Shelter Accountability Resources

A guide to maintaining accountability to affected populations whilst implementing humanitarian shelter programs

www.ecbproject.org/cluster-accountability



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The Emergency Capacity Building Project

The complexity, frequency and impact of humanitarian emergencies and disasters continue to intensify pressure on the humanitarian system. In response to these challenges, six international humanitarian agencies, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Mercy Corps, Oxfam, Save the Children and World Vision, formed the [Emergency Capacity Building Project (ECB)](http://www.ecbproject.org/) initiative in 2006. These agencies, together with their partners, work collaboratively to find training solutions to common problems so that scarce resources, both human and financial, can be used more effectively to prepare national response teams, and surge teams, for future emergencies.

Background: The Shelter Accountability Resources

ECB Project agencies, led by CARE, have developed the Shelter Accountability Resources for project managers and decision-makers in humanitarian shelter programs. It is also intended to be useful for Shelter Cluster coordinators, and other staff who would like to monitor the accountability of particular projects and programs.

The tools and examples included here should help humanitarians to plan, implement and monitor shelter projects and programs in a way that is accountable to disaster-affected populations.

These resources support the ECB Project’s overall aim to improve the **speed, quality, and effectiveness** of the humanitarian community to save lives, improve welfare, and protect the rights of people in emergency situations.

Find out more at **www.ecbproject.org/cluster-accountability**

Contact us via email: **info@ecbproject.org**

# Introduction

The ECB Project has developed these resources in order to be able to support humanitarian shelter programming, and to improve the level of accountability to affected populations.

Shelter programming needs special consideration to ensure accountability because there are components in shelter programs that have unusual implications for accountability. These include, for example, risk management, construction monitoring and housing, land and property rights.

The resources here should help project managers and decision-makers, as well as those monitoring projects, plan, implement and monitor shelter activities in an accountable manner.

## What is accountability? Why is it necessary?

The Humanitarian Accountability Partnership International (HAP) defines accountability as “the responsible use of power.” The aim of being accountable is about ensuring that the funding we spend on humanitarian operations is done in a way that is appropriate for the context and meets the needs and wishes of those we aim to support.

The previous experiences of humanitarian agencies have demonstrated the importance of accountability. Working in an accountable fashion promotes the dignity of those affected by allowing them a role in decision-making, and thus increasing the speed of self-recovery. The examples in section 4 show some of the positive effects on programming, as well as some of the negative effects of unaccountable programming.

In recognition of this importance, the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has adopted accountability to affected populations as one of the key areas for improvement.

Accountability can be seen as having five key elements, adapted by the IASC from previous work undertaken by the ECB Project:

* **Leadership/governance:** Demonstrate commitment to accountability to affected populations throughout the organization.
* **Transparency:** Provide accessible and timely information to affected populations.
* **Feedback and complaints:** Actively seek the views of affected populations to improve policy and practice in programming.
* **Participation:** Enable affected populations to play an active role in the decision-making processes that affect them.
* **Design, monitoring and evaluation:** Design, monitor and evaluate the goals and objectives of programs with the involvement of affected populations.

## Types of accountability

Accountability comes in a variety of formats: upwards / backwards accountability to donors; horizontal / lateral accountability to peer agencies; forwards / downwards accountability to those receiving our funds, either the affected population or implementing partners.

These accountabilities can, of course, be at odds with one another. Managing expectations is therefore important. It is also good practice to make sure donors are aware of accountability to affected population principles and mechanisms that will be used in the program, and ensure that the donor is comfortable allowing modifications to the program based on the desires of affected populations. Likewise, ensure that affected populations understand the constraints and limits linked with programming such as donor requirements and principles of humanitarian action.

Up until recently, accountability to donors, or upward accountability, has been the primary one of concern to agencies and organizations. The other two types that are gaining importance are accountability to affected populations, or downward accountability, and accountability to peer organizations. These resources are focused on accountability towards affected populations[[1]](#footnote-1), but horizontal accountability is also touched upon as it cannot be separated, particularly in contexts where operations are collectively undertaken.

## Coordination and accountability

Any single agency being fully accountable for the funds it spends and the actions it takes is a good start, but humanitarian operations are rarely undertaken by one agency in isolation. Accountability must be addressed at the coordination level as well, such as through the Shelter Cluster or other mechanisms. See Example 1: Coordination and accountability on page 13.

As part of the IASC move towards improving downwards accountability, the Operational Framework for Ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations in Humanitarian Emergencies has been developed. This document aims to clarify the roles and responsibilities of clusters, inter-cluster coordination mechanisms, the Humanitarian Country Team and humanitarian coordinators with respect to ensuring accountability to affected populations.

For a cluster such as shelter, the implications of the Operational Framework require that agencies collaborate to ensure accountability is integrated into programming and learning. This includes confirming that affected populations understand and can participate in needs assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of a response. Additionally, the Operational Framework includes specific objective around ensuring the mainstreaming of and learning from accountability at the system level.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Ensuring thorough accountability to affected populations also requires maintaining a high level of accountability to peer agencies and to the wider Shelter Cluster. This includes ensuring that all partners are aware of what each other is doing and where, and contributing to the overall sector strategy. Promoting a joined, collective response allows for humanitarian action to be accountable to the entire affected population, rather than merely each agency working towards being accountable to those in its own area of operations.

## Shelter responses

The variety of potential responses within the remit of humanitarian shelter means that providing a prescriptive list of accountability activities is not possible. Whether facilitating tripartite rental agreements, providing cash to host families welcoming displaced populations, or building reinforced concrete houses as part of a reconstruction program, accountability remains a vital and integral component of an effective response.[[3]](#footnote-3) There are also components of a shelter response that have unusual implications for accountability, or forms of accountability that do not feature in other sectors of response as prominently. The Shelter Accountability Framework, on page 8 addresses these specifically.

## Resources required to ensure accountability

Including accountability does not require extensive additional resources. In larger programs, setting up a call center to handle feedback and complaints may be appropriate, but this is the exception and not the rule. Generally, providing basic training to staff on what accountability is, and how it should be incorporated in the program should be sufficient. Once staff are trained, it is necessary to ensure that they are allocated time during their field visits to gather opinions from affected populations, and to report back to the organization on what they found. See Example 8: Informal construction monitoring feedback on page 15.

# Accountability Checklist

This general accountability checklist[[4]](#footnote-4) should be used to ensure that all elements of accountability are integrated into programs. For application in shelter-specific contexts, see the Shelter Accountability Framework, page 8.

* **Leadership and governance**: is accountability valued throughout the organization?
	+ Is accountability integrated into job descriptions and terms of reference?
	+ Is accountability integrated into strategies at all levels of response?
	+ Do you provide training for new staff on what accountability means and how it influences their role?
	+ Are staff monitored against performance indicators that include accountability[[5]](#footnote-5)?
	+ Is accountability included in partnership agreements?
* **Transparency**: are you sharing information with all stakeholders?
	+ Is the information accessible to all?
	+ Is it in a language they can understand?
	+ Is it in a format that is easily accessible for them?
	+ Is it updated regularly and systematically?
	+ Does it include financial information and budgets[[6]](#footnote-6)?
	+ Is all financial information in an appropriate format?
	+ Is it sufficient for them to make informed contributions to program planning and implementation decisions?
	+ Are the roles of the organization and the communities clearly understood?
	+ Are stakeholders able to request and receive further information?
* **Feedback and complaints**: do you have a feedback and complaints system in place?
	+ Have stakeholders been able to choose how they would most like to provide input on different topics?
	+ Has the system been communicated to all stakeholders, and do all stakeholders know how to register complaints or feedback?
	+ Is the collection of feedback and complaints systematic?
	+ Are all complaints investigated promptly?
	+ Does the system maintain anonymity and confidentiality where appropriate?
	+ Is there a mechanism in place for escalating serious complaints, such as abuse of power or sexual exploitation, involving local authorities if necessary?
	+ Do all complainants receive a prompt and satisfactory response, providing the results of the investigation of their claims?
	+ Do projects, programs and the organization learn from complaints and feedback systematically, making improvements where necessary?
* **Participation**: do affected populations take a lead in making decisions, with support from organizational expertise?
	+ Are you facilitating the affected populations to lead the decision making?
	+ Are you checking that the work truly reflects the priorities and needs of the poorest and most marginalized populations?
	+ Are you working to identify and mitigate any conflict between different interest groups?
	+ Is this being done using a mechanism that all stakeholders respect?
* **Design, monitoring and evaluation**: is accountability integrated throughout the project and program?
	+ During needs assessment, are affected populations consulted about what their priorities are?
	+ Are assessment results shared with all stakeholders?
	+ Are communities provided the opportunity to contribute to the design of the intervention?
	+ Are all stakeholders given the opportunity to participate in the monitoring and evaluation processes?
	+ Are monitoring and evaluation results shared with all stakeholders?
	+ Is the complaints and feedback mechanism available throughout the intervention?
	+ Is the information gathered through feedback systems used to regularly inform and improve your work?
	+ Are you evaluating the work you have done, including measuring the impact of the program following its completion?

# Shelter Accountability Framework

The shelter accountability framework is designed to act as a guide for practitioners to understand the levels of accountability within their programs, as well as indicating what next steps should be taken to improve accountability. The components of response included are those that have a shelter-specific focus, but this list is not exhaustive, and space has been left at the end to include other components of response particularly relevant to the reader’s context. After each component of response is shown which element of accountability from section 1.1 that they link to, as well as the phase in the project cycle. The components are presented here because accountability within these contexts is often overlooked. More general areas of accountability are covered in the checklist above, and so have been omitted here. Other frameworks already exist for general accountable programming, such as the Listen First Framework or the Matrix on accountability and commitments in the Oxfam Accountability Starter Pack. This table should be used in a similar fashion.

| **Theme**  | ***Level 3*** |  | Level 2  | **Level 1** | **Level 0**  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Component of response | ***Highest level*** |  | *As level 1, but including* |  | ***Below minimum expected level*** |
| ***Instructions****: to undertake a self-assessment, identify which components of response are relevant to your activities. For each component, read Level 3, which is the target for fully accountable programming. From that, read levels 0, 1 and 2 which all refer back to the target, and determine which description most closely matches your project.* *To improve accountability, adjust your programming to increase the levels of accountability within each component. It is suggested that you start with the components at the lowest level. In ideal circumstances, practitioners would aim for their shelter programming to meet Level 3 in all components of the response. The reality of emergencies, and the wider socio-political circumstances in some contexts, dictates that such interventions are not always feasible, nor appropriate. If you are not aiming to achieve level 3, however, there should be clear justification.* |
| 1. Affected populations are provided the necessary information to effectively contribute to planning *(transparency and leadership; throughout the response)* | **1.3 Full program and financial information is published, in ways that are easily accessible for affected populations, and is regularly kept updated. This includes beneficiaries knowing the value of the assistance they are receiving. For example, the costs of shelter materials or shelter non-food items (NFIs) being distributed.**  |  | 1.2 Program and financial information is made available to affected populations.  | 1.1 Basic, top-line financial information is shared, by methods chosen by the organization.  | 1.0 No financial information about the program is shared with affected populations.  |
| 2. Ensure equitable representation, participation and access as shelter decisions affect men, women, girls and boys *(participation and transparency; throughout the response)*  | **2.3a The shelter project team is gender-balanced[[7]](#footnote-7) with female staff forming a core part, particularly those with community mobilization roles.** **2.3b Affected women and girls are consulted, in addition to and separately from men and boys, about shelter design, and settlement location and layout. This includes, for example, what NFIs are required, the lighting available, the location of latrines, and the location of the settlement. Consultations with women and girls are undertaken by female staff.** **2.3c Project design reflects the priorities of the most vulnerable women, girls, boys and men, including those who are particularly poor, marginalized or disabled, and promotes privacy and dignity for all members of the affected population.**  |  | 2.2a *Either* female staff form a core part of the shelter team; 2.2b *or* women and girls are consulted separately from men and boys, by female staff members on all aspects of the project. 2.2c Project designed appropriately. | 2.1a Female staff members are actively recruited to join the team. 2.1b Women and girls are consulted separately from men and boys, by female staff members. | 2.0a No consideration is given to the gender balance of the shelter staff.2.0b Affected women and girls are consulted together with men and boys.  |
| 3. Risks are fully assessed and planned for in consultation and communication with affected populations and their governments *(participation; assessment and planning)* | **3.3a Staff undertake a thorough risk assessment[[8]](#footnote-8) of the context and the proposed shelter response. Affected populations and the national government are consulted on appropriate levels of acceptable risk within the various contexts. Special efforts are made to engage the most marginalized and vulnerable members of the population. Results of this assessment are checked against national minimum standards (and globally accepted design standards where suitable), and used to inform program design and implementation.** **3.3b Where necessary, staff communicate and educate affected population and government on increased disaster risk reduction initiatives.**  |  | 3.2 Staff undertake a risk assessment of the context and the proposed shelter response. Staff consult populations on what constitutes acceptable risk. Along with appropriate standards, the results of these inform program design and implementation.  | 3.1 Staff undertake a basic risk assessment for the context (see also appropriate shelter design), and take appropriate actions to reduce major risks. Some stakeholders are consulted on their levels acceptable risk. | 3.0 No special consideration is given to calculate levels of acceptable risk. Pre-emergency levels of risk are assumed.  |
| 4. Affected populations play an active role in, and understand the prioritization, aims and classification methods of structural damage assessment *(participation and transparency; assessment and planning)* | **Where large-scale damage assessment programs are implemented, ensure that the aims of the assessment, and the classifications of damage, are agreed and clearly communicated to all members of the affected population in a manner identified by them as suitable.** **Affected populations are able to lead the prioritization of which structures are assessed first, with technical input where appropriate.**  |  | 4.2a *Either* the aims and classifications are defined and communicated to affected populations in a manner they identify; 4.2b *or* affected populations take a lead on prioritization of buildings to assess. | 4.1a Either the aims and classifications are defined and communicated to affected populations; 4.1b or affected populations are consulted on prioritization of buildings to assess. | 4.0a Aims and classifications of the assessment are defined. 4.0b Staff prioritize which buildings to assess.  |
| 5. The type of shelter response selected reflects affected populations’ preferences, the need for long-term recovery and the available resources *(participation; assessment and planning)* | **5.3a An assessment is made of pre- and post-disaster housing typologies, such as owner, tenant, multi-occupancy buildings. Solutions potentially innovative to the context are considered, and affected populations are consulted for their preferred typologies to ensure faster recovery. The information gathered is sufficiently detailed to properly inform decision-making, and is used to develop an appropriate shelter response which matches the needs of the most vulnerable, considering the available resources.** **5.3bThe assessment includes an analysis of the situations of those without formal land tenure or rental agreements.** **5.3c Communities are supported to lead the process of settlement planning in addition to shelter design, wherever appropriate, including infrastructure, access to services (health, schools), WASH, etc.** **5.3d Staff recognize the potential for conflict between interest groups, including over land tenure, and the project is designed to mitigate for these conflicts.** |  | 5.2a Affected populations are consulted, and:5.2b *either* affected populations’ desired typologies are assessed; 5.2c *or* special consideration to formalize informal occupancy is included in the project; 5.2d *or* full settlement planning is included within the program.  | 5.1a Affected populations are consulted, and pre- and post-disaster typologies assessed. 5.1b Informal occupancy is noted, but no efforts are made to formalize occupancy. 5.1c Basic settlement planning is included in the project, such as access to WASH. 5.1d Conflict between interest groups is recognized, and project is designed to mitigate these.  | 5.0a Affected populations are consulted, but only post-disaster housing typologies assessed. 5.0b No special consideration to informal occupancy is given.5.0c A shelter strategy considers only individual structures including access to water, but not the larger settlement. |
| 6. Comprehensive performance criteria are established in consultation with local communities, ensuring flexibility and risk reduction *(transparency and participation; assessment and planning)* | **6.3 For all interventions that involve design, construction or technical advice, appropriate performance criteria or standards are set, in consultation with the affected population and government. Performance criteria allow flexibility for affected populations to tailor individual shelter solutions to their own needs, but ensure that all solutions reduce risk. Performance criteria cover a range of topics including potential hazards, vernacular construction, environment and materials sourcing.**  |  | 6.2 Several possible construction specifications are produced, based on affected populations consultation, providing limited amounts of flexibility.  | 6.1 A single construction specification is produced, in consultation with affected populations, which is resistant to the appropriate risks.  | 6.0 The intervention mitigates risks.  |
| 7. Communities take the lead in setting beneficiary selection criteria and undertaking beneficiary identification *(participation and transparency; planning and implementation)* | **7.3a With a clear understanding of what assistance can be provided and the costs involved, communities are supported to set clear beneficiary selection criteria. Using these criteria, the community identifies which community members are eligible for support. It is important that this process be undertaken in a transparent manner, particularly given the potential for shelter projects to provide comparatively high-value materials.****7.3b Throughout the process, opportunities are provided for community members to ask questions or complain, for example if they feel they fit the criteria but have not been selected. These comments and complaints are responded to, and rectified where necessary.**  |  | 7.2a Communities and staff collaborate equally to develop the beneficiary selection criteria.7.2b Feedback and complaints mechanisms available and functioning, and widely publicized.  | 7.1a Communities contribute to the beneficiary selection criteria, but the process is led by staff.7.1b Feedback and complaints mechanisms available and functioning, and communities made aware of it. | 7.0 Staff set beneficiary selection criteria with little community involvement and no consideration for the wider economic impact on the community of the intervention. A feedback mechanism is available but not robust.  |
| 8. Beneficiaries are empowered and encouraged to participate in construction monitoring and quality control *(design, monitoring and evaluation, and feedback and complaints; implementation and monitoring)* | **8.3a Where construction or repairs are undertaken, staff do not treat houses and settlements as building sites but respect the right to privacy of occupants, for example requesting permission to enter.** **8.3b Beneficiaries are given the necessary training and empowered to monitor construction quality on a regular basis.** **8.3c The feedback and complaints system is designed with the affected population, and is adapted to include feedback on quality control. Local populations are empowered to provide feedback on quality in a manner most appropriate to them, and in a fashion that encourages marginalized people to respond.** **8.3d Staff carefully create opportunities to listen to affected populations and their reports on quality as a means to monitor satisfaction levels.**  |  | 8.2a Rights to privacy and respect are valued by all staff. 8.2b Beneficiaries are empowered to monitor quality against performance criteria.8.2c Feedback and complaints on quality are gathered, informally, often through comments to staff in the field.  | 8.1a Right to privacy is respected. 8.1b Construction quality is monitored against the relevant performance criteria.  | 8.0a Permission is sought to undertake work on land or properties. 8.0b Construction quality is monitored against the relevant performance criteria or specifications.  |
| 9. Community ownership is prioritized to ensure that recovery investments contribute to longer term improvements *(participation; implementation and exit strategy)* | **9.3 Community ownership is built into projects from the onset to ensure automatic handover. Affected populations are supported to identify the knowledge and skills they were not able to develop through their involvement in the project to date. Affected populations are supported to ensure that they have the capacity for long term management, care, quality maintenance, and future modifications of all structures built, repaired or retrofitted in their communities as part of the project. This includes, where suitable, supporting communities to identify the next steps in improving their settlements and whom to approach for additional assistance if necessary.**  |  | 9.2 Through involvement throughout the project, affected populations have developed knowledge in most areas required for on-going maintenance and management of structures. Additional capacity-building is provided where necessary.  | 9.1 Through involvement throughout the project, affected populations have developed knowledge in many areas required for on-going maintenance of structures. Additional training is provided where necessary.  | 9.0 At the end of the project, affected populations are provided with all information they lack for on-going management of structures.  |

# Shelter Accountability Examples

These case studies are examples of how accountability has been undertaken, or omitted, from shelter programs. Wherever possible, these examples also include improvements to the project that are directly attributable to accountability, or challenges that could have been avoided had there been accountability mechanisms in place.

## Example 1: Coordination and accountability

Haiti Earthquake 2010

The project

Emergency shelter provision for 20,000 beneficiaries.

The issue

Whilst individual agencies worked to be accountability to affected populations, the response overall could not be.

The Shelter Cluster had collectively decided to provide each household with two plastic sheets. One agency chose to distribute only one plastic sheet to each family, in order to reach more families for the benefit of their public profile. Communities receiving just one plastic sheet per family were disadvantaged, even though they were, in some cases, more vulnerable than communities receiving two sheets per family. This lack of accountability to peer agencies translated directly to a lack of collective accountability to affected populations.

The resolution

The agency later came in to line with cluster recommendations, and revisited beneficiaries who had only received one plastic sheet where possible.

## Example 2: Participation in beneficiary selection

West Sumatra Earthquake 2009

The project

Cash grants for transitional shelter.

The issue

Tensions existed between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, who were often in very similar circumstances

The resolution

The communities resolved the problems themselves, as each community had elected a local committee to undertake the beneficiary identification. These committees were voluntary, gender-balanced and representative of different social and age groups, and operated in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding[[9]](#footnote-9). Once the beneficiaries were selected and the organization verified each name, opportunities were provided for feedback and complaints from the wider community and each comment was investigated.

## Example 3: Participation in shelter design

Cyclone Giri, Myanmar, 2010

The project

Simple permanent house construction.

The issue

The proposed design would mean that the house displeased local ‘Nats’ (spirits).

The resolution

For the structure to be disaster-resilient, bracing in both directions in the walls was needed. Originally, this was proposed in an X-shape. This was then shown to the Village Development Committee, which highlighted that the X-shape would not be suitable. The design was adapted so that the bracing formed a V-shape whilst retraining structural efficiency, a design which was then approved by the communities.

Additionally, through participation in the housing design and construction of an example structure, the communities were educated in disaster resistant design and construction techniques in line with their local customs, which increases the likelihood of further local adoption and habitation of the houses and reduces future risk.

## Example 4: Transparency in beneficiary selection

Chilean Earthquake, 2010

The project

Voucher scheme for building supplies.

The issue

The project instilled jealousy and resentment amongst community members.

Little attempt was made by the agency to clearly communicate beneficiary selection criteria. Instead, they based beneficiary lists on previous emergency distribution lists provided by project staff, and by lists provided by community leaders. Inaccuracies in these lists meant that during distribution of the vouchers, some had been misprinted and were thus voided. Additionally, community members who did not have good relations with community leaders may well have been left out.

The resolution

Advertising the beneficiary selection methods and criteria, and providing an opportunity for feedback and complaints might well have prevented the dissatisfaction that arose.

## Example 5: Transparency in project changes

Post-election conflict, Côte d’Ivoire, 2010

The project

Rebuilding damaged rural shelters.

The issue

A change in the proposed shelter specifications of the shelter was not clearly communicated to beneficiaries, who then believed that their shelters were unfinished, and assumed this was also the cause of several cases of leaking roofs.

Once construction had begun, it was observed that had overestimated the number of CGI sheets required for the roof. The agency kept the extra sheets, with the intention that they construct a further 20 shelters for new beneficiaries yet to be identified within the same community. This change was not sufficiently communicated to affected populations. With no clear complaints mechanism, beneficiaries did not know that they could enquire about the altered number of CGI sheets or complain about their leaking roofs.

The resolution

Clear communication of changes in the project would have prevented this misunderstanding, and in some cases allowed beneficiaries to move into completed houses earlier than was the case. Additionally, a clearly defined feedback and complaints mechanism that includes capacity to deal with quality complaints would have identified cases of leaking roofs earlier.

## Example 6: Leadership commitment to accountability

Myanmar, 2011

The project

In 2011, ACTED reviewed its programming in Myanmar to ensure it complied with commitments to Leadership and Governance. As part of this they conducted an awareness-raising activity at the start of each project to ensure beneficiaries and communities had all the information on project activities, budget, size, donor and beneficiary selection criteria and held training for current and newly-recruited staff on accountability. They also informed local administrations of their interventions, and introduced all partners to the HAP Standard then supported them to meet the requirements, by adding a HAP information board in each village where ACTED operates, including information about the organization and project, a contact list of staff at local and country office level, and details about how to lodge a complaint.

## Example 7: Information sharing in structural damage assessments

Haiti earthquake, 2010

The project

Rapid and large-scale structural damage assessments.

The issue

Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Communications (MTPTC) carried out very rapid structural damage assessments on houses, classifying each home as red, yellow or green. The methodology allowed for a large volume of buildings to be assessed in a very short time. A large number of people living in camps did not know what color their home had been given, and many of those living in their houses had to go outside to check the color rating. There was a gross lack of understanding about what the different colors meant, and no real effort had been made by MTPTC to explain to residents the classification system.

People did not know which areas of their houses were safe, and they received little advice on whether it would be possible for them to safely carry out repairs.

The resolution

Large-scale and clear communication of the project, the process, the results and what they meant would have enabled individuals to better decide where to live and what repairs or reconstruction work to focus on.

## Example 8: Informal construction monitoring feedback

Bangladesh 2012

The project

Timber frame houses for 11,000 households.

The issue

The NGO needed to improve its construction monitoring.

The resolution

The project manager developed a short form for NGO field staff to complete at the end of each day. It prompted community mobilization staff to reflect on the informal feedback that they had received from their discussions with communities each day. This included noting when a beneficiary had identified a potential problem with the design but had implemented a solution already. For example, some beneficiaries had added a layer of plastic just below the top layer of the soil plinth, to prevent the floor of the house getting wet from water rising up. Time was given at the end of each day to allow staff to complete the form.

Ensuring that field staff reflected on their discussions and noted them down allowed the project manager to identify recurring themes and trends, and address them where suitable, as well as capitalizing on beneficiary innovation and sharing such small modifications throughout the project.

## Example 9: Fraud identified through complaints mechanisms

West Sumatra Earthquake 2009

The project

Transitional shelters for 3,400 households.

The issue

NGO funds were being extorted under the disguise of a ‘public service tax’.

The resolution

This problem was brought to the attention of the organization through their complaints mechanism. Trust in the agency and their complaints mechanism had been developed over time by ensuring detailed and timely follow-up to each complaint or request for information, in collaboration with the village government and community committees. This included cases of people meeting the beneficiary criteria but not being assisted, and those being assisted but incorrectly.

Attempted corruption and fraud were dealt with at community meetings, and statements offering solutions and sanctions were collectively signed by all parties to ensure community ownership of the process.

## Example 9: Thorough accountability mechanisms

Aceh, Boxing Day tsunami, 2004

The project

Infrastructure reconstruction.

The issue

Mechanisms for transparent and safe communication were new in Aceh.

The accountability mechanism

CARE’s complaints mechanism was comprehensive, including 9 field-based humanitarian accountability officers, with phone numbers and office hours publicized through which community members could channel their concerns. The accountability team then fed each complaint into a database, through which they were able to analyze which issues were of main concern. Management were provided with regular reports on the issues raised, and the Accountability Team identified outstanding policies and recommendations needed to respond effectively to the concerns of the affected people.

Once staff had ensured people were guaranteed a response to their concerns within a structured mechanism and procedure, CARE Indonesia was able to manage community expectations and work in a safer environment. Several outbreaks of violence were reported, but it is suspected that the strong accountability that CARE had to affected populations significantly reduced the number and severity of these incidents. When a demonstration was staged in front of the CARE office the Accountability unit was able to meet with the crowd and develop a process with the demonstrators to make a written complaint which was processed by senior management in a given timeframe. The demonstration may have been avoidable if community concerns and rumors had been responded to earlier, but once the event materialized the accountability team was able to make swift and efficient provision.

It was important that staff were properly educated as many were unfamiliar with good governance. CARE therefore needed to build up their understanding and expectations of how a fair and transparently-structured organization should operate.

Further, the importance of integrating a complaints mechanism into every level of project planning was key. The accountability team had a very strong dialogue with the shelter team ensuring that they knew the plans for construction in detail. It was then anticipated early at what stages of implementation the team could expect problems, and the communications team were in a strong position to provide the project with materials such as staff briefings and answers for common questions. This meant staff of all projects were properly prepared to answer questions and handle community concerns and expectations.

# Acronyms

CGI Corrugated Iron

HAP Humanitarian Accountability Partnership

HC Humanitarian Coordinator

HCT Humanitarian Country Team

IASC Inter-Agency Standing Committee

NFI Non-Food Item

# General resources to support accountability

DRAFT Operational Framework for Ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations in Humanitarian Emergencies, IASC. <http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/pageloader.aspx>

ECB Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies: the Good Enough Guide, 2007. http://www.ecbproject.org/the-good-enough-guide/the-good-enough-guide

Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response, Sphere Project, 2012. http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/

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1. For the remainder of this document, accountability will refer to accountability to affected populations, unless otherwise specified. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the Operational Framework for Ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations in Humanitarian Emergencies, IASC draft 2012, available from [www.ecbproject.org/cluster-accountability](http://www.ecbproject.org/cluster-accountability). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For further information on strategic planning in shelter responses, see Shelter After Disaster, UN 2010, available from [www.shelterlibrary.org](http://www.shelterlibrary.org). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Adapted from The Listen First Framework, the Accountability and Impact Measurement in Emergencies: The Good Enough Guide, and the IASC Operational Framework for Ensuring Accountability to Affected Populations in Humanitarian Emergencies. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The WASH Accountability Resources have specific resources aimed at staff competency. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Security concerns may prevent certain information being disclosed. Agencies should release as much information as possible with jeopardising the security of staff. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Safety and security of staff must take precedence over accountability. Ensuring a gender balance amongst staff may not be suitable, for example in contexts when women who are employed are exposed to greater risk of gender-based violence. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Risk should not be limited to construction risk in this context, but can include technical, social, economic, environmental, and political, amongst others. For cash programming particularly, particular consideration needs to be given to the security risks around the intended disbursement method, such as what information can safely be made public. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A sample MoU between an agency and a community can be found in the WASH Accountability Resources. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)