



Lessons learned from the content development stream of the mNutrition initiative:

Quality assurance and quality control processes as a part of mNutrition's aim to produce high-quality content

Between 2014 and 2017 the GSMA's mNutrition initiative brought together five global content partners (GCP) to deliver the content stream of the initiative across 12 implementing countries. Lead by CABI, GCP activities included: the development of a general framework for nutrition content creation, carrying out landscape analyses of nutritional needs in each implementing country, and identifying key factors for sustainable content services beyond the project. GCPs contracted and provided technical assistance to local content partners (LCP) so that they were able to partner with mobile service providers and/or mobile operators to either scale-up existing or develop, launch and market new mNutrition content services.

The focus of this brief is to provide the lessons learned related to content quality. More specifically:

1. Defining quality
2. The impact of time and quantity as two main factors affecting quality
3. Introduction of the QC gateway and retrospective reviews

1 DEFINING QUALITY

As a result of the GCP recruiting local partners in the target countries who were more familiar with the local context and therefore best suited to create locally relevant content and in effort to ensure that only factually correct, relevant and targeted content was created, there was a need to develop a quality assurance and quality control process. To achieve this, the GCP developed a set of procedures and standards (quality assurance framework) that would guide the content teams and ensure only quality inputs were used to create content. All local content teams were trained on these procedures and standards as the first step of ensuring quality. The GCP also set a series of checks (quality control) that would be employed to ensure that the content teams were following the set procedures and standards when creating the content.



The biggest question when it came to defining quality was: good for whom? For the purpose of relevant government ministries and other stakeholders, content had to be 'good' in terms of being scientifically accurate; for the purpose of target farmer or households, i.e. the end-user, content had to be 'good' in terms of being understandable, actionable and accessible – and during the course of mNutrition these objectives for different audiences were in direct conflict on several occasions.

Having different parties at the receiving end of 'quality' made defining a Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Control (QC) process challenging. As a solution, the GCP put together a QA framework, which included a process-driven QC assessment of content. This mainly consisted of checking adherence to the defined QA processes to objectively confirm the produced content was of good quality. This process provided a certain degree of autonomy to content teams to determine what quality standards meant for the local context. However, this approach was abandoned as it became clear that the quality of the content being produced was drifting further away from the desired minimum quality levels that would have been deemed acceptable; and an additional check (QC gateway) was introduced instead. After the implementation of the QC gateway, which was more technical, the content produced shifted from being user centric to expert centric. This meant there was a risk devaluing of end-users as the overall 'sign-off' for good quality content.

The newly designed quality assurance framework and supporting tools to assist the LCPs in carrying out successful QA were helpful and, to this day, LCPs continue to implement many of the quality assurance processes, such as the source matrix used to curate information sources and the quality framework matrix which was a step-by-step list of standards to guide the LCPs through the content creation. However, having these supporting documents and tools meant a great time investment on the GCP end.

Once the message is considered as ready to be rolled out based on adhering to the QA process, the ultimate arbiter of quality should always be the end-user. In line with this, GCP should have encouraged and built capacity more forcefully, giving sufficient resources and time to conduct comprehensive end-user testing.

As a summary, when it comes to defining quality, the first question to answer should be whom the quality needs to be good for. Once this is established and agreed on, it should be clearly communicated to everybody involved in the process, along with guidelines on roles, responsibilities, expectations, process and criteria should be made available to content partners upfront.

Moreover, sufficiently clear support tools need to be provided to better ensure adherence to the defined process and the involved parties should have the capacity to conduct QC reviews in the language in which users will receive the content to avoid unnecessary and limited rendering of local language script.



2 THE IMPACT OF TIME AND QUANTITY AS TWO MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING QUALITY

In the case of mNutrition, as in many other projects, we cannot address the quality of the content being produced without taking into consideration the quantity and the time available. While all were equally relevant when the initiative first started, it has soon become clear that with the processes in place, quality suffered at the extent of the quantity of content needed within the available timeframe.

The first LCPs to come on board committed to huge quantities of content, which took its toll on the desired quality and, furthermore, it turned out to be a challenge to complete the content creation within the given timeframes. This was the case for the majority of mAgri LCPs, as well as a few wave 1 mHealth countries. To address this issue from the very beginning, LCPs were given instructions from GCPs to prioritize interventions and key messaging that addressed an identified needs gap based on the Country Landscape Analysis and Country Content Framework. Despite this effort, there was an unavoidable burden to produce the content within the set timeframe, which meant pressure was put on producing a high quantity of content often at the expense of high quality.

Looking back, it should have been ensured that first and foremost, the content created met the end-users and government partners/validators demand. Deadlines and the identified priority content should be balanced with a quantity that is reasonable given the time requirements, taking into consideration the role external parties play in completing the process.

3 INTRODUCTION OF THE QUALITY CONTROL GATEWAY AND RETROSPECTIVE REVIEWS

Initially, the QA/QC process provided some degree of autonomy for the content teams to determine what standards were really feasible/applicable in their context. This resulted in undesired outcomes where low-quality content was produced, making the need for introducing another check – hence the QC gateway. The introduction of the QC gateway came about in June 2016 when an enhanced QC process, based on criteria covered in initial content team training and administered by ILRI, became a ‘gateway’ for the release of content in which messages not meeting the quality criteria were returned to the content teams for further editing before publishing. This was due to the GCP and GSMA observing that the same quality issues were reoccurring despite being flagged and corrected in initial reviews.

After the implementation of the QC gateway, an improvement in the overall quality of content produced by the content teams was clearly reflected in the messages produced. However, since it required substantial support from GCP to the content teams, as well as multiple steps in content production, it quickly became clear that the timeframes needed to be extended. In fact, there is work still taking place outside of the content teams’ completion of contracts in some cases.

Nevertheless, this was not the most critical implication – with the implementation of QC gateway, the content teams’ opportunity to take ownership of the content, a key requirement of content creation, reduced and their reliance on external support and input from GCP increased.

As a recommendation based on GCPs experience in terms of QC gateway, the mitigation plans should be outlined and prepared for whichever content production models are available. At the same time, in the early stages of the project, the model selection should be based on it meeting the program priorities best. Furthermore, the quality criteria – and if it constitutes a go/no-go gateway – should be set before content creation begins.



The introduction of the QC gateway meant that all previously produced content had to be reviewed as well to make sure the quality standards were met. This new step in the process, called retrospective review, meant that all messages, including those that were already released, had to be submitted to for GCP review and then adjusted according to the feedback.

As a benefit, the content quality increased as per the QC gateway criteria. However, there was a downside related to the process being extremely time-consuming for the LCPs, who felt that the work in review was already delivered, especially in cases when key personnel from national governments have previously validated it. This had a direct impact on the relationships between GCPs and LCPs, which became more of a contractor/subcontractor relationship as compared to a previously well-performing partnership relationship (see Brief 1 for further details).

In hindsight, the role of retrospective reviews should be defined as addressing changes in policy, practices, regulations and responding to real end-user feedback following the launch of services and communicated to all parties up front.

Project overview and aim:

The mNutrition initiative was launched in 2014 by the GSMA in partnership with the UK government's Department for International Development. The aim was to see 'improved nutrition for the poor as a result of behaviour change promoted by accessible mobile-based services delivered at scale through sustainable business models', reaching 'at least three million people across eight Sub-Saharan African and four Asian countries'.

The GSMA delivered this through leveraging expertise and capacity from two of its existing development initiatives under Mobile for Development: mFarmer (mAgri) and mHealth, and brought the global content partners onboard to manage the content creation process.

Briefs in this series:

- 1** How to set up the right content creation model, processes and structures to achieve maximum project efficiency and quality outputs
- 2** End-user feedback and its role in producing high-quality localized content
- 3** Validating the content via sign-off letters as a part of the content development process
- 4** Quality assurance and quality control processes as a part of mNutrition's aim to produce high-quality content



To view and download for free the content produced by the mNutrition initiative's content partners, please visit the Nutrition Knowledge Bank at: www.cabi.org/nutritionkb.