

Tearfund North Kenya Programme Community notice boards to increase transparency

In August 2007 Monica Blagescu and Emily Rogers from the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP) worked alongside Tearfund to conduct an accountability assessment of their programme in North Kenya. Over the course of ten days the field team visited four different project sites, spoke with staff and local people, made observations, and reviewed project documentation. This case study reflects the practice that was documented by HAP during this visit, and has been approved by Tearfund for wider dissemination.

North Kenya programme background

The prolonged drought affecting the Horn of Africa has threatened the lives of 11 million people in the region, 3 million of who live in Kenya. The impact was most severe in pastoral areas of Northern Kenya where malnutrition levels exceeded emergency thresholds and livestock losses of up to 70% were reported, resulting in mass migration of pastoralists in search of water, pasture and jobs.

Tearfund responded to the drought in Northern Kenya, Marsabit District, by firstly implementing an emergency therapeutic and supplementary feeding nutrition programme (June '06 to April '07). Later, two more projects – Livelihoods and Food Security, and Water and Sanitation (April to October '07) were launched to focus on longer term needs of the targeted communities. The former focused on restocking of camels in ten communities, vegetable garden and support to women groups in two communities, while the water and sanitation project focused on the construction of four earth dams through cash for work, of which three have been completed.

Setting up community notice boards

Sharing information helps to build trust and understanding, and can strengthen the relationship between communities and NGOs. To achieve this, Tearfund introduced community notice boards in all ten project locations. While there was no extensive consultation on whether notice boards were the best means for strengthening transparency, these boards were seen as part of a pilot process to improve accountability in the North Kenya programme. The location of each board was chosen during a consultative meeting, taking into account security, proximity and long-term use of the boards. As a result they were generally placed near water points and community buildings such as schools and shops.

The lockable glass fronted notice boards were each managed by a member of the Beneficiary Reference Group (BRG)¹ from the same community, and updated by members of the programme team as relevant information arose.



Photo © Emily Rogers, HAP

The Tearfund notice board in Korr is close to the water point in the centre of the town. When the Tearfund programme ends this will be handed over to the area Chief, and will continue to be used community communication.

¹ Beneficiary Reference Groups (BRGs) were established by Tearfund in each project location to act as an independent group of community members. The BRGs were tasked with receiving and processing queries, complaints and feedback from committees and their community, working in close consultation with Tearfund staff so that concerns were swiftly addressed. *(For more details see case study: Tearfund North Kenya Programme, Increasing levels of participation – the role of the Beneficiary Reference Groups (BRGs))*

The ownership of the notice boards after the Tearfund programme ends was also considered. Plans were made to hand them over to the local administration, churches and schools so the notice boards would continue to be used.

Types of information displayed on the community notice boards

- Background information on Tearfund and purpose of the notice boards.
- List of members of the community committees, e.g. water and livestock committee, and Beneficiary Reference Group.
- Information about activities to be conducted, e.g. livestock vaccination details
- List of beneficiaries, how they were selected, and how complaints on this list could be raised.
- Results of reports and surveys, for example Nutrition survey, Environmental Impact Report.
- Memorandums of Understandings between the community and Tearfund.

Language and format

Levels of literacy in the project areas are low, with people speaking and reading a combination of English, Kiswahili, Rendille, and Samburu to varying degrees. The communities, however, are very oral and information is traditionally shared by word of mouth, travelling fast between households and villages. While some information was translated into Kiswahili the majority was posted in English, and those who were able to read could then transmit this information to others.

Resources required to establish the notice boards

In addition to time, the cost of setting up the 10 notice boards was estimated to be \$710.

Results observed

- Communities recognized the boards as a means through which Tearfund was increasing its levels of transparency; in particular, having beneficiaries lists publicly displayed was welcome (see box 1). While details of who was identified had already spread via word of mouth from the elders, the notice boards served to confirm this information. This was especially important for the camel beneficiaries as this written confirmation reassured them that they would receive a camel and so enabling them to plan their lives with this in mind.
- The notice boards held significance for communities. For example, in Oltorot when a child broke the notice board glass the community decided everyone should contribute a small amount to replacing this, showing how the notice board was valued and owned by this village.
- Listing the beneficiaries publicly allowed communities to verify the true identity of those assessed to be in need. Giving adequate time for communities to respond reduced the number of issues raised during distributions, and feedback indicated people found the level of information sufficient at times.
- Displaying the recruitment process, selection criteria and the names of those short-listed for a position helps all to understand the process followed, and who has been chosen for what reason. In Korr publicly displaying the short-listed names helped to identify an individual who had embellished their schooling history and falsified papers.

Lesson Learnt

- As the best ways for communicating information varies between locations (depending on culture, levels of literacy and technology readily available) it is important the available and preferred modes are identified from the onset. Different channels of communication have different advantages and disadvantages and will reach different audiences; hence it is important not to rely on one channel alone. In Northern Kenya notice boards were used in conjunction with the water and livestock committees and the Beneficiary Reference Groups, who were vital in supporting with understanding and interpretation of information.
- Information passed from person to person may become distorted, but written information displayed on notice boards can act as a valuable reference point allowing those who can read to return to the

original information. There is a risk, however, that the more vulnerable who can not read, receive only inaccurate information passed 3rd or 4th hand to them. Again this needs to be carefully monitored.

- Communities vary in their information wants and needs. Identification of these from the onset will enable information shared via different channels to be adapted according to the needs of local communities, simplifying terms and concepts to maximise the number of people who understand. For example communities in Northern Kenya were generally more interested in what Tearfund has to offer, rather than what it stands for.
- While tapping into traditional channels of information dissemination can speed its spread, it is also vital to look at alternative methods of reaching more vulnerable groups in the community that may be excluded. Written material can often only be read by an elite few, and risks creating a power imbalance between those who can and cannot understand it. This needs to be carefully monitored, and the risk of this will vary between communities.
- Basic guidelines on the minimum details each notice should contain can help increase consistency in approach. Examples include: date of the document, name of person who posted it, and contact details.
- Mapping of the different stakeholders from the onset will facilitate thinking on communication to different groups. For example it is important to consider communication to both those directly involved with the work of the NGO and the wider community, who may also want to know what the organization is doing in the area.

Box 1: The sign displayed on the Oltorot notice board, giving details and asking for feedback on the camel beneficiaries.



COMPLAINTS NOTICE

Tearfund UK Northern Kenya Disaster management Team (DMT) wishes to give a seven (7) days notice for whoever has any reason why the persons named below should not benefit from camel distribution project. Any such complaint can be channelled through the Livestock committee, local leaders or through the Rumyeito/Ndedei (Beneficiary Reference Group) group of Oltorot. This NOTICE expires on 20th June 2007.

OLTOROT COMMUNITY PROPOSED CAMEL BENEFICIARIES

SELECTION CRITERIA		BENEFICIARY NAME
Those without livestock	1	Ntepesin Leparssanti
	2	Ntupunywa Lepeleina
	3	Suro Ogom
	4	Nkilis Lemoloi
	5	Ntaiya Leparssanti
	6	Naleni Lolokiri
	7	Twenty Galgagaroule
Those with fewer than 10 goats	8	Erupe Gacharoule
	9	Mbakarin Ledany
	10	Media Lekadaa
	11	Mparsipiani Lekupe
	12	Arpe Lenawamulo

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