



## Table of Contents

Acronyms	3
1. Introduction	4
2. Background	8
3. MERL Methods and Tools	11
4. Remote MERL: advantages during Covid-19	14
5. Common MERL challenges	15
6. Recommendations	19
Appendix A: KII questions	24
Appendix B: List of MERL methods and tools used by programmes interviewed	26

This paper is based on research funded in part by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

## Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
FP	Family Planning
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
IVR	Interactive Voice Response
KAP/B	Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices/Behaviours
KI, KII	Key Informant, Key Informant Interview
K&L	Knowledge and Learning
LARC	Long-Acting Reversible Contraceptive
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
SBCC	Social and Behaviour Change Communication
SMS	Short Messaging Services
SRH/R	Sexual and Reproductive Health/Rights
ToC	Theory of Change
TTM	Transtheoretical Model
USSD	Unstructured Supplementary Service Data
VOIP	Voice Over Internet Protocol

## 1. Introduction

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, disrupting the entire world. A surge in the use of digital tools and platforms was one result of the outbreak. As country governments mandated travel bans, quarantines, and lockdowns, Internet and mobile phone use rose significantly with people working from home; accessing online education, health and other services; seeking news and information; connecting with family and friends; and entertaining themselves through social media and streaming video. This major shift in digital access and use along with other broad changes wrought by the pandemic affected how many organisations approach social and behaviour change communication (SBCC) programmes and how they conducted their monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL). In this paper we explore how the pre-pandemic digital SBCC experiences and strategies of four organisations served as an asset for helping them to address emerging pandemic realities. We hope this will be of interest and offer guidance to funders, programme managers and MERL officers of digital SBCC programmes, and will provide a basis for building further evidence and understanding in this rapidly evolving field.

### **The COVID connectivity boost**

The so-called 'COVID connectivity boost' brought an estimated 782 million more people online, an increase of 17% according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The agency revealed in November 2021 that almost two-thirds of the world's population was now able to access the Internet (4.9 billion in 2021 up from an estimated 4.1 billion in 2019). This growth was largely driven by increases in developing countries, with Internet penetration growing by over 13%. UN-designated Least Developed Countries, saw an average increase in Internet access that exceeded 20%.<sup>1</sup>

Social media platforms benefited from much of this growth. By March 2020, shortly after the pandemic first hit, Facebook reported that voice and video messaging had more than doubled on Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp in countries hit hardest by the pandemic. In Italy, an early epicentre of the virus, Facebook users were spending up to 70% more time across the company's apps, and group calling increased by over 1000% in the first month of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> People also expanded their use of technologies and platforms - in the United States, for example, 40% of those surveyed by Pew Research in 2021 said that they had used digital technology or the Internet in new ways since the outbreak.<sup>3</sup>

While the growth in Internet use has been pronounced, 37% of the world's population have still never used the Internet, 96% of these in developing countries. Additionally much of the internet use among economically vulnerable and hard-to-reach populations remains irregular. Rather than the 'always on' experience of most Internet users in higher income settings, these users often have intermittent or unstable access. Understanding local context and access and use

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/Pages/PR-2021-11-29-FactsFigures.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> <https://about.fb.com/news/2020/03/keeping-our-apps-stable-during-covid-19/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2021/09/01/the-internet-and-the-pandemic/>

patterns such as these is critical for designing and implementing digital social and behaviour change communication approaches.

## **Digital SBCC and the Pandemic**

Over the past several years, platforms such as Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok have expanded the SBCC ecosystem. On their own or in combination with traditional media approaches, they have enabled new - and often deeper, more holistic and effective - ways of engaging audiences.

This move to digital SBCC began pre-pandemic, yet digital SBCC is still relatively new territory for donor and practitioner agencies. The advent of COVID forced some organisations to adapt rapidly because of this challenge - they could no longer implement face-to-face aspects of their SBCC activities - but also as a result of the opportunity afforded because their audiences' access to the Internet and time spent online was growing. Other organisations, such as those included in this paper, were well-positioned to continue with existing activities, because their digital components were already well established. There are still gaps, however, in understanding how best to reach vulnerable populations virtually (if this is even possible in the near future), how to monitor digital SBCC programming, and how to design research and evaluation that captures online-offline behaviour change.

Digital tools and social media are a natural fit for SBCC because rich and multilayered approaches tend to have a more pronounced effect on behaviour change. At the same time, the process of creating and finessing a digital SBCC approach is highly complex. It depends on factors at the individual, family, community, society levels; as well as media context and access to digital devices, channels, platforms, and the skills to navigate them. We discuss this further along in this paper.

While use of digital SBCC approaches is growing, the evidence base is still patchy. In addition, traditional ways of measuring the impact of SBCC programming are not always a good fit for digital. Existing behaviour change theories need to be updated for the digital reality and new theories may need to be developed. The rapid shift to using digital monitoring and evaluation tools required by the COVID context provides insights and learning that the sector can build on.

In addition, new challenges related to the ethics of data collection during a global pandemic need addressing. Organisations working with vulnerable groups must consider whether related COVID economic downturns mean that fewer of the individuals they want to reach are online. Aspects of inclusion become even more heightened when offline activities are no longer possible. Additionally, with families in closer quarters due to the pandemic, sensitive topics like gender based violence and sexual and reproductive health are riskier to address.<sup>4</sup> Some organisations have asked themselves whether reaching out to collect data from populations who were already suffering the effects of the pandemic is ethical.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.alnap.org/help-library/getting-remote-me-right-ethics-challenges-and-gaps>

To explore how implementation, monitoring and evaluation strategies for digital SBCC are shifting and changing, below we offer an overview of how four organisations, three of which are supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (the Foundation), have managed through the initial two years of the COVID pandemic. Lessons from these experiences can help to inform the field of SBCC during the ongoing pandemic and afterwards, as we assume that digital approaches will continue even after (if?) the pandemic ends and its effects subside.

### ***What do we mean by ‘digital intervention’?***

When referring to a ‘digital intervention’ we are talking about approaches that rely on the Internet and/or digital devices, including mobile phones. The digital platforms, tools, and approaches used by the four organisations we highlight in this paper include:

- Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram
- Short Messaging Services (SMS) and messaging platforms, including text messages, USSD, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger
- Chatbots, which are generally built on top of messaging platforms
- Websites
- Mobile applications
- Call centres

### **Digital SBCC in pre-pandemic times**

In 2019, almost a year before the pandemic emerged, iMedia Associates released an overview of the state of digital SBCC<sup>5</sup>, which reprised the various theoretical models being applied to digital SBCC, such as transtheoretical/stages of change, behavioural economics, socio-ecological model, social norm theory, narrative persuasion models, diffusion of innovation models, and others. We reviewed lessons emerging from current and recent health communications interventions using social media and digital tools, and drew out good practice and areas to be aware of when designing digital SBCC, as well as ethical and safeguarding concerns.

In this report, we highlighted a set of good practices in digital SBCC design, including:

1. Ground efforts in theory
2. Understand the population and their social context
3. Design for people’s existing habits, preferences, and interests
4. Watch out for cost and data limitations
5. Consider language and literacy
6. Determine the right frequency of messaging and content sharing
7. Build trust, find the right voice and messenger

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<sup>5</sup> <https://imediaassociates.org/app/uploads/2019/07/Digital-and-Social-Media-for-SBCC-March-2019.pdf>

8. Prepare with signposting and ensure capacity to respond to demand generated
9. Budget for moderation of content and comments
10. Don't be fooled by vanity metrics (number of likes, shares etc.) which say little about the depth of engagement and impact

We also provided recommendations for digital safeguarding good practices when implementing digital SBCC programming, including:

1. Ask if the overall effort is ethical
2. Ensure informed consent, and data privacy and security
3. Design for privacy and security in platform, product or outreach
4. Determine whether benefits of collecting personal or sensitive data outweigh the risks
5. Follow legal frameworks for data privacy and transmission across borders
6. Protect data throughout the process
7. Assess and build partner capacity for data protection
8. Moderate to ensure safe and appropriate content and comments
9. Safeguard users from online abuse, bullying, harassment, hate speech, violence, scams and grooming

While we explored a number of promising use cases in this research, we found that the evidence base for digital approaches to SBCC was relatively weak. A key study cited in our research identified the need for more rigorous designs and endpoints.<sup>6</sup> We also noted the need for more exploration of monitoring and evaluation approaches for digital SBCC. The current paper aims to partially address this through case studies of four programmes: Honey & Banana (DKT Nigeria), Chhaa Jaa (Girl Effect in India), C'est la Vie (RAES)<sup>7</sup>, and Shujaaz Inc.

#### ***A note on terminology***

In this paper, we generally use the term MERL (monitoring, evaluation, research and learning) rather than referring to M&E (monitoring and evaluation). The nature of digital SBCC, and the kinds of tools and data sources involved in this work tend to lead to blurred lines across functions. The organisations that we feature in this paper did not strongly differentiate between monitoring, evaluation, research and learning data. The information that they captured from various digital sources during programme implementation often served more than one purpose. For example, the same data or data stream might serve a research function and also help to monitor and adapt programming in 'real time' or near real time.

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<sup>6</sup> Higgs, Elizabeth, et al. "Understanding the role of mHealth and other media interventions for behaviour change to enhance child survival and development in low- and middle-income countries: An evidence review." *Journal of Health Communication* (Routledge) 19 (2014): 164-189.

<sup>7</sup> Réseau Africain de l'Éducation pour la Santé - African Network for Health Education

## 2. Background

In this paper we highlight the implementation, monitoring and evaluation strategies of four different digital SBC/C programmes:

- **Honey & Banana** is a programme developed by DKT Nigeria. It uses social marketing to increase the uptake of SRH products across family planning, safe abortion, and HIV/AIDS. This is done via traditional interventions including Radio and Community Health Workers, but also by leveraging digital channels including a website, via a partnership with a third-party app (WHISPA), and social media pages. These activities drive clients towards a toll-free hotline which provides information, advice, product recommendations and referrals to clinics.
- **Chhaa Jaa** is an online youth brand inspiring, entertaining and empowering girls with the right skills and confidence to navigate adolescence, from accessing information about sexual and reproductive health to preparing them to enter the workforce. Chhaa Jaa's product portfolio is aimed at girls aged 16-22, across urban and peri-urban centres in the Hindi speaking belt of India, and accessible online via mobile. Girl Effect uses its mobile-based, peer-to-peer research methodology TEGA (Technology Enabled Girl Ambassadors) as one methodology to gain real-time feedback and authentic insights from girls to improve its programmes.
- **C'est la Vie** is a multi-channel programme from the Senegalese NGO, RAES, designed to promote debate on maternal health, sexual violence and family planning. Its main output is a TV drama focused on SRHR, which reaches millions of people across West Africa in six languages, as well as a radio show. It also includes digital channels: a youtube channel, Facebook page and Instagram account. The digital channels intend to 'expand the experience around the TV show and its key messaging' using interactive media including videos, surveys, quizzes, infographics and articles. C'est La Vie also includes community-based work in nine countries which facilitate discussion and debate of key issues.
- **Shujaaz** is a multi-media youth platform, run by the team at Shujaaz Inc. Reaching 71% of 15-24 year olds in Kenya, Shujaaz is East Africa's biggest youth brand. At its heart is a print comic book series (7.4 million readers) which blends fictional characters and real-life heroes plus 15+ social media channels, an SMS platform and on-the-ground events. Shujaaz' SBCC campaigns use a holistic approach which addresses all aspects of young people's lives, including sex and relationships, income and entrepreneurship, governance, agriculture etc. The Shujaaz Inc team also design and run 'Shujaaz Biz', an online peer-to-peer entrepreneurship course and and "MESH" the first online community for entrepreneurs in the informal economy.



Through key informant interviews and document review, we reviewed and discussed intervention channels; the use, operationalisation and adaptation of Theories of Change (ToCs) in relation to programme implementation and MERL; data collection methods and tools; shifts as a result of COVID-19 and other contextual factors; and key challenges and recommendations. Key Informants were provided with the questions in advance, as well as with information about the use of the interview data, and were also asked for their verbal consent to proceed. (Interview questions for KIIs are included in [Appendix A](#)).

This overview of MERL activities, challenges and recommendations is by no means exhaustive as it is limited in geographic scope (India & Africa only), language coverage (Anglophone and Francophone countries only) and technologies deployed (interventions spanned human managed voice-based services; social media channels; websites; apps; chatbots and SMS but not other common or emerging digital tools such as IVR, virtual reality, or USSD). Nonetheless we hope it will provide actionable insights that will contribute to the success of current or planned FP and SRH programmes supported by the Foundation.

## Theories of Change

In addition to exploring common methods and tools, we wanted to understand whether MERL activities were grounded in a particular ToC. We found that the four organisations used different ToCs, either implicitly or explicitly, including:

- **Narrative engagement or persuasion theory** - which argues that exposure and identification with characters and stories can create pathways of change by shifting people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours over time. (C'est La Vie, Shujaaz)
- **The Fogg model** - a simple framework focused on identifying and leveraging people's motivation(s) to change their behaviour, examining their ability to exercise that behaviour (and attempting to identify and remove any barriers standing in the way of that ability), and identifying and using 'prompts' to kickstart the process of behaviour change. (Honey & Banana, Shujaaz)
- **Positive deviance theory** - identifying, understanding and role-modelling the qualities and actions of individuals in a given community who exercise the desired attitudinal and behavioural traits, despite facing similar challenges and having access to the same resources as their peers. (Shujaaz)
- **The Transtheoretical model (TTM)** - positing that behaviour change involves progressing through 6 stages of change (pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, termination). (Honey & Banana, Shujaaz)
- **A custom-developed Theory of Change** based on behaviour change principles such as behavioural economics. (Girl Effect)

Theories of change were not always used by programme implementers to develop an M&E framework that systematically tied key indicators directly to a given change-model (and where these indicators then inform data collection methods). Rather, the ToCs were more often seen as 'guiding principles' for the development of programme activities as a whole. None of our key informants felt the need to alter their ToC significantly as a result of the pandemic, likely

because programmes were already using digital interventions and/or digital MERL methods pre-pandemic.

**Case study: Honey & Banana, DKT Nigeria: Supporting and monitoring behaviour change journeys from end-to-end**

Honey & Banana makes for an interesting case study, as unlike most programmes, their interventions cover all aspects of a behaviour change journey to FP and contraception uptake. (see: *Recurring Challenges*). For example, the programme might first make contact with their target audience via radio spots or through tie-ins with 3rd party blogs; this in turn could direct people to engage with their content via a digital channel such as a social media page or their website. However, the central ‘hub’ of their intervention approach is their toll-free call centre, which provides information and advice, SRH product information, clinic referrals, and eVouchers. The referral services are vetted members of the DKT network, and their staff trained to provide a high quality of service. Crucially, if an individual has expressed an intention to visit a clinic, they will receive a follow-up call to see how their experience went, or to provide further information or encouragement if the individual struggled to keep the appointment. Those who take up LARC (Long-acting Reversible Contraception) can also opt-in to follow ups to support them on their continued use of the method.

With the call centre at the heart of this model, much of the programme’s data collection activities focus on recording and analysing data from incoming and outgoing calls. Honey & Banana collects anonymised demographic and social information about callers, the reason for their call, prior FP use, and whether or not a referral was made. They also track the source of calls to gauge the success of their other communication channels, for example, their website or the 3rd party SRH app they have partnered with. Honey & Banana has recently commissioned AI-powered analysis of the audio data to further understand callers’ motivations and barriers via sentiment analysis. The outcome of this research will allow the team to better understand the different factors at play in the change journey of their target audience, which can in turn feed into future intervention design. For example, improving the scripts that call centre operators use to better encourage the callers to follow through on their intention to try a new FP method.

An area which could also merit more research is the specific role of the digital platforms and content on this journey in terms of how effective they are at motivating users to pick up the phone and contact the call centre in the first place. Arguably this initial stage is, along with the next stage, which involves individuals sustaining the desired behaviour, are the hardest to crack using digital channels. Due to the nature of digital engagement (high level of distraction inherent to online usage, low-attention spans, competition for attention with other online content, difficulties with reaching the same people more than once...), it’s necessary to drive high volumes of people (at cost) in order to ‘funnel through’ a relatively small group of people to the desired behaviour (in this case, contacting the call centre and committing to a referral or obtaining an eVoucher). An improved understanding of the role of digital could be achieved for example by increased collection and analysis of data from the website, and including more questions on the role of digital channels in the users’ motivation to contact a call centre in their rapid-assessment surveys.

### 3. MERL Methods and Tools

The different organisations interviewed reported using a wide range of methods and tools for MERL, even in cases where they were using the same channels. The interviews revealed at least 26 distinct methods and tools that are employed throughout the programme cycle (see: [Appendix B](#)). We have synthesised them below in order to highlight the different functions they can fulfil, and the different digital channels they can be used to monitor.

#### **Goal: Monitoring reach**

The objective fulfilled by these methods primarily concerns the quantity of individuals reached by a programme's interventions, but might also include the number of interventions themselves. Methods used might include the collection of performance data from a call centre (for example, the number of calls incoming/outgoing), or from a website or social media page (for example, tracking the number of social media page followers or likes, the number of views on a piece of content, the number of all-time visits to a home page, or the number of conversations started with a chatbot).

#### **Goal: Learning about digital discovery pathways**

This learning objective can help programme implementers to understand how effectively they are leveraging their different intervention channels in order to mobilise users towards the most powerful interaction point. For example, through cross-channel referral tracking via digital forms, web analytics 'traffic source' data, or as part of a first conversation with a call-centre operator or chatbot. This can help implementers understand where an individual heard about a given service, and identify opportunities to bolster referrals to better drive the desired engagement.

#### **Goal: Monitoring engagement**

Once target audience members have been compelled to engage with the programme, implementers need to understand more about the *quality* of their subsequent engagement. On digital channels, this most often requires monitoring website and social media metrics including time spent on a site, pages viewed per user, visits per user, length of time spent viewing a video, or likes/comments/shares on social media pages and posts. This can provide an indication of the 'stickiness' of the channel's offering, i.e how well it does at keeping the user's attention, which is crucial in order to increase the likelihood of behaviour change. When combined with impact evaluation methods (see below), this data can also help implementers learn about the ideal quantity, frequency and combination of interventions required in order to generate measurable impact. An additional interesting method used by Girl Effect involved the use of online A/B tests, comparing impact data for girls who had watched at least 50% of a Chhaa Jaa episode vs. those who had watched less than 50% of an episode, in order to learn more about the minimum levels of content consumption required to generate a measurable impact.

### **Goal: Learning about the audience**

This objective revealed the richest combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods deployed from programme design to implementation. Even when learning about digital audiences, this often involved using face to face research methods (e.g FGDs or usability testing sessions) to dig deeper into a particular aspect of the audience's lives, attitudes, behaviours and needs. However, where audiences were hard to reach, this was also conducted remotely: for example, Shujaaz switched to Instant Messaging based qualitative research during the pandemic, using WhatsApp groups. Similarly, Girl Effect ran social media surveys to get a 'temperature check' on the audience's attitudes or experiences at a specific point in time.

Another function might also involve the systematic tracking of demographic and other contextual and FP-related information (e.g marital status, motivation for engaging with the programme...) at the first point of contact with the target audience, for example via phone, an online form, or as part of an onboarding conversation with a chatbot. This enables implementers to ensure they are reaching the right type of individuals.

An additional innovation mentioned by our KIs was text-based analysis, either AI-powered or manual, of social media, website, and SMS messages, to understand more about the topics the audience likes to engage on, as well as the language they use to talk about them. For example, using machine learning, Shujaaz conducted sentiment analysis of SMS and social media messages to understand more how their audience's use of language (e.g., grammatical models, choice of pronouns, word combinations, slang vs formal language) shifted as they moved through different stages of their normative and behaviour-change journey. This improved depth of knowledge about the audience can be used to assess whether the intended audience is being reached, and can also be fed back into intervention design process.

Finally, we noted the use of peer to peer and community based qualitative research, either using individuals representative of the target audience, trained in qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, and supported by digital (mobile) data gathering tools (Girl Effect), or via 'grassroots reporting' using mobile videos and vox pops - working with the target audience to document realities and attitudes in their communities, in real time (Shujaaz).

### **Goal: Learning about barriers and motivators to behaviour change**

This can involve MERL activities either before the programme design, for example in the shape of FGDs with the target audience, or during programme implementation. This might involve periodic follow-ups with individuals who have received an intervention, either on a self-selecting basis or in a randomised fashion, and can be a one-off phone call, or a rapid-assessment interview or survey conducted either face to face or online. Another innovative method includes AI-powered data analysis to detect patterns covering motivation and barriers to desired FP/SRH behaviours or product uptake: data sources might include audio records from phone-based interventions or SMS exchanges.

### **Goal: Monitoring behaviour change intentions and follow-through**

Honey & Banana call centre staff record any behaviour change intentions expressed during a first call (for example, clinic referral, eVoucher requested...) and follow up to see if the individual succeeded in carrying out the intended behaviour. If not, they probe further to understand more about the barriers encountered, and attempt to address them through further information and advice. Monitoring behaviour change intentions and follow-through might also take place through the textual analysis of feedback forms or social media comments, where individuals self-report an intention to change, or that they have carried out a desired behaviour. For example, Shujaaz asked their audience to pledge to follow public health regulations during the pandemic – the pledge (a hand gesture) was to be photographed and shared back with Shujaaz via any digital channel. It could also include monitoring online sales records, tracking purchases of FP products or the redemption of eVouchers.

### **Goal: Monitoring audience satisfaction**

This could take the shape of human-led or automated customer satisfaction check-ins, conducted shortly after an initial intervention, or Instant Messaging based media testing with user panels before an intervention is finalised. It includes sharing content via a dedicated Instant Messaging group with self-selected members of the target audience in order to gauge their reactions and gather feedback before content is disseminated. An interesting development in audience satisfaction monitoring was the piloting of AI-powered or manual analysis of audio and text records such as digital feedback form responses, or social media post comment, in order to generate quantitative data on audience satisfaction.

### **Goal: Evaluating intervention impact**

This approach focuses on comparing the knowledge, attitudes and self-reported behaviours of individuals before and after an intervention, either as a one-off or over a period of time (longitudinal or cross-sectional studies), and sometimes includes a parallel comparison with a group of similar individuals who had not been exposed to the intervention. KIs reported using a blend of face to face and remote tools, including surveys (to track self-reported knowledge, attitude or behaviour shifts) conducted in an automated way via a website form, chatbot conversation or SMS, or conducted by a researcher on the phone, using VOIP (see *Case study: Piloting digital M&E approaches during COVID, Chhaa Jaa & TEGA, Girl Effect India* below), or face to face. These methods can be used either to evaluate the impact of the programme as a whole, or on a smaller scale to assess the effectiveness of a particular piece of content: for example, C'est la Vie conducted pre and post surveys with users exposed to Facebook content on HPV to assess how effective the content was at generating knowledge and attitude shifts.

### **Cross cutting methods & tools**

Finally, implementers mentioned two important approaches which were used to support all the previous objectives. The first emphasised the usefulness of partnerships with academic institutions, especially when their researchers are embedded in the programme team on a long term basis to provide evidence-based strategic and practical support on ToC development and MERL operationalisation. The second was the utility of data visualisation dashboards to collate

and analyse programme data in real time, whether derived from analogue or digital interventions. When used as part of a regular MERL process by implementation teams (see: [Recommendations](#), below), they allow greater visibility and responsiveness, allowing teams to course-correct in a more agile way.

#### 4. Remote MERL: advantages during Covid-19

Interestingly, our KIs revealed that the pandemic impinged very little on programmes' ability to deliver interventions or measure impact. The main challenges mentioned included:

- Call-centre workers needing to take calls and use CRM systems from home, with teething problems relating mostly to connectivity issues and distractions from other family members. (Honey & Banana)
- People's reticence/inability to visit a clinic during staying at home measures, which was however mitigated by 'clearance letters' issued at the point of booking an appointment. (Honey & Banana)
- Face to face data collection methods having become impossible in some contexts, programmes experimented with shifts to digital channels including Zoom or WhatsApp to conduct surveys or FGDs. This created issues relating to safeguarding and technology access/literacy on both sides (see *Case Study* below), but also in terms of methodological adaptations - for example, FGDs with a heavy emphasis on role play or creative exercises predictably found this more challenging or even impossible online. (Shujaaz)
- At the same time, conducting small group discussions via WhatsApp, for example, proved very effective in terms of the numbers of end-users engaged with. By running 3x discussion groups per day with 10 young people, Shujaaz was able to consult with over 200 young people per week, with minimum logistics and costs compared to a similar undertaking face to face.

All in all, the impact of Covid-19 on the programmes we investigated appeared minimal: if anything, KIs highlighted the positive impact of stay-at-home restrictions in terms of increased traffic to digital channels, and also enjoyed the opportunity to experiment with new MERL techniques. At least two organisations said they were committed to continuing with a hybrid model of remote and face to face methods in order to enjoy the unique advantages of each depending on their needs.

#### **Case study: Piloting digital M&E approaches during COVID, Chhaa Jaa & TEGA, Girl Effect India**

Co-created with girls and young women aged 18-24, TEGA (Technology Enabled Girl Ambassadors) is Girl Effect's mobile based research tool, enabling girls to collect real-time insights into the lives of their peers.

The TEGAs are provided with a phone and trained as Market Research Society (MRS) qualified

researchers to conduct face to face interviews, capturing qualitative (video, audio, photos) and quantitative data with the support of the TEGA app. Data collected is instantly transferred to a secure Data Hub and disappears from the girl's phone to ensure safety and confidentiality. Girl Effect researchers analyse the data, which uncovers insights that are then validated again with TEGA researchers and research participants. Once verified, insights and recommendations are delivered to Girl Effect's internal teams or to content and partner programmes.

During the pandemic, all on the ground/ face to face research came to a standstill. TEGA quickly pivoted to remote practices in order to continue to conduct peer research studies. One such study was conducted to understand the perceptions of Chhaa Jaa's girls-only, digital Facebook community, Bak Bak Gang (loosely translates as 'chitter-chatter group'). Girls who were interested in participating were encouraged to reach out to the group admins via direct messaging to ensure confidentiality. The recruitment and data collection had to be designed keeping in mind TEGA's commitment to data protection and safeguarding. Informed consent was secured via direct messages using girl-friendly language. TEGA researchers then scheduled Zoom interviews with them in order to understand more about their experiences of the pandemic, and the role of the Facebook group in supporting them during this time.

The research team naturally experienced challenges during this pilot. During recruitment, the team realised that most of the users of Bak Bak Gang had low-budget smartphones and therefore used Facebook Lite which did not have direct messaging functionality. Nonetheless, many of them downloaded Facebook Messenger in order to be able to sign up to take part. Similarly, there were challenges in conducting the remote interviews because of data/ connectivity issues. It was also challenging to schedule interviews because sometimes girls didn't show up/ showed up late or were unable to have open conversations due to lack of a private space within their homes.

Nevertheless, for a team running a digital programme and constantly looking for ways to reach more girls digitally, this was a valuable pilot with many learnings. The team intends to continue to refine their digital data collection capabilities- both for qualitative and quantitative research on their programmes, particularly as girls themselves often report preferring to engage digitally, as this gives them a greater freedom of expression despite some of the technical, socio-economic or gender-related barriers. Girl Effect India emphasised the need for donors to recognise the importance of digital vs traditional M&E methods whilst also making allowances for their (sometimes) experimental nature.

## 5. Common MERL challenges

In addition to the minimal COVID-specific challenges listed above, organisations we spoke with for this paper mentioned several ongoing challenges related to conducting M&E on their digital SBCC programming.

### **Challenges conducting remote M&E activities safely**

With sensitive and often taboo topics like FP/SRH, important safeguarding questions are raised in relation to ethical data collection, particularly so when it comes to digital MERL methods such as phone or message-based follow ups which may not take into account the users' privacy, and therefore safety, when contacted. This is particularly the case for girls and women, whose phone usage may be shared or supervised by husbands, boyfriends, or male family

members. This leads to increased attrition rates from female participants in longitudinal studies in particular, which is problematic as it reinforces a sector-wide dearth of women- and girl-centred data.

### **Challenges with attrition when conducting longitudinal studies**

Longitudinal methods that rely on getting back in touch with the same panel of individuals seem to provide the biggest challenges in terms of methodology, even in an increasingly connected world. This is especially the case with hard to reach individuals such as adolescents, who may change phones, have multiple sim cards and therefore phone numbers, and whose agency to take part may fluctuate over time (for example, because of restrictions imposed by parents, increased responsibilities or preoccupation with studies or work). Although this attrition is to be expected when conducting longitudinal studies, this can be mitigated by keeping panellists 'warm' by making sure they are receiving something of benefit in between M&E activities. By this, we don't mean the usual participation incentives (for example, transport or airtime costs), rather, that their engagement with the programme as a whole adds value to their lives to the extent that they are excited to participate.

### **Challenges with proving actual behaviour change vs self-reported or intention-to-act evidence**

Not all programmes choose or feel able to implement interventions that allow for the measurement of *actual* behaviour change, for example, product uptake or service provision. The main reason for this is the amount of additional investment and cooperation it would require to ensure that the services or products being signposted were available, affordable, and of high quality, as this would require investment at the level of infrastructure, capacity building, manufacturing, supply-chain management and more. As a result, impact evidence more often than not ends at self-reported 'intention to act' data, which, while useful, can only really be considered a mid-point in any behavioural journey. Similarly, even when there has been evidence of behaviour change (for example, data evidence of contraception uptake as a result of a clinic appointment), programmes are often not designed with maintenance of said behaviour in mind.

### **Challenges developing benchmarks during the creation of M&E frameworks**

A lack of widely available evidence data from comparable programmes makes it hard to know what success looks like - it's not possible to create benchmarks other than internally, meaning that programmes can spend time re-inventing the wheel. KIs expressed a strong desire to have support from donors in identifying benchmarks from similar programmes, for example, performance data relating to numbers of users reached; the proportion of those reached who engage with meaningful content (and how this is defined); the proportion of those who engage with meaningful content who go on to self-report or are assessed as having experienced knowledge/attitude/behaviour change; and the degree of shift measured. This data could be collated by donors, based on in-house research into comparable programmes which have been deemed 'successful' and made accessible as part of the bidding process. Alternatively, programmes should be encouraged to plan time and budget for conducting desk research into



M&E results of comparable programmes themselves – and donors should be prepared to include this in their funding allocations.

### **Challenges with organisational resources, skills and capacity relating to meaningful data analysis**

Ensuring that teams have the budget, skills and capacity to identify and make meaningful use of data being generated by digital (and analogue) channels - both in terms of filtering out most useful data, and then making sense of it, actioning it etc., requires both time and money that programmes or funders haven't always taken into account. Similarly, global and local capacity to crunch numbers is good (e.g ready availability of skilled statisticians or data analysts) - but identifying people with the right skill-set to both understand the data *and* derive actionable insights is challenging. In part this is linked to a tendency to work in silos - with data reporting and analysis either being outsourced or occurring without close collaboration with programme implementers.

### **Challenges quantifying the exact dosage and combination of digital interventions which produce the most impact**

It is impossible to quantify the difference in terms of potential impact between different digital engagement indicators. For example, whilst it's tempting to develop a 'reverse pyramid' or 'funnel' model for engagement, with different types of digital activity representing more or less rich engagement, the meaning behind online actions vary from person to person, day to day, and from platform to platform. For the same person, a 'like' on Facebook might be a knee-jerk behaviour representing a relatively muted or performative reaction or it might imply a much stronger feeling; a 'like' on Instagram could stem from a heartfelt validation of the content or it could be a social impulse. Similarly, despite the wealth of data tracking that occurs online, what and how it gets tracked has been designed to serve the needs of commercial, not development/humanitarian actors.

In addition, despite the amount of data generated by digital channels, understanding the specific mix and saturation of interventions that achieve the most impact is difficult, as is understanding the specific qualities of each intervention channel which could be most usefully leveraged to a specific aim. Whilst programmes may be able to say *'women who used our website were 3 times more likely to request a voucher for an FP method than those who didn't'*, the exact *extent* of that individual's use of the website (for example, number of content items fully consumed) as well as her exposure to other digital or analogue interventions often remains unknown.

### **Challenges securing depth and breadth of engagement online**

Finally, although the importance and value of using digital channels as part of S/BCC interventions is being more consistently recognised across the development and humanitarian sectors, there are still significant challenges thrown up by the very nature of digital spaces which have a direct impact on programme success. The biggest of these is retaining enough 'control' over the user's journey through digital channel(s) and content, ensuring for example that the user is exposed to content and messaging in a coherent order, with enough

attention/concentration, and with repeated opportunities for engagement over time. Similarly, even the best digital tools (in terms of their content's relevance or the way they are designed to hand-hold users through a learning journey, for example) are competing constantly with other, often contradictory content, likely in much higher volumes. This means that a programme's effectiveness is being constantly diluted, even when, if assessed in isolation, it performs highly in terms of impact.

### **Case study - C'est la Vie, ONG RAES: flexibility and responsiveness when setting MERL objectives at scale**

C'est la Vie, a multi-channel programme aiming to promote debate, discussion and behaviour change in relation to FP, sexual violence and maternal health has achieved exceptional scale in Francophone Africa. At the heart of its approach is a TV series broadcast in 9 countries and 6 different languages, as well as a radio show available in 3 different languages. Digital and analogue interventions reinforce the programme's messaging by creating spaces for conversation, reflection and further learning, including a Youtube channel, social media pages, and community-based interventions that use SBCC techniques.

What is also exceptional about this programme is the flexibility with which they approach their MERL activities. Whilst the programme uses a ToC in the shape of narrative engagement theory, they do so in a light touch way, with a focus on creating truly compelling storylines that transport and entertain viewers, whilst allowing them to identify and build empathy with the characters. It would not be possible to do this with a more rigid, top down MERL framework which promised to reach specific behavioural indicators from the start and might require a decreased focus on honing a truly compelling media product, and for messages to be expressed too bluntly and with little nuance.

The team describe their MERL process as 'organic and ongoing': whilst scripts are developed with behaviour change outcomes in mind, story and character are key in order to capture and retain the audience. The complex process of behaviour change journeys reflected in the show and its characters are allowed to evolve at a pace which is ultimately more representative of real world change processes.

ONG RAES and their MERL partners have had to allow themselves to be comfortable with a process of trial and error, allowing insights to emerge from their research, which enrich their next creative cycle (for example, making sure MERL team members are closely involved in creative process), this in turn informing their next research activities. Similarly, they have been happy to acknowledge perceived 'failures' (for example, when a tool such as pre- and -post surveying of individuals reached through community engagement has not yielded reliable results) without feeling put in a position of programmatic 'failure'. This flexibility is partly due to their commitment to scale: the teamed wanted to avoid what they saw as the sector's tendency to run expensive programmes which ultimately reach very few people relative to the regional population, and have little to no impact on the most problematic SRHR indicator, which is a dearth of information at scale. Their initial focus has therefore been making C'est la Vie a household name across the region, and this was the primary MERL objective for the first few years of the programme - an objective which they have achieved.

However, for the past 2-3 years the team have shifted their emphasis towards understanding the behavioural impact their at-scale messaging dissemination has achieved, including

understanding the specific role the complementary channels play, especially digital ones. Moving on from a more traditional MERL method examining KAP change via surveys with exposed vs unexposed viewers of the TV show, they are now trying to understand the complex interplay of media dosage in the online space. This means for example, attempting to map how different digital channels, and the specific types of content people prefer to consume on them, as well as the qualities of the audience segment they reach, might be working from a SBCC perspective.

Importantly, the flexibility with which they approach their MERL activities would not have been possible without two key factors: the length of the programme itself, and the support from the donor in allowing for data and learnings to emerge organically, once the original and no less ambitious programme objective was achieved.

## 6. Recommendations

The four organisations represented in this paper are all pioneering new approaches and implementing good practices, in different ways. The recommendations below emanate both from distilling this learning and from issues they have identified as being bottlenecks to their work and in the sector more generally.

### **Programme and M&E design**

#### Make evidence data available across funding portfolios as early as possible.

Programme implementers are increasingly mindful not to ‘re-invent the wheel’ when designing new programmes, but can often struggle to secure funding for research which would enable them to learn from the experiences of other implementers in the country, region or at a global level. Similarly, without access to evidence data from other comparable programmes, setting MERL targets and establishing benchmarks becomes a somewhat arbitrary exercise which can lead to a misplaced sense of either failure or success for implementation teams. Making case studies and evidence data available early, and encouraging ongoing knowledge exchange sessions between implementers will support faster, smarter programme design and implementation.

#### Prioritise programmes and MERL approaches that encourage constant learning and iteration rather than complex, periodic data collection tied to complex M&E frameworks.

This will allow implementers to focus not on achieving targets that may or may not still be relevant, but on a constant commitment to gathering feedback and learning about their user base and what’s working for them. In addition, learning more about the audience and what’s working/what’s not during intervention rollout will allow space for the programme ToC to be changed and adapted.

### Evolve robust programme ToCs that can be applied in a light-touch way.

This will ensure that programmes are rooted in sound behaviour change models, but that at the same time don't get too tangled up in excessively complex or abstract concepts which may be difficult to translate into digital content or products, or lead to MERL frameworks which require the collection of rigid layers of data without leaving room for insights to emerge more naturally. This is especially important as elaborate ToCs can be challenging to implement faithfully and consistently by teams composed of people of different backgrounds and skills. Whilst a more complex change model can be developed and referred to/refined by key team members (e.g M&E specialists), simpler models, such as the FOGG model (which principally requires a constant referring back to the idea of identifying and addressing barriers, motivation and ability), seem to be more effective in terms of allowing operationalisation across entire teams with different skills and capacities.

### Consider prioritising '360' programmes which include interventions at every stage of the behaviour change journey and across thematic areas.

Although this does make programming more complex, and more costly, if programmes do not incorporate interventions directly addressing service or product uptake they can fail to close the loop in terms of generating measurable behaviour change. The programmes that seemed most compelling were those that worked not just on knowledge/attitude shifts, but also offered a clear behavioural pathway, with support provided along the way, from interest, to commitment, to behavioural uptake, to maintenance. Another emerging development are programmes like Shujaaz, which avoid a silo-ed, one sector approach and work across different issues, reflecting the reality of people's multi-themed lives and conversations.

## **Methods & data**

### Prioritise the funding of programmes that include more participatory MERL methodologies...

Learn from programmes such as Shujaaz that routinely include direct participation from the target audience. Encourage the implementation of feedback loops which make end users feel they are meaningful stakeholders in what after all is an SBCC 'experiment'. All digital channels should include a clear strategy for soliciting both open ended and structured feedback as part of their service offering, and they should also make the solicitation of feedback part of their editorial timetable (for example 'Feedback Fridays') to ensure that audience members know their inputs are valued and listened to. Super-users of digital channels, such as those who frequently comment, react or send feedback can also be identified and can themselves become key informants in MERL activities, and potentially become peer-to-peer researchers.

### ...But be mindful of the practical and ethical limits of participatory methods.

FGDs can be a valuable approach when it comes to understanding more about audience attitudes, expectations, desires, or reactions to content. Similarly, it can be an effective way of 'co-creating' certain aspects of the content disseminated, for example, sketching out characters or storylines, or gauging reactions to branding. However, working directly with audience members to assess or develop certain types of content, especially when it is complex to craft, such as a television script, is not necessarily appropriate. The feedback that

implementers receive can often be biased as participants' technical and media literacy skills may be insufficient to provide objective feedback. Similarly, there is a risk that a constant process of 'co-creation' or consultation can become extractive, putting too much pressure on participants with little to show for it in return. Be clear about what you are trying to achieve via audience participation, and be considerate of the cost/benefit to participants themselves.

Although digital MERL methods and tools open up the tantalising possibility of a world of Big Data and real-time monitoring, external evaluation and academic research remains important.

There will always be the need for human researchers to dig deeper into the reasons behind the shifts that may be seen - data science can unearth patterns implementers may not have even thought to look for, but from that point onwards, you still need to develop theories and research experiments to prove or disprove the assumptions about how and why these patterns are occurring. MERL frameworks should allow insights to emerge organically.

Its crucial to admit it when MERL data gathered may not be reliable - especially when data seems too good to be true!

This is normal, and to be expected, and nobody wins by filling reports with reams of data that may be biased in some way. Rather examine the reasons for the unreliability, pinpoint and document the learning, and move on.

Unless there is reason to believe that digital indicators of *reach* meaningfully contribute to the ToC, these should be viewed as vanity metrics and broadly disregarded in terms of impact measurement.

Reach is an indicator that is frequently used as a proxy for programme success, but it is a misleading one. This is because whilst it offers the biggest possible number of people a programme can interact with, it also represents the shallowest degree of engagement with the target audience. For example, Reach can be used to describe anything from the number of times an advert or a post for a brand has appeared in a social media feed, or the number of visits to a website. Whilst it's a good indicator of brand or product *awareness*, which is an important component in any SBCC programme, it shouldn't be given any more significance than this. Unless there is evidence to suggest that this reach has happened organically (for example, via word of mouth), reach figures are more often tied to ad-spend: Put simply, the more money you spend on online adverts (the running of which is itself a costly and resource heavy exercise), the higher your reach figures, regardless of the subsequent quality of engagement or eventual behaviour change action taken. Programmes, and funders, should rather define what 'meaningful reach' looks like, if necessary based on learnings as the programme evolves.

### **General best practice**

Ground all programme activities in a commitment to constantly understanding more about the target audience, their habits, needs, desires, aspirations and realities.

This ties into the philosophy of prioritising Knowledge and Learning (K&L) as opposed to M&E - the more you understand about your audience, and the more you feed this into your activities,

the better your chances of creating change that can be readily ‘measured’ when the time comes. This will likely involve a more and more in-depth segmentation of your audience groups (for example, developing detailed personas or profiles which accurately capture a diverse range of possible behaviour change journeys) and will help you match interventions and M&E activities appropriately. Similarly, make organisational commitments to ground all new activities in data derived from K&L activities: this minimises the risk of teams becoming too frequently distracted by constantly pursuing new interventions, for example those based only on assumptions, or that have come about as a result of ‘hype’ around an innovative technology.

### **Case study - Shujaaz, Inc, Kenya & Tanzania: Operationalising Knowledge & Learning activities**

Shujaaz, Inc. has been able to generate impressive impact evidence thanks to its face-to-face, analogue and digital interventions which aim to inspire, mobilise and entertain 15-24 year old East African youth in order to improve their agency and support their ability to succeed on their own terms. For **example**, evaluation shows that girls exposed to Shujaaz media are 2.4x more likely to delay childbirth, and fans engaging with Shujaaz digital platforms earn on average \$21 more per month.

Key to this success in both creating and measuring impact is an organisational commitment to two key pillars: firstly, to be ‘Player-First’ i.e to move beyond tokenism in terms of the participation of young people in intervention design and monitoring, and secondly, to ensure that every new product developed is grounded in data. To ensure the latter, Shujaaz has an in-house Knowledge & Learning team of seven full time staff, supplemented by a team of consultants, third-party partners and a panel of academic advisors. In addition, they are supported by a network of 4,000+ ‘SuperFans’, who are involved in distributing comics, arranging for monthly field tests of the Shujaaz media and overall overall serve as one of the key connectors between Shujaaz audience and the Shujaaz team.

To avoid the ‘silo-isation’ of K&L from day to day implementation activities, Shujaaz implements operational processes including weekly one hour sharing meeting, monthly story hours delivered by researchers to share what they’ve learned with the programme teams and brainstorm how the learning could be operationalised, and quarterly thematic reviews lasting half a day or more. During these in-depth sessions, the K&L and programme teams look at what was delivered, what evidence was gathered to understand the intervention’s impact, and discuss together how to move forward. Aside from the routine sharing of the learnings integrated in the programmatic processes, Shujaaz benefits from a number of ad hoc meetings and the so-called “Risk Monitors” – round-ups of national and global news, research, and information related to Shujaaz themes collected and shared with the team at-large by the K&L and Corporate Communication teams. Any new iteration on an existing intervention is therefore evidence-based, measurable and defensible.

Think creatively about how K&L activities and methods could be of use to other organisations in the sector.

The insights being generated by MERL activities, particularly where these are gathered consistently with the active and informed consent of respondents, could even become a monetisation opportunity, allowing implementers to shore up their sustainability, and reduce reliance on traditional funding cycles. At the same time, implementers should think critically

about the ethics of this approach in terms of the risk of becoming extractive. One way around this is to be up front with your users and understand the appetite for their experiences and insights to be shared.

Creating brand recognition as well as brand trust is key to conducting successful M&E activities.

Implementers can do this by attempting to ensure that their audience has constant and repeated exposure to the brand and its activities (ideally across different media, but at minimum, on the one they use the most.) This also means providing something of actual value during that interaction (which cannot be achieved without a strong and constantly evolving understanding of your audience). Not only will programmes be more likely to find participants willing to take part in M&E activities, but also to achieve positive impact results.

Support long-term institutional knowledge by investing in in-house MERL expertise and capacity, or building long term relationships with research partners.

Implementers should avoid an over-reliance on external consultants under short-term contracts for any work that would benefit from institutional knowledge. Bring MERL team members into the creative process, for example, to support the development of content including characters, storylines, or educational materials.

## Appendix A: KII questions

Thinking back to the inception of the programme, what evidence or research did you draw on that caused you to design the programme in the way you did? Did you invest heavily in research into what had been used elsewhere, or did you follow your instincts more?

Please can you outline/explain the theoretical framework/ToC that informs the design of [programme name]

When was it developed? Why was it chosen?

Has it been changed or adapted since?

How useful or limiting have you found using a ToC?

Have you developed a 'digital Theory of Change' that specifically looks into the opportunities/limitations of the digital media?

How have you understood the "affordances" or "special characteristics" of different digital channels or platforms and how have these influenced your use of them? (e.g., different platforms/channels will reach different groups in different ways - have they strategized specifically about this?)

Can I confirm that the digital elements of your programme include [xxx] and the other interventions include [xxx].

Going back to your Theory of Change, can you explain how you've operationalised that in terms of an M&E plan for your digital channels?

What are the key metrics you're trying to measure beyond reach/exposure, for your digital channels?

What methods and tools have you used to:

- monitor activities/outputs e.g. reach and engagement
- evaluate outcomes/impact e.g. changes in KAPB?
- Have you identified ways to understand how online content might be influencing online or offline behaviours?

We've found that one of the issues with measuring digital impact is the sheer volume of data collected and the potential ways of analysing it, not to mention the skills and time required to do it. What do you think about this?

One of the issues of digital M&E is (and all M&E, really...) is ensuring users are exposed to your digital interventions over time, ideally multiple times. (exposure) How have you addressed this? How do you measure this?



There's a school of thought that as practitioners we approach MEL the wrong way round - that rather than jumping straight to promising/measuring impact, we should focus first on Learning and Research, then based on that, craft an M&E framework. What do you think? What would have to change for you to take this approach?

Tell us more about [method]. What do you feel you learned? What worked about this methodology? What would you like to do differently? Have you considered using the methodology for other digital channels?

Did anything emerge from the [method] that gave you a sense of impact that you may not have anticipated?

Overall - how useful do you feel like the findings of the M&E activities conducted so far have been? Were you able to answer all your questions satisfactorily? What did it tell you about outcomes/impact, cost-effectiveness, replicability and scalability?

When you take into account capacity, cost and popularity of a particular digital channel, and weigh that against the ease with which you can measure results - which digital channel do you feel most positive about in terms of investment:measurable impact?

You mentioned plans to expand digital activities into new channels such as [xxx] where are you at with that?

Have you given any thought to how these fit into a ToC? And how would you imagine impact on these channels might be measured?

Have you had to adapt any of these methods as a result of Covid-19? What challenges/issues have you experienced? (prompt for methodological, technical/technological, ethical, data privacy and safeguarding etc.)

What have you found to be the limitations of online/remote methods and tools for M&E of digital SBCC?

What are your suggestions for how to design digital SBCC programmes to take account of MEL needs? Best/good practises?

Which other programmes/organisations do know of that you think are working effectively to use digital and social media for SBCC? Why do you look up to them?

What further evidence do you think is needed to inform the design of digital SBCC programmes to be effective? Do you have any thoughts on how this evidence can be gathered? What research questions should be asked?

## Appendix B: List of MERL methods and tools used by programmes interviewed

1. **Storing and analysis of audio records** from phone-based interventions including systematic **collection of performance data** (e.g number of calls incoming/outgoing) **demographic and other contextual and FP-related information**, (e.g marital status, motivation for calling...) and records of **behaviour-change commitments** (for example, clinic appointment made, eVoucher requested...)
2. **Phone-based customer satisfaction check-ins**, conducted shortly after an initial intervention, to follow up on behaviour-change commitments, as well as quality of service received (if relevant).
3. **Phone-based support calls**, which customers can opt-in to, conducted monthly, to check in on product uptake, answer any questions and provide guidance to aid continued use of the FP method.
4. **Phone-based rapid assessment interviews or surveys**, conducted bi-annually with a mid-size panel of clients engaged with the programme, to understand whether behaviour-change commitments made during the initial point of contact were followed through, and why (motivations vs barriers)
5. **Audio analysis by AI** of conversation records to detect patterns covering clients' motivation and barriers to FP/SRH product uptake.
6. **Text-based analysis by AI** of SMS messages covering key questions from users, allowing implementers not just to more rapidly provide responses to recurring questions, but also to perform analyses on recurring thematic areas.
7. **Manual sentiment analysis of SMS messages, social media comments, hashtags, or digital feedback form responses** to track reactions to content disseminated by the programme, as well as self-reported change. Also used to understand more how the audience's use of language shifts as they move through different stages of their change-journey.
8. **Website performance metrics** covering both reach and engagement, including site visits and page views (including disaggregated for relevant content)
9. **Social media performance metrics** covering both reach and engagement, including page or account likes/followers, post reach, post likes, comments and shares.
10. **Cross-channel referral tracking** via digital forms or verbally administered questionnaires on a core channel, to understand where a customer heard about a given service, helping programmes understand the effectiveness of different channels at generating leads.
11. **Online sales records**, tracking purchases of FP products or consumption of eVouchers.
12. **Face to face qualitative research** (e.g FGDs), to inform programme or content design, or to respond to a specific question that the data is not successfully answering
13. **Instant messaging based qualitative research**, for example via WhatsApp groups, to inform programme or content design or dig deeper into a specific question.

14. **Instant-messaging based media testing** with user panels - sharing content with self-selected members of the target audience in order to gauge their reactions and gather feedback before content is disseminated.
15. **Longitudinal studies**, involving individuals exposed vs not exposed, conducted either via household surveys or via telephone, focusing on knowledge, attitude and behavioural intention questions relating to key messaging (e.g on a particular social issue, storyline or character).
16. **Online pre- and Post- surveys**, examining knowledge, attitudes and behavioural intention before and after exposure to specific online content (e.g a video on HPV)
17. **Pre- and post- exposure online quizzes**, comparing the knowledge and attitude scores of users both exposed and not exposed to lessons on the quiz topic, before taking the quiz.
18. **SMS-based cross-sectional surveys** delivered quarterly to the same panel of individuals to assess knowledge, attitude or behaviour change
19. **Social media polls**, for example on Facebook or via Instagram stories, to get a 'temperature check' on the audience's attitudes or experiences at a specific point in time.
20. **Online pre- and post- panels**, using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative data on a custom-made research forum, where participants who have never been exposed to the (digital) intervention take part in quizzes, surveys and discussions both before and after exposure to the product over the course of a few days.
21. **Online A/B tests**, for example promoting 2 different types of content to the same audience, and seeing which receives the most engagement (likes, comments, shares).
22. **Analogue viewing figures for television and radio**, for example to help understand reach of a given programme, and from then to track knowledge, attitudes and behavioural changes or intentions depending on exposure levels.
23. **Peer to peer qualitative research**, conducted both face to face and remotely using individuals representative of the target audience, trained in qual and quant research methodologies, and supported by digital (mobile) data gathering tools.
24. **Community-based qualitative research via mobile videos and vox pops** - working with the target audience to document realities and attitudes in their communities, in real time.
25. **Data visualisation dashboards** to collate and analyse programme data in real time, whether derived from analogue or digital interventions.
26. **Partnerships with academic institutions** are common, providing evidence-based strategic and practical support on Theory of Change development, MERL operationalisation