

Case Study: Danish Refugee Council's approach to developing and implementing a contextualized Humanitarian Accountability Framework (HAF) in Sri Lanka

Background – DRC internationally and in Sri Lanka

DRC is an umbrella organization consisting of 31 organization members broadly representing civil society in Denmark committed to the refugee cause, as well as some 300 voluntary groups. Its head office in Copenhagen comprises of the following departments: Asylum and Repatriation; Integration; Volunteers; Communications; Resources and Development (administration); DRC International (international programs). DRC has program in 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. DRC works with the vision of “No refugee must be in want of help to find protection and durable solutions & nobody who wishes to be integrated into the Danish society must be in want of help to do so and we want to be the best problem-solver in regard to displacement and integration.”

DRC has been implementing humanitarian assistance activities in Sri Lanka since 1998. DRC's involvement in Sri Lanka began with the secondment of an international training adviser to a local NGO partner. In 2000, DRC registered as an international non-government organization under the social service act no. 31, of 1980 and established an independent programme supporting community rehabilitation and capacity building for IDP/refugee communities in war-affected areas. DRC currently operates in four districts - Mannar, Trincomalee, Vavuniya and Jaffna (DRC and DDG share office and warehouse space). DRC also has a warehouse in Anuradhapura district. A liaison office was set up in Colombo early 2008.

DRC and accountability

“In DRC we wish to be accountable. Not just to our donors and membership, but also – and in particular - to those we try to help. We have many instruments for this, like participation, feedback, complaints-handling and reporting. One important element is informing our beneficiaries and stakeholders about our Humanitarian Accountability Framework – in other words what they should hold us accountable for.” - DRC's global Humanitarian Accountability Framework (HAF), 2007

Ensuring accountability to beneficiaries & other stakeholders is not new in DRC & they have developed good practices for it. However, with DRC's certification under the HAP 2007 Standard, accountability has gained further prominence in DRC & it has become possible to apply a much more structured approach to accountability.

In order to meet the requirement on qualifying norm no. 4 & benchmark 1 as outlined in the HAP Standard, and achieve HAP certification, DRC made its global Humanitarian Accountability Framework (HAF) in 2007. Following on from this one of the first actions as part of DRC's global accountability improvement plan states that the country offices revise/draft their country-level contextualized HAF and make it available as per information strategy in program handbook. DRCSL too took effort to meet the above action point and prepared the contextualized HAF for its program in Sri Lanka. DRCSL started to work on HAF in latter part of the 2008.

Development of the HAF

The steps taken to draft the contextualized HAF are given below.

- Program coordinator – South & South East Asia and DRCSL Country Representative together drafted the outline with basic elements for the contextualized HAF.
- This draft was circulated among the staff members of DRCSL for their suggestions.
- The 1st draft has been finalized in April 2009.
- Though it was originally developed in English, it was translated into local languages (Tamil & Sinhalese).
- The translated HAF was issued to each and every staff members.

Implementation of HAF

- Published in DRC website – www.drc.dk in 2009.
- Placed on office notice board.
- Issued to partner organization & beneficiary representatives (Community based organization) of the integrated rehabilitation project.
- Training was conducted on HAF with all staff with the objective of increasing their knowledge on the commitments made by DRC & their role in implementing the HAF.
- As DRC is implementing all its integrated projects through local partner organizations, they too were trained on the HAF.
- DRCSL trained its staff members to required level on the codes, laws, standards that DRC has committed to work within, including for example Sphere minimum standard, HAP Standard, GPID, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and International Refugee Law.
- Some other commitments made in the HAF are already in practice, for example INGO registration, shop & business act, Sri Lankan labor law; other procedures need to be followed by INGO.
- As the beneficiaries can raise questions on DRC's commitments, they were also trained on DRC's HAF and some important points such as background of the organization, objectives, complaint mechanism, were issued to beneficiaries. It was reinforced during the field visits and it is planned to share this information at the inauguration meetings in the future.



Figure 1 & 2: Group work & discussion with community

Holding DRC to account

The community can raise their queries during the community meeting or they can submit their queries or comments in writing. The written feedback can be submitted through post, via e-mail, through the suggestion box that is placed in each project location of durable solution projects, or via any DRC staff. When they submit it through DRC staff, on the spot acknowledgement slip will be given, for postal queries acknowledgement will be sent through post, & for e-mail queries it will be sent through e-mail. Queries sent through suggestion boxes will be acknowledged in a register maintained by the community. These will be handled through DRC’s complaint mechanism.



Figure 3 & 4: Suggestion box fixed in a village

Main topics in the HAF

- Brief description of the country program
- DRC’s objectives, partners and stakeholders in Sri Lanka
- Organization structure for DRC Sri Lanka
- The codes, laws, and standards within which DRC Sri Lanka is committed to working
- DRC Sri Lanka relations to beneficiaries
 - Community Based Development
 - Complaint mechanisms
- List of current programs
- Accountability Baseline and Accountability Improvement Plan

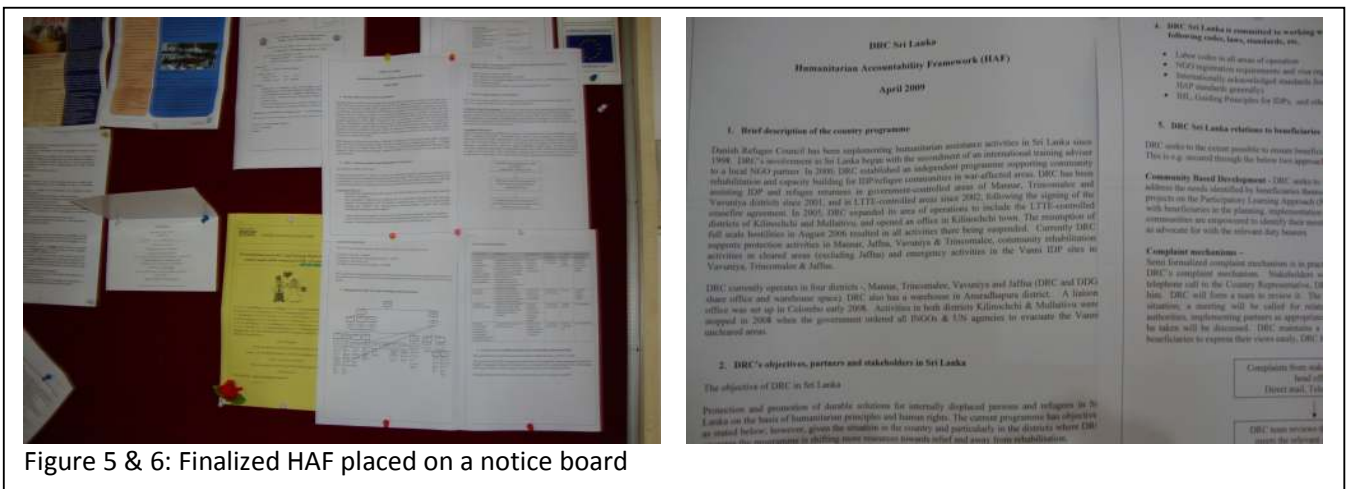


Figure 5 & 6: Finalized HAF placed on a notice board

Impact and benefits

To observe the impact will take time, & little changes have been observed in the behavior & attitude.

- Beneficiaries have started to use the suggestion boxes
- DRC management is now trying its best to handle the complaints formally
- Partners & staff morally accepted the need for a complaint mechanism
- Reinforced the necessity to have a ToR

- HAP mainstreaming was delegated to a staff member
- Developed & modified some processes to meet the requirement – e.g. Staff induction plan,
- Documents related to the implementation of quality management system were shared with all staff

Challenges

- It took a long time to finalize the 1st draft of the HAF.
- Train the staff, partners & beneficiaries has cost, in terms of funds, time and other resources
- It will take time to internalize by staff.
- As it is a living document it needs up-dates frequently.
- Numerous changes in staff

Suggestions made by DRC staff to improve implementation of the HAF

- Make it attractive – E.g. Print in leaflet style, color print, using pictures to explain
- Issue to beneficiaries or their representation groups – in all project villages
- Train the beneficiaries & partners - share it in the inauguration meetings with partners & beneficiaries, conduct workshops to partners & reinforce the use in monthly meeting.
- Include in annual budget costs needed for: trainings, revision, translation,
- Revise it in a frequent manner – annually or at set regular intervals
- Simplify the organization structure (district level) when giving it to beneficiaries

For more information about:

- This case study and how DRC developed their HAF for Sri Lanka contact: Selvi (Field Officer - M&E, in Sri Lanka) selvi@drc-lk.org
- DRC's global HAF, and other country contextualized HAFs see: the DRC website www.drc.dk/relief-work/humanitarian-accountability-framework/
- DRC's Complaints Handling Handbook see: the DRC website www.drc.dk/Complaints_Mechanism.4637.0.html
- HAP, the HAP Standard, and HAP certification see: the HAP website www.hapinternational.org