Global frameworks and commitments on communication and community engagement

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This note was developed by Lois Austin, Independent Consultant, as part of her work on the CDAC Network paper on “The Role of Collective Platforms, Services and Tools to support Communication and Community engagement”.

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There are a number of global level frameworks and commitments that have components specific to communication and community engagement. Whilst these spell out what action needs to be taken they are not consistently and coherently taken on board by humanitarian actors. They include:

- The Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) AAP Commitments
- The IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action
- IASC EDG Preliminary Guidance Note – Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC)
- The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability
- The Principles of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Response Programmes
- The Red Cross Movement Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)
- The World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) Grand Bargain

One of the most recent calls for action in this area came from the May 2016 WHS and the Grand Bargain. Here, accountability to affected people was a key theme and this area of work has a dedicated commitment included in the Grand Bargain focusing on a participation revolution through which agencies and donors commit to include people receiving aid in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Forty-five stakeholders made individual commitments in this area.

The Grand Bargain Participation Revolution commitment identifies a number of core components of “participation” and urges humanitarian actors to:

- Dialogue with and listen to affected people and communities, including to those most vulnerable and those most at risk.
- Act based on what we’ve heard.
- Give feedback on the decisions and the action we’ve taken.
- Receive feedback on how our response is received.
- Adapt our action based on the feedback received.
- Provide accessible, timely and relevant information.
The IASC AAP commitments, the IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action and the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) in particular, outline three essential components that are required of humanitarian responses in relation to communication and community engagement:

- Participation
- Feedback and complaints mechanisms
- Information provision.

Table 1, below, highlights some of the key frameworks and commitments in relation to communication and community engagement that are already in place.

| Key frameworks and commitments in relation to communication and community engagement |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability** | Commitments: 3. Communities and people affected by crisis are not negatively affected and are more prepared, resilient and less at-risk as a result of humanitarian action. 4. Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them. 5. Communities and people affected by crisis have access to safe and responsive mechanisms to handle complaints. |
| **Global Standard for CSO Accountability** | The Global Standard for CSO Accountability is an initiative of nine well-established civil society accountability networks from around the world. The overarching aim is to strengthen the effectiveness of CSOs worldwide by devising a collective Global Standard on CSO Accountability. The networks will over three years cooperate to learn from each other, gain a truly global view on CSO accountability, improve their codes and reduce transaction costs. The standard is currently in draft format. |
| **IASC Accountability to Affected Populations Commitments** | The five Commitments to Accountability to Affected Populations (CAAP) are: 1. **LEADERSHIP/GOVERNANCE**: Demonstrate their commitment to accountability to affected populations by ensuring feedback and accountability mechanisms are integrated into country strategies, programme proposals, monitoring and evaluations, recruitment, staff inductions, trainings and performance management, partnership agreements, and highlighted in reporting. 2. **TRANSPARENCY**: Provide accessible and timely information to affected populations on organizational procedures, structures and processes that affect them to ensure that they can make informed decisions and |
choices, and facilitate a dialogue between an organisation and its affected populations over information provision.

3. **FEEDBACK and COMPLAINTS:** Actively seek the views of affected populations to improve policy and practice in programming, ensuring that feedback and complaints mechanisms are streamlined, appropriate and robust enough to deal with (communicate, receive, process, respond to and learn from) complaints about breaches in policy and stakeholder dissatisfaction. Specific issues raised by affected individuals regarding violations and/or physical abuse that may have human rights and legal, psychological or other implications should have the same entry point as programme-type complaints, but procedures for handling these should be adapted accordingly.

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

5. **DESIGN, MONITORING AND EVALUATION:** Design, monitor and evaluate the goals and objectives of programmes with the involvement of affected populations, feeding learning back into the organisation on an ongoing basis and reporting on the results of the process.

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<tr>
<th>Inter-Agency Standing Committee Emergency Disaster Group Preliminary Guidance Note – Protection and Accountability to Affected Populations in the Humanitarian Programme Cycle</th>
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<td>This note sets out actions to be undertaken throughout the humanitarian programme cycle (HPC) to fulfil commitments on Accountability to Affected Populations (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.</td>
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<th>IFRC Strategy 2020</th>
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<td>Encompasses our commitment to prevent and alleviate suffering and contribute to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world by the Red Cross and Red Crescent through the provision of beneficiary-centred aid delivery services in which:</td>
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<td>- Affected populations are involved in setting priorities and creating plans for recovery programmes</td>
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<td>- The affected population ‘owns’ the relief and recovery response</td>
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<td>- The Red Cross and Red Crescent will hold itself accountable to the affected people we serve.</td>
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IFRC General Assembly Resolution, Sydney, Australia, 2013: DD/6.4/1

The General Assembly,
- recommends that National Societies integrate beneficiary communications at all levels of disaster management and disaster risk reduction, health prevention and social inclusion work, including early-warning, needs and impact assessments
- recognizes that rapid growth in access to communications technology presents new opportunities to inform, listen to, be accountable to and empower the communities we serve
- welcomes the innovative leadership that many National Societies are showing in capturing community voices in support of better services and advocacy for vulnerable communities
- encourages National Societies to explore, pilot, form partnerships and share experiences on integrating beneficiary communications in disaster management and disaster risk reduction, health services, social inclusion and National Society decision making processes
- urges National Societies to integrate community engagement in programme design and management, and to use beneficiary communication to strengthen evidence-based advocacy in their auxiliary role in providing prevention and life-saving information.

The resolution is the culmination of previous commitments. In particular, the resolution builds on the Movement’s long-established commitment to accountability, including the IFRC’s accountability commitments. The Movement’s commitment to accountability is reflected in a number of documents, including the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief (1995), the Code for Good Partnership of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (2009) and the Principles and Rules for Red Cross and Red Crescent Humanitarian Assistance (2013).

International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement:

A Red Cross Red Crescent Guide to Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA)

CEA is the process of and commitment to providing timely, relevant and actionable life-saving and life-enhancing information to communities. It is about using the most appropriate communication approaches to listen to communities’ needs, feedback and complaints, ensuring they can actively participate and guide Red Cross Red Crescent actions.

Provides minimum actions to integrate CEA into programming at all stages of the programme cycle.
| The Grand Bargain | Commitment 6 – A participation revolution: include people receiving aid in making the decisions which affect their lives.  
We need to include the people affected by humanitarian crises and their communities in our decisions to be certain that the humanitarian response is relevant, timely, effective and efficient. We need to provide accessible information, ensure that an effective process for participation and feedback is in place and that design and management decisions are responsive to the views of affected communities and people.  
Donors and aid organisations should work to ensure that the voices of the most vulnerable groups considering gender, age, ethnicity, language and special needs are heard and acted upon. This will create an environment of greater trust, transparency and accountability. The following commitments will help promote the Core Humanitarian Standard and the IASC Commitments to Accountability to Affected populations:  
Aid organisations and donors commit to:  
1) Improve leadership and governance mechanisms at the level of the humanitarian team and cluster/sector mechanisms to ensure engagement with and accountability to people and communities affected by crises.  
2) Develop common standards and a coordinated approach for community engagement and participation, with the emphasis on inclusion of the most vulnerable, supported by a common platform for sharing and analysing data to strengthen decision-making, transparency, accountability and limit duplication.  
3) Strengthen local dialogue and harness technologies to support more agile, transparent but appropriately secure feedback.  
4) Build systematic links between feedback and corrective action to adjust programming.  
Donors commit to:  
5) Fund flexibly to facilitate programme adaptation in response to community feedback.  
6) Invest time and resources to fund these activities.  
Aid organisations commit to:  
7) Ensure that, by the end of 2017, all humanitarian response plans – and strategic monitoring of them – demonstrate analysis and consideration of inputs from affected communities. |
We hold ourselves accountable to both those we seek to assist and those from whom we accept resources.

### Core Standard 1: People-centred humanitarian response

People’s capacity and strategies to survive with dignity are integral to the design and approach of humanitarian response.

**Key action:** Establish systematic and transparent mechanisms through which people affected by disaster or conflict can provide regular feedback and influence programmes.

**Key action:** Support local capacity by identifying community groups and social networks at the earliest opportunity and build on community-based and self-help initiatives.

**Key action:** Establish systematic and transparent mechanisms through which people affected by disaster or conflict can provide regular feedback and influence programmes.

**Key action:** Ensure a balanced representation of vulnerable people in discussions with the disaster-affected population.

**Key action:** Provide information to the affected population about the humanitarian agency, its project(s) and people’s entitlements in an accessible format and language.

**Key action:** Provide the affected population with access to safe and appropriate spaces for community meetings and information-sharing at the earliest opportunity.

**Key action:** Enable people to lodge complaints about the programme easily and safely and establish transparent, timely procedures for response and remedial actions.

**Humanitarian charter, number 12:** “our commitment” that we undertake to make our responses more effective, appropriate and accountable through sound assessment and monitoring of the evolving local context; through transparency of information and decision-making; through more effective coordination and collaboration with other relevant actors at all levels, as detailed in the Core Standards and minimum standards.
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<th>UNICEF Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action</th>
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| Framework:  
1.15 Communication for development in emergencies seeks to share relevant, action-oriented information so that when disaster strikes, people in affected communities know what actions to take to maintain and protect the health and wellbeing of all their members, including those with disabilities, the elderly and other especially vulnerable groups. It is a consultative process among programme and communication specialists, local authorities, change agents and communities.  
It is misguided to presume that communities affected by humanitarian situations are too shocked and helpless to take on responsibilities. In fact, many people, including children, are able to return to normalcy more quickly when they participate in helping others and themselves during and after an emergency. Communication for development can help to:  
- Support programme sectors in consulting adults, children and young people in affected groups from the onset of a crisis. This has been shown to be a key factor in reducing deaths and promoting psychological healing, cohesion and social mobilization.  
- Forge alliances and bring stakeholders together.  
- Establish a central health education and communication coordination centre.  
- Focus on establishing or re-establishing positive individual and social practices.  
- Conduct a rapid assessment of communication channels and resources.  
- Participate in sectoral assessments that help to identify high-risk practices that have implications for behaviour change communication, as well as opportunities for developing community-based response mechanisms.  
3.1 Media and communications  

*Commitment 1*  
Accurate information about the impact of the situation on children and women is rapidly provided to national committees and the general public through local and international media.  

*Commitment 2*  
Humanitarian needs and the actions taken to address them are communicated in a timely and credible manner to advocate for child-friendly solutions, increase support for the response and, where necessary, assist with fundraising.  