



Shelter Accountability Resources

A guide to improving accountability to disaster-affected populations during the implementation of humanitarian shelter programmes

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www.ecbproject.org/cluster-accountability

Contents

| | |
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| Contents | 2 |
| Acknowledgements..... | 3 |
| The Emergency Capacity Building Project | 3 |
| Acronyms..... | 3 |
| 1. Introduction | 4 |
| 1.1. What is accountability? Why is it necessary? | 4 |
| 1.2. Types of accountability | 4 |
| 1.3. Coordination and accountability | 5 |
| 1.4. Shelter responses | 5 |
| 1.5. Resources required to ensure accountability | 5 |
| 2. Accountability Checklist | 6 |
| 3. Shelter Accountability Framework | 8 |
| 4. Shelter Accountability Examples | 13 |
| 4.1. Example 1: Coordination and accountability | 13 |
| 4.2. Example 2: Participation in beneficiary selection | 13 |
| 4.3. Example 3: Participation in shelter design | 14 |
| 4.4. Example 4: Transparency in beneficiary selection | 14 |
| 4.5. Example 5: Transparency in project changes | 14 |
| 4.6. Example 6: Leadership commitment to accountability | 15 |
| 4.7. Example 7: Information sharing in structural damage assessments | 15 |
| 4.8. Example 8: Informal construction monitoring feedback | 15 |
| 4.9. Example 9: Fraud identified through complaints mechanisms | 16 |
| 4.10. Example 10: Thorough accountability mechanisms | 16 |
| 5. General resources to support accountability..... | 17 |
| 6. Conclusions | 17 |

Photo on cover page (Philip Barritt, CARE)

*Photo from the programme Flood Resistant Shelter for the South West Region of Bangladesh (2012), which aimed to reduce morbidity and mortality, and reduce loss of productive capacity and assets due to harmful coping strategies, and increase resilience to future disasters. The programme included many good accountability practices, including the modification of the shelter design following a **community consultation** to include a brick rather than mud plinth, a **transparent beneficiary selection process** with several feedback steps, a successful **Complaints and Response Mechanism**, and the establishment of gender-balanced **Local Management Committees** to monitor the shelter activities at community level and resolve problems such as land disputes. Beneficiaries were also taught what **quality** of materials to expect and how the construction would be undertaken to enable them to monitor vendors and contractors.*

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The Emergency Capacity Building Project

The complexity, frequency and impact of humanitarian emergencies and disasters continue to intensify pressure on the humanitarian system. In response to these challenges, six international humanitarian agencies, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision, formed the [Emergency Capacity Building Project \(ECB\)](#) initiative in 2006. These agencies, together with their partners, work collaboratively on common issues so that scarce resources, both human and financial, can be used more effectively to prepare national response teams, and surge teams, for future emergencies.

Acronyms

| | |
|------|---|
| HAP | Humanitarian Accountability Partnership |
| HC | Humanitarian Coordinator |
| HCT | Humanitarian Country Team |
| IASC | Inter-Agency Standing Committee |
| NFI | Non-Food Item |

Background: The Shelter Accountability Resources

ECB Project agencies, led by CARE, have developed the Shelter Accountability Resources, **a set of tools and examples for project managers and decision-makers to help them plan, implement and monitor humanitarian shelter projects and programmes in a way that is accountable to disaster-affected populations.**

The resources are also intended to be useful for Shelter Cluster coordinators and other staff who would like to monitor the accountability of particular projects and programmes.

These resources support the ECB Project's overall aim to improve the speed, quality, and effectiveness of the humanitarian community to save lives, improve welfare, and protect the rights of people in emergency situations.

Find out more at <http://www.ecbproject.org/cluster-accountability>

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1. Introduction

The ECB Project has developed these resources to support humanitarian shelter programming and to improve the level of accountability to affected populations.

Shelter programmes involve risk management, engineering and construction monitoring and concerns around secure land tenure. These are a few of the issues that imply a need for special accountability considerations.

The resources here should help project managers and decision-makers, as well as those monitoring projects, to plan, implement and monitor shelter activities in a manner that is accountable.

1.1. What is accountability? Why is it necessary?

The experience of humanitarian agencies has demonstrated the importance of accountability and this is reflected in the adoption of accountability frameworks within more and more agencies¹. Whilst there are various definitions, the ECB Project has defined accountability as: *the process through which an organisation makes a commitment to respond to and balance the needs of stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities, and delivers against this commitment. In the ECB Project context this means making sure that women, men and children affected by an emergency are involved in planning, implementing and judging the response to their emergency*². Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP) defines it as “the responsible use of power”. The examples in Section 4 show some of the consequences of programming where accountability was considered or omitted.

Whilst definitions and frameworks may vary, the ECB Project agencies have agreed on a shared understanding of accountability, based on five key elements which were also recently adopted by the IASC in their Operational Framework for Accountability to Affected Populations³:

- ▶ **Leadership/governance:** Demonstrate commitment to accountability to affected populations throughout the organisation.
- ▶ **Transparency:** Provide accessible and timely information to affected populations.
- ▶ **Feedback and complaints:** Actively seek the views of affected populations to improve policy and practice in programming.
- ▶ **Participation:** Enable affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them.
- ▶ **Design, monitoring and evaluation:** Design, monitor and evaluate the goals and objectives of programmes with the involvement of affected populations.

1.2. Types of accountability

Accountability comes in a variety of formats: *upwards* or *backwards* accountability to donors; *horizontal* or *lateral* accountability to peer agencies, and *forwards* or *downwards* accountability to those receiving funds (either the affected population or implementing partners).

These types of accountability can, of course, be at odds with one another. Managing expectations is therefore important. It is also good practice to make sure donors are aware of agencies' accountability principles and mechanisms that will be used in programmes, and ensure that the donor is comfortable allowing programme modifications based on the desires of affected populations. Likewise, it is good practice to ensure that affected populations understand the

¹ e.g. <http://www.care-international.org/Download-document/489-CI-Humanitarian-Accountability-Framework-Pilot-version.html>

² <http://www.ecbproject.org/downloads/resources/keyelements-of-accountability-forecbagencies-final.pdf>

³ In recognition of the importance of accountable programming, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee has adopted accountability to affected populations as one of the key areas for improvement in the humanitarian sector.

constraints and limits linked with programming, such as donor requirements and principles of humanitarian action.

Until recently, accountability to donors, or upward accountability, has been prioritised by agencies, linked to contractual obligations. The other two types that are gaining importance are accountability to affected populations and accountability to peer organisations. The Shelter Accountability Resources focuses on accountability towards affected populations and for the remainder of this document the term accountability will refer to forward accountability (to affected populations), unless otherwise specified. Accountability to peer agencies is touched upon as the two cannot be easily separated, particularly in contexts where operations are collectively undertaken.

1.3. Coordination and accountability

A single agency being fully accountable for the funds it spends and the actions it takes is a good start, but humanitarian operations are rarely undertaken by one agency in isolation. Accountability must be addressed at the coordination level as well, such as through the Shelter Cluster or other mechanisms. See [Example 1: Coordination and accountability](#) on page 13.

As part of the IASC move towards improving forward accountability, the Operational Framework for Ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations in Humanitarian Emergencies has been developed. This document aims to clarify the roles and responsibilities of clusters, inter-cluster coordination mechanisms, the Humanitarian Country Team and humanitarian coordinators with respect to ensuring accountability to affected populations.

The Operational Framework requires agencies participating in the cluster mechanism to collaborate to ensure accountability is integrated into programming and learning. This includes confirming that affected populations understand and can participate in needs assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of a response. Additionally, the Operational Framework includes specific objectives to mainstream and learn from accountability at the cluster system level.⁴

Being accountable also requires maintaining a high level of accountability to peer agencies and to the wider Shelter Cluster. This includes ensuring that all partners are aware of each other's activities and all contribute to the overall sector strategy. Promoting a collaborative response allows for humanitarian action to be accountable to the entire affected population, rather than each agency only being accountable to those in its own area of operation.

1.4. Shelter responses

The variety of potential responses within the remit of humanitarian shelter programmes means that providing a prescriptive list of accountability activities is not possible. Whether facilitating tripartite rental agreements, providing cash to host families, welcoming displaced populations or building reinforced concrete houses as part of a reconstruction programme, accountability remains a vital and integral component of an effective response.⁵ There are also components of a shelter response that have unusual implications for accountability, or forms of accountability, that do not feature so prominently in other sectors of response. The [Shelter Accountability Framework](#), on page 8 addresses these specifically.

1.5. Resources required to ensure accountability

Being accountable does not require extensive additional resources. In larger programmes setting up a call centre to handle feedback and complaints may be appropriate, but this is the exception and not the rule. Generally, providing basic training to staff on what accountability is, and how it should be incorporated into the programme should be sufficient. Once staff are trained, it is necessary to ensure that they are allocated time during their field visits to gather opinions from

⁴ See the Operational Framework for Ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations in Humanitarian Emergencies, IASC draft 2012, available from www.ecbproject.org/cluster-accountability.

⁵ For further information on strategic planning in shelter responses, see Shelter After Disaster, UN 2010, available from www.shelterlibrary.org.

affected populations, and to report back to the organisation on what they find. See [Example 8: Informal construction monitoring feedback](#) on page 15.

2. Accountability Checklist

This general accountability checklist⁶ is a self-assessment tool that can be used to assess how far key elements of accountability are integrated into any organisation or programme. It is built on practical action points that describe good practice and can be used by managers to track how effectively different programmes, projects and/or teams are being accountable to their beneficiaries and communities within which they work. This is best done by using the checklist to stimulate discussion within your team. It is important to triangulate your findings by completing it with other stakeholders, like local government officers or donors, but most importantly of course with communities themselves. For a more impartial approach you may choose an external colleague, staff from a peer agency or an independent consultant to facilitate the process.

For a shelter-specific checklist, see the [Shelter Accountability Framework](#), on page 8. The checklists can be used in conjunction with each other, or separately.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE: is accountability valued throughout the organisation?

- ▶ Is accountability integrated into job descriptions and terms of reference?
- ▶ Is accountability integrated into strategies at all levels of response?
- ▶ Is training provided for new staff on what accountability means and how it influences their role?
- ▶ Are staff members monitored against performance indicators that include accountability⁷?
- ▶ Is accountability included in partnership agreements?

TRANSPARENCY: is information shared with all stakeholders?

- ▶ Is the information accessible to all?
- ▶ Is it in a language they can understand?
- ▶ Is it in a format that is easily accessible to them?
- ▶ Is it updated regularly and systematically?
- ▶ Does it include financial information and budgets⁸?
- ▶ Is all financial information in an appropriate format?
- ▶ Is it sufficient for them to make informed contributions to programme planning and implementation decisions?
- ▶ Are the roles of the organisation and the communities clearly understood?
- ▶ Are stakeholders able to request and receive further information?

⁶ Adapted from The Listen First Framework, the Accountability and Impact Measurement in Emergencies: The Good Enough Guide, and the IASC Operational Framework for Ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations in Humanitarian Emergencies.

⁷ The WASH Accountability Resources have specific resources aimed at staff competency.

⁸ Security concerns may prevent certain information being disclosed. Agencies should release as much information as possible with jeopardising the security of staff.

FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS: do you have a feedback and complaints system in place?

- ▶ Have stakeholders been able to choose how they would most like to provide input on different topics?
- ▶ Has the system been communicated to all stakeholders, and do all stakeholders know how to register complaints or feedback?
- ▶ Is the collection of feedback and complaints systematic?
- ▶ Are all complaints investigated promptly?
- ▶ Does the system maintain anonymity and confidentiality where appropriate?
- ▶ Is there a mechanism in place for escalating serious complaints, such as abuse of power or sexual exploitation, involving local authorities if necessary?
- ▶ Do all complainants receive a prompt and satisfactory response, providing the results of the investigation of their claims?
- ▶ Do projects, programmes and the organisation learn from complaints and feedback systematically, making improvements where necessary?

PARTICIPATION: do affected populations take a lead in making decisions, with support from organisational experts?

- ▶ Are the affected population able to lead decision-making?
- ▶ Does the work truly reflect the priorities and needs of the poorest and most marginalised populations or sectors of the community?
- ▶ Are conflicts between different interest groups identified and mitigated?
- ▶ Is this being done using a mechanism that all stakeholders respect?

DESIGN, MONITORING AND EVALUATION: is accountability integrated throughout the project and programme?

- ▶ During needs assessment, are affected populations consulted about what their priorities are?
- ▶ Are assessment results shared with all stakeholders?
- ▶ Are communities given the opportunity to contribute to the design of the intervention?
- ▶ Are all stakeholders given the opportunity to participate in the monitoring and evaluation processes?
- ▶ Are monitoring and evaluation results shared with all stakeholders?
- ▶ Is the complaints and feedback mechanism available throughout the intervention?
- ▶ Is the information gathered through feedback systems used to regularly inform and improve the programme?
- ▶ Is the project or programme evaluated, including measuring the impact of the programme, following its completion?

3. Shelter Accountability Framework

The Shelter Accountability Framework is a guide for practitioners to understand and assess the levels of accountability within their shelter programmes, as well as indicating what next steps should be taken to improve practices. The framework is organised by “components of response” which are indicators with a shelter-specific focus. This list is not exhaustive, and other components of response particularly relevant to the reader’s context could be added. The key element of accountability (from section 1.1) that it links to is shown in brackets after each component of response, as well as the phase in the project cycle when this is relevant. The components of response included here were chosen specifically because accountability within these contexts is often overlooked. More general areas of accountability are covered in the Accountability Checklist above, and so have been omitted here. Other frameworks also already exist for general accountable programming, such as the Listen First Framework or the Matrix on accountability and commitments in the Oxfam Accountability Starter Pack⁹. This table should be used in a similar fashion to the Matrix in the starter pack.

Instructions: to undertake a self-assessment, identify which components of response are relevant to your activities. For each component, read Level 3, which is the target for programmes that are fully accountable. From here, read the description for levels 0, 1 and 2 and determine which description most closely matches your project.

To improve accountability, adjust your programming to increase the levels of accountability within each component. It is suggested that you start with the components at the lowest level. In ideal circumstances, practitioners would aim for their shelter programming to meet Level 3 in all components of the response. The reality of emergencies, and the wider socio-political circumstances in some contexts, dictates that such interventions are not always feasible, nor appropriate. If you are not aiming to achieve Level 3, however, there should be clear justification.

| Component of response <i>(key element; project phase)</i> | Level 3 Highest level | Level 2 <i>As level 1, but also including:</i> | Level 1 | Level 0 <i>Below minimum expected level</i> |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| 1. Affected populations are provided the necessary information to effectively contribute to planning <i>(transparency and leadership; throughout the response)</i> | 1.3 Full programme and financial information is published, in ways that are easily accessible for affected populations, and is regularly updated. This includes beneficiaries knowing the value of the assistance they are receiving. For example, the costs of shelter materials or shelter non-food items (NFIs) being distributed. | 1.2 Programme and financial information is made available to affected populations. | 1.1 Basic, top-line financial information is shared, by methods chosen by the organisation. | 1.0 No financial information about the programme is shared with affected populations. |

⁹ : http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/~media/Files/policy_and_practice/methods_approaches/monitoring_evaluation/Accountability_Starter_Pack_for_web.ashx

| Component of response <i>(key element; project phase)</i> | Level 3 Highest level | Level 2 <i>As level 1, but also including:</i> | Level 1 | Level 0 <i>Below minimum expected level</i> |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| 2. Ensure equitable representation, participation and access as shelter decisions affect men, women, girls and boys <i>(participation and transparency; throughout the response)</i> | 2.3a The shelter project team is gender balanced with female staff forming a core part, particularly those with community mobilization roles. 2.3b Affected women and girls are consulted, in addition to, and separately from, men and boys, about shelter design, and settlement location and layout. This includes, for example, what NFIs are required, the lighting available, the location of latrines and the location of the settlement. Consultations with women and girls are undertaken by female staff. 2.3c Project design reflects the priorities of the most vulnerable women, girls, boys and men, including those who are particularly poor, marginalised or disabled, and promotes privacy and dignity for all members of the affected population. | 2.2a <i>Either</i> female staff form a core part of the shelter team; 2.2b <i>or</i> women and girls are consulted separately from men and boys, by female staff members on all aspects of the project. 2.2c Project designed appropriately. | 2.1a Female staff members are actively recruited to join the team. 2.1b Women and girls are consulted separately from men and boys, by female staff members. | 2.0a No consideration is given to the gender balance of the shelter staff. 2.0b Affected women and girls are consulted together with men and boys. |
| 3. Risks are fully assessed and planned for in consultation and communication with affected populations and their governments <i>(participation; assessment and planning)</i> | 3.3a Staff members undertake a thorough risk assessment¹⁰ of the context and the proposed shelter response. Affected populations and the national government are consulted on appropriate levels of acceptable risk within the various contexts. Special efforts are made to engage the most marginalised and vulnerable members of the population. Results of this assessment are checked against national minimum standards (and globally accepted design standards where suitable), and used to inform programme design and implementation. 3.3b Where necessary, staff communicate and educate affected populations and governments on increased disaster risk reduction initiatives. | 3.2 Staff members undertake a risk assessment of the context and the proposed shelter response. Staff consult populations on what constitutes acceptable risk. The results of these, along with appropriate standards, inform programme design and implementation. | 3.1 Staff undertake a basic risk assessment for the context (see also appropriate shelter design), and take appropriate actions to reduce major risks. Some stakeholders are consulted on their levels of acceptable risk. | 3.0 No special consideration is given to calculate levels of acceptable risk. Pre-emergency levels of risk are assumed. |

¹⁰ Risk should not be limited to construction risk in this context, but can include technical, social, economic, environmental, and political, amongst others. The principle of Do No Harm should also be considered. For cash programming particularly, particular consideration needs to be given to the security risks around the intended disbursement method, such as what information can safely be made public.

| Component of response <i>(key element; project phase)</i> | Level 3 Highest level | Level 2 <i>As level 1, but also including:</i> | Level 1 | Level 0 <i>Below minimum expected level</i> |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| 4. Affected populations play an active role in, and understand the prioritisation, aims and classification methods of structural damage assessment <i>(participation and transparency; assessment and planning)</i> | Where large-scale damage assessment programs are implemented, ensure that the aims of the assessment, and the classifications of damage, are agreed and clearly communicated to all members of the affected population in a manner identified by them as suitable. Affected populations are able to lead the prioritisation of which structures are assessed first, with technical input where appropriate. | 4.2a <i>Either</i> the aims and classifications are defined and communicated to affected populations in a manner they identify; 4.2b <i>or</i> affected populations take a lead on prioritization of buildings to be assessed. | 4.1a Either the aims and classifications are defined and communicated to affected populations; 4.1b <i>or</i> affected populations are consulted on prioritization of buildings to be assessed. | 4.0a Aims and classifications of the assessment are defined. 4.0b Staff prioritise which buildings to assess. |
| 5. The type of shelter response selected reflects affected populations' preferences, the need for long-term recovery and the resources available <i>(participation; assessment and planning)</i> | 5.3a An assessment is made of pre- and post-disaster housing typologies, such as owner, tenant or multi-occupancy buildings. Solutions (potentially innovative to the context) are considered and affected populations are consulted for their preferred typologies to ensure faster recovery. The information gathered is sufficiently detailed to properly inform decision-making, and is used to develop an appropriate shelter response which matches the needs of the most vulnerable, considering the available resources. 5.3b The assessment includes an analysis of the situations of those without formal land tenure or rental agreements. 5.3c Communities are supported to lead the process of settlement planning in addition to shelter design, wherever appropriate, including infrastructure, access to services (health, schools), WASH, etc. 5.3d Staff recognise the potential for conflict between interest groups, including over land tenure, and the project is designed to mitigate these conflicts. | 5.2a Affected populations are consulted, and: 5.2b <i>either</i> affected populations' desired typologies are assessed; 5.2c <i>or</i> special consideration to formalise informal occupancy is included in the project; 5.2d <i>or</i> full settlement planning is included within the program. | 5.1a Affected populations are consulted, and pre- and post-disaster typologies assessed. 5.1b Informal occupancy is noted, but no efforts are made to formalise occupancy. 5.1c Basic settlement planning is included in the project, such as access to WASH. 5.1d Conflict between interest groups is recognised and the project is designed to mitigate this. | 5.0a Affected populations are consulted, but only post-disaster housing typologies assessed. 5.0b No special consideration to informal occupancy is given. 5.0c A shelter strategy considers only individual structures including access to water, but not the larger settlement. |

| Component of response <i>(key element; project phase)</i> | Level 3 Highest level | Level 2 <i>As level 1, but also including:</i> | Level 1 | Level 0 <i>Below minimum expected level</i> |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| 6. Comprehensive performance criteria are established in consultation with local communities, ensuring flexibility and risk reduction <i>(transparency and participation; assessment and planning)</i> | 6.3 For all interventions that involve design, construction or technical advice, appropriate performance criteria or standards are set, in consultation with the affected population and government. Performance criteria allow flexibility for affected populations to tailor individual shelter solutions to their own needs, but ensure that all solutions reduce risk. Performance criteria cover a range of topics, including potential hazards, vernacular construction, environment and material sourcing. | 6.2 Several possible construction specifications are produced based on consultation with affected populations, providing some flexibility. | 6.1 A single construction specification is produced, in consultation with affected populations, which is resistant to the appropriate risks. | 6.0 The intervention mitigates risks. |
| 7. Communities take the lead in setting beneficiary selection criteria and undertaking beneficiary identification <i>(participation and transparency; planning and implementation)</i> | 7.3a With a clear understanding of what assistance can be provided and the costs involved, communities are supported to set clear beneficiary selection criteria. Using these criteria, the community identifies which community members are eligible for support. It is important that this process be undertaken in a transparent manner, particularly given the potential for shelter projects to provide comparatively high-value materials. 7.3b Throughout the process, opportunities are provided for community members to ask questions or complain, for example if they feel they fit the criteria but have not been selected. These comments and complaints are responded to, and rectified where necessary. | 7.2a Communities and staff collaborate equally to develop the beneficiary selection criteria. 7.2b Feedback and complaints mechanisms are available, functioning and widely publicised. | 7.1a Communities contribute to the beneficiary selection criteria, but the process is led by staff. 7.1b Feedback and complaints mechanisms are available, are functioning and communities are made aware of them. | 7.0 Staff set beneficiary selection criteria with little community involvement and no consideration for the wider economic impact on the community. A feedback mechanism is available but is not robust. |

| Component of response <i>(key element; project phase)</i> | Level 3 Highest level | Level 2 <i>As level 1, but also including:</i> | Level 1 | Level 0 <i>Below minimum expected level</i> |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p>8. Beneficiaries are empowered and encouraged to participate in construction, monitoring and quality control <i>(design, monitoring and evaluation, and feedback and complaints; implementation and monitoring)</i></p> | <p>8.3a Where construction or repairs are undertaken, staff do not treat houses and settlements as building sites but respect the privacy rights of occupants, for example requesting permission to enter.</p> <p>8.3b Beneficiaries are given the necessary training and are empowered to monitor construction quality on a regular basis.</p> <p>8.3c The feedback and complaints system is designed with the affected population and is adapted to include feedback on quality control. Local populations are empowered to provide feedback on quality in a manner most appropriate to them and in a fashion that encourages marginalised people to respond.</p> <p>8.3d Staff carefully create opportunities to listen to affected populations and their reports on quality as a means to monitor satisfaction levels.</p> | <p>8.2a Rights to privacy and respect are valued by all staff.</p> <p>8.2b Beneficiaries are empowered to monitor quality against performance criteria.</p> <p>8.2c Feedback and complaints on quality are gathered, informally, often through comments to staff in the field.</p> | <p>8.1a Right to privacy is respected.</p> <p>8.1b Construction quality is monitored against the relevant performance criteria.</p> | <p>8.0a Permission is sought to undertake work on land or properties.</p> <p>8.0b Construction quality is monitored against the relevant performance criteria or specifications.</p> |
| <p>9. Community ownership is prioritised to ensure that recovery investments contribute to longer term improvements <i>(participation; implementation and exit strategy)</i></p> | <p>9.3 Community ownership is built into projects from the outset to ensure automatic handover. Affected populations are supported to identify the knowledge and skills they need to develop. Affected populations are supported to ensure that they have the capacity for long term management, care, quality maintenance, and future modifications of all structures built, repaired or retrofitted in their communities as part of the project. This includes, where suitable, supporting communities to identify the next steps in improving their settlements and who to approach for additional assistance if necessary.</p> | <p>9.2 Through involvement throughout the project, affected populations have developed knowledge in most areas required for on-going maintenance and management of structures. Additional capacity building is provided where necessary.</p> | <p>9.1 Through involvement throughout the project, affected populations have developed knowledge in many areas required for on-going maintenance of structures. Additional training is provided where necessary.</p> | <p>9.0 At the end of the project, affected populations are provided with all information they lack for on-going management of structures.</p> |

4. Shelter Accountability Examples

These case studies are examples of how accountability initiatives have been undertaken, or omitted, from shelter programs. Wherever possible, these examples also include possible improvements to the project that are directly attributable to accountability or challenges that could have been avoided had there been accountability mechanisms in place.

Examples 1, 5, 7 and 8 come from the author's personal experience. Numbers 9 and 10 were noted down following discussions with staff members involved. The remaining examples, as well as further details on many of them, can be found in the [Shelter Projects](#) series of booklets, published by UN-HABITAT, IFRC and UNHCR.

4.1. Example 1: Coordination and accountability

Haiti Earthquake 2010

The project

Emergency shelter provision for 20,000 beneficiaries.

The issue

Whilst many individual agencies worked to be accountable to affected populations, the overall response was not accountable due to the action of one agency.

The Shelter Cluster had collectively decided to provide each household with two plastic sheets. One agency chose to distribute only one plastic sheet to each family in order to reach more families for the benefit of their public profile. Communities receiving just one plastic sheet per family were disadvantaged, even though they were, in some cases, more vulnerable than communities receiving two sheets per family. This lack of accountability to peer agencies translated directly to a lack of collective accountability to affected populations, and can lead to confusion and worse still, conflict, in the community.

The resolution implemented

The agency later came in to line with cluster recommendations and, where possible, revisited beneficiaries who had only received one plastic sheet.

4.2. Example 2: Participation in beneficiary selection

West Sumatra Earthquake 2009

The project

Cash grants for transitional shelter.

The issue

Tensions existed between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, who were often in very similar circumstances.

The resolution implemented

The communities resolved the problems themselves, as each community elected a local committee to undertake the beneficiary identification. These committees were voluntary, gender-balanced and representative of different social and age groups, and operated in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding¹¹. Once the beneficiaries were selected and the organisation had verified each name, opportunities were provided for feedback and complaints from the wider community, and each comment was investigated.

¹¹ A sample Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between an agency and a community can be found in the [WASH Accountability Resources](#).

4.3. Example 3: Participation in shelter design

Cyclone Giri, Myanmar, 2010

The project

Simple permanent house construction.

The issue

The proposed design would mean that the house displeased local 'Nats' (spirits).

The resolution implemented

For the structure to be disaster-resilient, bracing in the walls in both directions was needed. Originally, this was proposed in an X-shape, but when consulted, the Village Development Committee highlighted that the X-shape would not be suitable. The design was therefore adapted so that the bracing formed a V-shape whilst retaining structural efficiency, a design which was then approved by the communities.

Additionally, through participation in the housing design and construction of a sample structure, the communities were educated in disaster-resistant design and construction techniques in line with their local customs. This makes it more likely that the houses will be occupied and reduces future risk.

4.4. Example 4: Transparency in beneficiary selection

Chilean Earthquake, 2010

The project

Voucher scheme for building supplies.

The issue

The project instilled jealousy and resentment amongst community members as little attempt was made by the agency to clearly communicate beneficiary selection criteria. Instead, beneficiary lists were based on previous emergency distribution lists provided by project staff, and by lists provided by community leaders. Inaccuracies in these lists meant that some of the vouchers had been misprinted and were thus void. Additionally, community members who did not have good relations with community leaders may well have been left out.

A potential resolution

Advertising the beneficiary selection methods and criteria and providing an opportunity for feedback and complaints might well have prevented the dissatisfaction that arose.

4.5. Example 5: Transparency in project changes

Post-election conflict, Côte d'Ivoire, 2010

The project

Rebuilding damaged rural shelters.

The issue

A change in the specifications of the planned shelters was not clearly communicated to beneficiaries, who subsequently believed that their shelters were left unfinished by the agency. It was also assumed that this caused several roofs to leak.

Once construction had begun it was observed that the organisation had overestimated the number of corrugated steel sheets required for the roof. The agency kept the extra sheets, with the intention that they construct a further 20 shelters for new beneficiaries, yet to be identified, within the same community. This change was not sufficiently communicated to affected populations. With no clear complaints mechanism, beneficiaries did not know that they could enquire about the altered number of roof sheets or complain about their leaking roofs.

A potential resolution

A consultation with the community and clear communication on project changes would have prevented this misunderstanding and in some cases allowed beneficiaries to move into completed houses quicker. Additionally, a clearly defined feedback and complaints mechanism,

that included capacity to deal with complaints about quality, would have identified problems, such as the leaking roofs, earlier.

4.6. Example 6: Leadership commitment to accountability

Myanmar, 2011

The project

In 2011, one NGO reviewed its programming in Myanmar to ensure it complied with commitments to Leadership and Governance. As part of this it conducted an awareness-raising activity at the start of each project to ensure beneficiaries and communities had all the information they needed on project activities, budget, size, donor, and beneficiary selection criteria. The NGO held accountability training for current and newly-recruited staff and informed local administrations of its intervention. It introduced all partners to the HAP Standard and supported them to meet these standards, by adding an information board in each village where the NGO operated. This contained information about the organisation and project, a contact list of staff at local and country office level, and details about how to lodge a complaint.

4.7. Example 7: Information sharing in structural damage assessments

Haiti earthquake, 2010

The project

Rapid and large-scale structural damage assessments.

The issue

The Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Communications (MTPTC) carried out very rapid structural damage assessments on houses, classifying each home as red, yellow or green. The methodology allowed for a large volume of buildings to be assessed in a very short time. A large number of people living in camps did not know what colour their home had been given, and many of those living in their houses had to go outside to check the colour rating. There was a gross lack of understanding about what the different colours meant, and no real effort had been made by MTPTC to explain to residents the classification system.

People did not know which areas of their houses were safe, and they received little advice on whether it would be possible for them to safely carry out repairs.

A potential resolution

Clear and wide communication of the project, the process, the results and what they meant would have enabled individuals to make an informed decision about where to live and what repairs or reconstruction work to focus on.

4.8. Example 8: Informal construction monitoring feedback

Bangladesh 2012

The project

Timber frame houses for 11,000 households.

The issue

The NGO needed to improve its construction monitoring.

The resolution implemented

The project manager developed a short form for NGO field staff to complete at the end of each day, and time was given for them to do so. It prompted community mobilisation staff to reflect on the informal feedback that they had received from their discussions with communities each day. This included noting when a beneficiary had identified a potential problem with the design but had implemented a solution already. For example, some beneficiaries had added a layer of plastic just below the top layer of the soil plinth, to prevent the floor of the house getting wet from water rising up.

Ensuring that field staff reflected on their discussions and noted them down allowed the project manager to identify recurring themes and trends, and address them where suitable, as well as capitalising on beneficiary innovation by sharing modifications throughout the project.

4.9. Example 9: Fraud identified through complaints mechanisms

West Sumatra Earthquake 2009

The project

Transitional shelters for 3,400 households.

The issue

NGO funds were being extorted under the pretext of a 'public service tax'.

The resolution implemented

This problem was brought to the attention of the organisation through their complaints mechanism. Trust in the agency and their complaints mechanism had been developed over time by ensuring detailed and timely follow-up to each complaint or request for information, in collaboration with the village government and community committees. This included cases of people meeting the beneficiary criteria but not being assisted, and those who were incorrectly assisted.

Attempted corruption and fraud were dealt with at community meetings and statements offering solutions and sanctions were collectively signed by all parties which ensured community ownership of the process.

4.10. Example 10: Thorough accountability mechanisms

Aceh, Boxing Day tsunami, 2004

The project

Infrastructure reconstruction.

The issue

Mechanisms for transparent and safe communication were new in Aceh.

The accountability mechanism

The agency's complaints mechanism was comprehensive, including nine field-based humanitarian accountability officers whose phone numbers and office hours were publicised so community members could channel their concerns. The Accountability Team fed each complaint into a database, through which they were able to analyse issues and trends. Management received regular reports on the issues raised, and the Accountability Team identified actions needed to respond effectively to the concerns of the affected people.

As complaints were in most cases acted upon within a structured mechanism and feedback to communities given, the agency was able to build a good relationship with the community to manage expectations and work in a safer environment. Several outbreaks of violence were reported but it is thought that the strong accountability practices significantly reduced the number and severity. When a demonstration was staged in front of the agency office the Accountability Team met with the crowd who then agreed to make a written complaint which was processed by senior management within a given timeframe. The demonstration may have been avoidable if community concerns and rumours had been responded to earlier, but once the event occurred the Accountability Team was able to address it swiftly.

It was important in setting up this mechanism that staff members were properly briefed to build up their understanding and expectations of how a fair and transparent organisation should operate as many staff were unfamiliar with good governance.

Integrating the complaints mechanism into every level of the project was also key. The Accountability Team maintained a very strong dialogue with the Shelter Team and were thus very knowledgeable on the construction plans. Together the teams anticipated problems and were able to mitigate these, for example through staff briefings and answers for common questions to better handle community concerns and expectations.

5. General resources to support accountability

DRAFT Operational Framework for Ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations in Humanitarian Emergencies, IASC. <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx>

ECB Project Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies: the Good Enough Guide, 2007. <http://www.ecbproject.org/goodenoughguide>

Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, Sphere Project, 2012. <http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/>

Listen First Framework, Mango and Concern Worldwide, 2008. <http://www.listenfirst.org/materials>

Oxfam Accountability Starter Pack, Oxfam GB (no date) <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-work/methods-approaches/monitoring-evaluation>

Participatory Approach to Safe Shelter Awareness, IFRC, 2011. <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/disaster-management/responding/services-for-the-disaster-affected/shelter-and-settlement/shelter-library/risk-reduction/>

The 2010 HAP Standard in Accountability and Quality Management, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International, 2010. <http://www.hapinternational.org/projects/standard/hap-2010-standard.aspx>

WASH Accountability Resources, Global WASH Cluster, 2009. <http://www.washcluster.info/drupal/?q=content/accountability>

6. Conclusions

These Shelter Accountability Resources offer a set of practical tools and examples to help plan, implement and monitor humanitarian shelter programmes in a way that is accountable to disaster-affected populations. Through using these tools programme managers and other staff will understand what practices their programmes should aim to incorporate, based on five key elements of accountability. In comparing this with their current practices, they will identify where there are gaps which, importantly, should lead to the formulation of recommendations and actions. This will allow incremental improvement of accountability practices and ensure accountability to disaster-affected populations.