UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE ON **ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED PEOPLE (AAP)**

1.
PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

2.
COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY

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FEEDBACK & RESPONSE

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ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING & ADAPTATION

UNHCR's Accountability to Affected People (AAP) is a commitment to the intentional and systematic inclusion of the expressed needs, concerns, capacities, and views of persons of concern in their diversity; and being answerable for our organisational decisions and staff actions, in all protection, assistance and solutions interventions and programmes.

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INTRODUCTION

What it is

Accountability to Affected People (AAP) is widely used in the humanitarian community to refer to the related commitments and mechanisms humanitarian agencies have in place to ensure that communities are meaningfully and continuously involved in decisions that directly impact their lives.

Accountability refers to the responsible use of power (resources, decision making) by humanitarian actors, combined with effective and quality programming that recognises the community of concern's dignity, capacity, and ability to be independent. For UNHCR, the term 'affected people,' common in inter-agency settings, refers to persons of concern, in line with the organization's mandate on behalf of asylum seekers, returnees, refugees, stateless, and internally displaced persons.

Examples of actions taken in relation to AAP include, participatory assessments, feedback boxes, public information boards, community meetings, interviews, counselling sessions, and home visits.

Why we do it

✔ ENHANCING PROTECTION AND SOLUTIONS.
UNHCR situates accountability to affected people within the broader protection and solutions work of the organisation that aims at the enjoyment of all human rights by persons of concern. Accountability mechanisms are instrumental in this process and for the achievement of this goal.

✔ PUTTING PEOPLE- FIRST.
The rights, needs, dignity and perspectives of persons of concern define and shape our work. UNHCR has long recognised the importance of proximity to persons of concern and understanding of, and responsiveness to, the diversity within communities. Accountability mechanisms help us to provide the best possible protection, assistance, and solutions programmes, which also take into account the capacities of the individuals and communities of concern.

✔ IMPLEMENTING THE RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH.
Human rights principles guide all our work. Participation in decision-making is a right, and the rights-based approach is founded on the principle of participation and working with communities to promote change and respect for rights. These cannot be achieved without accountability mechanisms.

How we do it

✔ QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS.
Accountability can only contribute to better and more effective programming if there are systems in place to capture, record and relay, the expressed risks, needs, capacities and aspirations from the perspective of individuals and communities. In addition, systems need to be in place to demonstrate how such feedback on programme quality is managed, responded to, and acted upon by decision makers to improve programming.

✔ COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT.
Accountability is not a one-off event. It requires direct and sustained engagement with communities, through transparent and continuous two-way communication. It requires actions and approaches that enable at risk communities to meaningfully participate in key decisions throughout the programme cycle: assessment and analysis, planning and design, resource mobilization, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

This operational guidance details the objectives of each AAP area of focus as outlined in UNHCR's AAP Framework (core actions 2-5 of the 2018 _UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity_[1]).

It outlines key elements of each area, and the expectations for compliance. It is accompanied by recommended implementation steps, and tools that can be contextually adapted to implement what is introduced in this guidance.

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[1] UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), _UNHCR Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity_ ["AGD Policy"], 8 March 2018.

UNHCR'S AAP COMMITMENTS

The Principals of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), including the High Commissioner for Refugees, have endorsed the 2017 Commitments on Accountability to Affected People and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and agreed to incorporate them into organisational policies and operational guidelines[2] and promote them with all partners. In addition, after having coordinated the IASC Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (AAP/PSEA), UNHCR has been co-chairing the IASC Results Group 2 on Accountability and Inclusion since its creation in 2019. UNHCR also supports the Nine Commitments outlined in the 2015 Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability that organisations and individuals involved in humanitarian response can use to improve the quality and effectiveness of the assistance they provide.[3] UNHCR is also signatory to specific AAP related commitments set out in the context of the 2016 Grand Bargain Initiative's Participatory Revolution.[4]

UNHCR has a history of continuous learning related to AAP, beginning in the early 1990's with People-Oriented Planning.[5] Since then, additional AAP-related policies and guidance have been developed and issued: the 2004 UNHCR Code of Conduct,[6] the 2006 Tool for Participatory Assessments in Operations,[7] the 2007 Accountability Framework for Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming,[8] and the 2008 Manual on a Community-Based Approach in UNHCR Operations.[9] AAP is a key component in managing Fraud Committed by Persons of Concern[10] and overall Risk Management for the organisation.[11]

AAP core actions are reflected in UNHCR's 2018 Age Gender and Diversity Policy which requires that all segments of populations of concern have equitable and non-discriminatory access to protection, assistance, and solutions programmes, and have a say in decisions that affect their lives.[12] Managers and staff at all levels are responsible for institutionalising AAP approaches and meeting AAP commitments. Regional Bureaux and Divisions will support country operations to establish mechanisms to implement the AAP commitments, and share aggregate reports on AAP trends, with relevant entities at headquarters.

The humanitarian sector has developed approaches that address different aspects of AAP (some described as "communicating with communities," "putting people at the centre" and 'community engagement' or similar labels) which seek to operationalize the understanding that affected people are the prime agents in their own protection, assistance and recovery, and that aid should reinforce not supplant this capacity.[13]

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2   Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), *IASC Revised AAP Commitments*, 2017, 13 July 2018.

3   Core Humanitarian Standards Alliance, *Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability*, 2014.

4   Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), *A participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making decisions which affect their lives,* n.d.

5   UNHCR, *A Framework for People-Oriented Planning in Refugee Situations Taking Account of Women, Men and Children*, December 1992.

6   UNHCR, *The UNHCR Code of Conduct and Explanatory Notes* ["Code of Conduct"], June 2004.

7   UNHCR, *UNHCR Tool for Participatory Assessments in Operations*, May 2006.

8   UNHCR, *UNHCR Accountability Framework for Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming*, May 2007.

9   UNHCR, *UNHCR Manual on a Community Based Approach in UNHCR Operations*, March 2008.

10 UNHCR, *Policy on Addressing Fraud Committed by Persons of Concern* [internal], October 2017.

11 UNHCR, *Policy for Enterprise Risk Management in UNHCR*, August 2014.

12 UNHCR, *AGD Policy*, above n 1.

13 European Parliament, *Towards more effective global humanitarian action: How the EU can contribute*, 2015; see also: Pat Gibbons, Brian Casey, Dominic Crowley, Lisa Doherty and Dualta Roughneen, Recommendations from the Irish Humanitarian Consultative Process, Centre for Humanitarian Action, University College Dublin, 2015.

UNHCR'S AAP FRAMEWORK

This section presents the minimum AAP requirements in an operation; explains how to measure progress against them; and provides some practical examples on how to operationalise them.

In practice, the relationship between UNHCR's community based approach to protection and accountability to affected people is expressed through the inclusive participation of all persons of concern in key decisions and processes throughout the operations management cycle. By ensuring continuous Communication and Transparency, and providing inclusive avenues for Participation, Feedback and Response, the ongoing Learning and Adaptation of programmes, for sustainable impact, is made possible.

UNHCR's AAP framework is outlined in core actions 2-5 of the 2018 Age, Gender and Diversity Policy:

- Participation and Inclusion (Core Action 2);
- Communication and Transparency (Core Action 3);
- Feedback and Response (Core Action 4); and
- Organization Learning and Adaptation (Core Action 5).

The purpose of this framework is to

- ✔ Outline the essential components that make up UNHCR's commitment to AAP, and how these align with existing processes, policy, and guidelines.

- ✔ Establish benchmarks for the operationalisation of our AAP commitments, as well as a common language and direction around issues to do with accountability, community engagement, communicating with communities, information provision, and participation.

- ✔ Contribute to quality and accountability management through systematic reporting to support measurement of UNHCR's progress in AAP and the learning and improvements made.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING & ADAPTATION

Interventions, planning, priority setting, course corrections, and evaluation are informed on an ongoing basis by the views of persons of concern.

PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

Women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds are able to engage meaningfully and are consulted on protection, assistance, and solutions.

FEEDBACK & RESPONSE

Formal and informal feedback from persons of concern is systematically received and responded to, and corrective action taken as appropriate.

COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY

Women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds in all operations have access to timely, accurate, and relevant information on (i) their rights and entitlements, and (ii) UNHCR and its partners' programmes.

AAP

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

The following principles guide UNHCR's approaches, systems, and processes in AAP.
They are applicable to all AAP related activities at different points of the operations management cycle.

UNHCR Code of Conduct

Organisational accountability is fulfilled through staff who implement AAP activities within the confines of the UNHCR Code of Conduct and the five Values, and nine Guiding Principles, that shape our ethical decision-making and every day actions.

Inclusivity and Non-discrimination

Meaningful participation of all persons of concern must be prioritised. AAP activities should allow for the inclusion of all segments of the community, and promote non-discrimination. Inclusion must take into account age, gender, and diversity, and ensure all persons of concern enjoy their rights on an equal footing.

Community Based Approach

AAP methodologies are in line with UNHCR's community based approach to protection and take into account pre-existing community structures and effective coping mechanisms, rather than working in parallel to them (where these are not harmful).

Safety and Dignity avoid causing harm

An important part of staff accountability in the implementation of AAP activities is the confidential treatment of personal and sensitive information in the follow up, investigation, and response to sensitive complaints and feedback. Sensitive complaints are typically related to staff conduct or any issue that the complainant may fear recrimination or victimisation for.

A part of our accountability responsibilities is ensuring that our interventions do not inadvertently cause harm, for example by having the unintended impact of exacerbating negative influences in the context. The wellbeing of the persons we aim to protect must be the focus of our efforts to provide assistance.

We must also prevent and minimize, as much as possible, any unintended negative effects of our interventions which can increase people's vulnerability to both physical and psychosocial risks.

Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA)

Sexual exploitation and abuse is regarded as the most egregious breach of accountability by the humanitarian community. Staff do not have the option of ignoring sexual exploitation or abuse by humanitarian workers. Rather, they are required to report it when it happens, and to actively prevent and respond to it. In Principle 7 of the Code of Conduct staff commit to: Prevent, oppose and combat all exploitation and abuse of refugees and other persons of concern.

UNHCR is committed to preventing and protecting persons of concern from breaches of accountability, including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by humanitarian and other actors. Staff are required to report such incidents and to take all measures to actively prevent and respond to SEA. UNHCR's Ethics Office is responsible for supporting all staff members to perform their functions in a way that is consistent with the standards of integrity and accountability required by the Code of Conduct.[14] Handling and reporting on sensitive issues and complaints of SEA must be the subject of specific standard operating

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[14]   UNHCR, *Code of Conduct*, above n 6.

procedures (SOPs) on the procedures for receiving and reporting SEA incidents, respecting the principle of confidentiality. While the SOPs on the treatment of SEA complaints will be specific, they should be an integral part of existing feedback mechanisms.[15]
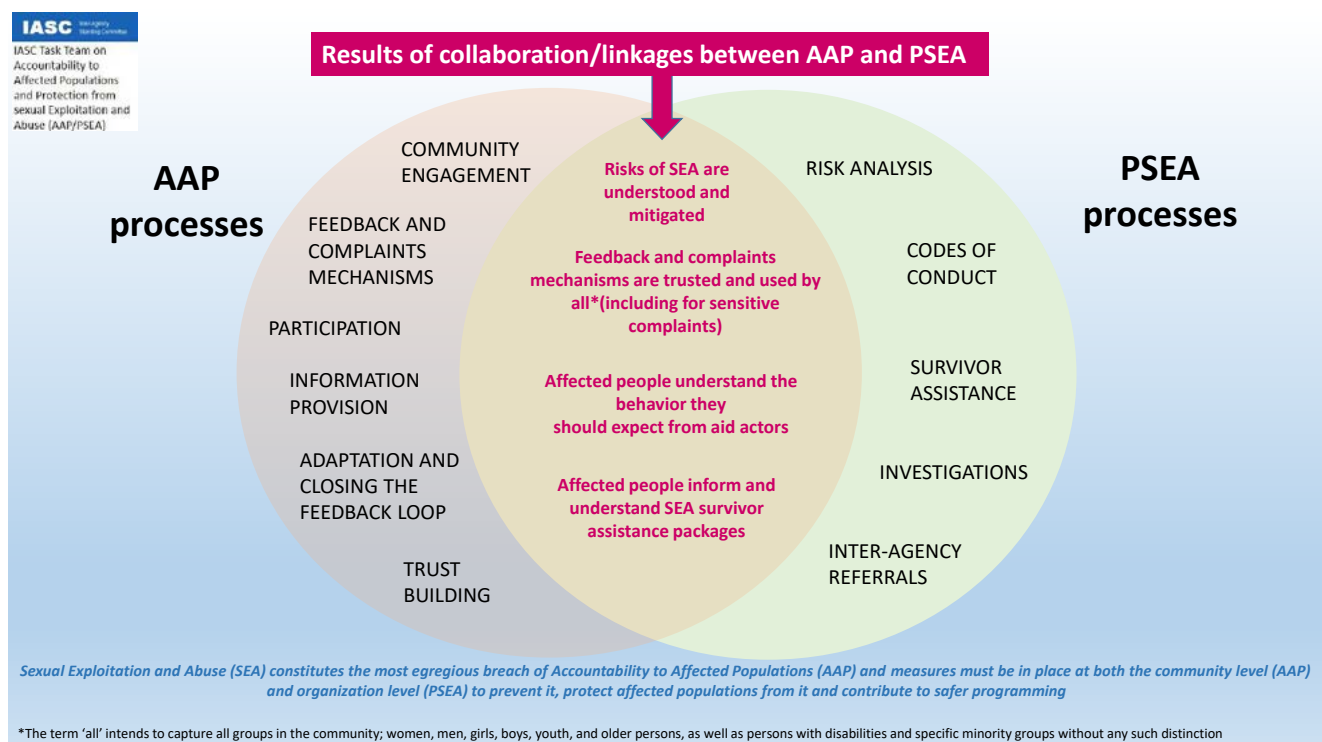
The Secretary-General's Bulletin (SGB) on Special Measures for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (ST/SGB/2003/13), outlines the UN's commitment to prevent and address SEA of persons of concern committed by humanitarian personnel. The Memorandum on UNHCR Compliance with the SG's Bulletin on Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (2004) outlines the primary responsibility of Senior Management, and PSEA focal points; including the guidelines on the issuing of communications to personnel and local populations.

IASC also issued an AAP Guidance Note for Principals and Senior Managers[16] on the responsibilities and accountabilities in the context of prevention, preparedness and response.

AAP and PSEA

The linkages between AAP and PSEA as outlined below result in the early identification of risks; the use of communities' existing capacities for prevention and reporting; and SEA programmes informed by feedback from the community.

IASC has also highlighted the linkages between AAP and PSEA, which is outlined in the diagram below.

IASC Inter-Agency Working Committee
IASC Task Team on Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection from sexual Exploitation and Abuse (AAP/PSEA)

Results of collaboration/linkages between AAP and PSEA

AAP processes

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS MECHANISMS

PARTICIPATION

INFORMATION PROVISION

ADAPTATION AND CLOSING THE FEEDBACK LOOP

TRUST BUILDING

Risks of SEA are understood and mitigated

Feedback and complaints mechanisms are trusted and used by all*(including for sensitive complaints)

Affected people understand the behavior they should expect from aid actors

Affected people inform and understand SEA survivor assistance packages

RISK ANALYSIS

CODES OF CONDUCT

SURVIVOR ASSISTANCE

INVESTIGATIONS

INTER-AGENCY REFERRALS

PSEA processes

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) constitutes the most egregious breach of Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) and measures must be in place at both the community level (AAP) and organization level (PSEA) to prevent it, protect affected populations from it and contribute to safer programming

*The term 'all' intends to capture all groups in the community; women, men, girls, boys, youth, and older persons, as well as persons with disabilities and specific minority groups without any such distinction

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15 For Guidance on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, please see: UNHCR, *Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA): Facilitator's Training Manual* [PSEA: Facilitator's Training Manual], Ethics Office, May 2016; IASC, *IASC Best Practice Guide Inter-Agency Community-Based Complaints Mechanisms*, 2016; and, UNHCR, *Making a Complaint*, Inspector General's Office, n.d.

16   IASC, *Revised CAAP Guidance note and resources list 2018*, 20 April 2018.

AAP's link with PSEA is primarily to do with setting up confidential feedback systems, consulting with communities on their preferences for these mechanisms, and informing communities on how to access them. Feedback mechanisms are accessible channels for women, girls, boys, and men in communities of concern to communicate with UNHCR, partners, and humanitarian actors and receive response. Feedback mechanisms must enable both personnel and persons of concern to make SEA complaints and to seek redress in a safe and confidential environment. This will be made possible if an AAP approach has been taken with the establishment and running of the feedback mechanism, which will support people to build trust in the system; only with trust in the system will people use it for SEA complaints.

A community-based approach adds efficiency to the reporting mechanism by incorporating local capacities and solutions into the overall system. The mechanism should be effective, fully accessible, and safe for the users. While SEA should be clearly established as a specific type of complaint with specific treatment procedures, reporting of SEA should be made possible within the structure of the existing complaints system, rather than a separate entity.

Commit to confidentiality.[17] Trust is an essential characteristic of an effective feedback and response system. Due to the sensitive nature of SEA, confidentiality needs to be a primary consideration. The aim is to respect and protect the complainants, potential witnesses, alleged perpetrators, agencies involved, and the integrity of the investigation process. All communications and complaints are confidential with disclosure of information on a strict need-to-know basis. Access to documents should be available only to those receiving the complaint, and the staff member facilitating access to Victim Assistance or other services as appropriate.

Safety of the complainant and of staff. There is a risk of retaliation and/or possible reactions from the community. Staff also might be reluctant to report other staff, for example because of a hierarchical relationship or because they depend on them for their own protection in insecure locations. The office must have a plan in place for dealing with immediate protection needs of the persons involved in the SEA case. Protection concerns for both the alleged survivor and witnesses should continue to be considered throughout and after an investigation.

To protect the integrity of the investigation process, feedback on individual cases will be given only to the complainant. In situations where the complainant is a minor, the legal custodian or representative will be informed. However, the community should be informed on how the feedback system results in changes to the programme affecting the community at large. This feedback is likely to be periodic, and focus on the actions UNHCR is taking on SEA to prevent it from occurring in the future.

Operationalising the AAP Framework

AAP is most effectively operationalized through actions tailored to each specific context. For example, in contexts where direct engagement with communities of concern or a preferred channel for communication of the community may not be possible, the development of innovative approaches to remotely engage, communicate with, and assist communities becomes necessary. Individual offices are encouraged to develop and implement the most optimal AAP tools for their context.

AAP is implemented in different ways in operations. An AAP self-assessment tool (see practical tools below)[18] can assist operations to identify their own particular areas of strength or gaps, and help operations determine AAP priorities and actions. The tool can also be used to assess AAP in partners. Training for staff and partners is important to building a culture of accountability to persons of concern and an understanding of the principles and purpose of the steps and activities outlined in this guidance.

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[17]   UNHCR, *PSEA: Facilitator's Training Manual*, above n 15.

[18]   Partners can also include private sector service providers/contractors (i.e., financial service providers who play a role in cash distribution).

The tools and implementation steps outlined in this guidance identify areas of focus and suggested actions to support the operationalisation of UNHCR's AAP commitments. They can be adapted to the local context and used in mapping AAP needs and existing opportunities, consulting with persons of concern on AAP, and planning for and implementing AAP activities.

The AAP framework, and its accompanying guidance, serves as a reference to ensure consistency in the standards of our AAP engagement during the design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation stages of the programme cycle.

PRACTICAL TOOLS

🔧 **Quick AAP Self-Assessment**

Identify areas of strength or gaps, and help operations determine AAP priorities and actions. The tool can also be used to assess AAP in partners [Word] [PDF].

🔧 **Examples of Remote Community Engagement**

Examples and emerging practices of remote community engagement from East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes Region [PDF] and from the Americas [PDF].

ACCOUNTABILITY TO AFFECTED PEOPLE BUILDING BLOCKS

PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

Women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds are able to engage meaningfully and are consulted on protection, assistance, and solutions.

COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY

Women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds in all operations have access to timely, accurate, and relevant information on (i) their rights and entitlements, and (ii) UNHCR and its partners' programmes.

SPECIFIC OUTPUTS (what we should do)

- Persons of concern are made aware of their right to participate and the means by which they can participate in programme decision making (including boys and girls).
- Means of continuous participation at all stages of the operations management cycle (assessments, design, implementation, monitoring and impact evaluation) are adapted to provide different options for Persons with specific needs.
- Programme decisions are informed by documented consultations with persons of concern.
- Persons of concern are involved in the needs identification and selection of targeting criteria.
- Communities can request formal meetings/ consultations with relevant programme staff.
- Pre-existing Community structures/organisations for community participation are strengthened/ established where none exist.
- Identified capacities in Participatory Assessment are built into programme planning for community related actions.
- Documented participation of persons of concern (in their diversity) in the prioritization of intervention areas and explanation of final decisions.

- Share information on targeting, eligibility criteria and selection processes and procedures (e.g. programme FAQs).
- Information is communicated in languages, formats and media that are culturally appropriate, and accessible (multi-channel) to all groups of the community (consider literacy, radio/T.V culture).
- Information shared is accurate and ethically reflects persons of concern as dignified human beings with rights.
- Information updates on programmes and assessments are shared with representative sections of the community.
- Information shared on available feedback or complaints systems and relevant contact details.
- Information on expectations on staff conduct and organisational commitments, rights and entitlements of persons of concern is made available.
- Operational guidelines/SOPs exist on information sharing with confidentiality and security considerations.
- Information is shared on feedback procedures timeframes, response, scope and limitations.
- Establish information systems to enable the sharing of information from persons of concern to the operation and partners.

BENCHMARKS TO MEASURE PERFORMANCE (what an accountable programme looks like)

- Participatory Assessment reports include the outcomes of the community's input into priority areas.
- Participatory Assessment reporting includes outcomes of feedback to the community.
- Documentation of community participation is disaggregated through age, gender, and diversity lens.
- Documented community mapping exercises with different population groups (identifying diverse groups and inter-relationships).
- An engagement plan for respective community groups covering the entire operations management cycle is in place.
- Documentation of the outcomes from participation (focus group discussions, satisfaction surveys, meetings and feedback) is included in planning/activity decisions.
- Persons of concern are satisfied with the frequency and quality of the opportunities they have to influence the response.

- Feedback is recorded for tracking trends on information gaps (e.g. feedback database).
- Mapping exercises of the communications landscape/ infrastructure (including barrier & risk identification to accessing information) are conducted.
- Regularly updated information materials (posters, leaflets, etc.) exist.
- Operational Plan budget includes resources assigned for communication with persons of concern.
- Documented mapping of community groups; their diverse information needs in the operation management cycle ; and the respective communication plans exist.
- Needs assessments include communication needs, barriers, risks and capacities of different groups.
- Information channels used are accessible to women, men, boys and girls, older people, and persons with specific needs.
- Information messages are regularly tested with target audiences for understanding.
- Established methods for reporting back to communities on assessments, surveys, decisions and actions.

FEEDBACK & RESPONSE

Formal and informal feedback from persons of concern is systematically received and responded to, and corrective action taken as appropriate.

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING & ADAPTATION

Interventions, planning, priority setting, course corrections, and evaluation are informed on an ongoing basis by the views of persons of concern.

SPECIFIC OUTPUTS (what we should do)

- Actively receive, record, analyse and respond to feedback and complaints (formal/informal).

- Contextually appropriate, accessible, and safe feedback mechanisms exist.

- Establish a clear internal feedback process with clear referral and response responsibilities and timelines.

- Mechanisms are in place for feedback, complaints, referrals and response.

- Identification of appropriate/accessible/community preferred feedback and response systems forms part of needs assessment.

- Complaints handling is carried out by competent staff with relevant authority to respond (Protection issues are referred to relevant staff, the same for programming issues).

- Clear and accessible procedures exist for handling of confidential complaints and SEA, and SGBV.

- Guidelines exist on protection and confidentiality of complainants.

- Staffing for feedback collection and response is gender sensitive.

- Identification of pre-existing and interagency mechanisms in the operating context.

- Periodical reporting includes data and action from feedback and response activities.

- Clear links exist between participatory evaluation/ assessment results and planning and reporting.

- Community feedback is included in programme planning and e-design.

- Internal & external sharing of learning from community consultation and engagement.

- Internal systems for senior management to be informed and act on feedback data.

- Evaluation data includes community feedback on quality and impact of the programme.

- Monitoring includes both qualitative & quantitative feedback data from persons of concern.

- Feedback collection and analysis responsibilities are embedded within the operational structure.

- AAP responsibilities do not sit with one or two people but are relevant throughout staffing levels and thematic areas.

BENCHMARKS TO MEASURE PERFORMANCE (what an accountable programme looks like)

- Feedback and complaints are responded to and the data is included in reporting.

- Feedback systems co-designed with community guidance and for the access and usability of all persons of concern.

- Staff are trained on feedback complaints handling, their roles and levels of responsibility.

- Operation budget for complaints and feedback collection, recording, analysis and reporting.

- There is a high percentage of complaints responded to within a reasonable time frame.

- Standardised feedback collection formats are used.

- Context assessment undertaken to assess the existing barriers to giving feedback.

- Referral pathways exist for feedback relating to external partners and taking in feedback from external partners.

- The specific needs of marginalised people including women, girls and boys, older people, and people with disabilities , are reflected in the design of feedback mechanisms, and the feedback and complaints handling procedures.

- Persons of concern consider the complaints and referral mechanisms accessible, effective, confidential and safe to use without fear of negative repercussions.

- Accountability outputs form part of performance management processes and partner monitoring.

- Feedback is formally captured, (e.g. database or other format), analysed, and utilized in programme decisions.

- Evidence of programme changes and/decisions that are directly linked to community feedback/input.

- Consistently closed feedback loops throughout the operations management cycle (e.g. responses to queries/complaints, reports to community on results of surveys and assessments conducted).

- Ongoing lessons learnt and good practice documentation in programming.

- Operational plan includes lessons learnt from feedback received from persons of concern in the preceding operations management cycle.

- Resources, and responsibilities are assigned for documenting learning, and reporting on feedback from persons of concern.

PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

UNHCR COMMITMENT

At a minimum, country operations will employ participatory methodologies at each stage of the operations management cycle, to incorporate the capacities and priorities of women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds into protection, assistance, and solutions programmes.

UNHCR OPERATIONS ARE EXPECTED TO:

● Establish means of meaningful participation at all stages of the operations management cycle (assessments, planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) that are accessible to all age, gender and other groups in a community, paying particular attention that potentially marginalised groups are included.

● Promote equal and non-discriminatory access to protection, assistance and solutions programmes for persons of concern and promote the resilience and achievement of self-reliance for women, men, girls and boys of concern.

● Identify and include the capacities and priorities of persons of concern in the development of protection, assistance and solutions programmes.

Why is this important?

Participation enables persons of concern to take part in the identification of priorities and the planning and implementation of appropriate protection, assistance and solutions programmes.

Women, men, girls and boys, including older people, people with disabilities and other diversity groups should be engaged in programming activities and decisions, securing their ownership, with acknowledgement of their existing capacities. This applies to decision making in interventions from priority setting, identification of solutions, and monitoring or evaluating programmes.

Participatory approaches should be employed at all stages of the operations management cycle.

What does it look like?

● Collaborative and sustainable protection and assistance programmes that build on the capacities of the community.

● Community, group and individual concerns and expectations are heard, integrated, and managed through open and interactive dialogue.

● Persons of concern participate in evaluating programmes based on their indicators of success, and their specific concerns are integrated through diversity of representation.

● Decision making on strategy and programmatic interventions is based on the expressed priorities of persons of concern.

● The organisation has increased access to all groups in the community through their preferred and trusted channels (face-to-face, group meetings, telephone calls, online etc.).

What if we don't do this?

✕ Ineffective programming that does not build on the knowledge, capacities and needs of persons of concern. Persons of concern are best placed to identify the main risks, concerns and the most effective, sustainable solutions to the problems they face.

✕ Community indifference, because they are not partners, and thus feel no ownership of programmes. Partnership with communities improves the sustainability of programmes and better enables communities to transition to successful, long-term solutions.

✕ Mistrust, frustration and unmanaged expectations can lead to reduced credibility and goodwill towards humanitarian actors.

✕ Exclusion of some members or non-participation of all segments of a community can break down social cohesion.

How can we do this?

> ★ **EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT QUESTIONS FOR PERSONS OF CONCERN**
>
> • How are you currently taking part in the programme?
>
> • How would you like to be involved in the programme?
>
> • Do any barriers exist for you or other community members to participate?
>
> • How can UNHCR and its partners better understand your community?
>
> • Do you think you are adequately represented in community and programming discussions/activities (such as meetings, focus group discussions, training)?

Understand the population of concern, and identify the preferred means of participation and barriers to inclusion.

Undertake community mapping (including in the host community) to understand which stakeholders have the most influence on the operational context and the nature of relationships between community groups and those stakeholders. Determine the likely impact of these relationships on the programme and ways that the positive relationships can be accentuated, and the negative ones minimised.

Engage persons of concern in all stages of the operations management cycle.

To prepare that engagement, analyse the context, including culture, community mechanisms, leadership structures, religious and societal norms, and community-based organisations. Based on the constraints and enabling factors , plan opportunities for participation and reporting back to persons of concern at all stages in the operations management cycle.

Make the affected population aware of the opportunities that exist to engage in programming with UNHCR and partners.

Establish clear, contextually relevant procedures and practices for the appropriate engagement of all persons of concern, including marginalised groups and persons with specific needs, in community processes that allow them to understand and influence programming.

Plan for the engagement of different population groups.

Different groups may require different engagement approaches. Link these approaches to the communication and feedback systems for cohesion. Include staffing considerations for the contextual requirements e.g. ensure there are adequate numbers of male/female staff.

Establish clear, contextually relevant guidelines and practices,

for the appropriate engagement of marginalised groups and persons with specific needs, in decision making to influence programming.
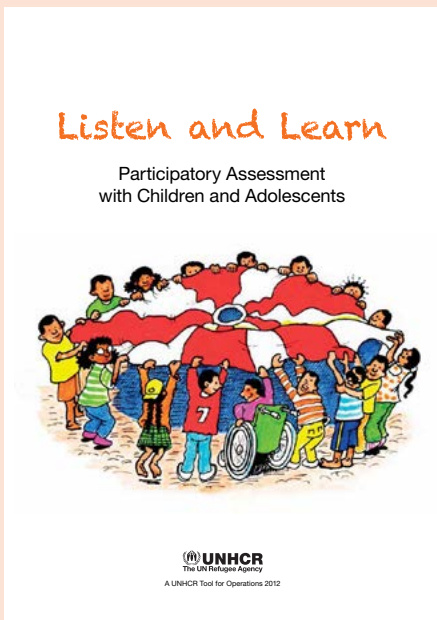
Consistently report back to persons of concern.

After conducting assessments, focus groups, surveys and other participatory exercises, inform communities and explain the final decisions made. This is an ongoing process in our engagement with persons of concern as partners in decision-making.

Reporting back should focus on key messaging on decisions made, actions to be taken, and ongoing programme updates. Information sharing with persons of concern should not be perfunctory. Incorporating the practice of regular reporting back to communities transforms the relationship into a partnership, and enacts the authentic expression of our accountability to persons of concern.

Reporting back to communities requires the combined use of existing community representative structures, and targeted reporting back using communities' preferred means and channels of communication. Particular attention should be given to reaching groups who may traditionally face barriers to accessing information.

★ **PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGIES FOR CHILDREN**

Listen and Learn

Participatory Assessment
with Children and Adolescents

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

A UNHCR Tool for Operations 2012

Field tested in India, Jordan, Kenya, and Nepal, this is a tool for consultation with younger children, including children and adolescents with disabilities. It is developed for use in communication, participation, and child friendly feedback collection.

Steps for Meaningful Participation and Inclusion

❶ **Mapping of the interlinkages between community groups and the existing connecters and dividers**

Community Relationship mapping with each community group to establish which community stakeholders have the most influence on their protection, the nature of that group's relationship with those stakeholders (positive, negative), and the nuances to be aware of during engagement. What is the likely impact on the programme? How can the positives be accentuated, and the negatives minimised during programme design and implementation?

❷ **Context Analysis**

Understand the culture, existing community systems, leadership structures, religious and societal norms. Programmes are not implemented within the confines of an operational plan but rather in dynamic contexts with unique influences. Understanding these influences is key to the success of an intervention.

❸ **Identification of barriers and enablers**

With the community, identify barriers to and enablers of participation and inclusion of the different population groups, and possible strategies to overcome the former and strengthen the latter.

❹ **Plan for opportunities**

Plan for opportunities for participation and reporting back to persons of concern at different stages in the operations management cycle, and assign roles and responsibilities for this deliverable. Identify the community's preferred methods of engagement and existing opportunities for engagement in the current programme activities.

❺ **Awareness raising**

Foster the community's understanding of their right to participate in programming and the means by which they can do so.

Participation and inclusion tip sheet

Existing capacities: Identified capacities within the community should be built into programme planning. Also take into account any existing interagency channels for participation that exist in your context.

Access: In consultation with persons of concern and partners, identify barriers to participation for different groups and devise strategies to address them.

Consistency: Obtain meaningful community participation throughout the operations management cycle.

Document: Programme decisions are informed by reports on the results of consultations with persons of concern. Such reports are also helpful to garner support from host communities, local/national government and donors, and should therefore be disseminated in a timely and appropriate manner to these different groups.

Avoid creating parallel structures: Pre-existing community structures and community-based organisations, including those in host communities, should be engaged where possible. Analyse the representation of and access to these structures by persons of concern, notably marginalised groups. Support the structures to serve the interests of all segments of the community.

Inclusivity: Aim for a balanced representation of the diversity in the community and develop community engagement approaches that recognize and reach different groups (such as people with disabilities, or members of minority groups).

Host community: Inclusion of the host community is critical for effective protection, assistance and solutions programming, including to avoid tensions and competition for resources.

Partnership: Incorporating the practice of regular reporting back to communities helps to transform the relationship between UNHCR and persons of concern into a partnership, and is a concrete expression of our commitment to AAP.

Brief and focused: Reporting back should focus on key messaging on decisions made, actions to be taken, and ongoing programme updates.

Targeted: Reporting back to communities requires the combined use of existing community representative structures, and any other communication modalities and channels preferred by the community. Particular attention should be given to reaching groups who may face barriers to accessing information.

Avoid causing harm: Representation is not always representative. Community engagement requires the identification and involvement of community leaders for access to the community, and the respect and acknowledgement of pre-existing community systems. It is important not to inadvertently empower unfair or unrepresentative systems, to the detriment of others, including the most marginalised. Care must be taken not to reinforce and privilege systems that perpetuate gender inequality and marginalisation.

PRACTICAL TOOLS

🔧 **Community Mapping**

The process aims to better understand the trusted structures that exist in the community and their levels of influence.

Mapping of the interlinkages between community groups and the connecters and dividers. [Word] [PDF]

🔧 **Supporting Participation of Persons with Disabilities**

Tips for better engagement with persons with disabilities. [PDF]

🔧 **UNHCR Listen and Learn:** *Participatory Assessment with Children and Adolescents*

Specific considerations for participatory assessments and consultations with younger children including children and adolescents with disabilities.

COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY

UNHCR COMMITMENT

At a minimum, all country-level protection and solutions strategies will detail the operation's approach to communicating with women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds, through means that are appropriate and accessible to all groups in a community.

UNHCR OPERATIONS ARE EXPECTED TO:

❯ Facilitate two-way communication and dialogue among UNHCR, its partners and people of concern at key stages throughout the operations management cycle.

❯ Share information and communicate in languages, formats and media that are culturally appropriate for and accessible to all groups in a community.

❯ Ensure women, men, girls, and boys of diverse backgrounds have access to timely, accurate, and relevant information on (i) their rights and entitlements, and (ii) UNHCR and its partners' programmes.

Communication and Community Engagement, or also referred to as Communicating with Communities (CwC), is central to communication and transparency but also reaches into other core actions, such as participation and inclusion and feedback and response.

Why is this important?

Persons of concern have the right to be informed about issues and decisions affecting their lives. This involves receiving information on their rights, responsibilities and entitlements, and being kept aware of protection and assistance programmes as they evolve.

Information is a form of assistance in itself: access to accurate information allows persons of concern to make informed decisions for their safety and protection, to shape and adapt to their environment, and to hold humanitarian actors accountable.

Effective communication between UNHCR, its partners,[19] and persons of concern also serves to manage expectations about the type and level of assistance that can be provided and why.

What does it look like?

- ✔ Diverse groups in the community are engaged, as partners, in a dialogue between UNHCR and persons of concern.

- ✔ Persons of concern have safe, regular access to timely, accurate and contextually relevant information, and are able to make informed decisions on the basis of the information available to them.

- ✔ Persons of concern are made aware of the means by which they can meaningfully participate and give feedback.

- ✔ Persons of concern have a say in the channels of communication and the types of information they need and how they receive it.

- ✔ Information channels consider the different information needs and levels of access within the community.

What if we don't do this?

- ✘ Increased mistrust and mutual frustration, due to an information vacuum and the absence of dialogue, which can generate rumours or misinformation.

- ✘ Insecurity and protection risks may be exacerbated as individuals or groups in the community can act on incomplete or incorrect information.

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19 Partners also include private sector providers and contractors.

❌ Lack of effective, continuous dialogue with persons of concern may cause unrealistic expectations about the assistance and services that can be provided.

❌ UNHCR and its partners are poorly informed about the priorities and the protection and assistance gaps that communities are concerned about and wish to inform humanitarian and other actors about.

How can we do this?

> ⭐ **EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT QUESTIONS FOR PERSONS OF CONCERN**
>
> - Do you feel informed about your rights, responsibilities and entitlements?
>
> - How do you like to receive information about the response, your rights, responsibilities and entitlements? (Phone, SMS, Twitter, Facebook, radio, community events, focus groups, posters, diaspora, places of worship)
>
> - Are you, or anyone you know with specific needs, able to access information; if not how best should this be addressed? (Focus on persons with specific needs, for example people with disabilities, children, older persons, etc.)
>
> - What is your preferred language of communication?
>
> - What, if anything, is preventing you from receiving and sharing information? (Security, literacy, access, connectivity)

Communication is, by definition, not one sided. When information is provided by one party there should be a response to show it is understood in the same way by both sides. The same is true for any communication between UNHCR, its partners, and persons of concern.

Through ongoing dialogue (two-way communication), persons of concern can meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their lives.

It is important to establish the necessary supporting systems and procedures for each part of the communication process with clearly defined roles and responsibilities among UNHCR staff and partners. Doing this requires planning and intentionality from

the outset of an intervention. The actual production and distribution of the communication materials should be done after establishing the goal or objective for the communication; the target audiences; and the most appropriate method, content, and timing.

> The importance of ongoing face-to-face interaction with the persons of concern including through regular meetings with the various community groups and individual counselling cannot be over emphasised. Other means of communication with people of concern cannot replace face-to-face dialogue.

Steps in designing a communication plan

It is important that planning for communication with people of concern is integrated within existing processes and not a separate output. For instance, community mapping is part of the community-based protection approach. Participatory assessments can include a mapping of the existing communications infrastructure, and relevant questions can be incorporated within existing surveys and consultations with persons of concern.

Each part of the process should be done in consultation with the community, making sure to engage all population groups in the context.

❶ ....

Mapping : Existing Communications Systems

Map existing communication systems in the community/ key influences (faith groups, social clubs, women's groups).

Note: mapping existing communication systems can also be done when analysing the context and mapping linkages within the community as part of the participation and inclusion actions.

❷ ....

Assess Communication Needs & define communication objectives

This process considers the existing communications channels, including the current infrastructure gaps/ needs (e.g. mobile coverage) and what partners/local organisations already have in place.

It reviews what information is most relevant to different groups (particularly the most marginalised), the best way to communicate it, any existing barriers

to information access, and how the barriers can be overcome.

Take note of existing opportunities of interaction or communication with UNHCR that already work well.

❸ ....

Community Validation

Identify appropriate communication channels in consultation with targeted users to validate the choice made is their preferred* method for receiving and giving information, including pre-existing community systems.

* Preference is usually a function of accessibility and level of trust in a channel. In some instances, it can be aspirational, e.g. a desire to use social media in areas with low connectivity.

❹ ....

Develop a plan

Determine what organisational/legal information standards need to be met; what security/confidentiality risks exist in the context, and

how these can be prevented and mitigated; what information will be provided, to whom, and at what point in the operations management cycle.

❺ ....

Establish Internal support structures

Determine what resources are required; who in the office will be responsible for which of the communication outputs; what the indicators of success will be; and what role the population of concern can play in the communications plan.

❻ ....

Develop, regularly update and disseminate appropriate, timely and accessible communication materials using multiple channels

6.1 When collaborating with partners on interagency communications
Establish clear roles and responsibilities, and have agreed SOPs on how, when and what to communicate.

See under Practical Tools for Standard Operating Procedures related to Information Hub and Information Service Centre in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh.

Pros and Cons of Different Information Channels

Advantages	Disadvantages
NOTICEBOARDS: Central locations in camps, at offices, and urban areas that persons of concern access.	
• Effective for simple and complex messages. • Can be used by communities for intra-community dialogue.	• Requires physical access to the audience. • Coverage limited to specific locations (where people go and will see the noticeboard). • Dependent on audience literacy levels. • Real time updates difficult. • Limited opportunities for two-way communication.
POSTERS AND FLYERS: Wide distribution (in camp and non-camp contexts). If staff distribute them, they can open two-way communication.	
• Simple to produce. • Effective for simple and complex information. • Pictures or cartoons can be effective.	• Requires physical access to the audience. • Dependent on audience literacy levels. • Real time updates difficult. • Environmental considerations (paper usage and littering). • Limited opportunities for two-way communication.
PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM (PA) *e.g. Boda Boda Talk Talk:* Effectively reaches high density populations, in large villages, urban areas or camps.	
• Wide geographical reach including to people with limited mobility. • Effective particularly when literacy rates are low. • Can use several languages. • Can be updated in real time.	• Audience cannot choose whether or not to listen. • May be perceived as intrusive. • Limited opportunity for two-way communication and feedback.

Advantages	Disadvantages
RADIO: Very good for information dissemination in both urban and rural settings.	
• A familiar medium. • Reaches large audience. • Can explore issues in depth through dialogue and phone ins. • Can be updated in real time.	• Users need access to a radio, and electricity or batteries unless solar or wind-up radios can be used. • Programmes tend to be in a dominant language, and can isolate linguistic minorities. • Licensing & infrastructure considerations if a system must be set up from scratch.
TELEVISION: Usually more urban than rural viewers. Shared viewing areas can be created by humanitarian agencies.	
• Wide geographical reach. • Can explore issues in depth. • Can be implemented remotely.	• Programmes tend to be in dominant language, and can isolate linguistic minorities. • Can be expensive both in terms of agencies 'buying' content and the TV set for a community/family.
SOCIAL MEDIA: Very wide reach, where internet is available.	
• Useful for sharing and gathering information. • Accessed by displaced people and can reach the diaspora. • Can be updated in real time. • Can be implemented remotely.	• Requires internet access and a functioning telecoms structure. • User protection and confidentiality issues to consider. • Digital Channels/Social Media can be prone to misinformation.
PHONELINE/CALL CENTRE: Ability to reach remote populations (dependent of connectivity coverage).	
• Can provide targeted information in several languages. • Useful for sharing and gathering information. • A relatively familiar channel for many populations. • Can be implemented remotely.	• Can be very resource intensive and expensive (particularly if call cost to be covered by agency). • Challenges with Data Protection particularly if Third Party call centre operators are engaged. Disparity in mobile phone ownership (and legal access to SIM cards) may exclude certain groups.
SMS/INSTANT MESSAGE CAMPAIGN: 'SMS blast systems' for one way key messages/alerts; Effective at reaching widespread audiences with similar needs.	
• Can provide targeted information in several languages and formats. • Useful for sharing and gathering information. • A relatively familiar channel for many populations. • Relatively quick for agencies to set-up and self-manage. • Cascading messaging approaches can reinforce/leverage existing community groups. • Can be implemented remotely.	• SMS messages can be expensive, particularly if 'SMS bundles' are not negotiated with mobile companies. • Data protection, Data Privacy and User Protection to be considered. Disparity in mobile phone ownership and/or digital literacy may exclude certain groups.
FACE TO FACE: In situations (camp and non-camp contexts) where physical access is not an issue; Good for complex information exchange.	
• Often peoples' preferred form of communication. • Strongest and most persuasive form of communication. • 2-way communication – interactive with immediate feedback. • Information can be tailored to individual needs. • Sensitive issues handled privately.	• Relies on physical access and can have limited reach. • Time-consuming and labour intensive. • Can be expensive. • Needs good communication skills.

Communication and Transparency Tip Sheet

Consultation: Provide persons of concern with platforms for discussion and debate, which can generate new ideas and solutions and enable communities to actively engage; provide feedback; and contextualise the information shared.

Inclusivity: Persons of concern need to be able to access information and communicate with UNHCR and partners safely and equally. Information shared only with one group in the community (leaders or influencers) can mean other groups (e.g. women, children, minorities, older persons, persons with disabilities) receive information in a limited or amended form. Identifying and capitalising on existing, trusted communications channels is critical, but additional measures might be necessary to ensure all groups have timely and effective access to the information they need.

Multiple channels: Use multiple channels for communication and select these in consultation with different groups in the community, ensuring consistency in the information among different channels. The importance of equality of access also applies to the choice of feedback mechanisms. Partnerships with local media, telecommunications companies, volunteer groups and youth networks can help broaden the scope of your communication channels.

Appropriate: Communication methods and information provided must be tailored to the context and the audience (e.g. children and low literacy communities). Balance practicality, safety, security and confidentiality when deciding what information to share. Support protection, respect confidentiality and consider appropriateness in all communications. Appropriateness of communication includes both verbal and nonverbal communication that considers cultural sensitivity, local languages, relevance and accuracy, without increasing exposure to risk.

Timely: In order for information-sharing and dialogue to meaningfully inform decision-making of both persons of concern and humanitarian actors, it should be provided at, or before, the time it is needed. Withholding information intentionally or **unintentionally**, or limiting access, can have harmful effects.

Accessible: All persons of concern should be able to access information in ways that they understand. Consider different formats and channels for different **groups** (e.g. children, persons with disabilities). Always ensure that the language used is simple and clear.

Transparent: Persons of concern must have information about UNHCR's programmes and organisational processes and procedures, and be able to ask questions.

Responsible & Ethical: Any communication must uphold the dignity of persons of concern. Pay particular attention to the manner in which social media communication by UNHCR and partner staff portrays persons of concern (e.g., personal Facebook posts that include pictures or comments about persons of concern). It is important to respect the principles and rights laid out in the UNHCR Data Protection Policy throughout the life-cycle of processing personal data.[20]

Standard Operating Procedures on Communication: UNHCR offices should develop context-specific guidelines that specify the approach to and responsibilities on communicating with persons of concern, as part of the broader AAP mechanisms put in place.

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[20] UNHCR, *Policy on the Protection of Personal Data of Persons of Concern to UNHCR*, May 2015.

PRACTICAL TOOLS

🔧 **Menu of AAP questions for needs assessment**
IASC-REACH menu of questions that can be used with different types of data collection methods including household and community level interviews and focus group discussions in the design and adaptation of communications strategies, inter-agency feedback mechanisms and participation strategies.

🔧 **Communication Needs Assessment Tool**
Contains over 100 questions that cover aspects from baseline demographic information to channel access.

🔧 **Communications Mapping**
This process takes into account the existing communications channels in the environment. It reviews what programme information is most relevant to the different groups, the best way to communicate it, any existing barriers to information access, and how the barriers can be overcome. [Word] [PDF]

🔧 **Communication Needs Checklist**
Checklist of areas to cover in learning what influences relevance, consumption and impact of information and the channels used for communication, feedback and response. Use with question banks provided. [Word] [PDF]

🔧 **Overcoming barriers to communication**
Recommended ways to increase positive interaction. [PDF]

🔧 **Sample Communication Plan**
Template to help you document the communications plan to be used during the implementation stage of the programme. Use after mapping information needs. [Word] [PDF]

🔧 **Accessible Communication for Persons with Disabilities**
Tips for communicating with persons with disabilities. [PDF]

🔧 **Using Audio Messaging**
How to for recording Audio Messages.

🔧 **10 things to consider before rolling out two-way SMS**
A list of the top ten things to consider before embarking on the journey of setting up a two-way SMS system.

🔧 **Set up a two-way SMS in 2 minutes**
The resourcing and business processes required to set-up SMS; things to consider before rolling out two-way SMS; considerations for mobile phone distributions; how to Videos. Including How to Videos for an 'out of the box' SMS solution.
* To use only after a thorough assessment. A full system needs to be in place to manage it responsibly.

🔧 **Engaging with Communities through Whatsapp Trees**
Guidance and tips for engaging with communities through Whatsapps trees. [PDF]

🔧 **Radio for communicating with communities**
Considerations for radio stations (including guidance on listening).

🔧 **Using TV Screens, creating inclusive content**
Guidance on using TV screens for people with disabilities. [PDF]

🔧 **Boda Boda Talk Talk (BBTT) Pocket Guide**
Basic Set-Up for BBTT. Using loudspeakers & motorbikes for communication. [PDF]

🔧 **Chatbots in humanitarian settings**
A case study on the use of Chatbots in Jordan, including recommendations on the application of Chatbots.

🔧 **Call Centres: Lessons Learned**
A case study from a call centre in Yemen, including lessons learned.

🔧 **Communication by refugees, for refugees, in Angola**
A case study on community-led engagement in Angola.

🔧 **Use of information hotline**
A case study on the use of a free hotline providing information to refugees in Niger.

🔧 **Information sharing App**
A case study on an information sharing app in Israel.

🔧 **Example Standard Operating Procedures**
SOPs from the Communication with Community Working Group in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh for the Information Hub and Information Service Centre. [PDF]

🔧 **10 Tips on Using Social Media**
10 top tips for using social media to minimize the sharing of misinformation. [PDF]

FEEDBACK & RESPONSE

UNHCR COMMITMENT

At a minimum, all UNHCR operations will establish and promote feedback and response systems, including for confidential complaints.

UNHCR OPERATIONS ARE EXPECTED TO:

❯ Establish multiple communication channels tailored to the different needs and capacities of persons of concern, including for example, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.

❯ Use confidentiality safeguards to ensure that matters such as sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) are handled in a protection-sensitive manner.

❯ Have standard operating procedures for the collection, acknowledgement, assessment and referral of feedback, and for the operational response to it, setting out roles and responsibilities.

Feedback is formal or informal communication from persons of concern received through feedback mechanisms. It can either be positive or negative (complaint) and informs programming or requires corrective action (response).

Feedback first needs to be acknowledged, and can then either be acted upon directly or referred to others for later action, as appropriate. The subsequent back and forth communication cycle is the feedback loop. The goal is to consistently close the feedback loop. Closed feedback loops require that data on feedback received is **collected, stored, analysed, responded to** and **reported on**.

Feedback Mechanisms are an accessible formal system through which persons of concern can safely communicate with, and receive responses from, the organisation. Feedback mechanisms can be community based (using community structures), or they can be agency run (suggestion box, hotline, etc.) or interagency (agency run on behalf of multiple agencies).

A suggestion box/hotline is a feedback **mechanism**. The processes, methods and tools that are in place to ensure the loop from receiving feedback to responding to feedback (collection, acknowledgement, storing, recording, assessment, referral & report) constitute a feedback and response **system**.

Why is this important?

Feedback and response systems allow us to hear directly from persons of concern, to have a real-time understanding of the protection risks they face, and to gauge the impact of our protection, assistance, and solutions programmes.

In the same way programme evaluations that include community feedback data give a measurement of impact that includes not only predetermined programming indicators of success; but also, a measurement of the value add of a programme, as determined by those receiving assistance.

Safe and accessible systems are required for the collection, storing, and analysis of formal and informal feedback, with appropriate referral and response pathways throughout the operations management cycle.

What does it look like?

- ✅ The dignity and value of persons of concern and their right to be heard is affirmed through receiving and acting on their feedback, including comments, suggestions, and complaints.

- ✅ UNHCR and partners are alerted to any protection issues that need to be addressed.

- ✅ The impact of protection, assistance and solutions programmes are consistently monitored and emerging, or aggravated needs, trends, and perceptions highlighted.

- ✅ Organisational learning is promoted, through reporting on best practice in the design and use of feedback mechanisms.

- ✅ Storing, recording and analysis of feedback data provides useful information for impact evaluation, and better understanding of community needs and expectations. The result is more effective programming through the adaptation of programmes.

- ✅ Identifying and capitalising on existing, trusted communications channels for different groups in a community to give feedback in multiple and inclusive ways.

What if we don't do this?

- ✅ Inefficient and ineffective protection, assistance and solutions programmes that do not meet the needs of the targeted population.

- ✅ Moral breaches and abuse of power, including human rights violations, SEA, corruption, and fraud can continue undetected.

- ✅ UNHCR's community-based approach is only partially implemented.

- ✅ Unsustainable programmes through lack of ownership by disengaged and apathetic communities of concern.

How can we do this?

> ★ **EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT QUESTIONS FOR PERSONS OF CONCERN**
>
> - How are you currently providing feedback about programmes?
>
> - How would you like to give feedback about the programme (including, sensitive feedback)?
>
> - Do you know where to give feedback if you have any concerns about or problems with the response?
>
> - If you have given feedback, did you receive a response?
>
> - Do you know how to complain about sensitive issues (e.g. SEA, fraud, corruption and trafficking)?
>
> - Are all people able to access existing feedback mechanisms?

CONSULT WITH PERSONS OF CONCERN ON PREFERRED FEEDBACK METHODS AND REVIEW EXISTING CHANNELS FOR FEEDBACK

Use mapping and context analysis to determine the different population groups and their respective preferred methods and channels of communicating, including those set up by partners, other agencies and humanitarian actors, and/or local authorities.

Formal and informal feedback includes comments, suggestions, and complaints from persons of concern, on issues within the organisation's control. It can generally be categorised in the following ways:

- ✅ **Operational:** Any feedback or complaint that does not relate to instances of misconduct by staff or partners and is related to programmatic issues in design, implementation and/or delivery.

- ✅ **Misconduct:** Misconduct is defined in the United Nations Staff Rules and Regulations (Rule 10.1) as: "Failure by a staff member to comply with his or her obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules or other relevant administrative issuances, or to observe the standards of

conduct expected of an international civil servant may amount to misconduct and may lead to the institution of a disciplinary process and the imposition of disciplinary measures for misconduct."[21] Misconduct complaints against UNHCR personnel and any entities/individuals with a direct contractual link with UNHCR, including NGO implementing partners, should be immediately forwarded to the UNHCR Inspector General's Office (IGO). The IGO is the only entity mandated to investigate such complaints, against UNHCR personnel and/or entities with a direct contractual link with UNHCR; with the exception of government entities. With regard to misconduct complaints against government entities, regardless of the existence of a contractual link with UNHCR, the complaint should be addressed by the country operation, while a copy of the complaint should be sent to the IGO for information purposes.

⊘ **Allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA):** Receiving, handling and reporting on sensitive issues and complaints of SEA must be informed by specific SOPs, and confidentiality must be respected. While the SOPs on the treatment of SEA complaints should be specific to SEA, the mechanism for SEA complaints should be an integral part of existing feedback/complaints mechanisms: feedback mechanisms cannot be SEA-specific, for protection reasons.[22]

Effective feedback and response systems don't just happen. They must be intentional, planned for, and adequately resourced. The design of feedback and response systems depends very much on the particular **context** and the input received through consultations with **communities** of concern.

CLOSE THE FEEDBACK LOOP. RECEIVE, ACKNOWLEDGE, AND RESPOND TO FEEDBACK

Clearly establish the internal process flow for feedback, including roles and responsibilities regarding referrals (e.g. operation level feedback flowchart).

Collect, process, store and analyse data using pre-existing systems or create context-specific systems. Ensure feedback data is disaggregated as relevant to the purpose, and establish timelines for each step (from collection to processing, storage, analysis, response, reporting, etc.).

Ensure a referral process exists for feedback related to partners and requests for support that UNHCR does not provide directly.

INTERAGENCY REFERRAL

Whenever possible, UNHCR should take a lead role in establishing, funding and coordinating interagency referrals, either directly or in partnership with other entities.

It is important to ensure that referral processes are fully functional. Focal points should exist for different type of feedback both internally and with other organisations.

The humanitarian community is commonly seen as one entity by communities, and it is common for complaints relating to partners or other agencies to be channelled to UNHCR and vice versa. The burden of distinguishing between agencies and their different responsibilities should not be placed on persons of concern. Communities should be able to use their preferred and most accessible channel of communication regardless of which agency operates it. This makes referral protocols and interagency focal points central to effective feedback and response systems.

Where collective, interagency feedback mechanisms exist, the feedback is forwarded for action to

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21 UNHCR, *The Role, Function and Modus Operandi of the Inspector General's Office* [internal], 2012.

22 UNHCR, *PSEA: Facilitator's Training Manual* and *Making a Complaint*; and, IASC, *IASC Best Practice Guide*, above n 15.

the relevant organisation, service provider (e.g. financial services provider in the case of cash based operations), or government entity. The benefits of these interagency accountability partnerships are both practicality and mutual accountability. In some operational contexts it may be more practical and efficient to use a common mechanism or system for communication and feedback.

Steps in setting up a feedback and response systems

❶

Context analysis & Mapping of existing mechanisms

Use context analysis to map the different population groups and their existing methods of communicating feedback and receiving response, including channels set up by partner agencies and local authorities. This will help to ascertain what can be built on to avoid parallel systems, and what barriers exist for different groups.

❷

Community Consultation

Consult persons of concern on preferred and accessible methods of giving feedback and getting information. Understand the needs and communication preferences of the population as well as their levels of access to different communication channels. This will help to decide which mechanisms from your mapping and your available resources to put in place.

❸

Select the most appropriate feedback mechanisms that are accessible to all community groups identified

Decide which mechanisms to be used, what their scope will be (what they can and cannot do), and be clear on which population groups have access.

Agree on processes and tools for feedback collection (formal and informal) a processing, storage, analysis, and reporting Ensure we collect the data we need to be able to disaggregate the findings during the analysis stage (e.g., by age, sex, disability and other diversity consideration as appropriate).

❹

Establish Internal support structures

Establish a clear internal process (work flow) with timelines for feedback collection, response and reporting, roles and responsibilities, referral procedures, and procedures for sensitive complaints.

Ensure a referral process exists, for feedback related to partners' programmes and staff, and for support that UNHCR does not provide directly (for example, to the police or legal aid providers, or medical care).

Ensure staff are trained to value and use feedback information, and that the organisational culture supports this, notably by establishing guidelines and standards.

❺

Establish SOPs/guidelines

Establish standard operating procedures for the feedback and response system, detailing exactly who does what when and how.

SOPs for feedback and response should include how to handle sensitive and confidential complaints. Data protection principles, which also reinforces the importance of confidentiality, should be mainstreamed.

❻

Raise awareness

Publicise the feedback system internally and externally. Communicate information about the system's existence and the right to give feedback or complain.

❼

Consistently receive, acknowledge, and respond to feedback.

❽

Consistently monitor the appropriateness and effectiveness of the feedback and response system, and report on data and findings to ensure it informs programme design.

Pros and Cons of Different Feedback Mechanisms

Advantages	Disadvantages
COMMUNITY MEETINGS: Feedback on general issues; Awareness raising	
• Reaches a large number of people at the same time. • Creates opportunity for two-way messaging between persons of concern and agency. • Does not require literate group.	• Consultative. • Not for individual cases. • Some persons may feel uncomfortable raising issues. • May exclude some groups of persons who are not accepted by the 'community'.
SUGGESTION/COMPLAINT BOXES: Written feedback from community on services provided e.g. at distribution points, offices, health centres, schools; Anonymous feedback on sensitive issues; Boxes are placed in humanitarian offices or areas in camps where people gather.	
• Easy to set up; can be mobile or fixed. • Capacity for confidential complaints. • Do not require the presence of staff to function. • Boxes are usually centrally located for easy access.	• One-way messaging from persons of concern to agency. • Responses are delayed. • Requires dedicated staff for regular collection. • No face to face interaction. • Anonymous feedback can be difficult to verify & respond to. • Users must be mobile & literate or have someone write for them.
INFORMATION DESK: Provide information, answer queries; Record feedback from individuals	
• Accessible to most of the community. • Capacity for immediate response or referral on issues. • Feedback is documented and can be tracked. • Allows for face to face communication. • Community members can be trained and participate in running the desk.	• Must be manned by staff at all times. • Usually available only at specific times.
HOTLINES: Hotlines allow the complainant to make direct contact with trained personnel; Can convey general pre-recorded messages	
• Provides a direct line to the agency. • Very useful in areas where humanitarian staff have limited access to persons of concern. • Can be employed in camp and non-camp settings. • Can be implemented remotely.	• May be at some cost to complainant if it is not a toll-free number. • Requires access to phones. • Those most at risk may not have access to a phone. • Phone may need to be answered in multiple languages. • Can be labour/resource intensive.
SMS (SHORT TEXT MESSAGING): Ability to reach remote populations (dependent of connectivity coverage) for instant messaging	
• Provides a direct link between the agency and persons of concern. • Can be used for sensitive complaints (if two-way messaging enabled with proper safeguards). • Provides mass reach if many people have mobile phones. • Cost effective if you have a partnership with local telecommunications providers. • Can be implemented remotely.	• Needs pre-existing database of numbers. • Can be costly for persons of concern if not toll free. • Depends on access to phones and functioning infrastructure. • You can only send short messages; the audience may need more detailed information. • It is hard to check whether messages have been understood. • Literacy may be required. The most vulnerable may not have access to phones.
SOCIAL MEDIA: An increasingly useful tool that persons of concern use for sharing and gathering information	
• Mass reach; but used mostly in urban areas and by certain demographic group. • Can be implemented remotely.	• Requires internet access, a functioning telecoms structure, some literacy. • Confidential issues need specific protection measures.

Advantages	Disadvantages
RADIO	
• A familiar medium. • Usually low cost. • Can reach large audience. • Can explore issues in depth. • Allows feedback and participation (via call in). • Can be implemented remotely.	• Users need access to a radio, and electricity or batteries unless solar or wind-up radios can be used. • Depends on access to phones to allow feedback and participation. • Anonymous feedback can be difficult to verify & respond to. • Can be delays in response. • Programmes tend to be in a dominant language, and can isolate linguistic minorities. • Expensive if a system must be set up from scratch.

Feedback Flowcharts

A feedback flow chart is a pictorial representation of how information from persons of concern moves through the operation. It captures the different channels that communities use to communicate with UNHCR and partners, and what happens to communication when it reaches the organisation and how it is responded to.

Outlining your operation's feedback flowchart can highlight key areas that may need to be addressed to ensure closed feedback loops, and inform the process of drawing up standard operating procedures (SOP) for the feedback and response system.

A feedback flowchart will look at:
• accessible channels that currently exist (including community based);
• if and how feedback from persons of concern is documented;
• how different categories of feedback (sensitive, non-sensitive, operational, protection issues) are securely stored and processed;
• existing referral processes with partners;
• existing focal points for receiving, recording, and/or responding to feedback from persons of concern;
• how feedback analysis and reporting is taking place;
• timelines for response to complaints; and
• for cash-based interventions- if there are focal points to receive and respond to feedback to and from financial service providers.

The flowchart is simply a combined process indicator to communicate the existing feedback loop, outlining what happens from the receipt of feedback or complaints, to the response or referral.

MEASUREMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK AND RESPONSE SYSTEM

RECORD – how feedback/complaints are safely stored, recorded and captured in each channel (is there a database, how are issues classified (operational, SEA, fraud,) what are the challenges, what support is required, which staff is responsible)?

REFERRAL – which issues get referred to other organisations/partners and how are issues referred to UNHCR received, who is responsible, what are the timelines, what are the challenges, what support is required).

RESPONSE – depending on the type of issue, who is responsible for ensuring a response? With what timeline? How to ensure confidentiality and privacy as needed?

REPORTING & Analysis – how is the feedback/complaint data analysed to identify trends, is it reported, to whom, who is responsible, challenges and support required?

TIMELINE – how long does the process normally take from the receipt of feedback to response? This will be different for different categories of feedback for instance, SEA allegations have a 24hr process time.

EXAMPLES OF FEEDBACK FLOW CHARTS

TIMELINE FOR FEEDBACK AND RESPONSE

RECEIVE	RECORD	REFER
The channels through which you receive feedback	How feedback/complaints are recorded and captured in each channel	Which issues get referred to other organisations /partners and how issues are referred to UNHCR

	RECORD	REFER
	OPERATIONAL	• Senior Protection Officer • Field Officer • CBI Officer • Resettlement Officer • Durable Solutions Officer • Partners / Private sector service providers
	SEA	• Senior Protection Officer / PSEA focal point • IGO
	STAFF CONDUCT	• Senior Protection Officer • Anti-fraud focal point • IGO
	PARTNER REPORTS	• Protection Officer

INTER-AGENCY REFERRAL

RESPOND

Who is responsible for responding, what type of response (i.e., support to survivors if SEA)

REPORTING & ANALYSIS

How is the feedback/ complaint data analyzed for trends

RESPOND	REPORTING & ANALYSIS
• Lead Agency	• Response or action shared at coordination meetings • Analysis of trends conducted and shared regularly at MFT meetings
• Lead Agency • IGO or other investigation service	• High Commissioner's Annual Report on disciplinary matters
• Human resources	• High Commissioner's Annual Report on disciplinary matters
• Reporting officer	• Reports forwarded to regional office

RESULTS USED FOR DECISION - MAKING

ACCESS TO INFORMATION → ACCESSIBLE AVENUES TO MAKE COMPLAINTS → REFERRAL PATHWAYS → RESOLUTION → FEEDBACK

Opening committee → Committee Secretary

@ → Protection Help Desk

Call Center

CRRM

INTERNAL FOCAL POINTS

Sub-Office Unit — RST email

Protection email — Reg'n /RSD email

IGO

CLOSED

Allegations of misconduct of staff of UNHCR / partner / contractor

PARTNER

IP / OP complaints Focal Point

Private sector customer service

Head of Country Office

RMCQ UNIT

POC fraud → Fraud by PoCs SOPs - AFFP

Integrity Officer

Allegations of misconduct → Head RMCQ

GOVERNMENT

Head of RAS — EACC

IG of Police — IPOA

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

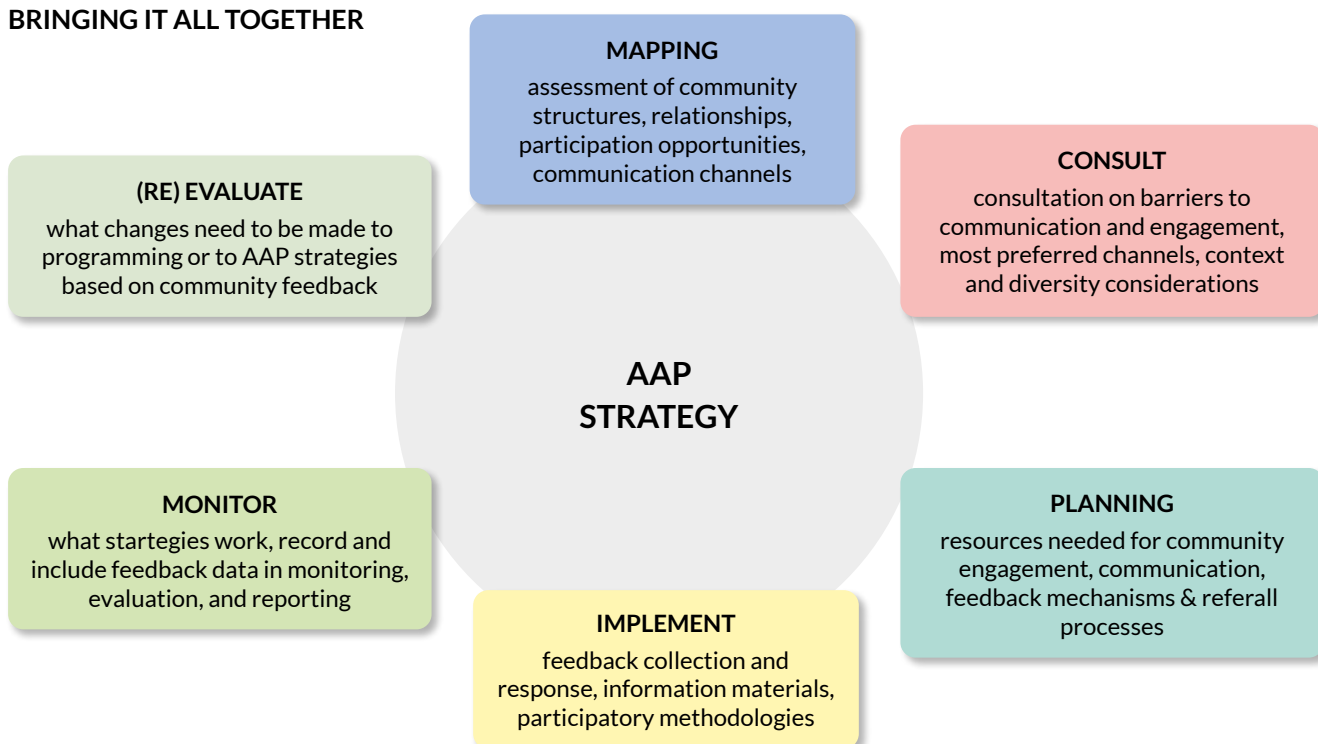SOPs formally establish the internal process flow of the feedback and response system, including response timelines, roles and responsibilities regarding referrals, and procedures for dealing with different types of feedback and complaints. In short, SOPs create predictable and transparent processes for who does what, when, and how – at each step of the process. It is important to establish SOPs and to clearly communicate what a system can and cannot do (i.e., to specify its scope and purpose).

SOPs should include:

- Definitions and categories of feedback/complaints (operational, sensitive and non-sensitive);

- Parameters for which issues the organisation will deal with or accept feedback on (non-political, etc.);

- The different types of feedback mechanisms available and their associated protocols;

- Referral protocols- internally and to other agencies;

- Response timelines for response to feedback;

- Roles and responsibilities for each step of the process (collection, storage, processing, recording/ documentation, analysis, reporting, referral, response and use of findings for programme adaptation); and

- How feedback data will be used in programme processes.

The processes and activities in the SOPs (i.e., what is required to make the feedback and response system work) should inform decisions about planning, staffing, and resource allocation.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

MAPPING
assessment of community structures, relationships, participation opportunities, communication channels

CONSULT
consultation on barriers to communication and engagement, most preferred channels, context and diversity considerations

(RE) EVALUATE
what changes need to be made to programming or to AAP strategies based on community feedback

AAP STRATEGY

MONITOR
what startegies work, record and include feedback data in monitoring, evaluation, and reporting

PLANNING
resources needed for community engagement, communication, feedback mechanisms & referall processes

IMPLEMENT
feedback collection and response, information materials, participatory methodologies

Inter-agency Accountability Partnerships

Accountability to the communities we serve is shared by our partners and other actors. The accountability commitments the organisation holds itself to, extend to activities implemented through partners on behalf of the organisation. Consequently, selection of partners should take into account their demonstrable commitment to the areas outlined in UNHCR's AAP framework.

The actions and behaviours of partners and other actors that operate with, or on behalf of UNHCR, have consequences, and lasting impact.

- ✓ Awareness of the AAP framework's expectations should be raised with partners, and AAP commitments should be reflected through Contractual Agreements, Memorandums of Understanding, Partnership Agreements, work plans, and performance monitoring reports.

- ✓ Conduct capacity building of partners in the elements of the AAP framework and codes of conduct regarding Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.[23]

- ✓ Establish clear lines of accountability and performance management in AAP for contractual partners.

- ✓ Create opportunities for partners' continual improvement of accountability practice.

- ✓ Not all the issues raised by persons of concern may be directly relevant to UNHCR staff and/or the organisation's activities. Not all partners may have feedback mechanisms in place. Persons of concern may use UNHCR systems to provide feedback to other organisations and vice versa. Referral processes with partners in the operating context are a necessary part of partnering on accountability.

- ✓ While UNHCR is not responsible for the resolution of the issues raised about another organisation, it is however, important to follow up and ensure that resolution is made.

Guidance for working with other agencies on PSEA for creating specific Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) for receiving complaints and reporting on sexual exploitation and abuse is available on the Ethics Office and IGO intranet pages. Please reference: IGO information, Zero Tolerance, about how to report incidents of SEA; UNHCR Administrative Instructions on PSEA Planning and Budgeting for 2018; the UNHCR Facilitators' Training Manual; and the Best Practice Guide for inter-agency community-based complaint mechanism.

Inter-agency Feedback Systems

In some instances, AAP is implemented in an interagency context with common systems for the recording of feedback, which is then forwarded to the relevant organisation for action. The benefits of interagency accountability partnerships are both practicality and mutual accountability. In some operational areas it may be more practical to use a common mechanism for the capture of feedback. This may be due to limitations in resources or access for humanitarian actors. Whenever possible, UNHCR should take a lead role in establishing, funding and coordinating interagency feedback systems, either directly or in partnership with other entities.

AAP strategies should be designed around what makes the most sense to serve people of concern. If a number of agencies are working together in the same area, multiple complaints mechanisms can be confusing. Community consultations and assessments can be done collectively, and communication channels can be jointly created and managed. The highest priority should be establishing systems that do not over burden communities, and are easiest for them to use and access.

It is important to note that while collaboration and inter-agency accountability is encouraged, the responsibility for resolution rests with the entity delivering the services in question. Interagency systems can help to capture feedback, for referral. The duty to respond falls on the organisation in a position to effect the required change in accordance with its internal procedures.

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23   United Nations, *UN Protocol on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse involving Implementing Partners*, 2018.

Where interagency policies and guidelines exist, they can be used as a reference to inform internal accountability and quality management systems.

Things to consider with Inter-Agency Systems

1. Mandate of the inter-agency system.

2. Practicalities around the system's operation (scope, process flow, timelines, resources, data protection and security, information sharing).

3. Roles and mutual Accountabilities.

4. Access, Appropriateness, Sustainability.

5. Internal support and referral systems.

Important Steps

1. Agree on purpose, scope, limitations, coverage and timelines for referral and response.

2. Have focal persons internally for issues to be referred to and to respond to persons of concern.

3. Agree on responsibilities, processes, and timelines for response and closing the feedback loop.

4. Preposition necessary resources and clear policies to support the commitments internally.

5. Align with existing community processes and have clear messaging common to all partners on the system, how it works its limitations and what persons of concern can expect re response.

6. Uniform awareness raising and communication on the system by all agencies.

MANDATE OF THE INTER-AGENCY SYSTEM

Scope

Does the feedback and response system deal with PSEA, fraud corruption, SGBV, operational issues?

Avoid having multiple systems for different things, in the same area. While it's important to have options so as to cover the whole community i.e. Considering differences in literacy and access. Do not confuse/ frustrate people with separate systems for different thematic issues.

Limitations: What it will not deal with and where such issues will be referred (police, local leadership, etc.).

OPERATIONAL

Coverage

All camps, all settlements, all community groups or restricted to a geographical area or type of area?

Ideally the agency covering a particular zone runs the system there and forwards to other partners any issues relevant to them.

PRACTICALITIES

Mechanisms

Hotline, boxes, visits, etc. What is being used? can it be improved to reach a wider range; which agency covers which system/ area?

Based on what persons of concern have expressed as desired methods.

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

SOPs

What is the common understanding on sensitive and non-sensitive issues, confidentiality and referral timelines, recording of data and access to responses from the different organisations?

The SOPs used should not conflict with the organization's internal systems. Clear communication on what to do with – and how to share information about – PSEA, Fraud, Operational issues, SGBV and agree in advance on the way forward should there me conflicting agency positions.

Modalities for safe and secure storage and sharing of information i.e. what information will be shared with whom, how, at which level of aggregation, for which purposes.

Expectations

What agencies are expected to report back on to other agencies, and also what resource commitments are required. It should be averages on response rates and not case details.

COMMUNITY BASED (ACCESS, PREFERENCES, ETC.)

Accessibility

Do marginalised groups access, do we create any marginalistion through the system's coverage.

Appropriateness

Alignment with preferences expressed by target groups in consultations.

INTERNAL SYSTEMS

Feedback process flow Chart

Internal Feedback flow chart on who will do what, when and how to close the feedback loop.

Complaints Records

System in place for storing and recording disaggregated feedback and resolutions/responses made.

Data Analysis

Time and resources are needed to move from the raw data of the individual cases to information about overall feedback received and actions taken, notably to inform programme design and course corrections.

Communication

Internal Communication packages for partners who may deal with queries on UNHCR it can simply be a set of UNHCR FAQs for the agency operating the hotline.

Responsiveness

Response. While you do not want to have multiple systems, an interagency system does not negate the need for independent organizational systems. The goal is full access and coverage with responsiveness.

Feedback and Response tip Sheet

Resourcing: Feedback and response systems cannot run effectively without adequate planning and resourcing. Set aside funding for AAP-related activities and clearly outline the persons responsible for different aspects of the feedback systems. In particular identify who will provide responses, record feedback and complaints, and track and report on feedback.

Recording Feedback: For feedback to be used to inform decisions or provide useful trend analyses, the data must be collected, stored and recorded in a structured and consistent manner. Both formal and informal feedback must be captured continually by staff in contact with persons of concern. Where possible, feedback collection should be designed to allow sharing and comparison of data with other humanitarian agencies in the operating context (i.e., data should be interoperable).

Responding to Feedback: Setting up a feedback mechanism (e.g., box, hotline, email account) does not imply a functional feedback and response process unless the feedback loop remains closed and responses are given within the stipulated time. Failure to respond undermines the credibility of a system and its impact/usefulness.

Multiple Systems: Balance between providing feedback options to different community groups and the number of systems available from one organisation. Remember that persons of concern may not distinguish between humanitarian actors and sectors. Be aware of any existing interagency feedback mechanisms in your context, to avoid the confusion caused by parallel mechanisms from different aid organisations within the same operating context.

Sensitive Complaints: Feedback mechanisms should exist for sensitive and non-sensitive feedback, in particular for issues relating to PSEA and SGBV. The complainant/ person giving feedback has the right to decide whether they feel their issue is sensitive or not. Establish focal person for referrals from other organisations. Staff must be trained in feedback handling, including identification and referral of SEA.

Internal Support Structures: Determine how (and by whom) feedback will be received, processed and recorded, and how the feedback and response system fits within the operational structure. Staff with a role in planning, monitoring, management (decision-making), and communications should be involved to allow feedback captured across sectors to be channelled to appropriate decision-makers, and for timely responses to the community.

Intended Purpose: Creating feedback mechanisms for the sake of it (as a box-checking exercise) results in ineffective, tokenistic mechanisms that can cause more harm than good. The purpose and scope of a feedback and response system must be clear to staff, partners, and persons of concern from the outset. Feedback mechanisms pertain to the community's relationship with UNHCR and its partners, and should therefore be related to protection, assistance and solutions programmes, and any issues regarding the conduct of staff.

Specialised Mechanisms: Use an integrated system for feedback in the operation rather than creating different mechanisms for instance for SEA, WASH or Cash related complaints. Do not set up SEA-specific mechanisms, as these could expose survivors, or those at risk of SEA, and increase their protection risks.

Targeted Access: Consideration must be given to the specific persons the feedback system will serve. For instance, systems designed for children will greatly differ from those designed for adults. The level of accessibility for the targeted users will determine the effectiveness of a feedback mechanism.

PRACTICAL TOOLS

🔧 **Menu of AAP questions for needs assessment**

IASC-REACH menu of questions that can be used with different types of data collection methods including household and community level interviews and focus group discussions in the design and adaptation of communications strategies, inter-agency feedback mechanisms and participation strategies.

🔧 **Key considerations when establishing feedback mechanisms**

List of key questions for a context analysis. [PDF]

🔧 **10 steps to setting up an effective feedback mechanism**

10 key steps to setting up an effective feedback mechanism based on experience. See also *Feedback Mechanisms in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*.

🔧 **Feedback and complaint Database (excel); Weekly Logbook Sample (word); Feedback and Complaints**

Feedback Logbook examples. [Excel] [Word] [PDF]

Outlines key information to be recorded in a feedback database.

🔧 **Using Complaint Cards (Jordan)**

Low literacy options for soliciting community feedback. [PDF]

🔧 **Closing the Feedback Loop**

Tips on how to close the feedback loop.

🔧 **Jordan Consultations on Community-Based Complaint Mechanism**

Using the participatory assessment for consultation of feedback mechanisms. [PDF]

ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING & ADAPTATION

UNHCR COMMITMENT

At a minimum, all UNHCR operations will adapt programmes and strategies in response to input from persons of concern, and document this in Country Operations Plans and Annual Reporting.

UNHCR OPERATIONS ARE EXPECTED TO:

➡ Adapt programmes and strategies in response to input from persons of concern, and document this in Country Operations Plans and Annual Reporting.

➡ Document lessons learnt from continuous engagement with communities of concern.

➡ Measure and improve accountability to persons of concern through assessments of organisational performance on AAP.

Why is this important?

Learning from our continuous engagement with communities and adapting programmes in line with community feedback is a measure of UNHCR's effective commitment to AAP. The ultimate goal of AAP is programming that is informed by, and adapted to, the voices, perceptions and needs expressed by persons of concern.

It is even more important in situations of reduced funding, to ensure persons of concern are informed about and are part of the reprioritization process.

What does it look like?

✔ Responsibilities for the collection, storage, analysis, reporting, dissemination and use of feedback information are embedded within the operational structure.

✔ Feedback data is analysed and used in programme planning and design decisions, and as a component of monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

✔ Evidence of programmatic changes and decisions that are directly linked to community participation and feedback.

✔ Consistently closed feedback loops throughout the operations management cycle (e.g. responses to queries/feedback, reports to community on results of surveys and assessments).

✔ Lessons learned from operationalising AAP are documented and shared between UNHCR operations.

✔ Periodic reporting includes aggregate data from feedback by persons of concern.

What if we don't do this?

✖ The effectiveness, impact, and quality of programming is compromised when the expressed priorities, needs, capacities and views of persons of concern are not systematically included.

✖ UNHCR will not meet the humanitarian standards on AAP and donor requirements related to documenting evidence of how feedback is used in programming decisions and of the engagement of populations of concern.

✖ Programmes will not adequately respond to the needs of the populations of concern.

✪ UNHCR's external commitments will not be met. Collectively and individually, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) have endorsed Commitments to AAP, and undertaken to ensure AAP is incorporated into organisational policies and operational guidelines, and to promote them with all partners.

How can we do this?

> ★ **EXAMPLES OF RELEVANT QUESTIONS FOR THE OPERATION**
>
> - How is feedback integrated into programming in your operation?
>
> - Does your operation make changes to programming in response to feedback received from persons of concern?
>
> - Does your operation report on the feedback trends identified, so that they can be used to inform strategy, programming, procedures and best practices in your operation and other operations?
>
> - Does performance management of partners include the collection and use of inputs from persons of concern?

LEARN FROM FEEDBACK AND ALTER THE PROGRAMME ACCORDINGLY

Include an agenda item in meetings to discuss perceptions/views of persons of concern with clear action points.

Maintain a system to track progress and trends and monitor responses to individual and community feedback.

Feedback data validates evaluation and monitoring reports with quantitative and qualitative evidence.

Document lessons learnt, what worked well, areas for improvement, best practices. Decisions on operational priorities and direction are informed by documented feedback from persons of concern and interaction with them.

Share knowledge between operations. This will ensure that best practice is Incorporated into organisational guidance, procedures, and policies.

Measure and report on impact. An analysis of the feedback data across operations contributes to a global overview of the impact and performance of UNHCR's protection, assistance, and solutions programming, based on evidence directly from persons of concern.

Include substantive information on how AAP commitments have been translated into action in Annual Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) Accountability reporting.

> AAP processes function as a daily monitoring tool for **quality assurance and monitoring of protection, assistance, and solutions programmes.**

Key actions for organizational learning and adaptation

❶ ....
Link between feedback and decision making
Decisions made on priorities and direction must be informed by feedback and interaction between UNHCR and persons of concern.

❷ ....
Monitoring and evaluation
AAP activities function as a daily monitoring tool for protection and assistance programmes. Trend analyses from feedback data (e.g. most common complaint areas, increase or reduction of certain complaint categories) should be included in measuring programme effectiveness and impact.

❸ ....
Course correction
Adaptation of programme plans, or programmatic changes during implementation, shows learning and continual improvement.

❹ ....
Reporting
Documenting feedback and the direction in which persons of concern lead the organisation, is crucial for determining country level operational priorities and

protection and solutions strategies. While it is true that engagement with communities and prioritisation of age, gender and diversity regularly take place, evidence of this must be captured in a structured, consistent, analytical manner, and frequently enough to measure impact.

❺ ....

Track progress and trends

By using a feedback and complaints system feedback from persons of concern can be analysed periodically to track and report on performance in a particular aspect of programming. For example, changes in the level of participation of women over time may be shown through the disaggregation of feedback by gender.

❻ ....

Staff AAP Roles

All staff play a role in facilitating the learning and adaptation resulting from community participation and feedback. This process, as with all programming outputs, requires planning and resourcing. A key responsibility for leadership is to ensure the proactive planning for and execution of accountability commitments.

Staff Accountability Roles

Senior management has a role in facilitating the process of learning and the adaptation that results from information from community participation and feedback.

Protection and programme management roles and responsibilities in AAP include:

- ◉ Knowledge and understanding of AAP benchmarks, the standards the organisation is committed to, and their application.

- ◉ Incorporation of the AAP commitments into guidelines and procedures.

- ◉ Incorporation of AAP roles within the operational structure with relevant authority, expertise and clear reporting lines.

- ◉ Proactive monitoring of implementation of accountability standards and changes resulting from feedback.

- ◉ Responsiveness to complaints raised.

- ◉ Periodical reporting on results of accountability activities.

- ◉ Identification of partners with a demonstrated commitment to accountability to affected people.

- ◉ Raising implementing partner's awareness of UNHCR's AAP commitments and strengthen capacity of partners, (including national, local and community-based organisations) to operationalise AAP.

- ◉ Performance management, through the inclusion of AAP activities, and outcomes in staff performance appraisals, including at mid-management and senior levels.

AAP in periodical reporting can include

- ◉ An outline of the AAP activities that were implemented at different points of the operations management cycle by an operation.

- ◉ Demonstration of the impact of the activities for persons of concern (e.g., increased empowerment, ownership, and partnership).

- ◉ Robust evidence of regular use of feedback to directly inform organisational strategy.

- ◉ Trends in feedback and response.

- ◉ Highlights of areas of learning and improvement in programming along with successes.

AAP IN THE OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT CYCLE

Accountability is identified as one of the key elements of protection mainstreaming[24], alongside participation and empowerment, meaningful access, providing safety and dignity, and avoiding causing harm. The operations management cycle is the process by which a UNHCR office organizes its protection programming.

Some phases of the cycle can take place simultaneously (e.g. assessment and implementation) or repeatedly (e.g., monitoring throughout the year, reporting at mid-year and year-end) depending on the situation and operational realities. The operations management cycle should be dynamic, with constant adjustments to programming, reflecting the variable nature of the environments in which UNHCR operates.

Ensuring accountability to affected people (AAP) throughout the operations management cycle requires that persons of concern have access and opportunity to input into the design of programmes and the decisions that are made throughout all phases of the operations management cycle.

Each step of the cycle, has opportunities for the practical improvement of accountability, and some aspects of AAP are applicable throughout all the phases of the operations management cycle. The activities outlined can be applied in emergency contexts as appropriate.

The accountability core actions need to be considered at each stage of the operations management cycle. One component cannot be effectively applied without the other and any action on one has a direct impact on the other. Likewise, inaction in one area will have a negative impact on the others.

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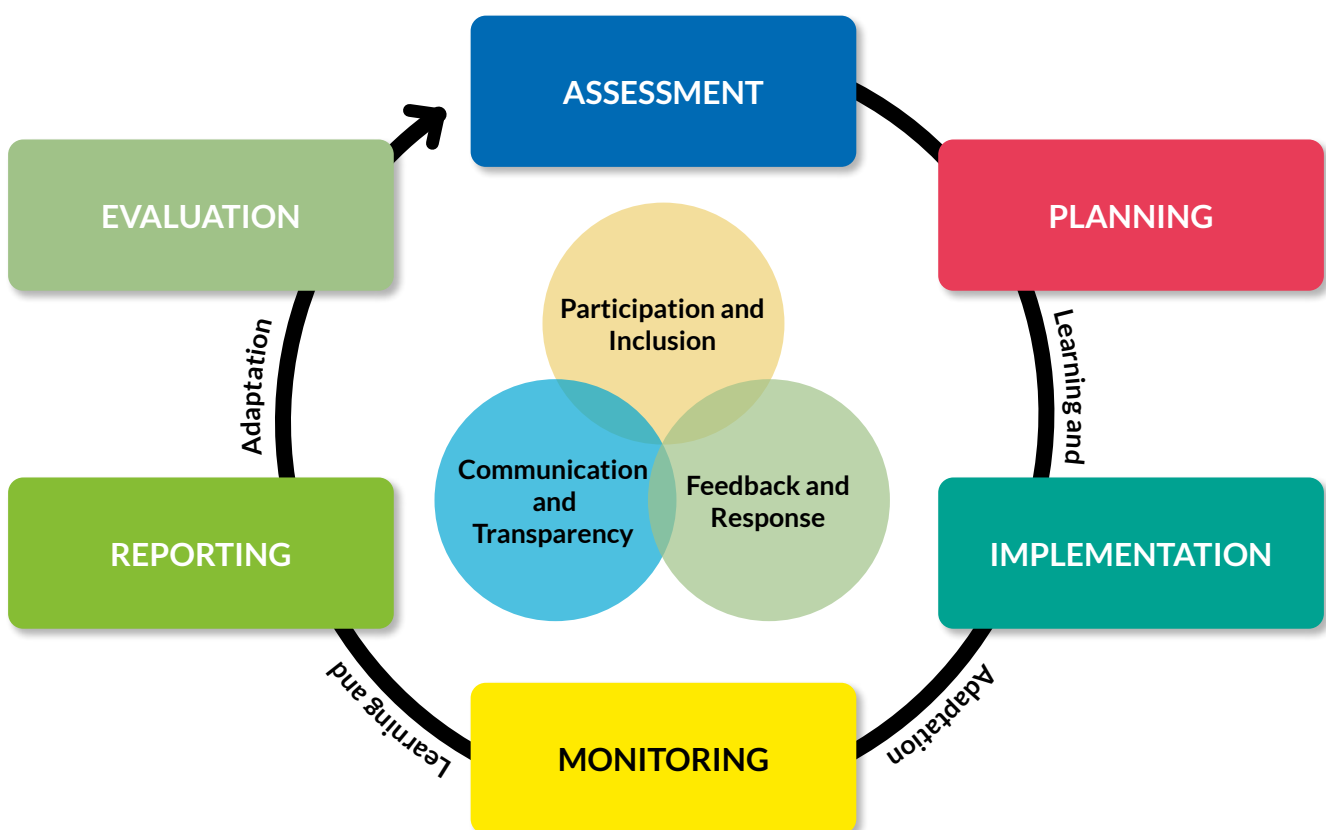
24   Global Protection Cluster, available at: https://bit.ly/2p5Ngym.

ASSESSMENT

Assessments involve systematically gathering and analysing evidence on the needs, risks, threats, vulnerabilities and capacities of people of concern to inform decision making, and a full range of operational activities, including programme implementation and monitoring. The objective of an assessment is to identify gaps between the current situation of persons of concern and agreed standards. Assessment takes place with the active involvement of persons of concern.

While a formal assessment exercise must take place on an annual basis to inform the planning exercise, assessments should be a continuous process that takes place throughout the year.

AAP activities during Assessment include:

- Conducting community assessments to identify community preferences for information provision, consultation, participation, feedback and response mechanisms.

- Exploring the community's context and culture (including conflict awareness) to avoid causing harm.

- Conducting community level stakeholder analyses and relationship mapping with different population groups.

- Developing a strategy to share the findings, decisions, conclusions and actions from the assessment with all persons of concern.

- Engaging communities in designing participatory assessments.

- Ensuring the representation of all age, gender, and diversity groups in the community.

- Ensuring that people of concern participate in prioritizing the results of needs assessments and are informed about the outcomes of this prioritization process.

PLANNING

Planning is the process by which the findings from assessments are translated into the design of programmes, taking into account the local context and global and regional priorities. This phase involves an important resource allocation element as operations formulate comprehensive budgets (OP), based on total needs identified and an analysis of implementation capacities and prioritized budgets (OL), based on projections of available resources.

AAP activities during the planning phase include:

- Developing strategies for the operationalization and resourcing of community engagement activities throughout the operations management cycle with indicators to measure progress.

- Inserting issues identified by persons of concern and key assessment findings on participation, communication and feedback and response, into the protection and solutions strategy and the operations plan.

- Ensuring Persons of concern have an opportunity to provide input in the design of the monitoring framework indicators.

- Allocating adequate resources for implementing actions related to AAP in project plans, and budgets including responsibilities and expectations for UNHCR and partners, in project partnership agreements.

- Planning for reporting back to persons of concern on the programme priorities to be implemented.

- Informing people of concern about participation opportunities in annual planning exercises.

- Planning for opportunities in the cycle to ensure that feedback and complaints from people of concern can be integrated into programme adjustments in an effective and timely manner.

- Where possible, select partners with a demonstrated commitment to accountability to affected people.

- Plan for and resource capacity strengthening for staff and partners in AAP.

- Advocating for the inclusion of key findings related to accountability, gender, age, diversity, and disability, in the country operating plan and the monitoring framework design.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation is the delivery of the activities outlined during the planning phase of the operations plan as UNHCR's response to the issues identified during assessment. It is undertaken directly by UNHCR and through operational partnerships.

AAP in implementation extends to partners and should be considered during selection, negotiation, drafting, signing, management, monitoring and closure of the commercial contracts and partnership agreements.

AAP activities during implementation include:

- Programme implementation and monitoring done with the meaningful participation of communities in a manner that enables their feedback and engagement.

- AAP systems (communication, feedback, participation, complaints mechanism) are implemented and information on their existence is publicly available.

- Ongoing analysis of feedback and complaints that translates into actions and response, and informs adjustments to programming and future strategic planning.

- Supporting interagency accountability initiatives relevant to local contexts, and other projects aiming to improve communication and feedback, and ensure safeguards against corruption and SEA.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring: Monitoring is the continuous review of programme implementation to confirm whether planned activities are on track to deliver the expected outputs and contribute to the expected impact. UNHCR measures progress towards targets for outputs and objectives using performance and impact indicators from its results framework.

Evaluation. Evaluation is the analysis and assessment, in as systematic, impartial and objective a manner as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area or institutional performance. Evaluation focuses on expected and achieved accomplishments and examines the results chain, processes, contextual factors and causality in order to understand achievements or the lack thereof.

AAP activities during monitoring and evaluation include:

- Participation of persons of concern in the analysis and prioritization of monitoring results by implementing participatory monitoring exercises.

- Ensure monitoring is done with the meaningful participation of communities in a manner that enables their contribution.

- In your evaluation, include ways to review project successes and failures with persons of concern, and to share and verify findings.

- Share monitoring and evaluation results with persons of concern and the subsequent actions and decisions made.

- Include data collected through ongoing community engagement and feedback mechanisms during implementation.

- Document learning and any changes made to programming as a result of feedback from persons of concern.

- Use documented learning and feedback from persons of concern to influence future programme design.

REPORTING

Reporting: Reporting is the process of documenting what has been achieved, based primarily on monitoring conducted by UNHCR and its partners. Reporting also informs donors how funding has been used.

AAP responsibilities during reporting include:

- Reporting on the operation's overall progress on achieving accountability to persons of concern including through AGD mandatory reporting.

- Including data on feedback and response trends, participation, and the resolution of issues that have been raised by persons of concern, in the annual report.

- Including priorities developed with persons of concern in fundraising proposals to allow for funding to be directed to needs identified by persons of concern.

AAP IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

UNHCR is accountable to persons of concern from the outset of an emergency. This requires direct and continuous work with communities of concern, to ensure and enable their participation in decisions that affect their lives. Preparedness makes it possible to respond faster, more appropriately and efficiently, and to make decisions based on reliable information.

AAP activities in Emergency Preparedness:

- ✓ Gathering data and information on the communications landscape, existing information channels used by the community, their information needs – and anticipating how these can be affected by an emergency.

- ✓ Assessing existing coordination systems and community-based processes and how they can be activated in an emergency.

- ✓ Establishing and acquainting staff and the community with preparedness plans that identify partners and coordination mechanisms.

- ✓ Establishing focal persons and clear roles and responsibilities (internal and external) for communication, that can be activated in the event of an emergency.

- ✓ Planning the establishment of feedback systems, where they do not exist.

- ✓ Engaging in ongoing capacity strengthening in AAP for staff and partners as a key part of preparedness activities.

- ✓ Establishing shared commitments on AAP with partners including (where applicable) to guide the coordination of AAP in humanitarian response. (See for example: *Communication with Communities Working Group - Cox's Bazar*, AAP Manifesto, 2019)

Several resources have been developed at the interagency and cluster level to assist with this:

- ✓ The Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) Emergency Directors Group issued the Guidance Note on Protection and Accountability to affected populations in the humanitarian programme cycle, 2015.[25] It sets out actions to be undertaken throughout the humanitarian programme cycle (HPC) to fulfil commitments on Accountability to Affected People (AAP) and to ensure that protection is central to humanitarian response. It sets out the fundamental link between accountability systems and protection in humanitarian action, and then describes, for each stage of the HPC, the accountability mechanisms that should be established and actions required at country-level, as the foundation for appropriate and effective programming to achieve improved protection outcomes for crisis-affected communities.

- ✓ Based on this guidance note, and the IASC Principals' Statement on the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action, December 2013, the Global Protection Cluster has developed a Checklist on incorporating Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle.[26] The Checklist is organised to mirror the three steps of the HPC, namely I) the Needs Overview, II) the Response Planning, and III) the Implementation and Monitoring.

- ✓ Suggested Actions for cluster and inter cluster coordination groups to strengthen Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle: This document developed by IASC along with OCHA and the Global Protection Cluster provides suggested actions in field operations to fulfil commitments on Accountability to Affected People (AAP) and to ensure that Protection is central to humanitarian response.[27]

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[25]   IASC, *Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle*, Emergency Directors Group (EDG), 2015.

[26]   Global Protection Cluster, *Checklist on incorporating Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle*, n.d.

[27]   Global Protection Cluster, *Suggested Actions for cluster coordination groups to strengthen Accountability to Affected Populations and Protection in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle*, September 2016.

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