

# **Humanitarian Accountability Partnership - International**

*"making humanitarian action accountable to beneficiaries"*

## **Ensuring Meaningful Beneficiary Engagement**

### **Mandate**

The **vision** of HAP International is of a humanitarian system championing the rights and the dignity of its intended beneficiaries.

The **mission** of HAP International is to make humanitarian action accountable to its intended beneficiaries through voluntary self-regulation.

**Accountability** - a definition: Power brings responsibility, and with responsibility comes accountability. HAP International's definition of accountability has moved away from an exclusive focus on the process or duty to account (and to be held responsible). For power-holders or duty-holders to account for their actions, there must be preliminary steps undertaken, allowing citizens, staff, service users and others to ask questions, or report complaints. Accountability is also about **the right to a say and the duty to respond**. The HAP-I definition of accountability therefore involves two sets of principles and mechanisms:

- Those by which individuals, organizations, and States account for their actions and are held responsible for them.
- Those by which individuals, organizations, and States may safely and legitimately report concerns, complaints, and abuses, and get redress where appropriate

### **Rationale**

Based on these core statements of intent, HAP International embodies the collective commitment of its members to ensure the meaningful participation of the people who are so often excluded from the governance of the humanitarian aid system. The Accountability and Quality Management Standards Project must reflect this commitment, both to ensure the quality of the products of the project and to demonstrate that HAP-International also complies with its own principles.

### **Concerns Raised**

Many arguments are used to question the validity, feasibility or legitimacy of beneficiaries participating in processes such as this. The following are examples:

- Risks of tokenism and charges of political correctness
- Difficulty of identifying legitimate beneficiary representatives able to speak on behalf of others
- Language barriers and cultural interpretation risks
- Capacity to engage at all levels of the process, in particular the planning phase
- Risks linked to political agendas being pursued
- Associated costs and administrative burden to facilitate presence at meetings
- Risk of stigmatisation of beneficiary participants within their own community or political context
- Risk of beneficiary representatives becoming asylum seekers once in Europe

### **Acknowledgement and Response**

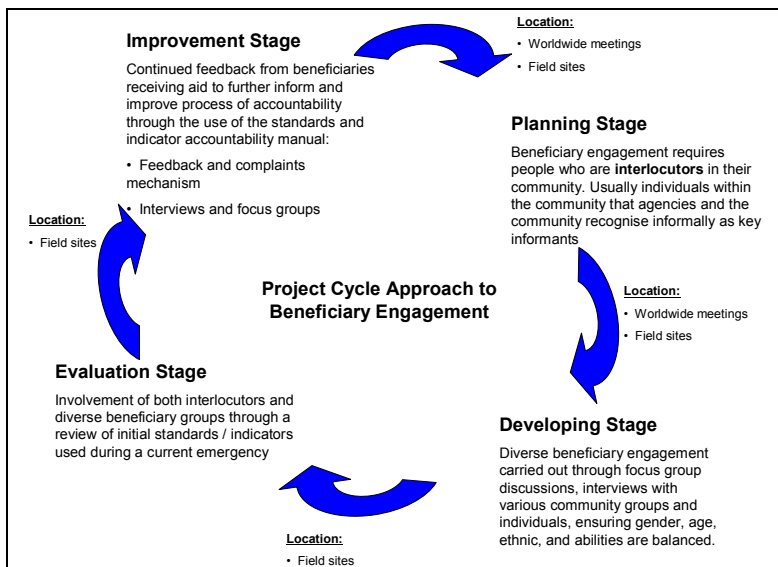
Perhaps it is a risky undertaking, but far better to take the risk than to excuse ourselves yet again for exclusion based on these perceived hurdles. To often stereotypes of silent, disempowered and inarticulate beneficiaries are invoked to block any beneficiary participation. Provided that the beneficiaries who are selected to participate have similar attributes to those required for all other participants in this process, we feel confident that these risks can be minimised, and that the enormous benefit to be gained from the participation of beneficiaries will be achieved.

### **Selection of Beneficiaries**

Beneficiary engagement should take place at all stages and levels of the process. The methods of engagement and who best to target will vary according to the stages and the context. For example, using the Project Cycle to illustrate this we shall see some clear stages evolving:

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For the success in any task undertaken good planning and management is required. Engaging with beneficiaries also requires a commitment to planning and an allocation of resources (time, money and staff) to ensure a meaningful and diverse engagement occurs at all stages.

## Planning Stage

We do not expect “beneficiaries” to be selected by a scientific sampling method, or by a democratic process. This does not occur in the selection of our member or donor representatives! Rather, we are seeking to identify and invite beneficiaries (those who have been on the receiving end of aid) who have a combination of the following suggested criteria:

- Professional background. For example:
  - Teachers/Academics
  - Lawyers/Jurists
  - Journalists
  - Medical professionals
  - Business managers
  - NGO/civil society leaders
  - Local Government Officers
- Literate
- Articulate
- Analytical
- Able to converse in English as this is the medium we are currently carrying out this process in (or French if we are able to ensure budget and capacity their to facilitate translation of material and discussions)

We feel that it would be best to not select those who might be subject to a conflict between their role as an interlocutor for beneficiaries and other interests: This would probably exclude:

- Those who are currently working with aid agencies.
- Professional politicians

As you can see we are looking for the kind of informally mandated people that agencies invariably talk to when doing assessments and evaluations. Such “key informants” are there and are well known by field staff. Thus we believe that members and non-members will indeed be able to locate and invite beneficiaries to participate in planning and running the project, as well as being consulted by it. In addition, such people will then be able to help us devise better strategies for consulting with a more diverse and representative sample of beneficiaries in the field during subsequent stages of the project.

## Developing and Evaluation Stage

A broader involvement of beneficiaries should be undertaken where standards and indicators are drafted and evaluated both at field and head office level. There are a number of methods available to ensure meaningful engagement. For example focus groups, participative evaluations, etc.

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## Improvement Stage

Once the first draft of the manual has been completed we see an ongoing and dynamic process of improvement through consultation with all key stakeholders. To this end engagement through information and complaints-handling mechanisms should be fully utilised.

## **Conclusion**

Engagement with beneficiaries at all levels is key. It will require real commitment to overcome the perceived blockages that so often frustrate our good intentions.

Our aim is to encourage members to ensure engagement of beneficiaries for the full cycle of the development of standards and indicators.

Sheryl Haw  
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