eclipse

Launch Session

What we did

The Launch Session is the first point of engagement between the UCCE project team and the crisis-affected community they are working with. Its primary aim is to introduce and discuss with the community the project and the activities that will take place over the coming days and weeks. Its secondary aim is to manage expectations of the community regarding the project by clearly communicating its scope and limitations.

The pilot in Ethiopia was the first time we tested a dedicated Launch Session guide as part of the UCCE methodology. The Launch Session took place in the morning on the first day of UCCE implementation in Tukaley village. It was run by the Project Team, lasted approx. 30 minutes and was attended by nearly 50 community members (men, women and children). The Launch Session guide can be found here.

What we learned

Conducting a Launch Session is common practice for humanitarian staff

The project team was very familiar with the concept of a Launch Session as holding such meetings with the community to introduce new projects is common practice. Therefore, during the training we decided not to ask the project team to follow the dedicated Launch Session guide. Instead, we agreed on the session objectives with the WASH and MEAL managers, who then structured and ran the session as they would normally do for any other project.

Proportion of target population among the Launch Session participants was unclear

The project team organised the Launch Session, which was well attended. However, it was unclear what percentage of attendees were internally displaced people and what percentage were from the host community. It was also unclear how many primary caregivers of children aged 5-12 attended.

Structuring the session as a dialogue worked well

During the Launch Session we observed a good dialogue between the project team and community members. WASH and MEAL managers and the community members took turns

speaking, with the team providing information about the project and the community expressing their views in response. This is in contrast to the initial session guidance we created, which included a Q&A component only at the end of the session, after the project was introduced in full. It was interesting to observe the back and forth, which seemed lively and energetic, but at the end of the session the community did not have any questions about the project itself, which was unexpected.

Project team appeared to manage community members' expectations well

The project team explained the scope of the project during the Launch Session and the community seemed very receptive and welcoming of it - although this may have been coloured by the fact that SCI was the only NGO providing aid in the community at the time of the pilot. In the dialogue with the project team, community members stressed that the main priority for them at this time was the supply of water rather than changes to sanitation facilities, which were recently constructed. The project team was then able to respond to these concerns.

Not including a detailed project timeline was a missed opportunity

Despite introducing the activities of UCCE to the community, the project team did not share a timeline of project activities in the Launch Session. In hindsight, this was a missed opportunity as the team later discovered events (e.g. community meeting, distributions, etc.) that were taking place in the village interfered with the timing of Interactive Digital Survey and Co-Creation Sessions. The Launch Session would have been a good opportunity to discover these and discuss how to best avoid clashes together with the community.

Eclipse team's presence was misunderstood

The Eclipse team's presence was misunderstood and thus a slight distraction from the objectives of the session. The community initially thought that Eclipse researchers were donors who would be able to assist with their need for water. However, the Project Team were able to clarify the reason for their visit and the session progressed as planned.

What this means for UCCE development

Revise Launch Session guidance to align it with common practice

The Launch Session guidance and training should refer explicitly to running the Launch Session according to common practice of launching a project in a community that is used in a given context. The project team should use the common approach but remember to clarify objectives that are specific to UCCE (e.g., scope of design decisions that UCCE will inform). The structure of the Launch Session should also be revised to a dialogue format.

Create a checklist of key actions and discussion points for the Launch Session

While the Launch Session guidance can be revised to be fairly high-level, as per the previous point, it is important to support the field teams with a concise, easy-to-use checklist of key actions and discussion points to cover in preparation to and during the Launch Session. This should also cover the inclusion of the target population in the Launch Session and the discussion of the project timeline with the community to adjust activities around any existing commitments of the community members.