The Operational Framework

The Operational Framework summarizes the key concepts for making programming at the field level more accountable to affected populations. The framework is designed to assist implementing agencies both individually and in groups to find practical entry points for improving accountability to affected populations.

The activities and indicators noted here should not preclude any agency from instituting further accountability improvements and mechanisms according to an internal analysis of their particular strengths and weaknesses against current industry standards and guidance. For the purposes of a more detailed analysis and agency specific action planning, the framework should be used in conjunction with the IASC Accountability Commitment Analysis Tool, the HAP 2010 Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, the Minimum Operating Standards for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, or locally developed and tailored tools.

Affected populations within this framework should not be understood as a homogenous group, but rather differences among population groups on the basis of sex, age, ethnicity, disability and other social markers of exclusion should be acknowledged. An understanding of these differences will shape the way communication messages are design and delivered and shape the way community consultations are carried out.

Program Cycle Phase	Objective	Responsible bodies
Planning needs assessment and response	Ensure that AAP is effectively integrated within systems for planning needs assessment and response (Objective 3)	Individual Organizations/ NATF/ Needs Assessment Teams in the Field/ Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms
During assessment	Ensure that AAP is effectively integrated within needs assessment methodology, including joint needs assessments (Objective 4)	Individual Organizations / Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms/
During project design or response planning	Ensure that AAP is effectively integrated within systems for project design and planning (Objective 5)	Individual Organizations / Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms/ HCT
During project implementation	Ensure AAP is effectively integrated throughout the implementation of projects (Objective 6)	Individual Organizations / Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms
During distribution and service delivery	Ensure that AAP is effectively integrated in distribution programmes (Objective 7)	Individual Organizations / Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms
During monitoring	Ensure that AAP is effectively integrated throughout the implementation of projects	Individual Organizations / Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms
Throughout all phases of the humanitarian program cycle	System wide learning and establishing means of mainstreaming and verification (Objective 1)	Individual Organizations / Coordination bodies (OCHA, NGO Consortia, Clusters) / HCT
Throughout all phases of the humanitarian program cycle	Systematically communicate with affected populations (Objective 2) Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse is considered integral to all operations	Individual Organizations / Clusters, HC (supported by OCHA), HCT

Objective 1:

System wide learning and establishing means of mainstreaming and verification

Phase:

Throughout all phases of the program cycle

Responsible bodies:

Individual Organizations / Coordination bodies (OCHA, NGO Consortia, Clusters) / HCT

Feedback on progress provided to IASC on:

Indicators / Activities	*Means of Verification / Evidence to gather for reporting*
Mainstreaming accountability commitments into recruitment and training	• Examples of job descriptions • Examples of training content and evidence of training conducted
Amend partnership agreements to include accountability	• Examples of recent partner agreements
Ensure accountability is integrated into ToRs	• ToR examples
Initiate a dialogue with donors to ensure flexibility and collaboration with regard to accountability	• Records of meetings • Evidence of changed agreements

Risks and challenges requiring strategies:

- Systematic mainstreaming and engagement requires significant time and resources
- Sufficient management buy-in
- Adequate skills and capacity of staff and partners
- Feedback mechanisms should systematically feed into performance management systems
- Systematic documentation of good practices

Tools / Resources:

- HAP Standard Benchmark 1- Establishing and delivering on commitments: The organization sets out the commitments that it will be held accountable for, and how they will be delivered

Objective 2:

Systematically communicate with affected populations using relevant feedback and communication mechanisms

Phase:
Throughout all phases of the program cycle

Responsible bodies:
Individual Organizations / Clusters, HC (supported by OCHA), HCT

Feedback on progress provided to IASC on:

Indicators / Activities	Means of Verification / Evidence to gather for reporting
Open up existing humanitarian information systems with affected communities and other local actors	• Plans for local media identified and recorded • Evidence of awareness raising on humanitarian information systems provided to local NGOs, media, government and community leadership
Develop if necessary and/or support multi-agency response communications initiatives. Implement communications projects that already deliver on a response-wide level, (including IFRC's SMS system, the radio models developed by IFRC and the BBC WST, support to local media and other actors).	• Humanitarian funding mechanisms adapted to include provision for financing of communications activities, including within the CERF and ERF • Increased number of organizations deploying dedicated resources for communications with affected communities and staff capacity at field level in humanitarian emergencies
Ensure that means of communication are appropriate and tailored to local circumstances	• Evidence of data gathering and community consultations regarding most appropriate local means of communication • Communication plans identify key messages and means of communication
Access to affected populations and by affected populations to humanitarian staff	• Evidence that affected populations have access to life-saving information on what services are available to them and how to access them. • Records of community meetings and means for access
Affected populations have opportunity to register complaints, provide feedback and to get a response	• Documentation of established feedback mechanisms and of complaints and response mechanisms, with evidence of responses provided

Risks and challenges requiring strategies:

- Need to further develop system-wide communications coordination function
- Methodology for collating feedback from affected communities, including media monitoring, feedback from agency partners etc, needs to be developed and implemented (OCHA?)
- May require provision of standby funding and capacity to manage communications in a response at systems level, including support to local media, projects such as radio shows and newsletters that operate across a response.
- Adapting means of communication to local context
- Feedback processes often only focus on project-level information

Tools / Resources:

- HAP Standard Benchmark 3 - Sharing information: The organisation ensures that the people it aims to assist and other stakeholders have access to timely, relevant and clear information about the organisation and its activities
- HAP Standard Benchmark 4 - Participation: The organization listens to the people it aims to assist, incorporating their views and analysis in programme decisions
- HAP Standard Benchmark 5 - Handling complaints: The organisation enables the people it aims to assist and other stakeholders to raise complaints and receive a response through an effective, accessible and safe process
- CDAC Network tools and information
- Info*as*aid tools and information

Objective 3:

Ensure that accountability to affected populations is effectively integrated within systems for planning needs assessment and response

Phase:
Before assessment and/or during contingency planning

Responsible bodies:
Individual Organizations/ NATF/ Needs Assessment Teams in the Field/ Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms

Feedback on progress provided to IASC on:

Indicators / Activities	Means of Verification / Evidence to gather for reporting
Include accountability to affected populations in job descriptions, staff development and appraisal mechanisms, and particularly in the Terms of Reference of the Cluster Coordinators	• Copies of job descriptions, staff appraisal mechanisms and ToRs
Inform local communities well before assessment takes place	• Policy document outlining intent • Record of meetings
Include accountability into the sector/ cluster plan in CAP	• Copy of relevant section of the CAP
Ensure communications are translated into local language(s) and adequate support for interpretation as necessary	• Copies of translations • Record of engaging interpreters
Gain understanding of local culture, customs and beliefs	• Evidence in needs assessments that appropriate research was done to achieve this
Identify potential partners with demonstrated commitment to accountability	• Partner selection policy • Evidence of partner selection process
Deploy Q&A officers at the beginning of response as a cross-cutting capacity	• Evidence of recruitment of Q&A officers • Inclusion of positions in budget proposals
Include accountability principles and mechanisms in trainings	• Training records

Risks and challenges requiring strategies:
• Common understanding of accountability between cluster members
• Common commitment to accountability to affected populations
• Sufficient resources
• Ensuring common standards for accountability when multiple stakeholders involved
• Making staff aware of their commitments
• Adequate training
• Inclusion in staff and programme performance evaluation

Tools / Resources:
• HAP Standard Benchmark 2, 3, 4 and 5
• Use of CAP indicators to monitor and evaluate the sector

Objective 4:

Ensure that accountability to affected populations is effectively integrated within needs assessment methodology, including joint needs assessments

Phase:

During assessment

Responsible bodies:

Individual Organizations / Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms/

Feedback on progress provided to IASC on:

Indicators / Activities	*Means of Verification / Evidence to gather for reporting*
Invite representatives of local community to participate in the assessment	• Assessment report notes in what way community representatives assisted in the conduct of the assessment as well as in the provision of information
Allow for separate and confidential discussions with different community groups (including gender and age disaggregated groups)	• Number and types of groups noted in assessment report
Describe methodology and limitations to communities, canvass opinions or needs and priorities of community groups	• Guidelines or ToRs for those undertaking the assessment note requirements • Assessment report outlines information gained from communities
Design and implement feedback mechanisms in consultation with local communities and inform all stakeholders how they function	• Documented process • Evidence of captured feedback
Communication needs and methods are assessed in joint needs assessments	• Noted in assessment report

Risks and challenges requiring strategies:

• Reaching out to all community groups – gaining an understanding of community leadership and dynamics
• Creating an environment where people/groups can speak openly
• Communicating in local language(s)
• Managing expectations

Tools / Resources:

• WFP's Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
• UNHCR's Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming methodology
• NATF and joint needs assessments (refer to the IASC Principals 19 April recommendations in this regard)
• HAP Standard Benchmarks 3, 4 and 5
• Sphere CS3: Assessment, KI1: Assessed needs have been explicitly linked to the capacity of affected people and the state to respond.

Objective 5:

Ensure that accountability to affected populations is effectively integrated within systems for project design and planning

Phase:

During project design and/or response planning

Responsible bodies:

Individual Organizations / Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms/ HCT

Feedback on progress provided to IASC on:

Indicators / Activities	*Means of Verification / Evidence to gather for reporting*
Share findings of assessment within the cluster, humanitarian community and with affected communities and local authorities	• Records of meetings • Policy or guidance documents outlining expectations
Ensure assessment results are used in design of projects	• Assessment findings explicitly used in project descriptions
Involve local community in project design	• Recorded in project documentation
Explain to people their rights as a disaster-affected population	• Copies of written materials produced from communities in relevant languages • Records of meetings
Design complaints and response mechanism with local input (issues related to confidentiality should be taken into account)	• Documentation regarding the design and implementation of the complaints mechanism
If necessary to recruit additional staff, advertise openly	• Copies of job advertisements

Risks and challenges requiring strategies:

• Ensuring that activities are measurable and transparent
• Realistic timeframes for project implementation and completion
• Ensuring that resources for accountability are included in country strategies and emergency appeals
• Complaints and feedback mechanism are tailored to local communities
• Reflect accountability commitments and expectations in partnership agreements

Tools / Resources:

• Good practice examples of feedback and complaints mechanisms, for eg;
  http://www.hapinternational.org/case-studies-and-tools/handling-complaints.aspx
• HAP Standard, all benchmarks
• Sphere CS 2: Coordination and collaboration: KI 4: The agency's response takes account of the capacities and strategies of other humanitarian agencies, civil society organisations and relevant authorities (CS1, GN1: explicit efforts to listen to, consult and engage people at an early stage will increase quality and community management later in the programme)

Objective 6:

Ensure that accountability to affected populations is effectively integrated throughout the implementation of projects

Phase:

During project implementation

Responsible bodies:

Individual Organizations / Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms

Feedback on progress provided to IASC on:

Indicators / Activities	*Means of Verification / Evidence to gather for reporting*
Invite representatives of local community groups in developing criteria for selection of beneficiaries, make criteria and beneficiary selection process public	• Record of communications regarding selection criteria
Inform about and implement complaints and response mechanism	• Record of implementation and of received complaints
Use feedback mechanisms to gather feedback on the quality and accountability of the response	• Evidence of feedback gathered • Analysis of feedback and complaints (trends in number and type of complaints and feedback received over time)

Risks and challenges requiring strategies:

- Ensuring means / resources to respond to feedback and to address complaints in a timely and effective manner
- Respecting the privacy of individuals and providing means for confidentiality when lodging complaints
- Ability of community representatives to freely engage in beneficiary selection criteria discussions depending upon the participation of government authorities

Tools / Resources:

- HAP Standard Benchmark 4 and 5

Objective 7:

Ensure that accountability to affected populations is effectively integrated in distribution programmes

Phase:

During distribution and service delivery

Responsible bodies:

Individual Organizations / Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms

Feedback on progress provided to IASC on:

Indicators / Activities	*Means of Verification / Evidence to gather for reporting*
Where relevant, form a distribution committee and/or consultative group that includes local community representatives	• Documentation regarding the committee • Record of feedback from the committee
Inform local communities in advance of date and location for distribution / service provision, security allowing	• Evidence of means of communication

Risks and challenges requiring strategies:

- Making sure people know how to provide feedback or to register complaints and providing timely responses
- Prioritization of vulnerable groups and understanding differences among them

Tools / Resources:

- HAP Standard Benchmarks 3, 4 and 5

Objective 8:

Ensure that accountability to affected populations is effectively integrated throughout the implementation of projects

Phase:
During monitoring

Responsible bodies:
Individual Organizations / Clusters/ Inter Cluster mechanisms

Feedback on progress provided to IASC on:

Indicators / Activities	*Means of Verification / Evidence to gather for reporting*
Invite local community representatives to take part in monitoring process	• Description of methodology section of evaluation or monitoring reports
Share and discuss findings with local communities	• Record of feedback meetings
Project design is adjusted according to community feedback	• Project reports outline adaptation during implementation • Follow on or repeated projects identify adaptation/changes in response to community feedback
Hold an internal learning review	• Report from internal learning review

Risks and challenges requiring strategies:
• Reporting in a timely manner to affected populations, partners, authorities, donors, etc.

Tools / Resources:
• Feedback from communities
• Measure levels and types of local leadership, feedback, transparency and participation achieved
• HAP Standard Benchmark 3, 4 and 5
• Sphere CS5: Performance, transparency and learning: KI1 and 2: Programmes are adapted in response to monitoring and learning information; Monitoring and evaluation sources include the views of a representative number of people targeted by the response, as well as the host community if different
• Sphere CS1, KI3: The number of self-help initiatives led by the affected community and local authorities' increases during the response period.

Accountability to Affected Populations

IASC Commitments (CAAP)

The December 2011 IASC Principals meeting endorsed five Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP)[1] and agreed to incorporate the CAAP into the policies and operational guidelines of their organizations and promote them with operational partners, within Humanitarian Country Teams and amongst cluster members. These commitments are:

1. Leadership/Governance:

Demonstrate their commitment to accountability to affected populations by ensuring feedback and accountability mechanisms are integrated into country strategies, programme proposals, monitoring and evaluations, recruitment, staff inductions, trainings and performance management, partnership agreements, and highlighted in reporting.

2. Transparency:

Provide accessible and timely information to affected populations on organizational procedures, structures and processes that affect them to ensure that they can make informed decisions and choices, and facilitate a dialogue between an organisation and its affected populations over information provision.

3. Feedback and Complaints:

Actively seek the views of affected populations to improve policy and practice in programming, ensuring that feedback and complaints mechanisms are streamlined, appropriate and robust enough to deal with (communicate, receive, process, respond to and learn from) complaints about breaches in policy and stakeholder dissatisfaction.[2]

4. Participation:

Enable affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them through the establishment of clear guidelines and practices to engage them appropriately and ensure that the most marginalised and affected are represented and have influence.

5. Design, Monitoring And Evaluation:

Design, monitor and evaluate the goals and objectives of programmes with the involvement of affected populations, feeding learning back into the organisation on an on-going basis and reporting on the results of the process.

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[1] With the exception of ICRC and IFRC who have their own accountability mechanisms.

[2] Specific issues raised by affected individuals regarding violations and/or physical abuse that may have human rights and legal, psychological or other implications should have the same entry point as programme-type complaints, but procedures for handling these should be adapted accordingly.