assistance in Somaliland. The M4H team began by conducting KIIs with Telesom staff and representatives of various humanitarian partners. A draft inception report was then produced that outlined areas of interest for all stakeholders, resource availability, as well as preferences for developing new innovations or adapting and scaling existing solutions.
- At a validation workshop, eight humanitarian organisations provided information on their target groups, needs and challenges, which included low levels of digital literacy, low handset ownership and limited smartphone use among service users.

A collaborative discussion was then facilitated to help prioritise focus areas for addressing in Telesom's HPS. The Telesom Business Development Director also led a session on the differences in ways of working between MNOs and humanitarian organisations.

- Telesom's HPS was completed in 2022 and outlined various aspects of the partnership opportunity and approach, including eight priority areas for Telesom: 1) Better partner coordination; 2) Improving registration processes; 3) Extending networks to remote areas; 4) Digital literacy; 5) Integrating Telesom systems in existing humanitarian platforms; 7) Sustainable pricing; and 8) Data protection.

Figure 5

Opportunities to drive adoption of digital payments identified in Telesom's HPS



For both MNOs & Humanitarian Partners



- Encourage coordination between MNOs and HPs to better understand each other's operations, goals and needs.
- Establish working groups that include MNOs, HPs and relevant government ministries to achieve the above.
- Collaboratively develop joint strategies regarding cash transfers.

For Humanitarian Partners



- Support the financial inclusion of women through partnership with MNOs to offer finance and saving products that encourage gender inclusivity.
- Encourage the adoption of technology that provides access to health and educational content via mobile phones.
- Consider the use of Digital Identity for Biometric registration for recipients.

For MNOs



- Upskill Agents into 'Agents of change' that can train recipients on digital solutions.
- Capacity building programmes that can tap into the youth sector by developing specific products and Apps for MSMEs that support young business start-ups.
- Consider donor funding opportunities to provide mobile technology infrastructure to improve services access.
- Develop tailored Apps and/or video content for vulnerable populations to help raise awareness around specific mobile technologies.
- Integration of MNOs into HP databases and systems to reduce errors during user registration and payment delivery.
- Provide portable mobile network technology to support mobile services for recipients in locations expecting service disruptions.
- 'Cash in Transit' service through delivery of sufficient cash floats to agents for distribution.

Source: Telesom

Outcomes and impact

OUTCOMES

The assessment found that Telesom's HPS resulted in engagements with **eight** partners and the subsequent development of **seven** projects to deliver innovative, mobile enabled humanitarian products and services.

Eight partners engaged:

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), CARE Somalia, HI Federation, Population Services International (PSI), Save the Children, TAAKULO, UNICEF & World Food Programme (WFP).

Seven collaborative projects developed on:

- Digital inclusion
- CVA
- Digital literacy
- DVSLA
- Digital health
- Feedback mechanisms

IMPACT

These projects in Somaliland were found to have delivered tangible benefits for Telesom, their partners and end users alike, including:

- The provision of more inclusive and efficient digital humanitarian assistance:
 - Improved overall humanitarian service coverage and accessibility
 - Improved mechanisms for mobile CVA
 - Strengthened project management and funding mechanisms for humanitarian partners
- Business value for Telesom due to new products and more users
- More systemic and sustainable collaboration between Telesom and the humanitarian sector in Somaliland:
 - A change in the way Telesom views the humanitarian sector, and vice versa
 - More collaborative internal policies and structure
 - More formal and structured working relationships

The assessment also found that since the HPS, Telesom has seen an increase in the number of humanitarian organisations approaching them to work together.

Lessons and observations

Valued support throughout the HPS process

The assessment found that M4H support throughout the HPS development process was greatly appreciated and perceived as necessary by both Telesom and the humanitarian partners. Support through training, workshops and research initiatives helped enhance the knowledge and skills of all involved, facilitated meaningful discussions and provided valuable insights into best practices for implementation.

Importance of ongoing progress monitoring

The assessment also found that not all the Telesom and humanitarian partner teams present at the assessment workshop were fully aware of the HPS due to changes in staff roles, responsibilities and turnover. It should also be noted that although an implementation plan was included, there was no agreed approach for tracking the progress and outcomes of the HPS, which may have affected the implementation of the strategy.

“We are seeing more NGOs coming to use our voice ID platforms and as a result now have more transfers are coming, which is commercially good for us, and also our clients using the platform.”

- **Telesom, Somaliland**

“Through this collaboration process we have been put together with the key people in these companies, and it is because of this that we have been able to build relationships that can actually progress into active partnerships”

- **CARE, Somaliland**

04

Conclusion



Successful partnerships between MNOs and humanitarian organisations can leverage mobile technology for more efficient humanitarian delivery while tailoring interventions to the unique contexts and needs of end users. Ongoing partnerships enable partners to preemptively plan how to best work together to leverage each other's core competencies and skills. Cultivating long-term, cross-sector partnerships and working relationships with trusted organisations also results in better coordinated crisis response. Proactive efforts by MNOs and humanitarians helps ensure the necessary agreements and protocols are in place to facilitate speedy, coordinated efforts in emergency response.

This report has examined some of the key motivations and benefits for MNOs to take a more proactive approach to working in partnership with the humanitarian sector, and provided evidence of the value of these partnerships for MNOs, humanitarian organisations and end users alike. While revenue generation may not always be a primary consideration, for humanitarian interventions to be sustainable and lasting, business models do need to reward both partners and beneficiaries.

The assessment found that GSMA supported HPS have helped to catalyse and support partnerships between non-traditional actors in the humanitarian space. The MNO's supported have increased their customer base, visibility and overall service provision their humanitarian partners have also seen direct and tangible benefits from more available, effective and efficient digital humanitarian products and services.

Less tangible benefits identified also include the structural changes and mindset shifts that lead to stronger and more sustainable working relationships between MNOs and the humanitarian sector. Finally, there is also evidence that that HPS can more broadly contribute to a more enabling environment for mobile-enabled humanitarian response through better knowledge, skills and awareness, improved interoperability standards and more supportive policies and regulations.

As the landscape of humanitarian response continues to change, including both the nature of crises and funding patterns, the humanitarian sector will need to rely increasingly on MNOs and the wider private sector to deliver impactful services. The lessons and evidence presented in this report will help strengthen the GSMA's partnership portfolio as it continues to deliver a replicable model for developing and supporting strategic partnerships for innovative mobile-enabled humanitarian solutions.

The Mobile for Humanitarian Innovation team will continue to catalyse cross-sectoral partnerships with non-traditional actors to deliver digital humanitarian programmes and facilitate the development of fully functioning digital ecosystems. The team will also continue to generate evidence to guide future programming and share lessons to inform the future of digital humanitarian action.

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