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Feedback without Follow-Up? Complaint Pathways in Refugee Food Assistance

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Abstract

Humanitarian feedback systems can collect concerns without ensuring that recipients learn how those concerns were resolved. This study examines complaint pathways in food assistance programmes serving refugees in northern Uganda. Researchers traced 186 anonymised complaints, interviewed 52 recipients and 29 programme staff, and observed help desks at six distribution sites over four months. Case analysis distinguished acknowledgement, referral, substantive response, and communication of an outcome to the complainant. Most recorded complaints received an initial acknowledgement, but recipients often remained unsure whether a referral led to further action. Cases involving household-list discrepancies crossed organisational boundaries and took longer to resolve. Women with limited phone access were less likely to receive callback updates and relied on repeated in-person enquiries. The findings show why administrative closure should be assessed separately from a recipient's understanding of the outcome. Records exclude concerns never formally submitted and contain uneven detail. Feedback systems should identify responsibility for referrals and offer accessible ways for recipients to check progress and challenge unresolved errors.

Keywords: humanitarian accountability, refugee food assistance, complaint pathways, referral systems, Uganda

1. Introduction

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2. Methods

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