

## Humanitarian Accountability in the Sidr Cyclone Response

### Phase 1 Inter-agency workshop: Summary notes

25 March 2008  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

*On the 15th November 2007 Cyclone Sidr hit southern Bangladesh destroying both houses and livelihoods, and leaving thousands of people in need of assistance. Immediate relief focused on life-saving measures such as provision of medical support and clean water, and distribution of food and non-food items. The critical period is now over and NGOs are focusing on longer-term rehabilitation and reconstruction, including supporting with shelter, livelihoods and income-generation activities.*

The notes below summarise the highlights of a workshop on humanitarian accountability that took place in Dhaka on 25 March 2008 as part of a HAP initiative in Bangladesh to strengthen awareness and improve practice of humanitarian accountability and quality management in response to the Sidr Cyclone and beyond.

### **HAP ENGAGEMENT IN BANGLADESH: the overall initiative**

Under the [New Emergencies Policy](#), a HAP-led initiative in Bangladesh was agreed to promote good practice through supporting efforts to develop and improve immediate activities and systems that focus on quality and accountability to disaster survivors during the Sidr response. The strategy for this initiative is to:

- Strengthen staff understanding of Principles of Accountability to disaster survivors and of their agencies' compliance with these Principles;
- Promote and support immediate action and longer-term collaborative approaches that strengthen the accountability and quality of humanitarian work in Bangladesh;
- Facilitate the development and implementation of accountability self-assessment plans; and
- Encourage sharing of lessons learnt and peer support amongst HAP members, their local partners and other interested agencies.

In the first phase, the HAP Field team work alongside a designated member of staff from participating agencies and provide support in undertaking accountability self-assessment of the agency's cyclone response at one field location. This review provides a snapshot of the agency's level of humanitarian accountability and quality at that particular site, and identifies good practices, gaps, and areas for improvement that require immediate or longer-term action. At the end of this process, the agency staff working with the HAP team will have the knowledge, capacity and confidence to undertake further such self-assessments of accountability to disaster survivors (by integrating this into existing monitoring and evaluation or through the use of new tools and processes). The agency will be in a better position to respond to evidence-based recommendations and continuously improve its humanitarian accountability and quality management system. This phase concluded with the workshop in Dhaka on March 25<sup>th</sup> which reviewed some of the activities and learning to date.

*The following organisations provided financial support to this initiative: CARE Bangladesh, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh, DanChurchAid, Muslim Aid UK, Oxfam GB Bangladesh Program, Save the Children UK in Bangladesh, Tearfund UK, and World Vision Bangladesh. In particular we would like to acknowledge the support from Concern Worldwide in hosting the HAP Field Team in Dhaka.*

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## THE LESSONS LEARNT WORKSHOP

On the 25th March 2008, 18 participants, representatives of HAP members and their partners (see Appendix 2) met in Dhaka to analyze findings from the guided self-assessments and to explore short and long-term options for (individually and collectively) promoting humanitarian accountability and quality in the Sidr cyclone response and more widely in humanitarian action in Bangladesh. The following key objectives were agreed at the start of the day:

- Review progress against the initiative to date
- Share lessons learnt through the field visits and other self-assessment activities;
- Explore options to continue sharing findings and learning from self-assessment
- Discuss accountability action plans, including support for local partners' capacity to comply with the Principles of Accountability.
- Identify further support from HAP

The sections below highlight main discussion points during the March workshop, as follows: (1) the progress to date against the plan of the initiative, with notes on engagement with partners of HAP members and on the method used during the guided self-assessments; (2) some of the current steps that participating agencies are undertaking to strengthen humanitarian accountability and quality management; (3) key lessons learnt during the accountability self-assessments; (4) priority areas and key action points that participating agencies will implement over the next few months; (5) areas for inter-agency work at national level; (6) immediate next steps as per the initiative work plan.

### 1. Review of progress to date (January to March 2008)

The initiative started on 23rd-24th January with a workshop on accountability self-assessments attended by key staff from 14 NGOs, both HAP members and partners. Following this, and with guidance from the HAP Field Team, staff from participating agencies have been undertaking self-assessments during field visits in the most severely Sidr-affected in Bagerhat, Patuakhali and Barguna Districts. In total, the HAP Field Team conducted six field visits with: Save the Children UK; GUP and their partner Christian Aid; Concern Worldwide and their partner SPEED Trust; CARE Bangladesh; HEED Bangladesh; and Muslim Aid. World Vision Bangladesh undertook a self-assessment without direct support from the HAP Field Team.

*Focus group discussion in Bagerhat district*



The field visits focused on reviewing practice against the HAP Standard Benchmarks, in particular information dissemination, participation, and complaint-handling (please see Appendix 1 for an indication of what the joint teams reviewed at each location). Through reviews of existing policies and procedures, semi-structured interviews and facilitated discussions with local staff, and focus group discussions with disaster-affected communities, the six NGOs have been able to identify good practice and gaps in their accountability towards Sidr-affected communities.

Overall, the joint teams (HAP Field Team – participating agency) undertook more than 38 focus group discussions with disaster-affected communities, staff of HAP members and their partners; over 37 semi-structured interviews with disaster-affected communities and have spoken with over 420 beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries.

From notice boards with key information about humanitarian plans, to regular monitoring of beneficiary satisfaction with the response programmes, to village committees which make project related decisions on behalf of their communities, good practice examples of humanitarian accountability abound. However, many of these remain ad-hoc and are not always integrated into a coherent strategy. There are great opportunities for improvement, which NGOs are recognising they cannot afford to miss. Disaster-affected communities and field-based staff alike are acknowledging the need for, and benefits of, better information sharing and improved community engagement in decisions that affect their lives. In Sidr-affected response, accountability to beneficiaries becomes about restoring a sense of normality and giving people control over their lives.

To enable agencies to strengthen their humanitarian accountability in the Sidr response and from the onset of future emergency responses, recommendations and specific action points have been agreed with each of the participating agencies.

### **1.1 A note on partners of HAP members**

To assess compliance with the principles, HAP members have developed and, in January 2007, adopted the HAP Standard in Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management.

As partners of HAP members are autonomous entities and not necessarily themselves made a commitment to HAP's principles of accountability and humanitarian action, two key elements will be measured under the Standard with regards to HAP agency partners:



*HEED action planning session, Barguna district*

- That the agency shall inform and make their partners aware of the agency's own Humanitarian Accountability Commitments. In other words – the partner should be aware of what standards, codes, and guidelines the agency has signed up to and whether any of these have direct or indirect impact on the partner.
- The agency should be able to demonstrate that it has – together with its partners – discussed and established means to improve the quality of their partnership by strengthening partners' ability to apply
  - the Principles of Accountability
  - the Principles for Humanitarian Action.

As agencies interested to strengthen the accountability and quality of their work, some partners of HAP members have expressed an interest in understanding where they stand in relation to accountability and quality management as part of their Sidr response and the same framework for analysis has been used in this regard.

### **1.2 Overview of the guided self-assessment process**

An agency-specific planning session took place after the January workshop with the purpose of developing the draft methodology tailored to the needs of the individual agency. The schedule below reflects the generic steps undertaken with each agency.

**DAY 1:**

- Staff introductory meeting –meeting with staff from the field site to introduce and agree on the key objectives, identify most appropriate activities that will be undertaken over the next few days and the role of other staff.
- Preliminary identification of current practice related to accountability and quality management. This took place via one-to-one interviews or group discussions with key staff using open-ended questions (what, why, how, risks and benefits in the respective context).

**DAY 2:**

- Planning with the field team of the scope for the following days; focus group discussions (FGDs), semi-structured interviews (SSIs) and indicators for field observation:
- Site visit: Parallel teams conducted FGDs or SSIs to understand the point of view and experience of beneficiaries and other stakeholder groups.
- Debrief findings to date – at the end of the day, the teams had a debriefing to share site findings, reflect on progress to date and discuss focus of day 3. Particular attention was given to discrepancies between data collected from different sites, different sources, etc with a view identifying the reasons for this.

**DAY 3:**

- *Continued with site visits and/or interviews with key programme staff as needed.*
- Action planning based on findings – based on the findings from interviews and how these relate to the absence or presence of organisational policies, procedures or guidelines, we identified recommendations and specific action points for taking these forward.

**DAY 4:**

- *Action planning based on findings continued, as needed*
- Staff debrief – shared main findings with all field level staff including current status against the Benchmarks, recommendations and actions, and encouraged further discussion. .

Upon return to Dhaka, the joint team had a debriefing session with Senior Management Team (of NGO or, if guided self-assessment when working through partners, a joint debrief with SMTs from NGO and local partner). Follow up meetings for the purpose of sharing more details on the findings and consolidating action plans took place as requested. Extensive reports with specific recommendations have been prepared for each agency by the joint HAP-agency teams.

## **2. Current steps for strengthening humanitarian accountability**

During the March workshop, participants were asked to list 3 examples that illustrate how their respective agencies are strengthening humanitarian accountability in the Sidr Response. These are listed below (in alphabetical order by agency name). For more details, please contact the relevant agency staff on the list of participants in Appendix 2.

Several consolidated case studies will be developed by the HAP Field Team based on the examples listed below and others collected during the field visits. The written case studies will be made available in the final lessons learnt report to be produced at the end of 2008.

### ***CARE Bangladesh***

- CARE is conducting FGDs with Sidr affected people to understand their level of satisfaction with the humanitarian response implemented by CARE or its partners, the level of participation in response activities and awareness about CARE, its response activities and future plan.
- Introduction of complaints boxes at distribution point led to community driven rectification of beneficiary lists.
- Conducted a survey just after initial response to better capture gender perspectives.

### ***Caritas***

- Participatory approaches like transect walk, focus group discussions and interviews have been conducted to identify emergency needs of affected people and draft the response strategy.
- Distribution of leaflets detailing project-related information and contact persons, e.g. a leaflet was circulated during the housing project about how to raise concerns or complaints if needed. Complaints were received, including over the telephone directly to senior management.
- Discussions and displaying of project signboards with project related information.
- Ensured representation from beneficiaries in the project implementation committee with a view of enabling them to make recommendations for improvement and strengthen their capacity to engage.
- Meeting with beneficiaries are organized at the start of new activities to share details about the project and ensure that they contribute accordingly to its implementation.

### ***Christian Aid***

- Through dissemination of information as much as possible, e.g. information on relief materials through posters.
- Involving beneficiaries in project decisions through community consultation and alongside UP discussions.
- Supporting implementing partners to respond to complaints and recommendations from the disaster-affected community.

### ***COAST Trust***

- The beneficiary list was published and announced via mikes to enable verification of names.
- Community members were involved in selecting the location for tube wells to be built so they are accessible for the more vulnerable people.
- During rehabilitation, loan support was provided to 1400 families; information was shared with the community on the loan and criteria used to select recipient families.

### ***Concern Worldwide***

- Information made available at distribution point to both literate and illiterate people through banner and microphone announcement; display table with items and quality to expect in the relief kit.
- Staff direct engagement with disaster-affected communities during beneficiary selection, including consultation to explore the needs and areas of improvement.
- Female staff involved in relief distribution; as a result, women beneficiaries feel reassured and protected.
- Staff treat beneficiaries, especially in the distribution centers, as their “guest” by engaging in respectful and informative conversations.
- Introducing the Programme Participant Protection policies, sharing these with partners and including them in the MoUs.

### ***DCA/DSK***

- Budget Sharing: total budget of the project was shared with the community and other stakeholders.
- Social audit: programme quality checks by the community and others (e.g. local school teachers, community leaders)
- Complaint-handling mechanisms piloted.

### ***HEED Bangladesh***

- Involvement of community (e.g. community Disaster Management Committees) in preparing list, assessment and distribution of relief items.
- Discussion with community in deciding housing model and materials. Priority is given to the choice of beneficiaries. Before distributing house materials, focus group discussions with the community are organized for gathering feedback.
- Presenting selection criteria to community; community assisted in selection process according to criteria.

### ***Muslim Aid***

- Project planning with participation of community people for the shelter project. During a community planning meeting people were asked what specific design and components they expect in shelter provided by Muslim Aid. They sketched the design with the components and, as a result, in order to better address their expectations, the total budget dedicated to this work was increased beyond initial Muslim Aid estimate.
- Information boards, bulletins and posters complement verbal dissemination of information among community; this helps increase trust and confidence level. For example, before the sanitation project the components / items for each latrine were published in a News Bulletin, which provides written reassurance to community.
- Piloting complaint boxes, and tracking concerns raised and how they are addressed.

### ***Save the Children UK (SCUK)***

- All relevant staff have been orientated on SCUK's Child Protection Policy
- Children and teachers have been consulted before the establishment of *Safe Spaces* for children.
- Facilitators from the community were recruited to take care of the children coming to the *Safe Spaces*.

### ***Speed Trust***

- Participatory beneficiary selection process for relief distribution.
- Ensured quality and quantity of relief items through visualization of posters, miking and complaint boxes
- Community participation as volunteers in relief food distribution.

### ***World Vision***

- Inclusion of a cross-section of beneficiaries, CBOs, people's representatives and local governments in assessing relief needs.
- Declaration/display of materials before distribution.
- Beneficiary satisfaction interviews after relief distribution.

### **3. Key lessons learnt during accountability self-assessments**

The following is a summary of key lessons learnt during the self-assessments as agreed by participants in the workshop. These, together with the lessons collected by the HAP Field Team will be distilled in the lessons learnt report to be published at the end of 2008. Key highlights discussed in more detail during the workshop follow.

- Field staff and volunteers are not always aware of key organizational objectives, values and policies. The importance of staff orientation and effective internal communication of plans and progress reports should not be underestimated even in the midst of an emergency response.
- There is a disconnection between field level and Dhaka level staff understanding of quality, accountability, challenges and risks associated with not engaging in accountable practices. In the absence of an organizational strategy on how to improve quality and accountability, leadership support and guidelines for staff, this gap could widen.
- Where humanitarian accountability principles have been integrated in Disaster Risk Reduction strategies, more accountable and better quality emergency response is apparent.
- Maintaining good relations with local authorities is desirable, yet not relying on local authorities as sole representatives of the community will have positive effects on the quality of the response provided.
- Coordination with local government and other stakeholders, local NGOs, disaster management committees and international NGOs with a view of making best use of available resources and ensuring that no vulnerable communities are missed during the response is in fact possible if and when there is senior management support and leadership!

#### **Transparency**

- Sharing information builds confidence and trust with the community.
- There is room for improvement on meaningfully communicating to beneficiaries
- Staff fears of transparency are not well-founded in the Bangladesh context, but understandable when no organizational guidance is provided and no awareness on the benefits of information sharing takes place.
- Different modes of communication reach different people and have different levels of effectiveness.
- Transparency about resources can help with addressing community over-reliance on external support, and enable participation from communities so the agency makes better decisions and identifies the most vulnerable groups
- Field staff need to have coherent guidance on how to make decision about what to share with the community, in particular how to mitigate risks of disclosing or not disclosing certain information, particularly details on resources.

#### **Participation**

- Involvement of a cross-section of the disaster-affected community in project planning and beneficiary selection processes are critical factors that will affect the effectiveness of the intervention.
- Development participation practice can work and should be explored in humanitarian contexts.
- Vulnerable groups risk being excluded in a humanitarian response, despite the agency having worked there for a longer period of time.
- Offering beneficiaries opportunities to provide suggestions has changed the mind-set of staff; beneficiary views are sometimes different from staff expectations.
- Involvement of local communities in beneficiary selection improves effectiveness of intervention.

#### **Complaint-handling**

- If communities are not enabled to have their voice heard and raise concerns, humanitarian agencies are undermining them as human beings.

- Complaints handling can help address challenging issues before they escalate.
- Staff reluctance to receive and handle complaints is usually driven by a fear of complaints overload in the absence of clear procedures and definition of valid complaints.

## Highlights for discussion

- The 'humanitarian blind' versus good practice examples
- "Our organisation is best! But we don't know how to demonstrate it..."
- Much energy and interest from field-based staff, as an opportunity to learn, improve impact of work and build trust with the community

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## Humanitarian Quality Management Systems

- Strong quality management systems, with particular focus on financial controls
- Limited integration of codes of conduct, standards and other internal commitments into **existing quality management systems** (how implementation will be monitored, etc)
- In relation to partners
  - no strategy to agree means for supporting partner capacity to strengthen humanitarian accountability

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## Information dissemination

- Risks due to over-reliance on one channel of information dissemination
- Existing means of communication with community not fully maximised
- Type of information shared: limited details on beneficiary criteria, duration of activities, how disaster-communities can raise concerns
- Some new trends to mainstream information dissemination across all projects, through various means
- Limited to no monitoring of what information reaches the people

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## Participation

- It is possible! And even during project planning and design
- Easier to achieve when using existing DRR community structures such as DMCs, etc
- High levels of community involvement in project implementation
- The most vulnerable are usually left out when there is over-reliance on local authorities or elites alone act as community representatives
- Some good practice example of involving disaster-affected communities in monitoring

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## Staff competencies

- Missed opportunities: some staff not able to articulate organisational mission, values and objectives
- Limited awareness of expectations regarding information sharing, participation, complaints handling
- Efforts to improve staff values, attitudes and behaviour in relation to disaster-affected communities are not interlinked
- High field-based staff interest in capacity building, resources and tools 'on how to'

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## Complaint-handling mechanisms

- A not so new concept/practice in Bangladesh
- Some tendency to focus on **specific** mechanisms rather than invest in identifying the **most appropriate** mechanism
- Where they exist, complaint-handling mechanisms are effectively used if
  - there is awareness of rights and entitlements
  - communities are reassured that due process is followed
  - Staff recognise their importance as check&balance, and improvement opportunity
- Staff too need to be protected and their right to raise concerns recognised

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## Continual improvement

Lessons **learnt** can easily become **unlearnt**

- No regular reviews to strengthen the quality of partnerships and how partners are managed
  - “we are all partners” – with limited recognition of the different types of partnerships, what guides them, how they are evaluated, etc

## In conclusion

- Good practice abounds alongside gaps that require improvement
- Need to move from ad-hoc good practice examples to an integrated strategy that articulates linkages between humanitarian accountability and quality management
- Questions remain on coordination and alignment of different NGOs’ practice on humanitarian accountability
- Where new approaches are piloted, NGOs are already seeing the results!

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**4. Ways forward:** below are some key priority areas identified during the workshop to be taken forward over the next few months with a view of strengthening humanitarian accountability and quality management systems.

Most are aligned with both the report recommendations that the HAP Field Team made to participating agencies following the guided self-assessments, as well as the action plans jointly developed. Depending on demand and resources, the HAP Field Team will provide advice and support to agencies over the next few months towards the implementation of these proposed action points.

Towards the end of 2008, the HAP Field Team and inter-agency group will use the recommendations made in individual agency reports and the points below as the basis for the after action review process.

### **CARE**

- Consolidate Accountability Framework
- After Action Review with partners from an accountability perspective
- Continue M&E / FGDs with beneficiaries in the field on humanitarian accountability
- Integrate learning / systems in strategic planning
- EPR plan review will incorporate accountability

### **Caritas**

- Review disaster management manual and code of conduct to reflect HAP Principles of Accountability
- Monitor accountability in the field and project management committees
- Share learning from this workshop with SMT and other policy makers during monthly meeting.

### **Christian Aid**

- Include humanitarian accountability in MoU with partners, and focus on supporting partners with implementation of this.
- Include humanitarian accountability in the country-level emergency plan.
- Conduct training for partners on humanitarian accountability and identify ways to better support their capacity to comply with principles of humanitarian accountability .

### **COAST Trust**

- Conduct baseline analysis against the HAP Standard
- Conduct staff training on humanitarian accountability
- Integrate principles of accountability into existing policies
- Link humanitarian work with other programmes

### **Concern Worldwide (focus on partners)**

- Hold regular meetings with partners to assess the quality of the partnership beyond individual projects
- Conduct orientations on HAP for partners
- Identify approaches for integrating humanitarian accountability in M&E activities
- Support partners in piloting complaint-handling mechanisms
- Integrate this work into wider organizational strategies and in relation to Concern Worldwide staff

### **DanChurchAid**

- Establish complaint-handling mechanisms for and with partners
- Integrate humanitarian accountability into DRR activities.
- Build partner capacity to improve humanitarian accountability.

### **DSK**

- Integrate humanitarian accountability into emergency response strategic plan.

### **HEED Bangladesh**

- Expand on piloted complaint-handling mechanisms
- Post signboards and notice boards at new sites / other programmes and explore other options for more effectively sharing information with the communities
- Integrate humanitarian accountability into other programmes.

### ***Muslim Aid UK***

- Align emerging policies with principles of accountability
- Integrate beneficiary accountability assessments into non-humanitarian programmes
- Strengthen and institutionalise piloted mechanisms (complaint-handling, information sharing, etc)

### ***Speed Trust***

- Coordinate internal workshop to develop guidelines on participation
- Hold staff workshop to assess humanitarian accountability at organizational level
- Engage with Concern and other HAP members on how to better integrate HAP Principles across the organisation.

### ***SCUK (focus on partners)***

- Assess partners' existing practice of handling complaints
- In upcoming meeting with partners, plan how to pilot complaint-handling mechanisms
- Incorporate accountability principles in review of MoUs with partners

### ***Uttaran***

- Pilot complaint handling mechanisms
- Use monitoring tools for quality and accountability
- Provide capacity building and staff development with a view of strengthening accountability to beneficiaries

### ***World Vision***

- Formalize / structure existing practice into organizational operating procedure.
- Integrate development participatory practice into emergency work
- Share lessons from this process with other programmes
- Review existing CRM practice

## **5. Inter-agency action points**

The following two areas were highlighted and agreed to be taken forward by HAP members and their partners to strengthen humanitarian accountability and quality management.

### **5.1. Leadership support**

- There was unanimous agreement that endorsement and support from senior management/Country Directors/ CEOs is necessary in order to effectively strengthen humanitarian accountability and have a more positive impact on the lives of disaster-affected communities
- Workshop participants will share with SMT and head of agencies the reports from the guided self-assessments, the key lessons learnt from this process and recommendations/action points for improvement.
- In line with the PSG below, opportunities will be explore for heads of agencies to have a working meeting and discuss challenges and opportunities of strengthening humanitarian accountability and quality management as per their commitments to HAP and taking into account findings and recommendations from the self-assessments in the Sidr Response.

**5.2. National-level Peer Support Group on Humanitarian Accountability and Quality Management:** establish an inter-agency forum peer support group for HAP members, partners and other relevant stakeholder with the following mandate

- For “accountability champions” to share regular updates and progress of relevant activities and approaches
- Capture new learning on humanitarian accountability and quality management and share this with non-HAP members; Disseminate new tools and case studies
- Organize inter-agency exposure visits and joint staff training (inc. orientation sessions))
- Undertake inter-agency evaluation of the level of humanitarian accountability and quality management in different responses
- Advocacy/lobbying of other policy makers on the importance of and need for support to strengthen accountability (link in to DER and other coordination mechanisms)

One of the first suggested activities was for the self-assessments to be replicated at other locations, drawing on the knowledge and expertise that participating staff have accumulated during this initiative to date.

Resources to manage the Peer Support Group (PSG) will be sought before the end of the year, once the scope and administration of the PSG will be further developed and agreed by participating agencies.

## **6. Next Steps**

- Muslim Aid and CARE offered to host a follow up meeting in the second half of June 2008 with a view of
  - discussing progress that members have made since the March workshop,
  - moving forward with agreement on the scope, administrative details and next activities for the PSG
  - discuss options for raising inter-agency resources (via joint proposal, with HAP Field Team Support, etc) to consolidate and maintain the PSG
- HAP Field Team will provide input and feedback to the proposal for a formalized PSG and explore options for securing resources with PSG members, accordingly
- Participating agencies will indicate the type of capacity building activity that they would require from the HAP Field team during a potential visit mid-2008 (July/August, tbc)
- Plans will be consolidated for the after action review that will assess progress made against agency-specific recommendations and action points later in 2008 (Sept-October, tbc)

## APPENDIX 1: framework for the guided self-assessments

**BENCHMARK 1:** *The agency shall establish a humanitarian quality management system.*

Requirements	
1.1	The agency shall document its humanitarian accountability framework (referring to all relevant internal and external accountability and quality standards, codes, guidelines, and principles committed to by the agency)
1.2	The agency shall demonstrate that its humanitarian quality management system enables implementation of its humanitarian accountability framework

The expectation here is for the agency to have in place a documented humanitarian accountability framework and ensure that their management system enables the implementation of this framework throughout the organization, including in the Sidr response. In relation to partners, the expectation is that the agency has in place a strategy for assisting partners to develop their capacity to comply with the Principles of Accountability and of Humanitarian Action.

**BENCHMARK 2:** *The agency shall make the following information publicly available to intended beneficiaries, disaster-affected communities, agency staff and other specified stakeholders: (a) organisational background, (b) humanitarian accountability framework, (c) humanitarian plan, (d) progress reports, and (e) complaints handling procedures.*

Requirements	
2.1	The agency shall ensure that information is presented in languages, formats and media that are accessible and comprehensible for beneficiaries and specified stakeholders
2.2	The agency shall inform disaster-affected communities about beneficiary selection criteria and deliverables as agreed with their representatives
2.3	The agency shall include its name and contact details in all publicly available information
2.4	The agency shall make available information about the relevant parts of its structure, including staff roles and responsibilities

Through observation and discussions we tried to identify

- How, when and what type of information is shared with the disaster-affected communities; in particular, we were looking for information about the organization; commitments that the agency had made; the plan and progress; how to raise concerns
- Whether the information is presented in languages, formats, and media that are accessible and comprehensible for beneficiaries
- Whether disaster-affected communities know about beneficiary selection criteria and deliverables *as agreed* with their representatives
- Whether beneficiaries know how to identify and contact relevant agency staff

In relation to partners, the expectation is for a mechanism to be in place by which the agency ensures its partners convey information to beneficiaries, in particular that they are agency partners, what the deliverables and beneficiary selection criteria are, how beneficiaries can raise concerns directly to the agency.

**BENCHMARK 3:** *The agency shall enable beneficiaries and their representatives to participate in programme decisions and seek their informed consent.*

Requirements	
3.1	The agency shall specify the processes it uses to identify intended beneficiaries and their representatives with specific reference to gender, age, disability and other identifiable vulnerabilities
3.2	The agency shall enable intended beneficiaries and their representatives to participate in project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Through observation and discussions, we tried to identify whether and how beneficiaries or their representatives are enabled to participate in project decisions, in particular:

- Whether different group vulnerabilities are acknowledged and respected
- Whether beneficiaries participate in the project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and how the agency is assisting its partners in enabling beneficiaries to do so.

**BENCHMARK 4:** *The agency shall determine the competencies, attitudes and development needs of staff required to implement its humanitarian quality management system.*

Requirements	
4.1	The agency shall maintain a statement of the competencies (knowledge, skills and behaviours) and attitudes required from its staff
4.2	The agency shall ensure that staff are aware of the humanitarian accountability framework and humanitarian quality management system, its relevance and importance, and understand their responsibilities in its implementation
4.3	The agency shall implement a system to review staff performance and competencies, including their knowledge, skills, behaviours, and attitudes
4.4	The agency shall enable continual staff development for more effective implementation of the humanitarian quality management system

In relation to partners, the expectation is that the agency implements a clearly stated procedure on how it selects partners, how it monitors partner performance and what training it provides to support partner capacity to apply the Principles of Accountability and of Humanitarian Action.

**BENCHMARK 5:** *The agency shall establish and implement complaints-handling procedures that are effective, accessible and safe for intended beneficiaries, disaster-affected communities, agency staff, humanitarian partners and other specified bodies.*

Requirements	
5.1	The agency shall ask intended beneficiaries and the host community about appropriate ways to handle complaints
5.2	The agency shall establish and document complaints-handling procedures which clearly state: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the right of beneficiaries and other specified stakeholders to file a complaint</li> <li>• the purpose, parameters and limitations of the procedure</li> <li>• the procedure for submitting complaints</li> <li>• the steps taken in processing complaints</li> <li>• confidentiality and non-retaliation policy for complainants</li> <li>• the process for safe referral of complaints that the agency is not equipped to handle</li> <li>• the right to receive a response</li> </ul>

5.3	The agency shall ensure that intended beneficiaries, affected communities and its staff understand the complaints-handling procedures
5.4	The agency shall verify that all complaints received are handled according to the stated procedures
5.5	The agency shall establish and implement an effective and safe complaints handling mechanism for its staff, consistent with the requirements set out in 5.2

The team focused on identifying how the agency enables disaster-affected communities to raise concerns or complaints in relation to the Sidr response program and its implementation. In particular, we were looking to understand:

- Whether beneficiaries are aware of their right to raise concerns and receive a response
- The quality and effectiveness of existing channels for beneficiaries to raise concerns: what and how effective they are, and whether procedures that guide them are consistently implemented

In relation to partners, the expectation is that the agency supports its partner to develop and run an effective, safe and accessible complaints system for beneficiaries and that it addresses the possibility that beneficiaries may want to complain to them directly. The agency is also expected to have in place a safe and effective system through which partners themselves can raise concerns.

**BENCHMARK 6:** *The agency shall establish a process of continual improvement for its humanitarian accountability framework and humanitarian quality management system.*

Requirements	
6.1	The agency shall specify the processes used for continual improvement of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the agency's humanitarian accountability framework</li> <li>• the agency's humanitarian quality management system, inclusive of all HAP benchmarks</li> </ul>
6.2	The agency shall together with its humanitarian partners monitor and evaluate the agreed means to improve the quality of the partnership with respect to the Principles of Accountability, and the Principles for Humanitarian Action

In relation to partners, the expectation is that the agency can demonstrate its commitment to improve their partners within a realistic and viable way, including through partner assessment and subsequent plan of action to improve capacity.

**APPENDIX 2: “accountability champions” participating in the March workshop**

Participant	Organisation	Job title	Email
Abdul Hakim	DSK	Advocacy Coordinator	<a href="mailto:dskadvo@dskbangladesh.org">dskadvo@dskbangladesh.org</a>
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Abu Hanif	Concern	M&E Coordinator	<a href="mailto:Abu.hanif@concern.net">Abu.hanif@concern.net</a>
Aminur Rahman	Uttaran	Assistant Coordinator	<a href="mailto:uttaran@bdonline.com">uttaran@bdonline.com</a>
Charles S Sarkar	Christian Aid	Disaster Risk Reduction Officer	<a href="mailto:charles@christian-aidbd.org">charles@christian-aidbd.org</a>
Eliza Islam	CARE Bangladesh	Program Impact & Evaluation Coordinator, PQ Unit	<a href="mailto:eliza@carebangladesh.org">eliza@carebangladesh.org</a>
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Hasina Inam	DanChurchAid	Country Programme Officer	<a href="mailto:hin.india@dca.dk">hin.india@dca.dk</a>
Iqbal Ahmed	Muslim Aid	Program Executive	<a href="mailto:Iqbal@muslimaidbd.org">Iqbal@muslimaidbd.org</a>
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Stephen Halder	World Vision Bangladesh	Director, Partnership Services Division	<a href="mailto:stephen_halder@wvi.org">stephen_halder@wvi.org</a>

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