

NEP Meeting on Humanitarian Accountability in Somalia

17 August 2007, Nairobi, Kenya

Notes from the meeting

Following the meeting on beneficiary accountability in Somalia held on the 25th July 2007, representatives from 6 of the 7 HAP member agencies active in Somalia met on the 17th August in Nairobi. The purpose of this meeting was to follow up on discussions held within their agencies, discuss the proposals for joint action raised during the previous meeting, and confirm areas where members would like support from the HAP Secretariat.

ATTENDING:

CARE: Mohamed Khaled

Concern Worldwide: Reiseal Ni Cheilleachair

Danish Refugee Council: Hugh Fenton

Oxfam GB: Nona Zicherman

Save the Children UK: Toby Kay, Sarthak Pal

World Vision International: Foday Sawi, Chris Smoot, Marie Bettings

From the HAP team: Monica Blagescu and Emily Rogers.

GENERAL DISCUSSION REGARDING ENGAGEMENT WITH HAP

Moving from HQ/Nairobi level of commitment to accountability to the field level

A number of agencies mentioned the current drive for improved accountability comes too often from country directors and international staff only, with little engagement of field staff (who are not trained or involved in HAP-related discussion). The implementation of accountability principles is greatly affected by the turnover of international staff, and changing priorities of country directors. To address this and improve practice, it was recognised that accountability needs to also be integrated into field level operations for local staff. Attendees mentioned the responsibility for sensitizing staff and ensuring this integration lies within organisations, rather than with the HAP secretariat.

Small, simple steps

There was general consensus that we need to focus on small, simple, practical steps that can be undertaken at field level in Somalia while not forgetting the bigger picture (involvement of Nairobi/HQ). As discussed on the 25th, any approach taken needs to avoid overwhelming field staff with too many proposals and recommendations.

HAP and the Joint Operating Principles (JOPs)

There was general agreement that HAP members' work in relation to strengthening accountability to beneficiaries in Somalia will feed into the JOPs. It is likely that agreement on the JOPs will be a longer process, so HAP can pursue in parallel support to members and partner agencies. Learning from engagement and joint action of HAP members can feed into the JOP process.

It mentioned that there are meetings on the JOPs coming up in September, and that agencies would like someone from HAP to facilitate the discussion in Baidoa and Belet Weyne.

Working through partners

Many organisations are working through partners, and it is unclear how well HAP members are passing accountability practices onto partners. It was suggested that HAP activities and support in Somalia needs to fully include HAP members' local staff and partners.

Accountability Principles and humanitarian reform in the Somali context

It was suggested that the HAP Secretariat propose how accountability principles can be best implemented in the Somali context, taking into account the prevailing conditions. While all agencies could contribute to this, HAP Secretariat would ideally take the lead and provide expert advice, with consideration to the unreliable security situation and access, the strong

clan factors, and the difficulties of communicating programming uncertainty to communities, that all contribute to making Somalia a unique situation. The analysis will also need to consider how humanitarian reform fits into all of this.

Some participants raised the issue that often NGOs ignore the accountability structures already existing within Somali society (i.e. those related to religion and the clan), and can at times damage these through the creation of other structures (i.e. sector committees). As mentioned during the meeting on the 25th, accountability exists, but the understanding of it may differ; it was suggested we need a marketing approach to help align ideas of accountability in this context.

Who are agencies accountable to and what are they accountable for?

Much of what agencies are able to do in Somalia is dependent on other actors – be they other NGOs, donors, the UN or the government. Agencies are under pressure from donors, who have money earmarked for Somalia; as a result some agencies are accepting funds for programmes they are unable to implement effectively. This raises the issues of who agencies are accountable to and what are they accountable for.

REVIEW OF ACTION POINTS PROPOSED AS A RESULT OF 25th JULY MEETING

The action points proposed during the meeting on the 25th July, and subsequently by HAP, were discussed. Below is a summary of the action points agreed.

1) Staff management and competencies

- i. ACTION REQUESTED BY MEMBERS: HAP to conduct inter-agency trainings at various field sites within Somalia for HAP members' staff (and their partners) focusing on the practical aspects of accountability. This should also include an element of sharing good practice so that members can learn from each other. These workshops will be organised through one of the members as lead agency; members will offer support through a field person in each location to joint facilitate the training (specific arrangements to be made after the proposal is prepared). A staff induction package will also be developed and HAP will engage with individual agencies to best identify ways in which this can be incorporated into existing staff training/induction practices.

2) Transparency: Information flow to beneficiary communities and other relevant stakeholders

- i. ACTION REQUESTED BY MEMBERS: HAP to undertake communications / information monitoring (against clear indicators) for those member agencies interested. This review should look at modes of communication by agencies to different stakeholders, as well as types of information disseminated; and what information gets to whom. It was suggested that the review should focus on processes, rather than just content of communication, and should take into account geographical variations. In addition it should also seek to include member's local partner organisations, which may have different approaches. Lessons learnt will then be shared across the partnership and to other NGOs.

3) Monitoring and compliance to commitments that we make

- i. ACTION REQUESTED BY MEMBERS: HAP to undertake a baseline analysis on accountability practice. Based on this, develop a framework for self-assessment of accountability in Somali programmes which managers can use to monitor progress. It was suggested that the initial analysis draws on the HAP benchmarks, using context-specific means of verification; that it will identify existing good practice, highlight areas for improvement and contribute to the development of action plans to address existing gaps.
- ii. ACTION REQUESTED BY MEMBERS: Following this, HAP to support with integration of elements of humanitarian accountability into the JOPs, and to review how HAP could support with the JOPs in the longer-term.

DISCUSSION ON COMPLAINT-HANDLING MECHANISMS:

It was mentioned that one of the potential benefits of a complaints system could be less violent behaviour towards staff, as it would give a formal outlet for concerns to be raised. However, even within individual agencies there are very different approaches to dealing with complaints, and different commitments to addressing these. In Somalia, in some areas, district authorities are being encouraged to play a role, and advocate for the rights of their people, in other areas senior staff members are more often approached with complaints.

It was raised that effective progress on setting up a complaint and response mechanisms cannot be agency specific in the Somalia context but must be related to the JOPs.

The first step recommended for HAP is to review existing practice in complaint-handling in Somalia (this will be integrated in action 3.i above), and to include complaint handling mechanisms in the training workshops to share current practice.

4) Participation: How can we listen better to communities and beneficiaries

NO ADDITIONAL ACTION REQUESTED BY MEMBERS

As part of the accountability self-assessment (see above, action 3.i), and the stakeholder analysis as part of the communications review (see above, action 2.1), it will also be possible to:

- a) Improve the understanding of beneficiary communities, then document beneficiaries' views on the concept of accountability and their understanding on the role of aid agencies.
- b) Review and share best practices in listening to and engaging with communities.

After focusing on the above two points, and when there is a greater understanding of accountability at field level, it will then be possible to ensure accountability reporting is added to the agenda of field reports, coordination meetings etc. This will also be driven forward by the JOPs.

5) Advocacy with donors and others on accountability issues

- i. More discussion on this is needed

Specific donor issues raised during this meeting included:

- a. The accuracy of reporting on participation by agencies to donors (as this has become standard in donor reporting formats but questions over accuracy of information presented by agencies).
- b. Duration of donor funding means agencies feel they are often not given sufficient time for accountability activities.
- c. Lack of interest from donors on information about programme design that emanates from the field, agencies reported feeling donor led.

ACTION REQUESTED BY MEMBERS: HAP to sensitise donors (staff) on accountability issues (possibly done jointly with JOP/OCHA). There is a need for more meaningful inclusion of accountability in donor reports.

NEXT STEPS

- HAP will circulate the minutes from the meeting by **Monday 20th August**
- Participants send in additions/corrections, etc by **Friday 24th August**
- HAP prepare a detailed proposal on how to move forward with this work; to be shared with participants and HQ HAP focal points – **date tbc**
- Question from the floor on whether these meetings will become regular. We are planning a follow up meeting at the end of September to hopefully share the proposal and discuss the work plan – **exact date tbc**