

Tearfund's approach to improving accountability in North Kenya

As one of the founding members of Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), Tearfund is committed to implementing HAP's Principles of Accountability across all emergency programmes. In order to improve the way it engages local communities in decisions that affect them, shares information with beneficiaries, and provides them with a channel through which concerns can be raised, Tearfund has piloted a new approach for its emergency response programmes in Pakistan and North Kenya – by recruiting a Beneficiary Accountability Officer.

In August 2007 Monica Blagescu and Emily Rogers from the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) worked alongside Tearfund to conduct an accountability assessment of their programme in North Kenya. Over the course of ten days the field team visited four different project sites, spoke with staff and local people, made observations, and reviewed project documentation. This case study reflects the practice that was documented by HAP during this visit, and has been approved by Tearfund for wider dissemination.

North Kenya programme background

The prolonged drought affecting the Horn of Africa has threatened the lives of 11 million people in the region, 3 million of who live in Kenya. The impact was most severe in pastoral areas of Northern Kenya where malnutrition levels exceeded emergency thresholds and livestock losses of up to 70% were reported, resulting in mass migration of pastoralists in search of water, pasture and jobs.

Tearfund responded to the drought in Northern Kenya, Marsabit District, by firstly implementing an emergency therapeutic and supplementary feeding nutrition programme (June '06 to April '07). Later, two more projects – Livelihoods and Food Security, and Water and Sanitation (April to October '07) were launched to focus on longer-term needs of the targeted communities. The former focused on restocking of camels in ten communities, vegetable garden and support to women groups in two communities, while the water and sanitation project focused on the construction of four earth dams through cash for work, of which three have been completed.

Allocated resources

The Beneficiary Accountability Officer for the North Kenya programme started in his role in November '06. The aim of this position was to provide operational support in order to improve accountability practices, integrating them into existing project plans. The focus was on three main areas:

- a) To improve levels of community participation, for example by enabling beneficiary involvement in project design (HAP Standard Benchmark 3).
- b) To increase transparency and information sharing, for example by ensuring that programme information is disseminated to communities (HAP Standard Benchmark 2)
- c) To establish a mechanism for community feedback (HAP Standard Benchmark 5).

The cost of this approach during the later stage of the response from April to October '07 was less than 1.5% of the total project budget. This included the costs for the new staff member and associated activities, including training of the Beneficiary Reference Groups (see below), and production of community notice boards and suggestion boxes.

Brief summary of main activities and achievements

The Beneficiary Accountability Officer, managed by the Area Coordinator, was responsible for the design and implementation of an action plan to improve accountability across the North Kenya programme. As part

of this he was tasked with ensuring that beneficiaries were involved in the design of the assistance they receive, and there was a mechanism for them to give feedback to Tearfund. In addition he was responsible for facilitating information dissemination to communities, and ensuring good practice was reviewed and shared. As part of this he produced monthly reports, which fed into the regular programme progress reports for the headquarters. Annex 1 shows the full job description for this position.

Below is a summary of the Beneficiary Accountability Officer's main achievements, with support from and in collaboration with the programme team:

a) Improving levels of participation

Through a process of community consultation before project implementation, livestock and water committees were established to:

- Provide technical support throughout the surveying and implementation stage.
- Establish a list of vulnerability criteria and identify beneficiaries based on these criteria.
- Follow-up with maintenance after project closure.

The additional responsibility given to the individuals in these committees risked potential conflicts of interest and abuse of power, resulting in beneficiaries identified based on personal connections or clan links rather than based on needs. Therefore to address this concern, and to support Tearfund with hearing the voices of the less vocal in the communities, independent Beneficiary Reference Groups (BRGs) were established at the ten project locations to be the 'eyes' of the community. The BRGs, each comprised of five individuals, were tasked with receiving and processing queries, complaints and feedback from the communities in relation to the implementation of the project, working in close consultation with Tearfund staff so that concerns were swiftly addressed. In particular, the BRGs were able to support Tearfund with hearing the views of the more vulnerable groups, who may have been absent or unable to voice their opinions during public meetings.

For more details see case study: Tearfund North Kenya Programme, Increasing levels of participation – the role of the Beneficiary Reference Groups (BRGs)



b) Transparency and information sharing

While the committees and BRGs played a role in disseminating information to the wider community, notice boards were also established at each of the ten project sites. The location of each board was chosen during a consultative meeting, taking into account security, proximity and the long-term use of the boards. As a result, they were generally placed near water points, community buildings (churches and meeting points) and shops. The notice boards included background information on Tearfund; results of recent relevant surveys (for example on malnutrition levels); the names of the water and livestock committees' and BRGs' members; and a list of beneficiaries, how they were selected, and how individuals could question those selected.

While literacy in these areas is low, community members often reported that those who could read were able to tell others the content and up-date them when new information was added. The very oral nature of these communities facilitated information sharing.

For more details see case study: Tearfund North Kenya Programme, Community notice boards to increase transparency

c) Channels for the community to raise concerns

The Beneficiary Reference Groups provided a means through which community members could raise concerns verbally. However, after consultation with the BRGs, it was also felt that in some locations there was a need to provide an alternative channel through which more sensitive concerns could be raised.



Photo © Emily Rogers, HAP

The Tearfund notice board in Korr is close to the water point in the centre of the town. The camel beneficiaries list was pinned to this board, explaining the selection criteria used and giving community members one week to raise concerns. Feedback from the community revealed there was high level of satisfaction with the transparency in the camel distribution project.

As a result, five suggestion boxes were put in place, so that written concerns could be received and reviewed by Tearfund. Responses to those concerns relevant to the entire community were posted on the notice boards for all to see.

For more details see case study: Tearfund North Kenya Programme, Suggestion boxes for community feedback

Benefits observed

Observation and feedback from the communities showed there were a number of positive outcomes as a result of these new practices:

- Conflict resolution – the BRGs and suggestion boxes were instrumental in providing feedback to Tearfund and highlighting areas of community concern. For example, during the recruitment of community extension workers some candidates felt the local chief had unfairly influenced the process. This issue, which would not have been brought up in a public meeting, was raised through the suggestion boxes. As a result, Tearfund was able to clarify the recruitment process, reassuring the community that a fair process had been conducted, and addressing the concerns before they escalated.
- Strengthening levels of trust in Tearfund – the use of notice boards in particular was felt to improve communication, and community feedback revealed high levels of satisfaction with Tearfund’s levels of transparency. The public list of the beneficiaries identified to receive assistance reassured those individuals that the verbal promises would come to fruition, helping them to plan for the future.
- Community empowerment - as a result of Tearfund’s practices, some communities were able to demand greater accountability from other organisations working in the same area.

Lessons learnt

- The Beneficiary Accountability Officer was a valuable addition to the North Kenya programme, and was able to kick-start improved accountability activities. Accountability needs to be integrated into all other staff roles, from the guards and cooks (who may be the first point of contact for many in the community), to the sector coordinators (who need to factor additional activities into proposals, budgets, field visits etc). A dedicated Beneficiary Accountability Officer can act as a catalyst for this,

supporting other staff to integrate accountability into their activities.

- Commitment from senior managers and clarity on the Beneficiary Accountability Officer role, responsibilities, expectations and how this position relates to the others in the team are needed from the start so that other staff do not perceive the new Officer to have a policing/enforcement role.
- Budgets must incorporate lines for accountability related activities so that the appropriate funding is available. Activities may include holding community meetings, establishing and training committees or reference groups, constructing information notice boards, training of staff etc. Tearfund is aiming to include an “Accountability and Quality” budget line in all programme proposals, with a suggested target of 2-5% of the total project budget.
- There is a need to sensitize staff on beneficiary accountability from the onset of a programme, so that strong links with the community can be built at all stages of the project cycle. This is particularly important during project design, to ensure the project proposal and budget is tailored to the needs and wants of each community.
- Based on their past experiences working with other agencies, the North Kenya Tearfund staff felt improving accountability would involve a shift in the way many agencies currently operate. As additional time is needed in order to consult with communities and ensure full participation in decisions, staff felt this must be reflected by longer lead times to deadlines from headquarters for project proposals from the field.
- The *process* of involving communities, from setting up of committees to establishing notice boards, is as important as the outcome. It is the process that will determine how meaningful the outcomes are, and so the impact these will have on improving the strength of relationship between the agency and the community.

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ANNEX 1 – Beneficiary Accountability Officer Job Description

MAIN PURPOSE OF JOB

Comprehensively provide operational support in the implementation of the Humanitarian Accountability Principles and integrate the activities set out in a separate action plan of each project.

LINE MANAGEMENT / POSITION IN ORGANISATION

DMT Grade B2

May deputise for grades B1

Closely co-ordinates with the following members of the senior management team: Deputy Programme Director, Area Coordinator (and where appropriate Sector Advisors).

DIMENSIONS AND LIMITS OF AUTHORITY

£0. This is subject to changes in the Disaster Management System.

DUTIES AND KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

The percentage figures shown against each heading are only intended to convey a rough idea of the relative size of the various areas within the overall job.

Good Practice and Institutional Learning (80%)

- With the Area Coordinator designs the HAP action plan
- Implementation of HAP action plan in the field. This will involve seeing that beneficiaries are involved in the design of the assistance they receive and that there is a mechanism for them to give feedback to Tearfund on the assistance.
- Develops good and open relationships with beneficiary communities and maintains a good understanding of their perception of the programme
- Facilitates Tearfund's operations being as open as possible to the beneficiaries including disseminating information about the programme as appropriate as well as beneficiary entitlements to the beneficiaries.
- Facilitate, participate in and document project reviews and evaluations and ensure learning is understood and disseminated to field and Head office based stakeholders.
- Manage knowledge and information sharing within the programme to identify, document and disseminate good practice.
- Develop and maintain on going orientation and induction package for north Kenya programme.
- Provide information on impact of Tearfund activities to the community in liaison with other programme staff.

External Relationships / Representation (5%)

- Provide required information to Area Coordinator and DPD for relevant inter-agency coordination and donor meetings as required.
- Liaise closely with local community leaders, local government/ministries, Tearfund partners and other relevant stakeholders as directed by Area Coordinator.

Administration / Programme Support (15%)

- In consultation with the Technical Logistician and the Area Coordinator, establish and maintain an effective filing system in accordance with Tearfund standard procedures to ensure that all information is efficiently record and easily accessible.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

| | ESSENTIAL | DESIRABLE |
|--------------------|---|---|
| QUALIFICATIONS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graduate (Sociology, Community Development studies, rural development planning or equivalent qualification) | Master Degree |
| EXPERIENCE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 years Monitoring & Evaluation. 1 year strategic planning 2 years experience working with pastoral community. Strong work experience with international NGO. Strong experience working with CBOs and/or local NGOs | 2 years people management. |
| SKILLS/ABILITIES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negotiation and representation skills Analytical skills Problem solving skills Training skills Excellent written and verbal communication skills in English (including ability to communicate effectively in Kiswahili) Mobilization and facilitation skills Strong understanding of project cycle. MS office computer knowledge Administrative skills Ability to communicate confidently and comfortably about own personal faith | <p>Rendile language speaker is an added advantage</p> <p>Have a valid Driving license</p> |
| PERSONAL QUALITIES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humanitarian motivation Emotionally and spiritually mature Team player and strong capacity of patience Understanding and sensitivity to cross cultural issues Flexible and adaptable to ever changing environments Ability to remain calm under pressure Good sense of humour and out going Willingness to travel and live in difficult, basic and at times insecure condition An understanding of and a commitment to Tearfund's Mission, Values and Beliefs Statement | |