

## 2008 Peer Support Group Meeting

### Notes captured on flipcharts from Block II: Tools and approaches to improving accountability

Guiding questions for the group discussion:

- When approaching the topics below, what foundations did you built (or could build on) in your organisation?
- What new practices did (or will) you have to initiate?
- Where applicable, what have been the key learning points and perceived benefits?

**Session 3:** Promoting relevant staff attitudes and behaviours  
Presentations from Toireas Ni Bhriain & Robyn Wilford (Concern) and  
Jonathan Potter (People in Aid)

**Session 4:** Complaints handling processes for agencies working through partners  
Facilitator: Smruti Patel (HAP)

**Session 5:** Complaint handling by agencies directly operational  
Facilitator: Julian Srodecki (World Vision International)

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### Notes captured on flipcharts

**Session 3:** promoting staff attitudes and behaviours for increased accountability

*Competencies:*

- Agency must have manageable frameworks for line managers
- Involve communities themselves in identifying necessary staff competencies
- Facilitation skills are key for field staff to ensure views (especially of the most vulnerable) are heard; staff need appropriate training
- Give due consideration to the measurement of performance against competencies (both qualitative and quantitative)
- Importance of relevant performance appraisals and links between job descriptions against which people are recruited, and performance review and personal development plans
- Potential mismatch between competencies required for aid worker (hard management skills, decision making etc) and for accountable roles (listening, facilitating, etc)
- Accountability officers may be the beginning of the process but it needs to evolve until humanitarian accountability is effectively mainstreamed into all jobs

*Values:*

- Need to ensure close match between what an organisation says its values are and what happens in practice, else staff become disillusioned
- Leaders need not only to model values but to promote and support them in all directions
- All staff need proper induction into an organisation's values, including drivers, guards, etc

*Key learning*

- Behaviour change is key: needs approaching in some way as any other organisational change process
  - Change agents
  - Strategic planning
- Is beneficiary accountability the main priority? If not, why are we here? Need to reframe all processes (HR, Finance, etc) around accountability
- Credit crunch impact
  - Do we need to develop international community contingency plans to ensure quality staffing despite decrease in funds? E.g. shared accountability officers in field locations between HAP members?

**Session 4:** Complaint handling processes for agencies working through partners

Complaint handling processes for agencies working through partners relate to complaints in three directions: (1) between partners, (2) from beneficiaries to the local partner that implements the project, (3) from beneficiaries directly to the overseas partner that supports the project. There is limited experience in setting up complaint handling processes through which beneficiaries can raise complaints directly with the overseas partner. Most of the practice of HAP members to date has been focused on strengthening procedures to address complaints between partners *and* supporting local partners in enabling beneficiaries to raise complaints directly with them.

*Current approaches*

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- Agencies are integrating complaint processes (that would handle complaints between partners) in partner agreements
- Building on existing relation of trust between the agency and the organisation
- Agencies are raising local partners' awareness and understanding of accountability and complaint handling procedures during existing annual forums
- Collecting existing practice and build case studies to demonstrate to partners what is possible and how a complaint procedure could work
- Piloting with partners complaint handling procedures, also as a means of increasing exposure across partners
  - Start with partners that are more inclined to do this, share values

*Key learning*

- Essential: agency and partners' staff buy-in and understanding of complaint handling procedures and accountability more broadly
- Adapt to local culture
- Assign focal person to manage the partnership and address complaints from partners as soon as they arise
- Assess existing practice through light approaches such as the introduction of questions in partners' evaluation ToRs; Undertake regular monitoring visits which include questions around complaints, to understand existing practice

*Challenge*

Questions remain around how communities can raise complaints directly with the overseas partner.

- HAP agencies will further explore options for facilitating a 3<sup>rd</sup> party system.
- The complaint advisory service provided by the HAP Secretariat will be used more
- Member agencies will actively raise the awareness of partners and beneficiaries of the complaint handling services offered by the HAP Secretariat.

## **Session 5:** Complaint handling by agencies directly operational

Based on presentation from World Vision International. The Food Programming and Management Group (FPMG) requested support from HAP International on piloting up complaint handling processes in food programmes in several countries.

### *Process:*

- Assessment with communities, to develop a process that is culturally appropriate
- In preparation, the following are necessary
  - Culture: management support to change the way that we work
  - Practicalities: forms, pens, paper, time needed, etc
  - Awareness raising and training for staff and communities: to adapt staff attitudes and behaviour, how to use the process

### *What new practices had to be initiated?*

- Info provision: helping communities to understand their rights and entitlements, including the right to raise valid complaints and receive a response
- Design of program:
  - Assessment: what is the most appropriate process for communities to raise complaints?
  - Budgeting: staff and other resources (there is donor support for this type of work)
- Sensitive complaints – related to allegations of staff misconduct, sexual abuse – need to be handled separately. The project undertaken with HAP support showed that community help desks can be a useful means for providing immediate response to programme-related issues, but that sensitive complaints need to be handled through a different process, which ensures confidentiality, independence and protects complainants and the subject of the complaint.

### *Ongoing Considerations:*

- Who does the complaining?
- Who has access to complaint handling processes?
- Social contracts: is the community taking its own civic responsibilities seriously

### *Key learning:*

- The process of developing the process and checking that all relevant parties understand it
- The procedure should be locally-owned, with participation from potential users
- Often, intermediaries will be necessary for communities to raise complaints
- Management need to be ready to respond: how sincere are we about responding?
- Be clear with the community about what you can and cannot complain about.
- Confidence and trust in the system is important: think about risk factors
- Many complaints can be addressed at source and are related to either lack of information or misunderstandings
- Cost implications: complaint-handling processes need not be complicated; start somewhere and take small steps to refine the process!