

**HAP DEPLOYMENT TO SRI LANKA
(JULY- OCTOBER 2009)
REPORT**



National staff participating in the guided-self assessment in Vavuniya, 2009

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HAP ROVING TEAM DEPLOYMENT TO SRI LANKA JULY- OCTOBER 2009

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Executive Summary

The HAP Roving Team was deployed to Sri Lanka from 22 July- 21st October, 2009 with the aim to improve understanding about, and strengthen performance of, the humanitarian accountability and quality management practices of participating HAP Members and their partners responding to the humanitarian crisis in northern Sri Lanka.

During this time the team worked in Colombo and at Vavuniya District, (Menik Farm is located here), with 17 HAP Members and/or their implementing partners, over 140 agency staff, 9 non-HAP agencies, and held discussions with key humanitarian actors.

In June 2009, approximately 250,000 disaster-survivors who had escaped the conflict in Northern Sri Lanka were interned in Menik Farm making it one of the of the largest camp for internally displaced person (IDPs) in the world. The complex and restrictive operational context in Sri Lanka hindered the safeguarding of protection rights, consultation with beneficiaries, their participation in the design and implementation of projects, and the provision of safe avenues for registering complaints. The context has remained fluid, with the return of IDPs starting in September and according to UN¹ sources by November 2009, the pace of returns accelerated allowing around 90,000 IDPs to leave the camps.

The aim of the HAP deployment was to provide support to agencies in increasing understanding of humanitarian accountability in light of the prevailing context, and to highlight internal and external efforts and actions that could decrease the accountability deficit within the current constraints. All activities undertaken aimed to provide support to strengthen NGO accountability primarily to affected-people in the ongoing humanitarian response as well as planned future assistance.

The objectives included:

a) Delivering appropriate immediate and direct support to interested agencies.

This was done through inter-agency workshops; guided self-assessment process undertaken by to ACTED, Christian Aid- DanChurchAid partner OfERR, Habitat for Humanity Sri Lanka Mercy Malaysia, Save the Children in Sri Lanka, World Vision in Sri Lanka and provision of context-specific and direct support at Colombo and Vavuniya (which included a visit to Menik Farm). An inter-agency lesson learnt event was held towards the end of the deployment and relevant learning resources were made available to the agencies. Tailored support to CARE Sri Lanka and additional support to Christian Aid and ACTED was also provided.

b) To facilitate collective learning between HAP members, their partners and other interested agencies within Sri Lanka.

Planned activities included establishing an accountability working group, however this could not be undertaken due to a range of reasons, and this activity is being reviewed for future deployments. The HAP 2007 Standard was translated into local languages by Lutheran World Relief Sri Lanka. Case studies and tools from other agencies across the world were shared and used to enhance the wider learning of staff in Sri Lanka. Three new case studies related to the application of accountability and the HAP 2007 Standard were also developed and more are anticipated. A number of staff also participated in the HAP 2007 Standard Review Process and contributed their expertise. To ensure wider awareness and understanding of accountability issues, an inter-agency workshop for non-HAP Members was held, along with bi-lateral meetings with agencies, UNHCR and donor community operating in Sri Lanka.

c) To analyse, and share outputs and lessons learnt during the deployment, so that HAP and member agencies can continually improve impact and practice.

An externally facilitated After-Action Review was held on 15th October. The report examines the activities and impact of the deployment and will be shared with participating agencies and focal points. Staff from participating agencies also highlighted their immediate and long term actions and the progress being made.

Participating agencies have initiated the following immediate actions as a result of the deployment activities:

- Improving dissemination and collection of information to beneficiaries

¹ UN News Centre, 6 November 2009, Displaced Sri Lankans increasingly returning home from camps.

- Commitment to put in place or strengthen complaints handling procedures for beneficiaries and staff
- Introduction to partners about accountability and quality commitments
- Improving plans for partner capacity building
- Including humanitarian accountability and quality aspects in agreements and MoUs with partners.
- Translation of key documents into local languages
- Addressing staff issues and related concerns
- Developing knowledge management systems and humanitarian accountability frameworks
- Inclusion of beneficiary feedback and qualitative aspects in monitoring and evaluation
- Replicating the self-assessment for other programmes and areas within Sri Lanka
- Develop tools to: capture feedback from beneficiaries, draft programme-based fact sheets and quality programming appraisal forms

The team worked closely with senior management at the Colombo level to build commitment and interest and to ensure that they were well informed of progress. Post-deployment activities have included bilateral and collective debriefings in the wider sector to discuss the challenges and impact of the deployment. Some remote support is offered to participating agencies with follow-up taking place three months after the end of the deployment.

During the externally facilitated After-Action Review agencies highlighted the following impacts as a result of the deployment:

- Staff gained a sense of satisfaction with being able to gauge their accountability practices – field staff were motivated as they felt their good practice was acknowledged.
- Identification of gaps and prioritisation of areas for improvement with participation of staff
- Opened up a space for accountability to beneficiaries.
- Resources, time, and staff training on humanitarian accountability issues to be in all future budgets, and donor funding proposals, which will need senior management commitment.
- Staff will seek greater engagement with accountability focal person at HQ, and will initiate a process of annual review across the agency.
- Positive change in perception on complaints and complaints handling among staff. Formalisation of complaints and response mechanisms and to achieve the requirements of Benchmark 5 of the HAP Standard.
- Shift in monitoring and evaluation approach (including techniques and tools) by taking into account the HAP Standard and strengthening participatory and qualitative aspects.
- Staff now able to run workshop for others in their agency on accountability.
- With the training of staff on the Principles of Accountability and HAP Benchmarks staff now feel motivated to work on strengthening practice against the benchmarks.
- Staff are now aware of their own agency's commitment to HAP and have gained shared understanding of HAP across the country offices on par with head office.

The positive response of agencies to the deployment and the level of participation in its activities amidst a challenging context is indicative of a high level of commitment to strengthen beneficiary accountability when and where it is needed most. The activities undertaken aimed to build in-country capacity, sustain the focus on improved accountability, not only for the current responses, but future planned ones for each agency. For the momentum to continue and be maintained, consistent support from focal points and senior management is required. It is hoped that the experience and learning from the deployment in Sri Lanka will be shared across the agencies' programmes and locations to ensure impact not only in Sri Lanka but more widely in the humanitarian community.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

Why Sri Lanka? Rationale of the NEP

HAP's Roving Team is deployed to various locations under the New Emergencies Policy (NEP) which sets out a commitment by HAP members to make a special collective effort to apply the HAP Principles of Accountability (measured through the HAP 2007 Standard) from the outset of all new humanitarian emergencies² to mitigate the accountability deficit which can exist during a humanitarian response. Recent deployments under the NEP include Pakistan; Bangladesh and Myanmar.

In early in 2009, the internal armed conflict in Sri Lanka and Pakistan escalated considerably, leading to displacement of thousands. The HAP Secretariat convened a teleconference with HAP Members on 29th May 2009 to discuss these exacerbating crises in which beneficiary consultation and participation became acutely limited due to the insecure operational context in Pakistan and the restricted humanitarian access in Sri Lanka. During the teleconference the ongoing emergency in Sri Lanka was collectively identified as a site for additional HAP support and chosen for the deployment. Reasons for selecting Sri Lanka included:

- To support staff understanding and practice of accountability to beneficiaries.
- To understand, given the challenging context, what is possible in terms of NGO accountability.
- Prevailing issues within Menik Farm, which had become one of the largest IDP camps in the world, necessitated additional focus and efforts to promote accountability in ongoing humanitarian response.

The Humanitarian Context

The protracted armed conflict in Sri Lanka between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ended in May 2009. Between October 2008 and June 2009, more than 280,000 people fled the conflict, and were placed in internment camps. The largest camps (including Menik Farm), which held the majority of the internally displaced people (IDPs), were in the district of Vavuniya, with smaller camps in Mannar, Jaffna and Trincomalee.

Established as temporary camps, Menik Farm in Vavuniya, faced the worst conditions of over-crowding. With more than 220,000 IDPs in June 2009 it became one of the largest IDP camps in the world³. Agencies working to provide humanitarian assistance needed undergo a lengthy approval process by military and government authorities. In the initial stages of the emergency and camp establishment all access was granted on the basis of provision of tangible items such as non-food items, food, medical supplies and assistance etc. Time in the camp was limited and interaction with beneficiaries beyond provision of items was disallowed. As a result many approaches normally employed by agencies as part of an emergency response were not possible, for example at the time of the deployment the following were not allowed under the camp conditions:

- Surveys and focus group discussions as part of needs assessments and reviewing suitability of services
- Community meetings and gatherings
- Sharing of information (for example the use of notice boards and leaflets) that had not been pre-approved by the military.
- This operational context hindered safeguarding protection rights, informing and consulting beneficiaries, ensuring participation or providing safe avenues for registering complaints. Practices such as needs assessments or feedback were disallowed and risks existed for staff and beneficiaries on any such interaction.

There is clear recognition by HAP that emergencies are complex and fraught with moral dilemmas and difficult choices, therefore there are times when all humanitarian principles and the requirements of the

² NEP Protocol: A humanitarian emergency is defined as "an urgent response designed to save lives subject to imminent threat. A "new" humanitarian emergency is the response that is mounted as a consequence of recent and significant increase in vulnerability, which occurs after, for example, natural hazard events, forced displacement, deteriorating security or exhaustion of local coping strategies

³ For more details see: Sri Lanka: Continuing humanitarian concerns and obstacles to durable solutions for recent and longer-term IDPs www.internal-displacement.org

HAP 2007 Standard cannot be met. The HAP standard outlines the Principles of Humanitarian Action, which are ranked, similar to the medical practice of ranking the order in which emergency patients are treated (known as *triage*). This ranking acknowledges that humanitarian organisations can be forced to select the 'least worst' option from within a range of 'bad choices'. While agencies are expected to commit to the principles with equal determination, real circumstances may still force an agency to compromise on a tertiary principle, such as neutrality or informed consent in order that it is allowed to run an operation that can fulfil a secondary or primary principle, such as meeting humanitarian needs in an impartial way.⁴

Numerous agencies, including donors, internally and collectively struggled with questions of the humanitarian imperative and inadvertently sustaining the camps. Agencies had to make hard choices, as one staff member put it, between 'principles and pragmatism.' HAP members and staff of other humanitarian agencies during discussions highlighted the utility the hierarchy of the Principles of Humanitarian Accountability and concept of triage as it would assist agencies to maintain balance between principles and pragmatism both and towards 'principled pragmatism.'

The humanitarian context in the North did not remain static, and over time, the conditions enforced by the government improved, with slight increased ease of access for field staff, identification of point persons in each block, and IDPs volunteering able to participate in agencies' activities. These slight shifts present opportunities for strengthening NGO accountability – for example by observing, collecting and recording beneficiary input and feedback.

The return of IDPs started in September and by November 2009, the pace of returns accelerated and according to UN⁵ sources, around 90,000 IDPs had been allowed to leave the camps.

⁴ For more see the Guide to the HAP Standard available, free of cost at: www.hapinternational.org

⁵ UN News Centre, 6 November 2009, Displaced Sri Lankans increasingly returning home from camps.

SECTION 2: MAIN ACTIVITIES

Developing and defining the deployment activities

Bilateral consultations with HAP Member focal points and country offices were undertaken to define activities and develop the Terms of Reference (available on the HAP website- Field Support- Sri Lanka page). Additional discussions were held with the Listening Project and CWS-Pakistan/Afghanistan.

Once in-country bilateral discussions were also held with country directors and senior management of HAP Members and other key agencies (between 23rd July- 6th August) to:

- Introduce the HAP Team, discuss the ToR, and identify agency-specific requests
- Gather inputs related to the challenges and constraints of the context
- Confirm agency participation in activities and meet the designated staff

Discussions also took place with staff from Sight Savers, Canadian Red Cross, Lutheran World Relief and Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA).

An Inter-Agency meeting for HAP Members and partners in Sri Lanka was held on 6th August to collectively discuss the ToR and activities planned. This was attended by representatives from 12 agencies who highlighted that the deployment will give an opportunity to 'bring about system change; increase clarity within agencies; improve cost effectiveness; highlight good practice and work with other actors involved in the humanitarian response.' Agencies however, responded with limited enthusiasm towards establishing a working group and recommended that more time be given to participating agencies to think this over. A suggestion to explore other options to share learning through electronic exchange was made.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with each of the agency participating in the tailored agency-specific support provided by the HAP Team.

Observations and Learning points:

- With the significant increase in number of HAP Members since the New Emergency protocol was designed, it is felt that a teleconference with all members can prove to be unwieldy. Therefore alternate structures and means of participation in the teleconference will be explored.
- The HAP Team should establish early contact with the country office to communicate the rationale for the chosen location and discussions about the ToR and deployment can be held.
- Initial meetings with agencies were critical. During these the HAP Team explained the aim and activities and the agencies highlighted specific risks and concerns. These meetings led to increased interest and participation.
- Improved preparation of designated staff prior to HAP Team's arrival in country would be beneficial, as few designated staff were informed or briefed on the role they were to undertake. This would need to be led by focal points and contacts within the country offices.
- The ToR should be finalised in-country, based on the feedback received by senior managers and other stakeholders in light of the contextual realities on the ground. This will allow for increased ownership by the agencies in-country and greater flexibility based on the context and needs of the agencies. However, for this to take place agency staff, both focal points and senior management, will need to overcome time and other constraints to facilitate this process.

Below are the activities undertaken to achieve the objectives outlined in the deployment ToR.

OBJECTIVE 1

To identify and deliver appropriate immediate and direct support activities with participating agencies to implement context-specific accountability mechanisms and strengthen quality management systems related to programme delivery.

1.1 Guided Self-Assessments

“Through the guided self-assessment we know where we are at against the HAP Standard and where we want to be”

(Statement made by Save the Children in Sri Lanka staff member in the After-Action Review of the deployment, 15th Oct, 2009)

A Guided Self-Assessment (GSA) allows agencies to gain a snapshot of strengths and gaps that could benefit from improvement, which provides the basis for developing a realistic action plan. The process focuses on reviewing agency practice against the HAP Standard at a project site (through reviews of existing systems and practice, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with staff, and normally with affected-communities and beneficiaries), with particular focus on information dissemination; participation of communities in decision-making; complaint handling; management practices (including staff); and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.

Guided self-assessments are led by designated agency staff for their agency, with support and guidance provided by the HAP team. Through working alongside designated staff, and involving others as part of discussions, the process also serves to increase staff awareness and capacity. By the end it is anticipated that designated staff have a good understanding of the HAP Standard, and feel able to take forward improved practice within their agency. As a result of this process both immediate and long-term action points are identified.

Given the context, the GSA sought to understand:

- a) Existing systems related to accountability (that would enable an agency to meet the benchmarks in conducive contexts)
- b) Level of staff awareness on key approaches related to accountability, and attitude towards this.
- c) Current practice and the extent to which agencies recognised and capitalised on existing opportunities.

Guided self-assessment process was undertaken by:

- 1. ACTED
- 2. OfERR: Christian Aid & DanChurchAid partner
- 3. Habitat for Humanity Sri Lanka
- 4. Mercy Malaysia
- 5. Muslim Aid
- 6. Save the Children Sri Lanka
- 7. World Vision Sri Lanka

Direct and tailored support was also provided to:

- 8. CARE Sri Lanka
- 9. Christian Aid

- “The HAP team and the GSA process allowed for gaps in current practices and new methods of information sharing to be identified, revising current tools, and opening new avenues for accountability.”
- “The opportunity to generate and review the self-assessment results with the HAP team was seen as a key motivational tool for the designated staff to continue to improve and work with colleagues on identifying gap areas.”

(Excerpts from the externally facilitated After-Action Review)

It should be noted that the GSA process undertaken with agencies in Sri Lanka is not part of the HAP certification process, and differs from the baseline analysis, which is a more extensive study including an exhaustive review of the quality management system and practice at the head and programme site offices.

1.2 Process of Guided Self-Assessment

The focus of the HAP Roving team:

a) Inter-agency workshop : Introduction to the HAP Standard and self-assessment process	b) Agency specific: Reviewing agency practice (at Colombo)	c) Agency specific: - Reviewing Practice - Seeking beneficiary input to improve practice (at Menik Farm * Vavuniya offices)	d) Reports & Senior Management Debrief	e) Inter-agency workshop: Learning from self-assessments	f) Additional support and follow-up
2 days: 12- 13 August	17 August – 4 September	9-25 September	28 Sept- 13 Oct	14 th October	Continuous & Report update- 15 th Feb 2010

a) Inter-agency Workshop

The workshop was held to introduce the designated staff to the HAP 2007 Standard and provide guidance on how to undertake the self-assessment. It included exploring and examining:

- Concepts of Humanitarian accountability
- Benchmarks of the HAP 2007 Standard
- Process and methodology of a self-assessment, taking into account the context.

In total 20 staff from 12 agencies participated in this workshop.

b) Reviewing practice at Colombo level

On average the HAP Team spent two days working alongside designated staff of the participating agency at Colombo level to review policy and practice through a brief document review, and interview/focus-group discussions with a cross section of staff, including:

- Country directors and senior management
- Operations and programme staff
- Programme support – including human resource, administration, logistics, finance

A combination of open questions, ranking exercises, mapping using staff organigrams, and ‘games’ were used to generate discussion.

Throughout the process the focus was on building the capacity of and supporting the designated staff to lead the process with the aim to identify:

- level of staff awareness of the key policies
- practice in the current emergency response
- good practice and areas requiring improvement
- additional action and support needed by staff to increase the impact of response

Before each session the HAP Team and designated staff discussed the key points to be raised, how to verify practice and analyze the feedback received against the HAP 2007 Standard along with a debrief at the end of each day in which the findings were collated and the next sessions planned.

c) Reviewing Practice at Vavuniya Level

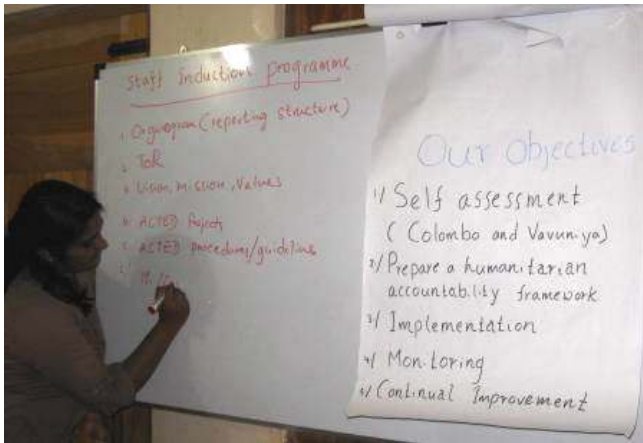
Normally a critical feature of a HAP deployment is providing support to field staff, and seeking input from beneficiaries to improve agency practice. However, given the travel restrictions, time in Vavuniya was limited to 3 weeks for the Roving Team, and the degree of beneficiary input into the GSA process was less than usual.

On average the team spent two days with each agency in Vavuniya, working with designated staff to review practice through discussions with: programme site staff (including head of programmes, operations, field staff to tractor drivers), and programme support staff. Again, a combination of techniques were used to generate discussion and interaction to ensure staff felt at ease in giving feedback. In addition, in five of the agency GSAs designated staff entered the camps to observe and informally seek feedback from beneficiaries on their agency’s activities. The HAP team were limited to one visit to Menik Farm themselves, and so accompanied their host agency Muslim Aid to better understand their practice.

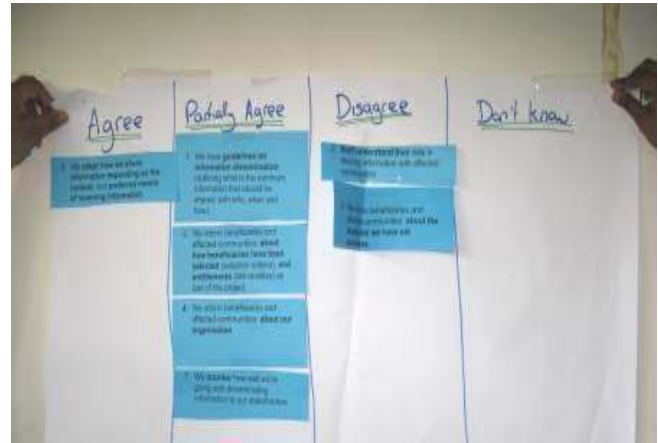
d) Other agency-specific support provided

In addition to the guided-self assessment, direct and tailored support was provided at Colombo and Vavuniya to agencies per their requests.

- CARE: focus on Benchmarks related to information sharing, complaints handling and continual improvement (monitoring and evaluation)
- Christian Aid: One day workshop on the HAP 2007 Standard for staff and partners
- ACTED: Orientation on the HAP 2007 Standard for partners as part of a post-conflict inter-agency project.



Agency staff leading the GSA in Vavuniya



Ranking exercise used by staff to give feedback in the GSA

"Methods employed during the workshops and the availability of case studies and tools from other agencies and countries (on the HAP website) along with first time training on the HAP Standard and its benchmarks provided agency staff with the necessary guidance on how to deepen their understanding and the organisations' accountability practices." (Excerpt from the After-Action Review Report)

e) Reports and senior management commitment

Reports on the findings were prepared by the designated staff and HAP team for each agency, summarising the findings and attempting to categorise the requirements under each benchmark as "met", "partially met" or "not met", stating whether the cause of gaps identified were due to external factors (related to the context), "internal factors" (e.g. lack of policy or guidance, gaps in staff awareness and understanding, management system needs to be strengthened), or a "combination of factors". In this way agency staff could identify to what extent gaps in practice against the HAP Standard were beyond their control.

Country Directors and senior managers of each agency were debriefed on the key findings, and amendments were made to the reports as needed.

f) Inter-agency Lessons Learnt Workshop

An inter-agency Lessons Learned Workshop was held on 14th October, 2009 in which the agencies highlight key learning identified through their work with the HAP Team- outlined in later sections of this report. "The development of partnerships (formal and informal) between agencies responding to the IDP crisis was highlighted as an extremely positive outcome of HAP's deployment. Agency staff stated this as a key opportunity as they were better able to interact, understand and learn from peers." (Excerpt from the After-Action Review report). Details of the of the outcomes and other highlights are in the following sections.



Staff share learning in the Lessons Learnt Workshop – October 2009

Observations and Learning:

- The GSA provided an opportunity for a cross-section of staff to be and feel involved. It also highlighted an agency's staff had varying understanding, perspective and practice of key policies and commitments.
- By giving the leadership role to designated staff, they had the chance to acquire new learning and skills. Some have planned to replicate this process across other programmes (in Sri Lanka and internationally).
- However, senior management focus and priority to address the findings needs to continue with vigour and consistency.
- Each GSA requires significant amount of preparation and follow-up work for the HAP team. This can be quite time-consuming which can leave less time for the HAP Team to focus on other activities. The number of agencies undertaking the GSA and its methodology will be evaluated for future deployments.

OBJECTIVE 2

To facilitate collective learning between HAP members, their partners and other interested agencies within Sri Lanka.

2.1 Accountability and Quality Working Group

As mentioned above, the response to establishing an Accountability and Quality Working Group by HAP members was initially ambivalent. The impediments towards establishing a working group included;

- Agencies expressed concern as to how such a group would be perceived in their context, given wider issues of transparency, trust and the vulnerability of their positions. In the initial stages there was a limited understanding as to how the issue of humanitarian accountability might be addressed in Sri Lanka, and people needed some time to reflect upon the possible implications of, for example, wide publication of the standard and public association with accountability.
- Resources (human and financial - questions were raised of hosting, resourcing and coordinating this group)
- Time constraints
- Too many meetings and groups - staff were already committed to attending numerous coordination or cluster meetings.
- Non-preference for linking it with existing forums or groups.

By the end of the deployment, participating agencies appeared to see greater value in the concept of a local peer based forum, and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn from each other and to exchange ideas and experiences through the HAP deployment. It seems that time may be needed in certain contexts to lay the groundwork for a more full consideration of the benefits and costs of establishing ongoing processes in-country, and this will be taken into consideration for future deployments.

2.2 Translation of the HAP 2007 Standard

The translation of the Principles of Accountability and the HAP 2007 Standard into Tamil and Sinhala was led by Lutheran World Relief (LWR) – a non-HAP member. The Sinhala version was finalised quickly, however due to greater variation in the Tamil language, this version was made available later. These translated documents were distributed in print form to agencies in Sri Lanka, and are available to download free of cost from the HAP website: www.hapinternational.org

2.3 Case Studies & Tools

Case studies and tools on beneficiary accountability were shared during the workshops and orientations. Agency staff were supported and encouraged to draft context-specific case studies of good practice and the following have been contributed:

- a) Case Study: Danish Refugee Council's approach to developing and implementing a contextualized Humanitarian Accountability Framework (HAF) in Sri Lanka
- b) Self-Assessment Case Study: Methodology used to review accountability as part of ACTED's response in northern Sri Lanka
- c) 'Bus scenario' to facilitate discussion on the concept of humanitarian accountability (developed by World Vision in Sri Lanka staff member seconded to HAP team)

Further case studies are anticipated, while the above ones are available on the HAP website: www.hapinternational.org

d) Engagement with non-HAP members and other stakeholders

To increase awareness and understanding of humanitarian accountability and quality beyond the HAP Membership amongst other I/NGOs and stakeholders involved in the humanitarian response, the HAP Team undertook the following activities:

- Bilateral meetings
- Workshop on 'Introduction to Humanitarian Accountability and HAP 2007 Standard' held 2nd October
- Contribution to the HAP 2007 Standard Review process

The following table summarises these interactions:

AGENCY	ACTIVITY
1. Canadian Red Cross	Participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bilateral meeting ○ Focus group discussion on Standard Review ○ Standard Review consultation ○ Workshop on Introduction to Humanitarian Accountability
2. SAH Sri Lanka (part of Solidar)	Participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Standard Review consultation ○ Workshop on Introduction to Humanitarian Accountability
3. World Concern	Participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Standard Review consultation ○ Workshop on Introduction to Humanitarian Accountability
4. ASB Sri Lanka	Participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Standard Review consultation ○ Workshop on Introduction to Humanitarian Accountability
5. Fridsro (partner of PMU Interlife),	Participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Standard Review consultation ○ Workshop on Introduction to Humanitarian Accountability
6. ZOA Refugee Council	Participation in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Standard Review consultation ○ Workshop on Introduction to Humanitarian Accountability
7. Lutheran World Relief (LWR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bilateral discussions with country director, staff and regional director. ○ HAP Team provided guidance on HAP trainings ○ Led on translating the HAP 2007 Standard into Tamil and Sinhala
8. United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bilateral meeting with country director- interest in participating in the guided self assessment- however due to staff turnover were unable to do so.
9. International Relief and Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introductory meeting to introduce HAP and its work on humanitarian accountability
10. Sight Savers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bilateral discussion ○ Participation in focus group discussion for the standard review

OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

Donors:

11. Japanese International Cooperation Agency (**JICA**)
12. Department for International Development (**DFID**)
13. Canadian International Development Agency (**CIDA**)

- Introductory meeting held
- Overview of the deployment activities and engagement of agencies
- Other observations on state of humanitarian accountability and related issues in the ongoing humanitarian response shared.

14. Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA):

- Bilateral meeting
 - Standard Review consultation
 - Workshop on Introduction to Humanitarian Accountability- 2nd Oct
- The HAP Team:
- Attended some of the weekly meetings held at CHA

15. Red-R Sri Lanka

- Red-R Sri Lanka, a leading training organisation for humanitarian agencies and the HAP Team have undertaken discussions to integrate the HAP 2007 Standard in their trainings.
- A Red-R staff member also accompanied the HAP Team on a guided-self assessment to improve the understanding of the HAP 2007 Standard and observe the methodology

16. UNHCR

- Meeting held with Senior Protection Officer at Colombo and Protection officer at Vavuniya
- Discussion on: challenges on ensuring accountability to beneficiaries, issues related to complaints, protection issues and other observations.
- The HAP Team was scheduled to present at the bi monthly protection cluster meeting, however, the initial date needed to be cancelled and another mutually suitable one could not be found prior to the end of the deployment.

e) HAP 2007 Standard Review

National and international staff working for I/NGOs were invited to participate in the HAP 2007 Standard Review Process which is currently underway. This provided staff from various agencies to discuss issues related to humanitarian accountability in general and in particular for Sri Lanka through the lens of humanitarian accountability. This experiential input into the Standard review was invaluable in further strengthening its applicability and relevance for the humanitarian agencies working in complex emergencies. Four consultations were undertaken with a total of 38 staff in Sri Lanka while additional feedback is being collected electronically.

Observations and Learning:

- The feasibility of establishing an accountability working group should be examined in collaboration with the in-country agencies, and more time may be needed prior to coming to a decision.
- The outreach with agencies beyond the HAP membership is determined by prevailing context, time available to the HAP team and support from the member agencies.

OBJECTIVE 3:

To analyse, and share outputs and lessons learnt during the deployment, so that HAP and member agencies can continually improve impact and practice.

Under this objective, An After-Action Review was undertaken on 15th October to assess the impact of the accountability activities undertaken by the HAP team in Sri Lanka as a result of the three-month deployment. It was conducted by external facilitators, Dr Jamie Munn (Research and Communications Manager- HAP International), and Dr Mark Foran (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative). The report of this event will be shared with participating agencies.

3.1 After-Action Review Report salient highlights:

- “The professional skills (and diplomacy) of the HAP team during the GSA process were seen as a considerable positive for a number of agencies. The GSA was highlighted as a tool that provided staff not only the opportunity to assess their current performance but to also build capacity on areas of quality management and accountability that otherwise were lost in paperwork. Some agencies noted that the assessment process allowed engaged staff to team build.”
- “The working culture of the organisation has changed and the organisation works towards the same direction. Attitudes towards strengthening accountability and quality have been strengthened.”
- “The opportunity to share experiences with agencies working in Sri Lanka during multi-agency workshops was highlighted as a key learning tool and provided reassurance as to individual agencies’ practices.”
- “Engagement with senior country management to gain their “buy-in” and commitment should be increased”
- “The Roving Team had to balance differing requests and needs from the head office and Country Director level, and designated staff. In this context head office and Country Directors were in support of the Roving Team focusing activities on Menik Farm, where as some staff expressed a preference for the Roving Team to focus in other areas where the emergency response was not as new and there was better access to beneficiaries. It was in these areas of the Sri Lankan response that designated staff felt they could show greater accountability practice. In future an initial dialogue between all groups may help overcome these different preferences. It also indicates the need for senior management to highlight why accountability and quality need to be highlighted and prioritised during an emergency”

3.2 Impacts of the HAP deployment highlighted in the AAR:

- Staff gained a sense of satisfaction with being able to gauge their accountability practices – field staff were motivated as they felt their good practice was acknowledged.
- Identification of gaps and prioritisation of areas for improvement with participation of staff
- Opened up a space for accountability to beneficiaries.

- Resources, time, and staff training on humanitarian accountability issues to be in all future budgets, and donor funding proposals which will need senior management commitment.
- Staff will seek greater engagement with accountability focal person at HQ, and will initiate a process of annual review across the agency.
- Positive change in perception on complaints and complaints handling among staff. Formalisation of complaints and response mechanisms and to achieve the requirements of Benchmark 5 of the HAP Standard.
- Shift in monitoring and evaluation approach (including techniques and tools) by taking into account the HAP Standard and strengthening participatory and qualitative aspects.
- Staff now able to run workshop for others in their agency on accountability.
- With the training of staff on the Principles of Accountability and HAP Benchmarks staff now feel motivated to work on strengthening practice against the benchmarks.
- Staff are now aware of their own agency's commitment to HAP and have gained shared understanding of HAP across the country offices on par with head office.
- Increase in workload for designated staff members.

3.3 Post-deployment Activities and wider learning

“Working with the HAP team allowed for senior country management “buy-in” to the importance of accountability mechanisms during the humanitarian response phase in Sri Lanka. Staff highlighted that the HAP Team’s involvement was essential in order to influence senior management.” (Excerpt from the AAR Report)

- Towards the end of the deployment, bilateral debriefings were held with country directors of the participating agencies to share key learning, elaborate upon the findings of the self-assessment reports and gain commitment for follow-up activities for the goals identified.
- Bilateral debriefings have been undertaken with focal points of participating agencies to ensure that the momentum created during the deployment is maintained and necessary follow-up support is provided. Incorporating the learning and good practice and sharing that widely across the agency is essential to fully maximise on the impact of the deployment.
- A teleconference to debrief the focal points of HAP Members agencies and other quality and accountability initiatives was held to discuss the outputs, achievements, challenges and learning from the deployment on 30th November 2009.
- Various options are being explored to modify the methodology for future deployments based upon the experience and learning from this and previous deployments.

Observations and Learning:

- AAR provides vital learning and an opportunity to reflect on deployment
- External facilitator helps support the team, and valuable alternative perspectives are garnered
- AAR should include a range of approaches for seeking feedback on the deployment, including input from senior managers and other stakeholders who may not be able to participate in longer workshop.
- Senior management and focal points need to ensure that the momentum and learning generated during the deployment are sustained in Sri Lanka for ongoing and future humanitarian responses and also extended wider across the organisation.

SECTION 3: MOVING FORWARD

Progress of Agencies:

Senior management commitment and support to address issues of humanitarian accountability has been identified by agency staff as vitally important. It is imperative that issues of accountability are prioritised and adequate support is provided to achieve progress to ensure that the deployment and its activities have the widest possible impact.

- a) Participating agencies have initiated the following immediate actions on the findings of the guided self assessments:
- Wider briefing on the key findings of the report to staff across the agency
 - Improved dissemination and collection of information to beneficiaries
 - Commitments to put in place or strengthen complaints handling procedures for beneficiaries and staff
 - Introduction to partners about accountability and quality commitments
 - Improved plans for partner capacity building
 - Including humanitarian accountability and quality aspects in agreements and MoUs with partners.
 - Translation of key documents into local languages
 - Addressing staff issues and related concerns
 - Develop knowledge management systems
 - Inclusion of beneficiary feedback and qualitative aspects in monitoring and evaluation
 - Replicating the self-assessment for other programmes and areas within Sri Lanka
 - Develop tools to: to capture feedback from beneficiaries, drafting programme-based fact sheets, and quality programming appraisal forms etc.

Additional areas that agencies have highlighted an intention to move forward on are:

- Contribute to and monitor the sharing of information through the internal management structure
 - Find agency-based methods of internally sustaining the current growth in accountability
 - Design indicators for measuring participation and consultation of beneficiaries given the context of difficult access
 - Develop a framework for improving indicators that can measure compliance to Benchmarks 2 & 5
 - Build agency-specific training modules, including induction and orientation training, for programme site staff on the 6 HAP benchmarks
 - Develop a questionnaire for programme beneficiaries which will respond to their changing needs as they move from Menik Farm
- b) In addition a staff member from RedR UK in Sri Lanka accompanied the HAP team during part of a Guided Self-assessment to improve their understanding of the HAP Standard and of the way in which HAP works. Following this, and through subsequent discussions, it is anticipated that the HAP Standard will be integrated into existing trainings, and a specific one-day course on accountability will be developed.
- c) Context-specific cases studies and tools are also being developed by the agencies with support by the HAP team.

HAP Team Follow-up:

- Continued support is provided to agencies in sharing resources, drafting humanitarian accountability frameworks, finalising the GSA reports and developing case studies.
- A planned post-deployment follow-up is scheduled for February 2010. The follow-up aims to understand progress made against the goals set by each agency and provide remote additional support as needed.

SECTION 4: OBSERVATIONS AND LEARNING

on Quality and Accountability as part of the Recent Response in Sri Lanka

This section summarises the Roving Team's learning on quality and accountability based on the response between July-October 2009 in Northern Sri Lanka. *These points are based on common findings from the engagement with the agencies and other actors involved in the response.*

This section serves to present potential opportunities that were found for strengthening practice, taking into account the contextual constraints expressed by a number of agencies at the time. The context in northern Sri Lanka is changing rapidly and the points below do not necessarily reflect the situation today, in which the opportunities may differ in number and focus. The opportunities outlined here are as cross-cutting as possible, and should be interpreted by each agency depending on the context they are facing.

1. Summary findings and opportunities against the HAP 2007 Standard

Benchmark 1: Humanitarian Quality Management System

- The degree to which each agency was constrained by the context varied, depending on a number of factors including previous work in Sri Lanka, mandate, advocacy, relationship with the Government of Sri Lanka etc. It was noticed that agencies from the South and national staff were given comparatively easier access than others. This highlights the importance of agencies having internal systems for conducting feasibility and risk analyses of the possibility for and impacts of different accountable practice (e.g. options for and risks of sharing key information vs risks of not sharing information).
- In a changing context agencies need to remain responsive, monitoring changes and linking these to NGO ways of working to take advantage of contextual changes as they occur (for example increased access allowing increased interaction with beneficiaries). At the time of the deployment there were variations in understanding between Colombo and Vavaunya offices regarding the limitations of the context, with field staff able to identify opportunities that could be utilised due to changes in the context.
- The ongoing debate within the humanitarian community in Sri Lanka regarding the continuation of response in Menik Farm was polarised between “principles vs pragmatism” rather than “principled pragmatism”. Decision-making and risk analysis processes need to be internally and collectively strengthened to enable the humanitarian actors to undertake contextual and timely decisions. The concept of triage and hierarchy on which the Principles of Humanitarian Action (pg 8, HAP 2007 Standard) and the process of exoneration were shared with HAP and non-HAP members. While there was some disagreement on which principle should be prioritised, the framework and conceptualisation of these principles was appreciated by the staff as being useful to help make decisions in complex contexts. Awareness and use of the Principles of Humanitarian Action as in the HAP 2007 Standard can help humanitarian actors to make context specific and timely decisions.
- Emphasis needs to be given to issues of accountability and quality, so that practice can occur when external context is not so limiting. Staff were often unaware of key organizational commitments, principles and policies, how these apply to them and their role in implementing them. Clear understanding of key commitments may prompt staff to develop innovative approaches to meeting these.
- While the majority of agencies did not have organizational or country-specific Humanitarian Accountability Framework (HAF), agency staff recognized the value a HAF would bring and expressed high levels of interest in drafting one. Particular interest was shown by monitoring and evaluation staff, who felt this would help provide a framework against which agency commitments could be monitored as part of the current and subsequent response.
- Some field staff felt less informed on the rationale and reasons of decisions undertaken, for example why did agencies suspend their advocacy mandate, why was the agency responding at all under the given circumstances, how was the agency helping their interned colleagues etc. These questions highlight the need for staff to be regularly informed and updated on the key decisions regarding their work.

Opportunities for strengthening quality management system

- Draft an emergency Humanitarian Accountability Framework that summarises the agency's key accountability commitments for emergency response, how each will be implemented as part of this response, and who is responsible for each.
- Integrate accountability commitments into project proposals, reports, and monitoring formats, so that these are considered at each stage of the project development and during implementation. Alternatively develop a brief checklist of accountability elements that need to be included in each project, for staff who draft and sign off on all project and manage activities.
- Monitor the context regularly through an accountability lens in order to conduct risk and feasibility analyses of strengthening accountability. In a context that has a number of constraints identify key factors that would enable change and increased accountability.
- Work with field staff as part of the above processes to ensure latest perspectives from the ground are taken into account, build awareness of the agencies commitments, and identify innovative solutions to contextual challenges.

Benchmark 2: Information Sharing

- During the deployment period contact with beneficiaries was limited, gatherings and meetings were not possible, and the sharing of written material was not allowed without prior approval from camp authorities. Project activities such as distributions presented opportunities for staff to be in contact with beneficiaries. In some instances written boards/posters were used (with prior approval) to display basic information regarding services. Agencies also used the camp loud speakers, volunteers and the Gram Sewaka⁶ (appointed community representative) to share basic information.
- Details regarding time, content and quantity of distributions are not always shared in advance causing beneficiaries to stand in long queues in the heat for items they might not wish to receive. Due to long waiting durations, and clash with timings of other activities such as cooking, children were made to keep a place in the queues while parents did other chores.
- Some agencies informed the Gram Sewaka regarding the distributions and relied on him/her to pass on the information, while others informed their IDP volunteers. There was an expectation that these individuals would pass on the information to others inside the camp, but staff acknowledged this expectation was assumed rather than explicitly clarified. Independent verification that information has been conveyed correctly or that the IDPs are aware of the channels of information is necessary to monitor if information is reaching intended audience and also to prevent misuse of power.
- Field staff themselves need to have basic information regarding the organisation, its values and its work (and limitations) so that they are able to respond to questions from beneficiaries without raising expectations or discouraging them. In addition field staff need to be aware of the role in sharing key information, and have clear guidance on what information can and can't be shared. A lack of information also prevents staff from effectively dealing with interactions with camp authorities, and other actors.

Opportunities for strengthening information sharing

- Identify key messages and pieces of information that should be shared with beneficiaries about the project and agency's response.
- With field staff identify the different available options for sharing basic information that exist in the current context, and limitations of each.
- Simple actions can make a difference - for example displaying the distribution items at the distribution point (either a list of what was included in the package, or a physical example) was seen as good and feasible idea by field staff.

Benchmark 3: Participation

- Field staff received feedback from beneficiaries as they carry out their jobs in the camps. Different types of programmes provided different degrees of opportunities for obtaining informal feedback on NGO activities. For example communal kitchens tended to provide more opportunities, than programmes focused on gully sucking.

⁶ The role of the Gram Sweka exists throughout Sri Lanka and in the camps the Gram Sweka was chosen from amongst the IDP community to become the head representative within allocated blocks of the camps and act as point of contact and coordination for agencies and camp authorities in the block.

- There was a tendency for more informal means of feedback to be discounted – as they did not fit with traditional thinking of needs assessment and monitoring. In addition field staff often expressed that there was no point in sharing feedback as all decisions were made at cluster level – this was seen as an additional layer of management decision-making against over which field staff felt they had little influence.
- Collecting and recording information from beneficiaries, and how this was processed within the agency and fed up to clusters could have been strengthened.

Opportunities for strengthening participation

- Recognise and maximize the use of opportunities for where informal feedback could be sought. For example in this context distribution times, maintenance of tents, communal kitchens, were potential opportunities where input from beneficiaries on projects services could have been informally gathered. In addition the Gram Sewaka, and volunteers could have been utilised to understand if services/products were meeting needs, and obtain feedback on agency activities.
- To take advantage of all informal interactions agencies need to identify and help field staff understand the types of feedback from beneficiaries and stress the importance of this for the agency to improve quality of its products and services in meeting needs. This feedback needs to be prioritised and conveyed to decision makers (e.g. via meetings or reports), and field staff should be kept informed on how the information from beneficiaries is incorporated into decisions made by the organization. In this context, agencies could identify 2-3 key questions for field staff to ask beneficiaries when possible related to their agency's product/service.
- While agencies remain committed to participation, what this means for each agency and the level of participation that staff should be aiming for (in an emergency and non-emergency context) needs to be outlined, and continually re-examined to match the context.

Benchmark 4: Staff Competencies

- Staff, particularly from field sites, was highly motivated and keen to broaden and improve their humanitarian assistance. For example staff were interested in capacity building, increasing their knowledge on issues of humanitarian accountability, and having “how to” tools.
- Potential risks exist for staff, and additional stress caused by concerns for colleagues and family members who were living in the camps needs to be taken into account.
- Language remained a barrier for field staff to fully communicate their concerns and discuss issues, or write qualitative reports on feedback from beneficiaries.
- Key documents (such as staff HR manuals and code of conduct) need to be translated, reinforced and made available to all staff. For example condensed versions need to be available during emergencies to all staff including those without computer access, and should form part of inductions.
- There was a need to strengthen inductions and initial briefings for field staff, temporary staff and volunteers, to share the basics about the agency, their role and expectations. For example in this context it was especially important that field staff and drivers could answer questions about the agency they worked for when stopped at checkpoints to avoid placing them at risk and raising suspicion. In addition in this context as volunteers were often one of the main points of contact between affected-people and the agency, guidance on the agency's expectations regarding engaging with beneficiaries and relay feedback accurately to the agencies becomes vital.

Opportunities for strengthening staff competencies

- Consider the diversity of beneficiaries in selection of staff and volunteers, in particular those staff who will be in contact with beneficiaries regularly.
- Ensure rapid basic inductions for all new staff and volunteers. Utilise regular meetings to build on knowledge (for example a topic per meeting).
- Job descriptions and code of conduct need to be shared in relevant languages, and relevant explanations given to ensure understanding.
- Identify and provide on-going training for staff linked to nature and context of the response (for example on disability, water purification etc).
- Seek feedback from affected-people on their experience interacting with staff on a “sample” basis. This could be incorporated into interim quarterly reports.

Benchmark 5: Complaints Handling

- Despite the contextual challenges complaints related to NGO activities were being received from beneficiaries, and there were examples from agencies of when these had been processed and acted upon. Practice tended to be informal, with a lack of clear procedures to guide staff on how complaints should be handled once received. While it was acknowledged that at the time of the deployment many agencies faced contextual challenges that prevented establishing more formal means of receiving complaints, this did not exclude the possibility of having a systematic way to process complaints once received informally (often based on opportunistic meetings).
- Complaints received tended to have been passed to the agency verbally via field staff (either directly from beneficiary or via the Gram Sewaka). One agency had negotiated with the ministry of health to put up a suggestion box inside the camp hospital where they were working.
- Examples of the types of complaints received included: mis-match of bucket lids, boys and men requesting clothing because they had been overlooked, need for variety in food provided at communal kitchens, need for more water, inadequate information on how to use some of the items distributed.
- On the whole, staff at field level expressed openness to the idea of a formal complaints mechanism, but would need sensitizing on the difference between feedback and complaint, and addressing common misconceptions (for example staff in one agency understood that a formal mechanism implied all complaints needed to be responded to positively). In addition staff need clear guidance on their role as part of any complaints mechanism, including what they should do if approached with a complaint (for example how complaints should be collected or re-directed to alternative channels).
- In regard to staff complaints handling, more agencies had procedures in place, although staff themselves highlighted cultural and organisational barriers that may prevent these from being utilised.

Opportunities to strengthen complaints handling:

- Establish a complaints handling procedure for handling complaints about the NGO's work from affected communities and beneficiaries (see Benchmark requirement 5.2 for more details).
- Raise staff awareness (including among drivers and volunteers) on: the value of complaints to the project/agency, the complaints handling procedures, and their role in this.
- Identify the most appropriate means to receive complaints related to NGO activities – taking into account the context. For many agencies at the time of the deployment this would have been via beneficiary-staff informal interactions – means to encourage this could be explored.
- Regularly review complaints received, and provide feedback to staff on how these complaints are used (for example, ensure complaints are reported on as part of standard reporting templates and non-sensitive ones discussed as part of regular staff meetings). Ensure relevant complaints are shared at cluster level, if linked to cluster-level decisions.

Benchmark 6: Continuous Learning

- Project monitoring tended to focus on quantitative and output oriented indicators (commonly linked to number of kits distributed, or gallons of water delivered). We found no examples of agencies monitoring process, or looking at more qualitative indicators such as those related to beneficiary satisfaction.
- A number of agencies had undertaken specific learning/review activities – for example review days, and After Action Reviews focused on their response to date.
- A number of agencies cited that staff turnover had been a challenge, in particular related to the loss of institutional memory and momentum. In particular it was felt that valuable learning from the Tsunami was not being remembered and implemented.
- Local partners highlighted the need for additional support to deal with the unique context particularly around protection issues.

Opportunities for strengthening continuous learning:

- Develop monitoring indicators (and associated questions) that seek to understand project processes in relation to beneficiaries, and beneficiary satisfaction with the product and service being delivered.
- Work with field staff to identify and prioritize 2-3 key questions that could be asked to beneficiaries as and when the opportunity arises in order to more systematically collect feedback related to their NGO activities.
- Expand monitoring formats (e.g. reports) so that they capture both quantitative data and some qualitative aspects.
- Hold regular meetings with field staff to share updates, discuss challenges faced, and share learning.

- Plan a review of the response to date with staff – aimed at capturing what has worked well and what needs to be improved. As part of this consider the extent to which the project is meeting key agency commitments (for example these may be related to how the agency has worked with affected-communities). As much as possible seek beneficiary input as part of this review.

2. Other observations and findings

2.1 Role of Clusters and beneficiary accountability

Coordination of the humanitarian response was undertaken by the government and camp authorities, UN OCHA and its clusters, which include government representatives such as line ministries, government agents, representatives of national NGOs and staff of INGOs. In the initial period, the government shared the data of beneficiaries (restricted to numbers with no disaggregation based on gender, disability, age or special needs etc) and asked the clusters to deliver against these targets.

Agencies under the auspices of the clusters were allocated particular zones and blocks in Menik Farm⁷ based on their expertise, delivery capacity and available funding. Due to restriction on needs assessment, any decision and change in the aid-delivery (content of non-food item kits, quantity of water, number and location of toilets etc) was based on the needs as identified by the government and in later days by the informal feedback of beneficiaries relayed by IDP volunteers and/or to agency staff who were permitted into the camps. The lines of communication and feedback to and from beneficiaries remain extremely tiered, and needs were not always congruent with the decisions made by the clusters. Examples were cited in which hygiene kits including sanitary napkins were repeatedly distributed to men or females not requiring them, which the beneficiaries found offensive or wasteful. However, positive examples were also observed of clusters adapting to feedback received from beneficiaries, such as the preference for communal kitchens, gowns instead of saris for women, uncooked food items instead of food packets, and request for clothing for men and boys.

In the absence of meaningful beneficiary consultation and participation due to contextual constraints, how agencies garner and record feedback from beneficiaries, process it within the agency and share it with the clusters in a timely and accurate manner to influence the humanitarian assistance becomes of critical importance.

In the Sri Lanka context, clusters were largely closed meetings, comprising a combination of invited UN bodies, government representatives, INGO's and a representative of national partners. Some local partners felt that their representation and voice remained limited in cluster decisions. This needs attention, in particular if national partners continue to be given priority in terms of access to affected people (be it in the camps or as part of the resettlement). Enabling meaningful involvement of national partner staff who are working with beneficiaries in the clusters could help to reduce the distance between decision-making and beneficiaries.

2.2 Role of Volunteers

During the humanitarian response the majority of agencies 'employed' volunteers from surrounding areas in Vavuniya, and within the camps. IDP volunteers were in some cases chosen by the Gram Sewaka (an administrative official), or chosen by the community while some indicated their interest to volunteer individually. Agencies grappled with the traditional spirit of volunteerism, which involves working without remuneration as opposed to the expectation of volunteers to be paid.

For volunteers from outside the camps, issues remained around salaries, contracts and clearance needed by authorities. These volunteers were not staff, casual or permanent, and so in some cases, induction to, for example, agency background or organisational codes of conduct, was not provided. While accompanied and guided by agency staff while in the camps, volunteers need necessary inductions. The clusters developed a code of conduct for volunteers and drivers which was used by some agencies, but the code was limited to warnings about not talking to beneficiaries, or assisting them in anyway beyond the delivery of aid. Agencies relied on volunteers and the Gram Sewaka; both these roles in the camps lend themselves to power and authority and vigilance through independent verification is needed. All volunteers

⁷ Between July and October, 2009 Menik Farm consisted of 14 zones, with each zone having a number of blocks.

need guidance or induction on how to engage with beneficiaries and relay their voice accurately to the agencies since they can become the main point of contact with the community.

For IDP volunteers, the clusters had not reached a consensus on the minimum wage that they were to be paid, with some agencies not paying volunteers anything at all; variance in wages can cause dissatisfaction and aggression within the beneficiary communities. The volunteer role provided an opportunity for the IDP's to become engaged in work and decrease their sense of dependency.

2.3 Disconnects between Colombo and Vavuniya

Senior management of agencies, clusters and decision-makers at Colombo level often had a different understanding of the context than their counterparts at Vavuniya. In some cases, field staff wanted a clearer sense of how long the humanitarian response would continue, why certain issues highlighted by them were not addressed, and in some cases, why more was not being done by the agency. Some agencies continued the process of broad internal dialogue and senior management visited often to address issues raised, while others lacked in this regard.

In the later stages access improved, giving field staff more opportunity to interact with beneficiaries. However, humanitarian actors at Colombo, not fully cognizant of the changing realities did not necessarily adapt nor encourage field staff to adjust practices accordingly. Therefore some opportunities to engage beneficiaries and improve impact of humanitarian response went unrecognised or under-utilised.

2.4 Role of donors

Agencies and donors alike struggled with questions regarding whether continuation of humanitarian assistance contributed to sustaining the camps in North Sri Lanka. Numerous debates continued within the donor community as to whether funding should be tied to the condition of closure of the camps and resettlement of the IDPs. International donors provided around \$200 million for the post-conflict humanitarian response in Sri Lanka. As debate continued amongst the humanitarian actors internally and collectively, agencies remained in a constant state of anticipation, not knowing whether financial support would continue or be withdrawn due to donor decisions to discontinue funding the humanitarian response in the camps.

Agencies were also compelled at times to make inappropriate choices that would not necessarily meet the needs of beneficiaries, due to funding requirements and conditions. Agencies reported feeling immense pressure with regard to competition for donor attention and funds, donor reporting obligations, and not having a clear sense of whether donors would continue to support the humanitarian response. This, along with the uncertainties of the context, prevented field staff from meeting expressed needs of the beneficiaries or communicating the agency's future plans. Staff noted that beneficiary feedback varied from 'why are you continuing to help us, this means that we will stay here longer' to 'can you assist us further? your help is needed'.

Conclusion

The positive response of agencies to the deployment and the level of participation in its activities amidst a challenging context is indicative of a high level of commitment to strengthen beneficiary accountability when and where it is needed most. The activities undertaken aimed to build in-country capacity, sustain the focus on improved accountability, not only for the current responses, but future planned ones for each agency. For the momentum to continue and be maintained, consistent support from focal points and senior management is required. It is hoped that the experience and learning from the deployment in Sri Lanka will be shared across the agencies' programmes and locations to ensure impact not only in Sri Lanka but more widely in the humanitarian community.
