

## SELF-ASSESSMENT CASE STUDY: Methodology used to review accountability as part of ACTED's response in northern Sri Lanka

In September 2009 ACTED in Sri Lanka undertook a self-assessment against the HAP 2007 Standard, guided by the HAP team, focused on the humanitarian response in the north of the country where over 250,000 displaced people were living in Menik Farm camps, Vavunyia.

The purpose of the self-assessment was two-fold:

- i) To identify existing strengths and gaps in accountability and quality management.
- ii) To build staff capacity on humanitarian accountability so that they may continue to drive this forward.

This case study summarises the approach and methodology used to examine practice in a context where access to project beneficiaries is restricted. Through a combination of document reviews, group and individual staff discussions, observations and informal discussions with beneficiaries the team sought to understand:

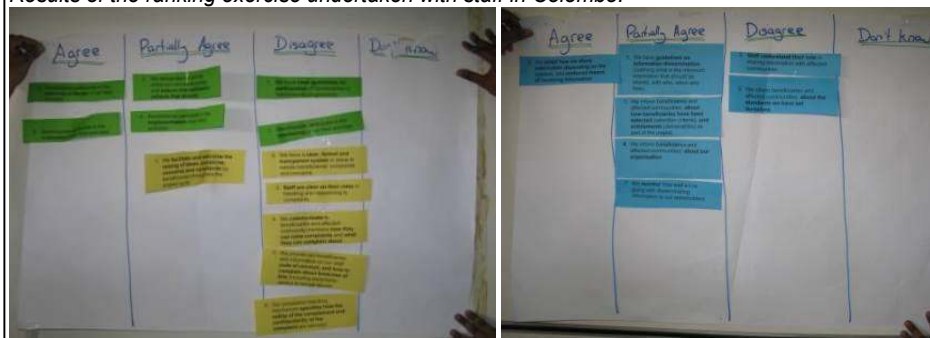
- Existing systems that support accountable practice
- Staff attitudes and awareness, and knowledge of existing systems
- Current practice and opportunities

### Staff discussion tools

Due to the context more time was given to discussions with staff at all levels from Tractor Drivers to Country Director, and a number of techniques were used to generate discussion.

a) A ranking exercise was used with 10-15 staff to gather initial findings. A series of statements based on the benchmarks in the HAP Standard were given to small groups, who were asked to discuss and decide if they 'agreed', 'partially agreed', 'disagreed' or 'didn't know'. Having several groups allowed responses to be compared, and differences of opinions to be discussed further.

Results of the ranking exercise undertaken with staff in Colombo.



#### Example statements used in ranking:

- “Staff understand their role in sharing information with affected communities.”
- “Beneficiaries participate in the **monitoring** of our field activities.”
- “We have a **clear, formal and transparent system** in place to handle beneficiaries' complaints and concerns.”

b) This was followed by more in-depth individual and small staff discussions using a series of prepared open questions, adapted for different job functions.

Question sheet developed for use with field staff in Vavunyia.

Questions - Field Officers (ACTED)	Answers
<p><b>Benchmark 1: Organizational Commitment</b></p> <p>1. What is the vision and mission of this organization?</p> <p>2. What are the key commitments of ACTED?</p> <p>3. How do you get to know about those?</p> <p>4. How do they relate to your work?</p> <p>5. How the implementation is being monitored?</p>	
<p><b>Benchmark 2: Information Sharing</b></p> <p>6. What is the key information that should be shared with beneficiaries and affected people?</p> <p>7. What guides you on that?</p>	
<p><b>Benchmark 3: Participation</b></p> <p>8. What are the existing opportunities for getting participation from beneficiaries and affected communities?</p>	
<p><b>Benchmark 4: Staff Competencies</b></p> <p>9. How did you join this organization?</p> <p>10. Did you get an induction and if so, what was included in that?</p>	
<p><b>Benchmark 5: Complaints Handling</b></p> <p>11. Should beneficiaries and affected people be able to complain about our work?</p> <p>12. What did you do if you receive a complaint from one of the beneficiaries?</p> <p>13. What would you do if you have a complaint?</p>	
<p><b>Benchmark 6: Continual Learning</b></p> <p>14. If you have a suggestion or idea based on your current work experience what would you do?</p> <p>15. How often do you meet to share lessons learnt?</p> <p>16. How are the lessons learnt then incorporated into areas of working?</p>	

Example questions used in staff discussions in Vavunyia:

- **Quality management system** - How is the implementation of ACTED's key accountability commitments being monitored?
- **Information sharing** - What guides you on what information should be shared with beneficiaries?
- **Participation** - What are the current opportunities for seeking input from beneficiaries?
- **Staff competencies** - Did you get an induction and if so, what was included in this?
- **Complaints handling** - What do you do if you receive a complaint from one ACTED's beneficiaries?
- **Continual improvement** - If you have a suggestion or idea based on your current work what would you do?

c) The staff organigram was also used to spark discussion, and to analyse current practice, for example which staff had contact with ACTED beneficiaries and how frequently, and mapping how information followed up and down from field staff to senior staff within ACTED.

### **An overview of the four days**

Three ACTED staff, guided by the HAP team, undertook the self-assessment. The outline below summarises the focus of the four days in each location.

#### Colombo: Country office – (2 days)

- Brief review of relevant documentation and team preparation, including review of questions to use
- All staff meeting - introduction and ranking exercise to understand staff perceptions of where ACTED currently stands in relation to the benchmarks.
- Individual and small groups discussions with – Country Director, Emergency Response Coordinators, and Finance, Logistics and Administration Team
- Review findings, identify action points, and planning for Vavunya assessment

#### Vavunya: Programme office – (2 days)

- All staff meeting – introduction and adapted ranking exercise
- Individual and small group discussions with – Emergency Response Manager, Field Officers, Tractor drivers and assistants, and staff from local Partner
- Project site visit– informal discussions to understand ACTED's work with beneficiaries in Menik Farm camps.
- Brief review of relevant documentation
- Initial debrief and feedback session with Emergency Response Coordinator.

The findings were then summarised in a report, and used to identify action points for strengthening accountability and quality management. These were shared and discussed with senior managers, and have been used as a basis to develop a quality and accountability improvement plan which forms part of the newly drafted country accountability framework.



*ACTED staff leading introductions to the process and facilitating a ranking exercise with staff, Vavunya, Northern Sri Lanka.*

**Reflections on the process an interview with Nishan Dissanayake (M&E Manager)**, an ACTED staff member involved in leading the self-assessment process and taking forward the findings.

### **The self-assessment process**

#### **▪ Why did ACTED choose to undertake a self-assessment?**

*“ACTED Sri Lanka realised the need for a well organised accountability and quality management system and this was widely discussed in a programme reflection event held in June 2009. As a result, ACTED volunteered to work with HAP international and carried out a self assessment in September 2009.”*

#### **▪ Thinking about the approach and methods used in the self-assessment process, what did you see as positive and what would you do differently next time?**

*“The approach and methodology were very relevant and staff were able to participate actively in the assessment process. However, some of the implementing partners were not much interested with the complaint handling mechanism and they were in the view that we don’t need these for development projects. The use of the word ‘Humanitarian’ leads sometimes to believe that HAP system has no application on development initiatives.*

*I also suggest that the involvement of people at HQ level should be improved since they are the ultimate decision makers and it will not always be possible to find necessary resources at country level to take forwards findings.”*

#### **▪ What factors do you think contribute to a successful self-assessment process?**

*“Initiation from the highest authority is essential to get the contribution from the staff. The HAP team was very successful on this and they were able to get the maximum support from the senior managers. Timing, staff motivation, and the use of local languages and simple terms are also contributing to a successful implementation.”*

### **Learning from the self-assessment – what came out of it and what will happen next?**

#### **▪ What did you learn from this process?**

*“ACTED was able to identify the gaps in implementing its humanitarian accountability commitments and had fruitful discussions with the staff members on the ways ACTED could improve the situation. To have a successful assessment, the approach is very important and staff should not feel that they are solely responsible for the gaps. Creation of the environment to share their views in an open forum is very important.”*

#### **▪ How will this be taken forward in ACTED?**

*“A Humanitarian Accountability Framework (HAF) for ACTED in Sri Lanka is being finalised and the actual implementation will start in January next year. A series of awareness raising and capacity building trainings will be conducted to the staff at all level including the implementing partners. The first review of the HAF implementation plan (including the goals and activities identified following the self-assessment which form part of ACTED Sri Lanka’s quality and accountability improvement plan) has also been scheduled for June 2010.”*

#### **▪ What advice would you give others thinking of reviewing their accountability practice?**

*“Even though most of the accountability commitments are binding in an organization, attitude change of the staff is really necessary to deliver the expected results of the accountability management system. The actual implementation needs to be accompanied by a comprehensive capacity building plan and there should be sufficient time period allocated for actual implementation. Standards should be prioritised by the agency according to the context, and implementation of all commitments at once may not be possible.*

*It’s better to make changes in the project cycle management process to streamline accountability commitments rather than making extra obligations to the staff.”*

#### **For more information contact:**

- ACTED M&E Manager Sri Lanka: [colombo.ame@acted.org](mailto:colombo.ame@acted.org)
- Emily Rogers (HAP Field Officer) [erogers@hapinternational.org](mailto:erogers@hapinternational.org)
- Or visit: [www.hapinternational.org](http://www.hapinternational.org) (see the [HAP in Sri Lanka](#) page for more information about HAP’s recent deployment to Sri Lanka)